

## A WEEKEND IN TARI

ROGER K. HICKS AND JENNY H. HICKS

The Tari area, in the Southern Highlands Province, is the home of some of the stranger and more spectacular of PNG's birds. With the opening of Ambua Lodge, in early 1986, it has acquired a reputation as one of the top birding locations in the world. Bird tours, from all over, visit the lodge and an extensive list of species, including 13 birds of paradise, have been recorded. A booklet detailing the species to be seen in the area, written by Brian Finch and updated by Cliff & Dawn Frith and Nick Gardner, is available from the lodge. Although several members of the PNGBS have visited the area, and stayed at the lodge, little has appeared in the PNGBS publications.

Ambua Lodge lies at about 2200 m on the edge of the inhabited, and cultivated Tari basin and unspoilt moss forest. The township of Tari lies 700 m lower while the forest above the lodge extends to the grassland of Tari Gap at 2800 m. Within this altitude range can be found a wide variety of birds and nearly every species seen will be a PNG endemic.

We visited Ambua Lodge on an Air Niugini weekender package in early October 1987. It was the first time this year that we had been away on our own and with due deference to PNGBS members it made a very nice change. We arrived in Tari before mid-day and were transported to the lodge. The bird-watching was delayed by lunch and then heavy rain but later we found a fruiting tree in the woods below the orchid garden which was attracting several birds of paradise. Over the weekend we watched this tree for about 8 hours and recorded the following feeding on the ripe black berries; an adult and juvenile Short-tailed Paradigalla; a female Blue Bird of Paradise; a female Lawes' Parotia; male and female Superb Bird of Paradise; male and female Loria's Bird of Paradise. Female Brown Sicklebill and Ribbon-tailed Astrapia were seen nearby. An impressive complement of birds, and all within the lodge grounds.

Early on Saturday morning we got a lift up to the Gap and began walking down to the lodge. In the low scrub bordering the grassland we watched a female Crested Bird of Paradise feeding on small berries and a pair of Crested Berrypeckers feeding in the next bush. The machine-gun-like call of a male Brown Sicklebill could be heard almost continuously while a female was watched foraging along moss-covered branches. Lower down in open moss forest the "radio-static" call of a male King of Saxony Bird of Paradise was heard and he was eventually located displaying in the top of a tree with his "antennae" waving in all directions, an unforgettable sight. Our stroll down the hill became a sprint through heavy rain and we arrived at the lodge soaked to the skin. The log fire of the bar/lounge was most welcoming.

On Sunday we went below the lodge and saw Superb Bird of Paradise and numerous Island Leaf Warblers but neither the hoped for Black Sicklebill nor male Blue Bird of Paradise. The remainder of the day we spent in the grounds of Ambua. A Torrent-Lark was seen near the spectacular waterfall, across the road from the lodge. A pair of Varied Sitella foraged on the trunks of trees along the driveway and a female Macgregor's Bowerbird was seen in the wood below the orchid garden.

Only a few of the species we recorded this weekend are mentioned above. Our list is presented below, but a dedicated bird watcher could add many to that over a long weekend. For any bird-watcher visiting PNG this area must be high on the list of places to visit. Nowhere else in the country is it possible to find so many endemic species which are so readily accessible. For example we saw ten species of bird of paradise in our first 24 hours. For "non-birders" there is the intriguing culture of the Huli wigmens, the inhabitants of the Tari basin, who use bird of paradise feathers in their head-dresses. It is a fascinating destination, whatever your interest.

Species list. h = heard only

New Guinea Harpy-Eagle (h), Little Curlew, Black-billed Cuckoo-Dove, White-breasted Fruit-Dove, Papuan Mountain Pigeon, Dusky Lory, Rainbow Lorikeet, Papuan Lorikeet, Yellow-billed Lorikeet, Tiger-Parrot sp., Rufous-throated Bronze-Cuckoo, Papuan Boobook, Mountain Swiftlet, Glossy Swiftlet, Pacific Swallow, Long-tailed Shrike, Pied Chat, Island Thrush, Tawny Grassbird, White-shouldered Fairy-Wren, Large Scrub-Wren, Buff-faced Scrub-Wren, Black Fantail, Friendly Fantail, Canary Flycatcher, Black-throated Robin, White-winged Robin, Blue-grey Robin, Fan-tailed Berrypecker, Crested Berrypecker, Red-collared Myzomela, Grey-backed Streaked Honeyeater, Belford's Melidectes, Yellow-browed Melidectes, Common Smoky Honeyeater, Hooded Mannikin, Mountain Firetail (h), Torrent-Lark, Great Wood-Swallow, Macgregor's Bowerbird, Crested Bird of Paradise, Loria's Bird of Paradise, Short-tailed Paradigalla, Brown Sicklebill, Ribbon-tailed Astrapia, Stephanie's Astrapia, Lawes' Parotia, King of Saxony Bird of Paradise, Blue Bird of Paradise.

The illustration on the centre pages is a birder's map of the Tari Gap area.

Address: c/o N.C.C., P.O. Wards Strip, Waigani, P.N.G.

## FIELD GUIDES INC. TOUR OF PNG 1986

Field Guides Inc. arrange annual bird-watching tours to PNG. Brett Whitney, the tour leader, has supplied the PNGBS with a 16 page annotated list of the species recorded on the 1986 tour. Some of the tour highlights and interesting observations have been extracted from the list and are presented here. The full list is held in the PNGBS library.

Field Guides Inc. were in PNG for four weeks from 11/8/86 - 7/9/86. Nearly 350 species of birds were recorded, including 24 birds of paradise and several rarely seen species.

PROVINCE ABBREVIATIONS: Cen = Central; Eng = Enga; = Eastern Highlands; Mor = Morobe; NCD = National Capital District; SHP = Southern Highlands; WHP = Western Highlands. [Note: we have been unable to locate Ilaru Pass - Eds.]

- DWARF CASSOWARY *Casuarius bennetti*  
Pair seen on track at Baiyer River Sanctuary (WHP).
- BLACK-MANTLED GOSHAWK *Accipiter melanochlamys*  
At Mt. Kaindi (Mor), Wapenamanda (Eng) and Tari (SHP).
- MEYER'S GOSHAWK *Accipiter meyerianus*  
One Moitaka settling ponds (NCD), and one Lae (Mor). Both dark morphs.
- NEW GUINEA HARPY-EAGLE *Harpyopsis novaeguineae*  
Two sightings. one soaring bird at Ilaru Pass. At Wapenamanda Gorge (Eng) an adult was seen reaching into a mossy cavity, attempting to extract something. Eventually it gave up and began to consume a cuscus that it had apparently already captured.
- CHESTNUT FOREST RAIL *Rallina rubra*  
A pair in cloud forest near Tari Gap (SHP), duetting loudly.
- LITTLE RED LORIKEET *Charmosyna pulchella*  
Possible nest in thick moss on the underside of a heavy limb, at Trauna Ridge (WHP).
- PAPUAN LORIKEET *Charmosyna papou*  
Possible nest in thick moss on underside of a limb at c 2150 m, above Ambua Lodge, Tari (SHP).
- ORANGE-BILLED LORIKEET *Neopsittacus musschenbroekii*  
Pair working on a cavity 3.5 m up in a diameter trunk, possibly a nesting cavity, at 2125 m on Mt Kaindi (Mor).

- PALM COCKATOO *Probosciger aterrimus*  
Three feeding on the fruits of a *Pandanus* in the Jimi Valley (WHP).
- ECLECTUS PARROT *Eclectus roratus*  
Two pairs nesting in the same tree, by the Wau - Lae road (Mor).
- WHITE-THROATED NIGHTJAR *Eurostopodus mystacalis*  
Probable only. A nightjar flushed off the road, in rain forest at Brown River (Cen), showed small white wing patches but no white in tail.
- MOUSTACHED TREE SWIFT *Hemiprocyne mystacea*  
Two pairs perched over a rushing stream, near Lae (Mor). One bird constructing its tiny nest on a small bare limb.
- BLACK-WINGED MONARCH *Monarcha frater*  
On nest at Baiyer River Sanctuary (WHP): a neat cup in the crotch of a sub-canopy tree at the forest edge. c. 12 m up.
- BLACK-THROATED ROBIN *Poecilodryas albonotata*  
Pair performing display whereby one bird perched above the other on a vertical stump and expanded its black cheeks and throat so highlighting the white neck tufts. White flank tufts also highly exposed. The whole accompanied by stiff body posturing and song.
- PAPUAN FLOWERPECKER *Dicaeum pectorale*  
One at c. 2650 m at Wapenamanda Gorge/Murmur Pass (Eng) was higher than usual.
- ORNATE MELIDECTES *Melidectes torquatus*  
On Mt. Kaindi (Mor), one at a nest c. 20 m above ground. A neat cup, 12 cm in diameter, in the fork of a horizontal branch just below the top of the tree.
- GREAT WOOD-SWALLOW *Artamus maximus*  
One as low as c. 92 m on Lae - Wau road (Mor).
- LOWLAND PELTOPS *Peltops blainvillii*  
Ads feeding juvs. at Veimauri River area (Cen); harlequin head pattern of juvs apparently undescribed.
- ARCHBOLD'S BOWERBIRD *Archboldia papuensis*  
One seen briefly at Tari (SHP).
- MACGREGOR'S BOWERBIRD *Ambylornis macgregoriae*  
At Ubai Gubi (EHP) a male was watched reconstructing a bower that had been destroyed by heavy overnight rain. Largely rebuilt between 07:00 and 13:00.
- SHORT-TAILED PARADIGALLA *Paradigalla brevicauda*  
Constructing a nest near Ambua Lodge, Tari (SHP).
- BUFF-TAILED SICKLEBILL *Epimachus albertisi*  
Female or subad. male seen at Ilaru Pass twice and an ad. male seen briefly.
- LAWES' PAROTIA *Parotia lawesii*  
At Ubai Gubi (EHP) ad. males were watched from hides as they cleaned fallen leaves and other debris from display court.
- CAROLA'S PAROTIA *Parotia carolae*  
An ad. male seen at Ubai Gubi (EHP).

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## OWLING AT THE PACIFIC ADVENTIST COLLEGE, PORT MORESBY

ROGER K. HICKS

Owls, nightjars and frogmouths are not easy birds to see. Most observations tend to be of birds glimpsed in car headlights while travelling at night, when identification is not always possible. Members of the PNGBS are fortunate that Len Tolhurst, a PNGBS committee member, works and lives on the SDA Pacific Adventist College campus, which lies south of the Hubert Murray Highway, near Ilimo Farm, about 10 km from the outskirts of Port Moresby. The campus is surrounded by a security fence which is well lit at night. The lights attract flying insects which in turn attract the night birds and for a change it is possible to see them well. The demand for some night-time bird watching was such that two trips were organised to the college, on 11th and 13th August 1987.

The plan was to drive around the perimeter track to see what had been attracted to the lights. The first birds seen each evening were a pair of Blue-winged Kookaburras using the security fence as vantage point from which to hunt. Barn Owls, Papuan Frogmouths and Large-tailed Nightjars were perched in open situations where they were easy to see. Having followed the security fence for some way, we moved into the farmland beyond the campus and were surprised how many Barn Owls and Large-tailed Nightjars there were. At least five pairs of the latter were scattered over an area of ploughed land, their eyes reflecting red or green in the spot-light beam. These nightjars allowed a close approach when dazzled by the light and subsequently we have managed to trap three for ringing (banding) by this means. While trapped in the light the full detail of their cryptic plumage was seen, although under such conditions it afforded them little protection. In the same area there were at least five Barn Owls. There was no sign of the rarer owls we had hoped for. Papuan Boobook, Barking Owl and Rufous Owl have all been reported from the college.

Our first visit finished on a note of excitement when a large nightjar was trapped in the spotlight beam. It was observed for about 15 minutes spending most of the time perched but occasionally sallying out after insects. It showed no white in the wing or tail and was identified as a White-throated Nightjar. This is thought to be the first sighting of this species, a migrant to New Guinea from its Australian breeding grounds, in the Port Moresby area. A note on this sighting will be in the next issue of Muruk.

On behalf of all those who enjoyed the night time viewing, I would like to thank Len for his hospitality, chauffeuring us around and more importantly knowing where to go, his wife, Val, for the welcoming drinks and cakes, and Mr Wilkinson, the Principal of the college, for allowing us to roam over his campus and for the loan of his spotlight which greatly helped our viewing.

### Species List.

Great Egret, Rufous Night-Heron, Masked Lapwing, Barn Owl, Papuan Frogmouth, White-throated Nightjar, Large-tailed Nightjar, Blue-winged Kookaburra.

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