

### **Trip Report Sightings of note (April and June 2007)**

*Courtesy of Sicklebill Safaris (Australia) and Field Guides Inc.*

#### **Melanesian Scrubfowl *Megapodius eremita***

Flight views at Garu on New Britain and we saw some of the holes dug in the heated soil there, then an amazing experience at the colony on the slopes of Tarvurur volcano at Rabaul April 2007. The local lads dig out something like a thousand eggs per day and maybe something approaching half a million p.a., going as much as 2m deep into the soft volcanic ash, with a real risk of a cave-in and getting suffocated! Astonishing how the birds continue to survive with this level of predation. Eggs sell for over K1 each so this is a very important local asset. Also seen on remote isolated Tench Island off New Ireland, a real tribute to the dispersive powers of the species.

#### **White-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon lepturus***

None seen on Tench but or two seen briefly off-shore June 2007. This is its only New Guinea breeding station.

#### **Red-footed Booby *Sula sula***

Great views on Tench Island June 2007, perched in trees and fishing offshore.

#### **Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster***

One adult on Tench June 2007, sat in an tree, and some saw one in Kimbe Bay.

#### **Plumed Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna eytoni***

There were 8 of this rare vagrant to PNG by the main lake at the PAU, Port Moresby in gathering darkness pre-storm on April 13 2007. This was only about the fourth record, maybe the dry weather in Australia has pushed them northwards? One bird was still present June 9 2007.

**Eastern Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus (ibis) coromanda*

One at Hoskins in June 2007 was unusual.

**Nankeen Night Heron** *Nycticorax caledonicus*

One at Walindi, and two singles in Arawa Jun 2007.

**Black Bittern** *Dupetor flavicollis*

One adult was standing out in an open grass field en route to Garu June 2007, no doubt wondering why it's habitat was now largely over-planted with the dreaded oil palm.

**Doria's Hawk** *Megatriorchis doriae*

One of this rarity just below the Fly-Elevala River confluence on April 17 2007, flying across the river. They are curiously short-winged with a long barred tail, very odd looking.

**Sanford's Sea Eagle** *Haliaeetus sanfordi*

The group were fortunate to get one from Kuri Lodge on Buka Jun 2007, and one over their truck near Kokopau on Bougainville. It is a scarce species, quite hard to get.

**Woodford's Rail** *Nesoclopeus woodfordi*

A pleasant surprise was two birds in the road near Nick's village on Buka Jun 2007, my first record from this island. Also seen around Arawa but the birds in the town have become much harder to find and are I suspect under hunting pressure. We saw 4 or 5 in the road on a couple of days June 2007.

**Beach Thick-knee** *Esacus magnirostris*

An unexpected record was one calling in flight off Restorf Island, heading towards Walindi on April 5 2007.

**Little Ringed Plover** *Charadrius dubius*

An adult of uncertain race on river gravel by Warangoi bridge, April 4 2007, and one at Km 120 near Tabubil. The subspecies in New Guinea *dubius* has a very different call compared to Western Palearctic birds and could well be a split.

**Swinhoe's Snipe** *Gallinago megala*

7 at Kokopo airstrip April 3 2007 and 35+ in a pasture field on the way to Garu on April 6 2007, great flight views of this pot-bellied species with the monosyllabic dry call.

**Grey-tailed Tattler** *Tringa brevipes*

One unexpectedly on river gravels some way inland at Warangoi April 4 2007, and one at Walindi. Inland records are unusual.

**Red-necked Phalarope** *Phalaropus lobatus*

120+ at sea in small flocks north of Restorf Island on April 5 2007, some coming into breeding dress and clearly migrating through. There are wintering records to March, and an October record of 4000-5000 on Lake Dakataua on Willaumez peninsula nearby (Bishop 1983).

**Black Noddy** *Anous minutus*

Common and nesting on Tench, and a few en route to New Hanover.

**Brown Noddy** *Anous stolidus*

Nesting on Tench, and a single off Walindi, also one in Rabaul Harbour on the Beehive volcanic plug.

**White Tern** *Gygis alba*

This lovely delicate species was nesting on Tench, with a tiny pepper-and-salt chick sat on a bare diagonal branch in the village. This is its sole New Guinean nesting site.

**Feral Pigeon** *Columba livia*

Birds at Lorengau on Manus may well be the real feral pigeon, which may not really be established in mainland PNG, (there was excitement in Kavieng where two had just showed up!)

**Yellow-bibbed Fruit Dove** *Ptilinopus solomonensis*

A pleasant bonus on Tench, where we showed the village lads a picture and they took us to a fruiting tree nearby, where one of this tiny small island dove showed well. Also heard on Tong.

**Claret-breasted Fruit Dove** *Ptilinopus viridis*

A male sat up near Arawa on Bougainville June 2007.

**Knob-billed Fruit Dove** *Ptilinopus insolitus*

Fairly common around Garu, and a few on New Ireland.

**Pacific Imperial Pigeon** *Ducula pacifica*

This is an elusive species, mainly known from small remote islands such as Tench, where we had great looks at several fine adults with large bill knobs in Jun 2007.

**Red-knobbed Imperial Pigeon** *Ducula rubricera*

Fine views on New Britain and New Ireland, with the very distinct *rufigula* subspecies on Bougainville. One on New Hanover June 2007 was by a nest (we later discovered from the photos!) and a village girl there had a small juvenile.

**Finsch's Imperial Pigeon** *Ducula finschii*

Heard on New Britain, then one sat up near Limbin on New Ireland June 2007, with a fly-by again later on that day.

**Island Imperial Pigeon** *Ducula pistrinaria*

Common on the islets in Kimbe Bay, and again on Manus.

**Black Imperial Pigeon** *Ducula melanochroa*

Just a few on the Limbin Road, New Ireland June 2007, they were perhaps scarcer than normal but we did get one sat up for great looks, and few nice flyovers of small flocks.

**Yellow-tinted Imperial Pigeon** *Ducula (spilorrhoea) subflavescens*

This distinctive form is split by some authorities and is a Bismarck endemic. We saw a few nicely around Garu and Kerevat.

**Papuan Mountain Pigeon** *Gymnophaps albertisii*

A flock of 14 on two days on the Limbin Road, New Ireland June 2007, it is high altitude species here, unlike on mainland New Guinea.

**Red-chinned Lorikeet** *Charmosyna rubrigularis*

This was common along the Limbin Road in June 2007, with over 100 one day, attracted to the flowering trees there.

**Bismarck (Green-fronted) Hanging Parrot** *Loriculus tener*

A strange call at Taskul on New Hanover saw this species come bulleting out for a flight glimpse for a few!

**Oriental Cuckoo** *Cuculus (saturatus) horsfieldi*

This Asian migrant was seen at Kiunga airstrip and km April 18 2007, and also near Dablin Creek April 20 2007. Silent birds are not identifiable to taxon, so the recent split here is problematic for us. It is assumed most are *horsfieldi*, but it is possible that the Himalayan Cuckoo *C. saturatus* also occurs.

**Long-billed Cuckoo** *Rhamphomantis megarhynchus*

This rare and little known bird was seen along Ketu Creek, and then an adult at Km 17; the host is still unknown and it seems to be an ancestral form to the other small cuckoos

**Shining Bronze-Cuckoo** *Chrysococcyx lucidus*

A female with a green cap along the Kulu R road near Kimbe April 5 2007. Several fine views on Bougainville June 2007, the species is a migrant from Australia, and one bird at Kisas village on Buka was clearly of this race.

**Manus Boobook** *Ninox meeki*

Great looks at this rather gingery colored species with the heavily streaked front near Lorengau Jun 2007. It was the fourth and final boobook for the trip.

**New Ireland (Bismarck) Boobook** *Ninox variegata*

The third boobook of the trip, coming in right away for a great look along the Limbin Road, the wings drooped down on either side of the branch as it grunted away. This should really be called the New Ireland Boobook, as it does not occur on New Britain, as was at one time thought (and is still being published!)

**Solomon's Boobook** *Ninox jacquinoti*

This one was sat up in hole in a huge tree near Morgan near Arawa and peering out on a strange heavily overcast afternoon where it got dark really early. We had terrific scope views of the bird. This is a potential split (Bougainville Boobook) as the two other insular races in the Solomons look very different and may have significant vocal differences too.

**New Britain Boobook** *Ninox odiosa*

A pair calling well out at the site along the Kulu River road April 4 2007, which was literally being destroyed as we waited. Still hanging on nearby in June 2007.

**Papuan Hawk-Owl** *Uroglaux dimorpha*

An amazing view of one at Ekame Lodge April 15 2007, I played some tape and it came in silently to perch at eye level and give us a wonderful view. It's the first time I've seen it here but I found them calling in previous years. Still a very little known species with the call only known since 2002.

**Mayr's Swiftlet** ? *Aerodramus orientalis leletensis*

There is a large and dark swiftlet on New Ireland, which is almost blackish above and more like Mountain Swiftlet (*C. hirundinaceus*) than Uniform (*C. vanikorensis*). It has quite dark underparts with the same colour chin and throat, and seems larger than Uniform and much darker, less brownish. It does not however show a pale greyish rump like the one specimen of Mayr's Swiftlet that was taken here. It seems unlikely that a second undescribed species would be here, but until more are collected or netted we simply don't know. We saw a few near Limbin in June 2007.

**Shovel-billed Kingfisher** *Clytoceyx rex*

A female came in silently at dusk along the Ok Ma Road April 20 2007. One of the great New Guinea prizes.

**White-mantled Kingfisher** *Halcyon albonotatus*

Two near Warangoi near Rabaul April 2007, and then one at Garu, always a hard species to find as it is not very vocal.

**Collared Kingfisher** *Halcyon chloris*

The taxonomy of this species group is a mess- 49 races, two being supposedly sympatric on New Ireland, New Britain birds having rich rusty underparts and distinct calls, birds on New Ireland looking like a big Forest Kingfisher etc. Splitting is way overdue, but for the record we saw: *tristrami* on New Britain, *nusae* on New Ireland and *alberti* on Bougainville. The birds on New Britain are fairly small, rusty below and live in forest. How can this be the same species as Collared Kingfisher?

**Black-headed Paradise Kingfisher** *T. (sylvia) nigriceps*

This is an island allospecies of Buff-breasted (*T. sylvia*), and we got super looks at Garu as well as a flyby and hearing it at Warangoi April 4 2007.

**Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher** *T. sylvia*

An adult and juvenile along the Varirata Lookout trail April 22 2007, definitely not early migrants from Australia but birds of the local race *sylvia*.

**Ashy Myzomela** *M. cinereifrons*

Just two at Kilu Ridge April 2007, curiously scarce this time.

**Sclater's (Red-bibbed) Myzomela** *M. sclateri*

20+ of this small island Bismarck endemic April 6 2007, feeding very actively on Restorf, Big Malo Malo and Kimbe Islands.

**Mountain Honeyeater (Meliphaga)** *M. orientalis*

This small montane Meliphaga was seen at Dablin April 2007.

**Yellow-gaped Honeyeater (Meliphaga)** *M. flavirictus*

I think we saw this a couple of times around Ekame in the forest in April 2007. It has a "chup" call (like most!), a yellow

gape line and greyish legs. It is seldom recorded and may be quite rare, but identification problems cloud the issue; I have very few sightings to date but I suspect it is regular here.

**Mimic & Puff-backed Honeyeater (Meliphaga)** *M. mimikae* / *M. aruensis*

Meliphagas seen along the river above Kiunga probably belong to one or both of these species, but brief views make field i.d. problematic, and calls are seemingly no help. They are one of the most difficult of all bird genera, far worse than greenbuls or cisticolas, with taxonomy still unresolved and vocalizations largely unknown.

**Yellow-tinted Honeyeater** *Lichenostomus flavescens*

Seen at the PAU April and June 2007, the race here (*germana*) has a curious call similar to Fuscous Honeyeater (*L. fuscus*) i.d. in Far North Queensland. Some genetic work here could be instructive, especially as the Fuscous has a much closer range than the Yellow-tinted.

**Manus Cuckooshrike** *Coracina (papuensis) ingens*

This was split as Manus Cuckooshrike in the *Handbook of the Birds of the World*. It is quite a bit larger than White-bellied (*C. papuensis*), has a big bill and seems much greyer on the chest. I had never paid it any mind before this trip, but we sought it out on the last morning on Manus with a fine look at a single at Rossun Jun 2007, though sadly no calls were heard.

**Cicadabird** *Coracina tenuirostris*

More splits pending, these island taxa have very distinct vocalizations and are clearly allospecies. The rusty and unbarred female on Bougainville is noteworthy. We saw what are currently races as follows: *heinrothi* on New Britain, *saturator* on Bougainville, *remota* on New Ireland.

**Solomon Is. Cuckooshrike** *Coracina holopolia*

Two males near Arawa Jun 2007, which came in nicely to tape.

**Papuan Sittella** *Daphoenositta (chrysoptera) papuensis*

This newly-split taxon was seen very well at Ambua with 8 birds on April 12 2007, and 2 the next day.

**Bismarck Fantail** *Rhipidura dahl*

Great looks at one of this scarce endemic in forest near Limbin.

**Manus Fantail** *Rhipidura semirubra*

Our trip to Tong June 2007 twitched this very nicely, with lovely views near where we landed. It is now restricted to a few tiny islands having seemingly died out on Manus proper, and the total population must be very small.

**Rufous Fantail** *Rhipidura rufifrons*

The Rufous Fantail in forest near Arawa is actually the taxon *commoda*, placed with this species and not Arafura Fantail despite the white tail tips. More work is need to establish the relations of these island forms.

**Black-faced Monarch** *Monarcha melanopsis*

One at Varirata April 22 2007 would be a winter visitor from Australia.

**Island Monarch** *Monarcha cinerascens*

Two on Big Malo Malo April 6 2007 were a useful trip bird; it is another small island specialist.

**Solomon's Pied Monarch** *Monarcha barbatus*

One near Morgan Jun 2007, finally it came good and really showed off, just as I was giving it up. It's a striking pied monarch with big white shoulder patch, again a very sparse and low density species.

**Atoll Starling** *Aplonis feadensis*

A real special bird of tiny, remote islands, we had them very well on Tench with at least 18 birds. Adults have a piercing yellow eye and immatures have a greyish one.

**Brown-winged Starling** *Aplonis grandis*

Just a few of this localised Solomon's endemic on Buka and Bougainville.

**Bismarck Flycatcher** *Microeca* sp. nov.

This undescribed species sat up and posed for us near Limbin, Jun 2007, and we got the first ever photos of this brown and white *Microeca* type which has to date been seen just a handful of times- with 4 of the sightings here, and just two on New Britain.

**Eurasian Tree Sparrow** *Passer montanus*

A major surprise in April 2007 and again in June 2007 was seeing Eurasian Tree Sparrows at Kimbe. This was the first record for Papua New Guinea, and it was clearly a new arrival, though now subsequently noted in Port Moresby, and a potential colonist. Birds looked to be nesting in April as they were carrying dried grass under the eaves of the warehouse.

**White-spotted Mannikin** *Lonchura leucosticta*

A scarce and restricted range western endemic that later Clements up-dates lump with Streak-headed Mannikin (*L. tristissima*), though the IOC separate it We saw 4+ at the airstrip, 6+ at km 14 on Boystown Road Kiunga April 2007.

**Forbes's Mannikin** *Lonchura forbesi*

A very scarce endemic on New Ireland, with immatures of other mannikins having a superficial resemblance to it and sometimes misidentified e.g. Kavieng records require confirmation. We found some small groups on the Lelet Plateau and got some good views, the bright chestnut back and black undertail with black head really show well.

**Hunstein's Mannikin** *Lonchura hunsteini*

Kavieng airstrip is the best place for this very localised northern New Ireland endemic, and we had good views in June 2007. There is apparently an introduced population in the Caroline Is., which some list as a distinct subspecies *minor*, supposedly only there since the 1920's- there is clearly something amiss here, and what an odd species to introduce, it is seemingly not known as a cagebird these days. It would be good to get confirmation of both the identification and the puzzling taxonomic status of these birds, especially given the reports of such a recent introduction.

The New Hanover taxon *Lonchura (hunsteini) nigerrima* is one that Clements for some reason best known to himself has split as New Hanover Munia; this needs to be substantiated as the call is very like Hunstein's, and the bird is basically much like that species but with an entirely black head. They are quite common around Taskul on New Hanover.

**Buff-bellied Mannikin** *Lonchura melaena*

Now quite common around Numundo and at Hoskins airstrip, much more so than ten years ago when they were quite hard to find. 20 near Numundo near Kimbe April 4 2007, and small numbers on the next two days. Immature has black breast patches and adults have black heads, contra Restall (1996). Also c. 20 south of Kavieng, with really vivid reddish tails and strongly red-buff underparts. First found on New Ireland in 1999, and maybe either a new subspecies or the mysterious taxon *bukaensis*, described from Buka where it is no longer found at the type locality, the airstrip there.

References

Bishop, K. D. (1983). Some notes on Non-Passerine birds of West New Britain. *Emu* 83: 235-241.

Restall, R. (1996) *Munias and Mannikins*. Pica Press, Sussex.