

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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