



BIRD TOURISM REPORTS 5/2016

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MUARA ANGKE, JAKARTA



Fig. 1. Garuda Indonesia is nowadays a quality airline, well above its other Indonesian competitors.

In 2016, on the 18th of July, I made a trip to the mangroves of Muara Angke in Jakarta, Indonesia. The mangrove conservation area has been closed for some years now, after its boardwalk deteriorated and became dangerous. Nevertheless, even with the current limited access (and precarious future), Muara Angke remains to be *the* easy to reach site for the endangered **Sunda Coucal** (*Centropus nigrorufus*). The Java endemic has suffered from coastal habitat destruction and trapping. With its massive overpopulation and other problems, the island of Java unfortunately has become one of the most inhospitable regions for wildlife, even though its natural heritage is unique and of global importance.

The following text is going to describe the practicalities of the short one-morning visit by a taxi. Scoring with the coucal will not be guaranteed, due to the species skulking nature and the limited views at the site, but the chances are fair, particularly if the visit may be arranged early in the morning, at sunrise. Renting a boat for a river/sewer cruise would probably improve one's chances, too, but that may be easier said than done.

The advice has been provided for particularly those birders who transit in Jakarta and may consequently have an extra morning or a day there, between flights to Indonesian and international destinations. From the Soekarno-Hatta International Airport hotel area, the Muara Angke site can easily be visited between sunrise and a hotel breakfast, the way I did my morning trip. I had arrived from Makassar, Sulawesi and was going fly to Padang, Sumatra. The flights had been with Garuda Indonesia, a company which has rigorously improved its standards during the past six years, after a near-collapse situation, and become a quality airline.

FEW WORDS ON FLIGHTS IN INDONESIA

Choosing one's air carrier is not an insignificant matter in Indonesia, with its record number of lowest safety ranking airlines in the world. The main other alternative to Garuda Indonesia, the no-frills Lion Air, may have a lion's share of the local market, but their on-time reliability and airport luggage services are not in par with Garuda. The same could be said about security, even though European Union lifted its ban on Lion Air in June 2016, allowing it to fly in the European airspace. The EU flight bans, by the way, are most certainly not based on discrimination against Muslims, the frequently heard claim in Indonesia, but on serious security problems. Most of the banned airlines are from Africa and Central Asia. In the East and South East Asia, a number of Indonesian airlines and North Korea belong to this category. The vast majority of Middle Eastern airlines are welcome in Europe, with the exception of Iraq and Syria.

The most recent case of a Lion Air pilot with crystal meth was in 2012. In 2016, four Lion Air employees were arrested for stealing from passenger's luggage in the hull. In another 2016 case, a Lion Air pilot was grounded for offering a female flight attendant to passengers to make up for a delay. The airline is still on the list of world's least safe air carriers. Lion Air may recently have improved its act, but as these examples show, improvements remain to be done.

If possible, avoid flights on Susi Air, Trigana Air Service, Batik Air, Citilink, Kalstar Aviation, Sriwijaya Air, TransNusa Air Services, Wings Air and Xpress Air! In addition, there are many smaller (pop-up) airline services, such as Alfa (one crash in 2016; no survivors) and Sunbird (one crash in 2016; no survivors), with even less reliability. In case one just has to accept the only available option, to see the larger-than-life island endemic, do not worry too much. Aviation accidents are not very frequent even in the worst category, and a less-than-frequent customer needs to be very unlucky to die in one of them. Still, the risk is significantly higher than with regular airlines. For Indonesia, check the current situation of its airlines in the Internet before flight reservations.

ACCOMMODATION

Traffic jams being a major problem in Jakarta, it may be best to stay away from the main city area. The neighborhood of Jakarta International Airport (Soekarno-Hatta) has a good number of hotels for passengers in transit. Most of them are located within a 15 to 20 minute shuttle drive radius from the main terminal. Personally, I stayed at the three-star Swiss Belinn Hotel, for €27-30 per night, including taxes and breakfast (Agoda price). The hotel had comfortable rooms, good food and room service, and fair to excellent reception services. The surroundings were not very attractive, but that is a common situation in the recently developed area.

The main problem was how to locate the hotel shuttle at the airport. They picked people up in front of Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), above T2 Arrivals (one level up), and one may need to phone them in advance, just after arrival. The shuttle was included in the room price. Otherwise, the ride in a taxi should be IDR 50.000, one way.

The services at the airport are not quite satisfactory and it is a crowded place. Prices are high, just like at many other international airports. The hot and humid climate adds to the general discomfort. Also currency exchange may best be performed before arrival, or at an ATM, if available. In July 2016, the commission at the airport was about 15%. What is more, the money was counted in front of dozens of spectators, people whose motivation to be there could only be guessed. They certainly did not change any currencies and did not appear to be passengers (no luggage), either!

TAXI TO MUARA ANGKE

In Jakarta, it may be a good idea to organize the taxi at a hotel reception. At Swiss Belinn, they work together with Bluebird Taxis, a major taxi company present in some other Indonesian islands as well. The service was friendly and professional. The blue taxi was on time, did not try to invent additional charges and, importantly, agreed to wait for me at the site for 1.5 hours, before we returned to the hotel. On our way back, we also stopped at a local Indomart, for inexpensive drinks and snacks, for the hotel room. For Muara Angke, make sure to bring drinks and insect repellent. It is hot and humid, with a few mosquitoes.

The charge was IDR 250.000 return, plus IDR 12.000 road tolls (bring small notes for the gates), and the drive went fast due to the early departure (5.30) and the toll roads. If I had known where to go, the exact location of the site, the charge would have been IDR 182.000, plus the tolls. Unfortunately, in my hurry before the trip I had not spotted any Internet information on the point of access. There are several useful references, which I somehow missed. One will be mentioned below. As a result of my ignorance, we did some unnecessary driving around the place and had to ask the locals where the 'Hutan Alam' was located. Even then, it was a guess between two access points. Fortunately, my guess was a lucky one.

The entrance is at -6.115958, 106.769199. Write the numbers at Google Maps search area, and locate the site both on a map and in Street View, which shows the entrance gate.

At the gate, large signs indicate a conservation area: 'Suaka Marga Satwa Muara Angke'. There is a shelter and just enough space to park for one sedan, by a four-lane wide boulevard, Jalan Pantai Indah Utara 2. It was possible to enter the first 50 meters of the boardwalk, to an abandoned office of the forest service (and a wooden platform, and a gated mangrove boardwalk), and stay in the area between 6.30 and 7.50. It felt like a long time in such a restricted area. The people I met there were a man and a woman who took the advantage of the abandoned toilets of the office, to wash their scooters by the river.

There is supposed to be a need for a permit and/or an entrance fee of IDR 150.000. At the moment, the planned improvements appear to be stalled and there is no access to the mangrove boardwalk (unrepaired). Therefore, neither the permit nor the fee may apply. It appears to be an open-ended situation. No new encroachment on that side of the Angke River was discovered in July 2016, but there is a constant threat of building projects, I presume. It is a narrow stretch of mangrove forest and reedy fringes between a river and the avenue. This is, however, but a 'tail' of a larger area of mangroves, in-between developed sectors (see Google Maps). Let's hope corruption does not prevail in this case and both the birds and local fish stocks will benefit from their breeding ground in the future, too. A tall order, I know...

BIRDS AND MAMMALS

In addition to birds, the site had about ten **Crab-eating Macaques** and three **Plantain Squirrels**. The following list of 21 species includes all the birds I saw at the site. Not many species, but not too bad for Jakarta, I guess. The **Racket-tailed Treepie** and especially the **Javan White-eye(s)** were nice finds. There apparently were several of the latter in a canopy of a tree, but only one could be identified. The other 2-3 (at least) white-eyes were moving about in the background, obscured by leaves and branches. As far as I know, the white-eyes are nowadays seldom seen in the reserve.

BIRD LIST

Javan Pond Heron	about 10 individuals roosting at riverside trees.
Little Egret	1
Black-crowned Night Heron	8; also roosting at trees.
White-breasted Waterhen	1
Pink-necked Green Pigeon	5
Sunda Coucal	1 adult.
Cave Swiftlet	10
Sunda Pygmy Woodpecker	3; breeding.
Freckle-breasted Woodpecker	2; breeding.
Racket-tailed Treepie	1; very nice views!

Sooty-headed Bulbul	25
Yellow-vented Bulbul	10
Olive-backed Tailorbird	1 pair, in edge habitat.
Cinereous Tit	2
Small Minivet	1
Malaysian Pied Fantail	1
Javan White-eye	1; +2-3?
Golden-bellied Gerygone	10; characteristic sound of the mangroves.
Olive-backed Sunbird	1
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	1
Javan Myna	1

Where exactly did I see the **Sunda Coucal**? It was sunning itself in the morning sun, at $\frac{3}{4}$ level in a riverside tree (next to some reeds) also favored by roosting herons, at -6.115996, 106.770351, between 07.08 and 07.35. It was not there before or afterwards. The coucal was in full view, sideways, and therefore showed its bi-colored wings quite nicely.

This spot was half-way towards a **Sunda Coucal** stake-out, as defined in the very useful trip report 'Gunung Gede and Jakarta – September 2015', by Vincent van der Speck. In other words, the stake-out area has remained active, at least till summer 2016, and may be best checked out by walking along the boulevard, in addition to scanning the close-by trees from the reserve entrance area.

Good luck with your visit at Muara Angke!

