



BOHOL, PHILIPPINES, IN JULY 2015

Petri Hottola (phottola@gmail.com)



Fig. 1. At night, there are many large frogs and giant snails around Bohol accommodations. Please, watch your step and push the frogs gently away. They are not very agile. Neither are the snails!

In July 2015, 3rd to 5th, I had a brief visit to the island of Bohol, Philippines, flying in from Manila and returning there three days later, on my way to Palawan. The journey was part of a private RTW birding tour on OneWorld Global Explorer tickets, with a number of attached regional flights. For Bohol, I had a target list of 28 bird species, out of which I was hoping to score with 15. In practice, I did significantly better, recording 22 target species in the Rajah Sikatuna National Park, my only site. The good result was reached as a consequence of favorable weather conditions, and perhaps also owing to the fact that I spent my time on observing, rather than on hiking the trails.

The target species were: **Pinsker's Hawk-Eagle, Everett's Scops Owl, Samar Hornbill, Northern Silvery Kingfisher, Rufous-lored Kingfisher, Mindanao Bleeding-Heart, Pink-bellied Imperial Pigeon, Blue-crowned Racket-tail, Azure-breasted Pitta, Philippine Pitta, Visayan Broadbill, Philippine Frogmouth, Black-faced Coucal, Buff-spotted Flameback, Visayan Blue Fantail, Rufous-tailed Jungle Flycatcher, Philippine Leaf-Warbler, Black-crowned Babbler, Striated Wren-Babbler, Brown Tit-Babbler, Philippine Oriole, Magnificent Sunbird, Handsome Sunbird, Bohol**

Sunbird, Purple-throated Sunbird, Orange-tufted Spiderhunter, Rufous-fronted Tailorbird and Yellow-breasted Tailorbird.

The following text and illustrations will describe how the visit was organized, which birds were observed and where the observations were made. With the exception of car rental services, Bohol is an easy nature tourism destination, particularly suitable for independent travelers. It is hoped that other solo visitors will keep on arriving in the island, in addition to birdwatching tour groups. The diversity of wildlife in Bohol definitely is worth of our attention, both in terms of enjoyment and conservation.

Bird photography was unfortunately mostly out of question in Bohol. It was a struggle to see the skulking forest birds, let alone to photograph them! The frequent darkness of the forest did not help either. As a result, the illustrations of the present report are mainly going to portray the site and its facilities. I salute the people who manage to take excellent bird photos in the difficult conditions of the Philippines. That required more skill and time than I possessed.

GETTING THERE

The Ninoy Aquino Manila International Airport (MNL) is the obvious gateway to Tagbilaran, the capital of Bohol. I flew in from Kuala Lumpur, on Malaysian Airlines (not the most reliable choice, nowadays, but suitable for my RTW), and arrived at T1 after midnight, transiting to T4 on a free airport shuttle bus, as the only foreigner on board. The bus parked on the runway side of T4 but there were people there who showed the right back door in. Once inside, after a security check, in which my big knife was duly noted and admired, I opened the suitcase and took a travel blanket and a pillow out of it. It was time to rest one's back on a metal bench before the check in opened.

There were no shops at the international arrivals (T1). I did, however, spot a familiar face in the no go zone, a female security officer, who once again helped me, by buying a bottle of water there. At T4, everything was closed till 3.00. Check in opened at 3.30 and we could go to the departures area at once, to buy food and drinks there, before the 6.15 departure. My flight was on Cebu Pacific Airways, which had a comfortable, new plane. The flight cost PHP 3.469 (€67), including a sizable extra luggage allowance. The departure was a bit chaotic (had to ask advice a few times), with several simultaneous flights, but we departed on time, arriving in Tagbilaran at 7.15, one hour after take off.

On the return flight, I had arrived at the small Tagbilaran airport a bit early and was initially told to wait outside, in rather humid conditions. Winds were gaining force and there was rain, as the typhoon Falcon (Chan-Hom) approached the island. It was crowded indeed at the far too small departures hall, where we also had to form a line in order to pay the domestic departure tax, PHP100 (€1.90). Such a trouble for a small red tape sum like that, with receipts and check ups and everything... There were two less than thorough security checks, too, within 10 meters! The special treat of the gate area were a few rocking chairs, one of which was soon reserved by yours truly. I could see my suitcase in a carriage outside, under a rain shelter, a sure sign that we were actually likely to leave as planned.



Fig. 2. The T4 departure area, in Manila (Ninoy Aquino), with some of its food and drink stalls.



Fig. 3. An eerie departure area at Tagbilaran airport, with purple plastic coating on its windows.

It was a Philippine Airlines flight and my first exposure to their not so funny 'icebox' approach. The plane (and their airport spaces in Manila) was so cold, that we wet and sweaty passengers were shivering and in a risk of getting ill from exposure. For the next Philippine Airlines flights I would bring a blanket, but on this first one, I was not prepared at all, unlike some local passengers, who wore winter coats. The flight Tagbilaran – Manila T2 cost PHP 3.645 (€70), including an extra luggage allowance. All the domestic flight tickets were bought in advance in the Internet, at the home pages of the airlines, and I had no problems with the reservations or payments.

For the next night, I had reserved a room at the MNL area, at Salem Domestic Guesthouse, next to the T4, the domestic terminal. The rooms there cost €31 (Agoda price) per night and can be recommended (clean with crisp sheets, good television). The double had no private toilet or shower, but there were one of both right next to my door and I shared the clean facilities with just one other traveler. A metered taxi from T2 to Salem Domestic Guesthouse cost PHP220 (€4.20). The metered ones are popular and the line is long. The prices of more or less everything are low in the Philippines, if compared to Europe, but while in there, it is not a good idea to make such comparisons. It is better to respect the local society and do as the locals do, looking after one's peso. Otherwise, one will cause inflation, a problem for both the locals and the visitors.

ACCOMMODATION

There is no accommodation inside the Rajah Sikatuna National Park. The buildings are derelict. In Bilar, opposite the park, by the highway, the obvious choice for accommodation is the former Simply Butterflies garden, currently Habitat Bohol. At boholhabitat@gmail.com, Cristy made prompt replies to all my emails. They have comfortable double flats in two-apartment villas at the back of the garden, behind a hobbit-style private walk-in entrance. I chose room B2, at a peaceful far corner of the garden, for PHP880 (€17) per night. One's car could be parked at the garden entrance, next to the main building with ticketing and a restaurant, and guards. In the mornings, the downside of the arrangements was the fact that I had to wake up the night watchmen and their three suspicious dogs, at 5.00. The dobermann pinscher, in particular, was afraid of any strangers and therefore a bit unpredictable.



Fig. 4. One of my Habitat Bohol lunches; noodles with some chicken and vegetables. The limes looked nice!

Another challenge were the slippery garden walkways. The concrete was green with algae and became extremely unreliable when wet. I had problems even with Icebug shoes, with studs, and mainly walked on grass, whenever possible. Moreover, my water was accidentally cut off once and it took some time before the night staff discovered the closed valve. Overall, the staff was nice and ready to help me, whenever needed.

Their restaurant is geared towards groups of tourists. The food was ok, and not expensive (a meal was around PHP100, €1.90), but the composition of the plates was a bit monotonous. As a rule, one could have rice or noodles and protein, with decorative vegetables, or rice and vegetables, but not a combination of ample vegetables and protein (meat, fish). On the second day, I therefore bought two meals and mixed them to create a healthy, tasty combination, half of the food being reserved for later consumption (bring a lunch box). They also had some bakery items and readily told me which were the fresh ones, and which were not, when requested. Most importantly, they had cold Sprite Zero (PHP45 each, €0.80), a drink I often miss in parts of Asia, where sugar is still valued as something healthy. Aspartame has recently been declared safe. Very refreshing after a hot day in the park!

I was not able to find fresh fruit in Bilar, but there was a fruit stall about one kilometer towards the Chocolate Hills, a tourism destination I had no time to visit. With a car, driving there was not a problem at all. Provisions were also bought on the way from Tagbilaran to Bilar, even though the choices were limited and there were no supermarkets along the coastal highway. Better stock up in Tagbilaran, if possible!



Fig. 5. My Habital Bohol room, or actually half of it. There was plenty of space for a solo occupant.

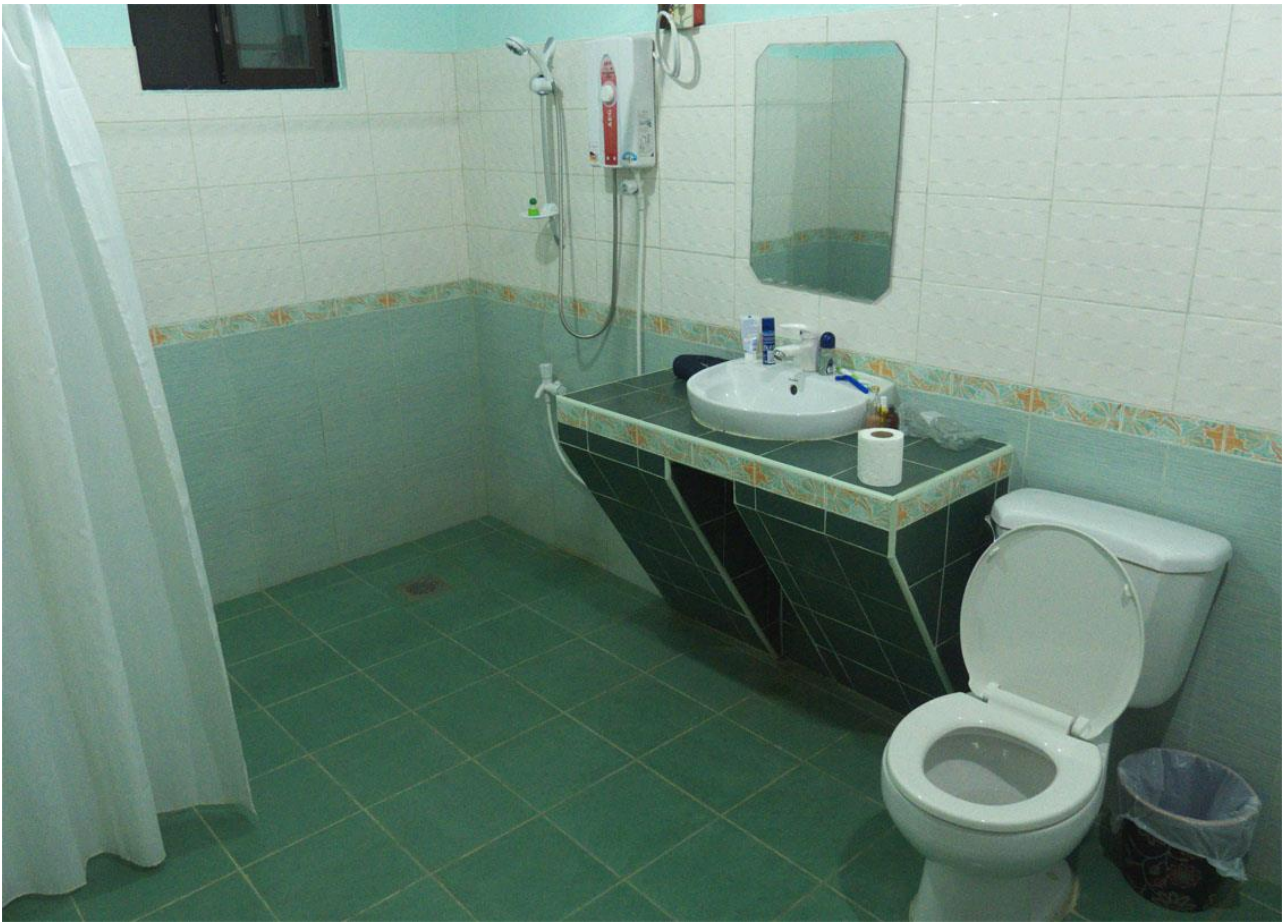


Fig. 6. The adjacent bathroom had a very different color code and lots of space, too.

CAR RENTAL

Some other birdwatchers who have stayed at Habitat Bohol have rented motorbike rides to the Rajah Sikatuna Park, or walked the distance. This is, however, strenuous in the hot and humid climate, especially if one carries a scope or is tired after exploring some of the longer forest trails. Being exposed like that also makes one vulnerable to the periodically rainy weather conditions. By walking, the three kilometers between the accommodation and the park consumed plenty of time, too. It may, however, be quite enjoyable for some fit 'super-birders' (I salute you, Juha Honkala!).

Personally, I preferred the comfort of an air-conditioned rental car. With the car, it is also convenient to drive back to the Habitat Bohol restaurant for a lunch, before returning to Rajah Sikatuna for late afternoon and night birding. Needless to say, having a car was particularly nice at night, instead of wading through the wet roads in darkness, or experiencing a bumpy ride on a bike.

Overall, driving by oneself in Bohol could not have been easier. The roads were mostly fine and there was little traffic. Even Tagbilaran was so small, that orientation was easy in the slow street traffic (many traffic lights), despite the occasional road closure (road works), with signs to a bypass.

Car rental is, however, a problem in Bohol. Just like in most of Indonesia and some more remote islands of the Philippines, the locals are not used to international travelers and have a misconception that tourism is only about guided tours, people being driven to places in vans and buses. Independent travel is not very well known. The local scene is less developed than in Luzon and Palawan, for example, and only starting to learn how to do business with tourists. Consequently, the idea of self-drive is relatively novel there and car rentals less than professional, also if judged by national standards.

I contacted several Bohol rental agencies, most of which did not bother to reply. Nick Car Rental did, reluctantly, and after a few emails agreed to rent me a sedan, for PHP1.200 (€23) per day, 200 pesos more than a car with a driver (limited hours) would have cost, with basic insurance and unlimited kilometers. Their representative would meet me at the airport arrivals hall, and bring the car (with documents), to be returned there as well. Several emails were exchanged to confirm all the arrangements. In them I had underlined, that I was in a hurry in the morning, and needed to leave for Bilar as soon as possible.

In practice, there was nobody waiting for me at the arrivals. It was raining steadily and it took a while before my local helpers found out that the man was sitting there in the car, along a street away from the airport building. Somehow, he had expected me to locate him, even though the instructions told otherwise and the car had no company logo. Then, he informed that the paperwork was not there. We had to drive to the office and return to the airport, because I had only studied a route from there to the coastal highway. What is more, the windscreen wipers were out of order and needed to be changed, with a visit to a spare parts dealer. In other words, the car was not ready for the rental.

Overall, the fact that nothing was prepared as promised, delayed my departure by two hours, effectively stunting a major part of the meager birding time in Bohol. No morning hours at Rajah Sikatuna, after arrival... In the similar vein of lacking professionalism, they gave me the car with an empty tank, causing another delay at a gas station. What is more, I had to fill the tank up, as I did not know how much the vehicle was going to consume, or whether there was a gas station close to Bilar. There was. The manager told me that I would not need much gasoline, but I simply could not take any risk of running out of gas. In the end, the company gained gas worth of another PHP1.200, which was not compensated. The priority was to get as much money as possible at once, instead of establishing a reputation which would guide other visitors to rent their services.

Because of the above-mentioned reasons, I am not able to recommend Nick Car Rental for other potential customers. I hope a reliably run car rental company will surface soon, to receive business from birdwatching visitors to Bohol. Search the Internet, send the emails and try to find a reasonable arrangement, to be tested after arrival, stating out the necessary details prior to the visit. Alternatively, prepare to spend, in the worst case, a full day or two on site, searching for service and negotiating face-to-face. There are no car rentals at the airport itself.

Renting a car with a driver would be easier, but complicated in terms of birding, with delays and problems with extended working hours, including night hours, as an example.

THE BIRDS OF RAJAH SIKATUNA AREA AND HABITAT BOHOL

Rajah Sikatuna National Park, even though apparently not very popular among tourists in general, is the main birdwatching destination in Bohol. The junction to the park is in Bilar, opposite a ruin of a church (turn right). At the junction, look for a sign for the 4th Special Forces Golden Tiger Company. The national park sign is so faded and damaged, that it will soon not be there. The military camp is located 350 meters on the way, beyond a bridge. Stop there, for **Northern Silvery Kingfisher**. They live in the area, and may appear next to the bridge.



Fig. 7. The Rajah Sikatuna sign being almost finished, it is better to rely on the Golden Tiger sign.

Drive straight on, until an entrance fee collection booth is seen at the park gate, on the right. Later on, there is a Y-junction, to the Logarita swimming pools on the right, and to Magsaysay Park on the left. Birding is mostly done at the Magsaysay Park and on the forest trails around it. Some of them run all the way to the Logarita pools. It takes about ten minutes to commute between Habitat Bohol and the park, by car. There is an informative and accurate map at Birding2asia.com page at www.birding2asia.com/W2W/Philippines/RajahSikatuna.html.

On arrival, I purchased an entrance ticket for three days, for one afternoon, one full day and one morning visit. The fee was PHP100 per day for entrance and an additional PHP10 per day for birdwatching, a total of €2.10 per day. It was a bit strange to pay for watching birds, something any visitor to the park is going to do as a part of the experience, but this was the Philippines, with its peculiar red tape practices.

At least I did not have to pay for scenery spotting, mammal watching, walking the trails or taking photographs... There was also a separate fee for swimming. After the payment and an initial discussion, I either waved my hand to the lady in charge, or stopped briefly to tell her about my plans and experiences. The entrance gate remained open 24/7.

At the rice fields between the highway and the park entrance, the following birds were recorded during the three days: **Eastern Cattle, Little, Great and Intermediate Egrets**, a **Cinnamon Bittern**, a **Common Moorhen**, a **Barred Rail**, an **Asian Palm Swift**, **Pacific Swallows** and **Tree Sparrows**.



Fig. 8. The Rajah Sikatuna hills in the background, roadside rice fields in the foreground.

3rd of July

At the oval-shaped Magsaysay clearing, the local bird guide Ryan Sugala soon spotted me, kindly offering his company and guidance for the first afternoon, even after I had told him that I desired to not to be guided. Later on, I had to tell him to stop pointing birds to me because I was quite able to locate them by myself, too, and started to feel uncomfortable. I am nevertheless grateful to him and the rest of the staff for pointing the arrival of a stunning **Northern Silvery Kingfisher**, at a shallow pond next to the staff building. That was the first and last time I saw the bird, even though I later checked the pond and the entrance road river on a regular basis. The staff normally left in the afternoon, and as there were hardly any other visitors, and I was alone in the area, excluding the birds and other mammal species.

During the first mid-day (10.30 – 13.00) and afternoon hours (15.00 – 18.00) at the clearing, before and after a lunch and check in at Habitat Bohol, I observed the following bird species: **Brahminy Kite** (one adult), a **White-eared** and an **Amethyst Brown Dove**, a **Yellow-breasted Fruit Dove**, a **Philippine Cuckoo-Dove**, **Ameline** and **Pygmy Swiftlets**, a **Bar-bellied Cuckooshrike**, *atricaudatus* **Yellow-wattled Bulbuls**, about 10 **Hair-crested Drongos**, a pair of **Coletos** and a **Red-keeled Flowerpecker**. Among the scarcer species, six **Black-faced Coucals** could be heard calling in the forest, together with three **Philippine Coucals** at edge habitats. My first three **Samar Hornbills** (on top of trees) and the first **Philippine Oriole** were also observed. In addition to the above-

mentioned **Northern Silvery Kingfisher**, a **Winchell's Kingfisher** arrived at the northwestern edge of the forest, in the late afternoon.

Much time was spent at the clearing because the way I see things, it is best to focus on observation sites with visibility, rather than hike up and down the hills. There were not so many birds around, but probably more than inside the forest, during the dull afternoon hours. What is more, I was a bit tired, after the travel and the stress with the car rental company.

In the evening, I waited till sunset and beyond, hoping to hear and possibly see owls, frogmouths and nightjars. I did not get disappointed. In the silence of late afternoon, a **Mindanao Bleeding-heart** started to call from the direction of Brahminy/Oriole Trail, the area where it has been recorded a number times during the recent years, including Ryan's sight record two weeks earlier. It kept on calling for at least 15 minutes. At dusk, two **Philippine Nightjars**, a pair, appeared over the clearing, hunting insects and calling. A **Philippine Boobook** called in the direction of the Ranger Station, and two **Everett's Scops Owls** joined in close by. Two **Philippine Frogmouths** were heard in the forest south of the opening. The scops owls were close, but I decided not to disturb them with a recording, because I expected to see one at Habitat Bohol, a known roosting site.

4th of July

In regard to Rajah Sikatuna trails, my strategy was based on the skulking nature of the local birds and the fact that people had scored with several good species just behind the Ranger Station. One needed to be silent (easy for a solo birder in a reasonably sound state of mind!) and to proceed slowly, wait and stalk without movement, to obtain views of the shy species. As a result, I limited my search to the combinable sections of Brahminy, Oriole and Tarsier Trails, in the good ravine habitat to the right of the Ranger Station and the closed Visitor Centre. There are stone steps in the beginning of the trail there, and an obvious Y-fork, left to Tarsier and right to Brahminy/Oriole. I also tried the Lemur Trail, but it proved to be too overgrown. There were a few mosquitoes, but no leeches.

In the early morning, I started on the Brahminy Trail at 5.30, turned left to Oriole and walked it till Tarsier, turning left again and returning to the Ranger Station at 11.00. Two **Black-faced Coucals** were seen exceedingly well, several times, 150 – 50 meters before the Magsaysay end of the Tarsier, where also a male **Handsome Sunbird** arrived to observe me. Two **Visayan Broadbills** were seen and one heard. Two **Azure-breasted** and one **Philippine Pittas** were recorded, the former calling (but not seen, despite a recording) by the Oriole Trail (past Trogon junction, on the right) and along the Tarsier Trail. A *fortichi* **Striated Wren-Babbler** was also heard at the first area.

Yellow-breasted Tailorbirds, known skulkers, were unexpectedly easy to observe. I played a recording at a streamside spot towards the end of the Oriole Trail. Some unknown calls were heard in low vegetation and after a while, a nice pair appeared, moving along the small stream together, and being clearly visible for minutes. At the Tarsier Trail junction, a **Rufous-fronted Tailorbird** was heard. Other birds along the walk included: **White-eared Brown Doves**, two **Black-chinned** and a **Yellow-breasted Fruit Dove**, four **Samar Hornbills**, and four **Philippine Orioles**.



Fig. 9. The Y-junction: Tarsier to the left and Brahminy/Oriole to the right.

The mixed bird parties were a real challenge; only **Philippine Leaf Warblers** (16) were readily seen, the rest of the birds possessing some amazing capacity in canopy skulking. One had to play recordings, sit and wait at the right height and intensively scan the nearby trees. Out of the 17 *mindanensis* **Brown Tit-Babblers** heard there, two could be closely observed this way. **Visayan Blue Fantails** took the first prize in stealth. Six of them were singing, responded to a recording and came close, but never allowed proper views! So frustrating...

The afternoon visit was conducted between 15.00 – 18.00. At the clearing, great views of two **White-eared Brown Doves**, cute birds, were enjoyed, in addition to about ten **Green Imperial Pigeons**. Among the latter birds, a juvenile begged food from an adult, who was clearly disturbed by the action, and declined the demands of a 'chick' already as large as its parents. The better records included a party of *whiteheadi* **Blue-crowned Racket-tails** and at least six calling **Black-faced Coucals**. A surprising discovery was a lone **Himalayan Cuckoo**, which stood on a branch forever, allowing a detailed scope study. In theory, the bird should have been in the north in July, but it had chosen to stay, for some reason. The more common species included a **Colasisi, Ameline** and **Pygmy Swiftlets**, up to eight **Samar Hornbills** at the same time, in tall trees, a **White-breasted Woodswallow** and the **Coletto** pair.

In the evening (sunset at 18.15), a short wait at Magsaysay was again productive, as the weather was calm and clear, and it was easy to listen to the birds. This time, I saw only one **Philippine Nightjar** and heard only single **Philippine Frogmouth**. The **Philippine Boobook** called from the same tree, but there were now four vocal **Everett's Scops Owls**. I played the recording and one of them immediately arrived, for close views, twice. The best one was, however, a **Philippine Eagle**

Owl which started its impressive concert higher up in the east, dominating the night with its deep, penetrating calls!

5th of July

In the second, the last morning, rain spoiled part of the walk, which occurred between 5.15 and 10.00. Soon after entering the trails, I had to wait about one hour, uncomfortably squatting under a cliff, until the heavy rain ceased. I nevertheless did part of the same circular route backwards, walking on the Tarsier Trail till the Oriole Trail junction, but staying on the Tarsier for about 100 more meters, before returning to the Magsaysay clearing the same way. One of the highlights of the morning was the **Mindanao Bleeding-heart**, which called again in the same area as two days ago, this time briefly but at a close distance.

A play of a mp3 file at the second **Azure-breasted Pitta** territory (Tarsier; see above) did not produce any response, but now I saw the bird flying in and landing in a nearby tree, at a four meter height, surprisingly high. A total of three **Rufous-fronted Tailorbirds** were also seen, at the site where I had heard one on the previous day. No such luck with a single **Visayan Blue Fantail**, however, despite much effort. Another **Yellow-bellied Tailorbird** was singing further on, along the Tarsier. A **Philippine Hawk-Cuckoo** and a **Philippine Trogon** were new species for the site. The other birds along the trail and at the Magsaysay Park included a **White-eared Brown Dove**, a **Black-chinned Fruit Dove**, **Green Imperial Pigeons**, four **Black-faced Coucals**, **Pygmy Swiftlets**, **Samar Hornbills**, **Hair-crested Drongos**, a **Philippine Oriole** and **Philippine Leaf Warblers**. A **Visayan Broadbill** was heard at the Logarita pool junction, when leaving the park.



Fig. 10. For most of the time, **Long-tailed Macaques** tend to be cute, like this female.

A word of warning: The resident **Long-tailed Macaques** were a bit of a problem at Magsaysay Park. The maximum number I saw there was around 100, consisting of more than one clan. For most of the time, they did their own thing, without disturbing people. Whenever they wandered around, encounters with humans could however not be avoided. If given a chance, some of them would try to dominate the visiting humans, by acting aggressively. It is therefore a good idea to keep an eye on the monkeys, keep the distance when possible, and show them who the boss is, if necessary. A show of fear is a sure way to lose their respect. I saw them chasing people who were running away after some mock attacks. With me, the aggressive individuals soon learned to stay away from my trekking pole and stones, just like they respected the resident park staff. For 99% of the time, they did not bother me, even when close, and I also left them in peace.

I had very much hoped to see a **Philippine Flying Lemur**, or **Colugo**, at Rajah Sikatuna. The Magsaysay Park clearing is, after all, known to be a good place to observe them. Only in the last morning, I succeeded, when leaving the Tarsier Trail, after a period of heavy rain. A lemur was hanging on a tree, and we had an eye-contact. There was also a single **Large Fruit Bat**, in both evenings, and few mostly unidentified small bats, including one apparent **Horsfield's Myotis**.

Habitat Bohol

The garden at Habitat Bohol, even though small, had an important role in enabling me to see certain nectar-loving birds not available in Rajah Sikatuna. These were mainly observed from a restaurant table, sipping a cold drink and waiting for the lunch to arrive. During the meals, I reserved a table at the garden end of the veranda and kept both my binoculars and camera ready. The lunch table was particularly good for the endemic sunbirds, with daily records of a pair of **Bohol Sunbirds**, a **Handsome Sunbird** and a **Purple-throated Sunbird**. In the last morning, I saw my only **Orange-tufted Spiderhunter** there, close to the accommodation. The other birds included a *leytensis* **Scarlet Minivet**, *saturator* **Philippine Bulbuls**, and up to four **Red-keeled** and one **Buzzing Flowerpecker**.

The garden also accommodated some of the most widespread generalists: **Spotted Doves** and **Asian Glossy Starlings**. Despite two requests, and the consequent short search efforts, the Habitat Bohol staff was not able to locate a roosting **Everett's Scops Owl** at the garden, as they have earlier done, according to trip reports. I heard, however, a **Philippine Boobook** close to my cottage.

Tagbilaran – Bilar – Tagbilaran

The coastal highway ran through a relatively densely populated area, with birds such as **Spotted Doves**, **Asian Glossy Starlings** (many) and **Tree Sparrows**. On the inland section of the road, a roadside **Moustached Treeswift** and two **White-breasted Woodswallows** were spotted. At some reed-fringed fish ponds on the coast, I scored with a *harterti* **Clamorous Reed-Warbler** (species may change; the taxonomy is a bit unclear). A lone **Pacific Swallow** and two summering **Barn Swallows** were also recorded, but the sea was completely devoid of birdlife. In this regard, the seas around Indonesia and the Philippines are an anomaly in the world.

AT THE END OF THE DAY

My visit to Bohol was a regrettably short one, due to airline timetables and the complicated RTW itinerary. It was, nevertheless, a quite productive one. In retrospect, I consider myself lucky for enjoying relatively good weather for most of the time, despite the fact that two major typhoons were moving north close by, creating strong winds and heavy rains in parts of the Philippines, including Bohol, right after my departure.

Among the species I had expected to see at Rajah Sikatuna, but failed, were **Pinsker's Hawk-Eagle**, **Pink-bellied Imperial Pigeon**, **Buff-spotted Flameback**, **Rufous-tailed Jungle Flycatcher** and **Black-crowned Babbler**. On the other hand, I had not expected to record the **Philippine Eagle Owl**, even though it is extant in Bohol. Other species would have been available higher up in the forest, but I gave them up, mainly as a result of limited time. Out of the listed misses, the **Buff-spotted Flameback** was an annoying one. Three times in the forest, I could hear a large woodpecker tapping a trunk of a tree, twice close by, but I failed to see them, either because of visibility blocked by trees and leaves, or because of approaching rain. It is a difficult place to see the birds. On the other hand, one cannot win them all, and has to be content with the ones observed.

At the end of the day, Bohol is a small island with reasonable population density. Life is definitely more easygoing than in Luzon, for example. The infrastructure is fine, for independent visits to the Rajah Sikatuna National Park and other bird observation sites in the general area. Habitat Bohol provides comfortable accommodation in the vicinity, and meals for the visitors. If only somebody could locate a proper car rental company in Tagbilaran, everything would be there for international visitors. Let us hope that happens soon and Bohol becomes firmly established on the bird tourist map. **Good luck and plenty of patience for your forest birding in Rajah Sikatuna!**



Fig. 11. A Philippine Flying Lemur, in a position adopted during a period of rain. Those eyes!