

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.

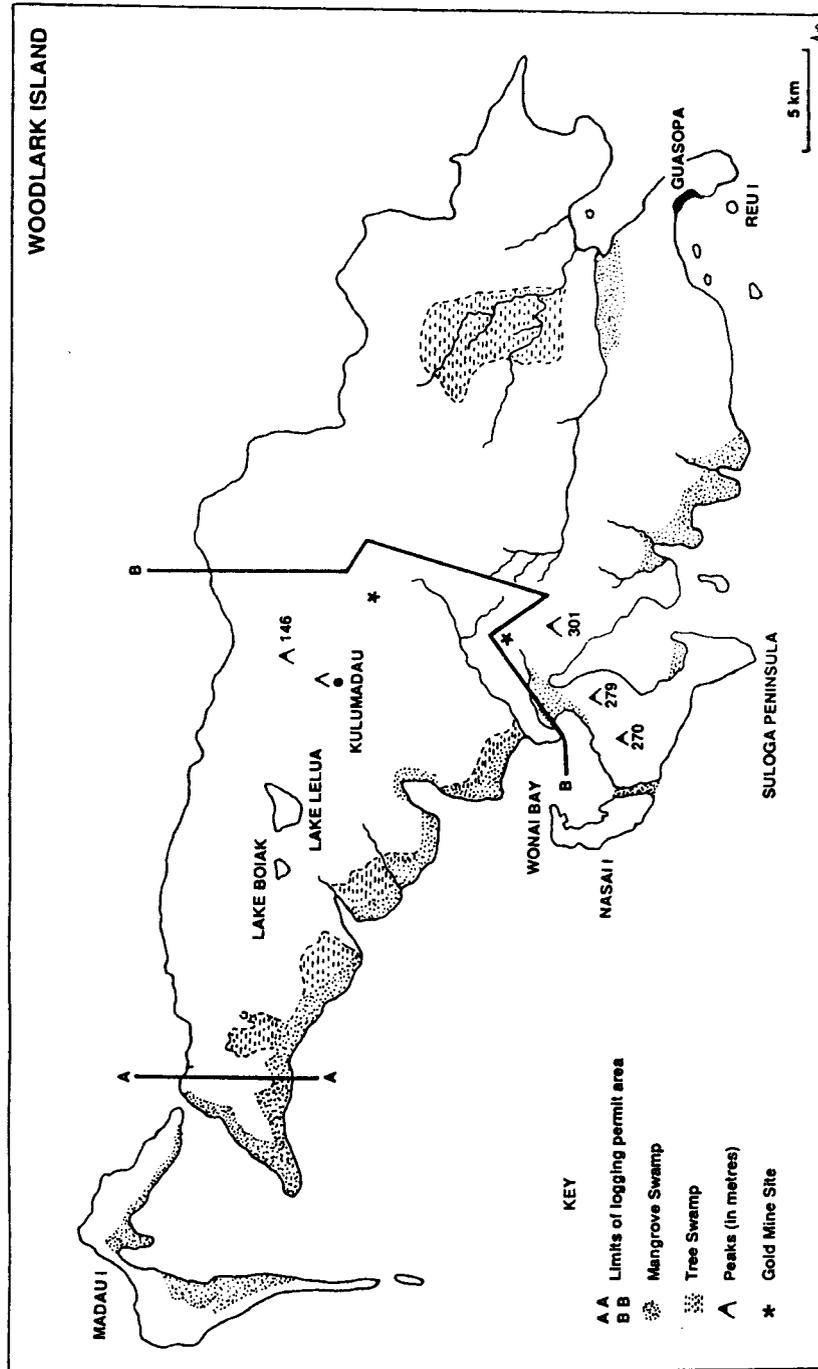
### AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST

**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.



**Offshore Islands**— Many small, uninhabited offshore islands which provide pristine marine and terrestrial habitats.

Between 13-18 June 1990 I visited Woodlark Island as part of the Tropical Forest Action Plan (TFAP) Taskforce Team. This was the TFAP Taskforce's first preliminary survey of a potential conservation area. Woodlark Island was chosen because its unique fauna, beautiful scenery, and rich marine life is under immediate threat from logging and mining activity. The team comprised eight persons. Two representing UPNG, three representing NGO's, two from Department of Environment and Conservation and one from Department of Forests.

The Taskforce mainly talked with land owners but some ecological surveys were undertaken. I did initial bird surveys visiting, briefly, most areas of the island.

I have only been birding in PNG for six months and am not as familiar with the species here as my veteran colleagues who will read this preliminary survey. I have tried to be as careful as possible to keep detailed notes in case of possible discrepancies, for instance, as between the Collared and Sacred Kingfishers. Many years of birding throughout the world has given me plenty of experience, but also taught me that mistakes are made by even the most careful observer. I have tried to alert the reader to areas where my observations were not exact, and have included other possible candidates and considerations where it is warranted. Further field trips of longer duration would solve remaining questions.

**Australasian Grebe**

*Tachybaptus novaehollandiae*

Very common on Lake Lelua. 100+ in breeding plumage (white bill-spot and red neck-patch) were observed gathered in small groups of two to five. The red neck-patch was only evident in direct light or very close range. Some possible reed nests were seen. There were no signs of fledgling or juvenile birds. This species was readily distinguished from the morphologically similar *T. ruficollis* by its whitish (some with yellowish wash) coloured iris. The white wing-patch was not obvious on close inspection while they were in the water, and none were seen in flight. The grebes seemed unusually unwary and allowed close approach. They probably occur on other small lakes on Woodlark Island. There are no previous records of this species from Woodlark or other East Papuan Islands (Coates 1985, Beehler *et al.* 1986).

**Lesser Frigatebird**

*Fregata ariel*

Frequently seen flying high above the coastal areas particularly along the south coast. One was forced onto a low water marker near Nasai Island during a heavy rain storm, and was observed at very close range.

**Egret sp.**

*Egretta sp.*

I did not see any egrets during this trip, but one was seen by my colleague in a wet, inland clearing near Kulumadau. By his description, it was probably a Great Egret. Locals often pointed to the white egrets in the bird book, but they may confuse these with the white-phase Eastern Reef Egrets. Due to suitable habitat on Woodlark, and the widespread presence of these species regionally, occasional visits seem probable. Coates (1985) and Beehler *et al.* (1986) indicate no previous records from East Papuan Islands of any species, but suggest possible visits, especially by the Great Egret.

- Eastern Reef-Egret *Egretta sacra*  
Very frequent along the coast and offshore islands. A nesting colony was seen on an offshore island near Nasai Island. The ratio of dark plumage birds to light ones was about 9:1. The colony was on a small offshore limestone island with many tall pinnacles on top of which the egrets nested. All these nesting areas were covered with guano. Some nests were also seen in less exposed sites on the ground or on the flatter areas of small cliffs.
- Black Bittern *Ixobrychus flavicollis*  
This was occasionally seen in the mangrove areas between Nasai Island and Suloga Peninsula and flying between mangrove pockets along the beach. One discovered at close range in the mangroves struck its typical, immobile, beak up position and allowed the canoe to approach to c. 1 m before flying deeper into the mangroves. Its stockier build and irregular white breast striping (coalesced while flying into one irregular, whitish stripe) distinguished it from other herons in flight. It tended to fly only 2-4 m above the ground or water for short distances unlike the reef egrets that were often seen flying higher and greater distances.
- Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*  
Occasionally seen soaring or flying quite high over the coastal areas.
- Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus*  
Common in all habitats, but seemed to favour, coastal areas, disturbed areas and second growth.
- White-bellied Sea-Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster*  
One seen on the windward side of Reu Island just off the coast from Guasopa. Residents suggest that this species is usually present in small numbers along the coast and offshore islands.
- Grey Goshawk *Accipiter novaehollandiae*  
or Grey-headed Goshawk *Accipiter poliiocephalus*  
A small accipiter was seen perched on a snag at some distance. The above two species are possible candidates due to their presence on surrounding islands, i.e., the D'Entrecasteauxs and Misima, although the Grey-headed Goshawk is usually seen in the forest interior and not perched out in the open.
- Pacific Black Duck *Anas superciliosa*  
I did not see any ducks on the island, but several colleagues described seeing what was probably this species at several small ponds. According to local accounts and literature sightings and because of the number of fresh water lakes, ponds and swamps on Woodlark, one could infer that this species is a likely visitor and perhaps resident breeding bird.
- Common Scrubfowl *Megapodius freycinet*  
An adult or possibly subadult individual sitting (hiding) on the ground in thick bush on Reu Island was carefully observed at less than 1 m. The body and head of the bird were very dark (light black-dark grey), the beak was a bit lighter (lighter grey with orange or yellow tinge), the legs were bright yellow, and the undertail coverts were very light (light grey or dusky white) not unlike a Purple Swamphen. It let me practically walk on it before it ran. No other individuals were seen at such a close range, but those frequently seen along the roads had the same general colouration.
- Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio*  
Locals suggest that it is very common in the deeper swamps. It probably breeds in the island's extensive inland swamp areas.
- Beach Stone-Curlew *Esacus magnirostris*  
One was observed repeatedly foraging on the airstrip in Guasopa. It was very unwary and occasionally was chased by dogs. As the dogs approached, it would run or fly a small distance and realight. Once this went on for a half hour before the dog gave up. Three others were seen on a beach at Reu Island foraging on the reef.
- Lesser Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*  
A flock of 8 birds was seen foraging on the airstrip in Guasopa.
- Crested Tern *Sterna bergii*  
Commonly seen along the coast and outer reefs. Sometimes solitary, and sometimes in straggling flocks of ten to twenty individuals.

- Emerald Ground-Dove *Chalcophaps indica*  
or Stephan's Ground-Dove *Chalcophaps stephani*  
One of these two species was seen commonly, flying rapidly at very low levels across open areas (usually roads) between dense cover. However, a close inspection of a sedentary individual was never made. One was seen at very close range, but the sighting lasted only a second. No white was clearly distinguished on the shoulders or on the forehead, only very distinct green wings and brown body. Emerald Ground-Dove has been recorded on Woodlark, but there are no records of Stephan's Ground-Dove (Coates 1985).
- Superb Fruit-Dove *Ptilinopus superbus*  
A solitary male, sitting c. 3-4 m high in a medium sized tree on the forest edge, just west of Guasopa, was the only record. The orange collar and dark blue breast stripe against the white body were the most distinctive features.
- Grey Imperial Pigeon *Ducula pistrinaria*  
Commonly seen on offshore islands and in lowland forest on Woodlark at the tops of large trees (or occasionally lower). They were usually in flocks of less than ten birds, but were occasionally solitary. Coates (1985) indicates that although this species has not been recorded for Woodlark, it is to be expected.
- Pied Imperial Pigeon *Ducula bicolor*  
Commonly seen on offshore islands and in the lowland forests of Woodlark. They were seen in groups of up to twenty birds, but were also often seen in smaller flocks or solitary. They often flew in small flocks between the offshore islands and the main island.
- Imperial Pigeon sp. *Ducula sp.*  
Other *Ducula* species probably occur on the islands from time to time. Local residents often pointed to the picture of the Pinon Imperial Pigeon *Ducula pinon* as being present and occasionally hunted.
- Eastern Black-capped Lory *Lorius hypoinochrous*  
The most common parrot on the island, inhabiting nearly all areas. They are very conspicuous, loud and unwary.
- Sulphur-crested Cockatoo *Cacatua galerita*  
Common throughout the island and small offshore islands. They seemed to favour the primary forest and more isolated areas, but they were still common throughout disturbed forest and second growth. They were not very wary, and are apparently little hunted.
- Uniform Swiftlet *Collocalia vanikorensis*  
Abundant, but more common in the lower areas of the island nearer the coast.
- Glossy Swiftlet *Collocalia esculenta*  
Very common, but not as much so as the preceding species. They seem to be more abundant in the hilly terrain in the central area around Kulumadau.
- Forest Kingfisher *Halcyon macleayii*  
Commonly seen in the disturbed areas around Guasopa. White wing patches diagnostic in flight.
- Collared Kingfisher *Halcyon chloris*  
or Sacred Kingfisher *Halcyon sancta*  
One, or perhaps both these species of kingfisher was commonly seen in disturbed areas around Guasopa, in the same localities as the Forest Kingfisher. Due to its buff-tinged breast, common occurrence in the town area, and the fact that it seemed to be the same size as Forest Kingfishers present and to the Sacred Kingfisher common in Port Moresby, I will tentatively identify it as the Sacred Kingfisher. Collared Kingfishers have not been recorded from Woodlark, but may occasionally have buffy underparts and occupy disturbed and second growth habitats especially on islands. However, on some Pacific islands buffy breasted kingfishers previously classified as Collared Kingfishers have been redesignated as Sacred Kingfishers (Pratt *et al.* 1987).
- Beach Kingfisher *Halcyon saurophaga*  
One sighting of this very conspicuous bird on Reu Island. It was very wary, but did not fly far when disturbed.

## Common Kingfisher

*Alcedo atthis*

Occasionally seen in the mangrove areas and in a tree on the edge of Lake Lelula. The diagnostic contrast between the dark blue wings and the electric blue back, the deep orange-red underparts and the small size were very evident. Generally they would perch on posts overlooking channels between the mangroves. As the boat approached, they would fly to another post down-channel. They were wary, but allowed for occasional very close approaches. Always solitary.

## Rainbow Bee-eater

*Merops ornatus*

Very common in open habitats especially in forest clearing and along roads. Usually in small groups. Streamers were only present in a few individuals. Not previously recorded on Woodlark (Coates 1985). Perhaps the logging operations have opened up enough habitat for recent colonization.

## Dollarbird

*Eurystomus orientalis*

Common in forest clearings perched in dead trees. Always solitary. Not previously recorded on Woodlark (Coates 1985). Logging and increased clearing of forest might have produced suitable habitat for this species.

## Black Sunbird

*Nectarinia aspasia*

This was probably the most common bird on the island. It was the only small passerine that was readily evident and occurred in all areas including mangroves and offshore islands. Iridescence of male is diagnostic. Seen in small groups with males and females present together. The lack of other small passerines on the island is not easy to account for. Other passerines previously recorded from Woodlark (Coates 1990) (not including starlings and crow below) include the Island Monarch *Monarcha cinerascens*, Cicadabird *Coracina tenuirostris*, Shining Flycatcher *Myiagra alecto* and the Black Myzomela *Myzomela nigrita*.

## Singing Starling

*Aplonis cantoroides*

Very common especially large flocks of juveniles. Occasionally seen deep inside the forest, although they seem to prefer disturbed areas. One adult was seen at close range puffing his head feathers into a sort of crest while singing intensely.

## Metallic Starling

*Aplonis metallica*

Common, but not as much so as preceding species. No nesting colonies were seen on the island, but are likely to be there. Favoured disturbed areas.

## Torresian Crow

*Corvus orru*

Common throughout the island and offshore islands.

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

Coates, B.J. 1985. *The Birds of Papua New Guinea*. Vol 1. Dove Publications.

Coates, B.J. 1990. *The Birds of Papua New Guinea*. Vol 2. Dove Publications.

Pratt, D., P.L. Bruner & D.G. Berrett. 1987. *The Birds of Hawaii and the Tropical Pacific*. Princeton University Press.

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## RECENT OBSERVATIONS OCTOBER - DECEMBER 1989

COMPILED BY ROGER K. HICKS

All observations refer to the Port Moresby area unless the site name is followed by an abbreviated province name.

Contributors: Ian Burrows (IB); Bill Cooper (BC); Chris Eastwood (CE); Jennifer Hicks (JH); Roger Hicks (RH); Helen Fortune Hopkins (HFH) Andrew Lyburn (AL); Geoff Smith (GS); Len Tolhurst (LT); Niklas Wahlberg (NW).

Abbreviations: ad = adult; bp = breeding plumage; Cen = Central Province; EHP = Eastern Highlands Province; Fm = Farm; I = Island; imm = immature; juv = juvenile; L = Lake; Mor = Morobe Province; NP = National Park; NSP = North Solomons Province; Oro = Northern Province; PAC = Pacific Adventist College; pr = pair; R = River; rd = road; SHP = Southern Highlands Province; SP = settling ponds; UPNG = University of PNG campus; Wes = Western Province.

Australasian Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus novaehollandiae</i>
12 Nov, 1 nest with eggs, Kanosia L (RH); 19 Nov, 1 nest, PAC (RH).	
Australian Pelican	<i>Pelecanus conspicillatus</i>
8 Oct, 6, L Iaraguma (IB).	
Cattle Egret	<i>Egretta ibis</i>
12 Nov, 50+, some in bp, Kanosia L (RH).	
Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>
3 Nov, 1 heard, Moitaka SP (RH); 20 Dec, 1, Moitaka SP (RH).	
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>
8 Oct, 1, L Iaraguma (IB).	
Sacred Ibis	<i>Threskiornis aethiopicus</i>
8 Oct, 1, L Iaraguma (IB).	
Royal Spoonbill	<i>Platalea regia</i>
20 Dec, 4, Moitaka SP (RH).	
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
19 Oct, 1, Moitaka SP (IB).	
White-bellied Sea-Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>
19 Oct & 26 Oct, 1 sub-ad, Moitaka SP (IB).	
Chestnut-shouldered Goshawk	<i>Accipiter buergersi</i>
15 Oct, 1 imm rufous phase, Mt Gahavisuka, EHP (IB); 17 Dec, 1, probably adult light phase, Koiari rd (IB <i>et al.</i> ).	
New Guinea Harpy-Eagle	<i>Harpyopsis novaeguinae</i>
Aug 89, 1 ad, Boundary trail, Varirata NP. Seen by two independent groups early and late in the month. Excellent photo in the possession of IB.	
Oriental Hobby	<i>Falco severus</i>
17 Dec, 2, Koiari rd (IB).	
Australian Hobby	<i>Falco longipennis</i>
8 Oct, 1 imm, L Iaraguma (IB).	
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
17 Oct, 1 female, swooped on a flock of Little Curlew <i>Numenius minutus</i> narrowly missing an erythristic bird. It spent 2 mins sitting on the playing fields, UPNG (IB); 14 Nov, 1, UPNG playing fields (IB).	