

EDITORIAL

During 1991 to 1993 **Muruk** has been much behind schedule due to changes of editor and heavy workloads. In particular, the recent observations section has become very out of date, and its usefulness is being questioned by some members. To remedy this **Muruk** 6:3 will contain an extended recent observations section. Recent observations provides a place where brief observation notes can be published. Records should fall into one of the following categories:

- a) records of rarely seen birds (wherever they occur);
- b) records of birds in localities where they are rarely, or infrequently encountered;
- c) records from localities which are rarely visited;
- d) records of interesting behaviours, including feeding;
- e) all nesting records, with date, nest site etc.;
- f) first and last dates for migrant species.

Compilation of recent observations from various lists is a tedious job, and the editor requests that all records be submitted in a standard format to make the job as easy as possible. Please put all bird lists in the same order as that used in Beehler *et al.*, The Birds of New Guinea, and use the names from that book, or, for island species, the names in Coates (1985-1990) The Birds of Papua New Guinea. All records should consist of the date, the number of birds, the locality, the province, and the observer, e.g.:

Black-sided Robin 23 Jul 92, 2, Vanapa R, Cen (MH).

I can supply a standard list with bird names and spaces to those contributors who have a large number of records they wish to see published. Write to the editor to request this.

Editor for this issue: Mike Hopkins, with help from Roger Hicks, Keyt Fischer & Phil Gregory.

COVER: Head study of Northern Cassowary by Jones Hiaso

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OBSERVATIONS ON THE GREY-HEADED MANNIKIN *LONGHURA CANICEPS* AND THE CHESTNUT-BREASTED MANNIKIN *LONGHURA CASTANEOETHORAX* IN THE PORT MORESBY AREA

ROBIN L. RESTALL

In July 1990, my wife and I visited Port Moresby with the express purpose of observing the local mannikins *Lonchura* spp. in the field, and to make detailed examination of individuals in the hand including painting accurate colour references of each plumage phase if possible. After some interesting adventures, including escaping from a gang of rascals in the Morata township [we were attempting a sortie to the Waigani marshes], we met up with Roger and Jenny Hicks. Thanks to their good nature and extreme helpfulness, our objectives were achieved.

We visited several locations around Port Moresby, including a drive past Sogeri. Thanks to the kind service of Mr. and Mrs. Tolhurst of the Pacific Adventist College, we were able to set a mist net in a perfect location on two mornings and caught several birds of both species mentioned in the title. On the first day, upon catching 12 birds, we closed down the net. These were banded with official ABBBS rings, recorded by Roger, and carefully detailed by me. I retained four Grey-headed Mannikins for painting. On the second day some 27 birds entered the net almost immediately and I had to make some special efforts to prevent others from becoming trapped. We closed the net at once. From these I retained five birds for painting. All the birds were subsequently released in the location where they had been netted the previous day. The following notes derive from a combination of field observations and study of the captive birds.

Grey-headed Mannikin - *Lonchura caniceps caniceps*

This is the darkest and most richly coloured of the three races of this species. The other two, *L. c. kumusii* from the northern lowlands, and *L. c. scratchleyana* of mid-montane levels are both more pallid in every sense.

Adult males measured 110 mm in length with wings invariably 52 mm. The orange of the rump begins at the level of the first tertiary and is flushed with yellow there. The underwing coverts are pure buffish-salmon. Adult females measured 105 mm with the wings 48 mm. The orange of the rump begins irregularly (it may be scalloped with dark brown) at the level of the third tertiary. It lacks the yellowish flush and the uppertail coverts are not quite so brilliant. With a quantity of full adults to choose from in the hand it is comparatively easy to select males and females, though no doubt a fair proportion would have to be classed as uncertain. The orange uppertail coverts are undoubtedly used as a social signal in