

MOUNTAIN NIGHTJAR *Eurostopodus archboldi* BREEDING AT AMBUA

During the afternoon of 23. 10.92 Allan Richards and I were birding some 200m above the bailey bridge east of Ambua Lodge, Tari, when we saw a bird on the side of the road. We split up and climbed a 4m bank in pursuit and in so doing flushed a nightjar. The bird allowed a close approach to within 1m on two occasions, before giving a pathetic fluttering display of aggression. The bird returned to some lichen covered road spoil pushed up during road construction. We realised that it might be defending a nest and quickly spotted a single white egg apparently without any support material around it. On our return the bird was sitting tightly on the egg.

Overall the bird was a very dark toffee-brown/blackish colour with prominent dull buffish eyebrows and a broken white collar. The feathers of the underparts were broadly tipped buffish but with some white tips too. Many of the mantle feathers were also tipped buff and white. Some feathers on the coverts and possibly scapulars were entirely fawn coloured. There were no white patches in the wings or tail. The tail feathers had tan notches as did some of the outer primaries.

The description fits Mountain Nightjar (*Eurostopodus archboldi*), and with the altitude of the Bailey Bridge at about 2200m this is the only species expected. The nest and eggs are hitherto undescribed.

Author's address : Richard Rowland, Address unknown, note given to editor by author Nov. 92.

FURTHER RECORDS OF AN UNIDENTIFIED PIGMY-PARROT *Micropsitta* sp. FROM THE OK TEDI AREA

Phil Gregory

Greg Johnston and I were birding along the track at Dablin Creek north of Tabubil on November 29th 1991, at a height of about 750metres. We found a flock of Josephine's Lorikeet (*Chamosyna josefinae*) high in the canopy and were observing them through a Kowa x30 wide angle lens telescope, when GJ saw a small flock of pigmy-parrots (*Micropsitta* sp.) fly in. Looking through the 'scope I realised we were on to something unusual as I could not recognise what we were observing :

I watched the bird for about 30 seconds, GJ for slightly longer, and we noted the following: A typical pigmy-parrot with short tail and a striking yellow forehead and crown, a broad dark eyestripe, red underparts with a dark chest band, and green upperparts. GJ noted the eyestripe as blue and the cheeks as yellow, with a blue breastband. The bird then flew away along with 3 other *Micropsitta*, giving the typical "tsit tsit" flight call.

The bird clearly did not fit any of the forms of Red-breasted Pigmy parrot (*M. bruijnii*) illustrated in either Coates (1986) or Beehler (1986), and neither did Yellow-capped Pigmy parrot (*M. keiensis*) seem right. However, reference to Murray (1988) clearly referred to a similar individual, her bird being a male at an altitude of 2140m on Mt. Binnie and again not obviously referable to any described form of *Micropsitta*. Murray suggested her bird may have been a colour variant of *M. bruijnii*, or perhaps a high altitude subspecies of same, or even a new species. Clearly we needed more sightings, and my next came on December 26th 1991 again along the Dablin Creek track at 800m. I located a flock of *Micropsitta* flying

around which settled in the crown of a tall leafy tree, and proved to be the strange form once again, this time with males, females and immature birds present. The flock of 18 birds was mostly inactive, sitting quietly or preening. The males were much as our previous sighting, with broad blue eyestripe, blue chest band, yellow cheeks, chin and throat and yellow crown and forehead with a bluish nape. The underparts were orangey-red, including the undertail coverts. The upperparts were green with a blue upper tail. The legs were grey.

Immature males had a dull yellow forecrown, a dark blue eyestripe, with a yellow chin throat and cheeks and a dark green chest band with paler green belly and flanks and orangey undertail coverts. Females had buff faces and supercilia with a dark eyestripe and the upperparts green with a bluish hindcrown and nape. When preening, the tail appeared tipped and edged with yellow. The underwing was greyish, and the eyes dark. Calls were a sibilant "tsst tsst". Birds were seen later feeding on the highest lichen covered branches of tall trees, too high to discern exactly what was being taken.

This sighting confirms the existence of an unknown form of *Micropsitta* at Ok Tedi, clearly not just some plumage variant of *M. bruijnii*. Views suggest close kinship with that species but with a very distinct head pattern on male birds. A review of my own records of *Micropsitta* showed most birds were just fly-overs and only three sightings were of perched birds, none of these adult males. Murray records seeing birds with red crowns of the race *M. b. bruijnii*, as might be expected from the known distribution. This raises perhaps the possibility of an overlap between this form and the new type, or great variation in the populations in this area. Discussions with visiting tour groups reveal most *Micropsitta* records are of flyovers, and several reports of *M. keiensis* most likely refer to the males of the new form instead. *An adult male example is illustrated in the frontispiece to this issue...ed.*

I suspect that this form is widespread as I later had sightings of 3 males and 5 females in forest edge at Ok Menga, 750, on March 1st 1993. A specimen or photograph would be highly desirable but not likely given the nature of *Micropsitta* parrots. The status of the new form requires further field work, and observers visiting the area should be aware of the situation, paying particular attention to any adult male *Micropsitta*.

References

- Beehler B. M. Pratt T. K. and Zimmerman D. 1986. **Birds of New Guinea**. Princeton.
 Coates B. J. 1986. **The Birds of Papua New Guinea Volume 1 : Non-passerines**. Dove Publications.
 Coates B. J. and Lindgren E. 1978. **Ok Tedi Birds**. Ok Tedi Environmental Task Force, Ok Tedi Development Co and the Office of the Environment and Conservation, PNG.
 Forshaw J.M. and Cooper W.T. 1989. **Parrots of the World**. Lansdowne Editions.
 Murray A. 1988. A Study of the Birds of the Tabubil Region, Western Province, Papua New Guinea. **Muruk** Vol 3 No 3.
 Murray A. 1988. A Possible New Pigmy-parrot (*Micropsitta*). **Muruk** Vol 3 No 3

Author's Address: PO Box 69, Tabubil, Western Province, Papua New Guinea
 (Received May 1992)

FIRST PNG NESTING RECORD FOR BAT HAWK *Macheiramphus alcinus*
by Chris Eastwood

I had gone birdwatching with friends of mine, Carmela and Ted Bishop, who had joined me for their first ever birdwatching trip. While driving back to Lae at about midday, Ted spotted a bird perched high up in a tall tree and silhouetted against the sky. We stopped our cars and with the aid of a telescope immediately

identified it as a Bat Hawk (*Macheiramphus alcinus*)! Bat Hawks are known to have favourite roosting trees so we decided to return the following weekend to see if see the bird was still around. It was there but this time a second bird flew in carrying a twig and landed by a nest which we had not previously noticed. This began a series of sporadic observations which are summarised below. The birds have clearly been attempting to breed for at least 12 months now but, for unknown reasons, seem to have been unsuccessful in rearing any young.

The site of the nest tree is in the foothills of the Rawlinson Range, about 30 minutes drive from Lae. The site is approximately 5 kilometres by road from the Sankwep River, although the river is much closer as the crow flies. The altitude is approximately 300 metres and the immediate terrain is generally flat although hills are close by. Much of the area is still well forested (Blyth's Hornbills *Rhyticeros plicatus*, for example, are still fairly regular), but since we found the site considerable logging activity has taken place in the immediate area with the nest tree now very much isolated from other trees. There is real concern that this tree may one day be felled. That the birds have so far remained faithful to the site, in spite of the dramatic changes to the surrounding habitat and the considerable disturbance that must be caused by the logging operations, is a good indication of their tolerance.

The tree is approximately 30 metres tall and is not particularly densely foliated. The nest is placed on the lowest horizontal branch (at approximately 20 metres from the ground) and is just before the branches break into leaf. Originally, the area between the tree and the road was an area of fairly dense secondary scrub but much of this, almost up to the tree itself, has since been cleared for village gardens. Beyond the tree there was primary forest but much of this has now been "selectively" logged. Logging tracks now pass within 50-100 metres of the tree. By the side of the road and some 100 metres from the nest tree, there is a densely foliated tree ("the shade tree") in which the birds were sometimes found.

The nest itself (from what can be seen of it from the ground) appears to be a relatively untidy affair of sticks, approximately 700 cms in diameter, straddling two parallel horizontal branches. The depth is approximately 200 cms so that a bird is completely hidden from view when sitting in it and is only visible if it moves. The nest would not appear to be very well shaded which may well cause problems for the birds in the heat of the day.

In general, observations were made in the early morning when I first arrived at the site and then again later towards midday as I prepared to return to Lae. One physical feature that I have noted is that both birds have two conspicuous white "false eyes" on the back of their heads. Brown & Amadon refer to a white nuchal collar in the race *papuanus* of New Guinea, and the two false eye spots are well illustrated in Sinclair 1993.

References:

- Brown L. & Amadon D. 1968 **Eagles, Hawks and Falcons of the World (Vol 1)** Country Life.
 Coates B.J. 1985. **Birds of Papua New Guinea Volume 1: Non-passerines**, Princeton.
 King B. 1975. **A Field Guide to the Birds of South East Asia**. Collins.
 Sinclair I. Hockey P. and Tarboton W. 1993 **Illustrated Guide to the Birds of Southern Africa** New Holland, London.
 Smythies B. 1960. **Birds of Borneo**. Oliver and Boyd.

Author's address : PO Box 998, Lae (Received Oct 1993)

SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS OF BAT HAWK AT NEST by C. Eastwood

- 6/9/92 One bird seen at midday perched towards the top of the nest tree, preening.
 16/9/92 One bird perched in amongst foliage; second bird seen flying into nest carrying a twig. Both birds then flew into the "shade tree" where they copulated; they did not return to the shade tree- early morning.
 20/9/92 The birds were seen copulating in the nest tree.
 11/10/92 Both birds perched near the nest with one bird occasionally moving into the nest where it re-arranged something on the floor of the nest - early morning.
 11/11/92 One bird in the nest; the second perched higher up in the tree; at one stage this bird flew one large circle around the tree before settling back at its perch - midday.
 15/11/92 One bird on the nest; the second in the shade tree - midday
 22/11/92 One bird on the nest; the second bird sitting close by - morning. By midday, one bird still on the nest but the second had moved to another part of the same tree.
 29/11/92 Both birds sitting away from the nest, preening - early evening.
 25/12/92 Both birds sitting away from nest and had moved into shade tree by 10.00am
 1/1/93 One bird perched close to the nest; the second bird not seen. At about 10.30 both birds then seen perched some 3 metres above nest; they then both flew in a circle around the tree with one bird landing on the nest and re-arranging something in it. The second bird landed near its earlier perch site.
 3/1/93 Both birds perched approximately 5 metres away from nest; by 10.30 a.m. both had moved into the shade tree.
 17/1/93 Both birds perched by the nest. It then started to rain and both birds flew out into it, circled the tree and landed back in the top where they stretched their wings and bodies in the rain. A little later one of the birds flew another circle around the tree before landing back by its mate. Both birds called when they flew.
 31/1/93 Both birds perched well away from the nest but had gone by midday, probably to the shade tree (I did not check because of the presence of villagers).
 9/5/93 Both birds perched away from the nest.
 10/7/93 One bird in the nest; the second bird perched close by.
 21/7/93 One bird in the nest; the second perched close by. The second bird flew off calling and returned carrying a stick which it gave to the bird on the nest. It flew off again, calling, but was not seen to return to the nest tree. Some 30 minutes later, now away from the nest site, a bird was seen flying overhead. Neither bird visible at midday.
 23/8/93 One bird standing in the nest and the second perched close by. The bird in the nest then joined its mate for some 5 minutes before returning to the nest.
 29/8/93 One bird in the nest and one perched close by. This second bird flew off, calling, but had returned a little later. Then the bird in the nest flew onto its mate and copulated (the bird in the nest must have been the male). Both birds then remained perched by the nest, preening themselves. At midday both birds still perched near the nest.
 5/9/93 Both birds sitting away from the nest and seen to copulate again.
 12/9/93 Both birds perched by the nest. One flew off returning with a stick; it did this several times over the next 30 minutes.
 10/10/93 One bird standing on the nest, one perched next to it. The bird on the nest flew off at least 3 times returning with small bare twigs, and, on one occasion with a small leafy twig. In one instance the bird flew towards me and flew at a tree, with feet held out, presumably to break off a twig, but it then saw me and flew off over me.