

IN SEARCH OF THE MANUS ENDEMIC.

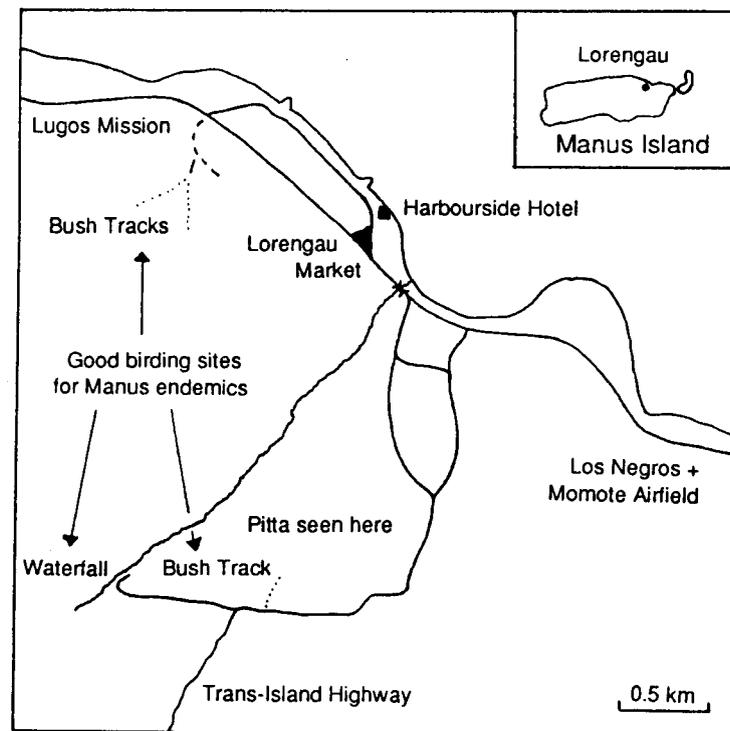
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Manus is one of the more remote of Papua New Guinea's provinces, lying about 250 km north of Madang and the same distance west of New Ireland. It was to this splendid isolation that we flew in early May 1989 for a long weekend away from Port Moresby. Of course while we were there we hoped to see some of the island's endemic birds. Depending which book you read there may be five or six of these: Meek's Pygmy Parrot *Micropsitta meeki*, Manus Boobook *Ninox meeki*, Superb Pitta *Pitta superba*, Manus Rufous Fantail *Rhipidura semirubra* (sometimes considered only a race of Rufous Fantail), Manus Pied Monarch *Monarcha infelix* and White-naped Friarbird *Philemon albitorques*. Manus and its birds have featured relatively little in PNGBS publications to date, so descriptions of the birds we saw are included here to help those who follow.

We arrived at Momote airfield at midday after a flight that had touched down in four provinces and flown over another four. Momote is a large ex-WW2 airfield on the island of Los Negros, which is separated from Manus island by the narrow Lonui Channel. We slowly drove the 25 km to Lorengau, the provincial capital, but only saw White-rumped Swiftlets en route.

Following a lazy afternoon, we went bird watching in the evening at a site recommended by Tony Palliser. It was less than 3 km from Lorengau (see map) and several of the endemics had been seen there. It proved productive for us too. White-rumped Swiftlets were again much in evidence, accompanied by a few Glossy Swiftlets, which also have white rumps here, but are distinguished by cleaner white bellies. Our first new bird was a Black-headed (Bismarck) White-Eye, which was relatively common in areas of secondary growth. It has, as its name implies, a black or dark grey head, including chin and throat, which becomes paler on the nape, shading into the dark green of the upperparts. The white eye-ring was broken in front of the eye and was not as broad as that of the Black-fronted White-Eye, the species with which we are most familiar. The underparts were dusky yellow, brighter on the undertail coverts.

The first endemic we saw, not surprisingly, was a White-naped Friarbird, flying across the valley. In silhouette it was not unlike the Eurasian Jay, albeit with a thinner neck. For a friarbird it was quite striking. It had a dark brown face, crown, mantle, back and wings. The nape and all underparts were pale fawn. It had an amazing range of calls, at times sounding like a Rufous-bellied Kookaburra or a Raggiana Bird of Paradise, neither of which occurs on Manus. It was widespread and we recorded it in all the habitats we visited, including around Lorengau.



BIRDERS MAP TO THE AREA AROUND LORENGAU, MANUS

The next bird we saw had us puzzled. A cuckoo-shrike landed in a fruiting tree where some Singing Starlings were already feeding. It seemed uniform dark grey with perhaps darker wings, and was noticeably smaller than the starlings. We ruled out Cicadabird at first because we thought it too small, but shortly after it was joined by a female-plumaged Cicadabird. As the starlings appeared normal sized we decided it must be a small subspecies. A second puzzle followed a little later when a third type of swiftlet with a white rump was seen. It was generally larger and stockier than both White-rumped and Glossy Swiftlets, with a large, square, dirty white rump. We think this may prove to be Whitehead's Swiftlet of the New Ireland race. As this may be a new record for Manus, one of only a few records of this subspecies and an increase in the known distribution of this subspecies, this observation will be written up in more detail (Hicks in prep).

Our third new bird was Meek's Pygmy-Parrot, which we heard repeatedly before seeing a small flock foraging along the branches of a large tree. Generally they had mustard yellow heads, although some had dark crowns, and underparts, except for the undertail coverts, which were brighter yellow. The mantle, back, wings and tail were dark green. The legs were orange. They were relatively common and easily seen in both forest and secondary growth. Our second new record for Manus, which will also be written up in more detail, was a pair of Claret-breasted Fruit-Doves feeding in the

same fruiting tree as the Cicadabirds and starlings. This rounded off our evening's bird watching.

Disappointingly the remainder of our stay produced no more new birds although we did see Common Golden Whistler and more Claret-breasted Fruit-Doves in rainforest along the highway. Frustratingly the endemic Superb Pitta may have been glimpsed. A bird was flushed from a forest track, all that was noted of this bird was a flash of electric blue on the inner wings and across the back of a pitta-sized bird. What else could it have been? If Superb Pitta is found at this site (see map), then all the Manus endemics can be found within 3 km of Lorengau, as Tony Palliser recorded Manus Boobook and Manus Pied Monarch in the same area.

We would like to thank Tony Palliser who provided information about bird watching on Manus and supplied the very useful map, which we have reproduced here, with some additions.

Species List: Brahminy Kite / Grey Goshawk / Large Sand-Plover / Grey-tailed Tattler / Black-naped Tern / Crested Tern / Claret-breasted Fruit-Dove / Rainbow Lorikeet; / Meek's Pygmy-Parrot / Eclectus Parrot / Brush Cuckoo (h) / Moustached Tree-Swift / White-rumped Swiftlet / Glossy Swiftlet / Whitehead's Swiftlet (?) / Rainbow Bee-eater / Superb Pitta (?) / White-bellied Cuckoo-Shrike / Cicadabird / Northern Fantail / Shining Flycatcher / Common Golden Whistler / Yellow-bellied Sunbird / Black-headed White-Eye / White-naped Friarbird / Singing Starling / Metallic Starling. 27 species.

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WOODLARK ISLAND

KEVIN VANG

Woodlark Island in Milne Bay Province, lies c. 300 km NE of Alotau, 400 km SW of Bougainville, 70 km N of Misima and 70 km E of the Trobriands. The island is c. 65 km long, east to west, and c. 25 km wide north to south at its widest point.

Woodlark is located on a wide, uplifted, island-arc zone which extends from the Luscanay Reefs in the west, across the Trobriands, through Woodlark and east to the Laughlin Islands. This uplifted zone was probably formed during the Miocene, 15-20 million years ago, by subductive tectonic activity that has long been associated with this region of Papua New Guinea. Around these volcanic rocks, coral reefs began to build and extend large platforms. Throughout the Miocene, volcanic and intrusive igneous activity recurred, further raising the general area. Each time the volcanism subsided, new coral platforms would build and extend around the shallow, uplifted areas. Therefore, today, Woodlark Island has a central core of intrusive and extrusive

igneous rocks which form the central hill region, surrounded by massive limestone platforms which comprise the lowland region.

The island is relatively flat with a subdued relief except in the central hill area of the Suloga Peninsula and Kulumadau where there are hills up to 300 m and relief is very rugged.

Within the flatter, lowland areas are many fresh water lakes and swamps, the largest being Lake Lelua in the north-west. In the well drained lowland areas, primary forest including vast tracts of virgin ebony are present. These forest areas have been the centre of the logging operations (see map). The western half of the island has been logged over leaving large pockets of secondary forest among the primary forest that had not been cut.

The highland areas are forested and have some very spectacular scenery. The mining has been concentrated in these areas and hence the disturbance from mining so far has been localized.

The coastal areas are very rich, with vast tracts of mangroves in the lowlands, and rugged cliffs where the sea meets the highland areas. There are extensive reef systems around the island and many small offshore islands.

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST

Suloga Peninsula (including Nasai Island) - Rugged, fairly undisturbed wilderness area which is rich in plant and animal life, including the Woodlark Cuscus and most of the island's bird species. Many coastal cliffs have spectacular wave action and are home to many species of salt-resistant orchids and other plants. There is a very important archaeological site, which is the only regional source of greenstone for the Kula trade. Extensive mangrove areas and the many scenic, rugged limestone pinnacles in Wonai Bay are used by birds for nesting.

North-east coastal area - Last large tracts of virgin ebony along with some small lakes and wetland areas.

Southern mangrove areas - Extensive mangrove and grass swamp areas which are home to fish, marine invertebrates, dugongs and birds from Suloga Peninsula to Madau Island. Breeding grounds for much of the marine life used as food and trade by the islanders.

Madau Island - Extensive marine swamps and reef areas.