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Acknowledgements

Brian Coates, Dawn Frith and Len Tolhurst provided constructive thoughts and comments on a first draft of this note and Bill Peckover kindly commented on the first two drafts sent him. The views expressed are entirely my own.

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**MANUS - A TRIP REPORT**

by Chris Eastwood

Last October, I spent 6 days on Manus with Liz Kerr. The first and last days were spent travelling to and from the island and making various arrangements, giving us 4 full days in the field. We stayed in Lorengau and hired a 4 wheel-drive utility, which although not strictly necessary, proved useful. We had heard that some villagers from Rossun (a 15 minute drive from town) knew of the Superb Pitta (*Pitta superba*) and might be able to help us find it. At Rossun, the villagers seemed to know the bird from our description but, somewhat disconcertingly, called it a "coucou".

They suggested we return to the village the next morning when someone would help us. We duly arrived and were introduced to Adam and his younger brother Luke, who both knew the bird well. As it transpired Luke was to keep us company almost our entire stay and proved invaluable. Luke also eventually got the assistance of a cousin of his, called Morgan, who lived in a satellite village of Rossun. Luke and Morgan were tireless in their efforts to help us find birds. We paid each of our guides K20 a day.

Most of our time was spent near Rossun, although we also made a couple of trips to the waterfall (which does not appear to have an official name) and spent time exploring along the road beyond Rossun. The waterfall is reached by taking a dirt track shortly after the end of the sealed road (the main dirt road veers left and the track to the waterfall goes straight ahead; the track ends at the waterfall where there is room to park and turn the vehicle). For our last full day, we arranged (through Luke and Morgan) to make a trip out to Tong Island. Luke and Morgan borrowed a boat and a 40HP engine and we bought 12 gallons of petrol (as it turned out we were a gallon short and had to row part of the way back!). The journey took just over two hours (but would have been quite a bit longer with a smaller engine). We spent a little over an hour on the island and were shown around by one of the villagers there.

We eventually saw all the Manus endemics with the exception of the Manus Boobook (*Ninox meeki*), which we only tried for on one night (although that night we did meet a villager out looking for cuscus who had just seen an owl!). It is likely that with a little more effort we would have seen this bird. (*Editor's note*: Some taxonomists also list the Manus Masked Owl *Tyto manusi* as a distinct species. Ref. Sibley and Monroe 1990.)

I list below the species seen during our trip making comments as appropriate. Species underlined are endemic to the Admiralty Islands group.

**Brown Booby** - *Sula leucogaster*

One or two birds seen during our trip out to Tong Island.

**Rufous Night-heron** - *Nycticorax caledonicus***Eastern Reef-Heron** - *Egretta sacra*

A dark phase bird regularly visited the shore outside our hotel; a white phase individual was seen on one of the off-shore islands during our return from Tong.

**Brahminy Kite** - *Haliastur indus***Grey Goshawk** - *Accipiter novaehollandiae*

**Melanesian Scrubfowl** - *Megapodius eremita*

We flushed two birds on our first afternoon in a small patch of forest beyond Rossun; we also heard them the next day in a small rubber plantation.

**Pacific Golden Plover** - *Pluvialis fulva*

Present on open areas of grass in Lorengau and at Manus airport.

**Ruddy Turnstone** - *Arenaria interpres*

One bird seen at Manus airport.

**Common Sandpiper** - *Actitis hypoleucos***Lesser Crested Tern** - *Sterna bengalensis***Brown Noddy** - *Anous stolidus***Spot-breasted Cuckoo-Dove** - *Macropygia mackinlayi*

Only one bird seen - on Tong Island.

**Stephan's Ground-Dove** - *Chalcophaps stephani***Yellow-bibbed Fruit-Dove** - *Ptilinopus solomonensis*

After some effort we eventually had good views of a pair on Tong (several had been seen flying over us (distinctive small size, about the size of a Rose-crowned). The birds do not fit the description and illustration given in Beehler; however, there is a good photograph in Coates. The male bird we saw had a yellow bib, with mauve below and yellow under the tail; the bird also had a purplish cap.

**Claret-breasted Fruit-Dove** - *Ptilinopus viridis*

Several birds perched in the afternoon by the waterfall.

**Grey Imperial Pigeon** - *Ducula pickeringii*

We were told by some villagers to go about 10 kilometres beyond Rossun where there was an open area around a single house with a number of large trees. The birds are often here in the afternoon and we saw several. The overall impression was of a large pale pigeon (with their green backs and wings only evident in good light). We also saw the birds on Tong.

**Rainbow Lorikeet** - *Trichoglossus haematodus***Meek's Pygmy-Parrot** - *Micropsitta meeki*

One bird seen well in a dead tree by the waterfall.

**Eclectus Parrot** - *Eclectus roratus***Moustached Tree-swift** - *Hemiprocne mystacea***Glossy Swiftlet** - *Collocalia esculenta*

Most of the birds had white rumps

**White-rumped Swiftlet** - *Collocalia spodiopygia***Beach Kingfisher** - *Halcyon saurophaga*

One bird seen on Tong Island.

**Dwarf Kingfisher** - *Ceyx lepidus*

One bird seen above waterfall (the Manus subspecies with red bill).

**Superb Pitta** - *Pitta superba*

It took some effort before we saw the bird properly, although we heard them every time we looked for them. The birds seemed fairly widespread and were present in areas of regrowth around village gardens as well as forest. The call sounded very similar to "coo coo", hence the local name.

Our guides, Luke and Morgan were able to imitate the call and birds nearly always responded and, eventually, came in to pause very briefly near us. Our guides saw them every time but we were not so lucky (and wanted perfect views!) On our final day we visited an area near the waterfall which was by some gardens belonging to Morgan's family. On this occasion we hid ourselves in the bush while Morgan stayed behind us and imitated the call - three birds responded. One came in after some 15 minutes and we were able to get excellent views. The bird continued to call, perching on a low branch. Each time it called it pushed its folded wing "elbows" down as if forcing the call out of its body.

**White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike** - *Coracina papuensis***Cicadabird** - *Coracina tenuirostris***Manus Rufous Fantail** - *Rhipidura semirubra*

Common and confiding on Tong Island where we first saw them flitting amongst the houses. Very reminiscent of a thicket-fantail in patterning, but not in behaviour.

**Island Monarch** - *Monarcha cinerascens*

Several on Tong Island - a very washed out looking monarch.

**Admiralty Pied Monarch** - *Monarcha infelix*

Fairly common on Manus and single birds seen nearly every time we went into the bush.

**Northern Fantail** - *Rhipidura rufiventris***Golden Whistler** - *Pachycephala pectoralis*

A male seen was presumed to be this species.

**Yellow-bellied Sunbird** *Nectarinia jugularis***Black-headed White-eye** - *Zosterops hypoxantha*

This was quite a hard bird to see properly, being extremely active or keeping to the top of the canopy. We got mediocre views of just one bird.

**Bismarck Black Myzomela** - *Myzomela melanocephala*

Small groups of birds on Tong Island.

**Manus Friarbird** - *Philemon albitorques*

Common in most habitats including in Lorengau itself.

**Metallic Starling** - *Aplonis metallica*

We presume this was the species we saw.

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