

Jungle VIPs

Borneo may be most famous for its orangutans, but there are plenty of other primates to look out for during a visit. Ian Wood offers his guide to the other simian stars of the forest



Here: proboscis females give birth after a gestation period of 166-200 days. Left: the species is known to make various types of honking call to signal danger or to reassure their young



PROBOSCIS MONKEYS

In some parts of Borneo, proboscis monkeys are still referred to as ‘orang belanda’ by local people, which translates as ‘Dutch person’ in the Indonesian language Bahasa. This a throwback to the early Dutch settlers who clearly had much larger noses and bellies in comparison to the slighter build of Indonesian people.

Male proboscis monkeys are certainly well endowed in the nasal department, with bigger noses than any other primate. Reaching up to 17cm long, their impressive conks are so large that sometimes you’ll see the monkeys pushing them out of their way to eat. When threatened, their noses swell even more and act as a kind of resonating chamber to amplify their warning call.

Talking of super-sized endowments, consider those pot bellies which aren’t a result of over

eating. The monkey’s stomachs are distended by a number of digestive departments needed to break down their principle diet of leaves. This process is extremely slow and their stomachs can contain up to a quarter of an individual’s body weight at any one time.

Proboscis monkeys are endemic to Borneo and live in mangrove and lowland forests near to fresh water and rivers. Every evening

they come to the side of these rivers to sleep in trees by the water’s edge, so dusk is a good time to see them.

However, some of my favourite encounters have also been very early morning when the mist clings to the surface of the water. As the sun rises, the

monkeys start their day, often moving through the trees in a ‘follow my leader’ routine; making spectacular leaps of faith from one tree to the next. Occasionally, they will

even cross rivers: dramatically hurling themselves from branches and crashing into the water before swimming doggy-paddle style to the other side.

Troop size typically ranges from about eight to more than 20 individuals with a common social structure that consists of one dominant male leading his harem of females and juveniles. Sometimes all male groups, which are made up of juveniles, adolescents and adult males, will also form.

Spotting tip:
Heading out by boat affords the best opportunities to see these bizarre looking primates at close quarters

WHERE TO FIND THEM

Tanjung Puting National Park has a thriving population of proboscis monkeys where you’ll see so many that it’s easy to forget how endangered these primates are. Or for close up personal encounters, visit Labuk Bay Proboscis Monkey Sanctuary where regular feedings are part of their approach to conservation.



Spotting tip:
For the best chances of success, try a river boat cruise or a guided forest walk

LANGURS

Langur means long tail and this group of primates certainly live up to their name with tails often far longer than their bodies. Of the five species resident in Borneo, the most widespread is the maroon langur which is also known as the red leaf monkey. Distinctive features include fiery orange fur, blue faces and a crest on the back of their necks with troop sizes ranging up to 40 individuals.

Silver langurs inhabit the coastal, mangrove and riverine forests of Borneo and like the other species feed mainly on a diet of leaves and shoots.

North western Borneo is home to the Hose's langur which has a grey upper body, white undercarriage and jet black hands and feet.

Found exclusively in Sarawak, banded langurs are easy to distinguish by their black

cheek bands with fur colouring varying from grey to burgundy to black.

Finally the Miller's grizzled langur has only ever been seen in the remote forests of Kalimantan and is so rare that sightings are always something of an event in the world of primate research.

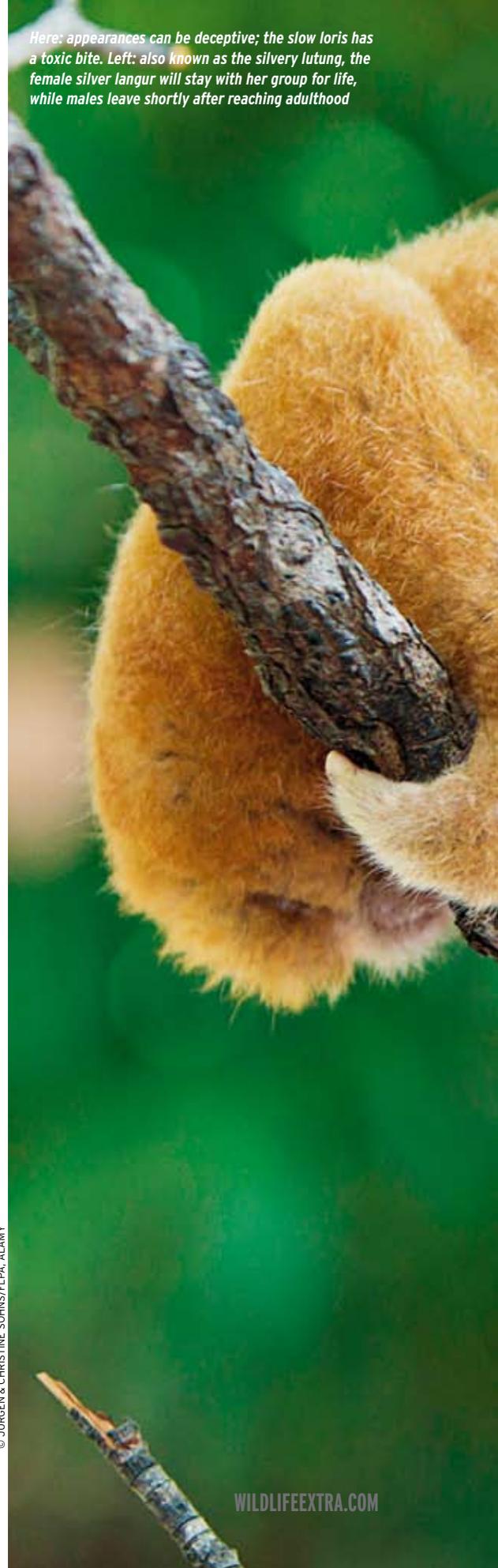
WHERE TO FIND THEM

Maroon and silver langurs: The Sekonyer river in **Tanjung Puting National Park** or the forest walkway in **Danum Valley**.

Hose's langurs: Hunting has made these primates wary, so you'll need luck to see them in **Kayan Mentarang National Park**.

Banded langurs: **Tanjung Datu National Park** is small but is still home to several troops of this distinctive monkey.

Miller's grizzled langurs: The most recent sightings were in 2012 in **Wehea Forest**, East Kalimantan.



Here: appearances can be deceptive; the slow loris has a toxic bite. Left: also known as the silvery lutung, the female silver langur will stay with her group for life, while males leave shortly after reaching adulthood

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**Spotting
tip:**

Your best chance of seeing these shy nocturnal hunters is on night walks or while camping in the forest



SLOW LORIS

With big eyes, striped faces and dense lush fur, these small primates have an adorable quality that unfortunately leads to a large demand from the pet trade. Three species are now recognised in Borneo and one of these was only discovered towards the end of 2012. Because they are nocturnal and sparsely distributed throughout their range, they are hard to encounter in the wild. This is hindered further by their solitary nature as the males and females only usually come together to breed. By day they sleep in a tight ball high up in a tree with their heads nestled between their thighs. Their bulging eyes enable them to forage in the dark and they eat a varied diet including small mammals, fruit and bird eggs. Camping out in the forest overnight affords the best chances of seeing them in their natural habitat. If you are lucky enough to come across one, they are not necessarily skittish, but do refrain from shining torches at their sensitive eyes. Cameras or binoculars with an infrared facility provide the best option to observe their behaviour without scaring them away.

WHERE TO FIND THEM

Both Tanjung Puting National Park and Danum Valley Wildlife Reserve offer night safaris to immerse yourself in nocturnal forest life. The former has a longer trail of 26 km with camping equipment available for overnight stays en route.

WESTERN TARSIERS

At first glance, the most distinctive feature of western tarsiers are their super-sized eyes protruding from their tiny heads. But study them further and you'll notice other benefits in their design. Thanks to a specially adapted vertebrae, they can turn their heads 180 degrees in both directions, enabling them to see behind without moving their bodies. Long hind legs – relative to small body size – give them the power to leap several metres between trees. Their longest fingers and toes have padded tips and claws to aid gripping trees and prey, while other digits have extended, curved claws for grooming. Finally those large bat-like ears are incredibly sensitive – a useful feature for detecting both predators and prey. Under the cover of darkness they cling to vertical branches in the forest; motionless apart from the rotation of their heads. Once food has been located – insects, lizards, frogs and small birds – they then move closer before pouncing and clutching it with their claws. A good guide will sometimes know where they are more likely to be found, but don't shine torches directly at their faces.

Spotting tip:

Try night walks through the forest but don't startle them by shining torches at their sensitive eyes



Here: the huge eyes of the western tarsier can sometimes weigh more than its brain. Below left: Müller's gibbons are endemic to Borneo

WHERE TO FIND THEM

The trails at the back of Pondok Ambung research centre in **Tanjung Puting National Park** have revealed good sightings of tarsiers recently. Ask one of the more experienced guides for updates.



GIBBONS

Personally speaking, one of the great pleasures of spending time in Borneo's forests is hearing the haunting call of gibbons. These primates are the true masters of jungle locomotion, capable of travelling through the trees at bewildering speeds and covering distances of several metres in one effortless swing. Two species exist in Borneo; the Müller's Borneo gibbon (also known as grey gibbon) and the agile gibbon, which is often referred to as the Borneo white bearded. They form monogamous pairings that last for life and have large home ranges of up to 40 hectares. Add in their almost wholly arboreal lifestyle and their inherent shyness of humans and you'll see why you are far more likely to hear them, than see them in the wild. Gibbons thrive on an abundant diet of

fruit with a particular liking for figs, although they supplement this with leaves and insects in times of scarcity. The habituated group near Camp Leakey in Tanjung Puting National Park, offer one of the most reliable opportunities for close encounters in Borneo.

Spotting tip:

Follow your ears! Listen out for the gibbons' distinctive call during forest walks and stay quiet and camouflaged

WHERE TO FIND THEM

Agile gibbons: The habituated group near Camp Leakey in **Tanjung Puting National Park** offer one of the most reliable opportunities for close encounters in Borneo. In fact, you'll need to keep an eye on your possessions when they are nearby. **Müller's gibbons:** Longer hikes in **Kutai National Park** afford the best chance for sightings of this elusive primate.

MACAQUES

There are two species of macaque in Borneo; the long tailed (also known as crab eating macaque) and the pig tailed. The former are considered pests throughout much of their range, which is wider than any other non-human primate. This reputation comes from their extraordinary resilience and adaptability, enabling them to thrive in different environments.

Despite being exported in their thousands for use in animal experiments, their remaining numbers are such that long-tailed macaques are categorized as 'least concern' by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). However, while they are not considered endangered, these macaques are the focus of animal welfare efforts due to this demand for medical research. Their range varies from primary forest to mangrove swamp through to the edges of urbanisations. Here they will sometimes exhibit extremely bold behaviour when scavenging for human scraps.

Both species live in troops that typically range from about 20 to 60 individuals, centred around an alpha female. Groups are made up of multi-male and multi-female individuals but with a bias of females – studies point towards more than two females for every male member in a troop.

Macaques have quite clearly defined structures to their day which start with a period of foraging, followed by a time for sleep, grooming and play in the middle of the day. Work resumes again in the afternoon until they come to rest once more before dusk. They often tend to sleep in trees overhanging the water where it's not uncommon to see several tails dangling down with rows of monkeys preening one another.

WHERE TO FIND THEM

Long tailed macaques: Common throughout much of Borneo, at Rimba Lodge in Tanjung Puting National Park you're advised to keep your door shut at all times to stop them raiding your room!

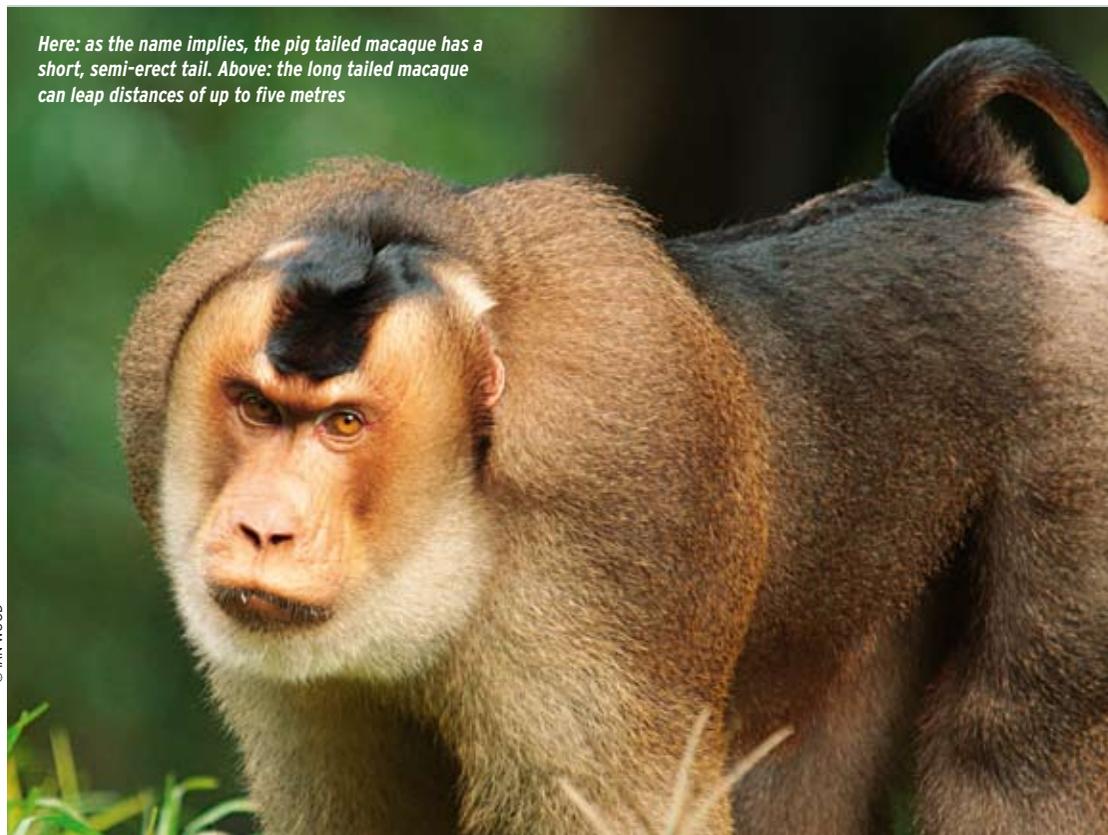
Pig tailed macaques: These are harder to see but good sightings are possible in Tanjung Puting National Park, Danum Valley Wildlife Reserve and Baku National Park.

Spotting tip:

To see macaques, try going on a river cruise or a forest walk - or where there are human food scraps



Here: as the name implies, the pig tailed macaque has a short, semi-erect tail. Above: the long tailed macaque can leap distances of up to five metres



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