

SOME OBSERVATIONS FROM LOWLAND SWAMP FOREST IN SOUTH BOUGAINVILLE

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The avifauna of North Solomons province, probably the most distinct in Papua New Guinea, is poorly known. This is shown by the fact that Hadden (1981) discovered two new birds in the mountains of Bougainville in addition to the numerous migrant species that he added to the province's list. These notes present information on species observed in an area of lowland swamp forest on Bougainville.

On January 6, 1985 I travelled south of Kieta airport to explore a lowland forest that I had seen several months before while overflying the area. I followed the road south-east from the airport for some 30 km along the coast. The road swings inland towards the south with a bridge over a creek 34 km from the airport. The forest began immediately beyond the bridge, and continued for several kilometres.

One of first birds to be seen was a swamphen-sized rail standing alongside the road, a daylight sighting at 3:30 pm on a rainy day, of one of PNG's rarest bird, Woodford's Rail. I could easily see the c. 5 cm long pale-based bill, dark brown back and sooty underparts. As another vehicle approached the rail become more nervous (at had been flicking its tail down and from its normal horizontal position), and stood quite erect. Suddenly it bolted across the road running on powerful slate-grey legs and flapping its brown wings ineffectively over its back. At that time, dark barring of the remiges was apparent (Woodford's Rail is sometimes considered conspecific with Fiji's Bar-winged Rail). The fact that the bird was running while flapping its wings, but not actually flying, lends accordance to assertions that it is probably flightless (Haddon 1981). The bird made no sound while visible, but a melodious yelping bark that was heard later in the area could have been made by it.

A colony of White-eyed Starlings (*Aplonis brunneicapillus*) was found in an isolated tree beside a logging track that goes west from the main road about 3.5 km from the bridge mentioned above. The birds, which I had seen twice briefly in Guadalcanal, were in the crown of a 20-25 m high tree. The largest branches were festooned with epiphytes into which the birds occasionally disappeared. The most obvious characteristic of the birds was the two elongated central tail feathers that doubled the length of the tail. These two long feathers were lax, an unusual characteristic in starlings, and flapped about in the breeze. Through 10x binoculars I could clearly see the white eyes, though the "highly arched bill" (Hadden 1981) was not evident in the field. At least two individuals made a "high flapping" display (Cain and Galbraith, 1956) which was the first clue that the birds were nesting and not feeding. In 10 minutes of observations I saw three probable nest holes in the epiphytes that covered the upper branches of the tree. The tree containing the nests was isolated from other trees by the logging operations which seems to indicate a preference for isolated trees such as the ones in which Cain and Galbraith found the first nesting colonies in Guadalcanal. However, the locale, in

lowland swamp forest, would counter their implicit assertion that the birds breed in hill forest, not lowland or mountain forest.

At 1900 hrs that evening, I heard a sound that may have been a Fearful Owl (*Nesasio solomonensis*). The noise was a grating, raspy, wailing "Wooooouuuuu" that lasted about 10 seconds. It slowly rose and fell in pitch, with a cycle of about 3 seconds. At the end, the pitch rose higher and higher until it ended in a screechy "eeeeee". When I tried to imitate the sound two birds flew up to me as if to mob. This reaction by a night heron and a white eye confirmed my thought that I had just imitated an owl. Unfortunately, after calling twice, the source of the noise stopped, and I never saw the bird.

The area was unusually rich in birdlife. In a few hours birding in an afternoon and the next morning I recorded 46 species in the forest alone. As can be seen from the following list, many characteristic Solomons species were found. The Ultramarine Kingfisher (*Halcyon leucopygia*) was unusual in its abundance in the forest west of the road on the lower slopes of some small hills.

The forest in the area is mostly swamp forest with many small streams running through it. The best area extends about six km along both sides of the main road between 34 and 40 km south of Kieta Airport. Sadly, the area is now being logged which will permanently alter the habitat. Let's hope that this destruction of habitat doesn't send Woodford's Rail down the same path to extinction as its close relative the Bar-Winged Rail of Fiji.

A complete list of the birds seen in the area follows:

Rufous Night Heron Common	<i>Nycticorax caledonicus</i>
Crested Hawk 2 seen	<i>Aviceda subcristata</i>
Variable Goshawk 2 seen	<i>Accipiter novaehollandiae</i>
Sanfords Sea-Eagle 1 seen	<i>Haliaeetus sanfordi</i>
Pacific Black Duck Common	<i>Anas superciliosa</i>
Woodford's Rail 1 seen	<i>Nesoclopeus woodfordi</i>
Superb First Dove 4 seen	<i>Ptilinopus superbus</i>
Claret-breasted Fruit-Dove 6 seen	<i>Ptilinopus viridis</i>
Red-knobbed Imperial Pigeon Common	<i>Ducula rubricera</i>

Grey Imperial Pigeon 5 seen.	<i>Ducula pistrinaria</i>	Dollarbird 1 seen.	<i>Eurystomus orientalis</i>
Spot-breasted Cuckoo-Dove 1 seen.	<i>Macropygia mackinlayi</i>	Blyth's Hornbill Common in evening.	<i>Rhyticeros plicatus</i>
Stephan's Ground-Dove Very commonly heard, 4 seen.	<i>Chalcophaps stephani</i>	Pacific Swallow Common.	<i>Hirundo tahitica</i>
Cardinal Lory Common.	<i>Eos cardinalis</i>	White-bellied Cuckoo-Shrike Common.	<i>Coracina papuensis</i>
Rainbow Lorikeet Common.	<i>Trichoglossus haematodus</i>	Solomons Black-bellied Cuckoo-Shrike 4 seen.	<i>Coracina holopolia</i>
Red-flanked Lorikeet 10 seen.	<i>Charmosyna placentis</i>	Cicadabird Common.	<i>Coracina tenuirostris</i>
Duchess Lorikeet 25 seen.	<i>Charmosyna margarethae</i>	Willie Wagtail Very common.	<i>Rhipidura leucophrys</i>
Green Pygmy Parrot Common.	<i>Micropsitta finschii</i>	Solomons Pied Monarch 2 seen.	<i>Monarcha barbata</i>
Solomons Cockatoo Very Common.	<i>Cacatua ducorpsi</i>	Chestnut-bellied Monarch 4 seen.	<i>Monarcha castaneiventris</i>
Brush Cuckoo 5 heard.	<i>Cacomantis variolosus</i>	Solomons Satin Flycatcher Common.	<i>Myiagra ferrocyanea</i>
Common Koel Commonly heard.	<i>Eudynamys scolopacea</i>	Red-naped Myzomela 1 seen.	<i>Myzomela lafargei</i>
Fearful Owl 1 heard (?).	<i>Nesasio solomonensis</i>	Solomons Flowerpecker Common.	<i>Dicaeum aenum</i>
Moustached Tree-Swift Common	<i>Hemiprocne mystacea</i>	Yellow-throated White-eye Common.	<i>Zosterops metcalfei</i>
Uniform Swiftlet Very common.	<i>Collocalia vanikorensis</i>	Metallic Starling 20 nests near bridge.	<i>Aplonis mystacea</i>
Glossy Swiftlet Common.	<i>Collocalia esculenta</i>	Brown-winged Starling Common, one active nest seen.	<i>Aplonis grandis</i>
White-rumped Swiftlet Fairly Common.	<i>Collocalia spodiopygia</i>	White-eyed Starling 15 seen, nesting.	<i>Aplonis brunneocapillus</i>
Ultramarine Kingfisher Unusually common.	<i>Halcyon leucopygia</i>	Yellow-faced Myna Common.	<i>Mino dumontii</i>
Collared Kingfisher Common.	<i>Halcyon chloris</i>	Bougainville Crow 2 seen	<i>Corvus meeki</i>

Yellow-bellied Sunbird
Common.

Nectarinia jugularis

REFERENCES

- Cain, A.J. & I.C.J. Galbraith, 1956. Field notes on the birds of the Eastern Solomon Islands. *Ibis* 98:100-134, 262-295.
Hadden, D. 1981. *Birds of the North Solomons*. Wau Ecology Institute Handbook No. 8.

SOME INTERESTING OBSERVATIONS FROM BOUGAINVILLE AND WEST NEW BRITAIN

NICK GARDNER

Heinroth's Shearwater

Puffinus heinrothi

At dawn on the 5th November 1986 I was travelling on the MU "Kazi" bound for Kieta. The boat had just made a brief stop at the wharf of Numa Numa oil palm estate, and whilst heading out to sea my attention was caught by a small flock of Heinroth's Shearwaters. At least ten birds had congregated a short distance offshore (c. 200 m) below the summit of Mt. Balbi, and remained here throughout the period of observation. All dark sooty-brown plumage, small size and pale underwing were the most distinctive features. The latter was especially noticeable. All birds kept low over the water, flapping wings then gliding.

Fearful Owl

Nesasio solomonensis

Birding had been rather unproductive on the morning of the 7th November in the Montane forest above Panguna Copper Mine. Persistent rain had continued throughout the night and for most of the morning. Towards 10.30 am the rain eased and watery sunlight penetrated the thick canopy of cloud. Whilst examining tall emergent trees for feeding flocks, I noted a large bird emerge from the top-most branches of a nearby tree and perch above me. The bird was identified as a medium sized owl and appeared to have responded to my "pishing" noises. It now sat staring at me, albeit at considerable height (c. 30 m). During the period of observation, c. 15 minutes, the owl looked as though it was drying itself and regularly stretched its neck and shuffled its body feathers. The following notes were taken: head tawny coloured, mottled dark; bill yellowish iris yellow-orange; pale "T" mark around eye; underparts

yellow-buff with two darker patches on either side of upper breast; paler buff margin on throat; rounded barrel wings observed as it flew.

White-throated Pigeon

Columba vitiensis

Between the 9th to 10th November 1986 I had been searching in vain for White-eyed Starling (*Aplonis brunneicapilla*) in lowland primary forest around Oria (Southern Bougainville). On both days single sightings of White-throated Pigeon (*Columba vitiensis*) had been recorded. On both occasions birds were in flight, where overall dark grey plumage and white patch on throat were diagnostic. This appears to be the first record of this species at sea-level in Bougainville, where it is reported to be an extremely scarce bird.

Finsch's Imperial Pigeon

Ducula finschii

On the 31st October 1986 I was birding the pristine hill forest around the small village of Sabal tepun (Midway between Kimbe and Biella) and I was fortunate enough to locate the beautiful Finsch's Imperial Pigeon. For much of the period of observation (about 20 minutes) the bird remained motionless in the low canopy of a tall tree. The following notes were taken: a neat medium sized *Ducula*, obviously smaller than Red-knobbed Imperial Pigeon (*D. rubricera*) and without the robustness; head, neck and upper breast pearly grey with a pink suffusion on breast and sides of neck, whiter on crown and around eye; mantle bottle-green colour; belly rufous and clearly demarcated from grey breast; undertail coverts rufous; upper side of tail grey-black with obvious pale grey subterminal band; iris red, bill black, legs and feet coral red; in flight, fairly broad yellow-green tip to tail.