

To See A Sulu Hornbill

Not many people have heard a Sulu Hornbill and fewer still have seen one. But I have! It's a remarkably prehistoric looking bird with an over-size beak and its long fantail. I saw it on my trekking vacation in the Philippines but it's not like I was looking for it, you see, I'm not interested in birds - not in the least - no, I was there to see the mountains and rivers and to wake up under a different sky. I wanted to experience a tropical forest; smell the scents, watch the waterfalls, touch the trees. I went for the whole, not the particular, and to know and be touched by something I'd never known before. Even the company of my group: those newly-retired, flabby-fleshed boomer tourists blowing their lump sums, couldn't spoil that.

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But that bird, it was no big deal, I hadn't stalked the thing - it that's what bird watchers do - and why would I? It was only a fluke that I was to be the one to see it. What happened was I'd wandered away from the group as they encircled our ever-smiling guide at a well-trodden viewpoint above a lush gorge. They were picking her brains about the most poisonous snake venom and asking how often the funny little brown monkeys dropped their babies jumping between trees. I just had to slip away from their chatter and the forest rinsed their babbling from my ears and cleared my head. Briefly, it seemed like I was in a completely different world. The greenery was thick and exotic - a proper jungle - and although I wasn't far away from the party I pretty soon couldn't hear them at all through the screen of broad leaves and clumps of