

AN UNIDENTIFIED PYGMY PARROT (*MICROPSITTA*)

ANNE MURRAY

On 20 September 1987 John Ebbelinghaus and I observed an unusual Pygmy-Parrot at Mount Binnie, Western Province, in dripping moss forest, at 2140 m. The bird was seen at a distance of only 3 m, in fine weather with only a very light mist. It sat on a branch above our heads, and gave us excellent views for about 15 minutes. It appeared to be agitated and called constantly, giving a sweet, twittery "ssiss ssiss.....". We thought it might be close to a nest, and found a hole in a mossy stump about 3 m from the ground. However, the parrot did not enter it, and eventually flew to another tree. I returned to the area on 25 September, but found no sign of the bird.

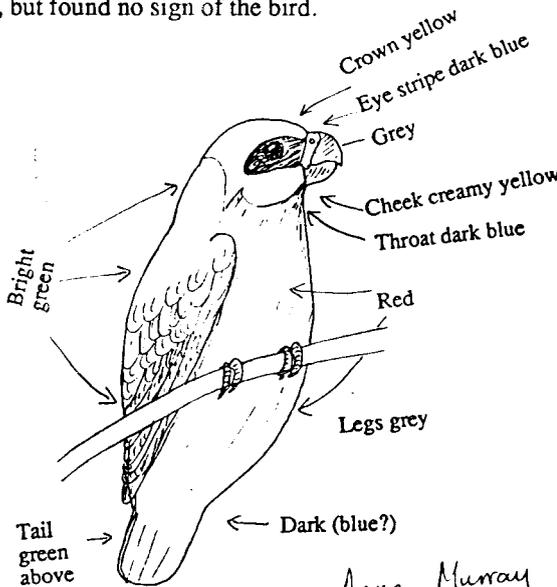
The figure shows a sketch of the bird, and the following description is taken from the field notes:

Size: 9 to 10 cm, typical *Micropsitta* shape. Crown vivid yellow with prominent dark blue eye-stripe. Cheek creamy yellow; throat dark blue. Chest and underparts extensively bright red, with undertail coverts appearing darker, possibly blue; tail short, green above; back, wings, and nape bright green.

This description does not seem to apply to any known *Micropsitta* species. The only *Micropsitta* recorded locally is the Red-breasted *M. bruijnii*, recorded at 650 m near Tabubil (Murray 1988) and at the Ok Tedi Mine at 1800 m (Coates & Lindgren 1978). Gilliard & LeCroy (1961) record it from the Victor Emanuel Mountains to the north.

The main differences between this bird and *M. bruijnii* are the yellow crown and the blue eye-stripe, the remainder of the body colouring being similar. Perhaps this bird was only an unusual colour form of *M. bruijnii*, but this observation is published to encourage other visitors to the area to look out for pygmy-parrots, since it is possible that there is an undescribed high altitude subspecies or species.

- Coates, B.J. & E. Lindgren. 1978. 6. Ok Tedi Environmental Task Force, Ok Tedi Development Co. and the Office of the Environment and Conservation, P.N.G.  
 Gilliard, E.T. & M. LeCroy. 1961. Birds of the Victor Emanuel and Hindenburg Mountains, New Guinea. *Bull. Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist.* 123.  
 Murray, A. 1988. A study of the birds of the Tabubil Region, Western Province, Papua New Guinea. *Muruk* 3:87-112.



## CRIPPLERS OF KIUNGA

DION HOBSCROFT

Following in the footsteps of Brian Finch & Hugh Buck, Hans Beste, Tony Palliser and myself arrived in Kiunga on 10 September 1987. Having spent the previous fortnight scouting the Tari Gap, it was time to "tackle the lowlands" and once accommodated, courtesy of Mr Arva Siage, we set about the task in earnest the following day.

Hans and I hitched out to the local sawmill, c. 9 km towards Tabubil. Walking along the road and logging tracks produced an excellent diversity of lowland species. I was able to record 80 species in a morning at this site. Small numbers of Palm Cockatoos and Blyth's Hornbills flew lazily over the canopy, while Yellow-capped Pygmy-Parrots were common, if typically difficult to obtain convincing views. Male Greater Bird of Paradise were delightful though generally hard to find. More conspicuous, Flame Bowerbirds, the males truly psychedelic, averaged three per morning at the sawmill - the females were abundant. Despite wishful thinking I was unable to produce male Flame Bowerbird, Golden Monarch, Golden Myna and Golden Cuckoo-Shrike in one tree! Further visits to this locality produced White-spotted Mannikin, Dwarf Koel, White-crowned Koel and Yellow-eyed Starling.

Tony on his initial trek into the forest interior behind the airstrip saw Broad-billed Fairy-Wren, so in we went, balancing precariously across logs over flooded channels while the mosquitos and leeches dined handsomely. Despite the many voices of the forest it was an excellent destination for a non-birding day (as optical connections were few and far between). The genuine highlight of the four mornings I gave to fairy-wren chasing was an excellent view of a Little Paradise-Kingfisher, which happily we all viewed. The diagnostic all navy blue outer rectrices were obvious. Two sightings of Mottled Pitohui, on both occasions associated with mixed foraging flocks, were an additional bonus. Tony also glimpsed a Golden-backed Whistler and an additional specimen of the highly elusive Fairy-Wren.

For a change of scenery we moved up to Tabubil. Vulturine Parrots, I'm happy to say, are still quite common in the adjacent forest. A Lesser Black Coucal was flushed from the roadside while Silver-eared Honeyeater was a most unexpected new bird. A morning at the Ok Tedi mine saw the three of us clambering up a track a mountain goat would have had difficulty negotiating. Nevertheless between looking at our feet we sighted Red-breasted Pygmy-Parrots, an adult Black-mantled Goshawk, and female Garnet Robin, unfortunately without her illustrious partner. Tony persevered and was rewarded with Sooty Whistler and Short-tailed Paradigalla. Hans and I turned back to look for Josephine's Lorikeet and dipped but we did pick up a pair of Torrent Flycatchers by the bridge at the security post. A Grey-tailed Tattler on the Tabubil playing field was a bit incongruous.

On our return to Kiunga I bade farewell to Hans and Tony as they moved on to Telefomin and Vanimo. Despite concerted negotiations and arrangements, which fell

by the wayside due to 'Melanesian time', we had been unable to get up river to the Elevala in search of the Southern Goura Pigeon.

Perseverance saw me on my way on 28 September, courtesy of the District Officer, Samuel Kepukinai who introduced me to one of the local villagers. Three hours later I was in the 'big bush' with a hunting party, and two hours later, with an explosion of wings reminiscent of a locomotive, a pair of gouras disappeared hastily from view. Muttering obscenities we continued, but a few minutes later one of these monstrous but beautiful birds careered spectacularly over my head and landed on a branch. It was a joyous moment. The goura had been flushed off a nest which was a suprisingly solid cup-shaped structure composed of tendrils and twigs. A small boy climbed up with an axe, and informed us that there was one egg. I began to explain to the party that if the gouras were left unmolested people would come from all over the World to see them in the bush. If everyone paid 10 kina to be guided to them it would provide valuable income for the village, particularly if there were organised bird tours to Kiunga. Everyone agreed, the more gouras the more visitors. So for that day the nest and adult survived, as did another which perched temptingly close. I gladly handed over my suggested fee - it was a small price to pay for such a superb bird. I repeated this idea to both the District Officer and Samuel. The development of a goura reserve would both help the community, and preserve the bird for future generations to enjoy.

The forest floor in the Elevala River area was quite alive with Hooded Pittas, Blue-breasted Pittas, and Blue Jewel-Babblers. There was also a New Guinea Bronzewing, and sadly untickable glimpses of the Broad-billed Fairy-Wren. I found the nest of a Beautiful Fruit-Dove only 1 m off the ground, a haphazard, flimsy, structure supporting the single white egg. It was dangerously close to one of the bush-trails, but members of the Columbidae are not blessed with Einstein's I.Q. That night a Hook-billed Kingfisher serenaded me into a delightful torpor.

As I boarded the dinghy back to Kiunga a young man came to see me. "I killed this bird for you", he said happily. It was a Beautiful Fruit-Dove. "Do twitchers harm birds?" Bill Oddie asks in his Little Black Bird Book. I speculated on this while I returned downriver. Palm Cockatoos, Blyth's Hornbills, Great Cuckoo-Dove, Little Curlew, and Spotted Whistling-Duck put in appearances. Back in Kiunga after frantic arrangements, I was whisked off that night aboard the Motuan Chief, en route for Port Moresby, at the end of a highly successful week visit in search of the unique avifauna of Papua New Guinea.

#### Species list:

K = Kiunga, T = Tabubil, E = Elevala River

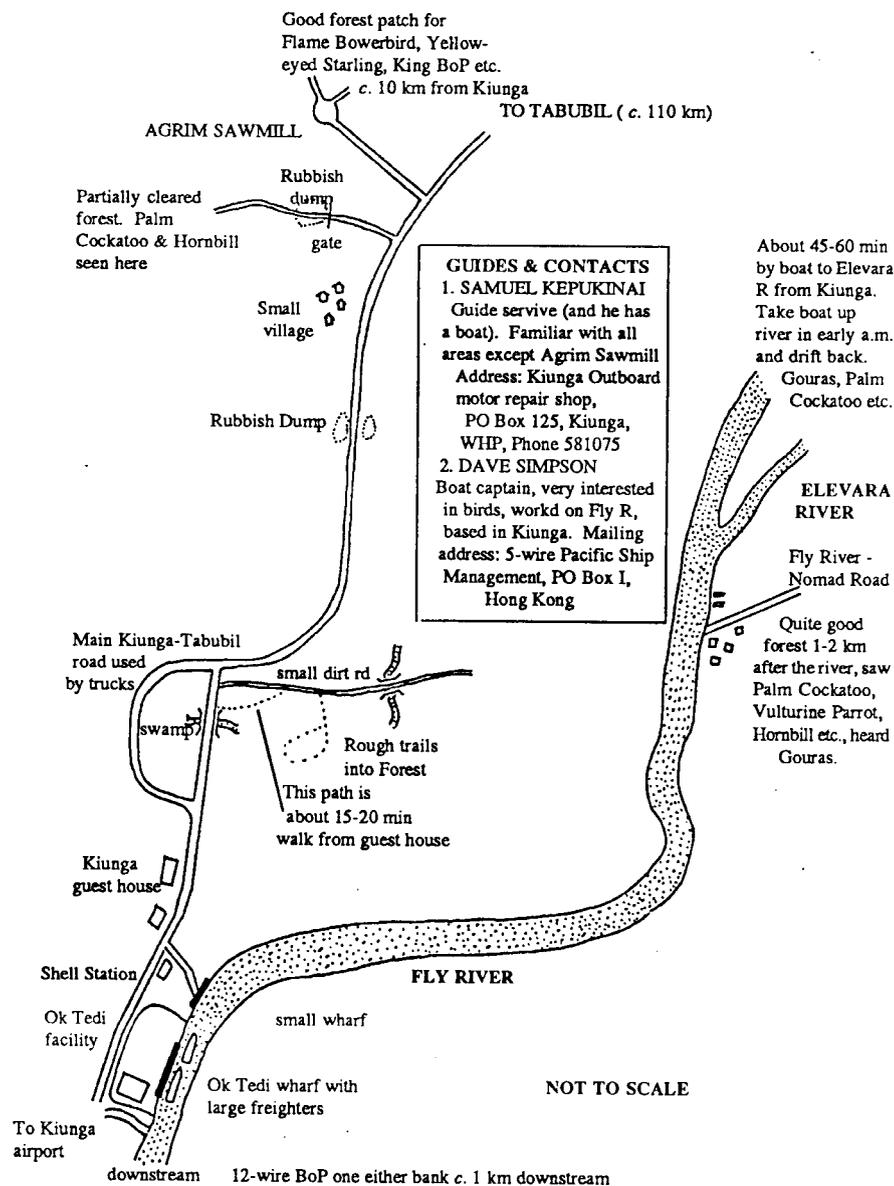
New Guinea Bronzewing (E), Stephan's Ground Dove (K), Southern Crowned Pigeon (E), Cinnamon Ground Dove (K), Great Cuckoo-Dove (KT), Black-billed Cuckoo-Dove (T), Brown Cuckoo-Dove (KT), Beautiful Fruit-Dove (KT), White-breasted Fruit-Dove (T), Wompoo Fruit-Dove (K), Pink-spotted Fruit-Dove (K), Orange-bellied Fruit-Dove (K), Coronated Fruit-Dove (K), Superb Fruit-Dove (KT), Dwarf Fruit-Dove (K), Zoe Imperial Pigeon (K), Pinon Imperial Pigeon (K), Papuan Mountain Pigeon (KT), Red-flanked Lorikeet (KT), Dusky Lorikeet (KT), Rainbow Lorikeet (KT), Western Black-capped Lory (K),

Eclectus Parrot (KT), Greater Streaked Lory (K), Red-cheeked Parrot (K), Blue-collared Parrot (K), Vulturine Parrot (T), Sulphur-crested Cockatoo (KTE), Palm Cockatoo (KE), Yellow-capped Pygmy-Parrot (K), Red-breasted Pygmy-Parrot (T), Orange-breasted Fig-parrot (KT), Double-eyed Fig-Parrot (K), White-eared Bronze-Cuckoo (T), Chestnut-bellied/Fan-tailed Cuckoo (heard T), Brush Cuckoo (KT), Dwarf Koel (K), White-crowned Koel (K), Channel-billed Cuckoo (K), Common Koel (K), Lesser Black Coucal (T), Pheasant Coucal (K), Little Paradise-Kingfisher (K), Azure Kingfisher (K), Yellow-billed Kingfisher (K), Forest Kingfisher (K), Sacred Kingfisher (KT), Hook-billed Kingfisher (KE), Rufous-bellied Kingfisher (KT), Rainbow Bee-eater (K), Dollarbird (K), Blyth's Hornbill (KE), Papuan Frogmouth (K), Uniform Swiftlet (K), Mountain Swiftlet (T), Glossy Swiftlet (T), Moustached Tree Swift (KT), Pacific Swallow (K), Blue Jewel Babbler (KE), Hooded Pitta (KE), Blue-breasted Pitta (E), Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike (KT), Boyer's Cuckoo-Shrike (KT), Cicadabird (K), Grey-headed Cuckoo-Shrike (KT), Golden Cuckoo-Shrike (K), Rufous Babbler (K), Brown Oriole (KT), Varied Triller (KT), Broad-billed Fairy-Wren (KT), Emperor Fairy-Wren (KE), White-shouldered Fairy-Wren (KT), Green-backed Gerygone (KT), Yellow-bellied Gerygone (K), Rusty Mouse-Warbler (KE), *Sericornis* sp. (T), Rufous-backed Fantail (K), White-bellied Thicket-Fantail (KT), Sooty Thicket-Fantail (heard KT), Black Fantail (T), Northern Fantail (T), Friendly Fantail (T), Willie Wagtail (KT), Black Monarch (T), Frilled Monarch (K), Black-faced Monarch (K), Spot-winged Monarch (K), Shining Flycatcher (K), Golden Monarch (K), Satin Flycatcher (K), Mountain Peltops (T), Lowland Peltops (KT), Torrent Flycatcher (T), Black-sided Robin (K), Garnet Robin (T), Golden-backed Whistler (K), Sclater's Whistler (T), Regent Whistler (T), Sooty Whistler (T), Grey Whistler (KT), Little Shrike-Thrush (KT), Rusty Pitohui (KT), Variable Pitohui (KT), White-bellied (Mottled) Pitohui (K), Papuan Flowerpecker (KT), Black Berrypecker (KT), Yellow-bellied Sunbird (K), Black Sunbird (K), Yellow-bellied Longbill (K), Dwarf Honeyeater (K), Pygmy Honeyeater (KT), Red-throated Myzomela (K), Red-collared Myzomela (KT), Mimic Meliphaga (K), Yellow-gaped Meliphaga (K), Scrub White-eared Meliphaga (KT), Spot-breasted Meliphaga (T), Silver-eared Honeyeater (T), Grey-streaked Honeyeater (T), Obscure Honeyeater (T), Black-throated Honeyeater (T), Tawny-breasted Honeyeater (KT), Common Smoky Honeyeater (T), Yellow-browed Melidectes (T), Streak-headed Honeyeater (K), Plain Honeyeater (K), Meyer's Friarbird (K), Helmeted Friarbird (KT), *Erythrura* sp. (T), White-spotted Mannikin (K), Streak-headed Mannikin (K), Golden Myna (KT), Yellow-faced Myna (KT), Yellow-eyed Starling (KT), Metallic Starling (K), White-breasted Wood-Swallow (K), Great Wood-Swallow (T), Hooded Butcherbird (KT), Black Butcherbird (KT), Flame Bowerbird (K), Greater Bird of Paradise (KT), Raggiana Bird of Paradise (E), King Bird of Paradise (K), Magnificent Bird of Paradise (T), Trumpet Manucode (K), Crinkle-collared Manucode (E), Short-tailed Paradigalla (T), Grey Crow (KT).

## A BIRDER'S MAP OF KIUNGA

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## RECENT OBSERVATIONS JANUARY TO MARCH 1988

COMPILED BY ROGER K HICKS

Observers:- Ian Burrows (IB); Richard Gregory-Smith (RGS); Roger Hicks (RH); Helen Fortune Hopkins (HFH); Niklas Wahlberg (NW).

Records were received from a disappointingly few number of observers for this period. Other PNGBS members must have some observations worth recording. All nest records, sightings of migrants, feeding records etc. will be gratefully received.

Abbreviations:- ad = adult; bp = breeding plumage; I = Island; juv = juvenile; Mor = Morobe Province; Mt = Mount; NP = National Park; Oro = Oro (Northern) Province; PAC = Pacific Adventist College, 14-mile, Port Moresby; R = River; SP = Settling Ponds; UPNG = University of PNG campus, Port Moresby.

All records refer to Port Moresby area unless the site is followed by a province abbreviation.

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|--|------------------------------------|
| Australasian Grebe   | <i>Tachybaptus novaehollandiae</i> |
| 19 Feb, two pairs with young, PAC (RH); 5 Mar, pair nesting, Varirata NP (RGS); for most of this period no birds were recorded at Moitaka SP (RH).               |                                    |
| Lesser Frigatebird   | <i>Fregata ariel</i>               |
| 18 Jan, single male, Paga Hill (RH).   |                                    |
| Great Egret  | <i>Egretta alba</i>                |
| 11 Mar, c. 50% of birds in bp, Moitaka SP (RH).  |                                    |
| Cattle Egret   | <i>Egretta ibis</i>                |
| 2 Jan, c. 40 (c. 50% in bp), Ilimo Farm (RH); 7 Jan, 1 in non-bp, Moitaka SP (RH); 9 Jan, 60 Goldie/Laloki R confluence (RGS); 6 Feb, 1 in non-bp, Kanosia (RH). |                                    |
| White-faced Heron  | <i>Egretta novaehollandiae</i>     |
| 23 Jan, 1, Tanuabada ponds (RH & RGS); 27 Feb, 1, Bootless Bay (RH). Two unseasonal records of this species.   |                                    |
| Little Egret   | <i>Egretta garzetta</i>            |
| 11 Mar, 5 with nuptial plumes, Moitaka SP (RH).  |                                    |
| Eastern Reef-Egret   | <i>Egretta sacra</i>               |
| 25 Mar, 15 dark phase & 1 white phase, Maui I, also 2 nests with eggs and 1 nest with a day old chick (RH & IB).   |                                    |
| Striated Heron   | <i>Ardeola striata</i>             |
| 16 Jan, 1, Bootless Bay (RH); 27 Feb, 3, Bootless Bay (RH); 12 Mar, 1 in bp (bright orange legs), Bootless Bay (RH); 13 Mar, 2, Roka (RGS).                      |                                    |
| Black Bittern  | <i>Ixobrychus flavicollis</i>      |
| 6 Feb, 1, Tanuabada ponds (RH); 19 Mar, 1, Hiwick R (RH); 30 Mar, 1 Moitaka SP (RH & RGS).   |                                    |
| Osprey   | <i>Pandion haliaetus</i>           |
| 13 Jan, 1, Moitaka SP (RH); 30 Jan, 1, catching grass carp, Moitaka SP (RH).   |                                    |
| Long-tailed Buzzard  | <i>Henicopernis longicauda</i>     |
| 12 Mar, 1, Veimauri logging tracks (RH).   |                                    |