

EDITORIAL

This issue of MURUK concentrates on bird behaviour, with papers and notes on bird song, displays, nests and feeding behaviour. Please note Andy Mack's request for information on Cassowaries. Observations can be sent direct to Andy or to the PNGBS for publication MURUK. I hope this issue will stimulate further contributions on bird behaviour for MURUK, there must be many observations lurking in note books that are worthy of publication. Please put pen to paper. We also require interesting observations for the last three quarters (Oct - Dec 1989, Jan - Mar 1990 and Apr - Jun 1990). Please submit these to the PNGBS or one of the committee members.

The front cover, drawn by Andy Mack and repeated on page 51, depicts a selection of seeds found in Cassowary droppings. For identification of the seeds see page 51.

We have used all our drawings of Cassowaries for the front cover of MURUK. We would be pleased to receive drawings of any of the three species of MURUKS (pidgin for Cassowary) or related drawings for use on the cover.

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MURUK is published by the Papua New Guinea Bird Society and is available as part of the Society membership. Backnumbers are available at K4 each plus postage and packaging. Please send articles to :- The Editor, PNGBS, P.O. Box 1598, Boroko, Papua New Guinea.

Roger Hicks (editor)

NOTES ON THE DWARF CASSOWARY *CASUARIUS BENNETTI* IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

ANDREW L. MACK

In the second half of 1987 I began a study of the Dwarf Cassowary *Casuarius bennetti* in PNG. During this period I worked primarily within the Crater Mountain Wildlife Management Area (CMWMA) in the Eastern Highlands and Chimbu Provinces. Other localities in PNG briefly visited during my six month stay included Mt. Missim near Wau, Baiyer River Sanctuary, and Varirata National Park. In CMWMA I worked in the vicinity of the villages of Ubaigubi (c. 75 km SSW of Goroka), Heroana (c. 95 km SSW of Goroka) and Haia (c. 30 km SE of Karimui). The approximate elevations of my camps at these three sites are 1900 m, 1600 m and 800 m, respectively. The forests at Ubaigubi and Heroana are montane, whereas the forest at the Haia camp is pre-montane.

The purpose of this field season was primarily to identify a field site, test different field techniques and collect preliminary data for a three year study of cassowaries. The season was a success, the area around Haia being chosen for the main study which began in 1989. As there is very little published data regarding cassowaries and their biology, I will report some preliminary findings here with the caveat that much more detailed information will be forthcoming later.

Distribution

Dwarf cassowaries were fairly common throughout the CMWMA during my visit, as judged by the numbers of fresh droppings found. Above 1700 m I found few droppings. Local hunters told me the birds move up into the higher forests seasonally and indicated that this movement coincided with the fruiting of a species of Guttiferae on which the birds feed heavily. This upward movement presumably occurs at the beginning of the wet season, in late November or December. I was not at the higher altitudes at this time and so was unable to confirm this assertion.

At 1600 m birds seem to be present year-round and here there was a greater variety and abundance of the large-fruited trees upon which the cassowaries feed. At the 800 m camp droppings were much more numerous as were the large-fruited trees and lianes which are amongst their food plants. I was told by hunters that Southern Cassowary *C. casuarius* was not present at this lower camp but could be found not too far below, at perhaps 300 m. However, I could not go in search of this species while I was in the area. During the main study period I will strive to learn where the two species meet and whether their ranges overlap.