

**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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(Received June 99)

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

in southern New Ireland in April 1984, and there have been a few records in the 1990's from the hill forests near Hauta on Makira, Solomon Islands. Subsequent to this sighting at Wild Dog, another Yellow-legged Pigeon was seen by Hank Kaestner in 1997 in hill forest inland from Rabaul, which suggest the continued presence of a small population in this region. I am not aware of any other recent records.

Several of the recent sightings have been of birds seen flying low down, which suggests the birds may be feeding on the ground. Birders in the Bismarcks should keep an eye out for this species as so little is known about it and it may be being overlooked.

References

Finch B. W. and McKean J. L. 1987. Some Notes on the Birds of the Bismarcks. *Muruk* 2:1, 3-28.
Goodwin, D 1970. *Pigeons and Doves of the World*. British Museum (Natural History).

Golden Monarch (*Monarcha chrysomela*) at Wild Dog, East New Britain

By Phil Gregory

During my visit to Wild Dog mining camp on 15 December 1995, I was watching a feeding flock of Golden Whistlers (*Pachycephala pectoralis*), Spangled Drongos (*Dicrurus hottentus*) and Bismarck Pied Monarchs (*Monarcha verticalis*), when I had good views of a female or immature plumaged Golden Monarch (*Monarcha chrysomela*). The small size, bright yellow underparts and the obvious pale mark below and in front of the eye were distinctive. The bird was on the edge of the forest at an altitude of about 900m.

The species is common on New Ireland and some of its satellite islands, but is previously unrecorded from New Britain. Perhaps there is a very localised population in the hill forest near Rabaul, or it was simply a wanderer? I publish the record to encourage others to look out for the species here.

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Documentation of Rare Birds in PNG

The PNG Bird Society recently decided that it would be desirable to formalize the process by which new species or major rarities are included in the avifauna of PNG. This has in the past been largely an *ad hoc* process, but it is desirable to bring it into line with many other countries, which have set up a small committee to vet records and establish a procedure for formal acceptance. This also facilitates the establishing of an archive of documentation, without which we run the risk of losing records or having a very random process of acceptance. We have followed the established rarity form template used by the Birds Australia Rarities Committee, whom we thank for permission to adapt the form now available.

We aim to be as transparent as possible with the process, it should be a simple matter to write up the sighting and let the committee vote on acceptance or otherwise.

We are happy to give reasons for acceptance or non-acceptance to the persons involved, and to publish details of additions to the avifauna, of which there is now something of a backlog.

The following have kindly agreed to form the initial committee, but expressions of interest from suitable persons who wish to be involved are also of interest.

K. David Bishop: One of the top PNG bird experts, a professional tour leader with vast experience there and with great knowledge of the avifauna.

Ian Burrows: Former professor of Biology at UPNG, with much experience of the country and its birds.

Brian Coates: Another of the top PNG bird experts, Brian is the author of the classic 2 volume standard avifauna *The Birds of PNG*.

Chris Eastwood: Experienced birder and longtime PNG resident, author of numerous notes and papers about his bird trips there.

Phil Gregory: Editor of *Muruk* and professional bird trip leader with much PNG experience, longtime resident of Tabubil in Western Province. Interim Secretary of PNGBS Rare Birds Committee, from whom rarity forms are available.

Please forward all correspondence and records to:

Secretary, PNGBS Rarities Committee, P. O. Box 387, Kuranda, Queensland 4872.

E-mail : sicklebill@internetnorth.com.au

Provisional list of requested species for which the committee would like to receive details:

- Any species not yet formally accepted onto the PNG list (see Beehler 1985 and Coates 1986 and 1990)
- Any species with less than 5 recorded occurrences, or which is not recorded annually in PNG territory or territorial waters.
- Rarely reported and very little known resident species.

Rare Species already recorded, or claimed * and pending possible acceptance (c)

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| Southern Giant Petrel | <i>Macronectes giganteus</i> |
| * Kermadec Petrel | <i>Pterodroma neglecta</i> (c) |
| Beck's Petrel | <i>Pterodroma becki</i> |
| Fairy Prion | <i>Pachyptila turtur</i> |
| Bulwer's Petrel | <i>Bulweria bulwerii</i> |
| Flesh-footed Shearwater | <i>Puffinus carneipes</i> |
| * Sooty Shearwater | <i>Puffinus griseus</i> (c) |
| Short-tailed Shearwater | <i>Puffinus tenuirostris</i> |
| * Hutton's Shearwater | <i>Puffinus huttoni</i> (c) |
| Heinroth's Shearwater | <i>Puffinus heinrothi</i> |
| * Audubon's Shearwater | <i>Puffinus l'herminieri</i> (c) |
| * Christmas Shearwater | <i>Puffinus nativitatis</i> (c) |
| Wilson's Storm-Petrel | <i>Oceanites oceanicus</i> |
| White-bellied Storm-Petrel | <i>Fregetta grallaria</i> |