

EDITORIAL

The Papua New Guinea Bird Society, during the two decades of its existence, has published a great deal of ornithological information in its official Newsletter. Unfortunately, but understandably, many authors who could have contributed to that publication chose to place their papers in other more widely distributed journals overseas. The Society now feels that an effort should be made to bring together in one journal all Papua New Guinean ornithological papers, thus avoiding the frustration and inconvenience of having the material scattered widely and often obscurely throughout the world. This is the first issue of MURUK, a quarterly journal, to be published by the Papua New Guinea Bird Society. It has come into being because of the a joint effort by the Society and the Department of Environment and Conservation who were also interested in consolidating papers on the birds of this region.

We hope that MURUK fulfils a need and encourage contributions of an academic or formal nature. It will be a journal dedicated to the sharing of knowledge about the unique birds of Papua New Guinea, as well as the other half of New Guinea, Irian Jaya, and the entire Solomon Islands region. Together they make up the 'New Guinea Region', an unique area, unsurpassed in its high percentage of endemics for such a relatively small part of the world.

This issue contains a paper questioning the current taxonomy of the *Aplonis* starlings, and a most interesting article on the co-operative breeding of Helmeted Friarbirds and Brown Orioles. The latter article raises many questions we hope to have answered in forthcoming issues of MURUK. Finally there is a report of a Black Tern at the Moitaka settling ponds near Port Moresby, the first record of this bird in the New Guinea region. We trust that you will find the articles interesting and topical, and hope that you will give this journal the support required for its success.

The Editorial Committee wishes to thank all authors who have contributed papers to date and we apologize for the delay in producing the first issue. We are optimistic that the next few issues will appear on schedule. For the long term the Society will continue to publish MURUK as regularly as possible when it receives appropriate papers. The continuing support of authors everywhere who have new material on the birds of the 'New Guinea Region' is needed.

The society Newsletter will henceforth become a bimonthly publication dealing solely with the activities of the Papua New Guinea Bird Society. Local members of the Society will receive both the Newsletter and MURUK as they are published. Overseas members will receive their Newsletters enclosed with MURUK on a quarterly basis.

Brian W. Finch, Editor

THE *APLONIS* STARLINGS OF THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

BRIAN W. FINCH

INTRODUCTION

The Solomon Islands are very well represented by the Starling family. There are only three genera present, one of which is introduced, but numerous species. The genus *Aplonis* has a greater abundance of species in the region than any other. Depending on the taxonomy followed there are no less than ten forms, which the author feels should all be recognised as individual species. This paper gives some unpublished data concerning these forms, and attempts to explain how so many different species can co-exist in these islands, whereas on the New Guinea mainland only two species occur over the major portion of the island with a very locally distributed third species confined to two major river basins.

THE GENUS *APLONIS*

The species of the genus *Aplonis* found in the Solomon Islands are as follows: *brunneicapilla*, *cantoroides*, *dichrous*, *feadensis*, *grandis*, *insularis*, *malaitae*, *metallica*, *tabuensis* and *zelandica*. These last two named species only enter the political Solomon Islands in the Santa Cruz Islands and represent New Hebridean avifauna not Solomon Islands; as such they are not discussed further in this paper, which deals with the Solomon Islands as a faunal region. The inter-relationships amongst the *Aplonis* species may be described by establishing three groups.

PROBABLE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SPECIES

<u>cantoroides</u>	<u>metallica</u>	<u>grandis</u>
feadensis	brunneicapilla	malaitae
insularis		
tabuensis		
zelandica...	(?).....	dichrous

THE *CANTOROIDES* GROUP

Plump, stout-billed, short-tailed starlings are very widespread in the south-west Pacific. Two species are very widespread, *payanensis*, which extends into Malaysia from the Philippines and Borneo, and the familiar *cantoroides* found from the Moluccas to the Solomons. Over most of its range, this adaptable species has colonised small islands without changing in form; on some very small islands, however, the birds have differentiated from the ancestral stock sufficiently to warrant full specific status.