

Notes on the Papuan Hawk-Owl (*Uroglaux dimorpha*)

By Phil Gregory

This species is one of the least known New Guinea birds, with few records from widely scattered lowland sites, and the call undescribed. Richard Webster and I were staying at Karawari Lodge, West Sepik in July 2002 when we were awakened about 0500 by an unfamiliar hooting call. It was vaguely reminiscent of a coucal (*Centropus*) but was not the right tone or structure, so we made tapes of it and were fortunate in getting the bird to respond and come in. It sat atop a palm and we could clearly see it was a medium-sized rather small-headed owl with dark streaks on the underparts and yellow eyes, Papuan Hawk-Owl being the only species that fits this description. We heard it calling about 2000 on subsequent nights but it buried itself in dense foliage quite high in a forest tree and was totally invisible, though calling almost continually for some 45 minutes. In 2003 Rose-Ann Rowlett and I staged a reprise of this scenario and got more views of it perched atop a tree, though still without seeing the upperparts properly.

The call is a very distinctive low, mournful, hooting disyllabic “hoo-hoo” series with a slight but distinct pause between each note, quite unlike any of the other New Guinea owls. This disyllabic call may sometimes have a single “hoo” added at the end, and a more emphatic faster series may have the notes almost run together.

The same hooting calls were heard along the river at Ekame Lodge, Elevala River some 60 km north of Kiunga in May 2005, though again we were not able to see the bird itself. Samuel Kepuknai reports that a Papuan Hawk-Owl was trapped here some time in 2003, and by call the species is clearly present. In April 2007 I was able to tape-in a bird and have prolonged close views of it right by Ekame Lodge.

We briefly heard the bird at Karawari in 2004 but not in 2005, but in August 2006 we had great success to playback and got a bird to come in and perch at eye-level, seeing the barred upperparts clearly and a quite long barred tail. It also gave a distinctive rather dry purring “prrr prrr prrr” introduction to the hooting series.

K. D. Bishop reported a strange wailing sequence almost like a Bush Stone-curlew (*Burhinus*) as being a possible call of this species from near Kutubu in 1998, but the tape sounds nothing like these calls and should be left uncertain for the moment. It was unfortunately featured as being made by this species in König et al (1999), but this seems premature based on current knowledge.

Reference

König, C., Weick, F., and Becking, J-H. (1999) *Owls: A Guide to the Owls of the World*. Pica Press, Sussex.

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Notes on the Mussau (St. Matthias) Triller (*Lalage conjuncta*)

By Phil Gregory

This is an exceedingly little known taxon, which was recently elevated to specific status in del Hoyo et al (2005). We summarise below some observations on this form made in June 1999.

We were interested to find the local subspecies *conjuncta* of Varied Triller (*Lalage leucomela*), which both Brian Coates and Guy Dutson believe is likely to be a new species. We found it to be quite common above 100m in secondary or cut-over forest growth, and a most distinctive bird it is too, differing from Varied Triller in 8 key characters:

1. No supercilium.
2. Sexes basically the same, though some variation in colour intensity of the underparts may be sex linked.
3. Virtually no barring on the underparts, just some scaling on the chest by the bend of the wing.
4. White chin and throat, then a richly coloured lower breast, flanks, belly, under tail coverts and vent, either orangey-buff or a quite rich cinnamon, far more extensive than the colour on Varied Triller.
5. A large white wing patch, very obvious in flight as an irregular patch at the base of the primaries.
6. A white rump.
7. Some white spots on the under tail.
8. Far more vocal than Varied Triller, the call of similar pattern but far more continuously given, higher pitched, more musical and less raspy.

We also found a nest; a mossy cup sited some 25 m up on a forked branch of one of the Acacia-type trees. It is a hill forest bird here, seen in groups of 2 or 3, perching high in the trees and with a fondness for sparsely leaved *Acacia* type trees. We believe this is not some taxon of Varied Triller, but rather a distinct endemic species that may not even be closely related to Varied Triller, given that Varied Trillers on both New Ireland and Manus are nothing like this bird. It has simply not been studied before and few (maybe only one?) museum specimens exist.