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Birds reported on Tingwon Island, New Ireland 18-20 May 1999

By Adam & Matthew Leavesley

The Tingwon Island group consists of three islands, Tingwon, Kolenusa and Beligila, surrounded by a large reef about 35 km south west of New Hanover. Tingwon is the main island and the only one with permanent inhabitants and gardens. Part of the interior land area is mangrove swamp. The other two islands are smaller and entirely sandy. Total land area is no more than 6 square km and nowhere does the height above sea level exceed 1m.

The quickest way to reach Tingwon is to charter a banana boat from Kavieng, the journey will take 4-5 hours one way and will cost close to K200. If you're not in a rush and also visiting New Hanover, it is best to go via Umbukul. Seats to Umbukul are K5-K10 (3-4 hours), and there is plenty of guesthouse accommodation. From Umbukul it may be possible to get a seat in the Tingwon community boat. Phone Tingwon and speak to the ward member to check. A charter boat from Umbukul to Tingwon costs K100 (1-2 hours). Benzene supplies on Tingwon can run out. If this happens arrange a charter from Umbukul to pick you up. We had accommodation arranged but the ward member also invited us to stay with him.

We visited Tingwon from 18-20 May, outside Nicobar Pigeon breeding time, after any northern waders should have left but Austral migrants should have arrived. The timing was not planned with birding in mind. We were taking a break from our four month archaeological exploration of New Hanover.

The main attraction was to see the Nicobar Pigeon breeding habitat and any birds still around. Breeding takes place between November and February. The Nicobar Pigeon is listed as "near threatened" by Birdlife International. People from Tingwon say the birds are very abundant during breeding and lots are eaten at this time. We also hoped to see the Beach Stone-curlew and sea birds on the passage to and from New Hanover.

Most of the birds on the island are relatively tame and easy to see. Nicobar Pigeon (in small numbers), Stephan's Ground-Dove and the Melanesian Scrubfowl forage through the main village during the day. The villagers feed the Nicobar Pigeons. Bismarck Black Myzomela, Rainbow Lorikeets, Golden Whistlers (We're not sure which species) and Yellow-bibbed Fruit-Doves can be seen in the villages, and Island Monarch in the nearby gardens. Beach Kingfishers are vocal and easy to see along the beachfront trees.

A real treat on Tingwon are the big birds of prey. Close to the main village are Osprey and White-bellied Sea-Eagle nests and there is at least one other Osprey nest nearby. A juvenile sea-eagle was seen. Hunting birds especially Osprey, are a constant presence over the reef.

The main Nicobar Pigeon breeding site is reportedly on Beligila Island, the furthest from the main island. The pigeons were harder to find there, than on the main island. There was also less diversity on the two smaller islands possibly because there was no gardening and no mangroves. Scrubfowl were abundant and Rainbow Lorikeets, possibly as many as 100 used Beligila to roost after feeding on Tingwon during the day.

Early morning exploration of Tingwon revealed a number of shyer species including a Black Bittern, Buff-banded Rail and several Mackinlay's Cuckoo-Dove. Around mid-morning three Beach Stone-curlews were seen on a small beach on a vegetated rock, facing the main village. They were very touchy, flying off as soon as I stepped on the island even though they were 50m away.

The passages between New Hanover and Tingwon was notable for the presence of two solitary Streaked Shearwaters, a group of three Flesh-footed Shearwaters heading north and a group of 15-20 Masked Boobies about half of which were juvenile. Common Terns, and both Black and Brown Noddies were common in mixed groups close to Tingwon and New Hanover.

Trip Bird List

Streaked Shearwater - *Calonectris leucomelas*

2 solitary birds seen between New Hanover and Tingwon (see next trip report).

Flesh-footed Shearwater - *Puffinus carneipes*

A group of three seen between New Hanover and Tingwon (see next trip report).

Masked Booby - *Sula dactylatra*

Between New Hanover and Tingwon (see next trip report).

Eastern Reef Egret - *Egretta sancta*

Several scattered about the reef.

Black Bittern - *Ixobrychus flavicollis*

One bird seen in forest on the main island.

Buff-banded Rail - *Rallus philippensis*

Two birds seen near the old airstrip.

Osprey - *Pandion haliaetus*

Conspicuous and vocal at nest and over the reef.

White-bellied Sea-Eagle - *Haliaeetus leucogaster*

Conspicuous and vocal at nest and over the reef, one juvenile seen.

Brahminy Kite - *Haliastur indus*

One bird seen.

Melanesian Scrubfowl - *Megapodius eremita*

Abundant in villages, scrub and forest.

Pacific Golden Plover - *Pluvialis fulva*

One non-breeding bird in a fallow garden.

Beach Stone-curlew - *Burhinus grallarius*

Three birds on a small beach close to the main village.

Crested Tern - *Sterna bergii*

Group of about 20 roosting on a log on the reef.

Common Tern - *Sterna hirundo*

Common offshore, often in large mixed groups.

Brown Noddy - *Anous stolidus*

Common offshore, often in large mixed groups.

Black Noddy - *Anous minutus*

Common offshore, often in large mixed groups.

Greater Frigatebird - *Fregata minor*

A few birds (part of two mixed groups) heading towards New Hanover in the afternoon.

Lesser Frigatebird - *Fregata ariel*

About 50 birds (part of two mixed groups) heading towards New Hanover in the afternoon.

Yellow billed Fruit-Dove - *Ptilinopus solomonensis*

Regularly seen in villages, gardens, plantations and forest.

Mackinlay's Cuckoo-Dove - *Macropygia mackinlayi*

Regularly seen in gardens and plantations on the main island.

Stephan's Ground-Dove - *Chalcophaps stephani*

Conspicuous foraging in villages.

Nicobar Pigeon - *Caloenas nicobarica*

Regularly seen foraging in villages on the main island, fed by villagers.

Rainbow Lorikeet - *Trichoglossus haematodus*

Conspicuous and vocal, many roost on Beligila.

Rainbow Bee-eater - *Merops ornatus*

Much smaller numbers than on New Hanover.

Collared Kingfisher - *Halcyon chloris*

Only a handful of birds, much smaller density than on New Hanover.

Beach Kingfisher - *Halcyon saurophaga*

Common in beach front trees and along the reef.

Common Kingfisher - *Alcedo atthis*

Common in beach front trees.

Willy Wagtail - *Rhipidura leucophrys*

Conspicuous along the beach and villages.

Island Monarch - *Monarcha cinerascens*

Common in gardens and forest.

Golden Whistler sp. (Common or Mangrove) - *Pachycephala pectoralis / melanura*

Common in villages, gardens and plantation on the main island.

Bismarck Black Myzomela *Myzomela pammelaena*

Conspicuous in village, gardens and plantation.

Metallic Starling *Aplonis metallica*

Conspicuous and vocal in village gardens and plantation.

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New Hanover Bird Report, March-May 1999

By Adam and Matthew Leavesley

We ventured to New Hanover at the beginning of March to undertake an archaeological exploration of the island and at the same time study the birdlife in the areas we visited. Prior e-mail enquiries amongst members of the PNGBS led to Birdlife International researcher Guy Dutton (*pers comm*) who posed a raft of questions which could contribute to conservation in the Bismarcks, an area regarded by Birdlife International as a "world hotspot of endemism".

First priority was to gather data on the threatened and near-threatened species present on the island and in the surrounding seas for inclusion in Birdlife International's Birds to Watch III. Information about population and population trends, ecology, threats, current conservation action and future action was required.