

**HIGH ALTITUDE RECORDS OF DOUBLE-EYED FIG-PARROT  
*CYCLOPSITTA DIOPHTHALMA* AND FAIRY GERYGONE  
*GERYGONE PALPEBROSA***

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During the recent Imperial College (London) expedition to Papua New Guinea I was lucky enough to be able to camp for two nights on Mount Missim, Wau (Morobe Province). At 09:00 on 21 July 1990, whilst preparing to depart from Camp 3, I was startled by an adult female Double-eyed Fig-Parrot *Cyclopsitta diophtalma* which flew across the camp clearing. On reaching the other side the bird paused for approximately 30 seconds, perching in a dense patch of secondary vegetation at the edge of the area.

Although the bird remained obscured for much of this time I was able to obtain good views of her head through a Kowa TSN-4 telescope from a distance of about 15 m. Good views of the blue cere and eye-ring, when coupled with the red face and green chin confirmed my initial identification. Flight was very fast and direct, a distinctive "cheet" flight call being uttered (it was this which alerted me to the bird's presence). The parrot appeared very small, being approximately 20 cm long.

This was the only occasion when I was able to positively identify Double-eyed Fig-Parrot in the area, although it may be noted that a similar pair of fast flying parrots were also observed during our stay.

Beehler *et al.* (1986) suggest that this species is found from sea-level to 1600 m. Camp 3 is located at *c.* 2000 m altitude, a significant increase over the previous quoted maximum. My observations of this species, both in Australia and Papua New Guinea suggest that large emergent trees often provide nest sites. Given the large number of these at this particular location it is more possible that breeding (as well as foraging) may occur at high altitudes.

Whilst based at the Wau Ecology Institute members of the expedition had several opportunities to investigate the summit of Mount Kaindi. On one such occasion, on the 24 July 1990 at approximately 11:00, I was able to observe a flock of small passerines which were foraging in the *Nothofagus* canopy. This included at least five female Fairy Gerygones *Gerygone palpebrosa*. Their lemon-yellow bellies and vents coupled with white throats and greenish upperparts excluded any of the other similar passerines normally found at this altitude. Whilst on Mount Kaindi I had ample opportunity to observe the Island Leaf-Warbler *Phylloscopus trivirgatus* at close quarters and so could confidently eliminate this species from the list of possibilities.

Beehler *et al.* (1986) state that *G. palpebrosa* occurs below 1450 m whilst my views were obtained at approximately 2350 m. It is interesting that, as in the majority of my Australian records of this species, an all female flock was observed. Males prove distinctly difficult to see in flocks in the neighbourhood of Cairns (North Queensland) in 1988 - good, clear views being rare.

These are two examples from growing list of extra-altitudinal records of a number of species (e.g., Cooper, 1988). Whilst significant habitat modification has occurred in the case of Mount Kaindi, resulting both in a decrease in the number of mature specimens of climax species and a concomitant increase in secondary vegetation, it is likely that this is only part of the story (*G. palpebrosa* being restricted to primary forest and older regrowth - Beehler *et al.* [1986]). Significant climatic and consequently vegetational changes appear to have occurred in the last few decades (resulting in the loss of glaciers from Mount Wilhelm in the late 1960s for example). It is quite possible that an amelioration associated with the changing conditions has allowed range expansions of various species which, hither-to, had been restricted to lowland habitats. Further records from montane regions are clearly required to investigate this assertion: it would undoubtedly pay to be on the look-out for lowland "residents" in these areas.

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

Cooper, W.R. 1988. High Altitude Scrubfowl. **Muruk** 3: 4.

**Acknowledgements**

These records were obtained during the recent "Imperial College Expedition to Papua New Guinea 1990", which took place during July and August of that year. I would like to extend my thanks to the following for their sponsorship:

The Imperial College Explorations Board, the Royal Geographical Society (Goldsmith's Company funds), the Gregory Fund (Imperial College), the Explorer's Club of New York, Glaxo Pharmaceuticals Ltd., the Gilchrist Educational Trust, the Godman Fund (Natural History Museum), the Royal Entomological Society, the British Ecological Society, the Royal College of Science Association (Imperial College) and Dorset County Council (U.K.).

In addition to the above organisations I would like to thank those companies that donated vital equipment, our patron Sir Cyril Clarke and all the other individuals who were kind enough to give financial assistance, advice and support.

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