

- Clay, J. (1994) Nakanai '93. *An Oxford University expedition to New Britain island, Papua New Guinea*. Unpublished report.
- Coates, B. J. (1985) *The birds of Papua New Guinea. Vol I*. Alderley, Australia: Dove Publications.
- Palliser, T. (1992) An unknown rail sighted in West New Britain Muruk 5: 62-63.
- del Hoyo, J., Elliott, A. & Sargatal, J. (1997) *Handbook of the birds of the world. Vol. 4*. Sandgrouse to cuckoos. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona.

Author's address: c/o Birds Australia, 60 Leicester Street, Carlton, Vic 3053, Australia. (Submitted Sept. 2001)

Notes on the New Ireland Boobook (*Ninox variegata*)

By Phil Gregory

During a trip to New Ireland in June 2000 we found this poorly known species in hill forest along the road to Limbin, on the Lelet Plateau. This is now a regular site for it, from the coast up to the plateau. The birds are typical of many *Ninox* in that they duet, with the male call presumably being the deeper toned one as is usual with the genus. A male seen at about 900m altitude adopted a curious horizontal crouching posture along the branch, with the wings slightly drooped on either side of the limb and showing prominent black barring on the very dark grey primaries. The head appeared greyish with a paler forehead; the underparts were well spotted with dark and the chest washed rufous with a paler throat. The eyes were yellow and the legs and feet orange. Each time he called he would pump the wings downwards, the call being a deep gruff grunting disyllabic rapidly repeated "prrrt-prrrt prrrt-prrrt" series, the disyllabic calls repeated three or four times.

There are very few records of the species, which may not be uncommon wherever hill forest survives on New Ireland. In the older literature it is also erroneously recorded from New Britain as well, and given the inappropriate name of Bismarck Boobook, when it is actually a New Ireland endemic. We suggest the vernacular name should reflect this status. We also suggest the use of the appropriate local vernacular name boobook (onomatopoeic, derived from the call) for the small and medium sized *Ninox* owls, rather than the confusing American coining Hawk-Owl. There are two other not closely related genera (Northern Hawk Owl *Surnia ulula* and Papuan Hawk-Owl *Uroglaux dimorpha*) which are better known by this name.

Author's address: PO Box 387, Kuranda, Queensland 4881.
Eddress: sicklebill@optusnet.com.au