

BIRD FEATHERS IN THE TRADITIONAL SING-SING HEAD-DRESS OF THE KAINANS AREA

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The village of Kainans is situated in Madang Province, close to Simbai. I visited the area in late October 1987 and had the pleasure of seeing an authentic sing-sing (traditional dances). It started at about 18:00 and continued to dawn. While watching I attempted to identify the bird feathers used on the head-dresses. I found there were eleven species used, of which six were Birds of Paradise.

There were two main types of head-dress. Type A was like a crown. Its sides were covered with the heads of a green beetle. The crest feathers of the Sulphur-crested Cockatoo were used down the sides in a column. The next piece on top of this was a jumble of chicken feathers or Christmas decorations. The breast shields of Superb Birds of Paradise sometimes stuck out of the side of this section. Above came a ring of large feathers, usually the tail feathers of the Long-tailed Buzzard. The tail feathers of Sulphur-crested Cockatoos and Crowned Pigeons were also used. Occasionally whole Papuan Lorikeets were used in place of these. In the middle of the upper section was an upright thin pole, about a metre long, with a Lesser Bird of Paradise at the top. Sometimes a Black Sicklebill was used instead. The head plumes of a King of Saxony Bird of Paradise were put through the nasal septum of the dancer. The people wearing these head-dresses usually had a necklace made of about six upper mandibles of Blyth's Hornbill.

Type B head-dresses were not as tall as type A. These were mainly Papuan Lorikeets (whole birds with outstretched wings) arranged in a spiral pattern. From these projected feathers of Stephanie's *Astrapia*, Black Sicklebill, King of Saxony Bird of Paradise or Lesser Bird of Paradise. Also there were whole skins of Common Paradise-Kingfishers and Magnificent Birds of Paradise.

The local people said that all the birds were caught in the area, i.e. from the Ramu Valley to the high peaks of the Bismark Ranges. There were about 200 dancers, and many of the head-dresses were old; however, I do not think that hunting pressure on the birds was too great. With the introduction of shotguns, and with customers in the central Highlands willing to pay high prices for feathers, hunting pressure on some species may increase.

The drawing is by Keith Harris from photographs.

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