

Night-time Roost of the Black-eared Barbet

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Introduction

The Black-eared Barbet *Psilopogon duvaucelii* is common in Peninsular Malaysia and Bornean Malaysia (Wells 1999; Smythies 1999) but little is known about the social behaviour of this barbet (Krishnan 2023a). We report a night-time roost of the Black-eared Barbet.

Observations

While on a field trip to Maliau Basin, Sabah, Malaysia, Amar and Ron were informed by Azree that he had observed an adult Black-eared Barbet using a hole almost every night for two weeks before our arrival. We decided to investigate and document this behaviour.

At 1500hrs on 28 March 2026 we visited the site but there was no bird in the roosting hole. Plate 1 shows an overview of the roosting site. It was in an old barbet or woodpecker nesting hole on the underside of a rotting, horizontal branch. The branch was approximately 3.5 meters above the ground. The tree was located fairly near to the Maliau Basin Field Station and our accommodation building.



Plate 1: Overview of Black-eared Barbet roosting site. Maliau Basin, Sabah, Malaysia, 28 March 2026.

We returned to the hole at 2110hrs the same day. The Black-eared Barbet was observed roosting in the hole (Plate 2). It was faced forward in the hole, suggesting that after entering the hole there was sufficient space in the cavity for it to turn around. Azree noted that the bird continued to use the roost site until the time of writing this article (04 April 2026).



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Plate 2: Black-eared Barbet in roost hole. Maliau Basin, Sabah, Malaysia, 28 March 2026. Image taken using a long lens and brief torch light; no flash was used.

Discussion

We were not able to find any published literature on night-time roosts by Black-eared Barbet using tree holes and this is probably the first such observation. The hole location suggest that this was an old Black-eared Barbet nesting hole. Nesting holes made by the Black-eared Barbet are often excavated on the underside of a dead branch (Smythies 1999; Shorts & Horne 2002). Personal observation by Amar of a nest excavation in Perak, Malaysia was also on the underside of a dead branch (Plate 3).

Some barbet species are known to use cavities for roosting, particularly the Coppersmith Barbet *Psilopogon haemacephalus*, which may spend 50% of the day in the roost (Shorts & Horne 2002; Krishnan 2023b). The Coppersmith Barbet has also been described using a hole in a concrete electricity pillar as a roost (Karunarathna. & Amarasinghe 2008); a behaviour that Amar has also observed once in Perak. The Brown-headed Barbet *Psilopogon zeylanicus* is also known to roost alone in tree hollows (Krishnan 2021). Amar previously reported four Sooty Barbets *Caloramphus hayii* using a nesting hole as a night-time cooperative roost (Amar-Singh HSS 2025).

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Plate 3: Black-eared Barbet excavating a nesting hole. Perak, Malaysia, 12th January 2026.

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