

## BIRDING THE MIDDLE SEPIK

By Phil Gregory

The chance to take the cruise along the middle Sepik River arose at short notice, and since little has been published about the birds of the area it may be worth listing the species I observed during the visit. I can recommend the cruise from the comfort and cultural interest angles, with birds a nice bonus. Bookings and enquiries via Melanesian Tourist Services P. O. Box 707, Madang or fax (675) 8523543 / 8523325.

“Melanesian Discoverer” Middle Sepik Itinerary  
28th September- 2 nd October 1996

September 28 th: Timbunke-Mindinbit  
September 29th Blackwater Lakes: Sangriman / Kabriman / Kaningara  
September 30 th: Kaminabit / Kanganaman / Palembangi  
October 1 st : Chambri Lakes area: Wombun / Aibom / Tambanum  
October 2 nd: Timbunke

### Composite bird-list

Australian Dabchick (*Podiceps novaehollandiae*)  
5 Blackwater Lakes, 1 Sepik R. The broad white wing stripe indicated this species and not *P. ruficollis*.  
Little Black Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax sulcirostris*)  
Common  
Little Pied Cormorant (*P. melanoleucos*)  
Less common than *P. sulcirostris*  
Darter (*Anhinga novaehollandiae*)  
Sparse. Max. 7 on 28 9  
Black Bittern (*Numenius flavicollis*)  
1 near Wombun 1.10.  
Pied Heron (*Egretta picata*)  
Common (max. 40 on 28.9)  
Intermediate Egret (*E. intermedia*)  
Common  
Great White Egret (*E. alba*)  
Common, but not as common as Intermediate Egret  
Little Egret (*E. garzetta*)  
Sparse, only around Chambri Lakes in 2 or 3 bird groups  
Rufous Night Heron (*Nycticorax caledonicus*)  
Fairly common, flushing from riverside vegetation  
White-bellied Sea-Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*)  
Singles on most days, but surprisingly uncommon  
Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*)  
Quite common  
Whistling Kite (*Haliastur sphenurus*)  
Common, outnumbering *M. migrans*

Brahminy Kite (*H. indus*)

One or two daily.

Variable Goshawk (*Accipiter novaehollandiae*)

1 grey-brown phase 29.9.

Papuan Harrier (*Circus spilonotus*)

6 on 29.9. at the Blackwater Lakes, 5 at Chambri Lakes on 1.10.

Two full adult males seen, and an almost entirely melanistic bird but having a white rump at the Chambri Lakes. Immatures have pale patches on the nape, and white or whitish rumps with pale brown scaly mottled upperwing coverts contrasting with the rest of the wing. Some variation in plumages which is presumably age related, the white rump being progressively lost.

Wandering Whistle Duck (*Dendrocygna arcuata*)

150 Blackwater Lakes, small numbers elsewhere. No *D. guttata* seen at all.

Pacific Black Duck (*Anas superciliosa*)

Fairly common

White Pigmy-Goose (*Nettion coromandelianus*)

5 males (2, 2 and a single) at Blackwater Lakes in the Kaningara Village area, a very localized species in New Guinea. Not associated with lily pads either, the first two males being in the main channel, others being in ox-bows.

Bush-hen (*Amaurornis olivaceus*)

Heard at Palembangi on 30.9.

Dusky Moorhen (*Gallinula tenebrosa*)

Small numbers around Chambri Lakes area.

Purple Swamp-hen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*)

Common, often flushed from kunai grass beds by the river.

Comb-crested Jacana (*Irediparra gallinacea*)

Small numbers.

Masked Lapwing (*Vanellus miles*)

Pairs in many areas.

Common Sandpiper (*Tringa hypoleucos*)

2 on 28.9. 1 on 29.9.

Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus (h) leucocephalus*)

2 singles on 1.10.

Whiskered Tern (*Chlidomas hybridus*)

Common, flocks of up to 40, many in breeding dress.

Great Cuckoo-Dove (*Reinwardtoena reinwardtii*)

1 at Tambanum on 1.10.

Zoe Imperial-Pigeon (*Ducula zoeae*)

1 on 28.9.

Pied Imperial-Pigeon (*D. bicolor*)

Fairly common, usually seen in two's.

Collared Imperial-Pigeon (*D. muelleri*)

3 on 28.9. 2 on 30.9.

Orange-fronted Fruit-Dove (*Ptilinopus aurantiifrons*)

1 on 29.9. and 1 on 1.10.

Orange-bellied Fruit-Dove (*P. tozonus*)

Small numbers most days.

Dusky Lory (*Pseudeos fuscata*)

2 on 29.9. were the only sighting.

Palm Cockatoo (*Probosciger aterrimus*)

1 at Kainingarra on 29.9 and 1 at Wombun 1.10.

Sulphur-crested Cockatoo (*Cacatua galerita*)

Small numbers, usually in two's

Red-cheeked Parrot (*Geoffroyus geoffroyi*)

Small numbers, often in pairs.

Eclectus Parrot (*Eclectus roratus*).

Surprisingly uncommon. 2 on 29.9. and 1 on 30.9.

Orange-breasted Fig-Parrot (*Cyclopsitta guihelmiterti*)

2 on 30.9. at Kanganaman. Call a silvery incisive note, quite unlike the flight call of Tabubil birds.

Common Koel (*Eudynamis scolopacea*)

1 male on 28.9.

Channel-billed Cuckoo (*Scythrops novaehollandiae*).

Quite common, with 10 on 28.9; 6 on 29.9; 8 on 30.9. 4 on 1.10. Calling also.

Lesser Black Coucal (*Centropus bernsteini*)

6 on 28.9. Small numbers daily, easily seen from the boat perched atop vegetation, especially after rain.

Papuan Spinetail (*Mearnsia novaeguineae*)

Singles on 28 and 29.9. 20+ on 30.9 and 1.10.

Rufous-bellied Kookaburra (*Dacelo gaudichaud*)

Quite common and noisy.

Sacred Kingfisher (*Halcyon sancta*)

Singles on most days.

Kingfisher sp. (*Halcyon Ceyx* sp.)

1 small one glimpsed near Wombun 1.10

Dollarbird (*Eurystomus orientalis*)

Small numbers, up to 10 daily. No bee-eaters was surprising

White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike (*Coracina papuensis*)

Common

Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike (*C. novaehollandiae*)

4 on 28.9.

Large-billed Gerygone (*Gerygone magnirostris*)

2 at Kabriman 29.9.

Black Thicket-Fantail (*Rhipidura maculipectus*)

Heard

Willie Wagtail (*Rhipidura leucophrys*)

Common throughout

Shining Flycatcher (*Myiagra alecto*)

Heard

Little Shrike-thrush (*Colluricincla megarrhyncha*)

Heard

Grey Shrike-thrush (*C. harmonica*)

1 near Wombun on 1.10

Papuan Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum pectorale*)

Heard

Black Sunbird (*Nectarinia aspasia*)

Few

Silver-eared Honeyeater (*Lichmera alboauricularis*)

Seen at Mindinbit and Kaminabit, and heard at most places

Helmeted Friarbird (*Philemon buceroides*)

Quite common, silvery nape and very small bill knob.

Grand Mannikin (*Lonchura grandis*)

Common, max. 20 in a flock. 3 nests in a bare tree at Palembang.

Singing Starling (*Aplonis cantoroides*)

Sparse

Metallic Starling (*A. metallica*)

5, only seen on 30.9.

Yellow-faced Myna (*Mino dumontii*)

Small numbers.

White-breasted Wood-swallow (*Artamus leucorhynchus*)

Few. Singles only.

Lowland Peltops (*Peltops blainvillii*)

Singles on 28.9 and 30.9. Curious single syllabled clicking song quite unlike that of *P. montana*.

\* Yellow-breasted Bowerbird (*Chlamydera lauterbachii*)

4 around the Chambri Lakes tie-channel on 1.10.

Manucode sp. (*Manucodia chalybata jobiensis*)

1 flyover on 30.9

Yellow-breasted Bowerbird (*Chlamydera lauterbachii*)

I saw one flying past the ship, an obvious *Chlamydera* bowerbird but not much else to say, then had brief flight views of 3 flying over the tie-channel to Wombun later that day in scrubby grassland with small trees. The bright orangey-yellowish underparts readily identified them, but I would have liked the chance to have telescope views.

The only paradisaeid was a flyover manucode, and bird diversity was generally low as compared to the Fly River, though my birding trips were somewhat limited and most things were incidental to the cultural aspects of the tour. Remarkably few parrots really, and no great numbers of waterbirds, though Intermediate and Great White Egrets were common, the former outnumbering the latter at least 3:1. Little Egret was very sparse indeed. The trip list of 66 is probably about average for the middle Sepik on this style of journey.

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### A LITTLE BITTERN (*Ixobrychus minutus*) AT CHAMBRI LAKE, MIDDLE SEPIK WETLANDS

By Roger Jaensch

During a June 1996 visit to the Middle and Upper Sepik wetlands to develop a project on crocodile conservation, I recorded all waterbirds encountered. On 3rd June in the early afternoon I observed an adult female Little Bittern while our boat negotiated a narrow channel connecting the Sepik River near Suapmeri to the northern end of Chambri Lake. The sighting was in an area with patches of tall aquatic grass (to 1.5m above water level) and short grass mat, about 300m north of the open waters of the Lake (site of observation: 4(10.9'S, 143(10.2'E). The tall grass included pit-pit (*Saccharum robustum*) and a similar looking but more slender grass with small drooping tassels as seed-heads, the grass mat included *Leersia* sp. (? *hexandra*), *Echinochloa* sp. (? *praestens*) and *Salvinia molesta*. The River was at peak height and floodplain wetlands including the site of the observation were fully inundated.