

EDITORIAL PAGE

COVER

The cover of this issue, and of those which follow, are representations of cassowaries by the artist Kauage.

Kauage is from Miugu Village in Chimbu Province, PNG. Until 1968 he worked in coffee and rubber plantations, and then he came to Port Moresby he and worked as a cleaner at the Administrative College. He showed his drawings to Georgina Beier, who was then in charge of the Centre for New Guinea Cultures at the University of Papua New Guinea. Soon after this he gave up his job and took up full time drawing and painting, giving his first exhibition at UPNG in 1969. Since then he has exhibited throughout Australia, as well as in Manila, Suva, Brighton, Edinburgh, Ite and Los Angeles. His work has recently been featured in Air Niugini's Paradise magazine, and he is generally recognised as one of Papua New Guinea's foremost artists. His work is frequently on show at the Art School in Port Moresby.

These pictures of Muruks were specially commissioned by the PNGBS. The full-sized originals (51 x 63 cm), in black and white, may be purchased from the Society at the very reasonable price of 40 kina each. Please write to Mike Hopkins if you are interested.

FUTURE COVERS

We would like to use pictures of Cassowaries on our future issues. Readers are invited to submit drawings for consideration. The size is unimportant, but in order to get as clear a reproduction as possible, line drawings in black ink with minimum shading would be best. Please send drawings to the editors.

FUTURE MURUKS

With the eventual publication of two issues of Muruk in 1987 the backlog of articles is now becoming low. If you have something which is intended for Muruk the editors would be very grateful if you could submit it as soon as possible. Suitable material can be sent direct to the editors, or to the Society at PO Box 1598, Boroko, NCD, Papua New Guinea.

Mike Hopkins & Joan Oliver, Editors

BIRDS OF THE LOWER SIBIUM MOUNTAINS PAPUA NEW GUINEA

GEORGE E. CLAPP

SUMMARY

An account is given of a brief visit in April 1984 to the Sibium Mountains, a semi-isolated outlier range in the Oro Province of North-east New Guinea. These mountains were hitherto unexplored ornithologically. Thirty-two species of birds were encountered, including the relatively uncommonly recorded Lesser Melampitta *Melampitta lugubris*, Wallace's Fairy-Wren *Sipodotus wallacii*, Yellow-legged Flycatcher *Microeca griseiceps* and Buff-tailed Sicklebill *Epimachus albertisi*. Brief notes are given on behaviour, calls, altitude, etc. It is concluded that these observations from 1000 to 1300 m indicate a potentially rich avifauna that may be revealed when the Sibium Mountains are explored to their full height of nearly 2200 m.

INTRODUCTION

This report continues the series of accounts by the writer on the avifauna in remote locations in the Oro Province of Papua New Guinea.

Between 9 and 13 April 1984 I camped out in the Sibium Mountains. My camp, Rhonda one, was situated at Latitude 09° 18' 13" S, longitude 148° 25' 40" E grid reference FK 568715 on the 1:100,000 topographical map, edition 1 - AAS Series T683 Sheet 8579 Sibium.

The camp was 12 km in a direct line from the village of Gewoia, but that represented a walk of one and a half days, necessitating an overnight stop, so the site was more isolated than appears at first glance. The nearest airstrip is at Gewoia village which lies at grid reference FKG30823 on the same topographic map. The camp was 42 km in a direct line from the crest of the Owen Stanley mountain range, and was situated at an altitude of exactly 1000 m. The journey from Popondetta to the camp and back was made by helicopter. Gewoia villagers walked from the village, erected the helipad, assisted me in my work and walked back again. All altitudes quoted were measured by altimeter.

THE SIBIUM MOUNTAINS

Situated in the Oro Province, in the northern portion of the south-east of the island of New Guinea, the Sibium Mountains rise to nearly 2200 m.

They appear to have been unexplored ornithologically before this visit (Diamond 1985 and my own researches) and none of the early collectors and naturalists recorded any visits to them. Although not far from the top of the main range, the Sibium Range is semi-isolated, being separated from the central cordillera by lowlands of 1000 m or less. It was therefore fortuitous

that my camp was situated exactly at 1000 m since the birds recorded will indicate what avifauna the forested land between the main range and the Sibium Mts might support. These records may be compared later when the highest parts of the Sibium Range are visited.

My observations should provide an interesting comparison between the avifaunas of other similar outlier ranges on New Guinea which are separated from the main range by a comparatively greater distance.

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF BIRDS OBSERVED

DWARF CASSOWARY *Casuarius bennetti*

Before I arrived at the camp on 9 April the villagers had shot and smoked some cassowaries which by size, description and name were *C. bennetti*. The Gewoia people distinguish in their language between *C. casuarius* which is "Bina" and *C. bennetti* which is "Hinini": they told me that they had shot "Hinini" which they said was common in the mountains. When I examined critical portions of meat (e.g. the legs) they were not big enough to have been *C. casuarius*. There is no doubt therefore that *C. bennetti* is found in the Sibium Range.

NEW GUINEA HARPY-EAGLE *Harpyopsis novaeguineae*

It was gratifying to find this large eagle in the Sibium Mountains, where it is unlikely to become endangered in the foreseeable future. I heard it calling from an area just below the camp at 1000 m for one hour before sunset on 11 April. On 12 April I saw and heard this species not far from the camp at 1200 m. The eagle had a method of apparently searching for game whereby it would perch for several minutes, then fly for 50 or 60 m and perch again then move another 50 or 60 m, and perch again, and so on. The noise of this large bird landing on a perch is an audible thud and the foliage shakes.

PAPUAN MOUNTAIN PIGEON *Gymnophaps albertisii*

My only sighting of mountain pigeons, and indeed the only pigeons on this visit, was a flock travelling high NNE on 11 April.

SULPHUR-CRESTED COCKATOO *Cacatua galerita*

This cockatoo was heard (the call is diagnostic) and/or seen on 9, 10, 11 and 12 April. Sightings were all of a single pair of birds and the species was not abundant. All sightings were of birds seen near the camp at 1000 m or of birds seen from the camp but on the ridges several hundred m above, and all were in the early morning or towards dusk.

PAPUAN KING-PARROT *Alisterus chloropterus*

I had one sighting on 11 April, a female, 8 or 9 m up in the canopy of a lower middle storey tree at 1100 m. The Papuan King-Parrot was eating the medium-small white fruits of the tree and was not particularly shy.

PAPUAN BOOBOOK *Ninox theomacha*

The diagnostic call of the Papuan Boobook was heard from the camp in the early hours of 12 April at 1000 m.

MARBLED FROGMOUTH *Podargus ocellatus*

The distinctive call of the Marbled Frogmouth was heard near the camp at 1000 m in the early hours of 12 April.

OWLET-NIGHTJAR SP. *Aegotheles* sp.

An owlet-nightjar, unidentified as to species, was heard calling near the camp in the early hours of 12 April.

MOUNTAIN SWIFTLET *Collocalia hirundinacea*

Several swiftlets, which I identified by size, colouration, shape and flight as Mountain Swiftlets, were seen near the camp at 1000 m on 11 April. A typical place frequented by these swiftlets in my experience, the camp was situated on a ridge at an angle to a river valley which sloped steeply away leading towards Gewoia. The river was some hundreds of m below.

MOUNTAIN KINGFISHER *Halcyon megarhyncha*

The distinctive police whistle call, undoubtedly the Mountain Kingfisher at this altitude, was heard near the camp at 1000 m on 11 April.

BLYTH'S HORNBILL *Rhyticeros plicatus*

The unmistakable call of a single individual of this species was heard at 1100 m on 12 April.

BLUE-BREASTED PITTA *Pitta erythrogaster*

The diagnostic call of this pitta was heard just above the camp on 11 April.

BLACK-BELLIED CUCKOO-SHRIKE *Coracina montana*

A small company of Black-bellied Cuckoo-Shrikes, a male, a female and a juvenile, was sighted on 10 April near the camp at 1100 m. They were giving harsh calls and at one stage there was a duet consisting of a "Swee" from one bird accompanied by two harsh disyllabic calls from another bird, this pattern being repeated continually. I base the composition of the group on the following: the fully plumaged male was distinctive and no detail need be added; the female I noted as having less black in the plumage - black on the throat and upper breast with the rest of the underparts grey; the juvenile I noted as having less black on the plumage - from the eye through to the beak.

These cuckoo-shrikes were seen again on 11 April at 1100 m where, judging by their calls, they were common. They were also seen on 13 April near the camp.

LESSER MELAMPITTA

Melampitta lugubris

A pair of these birds was seen on 11 April at 1200 m. The habitat agreed well with the description in Mayr and Rand (1937) of the favoured habitat of this species, being in lower montane forest with plenty of ground cover. As this presumably constitutes a low altitude record I include the field notes on identification, which was quite positive. Apart from the general plump melampitta build and shape of the birds my field notes recorded all black plumage, the distinctly shaped black beak, longish black legs and that the birds had a reddish iris. Size was about the same as a White-eyed Robin *Pachycephalopsis poliosoma*. I also noted that the birds clung sideways to saplings, etc. Despite my waiting, when the birds moved off they did not return and a search of the area failed to find them. This was unfortunately the only sighting of these intriguing birds.

WALLACE'S FAIRY-WREN

Sipodotus wallacii

Several of these birds were seen at the edge of the forest on 12 April near the camp at 1000 m. Good views were obtained and the identification was positive. The birds did not linger in any one spot and moved quickly along the foliage at a height of from 2 m up to the canopy. This was presumably a family party. 1000 m appears to be above the normal range for this species and may constitute an altitude record, but as the hill forest/lower montane forest ecotone was just about at this level and a little higher in places, it is perhaps not surprising. Bell, Coates and Layton (1979) mention no altitude range as such except to quote Rand and Gilliard (1967): "the whole of the New Guinea lowlands up to 800 m", which they imply, and I agree, is too broad a definition of range for this bird.

RUSTY MOUSE-WARBLER

Crateroscelis murina

The species was heard near the camp at 1000 m on 9, 10, 12 and 13 April.

BLACK-WINGED MONARCH

Monarcha frater

One individual of this distinctive species was seen on 12 April at 1030 m.

YELLOW-LEGGED FLYCATCHER

Microeca griseiceps

There was an excellent sighting of this uncommon flycatcher on 12 April at 1030 m. My field notes indicate: olive brown upperparts, grey head, yellowish green underparts with fine streaks on the throat and upper breast, orange-yellow legs, lower beak yellow and upper black, whitish eye ring, a plump bird 12.5-13 cm. I cite these notes because it is important to properly identify these birds which are the middle species in a three species altitudinal sequence. I also noted that the bird flicked its tail occasionally, a habit not previously noted for this species in the literature but which is listed for *M. papuana* (Rand and Gilliard 1967). I also noted that the bird chattered.

My discovery of *Tregellasia leucops* at the same basic altitude and locality as *M. griseiceps* in the Sibium Mountains agrees well with the niche differences outlined for this group of flycatchers by Diamond (1972) and further reinforces the identification.

WHITE-FACED ROBIN

Tregellasia leucops

This robin was sighted on 11 April at 1200 m and on 12 April at 1020 and 1040 m. It is quite distinctive and was apparently reasonably common in the area.

WHITE-EYED ROBIN

Pachycephalopsis poliosoma

The White-eyed Robin was sighted on 11 April at 1200 m and on 12 April at 1020, 1040 and 1100 m, and was a common bird in the area. I have noted that when flying it made a distinct whirring of wings. It was to be seen low in the undergrowth and made a "tuck tuck tuck tuck" call.

It is impossible to distinguish the sub-species without specimens but the white throat patch was fairly extensive and there was a whitish patch on the abdomen. Curiously enough I did not find this species difficult to see (pace Diamond 1972), perhaps reinforcing my impression that it was quite common in the area.

SCLATER'S WHISTLER

Pachycephala soror

Sclater's whistler was seen on 10 April at 1300 m. It was common in the forest canopy where the ridge flattened out.

GREY WHISTLER

Pachycephala simplex

Only one was heard on 10 April (altitude not noted).

HOODED PITOHUI

Pitohui dichrous

Heard on 10 April, this species was positively identified by a sighting on 12 April at 1300 m.

WHITE-EYE SP.

Zosterops sp.

A small flock of *Zosterops* were seen on 10 April. Although I could see that they were certainly white-eyes I could not see them clearly enough to distinguish the species. I suspect them to be *Z. minor*.

RED MYZOMELA

Myzomela cruentata

A pair, a male and a female, was active in a grove of secondary growth trees beyond the helipad at 1000 m on 10 April.

MELIPHAGA SP.

Meliphaga spp.

On 9 April I saw two yellow-eared *Meliphagas*. The yellow auricular spot was medium in size and somewhat cusp shaped, with the horns of the cusp towards the front and a rounded posterior end. They were giving a typical meliphagid "tup" call, and I have noted that it was different in quality from the *M. analoga* call of the lowlands around Popondetta. The birds had grey-yellow undersides and olive upperparts. They were at the forest edge. They did not tally with *M.*

aruensis in other parts of the province, which has a much darker top of the head and is generally darker in colouration.

On 10 April near the camp at 1000 m I saw a white-eared *Meliphaga* that was brown on the upperparts (with no discernible olive), grey underneath and with a white rictal gape streak. As I did not see the birds closely it is possible that the white rictal gape could have been very pale yellow but I certainly did not see any yellow. Nevertheless it is probable that this bird was *Meliphaga montana*.

MOUNTAIN DRONGO *Chaetorhynchus papuensis*

One only was sighted on 11 April at 1100 m.

SPOTTED CATBIRD *Ailuroedus melanotis*

A cat-like call, almost certainly this species and very similar to the Australian bird, was heard just below the 1000 m camp on 12 April.

BUFF-TAILED SICKLEBILL *Epimachus albertisi*

A single individual of this bird of paradise, a female or a male still in female plumage, was sighted on 11 April at 1100 m. It was in the canopy 3 or 4 m up and with its long bill it continually probed the heavy moss cover on the tree trunk to which it clung upright (c.f. Diamond 1985), but I could not distinguish what, if anything, it obtained by this behaviour.

LAWES' PAROTIA *Parotia lawesii*

My only sighting of this striking bird of paradise was a single fully plumaged male high in the canopy of a huge lower montane rainforest tree on 11 April at 1100 m in the same locality that I saw *E. albertisi*. I have noted that judging by the calls the species is not uncommon. I saw no white on the head, the only relatively conspicuous colouration being the bronze-green breast shield (and this was clearly visible). Presumably this was *P. lawesii helenae*, although confirmation would be needed. Its presence is not unexpected at this altitude. The behaviour of the bird was nervous, it was obviously watching me and did not stay long in view.

GREY CROW *Corvus tristis*

Heard only on 10 April from the camp at 1000 m. The call is diagnostic.

MISCELLANEOUS

On several days towards dusk flocks of a dozen medium sized parrots with a soft call flew swiftly through the gathering mist past the camp at right angles to the ridge on which we were camped.

An unidentified megapode mound was seen at 1200 m.

DISCUSSION

It is regrettable that I was unable to visit the highest part of these mountains, but I was on a non-ornithological working trip. However, species encountered were most interesting and indicate that the Sibium Mountains will probably prove to have a rich avifauna. One would expect this as the mountains are situated close to the main range, separated only by the various headwaters of the Musa River and their basin.

These mountains are little touched by man, except for the occasional hunting party. They are steep, subject to landslides (there were several areas of old slide not far from the camp and more on the other side of the mountain) and the crests of the foothills were rugged. Hunting trails were overgrown, and the abundance of game in the area of the camp, which was the site of an earlier camp for several weeks some years previously, showed that the area is rarely visited. Twice I saw tree kangaroos (*Dendrolagus* sp.) and they appeared to be relatively common, which might account for the presence of *Harpyopsis novaeguineae*. I also saw fresh burrows of a spiny anteater but whether *Zaglossus* or *Tachyglossus* I could not say. Wild pigs were common (several were shot while I was there) and so, apparently were cassowaries. These are indications that the area is fairly safe for animals and birds.

The interesting sighting of the Lesser Melampitta presumably constitutes a low altitude record for the species. It is intriguing that Diamond (1983) describes the Greater Melampitta (the Lesser Melampitta's only congener) as "perching with its body at an angle to the ground rather than horizontal". Perhaps there could be a connection between the two species and their perching habits - certainly I saw the Lesser Melampittas perching sideways on the stems of small saplings and plants, in which position, of course, the legs are at an angle to the body.

My observations confirm that in these mountains the duet of *Coracina montana* is the same as that described by Diamond and Terborgh (1968) as is the composition of the small duetting companies.

These records reveal that the small area of the Sibium Mountains explored, between 1000 and 1300 m, has basically a lower montane avifauna. A total of 28 positively identified species, four identified to genus only, an unidentified megapode mound and some non-specific sightings of smaller parrots, were noted.

This was the first visit to these mountains by an ornithologist, and records of the rarely encountered *Melampitta lugubris*, *Sipodotus wallacii*, *Microeca griseiceps* and *Epimachus albertisi*, obtained during only two days observation at lower altitudes, are indicative of a rich lower and middle montane avifauna which will be more fully revealed once the Sibium Mountains are fully explored and to their maximum height of nearly 2000 m.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Mr. B.J. Coates who provided expert criticism and discussion of an earlier draft of this paper. Needless to say any errors which may be

contained herein are mine alone. I am indebted to councillor Amos Bedana of Gewoia village for general organisation of the work programme, and to his relatives who walked in and out of the area, cut the helipad and generally arranged matters at the camp. Thanks are also due to the pilots of Pacific Helicopters for setting us down and picking us up safely and on time in a remote location.

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INTERESTING BIRD OBSERVATIONS IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

K.D. BISHOP

The following observations represent new distributional records for Papua New Guinea (cf. Beehler *et al.* 1986) or additional information on the voices of little known species (cf. Coates 1985, Hadden 1981). Most observations were made during the period 6 July to 9 October, 1986 while leading several bird tours in the region. I am grateful to my clients who made these observations possible.

ANNOTATED LIST

CATTLE EGRET *Egretta ibis*

Eleven individuals, none in breeding plumage, feeding among a small herd of cattle near Ilimo farm 22 August, Central Province.

GREAT CORMORANT *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Single adult with flocks of Little Black Cormorant *P. sulcirostris* on the Bensbach river below Bensbach Lodge. 26 July, Western Province.

GREAT-BILLED HERON *Ardea sumatrana*

Unusually numerous (for this species) along the Bensbach river. More than 18 individuals counted near the Bensbach Lodge. All birds were observed in tall, heavily wooded monsoon riverine forest and at least three individuals were in immature plumage. 27 July, Western Province.

SACRED IBIS *Threskiornis aethiopicus*

Two to three thousand seen along the Bensbach river above the Lodge. 27 July. Single adult in the top of a dead tree in heavily cut over sago swamp forest. 24 August, Western Province.

BAT HAWK *Macheiramphus alcinus*

Single adult hawking over selectively logged lowland forest immediately south of the Markham river (near the Markham bridge, Lae). 6 August, Morobe Province. (D. & N. Massie pers. comm.).

BRAHMINY KITE *Haliastur indus*

Single adult over alpine grassland at Tari gap c. 2700 m. 19 August, Southern Highlands.

GREY GOSHAWK *Accipiter novaehollandiae*

An adult female attending a large stick nest c. 12 m up in a 25 m tall tree at the edge of selectively logged lowland swamp forest. 18 July, Kapiura, northern West New Britain.

MEYER'S GOSHAWK *Accipiter meyerianus*

Two 'pied' phase birds soaring high over montane forest above Ambua Lodge, Tari (2000-2700 m). July and August, Southern Highlands.

GURNEY'S EAGLE *Aquila gurneyi*

Single adult soaring over a forested ridge of the Markham river (near the Markham bridge, Lae). 6 August, Morobe Province.

SALVADORI'S TEAL *Anas waiguensis*

One 'pair' on forest-lined river (c. 2100 m) above Margarima, Southern Highlands Province. Note: this species has disconcertingly declined radically in the past ten years from former regular haunts such as the Wahgi and Baiyer valleys. 16 August.