

A Tale of Two Langurs - China 2025

In 2024 I decided to sign up for Royle Safaris Sichuan Mammal Watching tour. With Golden Snub-nosed Monkeys and Tibetan Macaques on the table, I knew I wanted to add a little more primate action to my trip. Justin Brown had tipped me off about a population of Francois Langurs about 6 hours from Chengdu. I also had looked at Facebook posts from mega birder Jonathan Newman seeing White-headed Langurs on a birding trip. So I knew I wanted to try for both these species. My primate watching buddy Judy Parrish joined me for both trip extensions.

The Sichuan mammal watching tour is lead by Sid Francis. I contacted Martin Royle to set up the Francois Langur portion of the trip with him prior to the main trip which went as follows.

26 February 2025 - After an international flight I landed at the Chengdu Shuangliu Airport early in the morning. Sid was waiting for me and was joined by his wife Meggie who went to see the langurs with us. After picking up Judy we drove about 6 hours into Chongqing Province past the large city of Nanchuan. Meggie had booked us rooms in the Holiday Inn Tianshanping Canyon in Miaoba



Village. When we entered the village there were signs and wooden carvings of the langurs everywhere. From on bridges to tops of houses, to along the road. This was a good sign for me.



庙坝村野生动物科普

白颊黑叶猴的社会行为：

白颊黑叶猴一般以家族性群体生活。群体有明确的等级制度，猴王在群体中具有领导地位，负责保护群体的安全和领地。成员之间通过各种声音、动作和表情进行交流，维系群体的稳定和团结。





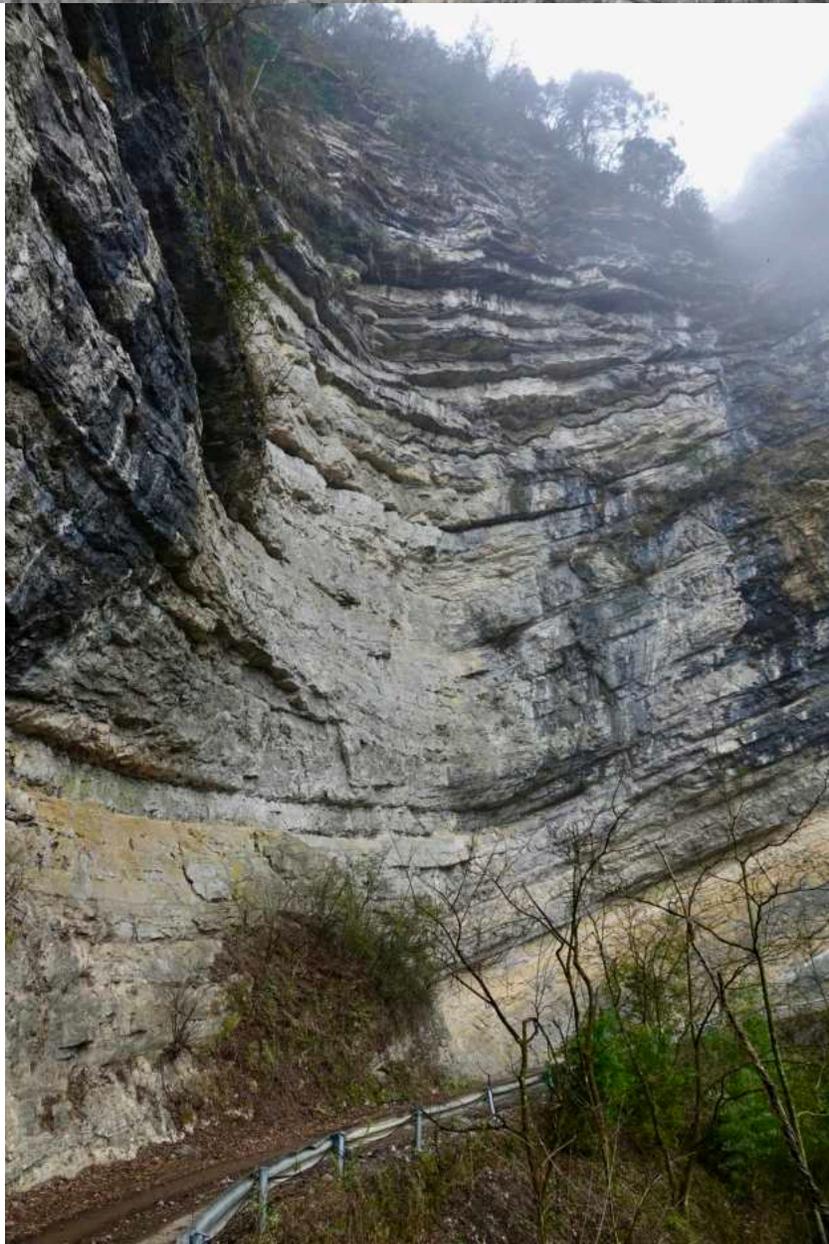
We were greeted by the owner of the hotel Miss Pei who served as a good source of information for us. She does not speak English. The hotel itself was a typical inside marble type huge Asian hotel.



With it not being tourist season we were the only guests. It also meant there was no heat in the hotel and I joked if I died they could just place my body in the lobby for preservation with the temperature. The hotel did supply a small space heater for the rooms and an electric blanket under the beds. The majority of tourists that go to the area are after two things as far as I can tell. First, rest and relaxation from city life and second to try to see a Temminck's Tragopan (bird) in one of the two bird hides in the area. After Sid showed me a picture of said bird, I agreed that it looked fancy and time permitting we should try to have a look for one. We ended up eating dinner with Miss Pei and with Meggie interpreting, we made a plan for the next day. She initially kept telling us to go to the bird hide that she owned in the morning. I kept asking did the langurs show up there? She then realized we were not as interested in the birds and wanted to primate watch. Her initial reaction was they are not guaranteed. But I felt confident as Justin had told me that when he was there they were easy to see along the road. He had also stopped at a small basic birding lodge closer to the canyon entrance to see them. Meggie called the lodge and they reported that sometimes the langurs show up behind the lodge and we could look in the morning.

27 Feb 2025

We ended up leaving early in the morning with Miss Pei with us to drive along the canyon road. The drive was beautiful and passed exposed limestone cliffs and had multiple pull outs with bricked margins to look into the canyon. Miss Pei showed us spots that she had seen the langurs before, but on the way in we saw nothing. On the drive out close to the last exposed cliff Meggie called out "LANGURS!!!" In what I considered to be the appropriate tone for excitement when seeing a new species of primate. But better than just seeing them, I watched as several members of a large troop were licking minerals from the cliff wall and eating clay. Something I had only ever seen with langurs on documentaries doing in the past. We had prolonged views of them doing this until the troop were done and ran up the forest close to the cliff out of sight. Several of the females in the troop also had young golden babies.



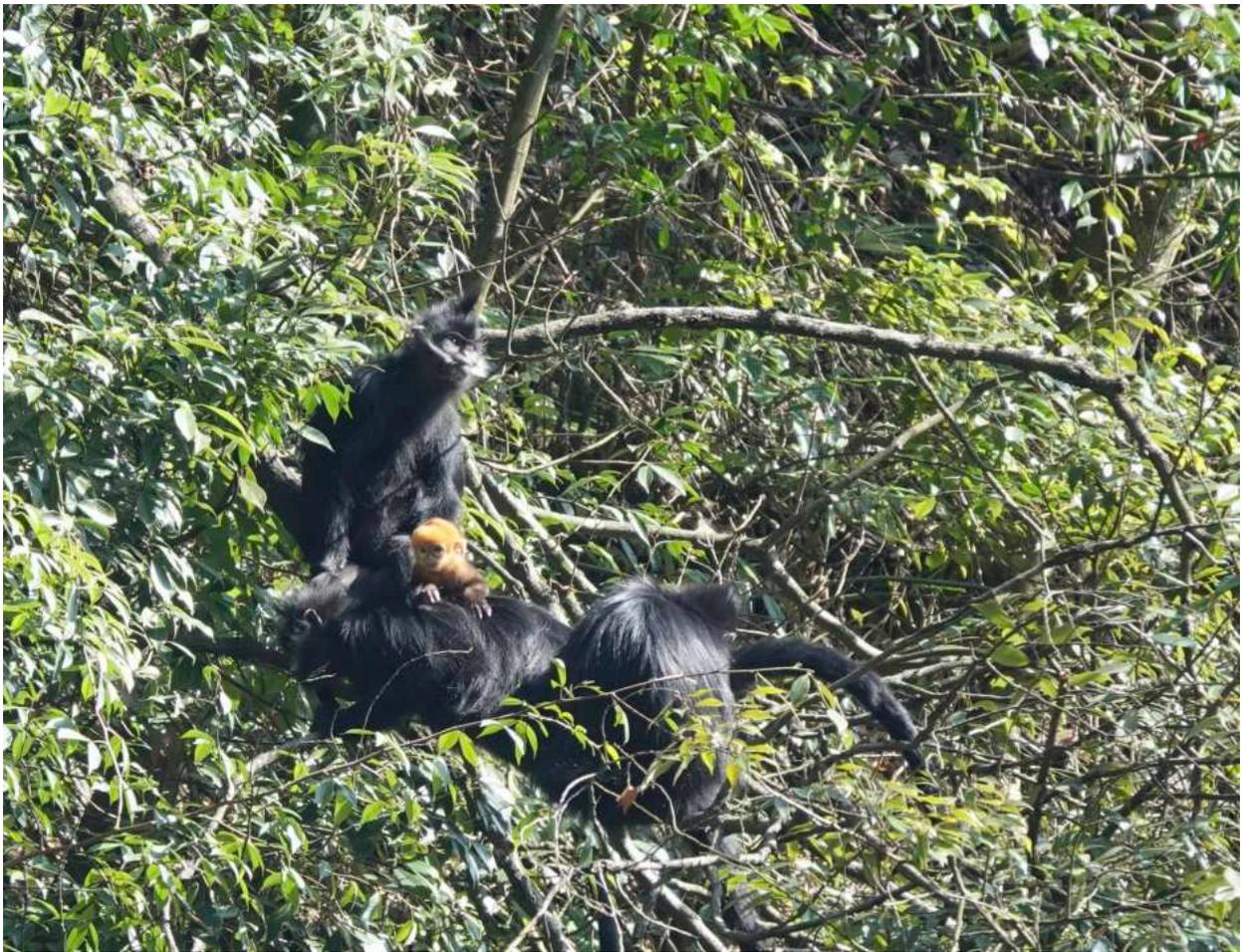
After this we drove to the small birding lodge where Justin had seen his langurs. There are several rooms with a shared bathroom and showers. They also did not seem to have heat. Sid was able to spot several distant langurs with his heat scope from the back of the hotel. We then decided to go to Miss Pei's bird hide. The hide was located close to the hotel. And after a brisk 10 minute straight up walk we reached the comfortable hide where a local worker was waiting for us. He placed grain in several areas in front of the hide and did some whistle noises to attract birds. Initially several species of birds showed up (note while Sid did call out what they were that information was not retained by me). At this point I was just sitting there watching. Then cue not one but five Red-hipped Squirrels



showed up to take advantage of the bounty. Cue me raising my camera in excitement and starting to fire off photos and videos. At this point the hide worker came over to look and see what I was photographing. When he realized I was ignoring the birds and taking squirrel photos, he made a disgusted look on his face, he grunted then he walked off. While we did not see the tragopan, some Golden Pheasants showed up which were worth some photos.



After lunch we went back along the canyon road and saw another three troops of langurs mostly at a distance. By the end of the day the troop we had watched in the morning had moved to the forest across from the cliff and we watched them for over an hour while they foraged.



After dinner we took a night drive in the canyon and saw two Red and White Giant Flying Squirrels along the same cliff face that we had seen the langurs on in the morning.

28 Feb 2025 - In the morning we went back to Miss Pei's bird hide. We missed the tragopans (supposedly they showed up about an hour after we left) but were rewarded with more Red-hipped Squirrels and a lone Pallas's Squirrel.



We drove back to the canyon drive and saw a new troop of langurs right next to the road. The large male was sitting along the bricks on a pull out and was licking minerals while younger troop members cautiously watched us. We then watched the large male forage in nearby trees, then go back to the bricks, then to the cliff face by the side of the road. As a departing gift as he was climbing the cliff he dropped several rocks on Sid's car.





After this we drove to back to Chengdu to meet up with the group the next day for the main tour which I will not cover here.

The White-headed Langur portion of my trip involved me contacting Chinese guide Steven An who runs China Birding Tours (info @chinabirdingtours.com). Steven mainly sets up bird watching tours, but is interested in doing mammal trips as well as culture based tours. He was very quick to answer and to quickly to set up my extension. While he was unable to be our actual guide, he linked us with the fabulous Elan James Tang to take us to the Guang Xi Chongzuo White-headed Langur National Nature Reserve close to the village of Banli in Guangxi Province. Elan is also bird watching guide that likes mammals.

15 March 2025 - We flew from Chengdu Tianfu International Airport to Nanning and were greeted by Elan. Elan speaks perfect English and is very enthusiastic. This was to be his first time seeing this species of langur and he seemed keen to do it. Our flight got in late so we initially did not think we would have time to see the langurs, but after a 1.5 hour drive from the airport close to the entrance gate of the reserve, we stopped and saw multiple langurs in trees right next to the reserve road with Chinese tourists photographing them. We immediately went to the visitor center and checked in and were given badges to wear while in the reserve. The best part was the reserve has large open air buses that drive tourists around to look for the langurs. We hopped on a bus and watched one remaining langur from the troop we had seen from the road, then hopped on the bus again and watched a second troop close to a stone wall. While the reserve closes around 16:30, since Steven had booked us rooms in the reserve hotel, we were allowed to stay as long as we wanted.





After staying with the last troop, Elan drove us to the hotel close to the visitor center. The hotel was monkey themed with a large monkey shaped head by the entrance and langur baby head bed frames and langur based bedspreads. The walls of the rooms were painted with a rainforest motif. I never realized I was missing out on a monkey based hotel until this point. The rooms of the hotel are en suite, but the bathroom and shower are located in a small room that you have to access by going out onto the room balcony. The reserve was also fond of the same wooden monkey statues as with the Francois Langur spot.





The hotel does not have a restaurant so Elan drove us into the small sleepy town of Banli to look for a restaurant. His initial choice no longer served food so we were taken to the one restaurant in town that was open. As this was a Saturday night, the restaurant had also just hosted a wedding party. We arrived with the stragglers of said party which included multiple passed out patrons on tables and the floor and a feisty group of patrons playing a somewhat aggressive game of rock-paper-scissors. My initial instinct based on the appearance of the restaurant inside post party was to maybe do a little vacation fasting, but hunger took the better of me. It actually ended up being the food highlight of the entire trip.

16 March 2025 - Elan had set it up with one of the rangers, Mr Xu, to meet us at 6 am in the morning to watch a family of langurs come out of the caves they sleep in, in the limestone karsts they inhabit. However at 6 am it was pouring down rain and he recommended to wait as the langurs were not fans of the rain. So at 7 am when the rain stopped we met Mr Xu who took us to one of his favorite spots. The langurs were too quick for us and the troop was already on the side of one of the roads feeding. The best part was there were 8 females (we saw 7) with golden babies. We watched them feed on paper mulberry leaves for an extended period of time until they went off deeper into the forest.





The reserve itself is set up around a series of limestone karst mountains that the langurs call home. The last census in 2020 counted about 400 monkeys. They currently reported that there are about 45 families. By the roads there was also sugarcane fields that were at the time of my visit not growing any plants. We were allowed to walk along the fields if needed to get closer to the forest edge with some of the troops. The majority of the langurs were very relaxed. They were not being fed by tourists or the rangers and showed little interest in people themselves. This ended up being one of my favorite parts of my entire trip and is now my favorite langur.



Since we were there on the weekend there were a moderate amount of Chinese tourists and two western tourists that I saw, but except for one time I never felt like I was in a huge crowd. In the morning we watched two langur families in the morning, then a third family that was walking, running and resting along a stone wall.





After lunch at the same restaurant (minus the post party atmosphere) we relaxed until around 3 pm then boarded a bus and drove around until we came across a langur family. As it was raining during the mid day, we did end up watching several members of a troop coming out of a cave. At the end of the day we had a prolonged view of a very large family with multiple large males that had a brief monkey battle in front of us from the dominant male showing the other males who was boss. We also watched them run down the road from their feeding area to the karst area that was there home.







After dinner, Elan was able to get permission for us to spot light in the reserve as the monkeys would not be disturbed since they were sleeping in caves. Unfortunately we saw no mammals during this. Elan did also have to have a call with the local police about why we were there as Westerners. Westerners are allowed in the reserve, but since it is very close to the Vietnam border, they wanted to make sure we were just staying in China. At the end of the day I asked Elan how he felt about watching just one species for a prolonged period of time as a birding guide who usually ticks off species with clients. He joked that he already had told Steven he was now going to be a mammal watching guide.

17 March 2025 - We drove back to Nanning to get our flight to Beijing for the evening. On the way out we did have a final view of the troop we had left the night before walking on the ground and along some power lines to get deeper into a forested area.