

OBITUARY NOTICE Shortly after the July - August 2005 tour finished, news was received that the male Blue Bird of Paradise at the Tapuka quarry had been injured by an opportunist 'hunter' with a slingshot. The intention was to sell the bird to whoever wanted it for K70 (£14, \$25) but it was retrieved by a local landowner and duly died. The 'hunter' got nothing and the Tapuka area is far less attractive to visiting birders now. Perhaps another male will fill the void, but that is doubtful.

Bismarck (Torresian) Crow *Corvus (orru) insularis*

The birds in New Britain are very different from mainland birds, both in jizz and voice, so there are good grounds for splitting them off as the Island or Bismarck Crow *Corvus insularis*. They are at least as distinct as the various corvid species in Australia, and probably not closely related to Bougainville Crow (*C. woodfordi*), though this was suggested by Brian Finch (Muruk 1988).

The above sightings were extracted from the following tour reports, all followed the standard PNG itinerary based around Port Moresby/ Kiunga/ Ambua except where noted:

Birdquest May 1998: Phil Gregory, New Britain extension.

Sicklebill Safaris (Australia) Aug 1999; Phil Gregory.:

Baiyer River and Kumul Lodge. New Britain, New Ireland and Manus.

Sunbird 2000: Phil Gregory. Vanimo, Wau, Madang, Kiunga, New Britain.

Field Guides Islands of PNG 2002, 2003 and 2007: Phil Gregory. New Britain, Buka, Bougainville, New Ireland, New Hanover, Djaul, Tench Island, Manus.

Sicklebill Safaris (Australia) March 7-26 2004; Phil Gregory. D'Entrecasteaux Archipelago: Fergusson, Dobu and Normanby Is; Huon Peninsula near Satop; Ambua/Tari; Keki, Adelbert Mts.

Sicklebill Safaris (UK) 25 September to 21 October 2005; Ian Burrows. Kikori area, Kumul Lodge.

Rockjumper July-Aug 2005 Adam Riley & Stephen Bailey. Kumul Lodge.

Rockjumper 23 June-14 July 2006. David Shackelford & Stephen Bailey. Kumul Lodge and New Britain extension.

Rockjumper 10 - 31 July 2006; David Shackelford & Stephen Bailey. Kumul Lodge and New Britain extension.

Buka and Bougainville August 30 - September 4 2001

By Phil Gregory

Chris Eastwood and I made a trip to these islands, long off the route for birders due to the civil war, which has put them off-limits since 1989. Andy Anderson made a brief Buka trip in 1999, and was surprisingly here just the week before us, but no other birders have visited the islands for many years. Don Hadden was the

resident birder, teaching with the NZ Aid program, and he and his wife Llane (of *Cichlornis (Megalurulus) llanae* fame) were kind enough to host us at Arawa. Happily a peace process is now in place, and the long task of rebuilding from the ruins can begin, though the mountain areas are still firmly off limits and are likely to be so for some time. Bougainville is now an autonomous province of Papua New Guinea, with a referendum about independence scheduled for sometime in the future.

Buka is the small island that lies off the north-west tip of Bougainville, and which has escaped the devastation wrought on the towns and infrastructure of the main island. It is a useful birding destination in its own right, with many Solomon Islands species, which have been inaccessible there due to the political and social problems besetting that country.

Our brief look on Buka consisted of a morning and a part of two afternoons around Buka town and about 5km inland along the main road. We also had a careful check of the airstrip area for **Buff-bellied Mannikins** of the endemic and newly described (1995) race *bukaensis*, but failed to locate any. The following species were noted:

Buka species (Solomon's and Bismarck endemics are in bold type)

Lesser Frigatebird 18, Great Frigatebird 1, Intermediate Egret 1, Pacific Black Duck, Glossy Ibis 2 by the airstrip Aug 31- a new bird for Buka it seems, Osprey 3, **Sanford's Sea-Eagle** 1, Variable Goshawk 1, **Pied Goshawk** 1, Brahminy Kite, Melanesian Scrubfowl heard, Bush-hen heard, Grey-tailed Tattler, Common Sandpiper, Whimbrel, Turnstone, Crested Tern, **Solomon's Cockatoo**, Eclectus Parrot, **Cardinal Lory** very common, Red-flanked Lorikeet, Rainbow Lorikeet, **Green Pygmy-Parrot** 1, Nicobar Pigeon 2 imm, **Red-knobbed Imperial-Pigeon**, **Grey (Island) Imperial-Pigeon** quite common, Claret-breasted Fruit-Dove, Moustached Tree-swift, Uniform Swiftlet, Pacific Swallow, Blyth's Hornbill 2, Sacred Kingfisher, Collared Kingfisher heard in mangroves, Yellow-bellied Sunbird, **Midget Flowerpecker**, **Solomon's Satin Flycatcher**, **Bougainville Monarch** 1 male, **Red-naped Myzomela** singles on two dates only, Willie-wagtail, **Yellow-throated White-eye** common, Cicadabird 1m and 1 f, White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike, **Long-tailed Myna** 20+, Singing Starling 5, **Brown-winged Starling** 2 and a nest by the Lodge, Metallic Starling 20.

46 species

We traveled by PMV from Buka, after crossing the narrow Buka Strait that separates the two islands, taking about 4 hours to reach Arawa on pretty reasonable gravel roads. Arawa is a simply a shell, burnt out and destroyed by the Bougainville Revolutionary Army in their scorched earth policy, obliterating all traces of the Panguna mine infrastructure including such things as schools,

hospitals, electricity, water supplies, banking, postal services etc. A sad sight indeed, though the UN and NZ aid have reconnected a water system and supply power for about 4 hours a day to the people dwelling in the surviving houses. Two guest-houses now operate as well and signs of recovery are evident. We encountered no animosity, people were friendly and interested in what we were doing, and now again have some hope for the future.

We added a few species by coming down to Arawa, including the almost mythical **Woodford's Rail** which is quite common in the environs of the town and can be seen scuttling across the main road north. The long grass everywhere may have helped the survival of this species, which is listed as vulnerable in *Threatened Birds of the World* (BirdLife International 2001) and of which there have been very few sightings until Don found them commonly here. We saw 9 birds one day, including a pair with two juveniles out by the Arawa airstrip. I saw 4 on the return car ride to Buka, including two quite well north between Wakunai and Tinputz. The plumage was entirely black, with a pale bill and legs almost whitish in colour, and the eye was reddish. The birds often ran across the road with wings upraised, and we saw them foraging along the banks of the main river in town and coming out on the shingle banks in the water.

Sanford's Sea-Eagle was elusive, and one we particularly wanted after just a glimpse on Buka. Fortunately we eventually did see a single bird out by the airstrip, and had scope views of it perched for a while. **Bougainville Monarch** was sparse but not uncommon in the understorey of forest, and we heard the **Solomon's Boobook** out in the same area on a night foray. **Bougainville Crow** was very scarce, we saw just 5 birds in total north of the Arawa/Panguna road junction. Good news was that **Common Myna** is down to a single pair and we had to twitch this for our PNG list in the ruins of the petrol station in Arawa, where it was formerly common. Hopefully it will die out soon!

Bougainville species

Wedge-tailed Shearwater 1 off Kieta, Reef Heron 1, Pacific Black Duck, Little Pied Cormorant, Osprey , **Sanford's Sea-Eagle** 1, Variable Goshawk 1, **Pied Goshawk** 1, Brahminy Kite, **Melanesian Scrubfowl** heard, Bush-hen heard, Purple Swamphen, Grey-tailed Tattler 3, Terek Sandpiper 1, Common Sandpiper 12, Whimbrel, Turnstone, Pacific Golden Plover 15, Lesser Sand Plover 3, Crested Tern, **Solomon's Cockatoo**, Eclectus Parrot, **Cardinal Lory** very common, Red-flanked Lorikeet, Rainbow Lorikeet, **Duchess Lorikeet** 2, **Red-knobbed Imperial-Pigeon**, **Grey (Island) Imperial-Pigeon** quite common, Claret-breasted Fruit-Dove 7 , Superb Fruit-Dove 5, **Mackinlay's Cuckoo-Dove** 5, **Solomon's Boobook** 3 heard, Moustached Tree-swift, Uniform Swiftlet, White-rumped Swiftlet, Pacific Swallow, Blyth's Hornbill 2, Collared Kingfisher, **Ultramarine Kingfisher** 4, Brush Cuckoo 1 (very distinctive song, quite unlike

Australian or NG birds and quite richly coloured beneath, subspecies *addendus*. Taxonomic status needs genetic work), Koel sp. heard (Asian?), Yellow-bellied Sunbird, **Midget Flowerpecker**, **Solomon's Satin Flycatcher**, **Bougainville Monarch** 5, Willie-wagtail, **Cockerell's Fantail** 4, **Yellow-throated White-eye** common, Australian Reed Warbler many heard and one seen at Kieta, Cicadabird 1m and 1 f, White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike 5, **Solomon's Black-bellied Cuckoo-shrike** 2, **Long-tailed Myna** 20+, Singing Starling 5, **Brown-winged Starling** 8, Metallic Starling, Common Myna 2.
58 species

The Collared-type Kingfishers here are very like Sacred in plumage, only more intensely coloured, with intermediate sized bills. They were very vocal and showing signs of breeding activity.

The total trip list was some 67 species.

We had only been at Don and Llane's house in Arawa some 5 minutes when Don's collector John Toroura appeared down from the mountains with live specimens of some species destined for the American Museum of Natural History. The following were taken at 1500m, and were duly photographed, measured and described:

Yellow-bibbed Fruit-Dove 1, Bronze Ground-Dove 1, Brush Cuckoo 1 which I initially thought was a Fan-tailed as it was so rufous beneath, Island Leaf Warbler, **Grey-throated White-eye** 1, **Red-naped Myzomela** 1 f, **Hooded Whistler** 1 female, **Bougainville Thicketbird** 1 presumed immature of this species- heavy black streaks on breast, faint rufous supercilium, broad dark eyestripe extending onto ear coverts, narrow dark malar stripe and broader pale moustachial. A short orangey gape suggested an immature, but there were no wing bars or obvious feather scaling. See the photo in Hadden (2005).

John has also brought in two specimens of the legendary Odedi bird, which was known by its call from the montane areas but remained unseen. It is a small warbler type along the lines of Shade Warbler and was formally described as the Odedi Warbler (*Cettia haddeni*) in 2005.

Thanks to Don and Llane Hadden for their hospitality, and to Chris Eastwood for accompanying me on this scouting trip, which was partly sponsored by Field Guides Inc., to whom I am most grateful.

Phil Gregory, Cassowary House, Kuranda, Queensland, Australia, September 2001.