

## 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.

Specific status seems well-deserved and genetic work to establish the close relationships would be desirable, in many ways it is more reminiscent of Black-browed Triller (*L. atrovirens*)

## Reference

del Hoyo, J. et al. (2005). *Handbook of the Birds of the World Vol. 10*. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona.

## **Names of New Guinea birds: an Editorial Perspective**

There has been a move to standardise the vernacular names of birds, with both the Asian Bird Club and the IOC leading a move in this direction. The recent (2007) publication of *Birds of the World Recommended English Names*, by McGill and Wright was put together by a small group of experts without wide consultation. Our view is that where a name is confusing or inappropriate, or the same as one in wide use elsewhere, then clearly a consensus decision is required. An instance in New Guinea is Vulturine Parrot (*Psittrichas fulgidus*), having the same name as a South American species (*Pionopsitta vulturina*), so it could be renamed Pesquet's Parrot.

A good general guideline is to use the established names as per the main field guides for the country, a principle which was sadly ignored by Clements in his checklist for the African and Australasian regions and which has caused much confusion ever since. North American names are far too often widely at variance with the names being used in the countries where the bird occurs. This smacks of cultural insensitivity to say the least. Moves to remove the names of historical pioneers (usually dead white males in politically correct jargon) from specific names are an initiative of the Asian Bird Club and seem regrettable, losing a lot of historic names for often poor descriptive alternatives.

We by and large use the common New Guinea field guide names, choosing what we feel to be the most appropriate where Coates is at variance with Beehler et al. A few coinings of our own are used for some taxa, such as Bismarck Crow (*Corvus (orru) insularis*) which we feel is long overdue for specific status, and Island Myna for the inaccurate Long-tailed Myna (*Mino kreffti*). We also favour a narrow taxonomic approach, as opposed to broad species groups, which lump many subspecies together, and opt for splitting taxa where a good case can be made. A revised New Guinea checklist is badly needed, using appropriate vernacular names and reviewing some records of rare birds.