

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

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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.

While on the island the pastor regaled me with tales about Tench Island (where birds are plentiful, particularly Nicobar Pigeons). Boats can be hired to take you from Mussau but it is a 7 or 8 hour trip. However, it is only about 3 hours (or so I was told) from Emirau and would probably be well worth doing. (Airlink stops at Emirau on the way to Mussau but not on the way back). Pastor Maisi is actually from Emirau (as were most people I met on Mussau !!) so he would be able to help arrange such a trip.

I list below those birds I saw during my trip and note that I saw Djaul Pied Monarch within about two minutes of starting birding (though we didn't come across them again) and that I saw both Mussau endemics within about 30 minutes of walking along the main road on my first morning (and at about midday when it was very hot and sunny!). Sightings refer to the logging area near Kavieng, unless otherwise stated.

Species underlined are endemic to New Guinea or Solomon Islands

Eastern Reef Egret - *Egretta sancta*

One on Mussau (dark phase)

Black Bittern - *Dupetor flavicollis*

One bird in mangroves by junction with main road

Osprey - *Pandion haliaetus*

Two birds in logging area; one on Mussau

Brahminy Kite - *Haliastur indus*

Occasional birds; one on Mussau

White-bellied Sea Eagle - *Haliaeetus leucogaster*

One on Mussau

Variable Goshawk - *Accipiter novaehollandiae*

One on Mussau

Melanesian Scrubfowl - *Megapodius eremita*

One flushed on road to Kaut

Pacific Golden Plover - *Pluvialis fulva*

Kavieng airport

Superb Fruit-Dove - *Ptilinopus superbus*

One bird seen

Red-knobbed Fruit-Dove - *Ptilinopus insolitus*

Fairly common; also on Djaul & Mussau

Yellow-bibbed Fruit-Dove - *Ptilinopus solomonensis*

Common on Mussau (refer Coates for illustration - different subspecies illustrated by Beehler?)

White-breasted Fruit-Dove - *Ptilinopus rivoli*

Fairly common

Grey Imperial Pigeon - *Ducula pistrinaria*

Fairly common on Mussau (a much greyer bird than Beehler's illustration would imply)

Red-knobbed Imperial Pigeon - *Ducula rubricera*

Fairly common

Brown Cuckoo-Dove - *Macropygia amboinensis*

Common

Spot-breasted Cuckoo-Dove - *Macropygia mackinlayi*

Common on Mussau (look quite red)

Pied Cuckoo-Dove - *Reinwardtoena browni*

At least one bird seen each day (in flight)

Stephan's Ground-dove - *Chalcophaps stephani*

Quite common in logging area and on Mussau

Rainbow Lorikeet - *Trichoglossus haematodus*

Common (none seen or heard on Mussau)

Eastern Black-capped Lory - *Lorius hypoinochrous*

Fairly common; also on Djaul

Red-flanked Lorikeet - *Charmosyna placensis*

Abundant around Kavieng; common on Djaul

Eclectus Parrot - *Eclectus roratus*

Fairly common

Song Parrot - *Geoffroyus heteroclitus*

Fairly common

White-necked Coucal - *Centropus ateralbus*

One or two birds seen

Glossy Swiftlet - *Collocalia esculenta*

Common

Uniform Swiftlet - *Collocalia vanikorensis*

Common in logging area and on Mussau

White-rumped Swiftlet - *Collocalia spodiopygia*

A few seen in logging area; common on Mussau

Moustached Tree-swift - *Hemiprocne mystacea*

One pair

Sacred Kingfisher - *Halcyon sancta*

Two birds on Mussau

Collared Kingfisher - *Halcyon chloris*

Common on Mussau (subspecies with white crown and broad black line through eye and around back of head)

Rainbow Bee-eater - *Merops ornatus*

Common

Dollarbird - *Eurystomus orientalis*

Single birds

Blyth's Hornbill - *Aceros plicatus*

A single bird and one pair seen

Blue-breasted Pitta - *Pitta erythrogaster*

One heard at Utu

White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike - *Coracina papuensis*

One bird seen

Cicadabird - *Coracina tenuirostris*

One or two birds seen - the Bismarck race (female being brown with grey cap)

Varied Triller - *Lalage leucomela*

Fairly common

Bismarck Rufous Fantail - *Rhipidura dahli*

One pair seen

Mussau Rufous Fantail - *Rhipidura matthiae*

Fairly common on Mussau - seen in regrowth along the main road

Northern Fantail - *Rhipidura rufiventris*

Fairly common; also on Djaul

Willie Wagtail - *Rhipidura leucophrys*

A pair on Eloaua

Paradise Drongo - *Dicurus megarhynchus*

Three or four birds at Utu

Island Monarch - *Monarcha cinerascens*

A few birds seen on Mussau & Eloaua

Bismarck Pied Monarch - *Monarcha verticalis*

Occasional birds seen

Djaul Pied Monarch - *Monarcha ateralba*

A group of three birds seen in a small feeding flock in swamp forest by the village of Sumuna, a fourth bird (presumed to be a juvenile based on Coates description) was seen later - it had whitish lower breast and belly with a pale orange head and upper breast, also prominent pale eyebrow

Mussau Pied Monarch - *Monarcha menckei*

Fairly common on Mussau; seen in the regrowth along the main road. One bird was feeding a fully fledged juvenile (with a blackish back and nape). Adult birds continually half-flicked their wings (reminiscent of Garnet Robin)

Golden Monarch - *Monarcha chrysomela*

Fairly common; also seen on Djaul

Shining Flycatcher - *Myiagra alecto*

Fairly common in logging area; a female on Djaul Island

Lesser Shining Flycatcher - *Myiagra hebetior*

One female on Djaul Island (seen moments before the female shining)

Golden Whistler - *Pachycephala soror*

Presumably this species - seen on Djaul and Mussau as well as in the logging area

Red Myzomela - *Myzomela cruentata*

Fairly common; also on Djaul

Bismarck Black Myzomela - *Myzomela pammelaena*

Common on Mussau

Black Sunbird - *Nectarinia aspasia*

Fairly common

Yellow-bellied Sunbird - *Nectarinia jugularis*

Fairly common

Bismarck Flowerpecker - *Dicaeum eximium*

Common

Hunstein's Mannikin - *Lonchura hunsteini*

Common - Kavieng airport & approach roads to logging area

Blue-faced Parrot-finch - *Erythrura trichroa*

Common on Mussau - seen along the road edge (particularly in the evening) and in the school gardens acting much like mannikins *Lonchura* sp. but feeding on the ground

Metallic Starling - *Aplonis metallica*

Common; also on Mussau. All birds seen had long elongated central tail feathers so presumably this species

Yellow-faced Myna - *Mino dumontii*

Only a few birds seen (but very vocal!)

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NESTING OBSERVATION OF DOUBLE-EYED FIG-PARROT (CYCLOPSITTA DIOPHTHALMA) AT KIKORI

By Yasuhisa Tanaka

A nest of Double-eyed Fig-Parrot was observed at Kikori on 21 November 1995. The observation area was about 30 km north of Kikori town, Gulf Province, where a dirt pipeline road cuts through forest. The nest site was about 2 km west of the Kikori River along this oil pipeline road. The nest itself was in a hollow of about 10 cm diameter located about 25 m above the ground on a vertical branch of a 30 m tall dead emergent tree. I had clear views of both the male and female visiting the nest, the female with a head pattern like that of the 9 a female bird on plate 21 of Beehler's "Birds of New Guinea" (presumably *C. d. diophtalma*). This female was looking into the hollow whilst a male bird was sitting on branch nearby. Calls of juvenile birds "ju ju ju ju ju ju" were heard when the female bird looked into the hollow, suggesting that the female was feeding them. The male gave a "chii chii" call but did not come to the nest at this time.

About an hour later, a female Orange-breasted Fig-Parrot (*C. guillemittii*) with the face pattern of the 10a female bird on plate 21 in Beehler (presumably *C. g. suavissima*) was sitting on top of the tall dead tree some 500m west of the Double-eyed Fig-Parrot nest site. This suggests that the two species co-exist in this area, though Beehler (1986) states that the species replace each other locally, and Coates (1985) gives that they are largely complementary, being rare or absent where the other occurs.

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FLOWER-PIERCING BY (PRESUMED) HONEYEATERS IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

By George E. Clapp

On 14 December 1994, at an altitude of 1940 m ASL and at a location only a few hundred metres distant from the Girebo Watersource in the Hides area of the Southern Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea, I noticed a single individual Rufous-backed Honeyeater (*Ptiloprora gusei*) at the flowers of a striking epiphytic plant about 15 m up in a medium size broadleaf tree in lightly mossed forest. It caught my attention that the bird appeared to be probing the bases of the flowers one by one. On a hunch I had the epiphyte retrieved from the tree and discovered an obvious instance of pierced flowers, and the use of those pierced flowers by the honeyeater in question.

The plant was an epiphyte with a single floral umbel hanging down, which consisted of nine white flowers. Each of the nine flowers (which were in excess of 5 cm from the base of the corolla to where it started to flare out) had been pierced near the base. On each bloom there was longitudinal slit about 7.5 mm (measured) with negligible variation in the length of the slits. These slits were slightly brownish coloured from the bruising of the floral tissue. Subsequently this plant was positively identified by Dr. G. Stocker of the Papua New Guinea Forest Research Institute, from photographs I had taken, as belonging to the genus *Rhododendron* (G. Stocker pers. comm.) Unfortunately an identification to species level could not be achieved from the photographs.

This rhododendron was quite distinctive, and *P. gusei* was certainly feeding from the slits pierced in the flowers, but because the bird was not actually observed piercing the flowers it cannot be stated with certainty that *P. gusei* is a flower piercer.

Moynihan (1979) discusses flower piercing by birds, in particular by the genus *Diglossa* in South America. "Birds of this genus have uniquely shaped bills which are an efficient tool for grasping and piercing the corollas of long tubular flowers from the side. The base... is held by the hook of