

Red Giant Flying Squirrel *Petaurista petaurista* at Panti Forest, Johor, Peninsular Malaysia

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Observer: Noel Thomas.

Photograph by: Nick Baker.

Subject identified by: Noel Thomas, Nick Baker.

Location: Panti Forest, Johor, Peninsular Malaysia.

Elevation: 30 metres.

Habitat: Edge of tall, secondary forest, close to a busy main road.

Dates and times: (i) 14 January 2017, 19:20 hrs (ii) 09 December 2018, 19:10 hrs.

Identity of subject: Red Giant Flying Squirrel, *Petaurista petaurista* (Mammalia, Rodentia, Sciuridae).

Description of record: On 14 January 2017 a large species of flying squirrel was observed at dusk climbing a tall, dead tree close to the main Kota Tinggi – Mersing highway, and after 5 minutes was seen to glide into the forest away from the road. No photographs were taken of that sighting. The tree was revisited on 09 December, 2018 and again a large flying squirrel was observed at the same tree at dusk: grainy photographs were acquired in low light, and enhanced in Adobe Photoshop. The squirrel was identified clearly as a Red Giant Flying Squirrel (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1.

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Remarks: The squirrel illustrated here is clearly identified as *Petaurista petaurista* based on its size, its reddish pelage (and absence of white markings) and the dark tip to its long tail. This is a widespread sciurid in tall, lowland forest in Peninsular Malaysia and beyond. The author has also observed the species at Sungai Menyala, Negeri Sembilan and on the island of Langkawi, Kedah where it is frequently seen. Although considered a nocturnal species, it may sometimes be active by day (Francis, 2008): a search of the internet reveals many images clearly taken in daylight at other locations.

The presence of *Petaurista petaurista* at Panti Forest does not appear to be documented: both Yong (2006) and Sharma *et al* (2009) make no mention of the species. Flying squirrels which emerge from their daytime roost at dusk and in very low light (as is the case with this example) may easily be overlooked. Tentatively, this implies that this large, brightly coloured and easily identifiable squirrel is almost exclusively nocturnal at those parts of Panti Forest visited by researchers and nature enthusiasts.

References:

- Francis, C. M. (2008). *A Field Guide to the Mammals of South-East Asia*. New Holland Publishers (UK) Ltd. 392 pp.
- Sharma, D. S. K., Wong, E. P., Liew, E. Y. T. & Azlan bin Mohamed. (2009). The Larger Mammals of Panti Forest Reserve. In *Hutan Simpan Panti, Johor, Pengurusan Hutan, Persekitaran Fizikal dan Kepelbagaian Biologi*. Jabatan Perhutanan Semenanjung Malaysia.
- Yong, D. L. (2006). Preliminary list of larger vertebrates of Panti Forest Reserve, South Johore (2002–2006). *Singapore Avifauna*, 20(1), 26-35.