

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.

New Hanover has no terrestrial threatened bird species but Heinroth's Shearwater (*Puffinus heinrothi*) and Beck's Petrel (*Pterodroma becki*) are known from the surrounding seas. Neither of these threatened species was sighted.

Near threatened species were the Nicobar Pigeon, Finsch's Imperial-Pigeon, Black Imperial-Pigeon (*Ducula melanochroa*) and Bismarck Kingfisher. Coates does not list Finsch's or Black Imperial-Pigeons on New Hanover but Dutson had observed them in good numbers during a visit to New Hanover in 1997. He also requested similar information for the New Hanover sub-species *nigerrima* of Hunstein's Mannikin which was separated as a species, the New Hanover Mannikin (*L. nigerrima*) by Monroe and Sibley (1993), raising a question about the conservation status of both.

Dutson also noted a paucity of recent records for the King Quail (*Coturnix chinensis*), Red-backed Buttonquail (*Turnix maculosa*), Red-necked Crake (*Rallina rubra*) and Bare-eyed Rail (*Eulabeornis plumbeiventris*) and suggested that grasslands and montane areas in the interior warranted more investigation (none of these were sighted). He suggested some of the species recorded in New Ireland but not New Hanover could be present in these habitats and that some previously unrecorded supertramps could turn up in the Tigak islands (the islets between New Ireland and New Hanover).

The area observed whilst on New Hanover was dictated by archaeological rather than ornithological requirements. Most effort was concentrated on the south coast between Lavongai and Umbukul, with most time spent at Lavongai. Trips to the interior were via the Woi River, over the main divide to Neikonomon, Ingi and Noipuos and from Ingi to Umbukul along the logging road. We also went up the Saula Valley to the main divide, visited Puas and Renmalik by boat, visited Kung Island and several of the Tigak Islands, Nusandaul, Bangatang, Tungelo, Kiton and Wadei. Observations were made around Kavieng during breaks. A trip to Tingwon Island group was covered in a separate article (see this issue of *Muruk*).

Early encouragement came from an unexpected quarter when two Oriental Pratincoles were discovered on the tarmac outside the terminal of the Kavieng airport on 10 March. The birds were not feeding and only reluctantly moved when approached. They were in the same place the following morning.

The search for near-threatened species met with mixed results. Nicobar Pigeons appear to roost in at least two places on the south coast, two sightings totalling four birds were made in the interior forests north and south of the divide and a solitary bird was seen flying above the logged forest in the west. On the south coast the birds were observed most easily at dawn and dusk flying in groups of 2-3 over the sea between the south-east corner of New Hanover and nearby islands. They also roost in the mangroves around the lagoon next to Lavongai village, but these birds were very secretive.

Any analysis of the conservation status of this bird would best be carried out at the nearest breeding grounds on the Tingwon islands, (not listed in Coates) 35km south west of New Hanover. During the breeding season, November - February they are reportedly present in enormous numbers, and many are eaten by the Tingwon people.

The Tingwon Island group is only 1m above sea level so the entire breeding ground is threatened in the event of predicted sea-level rise.

Bismarck Kingfishers are locally common in the Woi River and some tributaries and were also seen in the Habiuk River near Nursery in an area that had been previously disturbed by logging. The birds have whitish breasts rather than the buff colour described in Coates. They were most often found in pairs perched close together over the water and usually returned to favourite spots when disturbed. There is plenty of suitable habitat on the north and eastern sides of the island for these birds, but a new logging contract covering a large part of this area may pose a threat.

Two pairs of birds matching Coates description of Finsch's Imperial-Pigeon were seen close to dusk on 6 May in prominent trees in gardens close to the house of Bigman Dallius (GR 854217). The site is in primary forest right next to the main divide, and is crossed by numerous fast-flowing streams. We did not see any of this species on the south or west sides of the island, but there is plenty of similar habitat north of the divide. This habitat may be threatened by the planned logging. The Black Imperial-Pigeon was not sighted.

Large groups of the New Hanover form of Hunstein's Mannikin are present in grass at Baungung, Lavongai and Puas, which are larger villages. These groups are easiest to find in the early morning. At Lavongai they are regularly seen in reeds beside the Saula river in the evening. Sightings of 2-3 birds were made near Lavongai, Umbukul, Ingi and inland from Paterina. These sightings were all made later in the day except at Ingi, which was early morning. Birds are also reported from Taskul (Eastwood *pers comm*, Dutson *pers comm*).

Baungung, Lavongai and Puas have large areas of grass maintained around the church/school complex for sports and recreation. The birds were seen on the margins of these areas in seeding grass. At Lavongai birds were also regularly seen in larger numbers in fallow garden areas close to the church and one pair in short kunai grass. At Umbukul, two birds were seen along the logging road in bushes and inland from Paterina in a small garden (220m asl, GR910095).

Observations of the biggest group of mannikins seen on New Hanover suggest that the birds congregate to feed in favoured habitat just after dawn and then spend the day in smaller groups. If this is true it maybe possible to get an accurate estimate by surveying the larger villages. Some villages with apparently suitable habitat had no birds present and little sign of feeding on the favoured types of grass.

Three species not listed by Coates as present on New Hanover were seen on the island.

A single Greenshank was seen flying out of the Ingi River close to Nursery on 8 May in the afternoon and again the following day standing on a small patch of sand behind a pebble bank in the river.

Mackinlay's Cuckoo-Dove *Macropygia mackinlayi* appears to have replaced the Black-billed Cuckoo-Dove *M. nigrirostris* on New Hanover. Coates lists *M. nigrirostris* for New Hanover but not *M. mackinlayi*. We observed numerous *M.*

mackinlayi birds but not one *M. nigrirostris* individual. (The two species are readily confused, but *M. mackinlayi* is a member of the guild of small island specialist birds, which would be unexpected on New Hanover – Editor.)

A juvenile Oriental Cuckoo was seen on 22 May next to the beach west of Metekavil on the south coast. The bird was perched in thick mid-canopy foliage but called constantly for 15 minutes and didn't stop. A recording was made. It was seen being harassed by a small bird about the size of a Red Myzomela but was not inclined to move more than a few metres. Oriental Cuckoos breed in Asia and winter in Australia, New Guinea and New Britain during the Austral summer. They have also been sighted on Manus. Presumably this bird was off course on its return to Asia.

Several other notable observations were made adding to information published in Coates.

Coates lists the White-breasted Fruit-Dove as a mountain species of southern New Ireland and New Hanover. One bird was observed close to sea level in gardens near Kavieng and several were seen close to the southern New Hanover coast, usually in primary forest.

Coates describes the Masked Booby as rare in PNG waters. A group of 15-20 adult and juvenile Masked Boobies was observed about 500m offshore from Umbukul on 18 May. Another similar sized group was observed from a boat during a passage between Tingwon and Umbukul about 2-3km offshore in the same area two days later.

Pied Cuckoo-doves were seen performing display flights above the forest canopy. The display involved diving from a high perch, then going straight up vertically, stalling, diving again and flying on. The performance was all executed in a straight line.

Grey Imperial Pigeons were seen using a flight-path along a ridge on the true right of the Saula River. At least 300 birds flew up the ridge in the morning turning left over the first big tributary and continuing towards the main divide. Flocks of up to 30 fly inland with birds splitting off, usually one, two or three at a time. In the evening the birds re-traced the path with the flocks numbering more than 20 as they reached the coast.

One roosting tree in logged over forest near Metemulai contained more than 350 Grey Imperial Pigeons, More than 100 Yellow-faced Mynas, more than 50 Eclectus Parrots and 8 Eastern Black-capped Lories. A neighbouring tree contained 12 Brahminy Kites. Observed 10 & 12 May

On two successive evenings (15-16 April) more than 35 Blyth's Hornbills were seen flying from the main divide area, high over Woi River to a roosting area in the Ungat Valley. The largest single group contained 19 birds and was seen on both evenings. On April 17, 18 birds were seen and lesser numbers on the following evenings.

Greater and Lesser Frigatebirds were present daily in large numbers off the south coast of New Hanover. The birds roost on Nusandaul island, close to Taskul and more

than 500 were recorded in a quick count from a passing banana boat, evening, 25 May. The island is mostly mangrove swamp and has little dry land.

Bismarck Black Myzomelas were common on four out of five Tigak islands visited and can be seen flying between them and New Hanover. Beach Kingfishers were far more common on the smaller Tigak islands than New Hanover. An Island Monarch, and two Striated Herons were seen on Nusandaul. Imperial pigeons were seen and heard on Nusandaul but no identification could be made.

Flocks of up to 50 Whimbrels were seen flying west along the south coast of New Hanover just after dawn 25 April. Another large flock was seen feeding on a mud flat that evening. First sighting of a Channel-billed Cuckoo - 24 March, Rainbow Bee-eater - 18 April, Dollardbird - 7 May, Shining Bronze- Cuckoo - 12 May.

A pair of Brahminy Kites at Lavongai village were observed at a height of 60m trying to catch swiftlets on the wing. One bird was observed snatching a young domestic chicken.

Cicadabirds were regularly seen from the coast up into the mountains. Habitats include mangroves, coconut plantations, fringes of primary forest and logged forest. Usually seen in pairs or threes, quite conspicuous, but not vocal. The female plumage was a chestnut brown rather than the dull example illustrated in Beehler (*which is of the mainland form, the whole Cicadabird complex being in drastic need of revision-Ed.*) A young male with a combination of brown and grey plumage was also seen.

Trip Bird List

Streaked Shearwater - *Calonectris leucomelas*

2 solitary birds seen between New Hanover and Tingwon, 18 & 20 May (See previous Tingwon report).

Flesh-footed Shearwater - *Puffinus carneipes*

A group of three were seen between New Hanover and Tingwon, 18 May (See previous Tingwon report).

Greater Frigatebird - *Fregata minor*

Constant presence along the south coast of New Hanover, roosts on Nusandaul in the Tigak islands, combined frigate bird numbers more than 500.

Lesser Frigatebird - *Fregata ariel*

Constant presence along the south coast of New Hanover, roosts on Nusandaul in the Tigak islands, combined frigate bird numbers more than 500

Masked Booby - *Sula dactylatra*

10-15 Between New Hanover and Tingwon, 18 & 20 May (see Tingwon report).

Eastern Reef-Egret - *Egretta sancta*

Common around the coast, including by villages and up the Woi River. Grey and white phases seen in both habitats. One pied bird seen.

Striated Heron - *Ardeola striata*

Seen in mangroves at Lavongai and in the Tigak islands.

Rufous Night Heron - *Nycticorax caledonicus*

Riverbanks and mangroves, especially in the northern swamps.

Black Bittern - *Ixobrychus flavicollis*

Riverbanks, wet gardens, sago swamps, common close to villages.

Osprey - *Pandion haliaetus*

Common around the coast. Observed 8km up the Woi River

Crested Hawk - *Aviceda subcristata*

Readily observed away from the coast.

Brahminy Kite - *Haliastur indus*

Around the coast, but also inland. 12 observed in one roost near Metemulai.

White-bellied Sea-Eagle - *Haliaeetus leucogaster*

Seen around New Hanover, highest density in the north west between Wassanga and Mosuang.

Grey Goshawk - *Accipiter novaehollandiae*

Observed three times on a ridge on the true right of the Saula River, within 4 km of the coast.

Pacific Black Duck - *Anas superciliosa*

Regularly seen at the mouth of the Saula River.

Melanesian Scrubfowl - *Megapodius eremita*

Abundant in swampy areas, common in the interior but difficult to observe.

Buff-banded Rail - *Rallus philippensis*

Kavieng airport surrounds, not seen on New Hanover.

Bush-hen - *Amaurornis olivaceus*

One sighting in primary forest in the upper Woi River.

Oriental Pratincole - *Glareola maldivarum*

2 at Kavieng airport 10-11 March.

Pacific Golden Plover - *Pluvialis fulva*

More than 100 birds on Kavieng airfield, smaller numbers in school grounds, beaches, New Hanover.

Mongolian Plover - *Charadrius mongolus*

Kavieng airfield, one non-breeding bird on New Hanover south coast.

Ruddy Turnstone - *Arenaria interpres*

Seen in groups of 10-20 at Kavieng airport and harbour, Puas on New Hanover.

Whimbrel - *Numenius phaeopus*

Common in mangrove, grass and reef, Kavieng airport and New Hanover coastline.

Grey-tailed Tattler - *Tringa brevipes*

Common along the coastline including villages and rivers.

Common Sandpiper - *Tringa hypoleucos*

Common along the coastline including villages and rivers

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper - *Calidris acuminata*

Kavieng airport.

Red-necked Stint - *Calidris ruficollis*

Beach, behind the reef in Kavieng harbour.

Common Tern - *Sterna hirundo*

Common in the Tigaks and offshore, in large mixed groups.

Little Tern - *Sterna albifrons*

One group of five seen in the Tigaks.

Crested Tern - *Sterna bergii*

Common along the coast, often in large mixed groups.

Brown Noddy - *Anous stolidus*

Common along the coast, often in large mixed groups.

Black Noddy - *Anous minutus*

Common along the coast, often in large mixed groups.

Brown Cuckoo-Dove - *Macropygia amboinensis*

Common around the coast of New Hanover in gardens and plantations.

Mackinlay's Cuckoo-Dove - *Macropygia mackinlayi*

Most often seen in the hills on Tingwon.

Pied Cuckoo-Dove - *Reinwardtoena browni*

Interior primary forests in the south and logged forest, gardens in the north.

Stephan's Ground-Dove - *Chalcophaps stephani*

Common in gardens and cocoa plantations around New Hanover.

Nicobar Pigeon - *Caloenas nicobarica*

Breeds on a nearby island group, regularly seen in small numbers at mangrove roosts and once in northern New Hanover swamp forest.

White-breasted Fruit-Dove - *Ptilinopus rivoli*

Common on New Hanover, prefers primary forest.

Red-knobbed Fruit-Dove - *Ptilinopus insolitus*

Most common fruit-dove, often seen in large trees in beach villages, mangrove, hill forest.

Red-knobbed Imperial Pigeon - *Ducula rubricera*

Most common pigeon on the coast and seen inland in the northern swamp forests)

Grey Imperial Pigeon - *Ducula pistrinaria*

Most common pigeon inland. Large numbers in daily migrations from communal roosts.

Rainbow Lorikeet - *Trichoglossus haematodus*

Common in the coastal far west of New Hanover, Kavieng and the Tigaks.

Eastern Black-capped Lory - *Lorius hypoinochrous*

Small numbers in the west of New Hanover, usually seen in pairs.

Red-flanked Lorikeet - *Charmosyna placensis*

Common in gardens and forest throughout the island.

Green Pygmy-Parrot - *Micropsitta finschii*

Difficult to identify, one definite record only but this may not be an accurate reflection.

Song Parrot - *Geoffroyus heteroclitus*

Most common inland, but also seen on the coast, vocal on the wing.

Eclectus Parrot - *Eclectus roratus*

Common throughout New Hanover, especially around gardens.

Bismarck Hanging-Parrot - *Loriculus tener*

Relatively common in gardens and coconut plantations around the coast.

Oriental Cuckoo - *Cuculus saturatus*

New Hanover, one record, 22 May.

Brush Cuckoo - *Cacomantis variolosus*

Seen and heard in gardens, plantations and villages around the New Hanover.

Shining Bronze-Cuckoo - *Chrysococcyx lucidus*

Seen in gardens, secondary forests, first sighting: 12 May.

Channel billed Cuckoo - *Scythrops novaehollandiae*

Three sightings, all on the wing, two involving crows, first sighting: 24 March.

Bismarck Boobook - *Ninox solomonis*

Occasionally heard, one captive bird at Meteran.

Moustached Tree-swift - *Hemiprocne mystacea*

Commonly seen in a range of habitats from the coast into the mountains, often in pairs.

Uniform Swiftlet - *Collocalia vanikorensis*

Large numbers, especially in coastal gardens.

Glossy Swiftlet - *Collocalia esculenta*

Large numbers especially in forest areas.

White-rumped Swiftlet - *Collocalia spodiopygia*

One or two birds occasionally seen in large groups of other swifts

Collared Kingfisher - *Halcyon chloris*

Common along the coast, less so in the interior. Very vocal in March.

Beach Kingfisher - *Halcyon saurophaga*

Occasional sightings on New Hanover, common and conspicuous on Tigaks and around Kavieng.

Common Kingfisher - *Alcedo atthis*

Common along the coastline and up rivers.

Bismarck Kingfisher - *Ceyx websteri*

Common up the Woi River, also seen in the Habiuk.

Rainbow Bee-eater - *Merops ornatus*

Common and conspicuous, sometimes in groups of 30 around the island.

Dollarbird - *Eurystomus orientalis*

Several solitary birds seen in the west in logged forest and garden.

Blyth's Hornbill - *Rhyticeros plicatus*

Hunted around the coast, but flocks of 25 seen in the Woi River.

Blue-breasted Pitta - *Pitta erythrogaster*

One bird seen in primary forest in the Woi.

White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike - *Coracina papuensis*

Common coastal bird, often in groups of 2 or 3.

Cicadabird - *Coracina tenuirostris*

Regularly seen throughout the island in mangroves, plantations, primary forest edge and logged forest.

Varied Triller - *Lalage leucomela*

Commonly seen and heard in gardens and plantations.

Golden-headed Cisticola - *Cisticola exilis*

Seen in overgrown gardens, bushes, sugar cane and kunai grass in coastal areas.

Northern Fantail - *Rhipidura rufiventris*

Regularly seen in gardens, plantations, mangroves and primary forest.

Willy Wagtail - *Rhipidura leucophrys*

Constant presence in beach villages and in the lower reaches of rivers.

Island Monarch - *Monarcha cinerascens*

One sighting on New Hanover in bamboo, and the Tigaks islands.

Golden Monarch - *Monarcha chrysomela*

Commonly seen and heard esp. in swampy areas, gardens and plantations of New Hanover.

Bismarck Pied Monarch - *Monarcha verticalis*

Two sightings, both in the interior hills, bamboo and primary forest.

Shining Flycatcher - *Myiagra alecto*

Common on New Hanover in gardens, plantations and mangroves.

Bismarck Flowerpecker - *Dicaeum eximium*

Common in gardens, plantations and secondary forest on New Hanover.

Black Sunbird - *Nectarinia aspasia*

Common in gardens, plantations and secondary forest on New Hanover.

Yellow-bellied Sunbird - *Nectarinia jugularis*

Regularly seen in gardens, plantations and secondary forest on New Hanover.

Black-headed White-eye - *Zosterops hypoxantha*

Regularly seen in gardens, plantations and secondary forest on New Hanover.

Red Myzomela - *Myzomela cruentata*

Common in gardens, plantations and secondary forest on New Hanover.

Bismarck Black Myzomela - *Myzomela pammelaena*

Two sightings in western New Hanover, common in the Tigaks.

Hunstein's Mannikin [New Ireland subspecies] - *Lonchura hunsteini*

Abundant at Kavieng airport.

Hunstein's Mannikin [New Hanover subspecies] - *Lonchura hunsteini nigerrima*

Groups seen around large villages with big areas of grass. (Sometimes split as New Hanover Mannikin *Lonchura nigerrima*-Editor.)

Singing Starling - *Aplonis cantoroides*

Around human habitation, not as prevalent as the metallic starling.

Metallic Starling - *Aplonis metallica*

Very common, vocal and conspicuous around human habitation.

Yellow-faced Myna - *Mino dumontii*

Regularly seen and heard throughout the island in groups of 2-5. One roost had >100.

Torresian Crow - *Corvus orru*

Regularly seen and heard throughout the island.

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Observations of the New Hanover sub-species of Hunstein's Mannikin
Lonchura hunsteini nigerrima

By Adam and Matthew Leavesley

Large flocks of this bird are present in grass at Baungung, Lavongai and Puas, which are larger villages of New Hanover. The flocks are biggest and easiest to see within an hour of dawn. At Lavongai they can also be seen regularly in the evening in reeds near the Saula River mouth. Sightings of 2-3 birds were made near Lavongai, Umbukul, Ingi and inland from Paterina. These sightings were all made later in the day except at Ingi which was early morning.

Baungung, Lavongai and Puas have large areas of grass maintained around the church/school complex for sports and recreation. The birds were seen on the margins of these areas in the longer grass. At Lavongai birds were also regularly seen in reasonable numbers in fallow garden areas close to the church and one pair in short kunai grass. At Umbukul, two birds were seen along the logging road in bushes and at higher altitude inland from Paterina in a garden.

Observations at Baungung 22 May 1999

First light 0600: The overgrown Baungung school football field looked like a good place to look for grassland birds, so I arrived at first light to check it out. No birds were immediately evident upon arrival but five minutes later at the other end of the field a group of three was spotted close to the surrounding bushes. These joined another group to give a total of 10. This group was very active, all taking small flights of less than a metre from the back of the group to join the main bunch. In this way the group moved across the field. Other birds joined the group until it reached 30-40 (most of the joining groups numbered 3-7) Just before 6-30am another large group joined the first one to give the maximum group size of 60-80. (The intense activity at this time made getting an exact count difficult).

Upon being flushed by me, other people or the sound of a loud unexpected bird call, the mannikins would take to the air. Usually they would fly into another part of the field, but sometimes they would take to nearby bushes, small trees and sugar cane. If