Full Detailed Itinerary - Indonesia: Sulawesi and Halmahera

Day 1: Arrival in Makassar; transfer to Malino (Sulawesi)

After meeting just after lunch, we will spend a few hours at Makassar Fishponds searching for a host of Asian shorebirds, including the scarce Javan plover and Long-toed Stint. By mid-afternoon we will depart for Malino, a highland area, a few hours east of Sulawesi's capital, Makassar. The night will be spent in a highland resort in Malino, close to Lompobattang Mountain.

Day 2: Lompobattang Mountain to Makassar (Sulawesi)

On this day we will seek out some very local endemics, namely Lompobattang Flycatcher, and this will also be our first shot at Hylocitrea for the tour too, a much-wanted family endemic to the island. Other birds we could find include the local form of Red-eared Fruit-Dove, the endemic Lompobattang Leaf Warbler, and the odd Piping Crow. We will head back to Makassar in the afternoon.

Day 3: Karaenta to Lore Lindu NP (Sulawesi)

The first (of many) early rises, will see us travel up into the forested limestone hills north of the city. Karaenta Nature Reserve provides a beautiful setting for the first of many endemics. In particular, this area offers the highly local Black-ringed White-eye, an endemic that is confined to South Sulawesi. This forest also holds the recently described Sulawesi Brown Flycatcher, and an endemic mammal too, Moor Macaque. After a few hours, we will return to Makassar and take a flight to Palu in Central Sulawesi. From Palu, we will head to Wuasa, our base for exploring the montane forests of Lore Lindu National Park in the coming days. The first of four nights will be spent in a simple guesthouse in Wuasa, close to this magnificent park.

Days 4-6: Lore Lindu NP (Sulawesi)

With three full days in the area, we will have plenty of time to bird the rich forests of Lore Lindu, which offer a range of elevations, and therefore, species. Some of our birding will center around Lake Tambing, where mobile flocks of fantastic Fiery-browed Mynas come down to rest in the trees regularly and feeding flocks move through the canopy holding Pygmy and Cerulean Cuckooshrikes, Sulawesi Fantails, Sulawesi Leaf-Warblers, the very odd Malia, and occasionally the scarce Sulawesi Thrush too. The understory is home to two of the most difficult birds in the area, the shy Great Shortwing, and the reclusive Maroon-backed Whistler, as well as Blue-fronted Flycatcher. Other possibilities in this area include Superb Fruit-Dove, flocks of Meyer's Lorikeets, and noisy flocks of Finch-billed Mynas. On one of the days we will make the climb up the infamous Anaso Track, which allows access to higher altitudes, and the possibility of Sulawesi's sole endemic bird family, Hylocitrea; the rare and strange Geomalia (recently found to be an odd zoothera thrush); along with Red-eared Fruit-Dove, White-eared Myza, and Streak-headed White-eye. This hike will also give us a chance at the rare Sombre Pigeon, and we can often find Diabolical (Satanic) Nightjars roosting during the day at regular stakeouts along there. On several early mornings or nights we will venture out for endemic nightbirds, such as Cinnabar and Speckled Boobooks, and Australasian Grass-Owl. Some time will also be spent around the Sedoa Valley, which offers the best raptor watching opportunities in the area, with Sulawesi Serpent-Eagle, Sulawesi Hawk-Eagle, and Black and Rufous-bellied Eagles all occurring. These nights will also be spent in Wuasa.

Day 7: Lore Lindu to Palu (Sulawesi)

A final morning will be spent around Lore Lindu. After lunch back in Wuasa, we shall pack up and leave for the city of Palu, checking a site for White-shouldered Triller, day roosting Savanna Nightjars, Pale-headed Munia, and the rare Red-backed Buttonquail on the way there. A single night will be spent in a city hotel in Palu.

Day 8: Palu to Tomohon (Sulawesi)

In the morning we will fly from Palu to Manado, (via Makassar) in North Sulawesi, and then drive west to a mountain retreat in Tomohon; (a single night will be spent there. This will largely be a travel day.

Day 9: Gunung Mahawu to Tambun (Sulawesi)

A precious few hours will be spent on Mahawu Mountain, in North Sulawesi. While, by now, we will have seen the majority of mountain species in Lore Lindu, we are likely to be missing Scaly-breasted Kingfisher, for which this is the best site in all of Sulawesi. This will be our main target there, although it is also a good place for Sulawesi Myzomela, Scarlet-breasted Flowerpecker, and Isabelline Bush-hen. There is also a “pitta blind” in the forest, and IF IT IS ACTIVE during the time of our visit, we hope to Sulawesi Pitta there at very close quarters! By the middle of the morning activity will be low and we will head further west towards the town of Kotomobagu, where we will spend two nights. However, assuming no delays on the route, we hope to arrive in time to check the site of Tambun in the late afternoon, a good time to see Maleos roosting in the trees near their egg-laying grounds.

Day 10: Dumoga-Bone (Sulawesi)

The day will be spent in the lowland forests within this sprawling national park, visiting two of the three main areas of forest within the park - either Tambun (the famed Maleo breeding site), Toraut, or the Molibagu Road. Among the species we will be seeking are Maroon-chinned Fruit-Dove, White-faced Cuckoo-Dove, Sulawesi Goshawk, Sulawesi Myna, Pied Cuckooshrike, and Sulawesi Pitta. Mixed flocks within the forest might also yield Yellow-billed Malkoha, and the strange white-eyed race of Hair-crested Drongo (a surefire split?!) and Black-billed Koel are also both regularly encountered in the area.

Day 11: Dumoga-Bone to Manado (Sulawesi)

We will have a final morning to visit whichever of the Dumoga-Bone sites require further attention and offer the most remaining new birds. After lunch, we will head back east to the capital of North Sulawesi, Manado, staying in a very comfortable diver resort overlooking the Celebes Sea, and where we can sometimes find the endemic White-rumped Cuckooshrike in the mangroves on the property. A single night will be spent in Manado.

Day 12: Sulawesi to Halmahera

In the morning we will take a short flight from Manado, across the Molucca Sea to the volcanic island of Ternate, the former de-facto capital of the Maluku Islands (the Moluccas). From Ternate, we will take a ferry the short distance to the west coast of the island of Halmahera, where we will spend the next five nights. We will make our way over to the town of Tobelo, on the northwest coast of the island on the nothermost arm of this four-tentacle island. From there we will make a night “safari” out to a black sandy beach, where Moluccan Megapodes (Scrubfowl) fly in each night to lay their eggs in the warm, volcanic soils. With luck,

patience, (and a late night), we will see one of these amazing birds at close range when it makes its nocturnal pilgrimage to this treasured, protected beach. The beach is accessed via an hour-long drive, a short walk through a palm plantation (that often hosts Moluccan Scops-Owls), and a short boat ride. We may also see Large-tailed Nightjar on the beach. This will be the longest night of the tour as we spend a long night waiting for the arrival of the birds, which may be one of the highlights of the entire tour. A single night will be spent in North Halmahera, in the town of Tobelo.

Day 13: Tobelo to Aketajawe-Lolobata National Park (Halmahera)

After a lie in (breakfast around 07:30am!), following the exertions of the “scrubfowl safari” the night before, we will make our way south to another entirely different area on Halmahera, which may provide some of the best moments of the tour yet. On the way, we will break the journey to visit some mangroves that often host a pair of Beach Kingfishers; Moluccan Starlings can sometimes be found in the same area too. The journey may also provide some of the more widespread Moluccan species, like the handsome Rufous-bellied Triller, and striking Blue-and-white Kingfisher. In the afternoon, we will arrive at a simple guesthouse on the edge of Aketajawe-Lolobata National Park, run by a pioneering Halmahera bird guide. On site, he has a number of blinds for birds, which will be our focus on the next morning and is the reason for including this on the tour. However, in the afternoon, we will visit a viewpoint, scouring the skies for parrots and cockatoos going to roost in the late afternoon. Some of the enticing possibilities include White Cockatoo, Moluccan Eclectus, Great-billed Parrot, and Chattering Lory. After dark, we can check some regular spots for roosting birds, like Dusky Megapode, and North Moluccan Dwarf-Kingfisher, as well as search for nightbirds like Barking Owl, and Moluccan Owlet-Nightjar. A single night will be spent at a very conveniently located, rustic guesthouse on the edge of the national park, the only accommodation for miles around!

Day 14: Aketajawe-Lolobata National Park to Subaim (Halmahera)

In the morning, we shall visit some forest blinds that are visited by North Moluccan and Ivory-breasted Pittas. If these blinds are active during the time of our visit, this is sure to be one of the highlights of the tour. The forest there also holds other Moluccan specialties, like Spectacled Imperial-Pigeon, Goliath Coucal, Black-chinned Whistler, Halmahera Flowerpecker, Halmahera Golden-Bulbul, and the local forms of Common Paradise-Kingfisher and Spectacled. Monarchs, both potential splits. After lunch, we will depart for our next site, Subaim, stopping at a small hill, Gunung Roni, en-route in the hope of finding the rare Azure Roller (Purple Dollarbird), which has become increasingly difficult in recent years. The next three nights will be spent at a guesthouse that is used to catering for birding groups in the town of Subaim.

Days 15-16: Foli & Gunung Uni-Uni (Halmahera)

Over the coming two days we will search for some of Halmahera’s standout birds, not least among them will be the Standardwing Bird-of-paradise (Wallace’s Standardwing). As dawn approaches the flapping of wings should be heard, and then the ugly squawking of the excited males will penetrate the gloom, before full light reveals the full splendor of the male birds, with their green “cravats” raised, and delicate white display plumes vibrating during their energetic rainforest dances, which occur daily to draw in that ever-elusive female. Other endemics and specialties in the area include Scarlet-breasted Fruit-Dove, White-naped Monarch, Sombre Kingfisher, Cinnamon-bellied Imperial Pigeon, and Paradise Crow (actually a subdued bird-of-paradise). Other great birds there include the stunning Chattering and Violet-necked Lories, and Great Cuckoo-Dove. After two full days in this area we should amass a fair number of the many endemics on offer, which could also include some nightbirds, as all three endemic species occur near the town: Moluccan Owlet-Nightjar, Halmahera Boobook, and Moluccan Scops-Owl. We will be based in Subaim for three nights and visit both Gunung Uni-Uni and Foli over these days.

Day 17: Foli OR Gunung Uni-Uni (Halmahera) to Ternate

A final morning will be spent in North Halmahera, visiting whichever of the sites deserves further time, and offers the most new birds. After lunch back in Subaim we shall pack up and drive over to Sidangoli on the west coast of Halmahera, from where we shall take a ferry back to the island of Ternate, where a single night will be spent in a very comfortable hotel, away from the bustle of the city.

Day 18: Ternate to Manado and Tangkoko (Sulawesi)

In the morning we will take the short flight back to Manado from Ternate, then drive directly to Tangkoko, on the eastern end of the Minhassa Peninsula, (the uppermost tentacle of Sulawesi). We should arrive with some time to search for birds in the afternoon, like Isabelline Bush-hen, Silver-tipped Imperial-Pigeon, or Purple-winged Roller, while in the evening we can try for Sulawesi Nightjar and Sulawesi Scops-owl. Two nights will be spent in a guesthouse just outside the park.

Day 19: Tangkoko (Sulawesi)

This reserve is one of Sulawesi's flagship parks, the excellent lowland jungle and mangrove forest providing superb birding, and great mammal-watching opportunities. The reserve is especially famous for kingfishers, and with the assistance of the skilled local park guides, we will be search for Sulawesi Dwarf, Sulawesi Lilac, Green-backed, Great-billed, and Ruddy Kingfishers while on site. The wonderfully open nature of the forest provides excellent chances to find, and see well, a number of other normally tricky forest species too, such as the recently split Sulawesi Pitta (from Red-bellied), and the handsome Rusty-backed Thrush. The endemic Ochre-bellied Boobook can sometimes be found at daytime stakeouts too. Our time in the area will be mixed between trail walking through the forest, which may see walk among one of the large habituated groups of Celebes Crested Macaques; taking a boat ride through the mangroves for kingfishers and the endemic White-rumped Cuckooshrike; and watching for canopy species from a scenic lookout, which can yield a huge variety of endemics, from Sulawesi and Pygmy Hanging-parrots to Sulawesi Dwarf-Hornbills, Yellow-breasted and Golden-mantled Racquet-tails, and Ornate Lorikeets. Both nights will be spent in a simple lodge just outside the park, which will provide excellent, and large, meals throughout our stay.

Day 20: Tangkoko to Manado (Sulawesi)

After a final morning in Tangkoko, we shall return to Manado after lunch, for a final night of the tour. Departures can be taken any time the next day or late on this night, if desired.

Day 21: DEPARTURES from Manado (Sulawesi)

You are free to fly out at any time of the day as there is no birding planned on this day. Late night flights the evening before (9pm or later) can also work too as we will arrive back in Manado by 6pm the evening before.

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