

EDITORIAL

This issue, Volume 7 number 1, January 1995, commences a new volume. The aim is to produce 3 issues of *Muruk* during a 12 month period and we are now back on schedule. We are again pleased to publish papers in this issue about the birds of little studied areas. Given the rapid pace of development in PNG such base-line inventory studies will assume increasing significance when hard choices about the best usage of the environment have to be made.

Future issues will summarize major sightings over the past year, with some revised criteria applying to what is published:

E = Extension of range, records away from previously known range.

A = Altitudinal extension of range.

B = Breeding records, lacking for many quite common species.

R = Rare, scarce or seldom recorded species.

M = Migrants, with first and last dates of interest or numerical records of note.

G = General interest, may be behavioural, unusual numbers or localities, plumage abnormalities etc.

Records not fitting the above categories are usually from lesser known areas.

Contributors of sightings have been very few in recent years, and we encourage both residents and visitors to submit their records. Please use the above criteria as guidelines.

We particularly welcome copies of tour group reports, as many interesting sightings lie hidden in these inaccessible databases and it is a courtesy to the host country to make copies available to the PNGBS.

Such reports form part of our archives, and only excerpts would be used if such permission is given.

Feedback to notes and papers is welcomed, if you know better please write and tell us, we will be happy to publish, a major aim being to stimulate study and increase the knowledge of New Guinea birds.

Editor for this issue: Phil Gregory.

Please continue to send submissions to:

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All contributions will be acknowledged.

COVER: Dwarf Cassowary head study by Jones Hiaso

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FURTHER STUDIES OF THE BIRDS OF THE OK TEDI AREA, WESTERN PROVINCE, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Phil Gregory

The area around Tabubil in the remote Western Province of Papua New Guinea near the border with Irian Jaya has been the subject of three previous ornithological studies, namely Bell (1969), Coates and Lindgren (1978) and Murray (1988). This paper serves to up-date and amend those data sources and is primarily based on my own observations from Jan 1991-Oct 1994, plus some records collected from visitors during this period. The area is still relatively poorly known ornithologically, with the discovery of over 50 species additional to those previously known bearing out this fact. Major finds have been the discovery of a population of the Greater Melampitta (*Melampitta gigantea*) and Logrunner (*Orthonyx temminckii*) on Mt. Robinson and the continued existence of Black Sicklebill (*Epimachus fastuosus*) at several sites.

The avifauna has a significant component of western New Guinea forms, with north slope species largely absent. Western forms include Archbold's Owllet-nightjar (*Aegotheles archboldi*), Streaked Lorikeet (*Charmosyna multistriata*), Lorentz's Whistler (*Pachycephala lorentzi*), Western Mountain White-eye (*Zosterops fuscicapillus*) and Splendid Astrapia (*A. splendidissima*).

The habitat is being progressively altered, particularly along the roads as new settlements develop and the higher altitude villages are abandoned. The population of Tabubil in 1994 is well in excess of 10,000 people. However much forest remains intact and, contrary to the statement in Murray (1988) lowland forms such as Magnificent Bird-of-Paradise (*Cicinnurus magnificus*), and Golden Cuckoo-shrike (*Campochaera sloetii*) are still frequent in the area. Male Greater Bird-of-Paradise (*Paradisaea apoda*) Black Sicklebill and Vulturine Parrot (*Psittichas fulgidus*) are however under severe hunting pressure, with skins regularly on sale in the Tabubil market. Shotguns are mercifully still scarce, but catapults (shangis) and the traditional (low environmental impact!) bow-and-arrow are commonly used to hunt birds.

A remarkable total of at least 16 species of Bird-of-Paradise are confirmed to occur within the study area, comparing favourably with the famous Ambua/Tari Gap region of Southern Highlands Province. It would be fascinating to determine the occurrence or otherwise of Ribbon-tailed Astrapia (*A. mayeri*) and Crested Bird-of-Paradise (*Cnemophilus macgregorii*), two ornithological distribution mysteries which still persist and whose key is likely to be in this area.

The scarcity of species in the town itself reflects the propensity of the younger males of the human population to stone any species foolhardy enough to sit still within range. Sacred Kingfishers (*Halcyon sancta*) suffer a high mortality every year, as do many other species. Only the shy or high-flying survive around Tabubil town!

This study documents the occurrence of 321 species in the area, about 50 more than previously known. Some are quite common, others merely vagrants or visitors. The status of many is altering as habitats change, and a number of species such as Pied Chat (*Saxicola caprata*) and Black-headed Whistler (*Pachycephala monacha*) have colonised secondary growth areas. Losses have been few, with only the Buff-banded Rail (*Rallus philippensis*), Brown Quail (*Coturnix australis*) and Tawny Grassbird (*Megalurus timoriensis*) seemingly gone.