

**Upperparts:** From the nape extending on to lower back, there was a series of furrowed dark and pale stripes which shaded into the cold Dunlin-grey of the lower back. The wing-coverts and inner secondaries were grey with indications of darker centres and conspicuous buffy white edges to the feathers. The flight feathers were blackish and contrasted with the rest of the wings. The primaries were very long and extended well beyond the tail, and each wing tip crossed over totally obscuring the all grey tail.

**Flight:** In flight with the Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, this bird differed little except in being smaller; it shared the obscure indistinct whitish wing bar of the sharp-tails, and showed an all blackish rump.

**Bill:** The bill was shorter than a Sharp-tailed Sandpipers', and was straight with only a slightly perceptible droop at the tip when seen from some angles, but not nearly as pronounced a droop as in Sharp-tailed Sandpipers' bills. Unlike that species the bill was completely blackish, and did not show the olive cast to the basal third of the lower mandible. The width was even along the length, tapering at the tip.

**Legs:** Blackish although usually obscured by water as the bird fed with the Sharp-tailed Sandpipers in shallow muddy water. Although the two species were feeding in the same depth of water, the Baird's Sandpiper was up to its belly in water whilst the Sharp-tailed Sandpipers were still keeping their underparts dry, testifying to the *C. bairdii* having much shorter legs.

**General Appearance:** The bird was like a large stint in proportions, but more attenuated and with a head that appeared too small for the body. The neck was short compared to other medium sized *Calidris* and the bird had a very sleek profile with the long tapering back and wings protruding beyond the tail.

**Feeding:** Whilst feeding in the shallow water, the bird's habits were distinct enough to enable it to be picked out from the Sharp-tailed Sandpipers even if obscured bodily by that species. The jabbing motion was more like that exhibited by the Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos* (a useful means of picking out that species from Sharp-tailed Sandpipers when plumage differences cannot be discerned). The head was held with the bill pointing vertically downwards, and inserted into the water with a series of rapid jabs, retracted, although the tip may still have remained in water, and the bird moved forward a little. Then the procedure was repeated. By contrast the Sharp-tailed Sandpipers' feeding actions were far less deliberate and more casual, the bill inserted into the water at an angle, not vertically, and with slower series of shallow jabs. The legs were slightly bent, whereas the Baird's Sandpiper seemed to keep its legs straight, although admittedly obscured by water.

## DISCUSSION

All four observers had had previous experience with Baird's Sandpiper in the field, either in Canada or in the United Kingdom.

Like many vagrant birds, this individual exhibited variance from what is considered 'the norm' in its choice of feeding habitats. Instead of feeding on the dry mud it chose

to feed in water with the Sharp-tailed Sandpipers. It is quite likely that dry mud baking in an equatorial sun becomes quite sterile. Other Baird's Sandpipers that have turned up in Australia have also been found in wetter habitats than would be considered usual in the Nearctic where the bird is mainly a passage migrant through the central prairies rather than along the coasts.

The presence of obscure spotting along the flanks is suggestive of an adult bird coming out of breeding plumage, whilst the overall grey appearance with narrow but distinctive buffy white edges to coverts is more suggestive of a first winter bird.

The breeding range of this species extends from the Nearctic into western Siberia, and it is only to be expected that a few birds would wander southwards to the Australasian region. This record would constitute the first record for the New Guinea region, whilst Australian has had four and New Zealand one record.

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## ACCIPITER NOVAEHOLLANDIAE ATTACKS CACOMANTIS CASTANEIVENTRIS

D. McWHIRTER

On 4 June 1983, at about 15:00 hours, while sitting in the lounge of the Wau Ecological Institute hostel, I heard a rush of wings outside, behind me. A hawk had hit another bird in flight, and the impact had carried them about 10 m further into a small hollow near a coffee bush. The hawk crouched with spread wings and tail over the struggling, crying bird. The hawk's head was up and its mouth open. When the victim cried and struggled harder, the hawk pressed closer, bent its head down, and may have bitten the bird. At this point, the hawk could be identified as an adult, coloured phase Grey Goshawk, *Accipiter novaehollandiae*.

When I went outside to try and determine the identity of the other bird, the hawk flew off, but, judging from the scolding by other birds, circled around behind some trees, and stayed in the vicinity. The victim was an adult *Cacomantis castaneiventris*. It did not fly and seemed to be in shock. It had a slight wound in the throat area, the left eye was punctured, and the adjacent orbital bone looked damaged, perhaps from a bite. After setting the cuckoo down a metre from where it had previously lain, I went into the hostel to see if the hawk would return.

About fifteen minutes later, it flew in and landed in the base of the nearest coffee bush. It seemed to inspect the area visually, staying within the cover of the bush. However,

it apparently failed to see the immobile cuckoo (from where it was perched, the bush may have obscured its view). After two minutes or so, the hawk flew up to a bare branch, ruffled and preened its feathers for a minute, then flew off. Towards dusk, I went out to see if the cuckoo, which still had not moved, was dead. When I reached to touch it, it scrambled to the shelter of the nearby coffee bush. It acted more alert, but seemed incapable of sustained flight. When I checked the next morning, the cuckoo was gone.

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### BLACK-HEADED GULLS *LARUS RIDIBUNDUS* AT LAE AIRSTRIP, MOROBE PROVINCE. THIRD RECORD FOR MAINLAND PAPUA NEW GUINEA.

BRIAN W. FINCH

On 19 January 1985 a group of birdwatchers including myself, while waiting for a plane to be refuelled at Lae Airport, observed waders on the airstrip. Meanwhile, I walked to the sea at the end of the airfield and saw a bird, albeit at a great distance, that had dark underwings and white flashy forewings. I thought it was probably a Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*.

The party hurried to the same point where a sewage outfall pipe was attracting numbers of terns, particularly White-winged Black Terns *Chlidonias leucopterus*. Amongst these terns was not one but three Black-headed Gulls. All three birds were in first winter plumage, with a black tipped orangy-brown bill, brown on the secondary coverts and a narrow black terminal tail band.

The other two mainland Papua New Guinea records, also discovered by the author, were both at Moitaka Settling Ponds in 1979 and 1982. These individuals were also in first-winter plumage.

Three records by one observer in six years would suggest that small numbers of Black-headed Gulls are annually visiting the coasts of Papua New Guinea. The species has yet to be recorded in Australia.

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### FEMALE HOUSE SPARROW *PASSER DOMESTICUS* ON PAGA HILL, PORT MORESBY. A SECOND RECORD FOR PNG.

ROGER K. HICKS

On 10 June 1986 at 07:00 I was bird-watching on Paga Hill before going into work when I heard a familiar call, but was unable to identify the species. The source of the call was tracked down to a rubbish collection area. The bird was feeding amongst the rubbish but when disturbed flew up onto some nearby telephone wires where it was identified as a female House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*. I watched it for about two minutes before it flew into some trees and could not be relocated. I saw the sparrow once more, and again only briefly, on 12 June, when it was perched on some more overhead wires in the company of two White-breasted Wood-swallows *Artamus leucorhynchus*. Unfortunately no other bird-watchers managed to see the sparrow. I am familiar with this species and its congener, the Tree Sparrow *P. montanus* in Europe. The following description is taken from the notes I made shortly after each observation.

It was two thirds the size of a White-breasted Wood-Swallow, the only species present with which to compare it, and of a similar chunky build. It had a heavy pale seed-eaters bill. The underparts, from chin to vent, were a uniform brown-grey. The upperparts were a darker brown and heavily streaked with black on the mantle. Pale edgings to the wing coverts resulted in one obvious wing-bar and one less obvious. The most notable plumage feature was a broad pale supercilium which started behind the eye and went towards the back of the head.

The habitat on Paga Hill is mixed savanna (i.e. grassland with some trees and shrubs) with some houses and associated garden plants. This female House Sparrow first appeared after a month of continuous south-easterly winds. Assuming it was a true vagrant it would probably have originated in Australia where the nearest House Sparrows are at Cooktown, north Queensland (Pizzey 1980), some 700km SSW of Port Moresby. However the situation of Paga Hill less than 1km from Port Moresby's harbour, is probably more important than the habitat in which the sparrow was seen or the prevailing weather conditions prior to its arrival. As with the first record of this species in PNG, a party of four at Kila Kila (Ashford 1978), it is probably that this female arrived aboard ship.

Ashford, R.W. 1978. First record of House Sparrow for Papua New Guinea. *Emu* 78: 36

Pizzey, G. 1980. *A Field Guide to the Birds of Australia*. Collins. Sydney.

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