

A probable Mayr's Swiftlet *Collocalia orientalis leletensis* on New Ireland and a review of previous records

By Guy Dutson

Mayr's Swiftlet *Aerodramus orientalis* is known only from three specimens. The type was taken in 1927 from an unknown locality on Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands (Mayr 1935, 1936). The single specimen of *leletensis* was taken in 1962 at 900 m on the Lelet plateau on New Ireland in Papua New Guinea (Salomonsen 1963). A single specimen of an undescribed subspecies was taken in 1979 at 1200 m on Bougainville (Ripley 1983). The taxonomy of these specimens is uncertain; they had been included with Whitehead's Swiftlet *A. whiteheadi* of the Philippines (e.g. Mayr 1945) before splitting as *C. orientalis* (Somadikarta 1967), the Bougainville subspecies has been left unnamed awaiting further material, and the relationship between the three rather distinct specimens is unclear (Somadikarta 1967, Ripley 1983).

Field observations of this species are complicated by the identification difficulties of swiftlets, this species' rarity and the occurrence of little-known subspecies of the Uniform Swiftlet *A. vanikorensis*. There have been two possible field records of *A. orientalis*. Bishop (1983) noted a uniformly dull brown swiftlet on New Britain in 1980, which was larger with different flight than *A. vanikorensis*. Blaber (1990) noted a large unidentified swiftlet on New Georgia in the Solomon Islands in 1987. Hicks (1992) observed swiftlets on Manus in 1989 and Hornbuckle (unpubl. report) observed swiftlets on Mussau (both in Papua New Guinea) in 1999, which they believed may have been *A. orientalis*. However these Manus and Mussau records clearly refer to *A. vanikorensis coultasi* which neither observed but is common on both islands (pers. obs. 1990, 1997). *A. v. coultasi* has a variably defined paler rump, which is unlike other subspecies of *A. vanikorensis* but suggestive of *A. orientalis*.

On 6 August 1997, a probable *A. orientalis* flew past me amongst a movement of about 300 *A. vanikorensis* and 10 White-rumped Swiftlets *A. spodiopygius* over logged forest at 400 m above Taron on New Ireland. It appeared very different to the otherwise unvaried *A. vanikorensis*. It was clearly larger with stronger flight, and blacker with glossy black upperparts and hardly paler underparts. Its size, flight action, gloss, blackish upperparts and uniform dark underparts are all features of *A. o. leletensis*. An addition feature of *A. o. leletensis*, the shorter tail with a shallower fork, was not discernable under these conditions. However the upperparts appeared uniform whereas the single specimen of *A. o. leletensis* has an indistinct grey rump-band. In view of this discrepancy and the rarity of *A. o. leletensis*, this record is judged 'probable' but unconfirmed. No other unusual swiftlets were seen amongst many thousands of *A. vanikorensis* observed subsequently across Melanesia.

Phil Gregory saw two probable Mayr's Swiftlet *Collocalia mayri* hawking low over the main road north outside Namatanai Aug. 25 1999. They were clearly none of the regular species, being larger and much darker with glossy black upperparts, no pale rump and paler but still dusky underparts. Mayr's Swiftlet seems a distinct possibility. Similar birds have now also been seen up on the Lelet Plateau near Limbin in June 2007 (PG).

References

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Author's address: c/o Birds Australia, 60 Leicester Street, Carlton, Vic 3053, Australia.

The birds of Djaul Island, New Ireland

By Guy Dutson

(Taxonomy, nomenclature and distribution follow Coates (1985, 1990) unless otherwise stated.)

The birds of the small islands around New Ireland are relatively poorly known. In July 1997, I spent between three and five days on each of Lavongai (=New