

Palm Cockatoo (*Probosciger aterrimus*)

1 at Kaningarra 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.

Author's address: P. O. Box 69, Tabubil 332, Western Province, Papua New Guinea
(Received October 96)

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.

The Little Bittern rose from grass mat ahead of our approach and flew low toward and past us, giving good though brief views, especially of the wings and back. It settled in a patch of tall grass, from which we were unable to flush it until we brought the boat alongside, when a fleeting view was obtained as it escaped. The bird was identified on the basis of its brown back, grey-brown primaries and secondaries and generally unstreaked appearance. It was not an adult male Little Bittern because it lacked a black back. It was not a Yellow Bittern (*I. sinensis*) because it did not have black primaries and secondaries, which are a feature of all plumage phases of *sinensis*. In addition, there was little contrast in the appearance of the warmly coloured upperparts, which is typical of adult female *minutus*, whereas adult female *sinensis* show a strong contrast (almost a pied effect) between black primaries and very pale upperwing coverts. The bird was not an immature of either species because it was not boldly streaked. No other *minutus* or *sinensis* were seen during the visit.

Little Bitterns are known to occur in the southern drainages of New Guinea, especially in the middle Fly River wetlands which may be both a non-breeding area for Australian migrants and a breeding area for resident populations (Jaensch 1995). Occurrence of Little Bitterns in the northern drainages including the Sepik wetlands has not been previously documented, though the Yellow Bittern has been recorded, at least as a non-breeding migrant, from northern New Guinea (Beehler et al 1988). Both species are capable of long distance migration (Hancock and Elliot 1978) and it is therefore conceivable that *minutus* would sometimes reach northern New Guinea from Australia, most likely during the austral winter and that *sinensis* would also sometimes reach southern New Guinea, most likely during the austral summer. It is also possible that - assuming there are no residents of either species - *minutus* and *sinensis* occur in the northern wetlands of New Guinea at different times. The Sepik and Fly wetlands would support vast areas of habitat suitable for these species. Due to the difficulties of identification and of access to suitable (overgrown) habitat, bitterns of both *Ixobrychus* species may have escaped notice in the past.

References

- Beehler, B. M., Pratt, T. K. And Zimmerman D. A. 1986. **Birds of New Guinea**. Princeton University Press, Princeton
 Hancock, J. and Elliot, H. 1978. **The Herons of the World**. London Editions, London.
 Jaensch, R. P. 195 Little Bitterns (*Ixobrychus minutus*) in the Middle Fly Wetlands. **Muruk** Vol. 7 (3) :117-118.

Author's address: Wetlands International-Oceania Program, GPO Box 636, Canberra ACT 2601, Australia

(Received June 1996)

KAVIENG, DJAUL ISLAND & MUSSAU ISLAND, NEW IRELAND - A TRIP REPORT

By Chris Eastwood

I made a short trip to Kavieng and Mussau in early September 1996 to look for a few of the New Ireland endemics. I had previously birded in the Kavieng area so this part of the trip was aimed at trying to find a good birding area with reasonable forest. I was able to find an area of primary forest that had been recently logged and which consequently gave relatively easy access and which showed plenty of promise, though due to various circumstances, I did not bird there during

prime time (i.e. early morning). There are undoubtedly better area areas but you would have to be prepared to travel further from Kavieng.

To get to this site you leave Kavieng and drive down the main road (towards Namatanai) for 22 kilometres (measured from the cross-roads leading to the air port) where you take a dirt road to the left. The junction is just after the first bridge you come to; the dirt road follows the river inland and, at the start, has an area of mangroves on both sides of the road. Follow this road for approximately 8 kilometres, through areas of regrowth and gardens, and then take a road to the right (this road comes in at 45 (and you don't see the junction until you are practically on it). Follow this road for a further 5 kilometres or so before taking a logging track leading off to the left. There is a fairly good patch of forest on either side of the start of this road, but just under a kilometre from the start there is a small logging mill and an extensive cleared area so its probably best to drive beyond this. The whole drive takes just under an hour; a 4 WD vehicle is necessary because the logging tracks can be a little slippery if it has been raining.

I made one half hour trip to Utu, approximately 5 kilometres from Kavieng on the main Namatanai road. The turning is no more than a dirt track off to the right (on the left hand side of the road is the start of a fairly large school). The track, after 500 metres or so, comes to an old quarry where you can park. The area between the quarry and the main road can be quite good.

While at Kavieng I also visited Djaul island, by hiring a boat at the village of Kaut. Again take the main road to Namatanai and turn left after 22 kilometres (the same road as described above) but instead of turning off to the right for the L keep on the main road for another 5 kilometres or so, before taking a small track off the left which leads down to the village (ask for more precise directions when you are in the general area - regrettably my notes have been lost). I was charged K45 for the return trip plus an extra K20 for the petrol (which I had to buy myself in Kavieng using a container borrowed from the village). You will also have to be prepared to be patient; we agreed for the trip to take place on Saturday morning but on arriving at the village, discovered that the boat had not yet returned from a fishing trip so we had to return the following morning (hence I was not able to bird the logging tracks). The boat trip took about an hour and landed at the village of Sumuna, after making our introductions to the village elders we explored the areas of regrowth around the villages for about one hour before returning to the mainland. It is, apparently, also possible to get over to Djaul (for the grand cost of K2) by catching one of the boats that ferry people and goods between the New Ireland coast and the southern end of Djaul. These boats all operate from an area near Kaut but do not run at weekends and may not necessarily go when you want to.

After three nights in Kavieng, I flew to Mussau via Airlink for a two night stay. The flight takes just over an hour, stopping at Emirau (an old US war base) on the way. The airport for Mussau is actually on Eloaua, one of Mussau's small offshore islands, and there is a half hour boat trip across to the "mainland". The Airlink agent at Eloaua will organise the boat for you (and will send it to collect you for your return) though he does not speak much English; the one way trip cost me K10. There is no accommodation on the island so I had arranged to stay with Pastor Maisi who can be contacted through the SDA mission in Kavieng. He is always prepared to put people up; he does not charge but I gave him K20 per day for looking after me. I only had one full day on the island and so limited my birding to the areas of regrowth along the main road and around the pastor's house. There is plenty of primary forest close by; There are (unfortunately!) loggers on the island so ironically some of the logging roads may be the best areas to visit if they can be reached.