

**Whistling Kite (*Haliastur sphenurus*) kills and eats Green Pygmy Goose  
(*Nettapus pulchellus*)**

By Michael K. Tarburton

At 1045h on 30 July 1998, one of the resident Whistling Kites swooped across the campus of Pacific Adventist University and snatched an adult male Green Pygmy Goose from among a group of 43 such birds. These were in the company of Pacific Black Duck (*Anas superciliosa*), Australasian Grebes (*Tachybaptus novaehollandiae*) and other waterbirds on Pond Two.

The kite tried to land in a small tree next to its favourite roost tree, but gave up and landed on the ground between the trees about 20 metres from the edge of the pond. The bird, which was very pale indicating it to be an older bird, proceeded to pluck the body feathers from the ventral surface and after five minutes had completed that task as well as pulling out all the rectrices. This allowed it to eat the flesh of the tail, but before starting it walked about a metre with one foot on the carcass and one on the ground, to a place free of feathers. As it started to tear pieces from the body adjacent to the tail it would pause to make weak calls to the other Whistling Kite that had arrived overhead. There often are two on or over the campus.

Once most of the abdominal walls were consumed, the ligaments holding one of the legs were severed by the bill, and the whole leg swallowed. Some of the intestines were eaten and more of the abdominal area. One of the wings were then plucked and a little of the muscle stripped from it. After 34 minutes a Torresian Crow (*Corvus orru*) made the first of three approaches to within a metre by foot. At the third the kite flew at the crow and successfully chased it away. It did not return immediately to the carcass but remained about four metres away. When it returned it took only two small pieces before flying into the large tree near to where the other kite had settled.

I made use of this situation to approach the carcass to see if I could learn anything other than what I was able to see through the spotting scope. Both kites flew as I approached. The carcass confirmed what I have already described and the only additional data gained was that the abdomen had been consumed up to but not including the gizzard. The neck had been plucked but the head remained untouched.

At 1139h the kite returned and carried the carcass to a large branch about eight metres up the larger tree. This branch was a favourite feeding post as attested to by the dark "run marks" draped below the kites feet.

Feeding was concentrated on the other leg with two attempts to sever the thigh ligaments. The kite was clearly not as sure footed as when on the ground and was unsuccessful in separating the leg. It then concentrated on the breast muscles. Here too it had difficulty and the goose fell from its grip. The kite responded by flying further up the tree to give two loud calls. Feeding ended an hour and 10 minutes after starting, and no further feeding was seen in the next hour.

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**Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos* on New Britain**

By Roger Hicks

While waiting for an Air Niugini flight from Hoskins airport, West New Britain Province, on 27 September 1998, I passed the time by bird-watching around the airport terminal. Up to 20 Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*, one Large Sand-Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii* and one Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* foraged or roosted on the short grass bordering the airports runway and taxi-way. Among these waders was a sandpiper, which at first I thought was a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *Calidris acuminata*. Fortunately, it flew closer to the terminal so that I could observe it from a distance of about 30m, without the problems of heat haze, and could see that it was a Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*.

It was smaller than the Pacific Golden Plover; the Large Sand-Plover was too distant for direct comparison. It had a relatively short, straight, dark bill, yellowish at the base. There was no hint of rufous in its brownish crown. It had a pale supercilium. The streaked breast was a 'cold' brown with none of the buff or rufous tones of a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. The breast streaking was clearly demarcated from the white of the belly. Its legs were yellowish-green. In flight it showed a faint, pale wing bar while the rump had a dark central bar with white sides.

Pectoral Sandpiper is a regular but uncommon non-breeding visitor to PNG with the great majority of records (as for most migrant species visiting PNG) from the Port Moresby area (Coates 1985). The only records away from Port Moresby are from Higaturu, Northern Province and Bougainville, North Solomons Province (Coates 1985), which is more indicative of observer coverage than species occurrence. This is the first record of Pectoral Sandpiper for the island of New Britain and for the province of West New Britain.

Reference:

Coates, B.J. 1985. *Birds of Papua New Guinea*, Vol. 1. Dove Publications, Alderley.

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**Yellow-legged Pigeon (*Columba pallidiceps*) at Wild Dog, East New Britain**

By Phil Gregory

I was walking along the approach track to Wild Dog mining camp in the mountains inland from Rabaul, at an altitude of about 950m on 14 December 1995, when a large dark pigeon flew low across the track in front of me. I was surprised to note the head as being whitish, contrasting with the dark greyish-black body and seeming wrong for Black Imperial Pigeon (*Ducula melanochroa*). It was a species unfamiliar to me, but it was only upon returning home that I was able to consult Goodwin (1970) and identify the species as Yellow-legged Pigeon.

This is one of the most endangered birds of the region, with just a handful of sightings in recent times. Finch and McKean (1987) saw one near sea-level at Taron