

MIXED FLOCKS OF BIRDS FEEDING ON FRUITS OF THE SAVANNAH TREE *ANTIDESMA GAISAMBULLA* NEAR GIRUA AIRFIELD, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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OBSERVATION

On 2 January 1984, in savannah just north of Girua airfield, Oro Province, Papua New Guinea, I made separate observations of two mixed companies of birds feeding in the same fruiting tree.

Initially I saw 6 or 7 Red-cheeked Parrots *Geoffroyus geoffroyi*, 4 or 5 Metallic Starlings *Aplonis metallica* and 2 Orange-bellied Fruit-Doves *Ptilinopus iozonus* all in the tree simultaneously, feeding on the fruits. A Willie Wagtail *Rhipidura leucophrys* was also in the tree, but I did not see it feeding on the fruit and it may well have been attracted to insects which had been drawn by the ripe fruit.

On a later occasion the same day I saw a Fawn-breasted Bowerbird *Chlamydera cerviniventris* and 2 Eastern Black-capped Lories *Lorius hypoinochrous* in the same tree, and these also were feeding on the fruit.

I observed no aggression on either occasion, although both observations were of no more than a few minutes and the fruit was superabundant.

The densely-foliaged savannah tree was identified by specimens of branchlets, leaves and fruit as *Antidesma gaisambulla* (Euphorbiaceae). The fruit, born profusely, varied between 3 and 6 mm in diameter, was spherical and dark purple to black in colour. Sweet and sugary to the taste, it left a curious 'waxy' feeling on the interior of the mouth when eaten (local people identified the fruit as edible for humans) and temporarily stained the lips and tongue purple. Neither I, nor others with me who tried it, suffered any ill effects from eating the fruit, which contained a small but distinct pit surrounded by a fleshy pericarp. *A. gaisambulla* appears to be widespread in savannah areas of the Oro Province since, in addition to other specimens scattered around the Girua area, I have also seen it in low hill savannah near the Pongani road between Oro Bay and Banderi village, and a P.N.G. informant from the Tufi area and with us that day, told me it also occurred in the Tufi administrative district.

January is in the middle of the rainy season in the Girua area.

DISCUSSION

A. gaisambulla occurs in *Nauclea-Antidesma* savannah in Eastern Papua (Pajmans 1973). Although knowledge of the use of fruiting trees by birds in the rainforest and secondary forest in P.N.G. is rapidly being expanded (Terborgh and Diamond 1970; Clapp 1979; Lecroy *et al.* 1980; Beehler 1983; Pratt 1986) nothing seems to have been recorded about birds eating the fruit of

savannah trees in P.N.G. and I can find no previous reference in the literature to the consumption by birds of *A. gaisambulla* fruits.

The only in depth study of birds in any savannah area in P.N.G. is that of Bell (1982) who stated that the Port Moresby savannah was obviously an area of ornithological interest but comparatively little attention had been paid to it....ornithological exploration was mainly aimed at rainforest endemics. Little has changed since that statement was made.

Heyligers (1965) lists *Antidesma* spp. trees (although not specifically mentioning *A. gaisambulla*) as occurring in several different savannah vegetation communities in the Port Moresby-Kairuku area. Bell (1980), although listing frugivores, mixed feeders, etc. for the savannah, gave no observations at fruiting savannah trees, and it seems unlikely that he encountered any, particularly as his study area was necessarily restricted. He did, nevertheless, comment on the 'scarcity of edible fruits' as one reason, *inter alia*, for the poverty of the savannah avifauna.

In my observations five bird species from four separate taxonomic families were seen to eat the fruit of *A. gaisambulla*; three of the species involved were medium-large birds. Other specimens of *A. gaisambulla* in the Girua area were not fruiting at the same time, which suggests a possible staggered fruiting season dependent on unknown factors. It is premature to speculate on the importance or otherwise of *A. gaisambulla* in the ecology of New Guinea savannah birds, but birds may well be an important means of seed dispersal for this tree.

Although noting only two separate observations at a single tree this report has been compiled because it highlights the need for further observations of birds at fruiting savannah trees in Papua New Guinea.

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AN EXTENSION OF ALTITUDE RANGE FOR TWO MANNIKIN SPECIES

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On 3 April 1986 at Myola, Northern Province 09° 09' S, 147° 45' E two Eastern Alpine Mannikins *Lonchura monticola* were observed on the edge of a flock of c. 100 Grey-headed Mannikins *L. caniceps*, feeding on the short grass of the airstrip. Two birds were subsequently seen on the moss-forest/grassland border, again in the company of Grey-headed Mannikins. Myola, at 2080 m, lies well below the normal altitude range for Eastern Alpine Mannikins, given as 2700 m to 3500 m in Beehler *et al.* (1986) and 9000' to 12000' (2750 m to 3400 m) in Rand and Gilliard (1967). In the days preceding the observation there had been very heavy and continuous rainfall. This might have caused the birds to move lower. Grey-headed Mannikins had been recorded on each of the five days prior to this observation. The Eastern Alpine Mannikins were seen by six other observers. In September 1987 Eastern Alpine Mannikins were found to be common in the tree fern forest located 2 km from Myola 500 m higher (M.J.G. Hopkins, pers. comm.).

Grey-headed Mannikins have been recorded at Myola on previous and subsequent visits: April 1985 P. Lambley, June 1986 J. Oliver, April 1987 H.C.F. Hopkins & P. Lambley (pers. comms), and in September 1985 and June and September 1987 (pers. obs). They have usually been observed feeding in the grasslands of the Myola basin or along the moss-forest/grassland edge. Myola is higher than the upper altitude limit for this species given by Beehler *et al.* (1986) as 1900 m, and by Rand & Gilliard (1967) as 5800' (c. 1800 m). The regular recording of this species suggests it is a resident in the area.

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THE LOGRUNNER, *ORTHONYX TEMMINCKII* (ORTHONYCHIDAE), AT TARI GAP, SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS PROVINCE, PAPUA NEW GUINEA.

CLIFFORD AND DAWN FRITH

To date the Logrunner *Orthonyx temminckii* has been considered to have a conspicuously discontinuous distribution on the island of New Guinea. The three apparently isolated Papuan populations are each given subspecific status: *O. t. novaeguineae* of the Vogelkop in Irian Jaya, *O. t. dorsalis* of the Snow Mountains in Irian Jaya, and *O. t. victoriana* of the Wharton Range and Herzog Mountains of south-east New Guinea between 1200 and 2800 metres above sea level (Deignan 1964, Rand & Gilliard 1967, Beehler *et al.* 1986). A recent sighting of the species on Mt. Scratchley by Clapp (1986) has extended its altitudinal range to 3450 m. The species was unknown from the Eastern and Central Highlands of Papua New Guinea (Diamond 1972, Beehler *et al.* 1986).

During September and October 1986 the authors carried out a bird mist-netting and banding study at six sites in the moss forest of the Tari Gap area (5°58' S 143°8' E), Southern Highlands Province, at altitudes predominantly between 2600 and 2800 m. The study was conducted on behalf of the Wildlife Conservation International, of the New York Zoological Society. A total of 266 hours was spent with four 12 m and four 9 m mist nets erect during 32 netting days. Thus there was an average of 8.3 hours each netting day with 84 linear metres of mist net.

On 12 September 1986 a female Logrunner was netted, and on 30 September a male was caught 2 km from the capture point of the female. Both birds were in adult plumage without moult (see Table 1).

Table 1. Measurements of two banded *Orthonyx temminckii* mist-netted at Tari Gap, Southern Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea.

| Band No. | Sex | Weight | Wing | Tail | Tarsus | Culmen | Skull+bill |
|----------|-----|--------|------|------|--------|--------|------------|
| 05099314 | F | 55.1g | 85 | 66 | 29 | - | 38.9 |
| 05099346 | M | 61.5g | 87 | 82 | 34 | 17.1 | 39.9 |

Note: Skull+bill is the maximum length from rear skull to bill tip. Wing is the maximum, flattened chord. Culmen is from bill tip to union with skull. All measurements are in mm.