

# Tabin Wildlife Reserve

Contributed by Ross Spencer  
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The Tabin Wildlife Reserve stands in stark testimony to Malaysia's commitment towards conservation and the preservation of its biodiversity and wildlife resources and demolishes the wild and patently untrue allegations of indiscriminate deforestation and destruction of biodiversity habitat by palm oil plantations by environmental NGO's such as Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and the Rainforest Action Network.

Hailed as the finest wildlife observing area in South East Asia, Tabin is richly endowed with the most diverse range of flora and fauna and the reserve is home to a large number of animal species, including endangered ones such as the orang utan, the Sumatran rhinoceros and the pygmy elephant. Overall, at least 259 species of birds have been recorded here, especially Babblers, Broadbills, Hornbills and Raptors.

Until the early 1970s, the Tabin was covered by primary dipterocarp forest, but then it was intensively logged until the mid-1980s. In 1984, the Sabah State government stepped in and gazetted the 120,500 (300,000 acres) hectares of rainforest, an area that is more than twice the size of Singapore island as a wildlife reserve.

The nearest town is Lahad Datu, about 50km to the southwest or approximately 90 minutes by vehicle. For wildlife lovers, this is all good news, since it makes Tabin accessible and provides a variety of habitats in which to see wildlife in their natural habitat.

In fact, so accessible that the BBC chose to shoot their "Orang Utan" segment of the mini-series called "Cousins: Our Primate relatives" at Tabin.

Says naturalists Robert DeCandido and Deborah Allen: "There are more species of birds here because of the juxtaposition of several habitats. For example, we found raptor nests (including Blyth's Hawk Eagle and the rare Wallace's Hawk Eagle) in the tallest trees of the forest facing the nearby oil palm plantation." "We saw 10 raptor species of the 159 bird species we recorded in our two months investigating the reserve (Feb-March 2005)" they continued.

"We also found all 8 Hornbill species in this part of Borneo, with the observation tower at the mud volcano being the best place to comfortably sit and watch for them. Babblers are especially common since many of them like to forage in the dense understorey of the forest. Altogether, we found 12 babbler species at Tabin".

"Finally, we found 7 kingfisher species such as the Banded Kingfisher (Photo 5) that likes to hunt in the forest, and the tiny Black-backed Kingfisher." "The views from the cabins into the trees that arch over the river are especially nice (Photo 7), and it is possible to see Pied Hornbills, Malaysian Blue Flycatchers, Arctic Warblers and Red-rumped Trogons here (among others)," they observed.

"Anyone with a spouse who is not a keen birder (or a rainforest enthusiast) should take note: one of you will be perfectly happy birding while the other remains at the lodge in your comfortable room, or enjoying coffee/tea in the dining area with splendid views of the forest and small river nearby," they concluded. THE END