

## MYOLA IN JUNE

ROGER K. HICKS

Five members of the PNGBS and 10 others celebrated the Queen's official birthday by leaving the heat of Port Moresby for the cooler delights of Myola. Myola lies in the heart of the Owen Stanley mountain range at a height of 2080 m and is less than 25 minutes flying time from the capital. However the contrast could not be greater. Myola is a small satellite village of about 20 huts, two of which are the guest house sleeping quarters and common room, situated on the edge of moss forest and the swampy grassland of the Myola basin. The origin of this grassland is uncertain although a blackened slope where the vegetation had been burnt suggested one possible cause.

This was the first time we had trapped birds using mist nets at Myola. Rings (bands) were supplied by the Australian Bird and Bat Banding Scheme. The nets were sited close to the track leading to the Kokoda Trail. Over the weekend we caught, ringed, weighed and measured 16 birds of 10 species: four Ashy Robins, all caught in the same net, three Fan-tailed Berrypeckers, two Regent Whistlers, a pair of Black-billed Cuckoo-Doves, and one each of Bronze Ground-Dove, Mountain Mouse-Warbler, Friendly Fantail, Black Fantail and Rufous-backed Honeyeater. Pride of place though went to a female Macgregor's Bowerbird caught on the Sunday. She was a large, powerful bird with uniform olive-brown plumage and a pale yellow-orange underwing. It was nice to confirm the presence of this bird at Myola. We have subsequently heard of a bower close to where we caught the female.

We spent most of the weekend in the vicinity of the village as we did not want to leave the nets unattended for too long. Even so about 40 species were recorded. An unidentified fruiting tree proved attractive to several species including a pair of Loria's Bird of Paradise, several Fan-tailed Berrypeckers and the noisy Belford's Melidectes. Individual Stephanie's *Astrapia*, usually females or subadult males were seen, occasionally on the edge of the forest close to the village. In the grassland of the Myola basin Tawny Grassbirds were common, Spotless Crakes were heard calling but not seen and King Quail, in small groups, were recorded for the first time.

Our long weekend break, 6-9 June 1987, ended with a flight back to Moresby early on Tuesday morning. We all enjoyed our stay and would like to thank the villagers of Myola for their hospitality and Talair for getting us there and back. Accommodation at the Myola guest house can be booked via Pacific Expeditions (tel. 257803).

Species List. r = ringed, h = heard only.

Harrier sp, New Guinea Harpy-Eagle (h), Brown Falcon, Wattled Brush-Turkey, King Quail, Forbes' Forest-Rail, Spotless Crake (h), Black-billed Cuckoo-Dove (r), Bronze Ground-Dove (r), White-breasted Fruit-Dove, Papuan Mountain Pigeon, Goldie's Lorikeet, Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Sooty Owl (h), Mountain Swiftlet, Glossy Swiftlet, Forest Kingfisher, Pacific Swallow, Island Thrush, Spotted Jewel-Babbler (h), Lesser Melampitta, Blue-capped Ifrita, Tawny Grassbird, Mountain Mouse-Warbler (r), Large Scrub-Wren, Buff-faced Scrub-Wren, *Gerygone* sp, Dimorphic Fantail, Black Fantail (r), Friendly Fantail (r), Black-breasted Boatbill, Black Monarch, Canary Flycatcher, Ashy Robin (r), Blue-Grey Robin, Regent Whistler, Rufous-naped Whistler, Fan-tailed Berrypecker (r), Red-collared Myzomela, Rufous-backed Honeyeater (r), Belford's Melidectes, Common Smoky Honeyeater, Grey-headed Mannikin, Macgregor's Bowerbird, Loria's Bird of Paradise, Stephanie's *Astrapia*.

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## MYOLA IN SEPTEMBER

ROGER K. HICKS

Following our successful trip to Myola in early June, another was organised for late September 1987. Heavy overnight rain in the week preceding our departure, early on Friday 25 September, did not bode well for our long weekend. The general concensus was "If it's wet in Moresby, it must be worse in Myola". So we were pleasantly surprised upon landing to find clear blue skies, even if it was a bit chilly until the sun climbed above the surrounding hills. There might even have been a frost on the runway. It remained sunny, dry and mostly cloudless for the duration of our stay, surely a record for Myola.

The bird-watching matched the weather all the way with everyone seeing new birds. We recorded 72 species, several of which had not been recorded in the area previously. PNGBS members have visited Myola six times in the past two and a half years. Some species seemed more common and others less numerous than on previous visits. Less in evidence were Common Smoky Honeyeater, Blue-capped Ifrita and to a certain extent Belford's Melidectes, or maybe the latter were just quieter. Stephanie's *Astrapia* was only recorded on two occasions, at the edge of the forest. Black Monarch seemed to be present in greater numbers, or at least was recorded more often. Many of the birds 'new' to Myola were active canopy species, which I think would have been noted if they had been present on previous visits. Good views were had of both Sittellas, Varied and Black, in the same area of forest, although on different days. Joan Oliver rustled up Garnet Robins wherever she went, but I had real trouble getting to grips with these birds and am still waiting for my first good sighting; maybe next time. Two skulkers were also added to the list. These may have been present all the time but avoided detection. Chris Eastwood found a Black-throated Robin on our last afternoon, and a Lesser Ground-Robin was caught in a net. I subsequently had a glimpse of another one on the forest floor. One of the highlights of the weekend for me was seeing a male Macgregor's Bowerbird perched in the open with his crest partially raised, unfortunately a sight that only Ian Burrows and I witnessed.

As on our last visit we used mist nets to trap birds for ringing (banding). This time we set the nets to the east of the village, two in dense secondary growth and the rest in moss forest. We were much more successful than previously, catching 82 birds of 20 species. We seemed to have birds in the net all the time, but without doubt Saturday morning was the high spot. Our first round of the nets, just after dawn, produced only one bird, but that was a Mountain Owllet-Nightjar, the first in that family for most of us. This was followed in the next couple of hours by a succession of good birds, including Lesser Ground-Robin, (making Ian and Helen members of a very select club having seen and ringed the Greater Ground-Robin on English Peaks), Rufous-naped Whistler, which was much brighter than the illustration in the field guide, and New Guinea White-Eye. Fan-tailed Berrypecker was the most commonly caught species although only rarely seen out of the net; over the weekend we handled 21 of which 13 were female or juvenile and the majority were caught in the nets in the secondary growth. Ashy Robins were caught wherever we placed nets and always in the lowest shelves. The larger individuals all showed a pale horn-coloured tip to the bill which the smaller birds lacked. Further studies may indicate whether this is a reliable field character for aging or sexing birds, or whether it is just individual variation.

Mike Hopkins, Simon Headford and Krysia Lupa left the relative comfort of the guest house on Saturday morning for an expedition to the higher altitude of the central divide to the north of Myola. They spent a frosty night in the tree fern forest at c. 2600 m and then moved higher. Mike eventually reached c. 3150 m to the north-east of Myola and saw several species not recorded lower. Eastern Alpine Mannikins were common in the tree fern forest and higher he saw Painted Tiger-Parrot, Mountain Robin, Alpine Pipit and Sooty Melidectes. There was no sign of the hoped for Macgregor's Bird of Paradise but the bird's main food plant, *Dacrycarpus*, was not in flower or fruit. Mike returned full of