

**EDITORIAL**

We are pleased to publish in this issue, the first one for Volume 8, a miscellany of material:

A paper about the Middle Fly waterbird survey, some valuable nesting records from the Lakekamu basin including first documented nests of Sooty Thicket-Fantail and Yellow-eyed Starling, travelogues from Irian Jaya, the Middle Sepik and the Bismarck Archipelago, and a variety of notes and observations on Papua New Guinea species.

We welcome this variety and are grateful to our sponsors, Ok Tedi Mining for their continued support in 1996. We hope to continue with three issues per year, but are dependent on contributions for the publishing schedule, which is of necessity flexible. Due to a lack of material we are only able to publish a single issue this year, but hope to continue Volume 8 as items are submitted.

Contributors of sightings have been very few in recent years, and we urge both residents and visitors to submit their records. 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. Feedback about notes and papers is welcomed, if you know more or indeed 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:** Phil Gregory.

Please continue to send submissions (preferably on disk in the specified format) to:

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Phone (675) 5489310 or fax (675) 5489641 (note changed numbers!)

All contributions will be acknowledged.

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**Cover:** *Southern Cassowary head study by Jones Hiaso*

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**THE MIDDLE FLY WATERBIRD SURVEY 1994-95**

*By P. Gregory, S. A. Helse, R. P. Jaensch, W. R. Kay, P. Kulmoi, G. B. Pearson and A. W. Storey*

Ok Tedi Mining Limited commissioned waterbird surveys of the grassed floodplain of the Middle Fly River during both wet and dry seasons, as a part of its program to document the biology of the Fly River ecosystem and to expand the range of organisms monitored. These surveys were made at the end of the dry season (2-7 December 1994) when birds were concentrated at ox-bows and lakes, and near the end of the wet season (25-30 April 1995) when most of the floodplain was inundated.

The area surveyed comprises the Fly River floodplain due west of Lake Murray, from Adopted River Mile 350 in the north to ARM 150 in the south (ARM is the distance in river miles from the estuary mouth). Major water bodies therein include Bosset Lagoon, Lake Daviumbu, Lake Pangua and Lake Ambuve plus a variety of ox-bow lakes. Larger settlements exist at Suki, Obo Station and Bosset, as well as smaller villages at many other sites. The Fly / Strickland River confluence is located just south of Obo.

Two teams of three observers counted from boats and on foot in the accessible areas for the first 3 days of each survey, followed by two days of aerial transects conducted by SAH and GBP. Ground counts gave detailed species lists and were able to distinguish species that would be missed or be unidentified from a helicopter. The survey area was divided into 786 transects 200m wide, located perpendicular to the river channel. Every 23rd transect (36 in total at 4-6 km intervals) was surveyed at a height of 25 m in December and 15 m in April, at a speed of about 90 km/h. Transects were flown at a lower height in April as species were less easy to flush. Each observer counted all waterbirds in a 100m strip along either side of the helicopter, with length of transects varying from 24-46 km.

The overall area divided into transects was 5,957 km<sup>2</sup>, encompassing the Papua New Guinean portion of the middle Fly floodplain, but omitting a small area that is in Irian Jaya territory. 58 species of waterbird were recorded in total and estimated totals are given at the end of the table. The most abundant species were egrets, particularly Great White and Intermediate Egrets, Glossy Ibis, Australian White Ibis, and Magpie Geese. Based on the relative proportions related to ground level counts, it can be estimated that in December 1994 there were 130,000 Intermediate Egrets, 90,000 Great White Egrets and 1500 Little Egrets, with just a single Cattle Egret being recorded. Waterbird numbers in December were estimated at 58,7249 (+62,741), such a number making these wetlands of international significance.

A great reduction was evident in the wet season, with an estimated population of 54,914 (+9,790) individuals of just 36 species (57 in December). The most abundant were Magpie Geese, egrets, Darters and Comb-crested Jacanas. Based on ground count proportions numbers of egrets worked out to about 16,000 Great White and 2,000 Intermediate Egrets. Significant numbers of northern migrants were present in December, with Garganey being quite frequent (176 recorded) as well as Palearctic waders. Glossy Ibis, Radjah Shelduck and Pied Heron showed a major departure amounting to almost total absence by April, whilst Intermediate Egret, Green Pigmy-goose, Nankeen Night Herons and Wandering Whistle-Duck were recorded much less often in April, at