

flushed by a person they would fly off one after the other as the person got too close. If scared by the sound of a bird call they would all take to the air at the same instant and fly around in a tight group. The birds call when they are on the wing. There is always a little bit of calling when the flock is feeding because there are always some birds adjusting position and calling while they do so.

Whenever the birds took to the air there would be some dispersal followed by a re-grouping. Half the birds might go into a hedge and the other half would fly to another patch of grass. A small number of birds appeared to use the opportunity to leave the group whenever the flock was flushed. Pairs especially would fly off together. Sometimes as many as 8 would do this. Over a period of 2-3 minutes most of the birds would recongregate on the grass. By 8am the group size had reduced to around 30-40 birds and by 9-30am it was 12. Following the early morning frenetic activity, the group was far more settled by 8-30am. Far less movement in general and the group was more spread out. The spread of the group increased when they were left undisturbed for longer periods. Landing after disturbance they would group more tightly. During the settled period calling was virtually nil.

Around 9-30am when the group in the field was 12 another large group was seen in the top of nearby guava trees. They did not pause for long though. The guava did not appear to have anything edible in it. Locals say the mannikins are often seen in kunai grass, but this was not backed up by my observations. (Kunai grass grows to 2.5m high in places where the soil has been heavily cropped. There is plenty of it on New Hanover around the major areas of human habitation.)

#### Juveniles

Between 30%-50% of the group was juvenile (ie black head, brown wings, lighter brown belly and paler rufous tail than the adults). There appeared little difference in behaviour between the adults and juveniles.

#### Food

The mannikins preferred food was arrowhead grass (This is my name only, I have got a photo and I am trying to get a proper name). Up to 70% of this grass had been cropped of its seed in areas that the birds have been feeding. The birds also eat the disc seed grass (my name only, I have a photo and am trying to get a proper name) as a second choice if they have been flushed from the arrowhead grass. They feed by landing on the stalks and bending them to the ground, but they can also grip the stalk if it does not bend, and feed hanging at crazy angles. Two birds were observed pecking the bare earth under a tree next to a patch of grass. No seeds could be seen on the ground. (Subsequent examination of the ground at the spot did not reveal any seeds or other possible food).

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## Notes on the behaviour of Curl-crested Manucode - *Manucodia comrui*

By Brad Schram

On 23 September 1999, I made a brief visit to Fergusson Island as part of a cruise made by the *M/V World Discoverer*. While on the island I found a small group of Curl-crested Manucodes in high, thick forest edging a clearing that behaved suspiciously like lekking birds. Frith and Beehler note that its nuptial display is unknown. Cam Kepler (an ornithologist from the *M/V World Discoverer*) came along and agreed that it looked lek-like. I realise manucodes are not meant to lek.

I was drawn to the site by the low burbling calls of the birds. Another manucode arrived from outside the grove, which now held 4-6 birds. The birds were from 6 to 30 feet apart as best I could determine. Exact numbers and interactions were difficult to determine due to the thick foliage and the fact I only had about 20 minutes with the birds.

Each bird (which could be seen clearly, whether on a horizontal branch or vertical clean vine - both close beneath the canopy but in clear view) would flutter forward as if to fall beak-first off the branch, but holding on with their feet. At the same moment the bird would half-raise its wings and flutter them about pitifully as if trying to figure out what they were for. It concurrently raised and spread its tail with the curled and frilly feathers on the outer edge. The effect was of this large bird seeming to be trying to regain its balance on its perch, tail cocked high, while warbling its resonant notes. It would stop and regain its balance for awhile, then pitch forward and repeat the performance. Between performances it would look about as if to judge its effect. The iridescence of the upper body and the curl-crest was quite obvious. Occasionally a bird would move to another perch beneath the canopy. The way they bounded from branch to branch (when they did) reminded me of the movement of Macgregor's Bird of Paradise in their morning perch trees. Rather like big glorious, agile crows bounding about from branch to branch.

I never saw two birds come into contact. The performance noted above continued as I left. I do not claim that it was a lek but the birds did behave rather like lekking birds. It was possibly some kind of group interaction at the edge of a territory and may have included grown young of resident parents. It may also have been the equivalent of a singles' bar where members of each sex size one another up and go through the early stages of courtship prior to mating. The incessant calling, peering about, displaying, and choosing obvious perches from which to display - with no tail-chases - appeared lek-like however.

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