

WELCOME SWALLOW *HIRUNDO NEOXANA* AT MOITAKA SETTLING PONDS

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A single Welcome Swallow *Hirundo neoxana* was seen at Moitaka settling ponds (National Capital District) at 07:15 on 30 March 1988. The most notable feature was its elongated outer tail feathers, which made it appear more slender than the Pacific Swallows *H. tahitica* available for comparison. Its plumage was very similar to the Pacific Swallows': dark blue-black above, greyish below with a rich rufous throat and upper breast. The long tail-streamers and rich colour of the throat indicated this bird was an adult, as immatures have short tails and duller plumage (Pizzey 1980). A swallow with tail-streamers, that had been glimpsed but not identified, at the settling ponds on 24 March 1988, is now assumed to have been this Welcome Swallow. The other two possible options are Barn Swallow *H. rustica* and Red-rumped Swallow *H. daurica*, both northern winter visitors to PNG (Beehler *et al.* 1986). It was not considered to be either of these species because it lacked the dark breast band and white underparts of Barn Swallow, and did not have the pale or rufous rump and collar of Red-rumped Swallow. We are familiar with all three species.

The Welcome Swallow is endemic to Australia, although some authorities consider it conspecific with the Pacific Swallow (Howard & Moore 1984). It is a partial migrant; some southern breeders desert their nesting areas in the austral winter and move north. It has colonised New Zealand (Pizzey 1980). The first record in PNG was of a single bird associating with Barn Swallows and Tree Martins *H. nigricans* at Aroa Lagoon, Central Province, in November 1980 (Finch 1980). The second record was of two birds, an adult and an immature at Hisiu Lagoon, Central Province, in October 1984 (Finch 1984). Hence, this is only the third record for PNG and the entire New Guinea region.

Beehler, B.M., T.K. Pratt & D.A. Zimmerman. 1986. *Birds of New Guinea*. Princeton University Press.

Finch, B.W. 1980. Welcome Swallow *Hirundo neoxana* at Aroa Lagoon, Central Province. A new species for the New Guinea region. PNGBS Newsletter 173-74: 4-5.

Finch, B.W. 1984. Welcome Swallows *Hirundo neoxana* at Hisiu Lagoon. Second record for the New Guinea Region. PNGBS Newsletter 212: 4-5.

Howard, R. & A. Moore. 1984. *A Complete Checklist of the Birds of the World*. Papermac.

Pizzey, G. 1980. *A Field Guide to the Birds of Australia*. Collins.

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BARRED OWLET-NIGHTJAR *AEGOTHELES CRISTATUS* AT THE KING BIRD TREE

NIKLAS WAHLBERG

On 1 October 1988, Chris Eastwood and I were visiting the King Bird Tree area, situated 6 km north-west of the Brown River Bridge, on the Hiritano Highway.

We had gone c. 200 m into the forest when I flushed an owlet-nightjar that had apparently been roosting in a hollow tree trunk. It flew to a bare branch c. 10 m above the forest floor where it stayed for about half an hour. During this time the bird was carefully studied from various angles and these notes were taken: mouse brown above with distinct whitish collar; grey breast and belly, with fine black barring, which got thicker towards the throat; barring on tail; size, c. 20 cm.

After consulting Beehler *et al.* (1986), Barred Owlet-nightjar best fitted the description. Owlet-nightjars are extremely hard to see in Papua New Guinea.

Beehler, B.M., Pratt, T.K. & Zimmerman, D.A. (1986). *Birds of New Guinea*. Princeton University Press.

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INTERESTING OBSERVATIONS OF BIRDS AT VARIRATA NATIONAL PARK, JUNE-JULY 1989

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We spent two months at Varirata National Park in order to begin a study of the Raggiana Bird of Paradise. During this period, we recorded 120 species, and made observations of several species rarely or not previously known in the park. These are reported in the following annotated list. We follow the nomenclature of Beehler & Finch (1985).

Australasian Grebe

Tachybaptus novaehollandiae

A pair attempted to nest on the lowest pond in June. This nest was destroyed and the birds constructed a new nest in mid-July.

Little Pied Cormorant

Phalacrocorax melanoleucos

Observed in early June flying over the open picnic area.

- Doria's Hawk *Megatriorchis doriae*
Observed by JPD at a Raggiana Bird of Paradise Lek on 20 June. This bird entered the lek tree and perched there for a few minutes, which gave JPD the opportunity to make extensive field notes on the individual, an adult in typical plumage. The Raggianas evacuated the tree well before the hawk appeared in the lek.
- New Guinea Harpy-Eagle *Harpyopsis novaeguineae*
Michael Lucas and Rodney Goga, field technicians from Biagge working with our team, claimed to have heard this species in the area south of the loop trail.
- Little Eagle *Hieraaetus morphnoides*
15 June, 2 light-morphs, soaring off Gare's Lookout.
- White-bibbed Ground-Dove *Gallicolumba jobiensis*
One, in immature plumage, was observed by BMB in the forest interior after it flushed from the ground to a low perch.
- Malay Bronze-Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx minutillus*
The distinctive song of this species was heard on several days in the forest interior.
- Dwarf Koel *Microdynamis parva*
Several calls of this species were heard by BMB on a number of occasions. JPD observed a single male. The male is easily lured in by an imitation of its whistled call.
- Marbled Frogmouth *Podargus ocellatus*
9 July, BMB heard this species calling in the forest.
- Owlet-Nightjar sp. *Aegotheles* sp.
We observed this bird with the aid of torchlight. The bird perched in a *Casuarina* right by our camp in the open part of the park. BMB's tentative identification was Australian Owlet-Nightjar based on the pale plumage. A harsh call, typical of an owlet-nightjar, was heard from the *Casuarina* grove on several occasions.
- Scaly Thrush *Zosterodaema*
One, in adult plumage, was mist-netted in the forest interior.
- Streak-headed Honeyeater *Pycnopygius stictocephalus*
An oft-recorded species at the forest-edge. Heard more often than seen.
- Parrot-Finch *Erythrura* sp.
BMB heard the *t-t-t* flight call of a parrot-finch on several occasions.
- Mountain Peltops *Peltops montanus*
There has been some disagreement about which peltops species inhabit the park. On two differing days, at two different sites, BMB heard the distinctive, descending series of tittering notes that is given only by *P. montanus*.
- Crinkle-collared Manucode *Manucodia chalybata*
We observed and heard only this species of manucode in the park. It kept primarily to the forest interior, although we also saw individuals visiting fig trees at forest edge. We recorded neither Trumpet nor Glossy-mantled Manucodes.
- Raggiana Bird of Paradise *Paradisaea raggiana*
We found a female sitting on a nest in a small fig tree near the Information Centre in late July. No egg had been laid when we checked the nest.

Beehler, B. & B. Finch. 1985. *Species-Checklist of the birds of New Guinea*. RAOU Monogr. #1.

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WHEN VARIRATA IS GOOD IT IS VERY GOOD

CHRISTOPHER EASTWOOD

One Sunday in May I had arranged to go to Brown River to do some birding but, because I overslept, ended up in Varirata National Park. I was there by the relatively late hour of 07.45 and really did not expect to see much.

My route took me from Varirata Lookout to Gares Lookout, back down to the picnic site and the start of the Circuit Track and then back along the stream to Varirata Lookout. This is a longish walk at the best of times.

Starting out at Varirata Lookout, I first saw several Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrikes in the casuarinas and a Pheasant Coucal in the scrub below them. I walked on for about half an hour and eventually reached the first thick patch of bamboo. There seemed to be a fair bit of activity, so I sat down and waited. Shortly thereafter, I heard scratchings on the forest floor and a pair of Chestnut-backed Jewel-Babblers emerged in full view, foraging along the edge of the path and quite oblivious of me. I was then distracted by a burst of activity to my right, and a Black Butcherbird flushed from the floor to perch in the bamboo. The jewel-babblers had now moved on but, almost immediately, I heard more calls behind me, and turning I saw a male Painted Quail-Thrush cross the path a few metres away and forage nearby. It called continually and was soon joined by a female. As the female neared the male, the male circled the female two or three times, making the occasional small jump and calling at the same time. Both birds then settled down and continued foraging.

I had to flush the quail-thrush as I could hear a cuckoo calling nearby and wanted to investigate. I could not see the bird, but did hear some rustling down by the path; I froze, and a Pheasant Pigeon stepped onto the path. It appeared to see me, for it turned and started walking quickly down the path. However, after a few steps, it stopped and foraged by the path for at least 5 minutes before disappearing back into the bush.

It was time for me to move. Some distance away I came across a third quail-thrush, a male, but I was more interested in some activity nearby that turned out to be a party of Hooded Pitohuis. While trying to get some good views of them, I heard rustling to my left and saw a Cinnamon Ground-Dove walking quickly over the ground. Unfortunately, it saw me and had vanished by the time I lifted my binoculars.

Shortly before I reached Gares Lookout, I saw a large, noisy, active flock of at least 12 Grey Crows flying around and sometimes perching in the trees. They had with them several juveniles, which were almost as large as the adults but looked quite black.