NEST RECORDS FROM NORTH OF THE CENTRAL CORDILLERA OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA

LORRAINE LAMOTHE

A perusal of Coates (1985) indicates that few nest records exist for Papua New Guinea, especially away from the Port Moresby and the Papuan area generally. I offer here a few nest records, collected opportunistically over the past several years, from the Bulolo area, Morobe Province.

Brown Cuckoo-Dove *Macropygia amboinensis*

a) September 1977, in a young Klinkii Pine *Araucaria hunsteinii* in Gesch's Seed Orchard, Bulolo.

b) 13 April 1980, rough structure of grass, pine needles and ferns built onto a road cut at Kaisenik Plantation (*Pinus patula*). c. 14 cm in diameter. Contained one egg.

c) 29 September 1980, a nest of pine needles (main and upper most material), dry ferns and a few *Pinus* twigs (at the bottom) inter woven with rooted grasses. *c.* 11 to 12.5 cm in diameter. Found in a different road cut at Kaisenik Plantation, *c.* 1.5 above road level. One egg.

d) 8 December 1982, nest high on road cut (over 2 m up) at Kaisenik Plantation. One egg.

Emerald Ground-Dove *Chalcophaps indica*

2 May 1982. Female found dead in duck pen at a residence at the Forestry Station, Bulolo. Contained an enlarged ovum (*c.* 6 x 6 mm).

Superb Fruit-Dove *Ptilinopus superbus*

8 October 1985, carrying nesting material, Manki logging area, Bulolo.

Pheasant Coucal *Centropus phasianus*

15 April 1982, at the base of *Pinus caribaea* in a 4 year old plantation just outside Bulolo. Nest made of Kunai leaves. Two eggs.

Marbled Frogmouth *Podargus ocellatus*

14 November 1980, netted and collected in *P. patula* plantation, Kaisenik, Morobe Province. Contained fully developed but unhardened egg *c.* 50 x 40 mm in dimension.

Shining Flycatcher *Myiagra alecto*

September 1977, Nest overhanging the creek at Gesch's Seed Orchard, Bulolo.

Yellow-bellied Sunbird *Nectarinia jugularis*

a) 13 August 1982, nest (abandoned) *c.* 3 m off the ground in a young hoop pine *Araucaria cunninghamii* in the Forest Research Station nursery, Bulolo. The nest, especially the bottom and top, was made up of case-bearer cases. The main body of the nest was bound primarily with grasses.

b) 21 August 1982. Nest found in a lemon tree *c.* 2.5 to 3.0 m above the ground. Located in a gully running through the Forestry Station housing area, Bulolo. Nest completely lined with fluffy seed material, probably *Parsonia*, Apocynaceae.

Mannikin sp. *Lonchura* sp

2 September 1981, Fallen nest with two dead nestlings. Below a *Pinus* tree at a residence at the PNG Forestry College, Bulolo.

Thanks go to the following people who brought nests/nesting birds to my attention. Frans Arentz, Ken Hart, Michael Howcroft and Jeffrey Cunningham, and Neville Howcroft.

Coates, B.J. 1985. **The Birds of Papua New Guinea.** Vol. 1 Non-passerines. Dove Publications.

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CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

This issue of Muruk will be the final one for 1986 and our original, ambitious goal of four stimulated interest from several widely separated sources. One correspondent from Poland extended warm congratulations and in fact was surprised that we were attempting four issues in our first year. Other letters have expressed some doubt about the ability of the Papua New Guinea Bird Society to sustain two publications and have wondered about the basis on which articles will be placed in one or the other. These are, of course, some of the important concerns debated by both the editorial committee and the Society's executive. For Muruk we will be seeking research articles, reports of careful observations in the field, and short notes on vagrant or rare species, nesting records, display or other unusual bird behaviour. The Newsletter will continue with reports on meetings and outings and will include species lists from the various areas that members visit. Short notes on bird identification and 'jizz' or information on where to find particular birds or birdwatching anecdotes will be welcomed. Our policy will be open to review as Muruk becomes well established.

It is particular encouraging that we have had many promises of articles from people who have been doing research in Papua New Guinea. But not unexpectedly, they are slow to appear. Articles will also be forthcoming from some of our new members who have plans for netting and banding in the Port Moresby area. Their initial efforts at the Waigani setting ponds have already turned up a rare Gray's Grasshopper-Warbler. We look forward to all these contributions and ask the authors to submit their articles as soon as possible.

We now have access to a laser printer and hope that our senders appreciate the new format. Early in 1987 we will have a new cover design from students at the National Art School.

Joan A. Oliver, Editor.

BIRDS OF MOUNT SCRATCHLEY SUMMIT AND ENVIRONS: 3520 METRES ASL IN SOUTH-EASTERN NEW GUINEA

G.E.CLAPP

SUMMARY

Listed are 22 species of birds seen during a June 1984 visit to the summit of Mt. Scratchley, 3520 m in the Wharton Range of the central cordillera in south-eastern New Guinea. MacGregor's Bird of Paradise *Macgregoria pulchra* was not uncommon and specimens of a new food tree for this species were collected and subsequently identified as *Rapanea involucrata*. An active nest of the Island Thrush *Turdus poliocephalus* was found. Of exceptional interest was the sight record of the Logrunner *Orthonyx temminckii* at 3450 m the highest known record for this species on the island of New Guinea and the first known sighting by an ornithologist for many decades.

INTRODUCTION

I proceeded to Mt. Scratchley by helicopter from Kokoda on 9 June 1984 with one companion, T. Siravopa. We remained on the mountain until the morning of 18 June 1984 when we departed by helicopter for Kokoda. Whilst on the mountain we stayed in the Post and Telecommunication Corporation's microwave repeater station maintenance hut, sited on the summit. The weather was not good, several days being wasted because of thick cloud and rain and no bird observation was possible on 12 June. It was also quite cold and night temperatures may well have approached freezing. Wind varied between calm and quite high. Bird observation was thus rendered quite difficult, particularly because early clouding-in meant that we could not travel far from the hut with any safety.

Mt. Scratchley is one of the high mountain peaks in the central cordillera of the island of New Guinea, and is situated in the Wharton Mountain range. The site of the PTC tower is 3520 m (measured by altimeter) at ground level on the summit. Grid reference is EL472362 on the 1:100,000 scale topographic map EDITION 1 SERIES T683 SHEET 8380 WASA. Co-ordinates are 147°25'40"E and 08°43'10"S.

All altitudes quoted were measured by altimeter unless preceded by the letter 'C' which indicates an estimated altitude only.

The area visited was a patchwork of forest and natural grassland. The forest was largely dominated by *Dacrycarpus/Papuacedrus/Libocedrus* but also with many areas of lighter, drier and in some cases scrubby forest. The forest was interspersed with large areas of grassland: tussock grassland with cushion herbs and other alpine plants and trees and shrubs on the ridges and drier slopes, and coarse grassland and sedges

on the wetter slopes and in the gullies. The coarse grassland and sedges degraded to mild bog and standing water near run-off areas and towards the flatter centres of the glaciated valleys. Parts of Mt. Scratchley were glacier eroded during the last major glacial event in the Pleistocene, with consequent formation of U-shaped valleys. For a more detailed technical description of the Mt. Scratchley area see Blake (1973), Paijmans (1973) and Loeffler (1977).

We saw no wild pigs, no wallabies and no larger animals of any description, although I twice heard New Guinea wild dogs howling from fairly nearby and I also saw wallaby droppings.

Judging by the number of remains of obviously burned trees in the open areas, the drier season brings man, and with him fire. The forest appears in places to be getting pushed farther back, isolated forested ridges and knolls being particularly vulnerable. Although not of immediate concern because of the generally wet conditions, the apparently restricted areas of forest in which MacGregor's Bird of Paradise is to be found and its rather restricted dietary preferences, coupled with the complete lack of knowledge of tree regeneration at high altitudes in New Guinea, it is desirable that parts of the habitat of *Macgregoria pulchra* should be protected by law and a patrolled high altitude National Park set up.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

Harrier *Circus* sp.

A pair of large, dark looking raptors was seen from the summit a fair distance out over the grassland/forest mosaic on the morning of 17 June, and were initially presumed to be *Circus approximans*. However after reference to Coates (1985) regarding the distribution of C. *aeruginosus* (= *C. approximans*) and the difficulties of distinguishing between juveniles of *Circus spilonotus* and adult and juvenile *C. aeruginosus*, it seems best to designate the birds I saw merely as *Circus sp.* in the absence of any detailed description. Coates (personal communication) has pointed out that *C. spilothorax* has been recorded at 3500 m in the Wharton Range.

Painted Tiger-Parrot *Psittacella picta*

Seen only on 17 June at 3500 m in forest not far in from the edge, only 3 m up in a small tree. A pair, male and female, allowed a close approach. There was some gentle allopreening of the female's nape by the male but no other courtship activity. At one stage the male gave a slight 'chur' vocalisation. The birds are elusive and quiet, even when flying, so this one observation on the day before departure is probably not an indication of the species' true abundance.

Glossy Swiftlet *Collocalia esculenta*

Two individuals were seen at 1640 and 14 June after a day with much rain and cloud. They were about 20 m from the ground at 3500 m. On 17 June another two individuals were seen hawking low down over the grass at 3400 m. Evidently it is not common in the area.

Mountain Swiftlet *Collocalia hirundinacea*

At 1600 on 15 June numbers were seen near the communications tower at 3520 m hawking for insects high above and descending to within 3 or 4 m of the ground.

Alpine Pipit *Anthus gutturalis*

Not uncommon locally, these birds were clearly identifiable as the S.E. New Guinea race *A. g. gutturalis*, (c.f. Rand and Gilliard 1967). They were seen in twos and threes on 11 June at c. 3400 m and on 13 June at c. 3450 m. They seemed to prefer areas of alpine grassland, shrubs and

cushion herbs, where bare areas of rock or ground protruded, no matter how small these outcrops were. Diamond (1972) comes closest to describing the call of this endemic species, which I have noted as 'a thin tweeet'. The birds were shy and not easy to observe for any length of time.

Island Thrush *Turdus poliocephalus*

Sighted on every day of the expedition's stay, this species was the commonest bird in the alpine grassland/shrubbery areas and was even seen a short distance into the forest edge. I recorded calls as a thin downslurred 'sweet', as well a repeated alarm call 'chup chup'. I often noticed a number of birds flying out bushes and shrubbery but it was not until a nest was discovered on 17 June that I realised the reason. At c. 3400 m the nest was in the heart of the foliage of an alpine shrub or small tree on a slope and standing in tussock grassland. The tree was closely foliaged and about 2.5 m in height, and the nest, a bulky cup, was at a height of 1.75 m and contained either three or four nestling. Unfortunately the loss of my notebook containing the precise data makes it unwise to make further comment. I am certain from the number of birds which flew from the hearts of trees that several pairs were breeding.

Logrunner *Orthonyx temminckii*

To my great chagrin this species was only sighted on the day before we left, at 16:00 on 17 June down the slope from the summit of Mt. Scratchley at 3450 m. The bird, a male, was seen in very damp moss forest on a slope. There was fairly heavy undergrowth with a heavy layer of moss, humus and ground litter. I glimpsed the bird several times between 16:00 and 16:45.

When first spotted the bird had a large yellowish insect in its beak. The bird was continually digging and scratching in the forest floor. When disturbed, it would either run or flutter short distances with a whirring of wings. When undisturbed and feeding it occasionally gave a quite soft 'peet' call - which was the only vocalisation I heard (cf. Mayr and Rand 1937). This call was similar to but not as high pitched as the call of the Spotted Quail-thrush *Cinclosoma punctatus* of Australia. Although I saw only the male I gained the distinct impression from calls that there may have been another bird in the vicinity.

A full description is given as I believe it possible this bird may represent and undescribed plumage. It is curious that I estimated the bird to be 5" or 6" (12.5 - 15.0 cm) in length, despite Rand and Gilliard (1967) giving the length as 7 1/4" (18.0 cm). That seems a large discrepancy, but may possibly be accounted for by the bird being on the ground in poor light. I noted a dark eye and brown or dark grey beak. The bird appeared brown on the head, brown on the back with darker streaking; the primaries appeared brown edged black. It had a white throat and upper breast and appeared to have an uninterrupted black band across the breast. The lower breast and abdomen appeared brown.

However, I must emphasise the lateness of the hour for observing birds in closed canopy tropical forest and with a cloud cover outside. Indeed it was very dim in the forest. Also it was a difficult bird to observe: it was continually moving, was cryptically coloured, tended to be obscured by vegetation and was a very nervous bird, the slightest movement by the observer sent it scurrying. However it seemed reluctant to leave the general area, because despite being disturbed several times and going off, it came back repeatedly before finally leaving altogether.

The Australian race of this species in southern Queensland appears to be a much noisier bird and definitely larger (personal observation).

Blue-Capped Ifrita, *Ifrita kowaldi*

Only one pair of this interesting species was sighted, at 3450 m on 15 June high in a large tree at the edge of the forest, near a stream where they were feeding. I noted that 'they also go upside down' and that they tended to avoid the patches of sunlight on the tree where they were feeding (presumably an anti-predator behaviour), quickly fluttering on to another shaded area when they came to a sunny patch in their foraging.

Tawny Grassbird *Megalurus timoriensis*

The Tawny Grassbird was seen only on 9 June and 16 June in tall, rank grass and shrubs in slightly swampy areas at c. 3400 m: it was not common.

New Guinea Thornbill *Acanthiza murina*

Two or three of these thornbills were seen gleaning four or five metres up in scrubby forest at 3400 m on 15 June. A very high pitched single 'tweet' was repeated several times. As these small warblers can pose identification problems, I include my field notes which state: the birds were approximately 10 cm with brown upperparts and off-white underparts, a clearly visible black sub-terminal band and 'whitish' tip to the tail. I have depicted the bird with a fine dark bill.

Large Scrubwren *Sericornis nouhuysi*

This was a plump looking warbler seen on 11 June at c. 3200 m. Field notes indicate: brown upperparts with light buffy underparts and no other distinguishing marks; about 12.5 cm in length. There were two calls: a 'tweet' and a chattering call. The birds were in a small glade in scrubby forest at the head of a gully. A fresh nest was found nearby, a very bulky enclosed structure composed of grass and moss with a front entrance, and situated about 3 m up in the hanging dead fronds of a tree fern. Although we waited the birds did not approach the nest while we were present, so we left. But I am convinced this was the nest belonging to the *S. nouhuysi* we saw nearby.

Mountain Mouse-Warbler *Crateroscelis robusta*

Fairly common and sighted on a number of occasions: 11 June (3200 m); 15 June (3360 m). These scrubwrens were seen in lighter, scrubby forest without a heavy moss covering, rather than the wet podocarp cloud forest.

On 17 June at 3400 m, one was seen close up, in more open, somewhat lighter forest without a thick ground cover and with considerable stony protrusions. It chattered and scolded for some considerable time and although I suspected a nest, I could not find one.

However, attracted to its scolding were Crested Berrypeckers, a Friendly Fantail and a juvenile White-winged Robin.

Friendly Fantail *Rhipidura albolimbata*

Fairly common, particularly inside the forest at the edge. Seen on 11, 15, 16 and 17 June. Altitudes noted were 3360 m. These birds would approach quite close to an observer and had a remarkable and pleasant tinkling song.

White-Winged Robin *Peneothello sigillatus*

Seen on 11, 15 and 17 June at c. 3200 m and 3400 m and 3420 m. Several of those seen were juveniles. This bird has a habit of clinging sideways to a stem or tree. The only call noted was a 'chup call' given by a juvenile that was seen on 17 June at 3400 m.

Regent Whistler *Pachycephala schlegelii*

This beautiful bird was apparently quite local in occurrence, being seen in one restricted area, in forest on or at the bottom of, two knolls which were covered on their lower slopes with a drier (but still relatively moist) forest in comparison with the heavily mossed podocarp forest. The crests of these knolls were covered with a more stunted and quite scrubby forest which had the superficial appearance in some parts of being secondary, but which I believe in fact was caused by the stony nature of the ground and a much reduced soil and litter cover.

The species was seen on 16 June at 3400 m and 3470 m and on 17 June at 3470. On 17 June a pair of Regent Whistlers were seen foraging and giving a soft 'pit' call (a single note repeated at intervals) as they searched for insects. This was presumably a contact call. Twice the female was seen to eat small caterpillars. The female frequently descended to within one or two metres of the ground on this occasion.

Crested Bird of Paradise *Cnemophilus macgregorii*

This species was seen once only at 3450 m on 16 June in a remarkable incident. I was slowly moving through somewhat dense and heavily mossed cloud forest, with heavy ground cover and on a slope, when an adult male flew so closely past my head with a swish of wings that it gave me a fright. The bird perched low down only a few metres away. It had in its beak a yellowish looking thin twig or stick, quite straight and about 4 cm long. It moved down to ground level but unfortunately, out of sight. When I cautiously moved to try and see what it was doing it had gone.

I could see nothing to explain the twig. While the bird was out o f sight but still in the vicinity, it called once - a remarkable loud barking call which I have noted as a deep, aspirated 'Whuukh' (c.f. Beehler 1978). I had in fact heard the call in the canopy but had not known its source until then. Judging by the calls the bird was locally common in one small area in the deep cloud forest. The bird sighted had golden yellow upperparts, as would be expected of the South East New Guinea race *C. m. macgregorii*.

MacGregor's Bird of Paradise *Macgregoria pulchra*

This high mountain species was not uncommon locally, particularly in the forests west and south-west of the summit peak of Mt. Scratchley. It is still one of the least known of the birds of paradise despite having had several papers written on it, notably Rand (1940), Barker and Croft (1977) and Beehler (1983).

These birds frequented forest and forest edge and occasionally perched in low trees outside of the forest. On 15 June I saw one individual, probably a male, fly at least 150 m, from a tree to a shrub. After a pause it moved on. For the last several metres the bird glided. This bird was moving from the forest on the western side to the forest on the eastern side of the peak, the two stretches being separated by some two or three hundred metres of tussock grassland, rocky outcrops, shrubs and small trees. The two areas forest were quite discrete patches.

I never heard these birds utter anything except the very subdued 'jeet' call described by Rand (1940) and Beehler (1983). In the areas where *M. pulchra* was common the forest was cloud forest with large tall trees forming an even canopy 15 to 20 m in height. Presumably these were *Dacrycarpus*, *Libocedrus* and *Papuacedrus*, but I was not competent to distinguish between them. Where the character of the forest was different (and there are a number of different forest types in the area) *M. pulchra* it was not found, with one important exception which is detailed below. *M. pulchra* did not spend long periods in the open except at the edge of the forest in shrubbery. Sometimes it would sit on an exposed perch at the forest edge for some minutes. On 10 June I observed a pair of *M. pulchra*. The male had visibly more yellow in the wing. The birds moved into the shrub-like trees adjacent to the forest. The male, on its own was foraging wing flashing continually. Several times it probed into the shrubby tree (which had pink flowers) but if it obtained insects they must have been very small because I could not see them from thirty metres distance with binoculars. I watched the male continue this activity for several minutes and eventually both birds moved off in loose association, i.e. in the same general direction and within half a minute of each other. These birds gave the 'jeet' call several times.

The most interesting encounter with this bird was on 15 June at 3360 m in forest about 2 km from the hut. Markedly different from the heavy cloud forest near to the hut, this forest was more open, drier and with a lower canopy and few podocarp trees. There were bare rocks and rock ledges protruding in several places. I saw a pair of *M. pulchra* and actually watched one eating the fruit of a tree which was definitely not *Dacrycarpus*. The tree was 10 m high but slender rather than large, and the fruit was a pinky-mauve colour and not large. Specimens of the leaves, bark and fruit were taken and the tree was later identified as *Rapanea involucrata* Mez (Family Myrsinaceae). It was noted that the bird took several fruit while I was watching and would have continued feeding had I not disturbed it.

M. pulchra was recorded at the following altitudes:

9 June at 3520 m; 10 June c. 3500 m; 14 June c. 3500 m; 15 June 3450 m, 3360 m and c. 3500 m; 17 June 3400 m.

Red-Collared Myzomela *Myzomela rosenbergii*

This is the only species listed which I did not personally sight. On 11 June T. Siravopa saw a small black bird with a bright red back in the canopy of scrubby edge forest at the head of a gully at c. 3200 m.

Sooty Melidectes *Melidectes fuscus*

This honeyeater was sighted only on 16 June at 3450 m, low down in shrubby undergrowth and small trees, gleaning for insects. It was much less common than Belford's Melidectes.

Belford's Melidectes *Melidectes belfordi*

Belford's Melidectes was a very common, noisy bird of the forest and forest edge but rarely ventured outside. It was sighted on all days except 12 June when bad weather precluded any observations, but even on that day it could be plainly heard. It was present at a range of altitudes between 3300 and 3420 m. 'Dive bombing' of *Paramythia montium* by this species is described below the former. I noted the calls of this species on 9 June as 'whee whee whee whoa whoa'. On 11 June a pair of Belford's Melidectes I was observing sometimes called together - apparently in a duet.

Crested Berrypecker *Paramythia montium*

The Crested Berrypecker was one of the commonest birds in the area. I sighted it on all days except 9 and 12 June between c. 3100 and 3500 m.

On 14 June in the late afternoon at c. 3500 m there were two Crested Berrypeckers in a small shrubby tree. One was dive bombed by a Belford's Melidectes. There was no apparent reason for this aggression.

My notes indicate that of the twelve sightings of this species, six were of pairs, two were of birds associated together, two were noted only as Crested Berrypeckers in the plural and two were of single individuals. It is evident that the pair bond was strong in these birds at this time and, judging by the remarks in Rand and Gilliard (1967) they may well have been breeding.

On 15 June near the edge of the forest on a ridge I saw a Crested Berrypecker which 'also had a pleasant whistled song'. This does not appear to have been previously reported.

Mountain Firetail *Oreostruthus fuliginosus*

Appeared uncommon. Although Rand and Gilliard (1967) say this species was not found in flocks, two of the three sightings I made were of small flocks. On 16 June at c. 3300 m, in shrub and small trees at the edge of the grassland, a small flock of c. 10 of this species was observed. They were clearly identifiable but shy and tended to stay out of sight and move off unobtrusively. Their calls were soft but otherwise mannikin-like. Again on 16 June at 3400 m at a different location I noted a small flock of this species but did not record the number. On 17 June, two were seen at 3450 m in forest near the edge. They moved off quickly when encountered.

Miscellaneous

Other than the species listed above there were some difficult to resolve sightings. Small parrots in a small flock were heard on 9 June but not identified. On 16 June at 3450 m a bird was seen which was black with white on the wings and whitish on the abdomen. It was noted as being a robin, smaller than *Petroica sigillatus*. It may well have been *P. bivittata* but no white was noted on the forehead. On several occasions quite small warbles were glimpsed as they left tree ferns in which they had been gleaning. They were shy and there was too much over in other tree ferns and they left before identification was possible. These warblers may have been *Gerygone ruficollis*. Another mystery bird, seen at 3200 m in scrubby edge forest, was small (10 cm) with a dark top to the head, a whitish superciliary and a black line through the eye greenish brown on the back and with a light coloured underside. The description fits *Phylloscopus trivirgatus*, but as this was far above its known altitudinal range Rand and Gilliard 1967; Diamond 1972; Beehler 1978), it requires confirmation.

DISCUSSION

The weather on Mt. Scratchley should have been better considering time of the year. The general clouded-in conditions prevented us from reaching the small alpine lakes near English Peaks and the rocky area above the timberline. Nevertheless I made some interesting and valuable sightings.

Although Mayr and Rand (1937) mention that *M. pulchra* eats some fruit other than

Podocarpus (= *Dacrycarpus*) the first positive scientific identification of such a food tree is of great interest. *Rapanea* spp. trees are widespread in the high mountains of eastern New Guinea (Barker and Croft 1977) and are common trees where the Star Mountains population of *M. pulchra* is found (Barker and Croft 1977). *Rapanea* spp. are also found commonly in the Lake Habemma area, and moreover go right to the timber line as stunted small trees (Brass 1941); Schodde et al. (1975) recorded *Rapanea* spp. on the Carstensz Massif at the Western edge of the range of M. *pulchra* in Irian Jaya.

When discussing to this bird's diet I believe Beehler's exposition to be an oversimplification and to contain some misinterpretation of the facts found in the literature (Beehler, 1983). Beehler states 'Rand (1940) hints that *Macgregoria* is a strict frugivore specialising on a single fruit tree listed as '*Podocarpus* (Podocarpaceae)'. However to understand the position precisely it is necessary to quote the various authors exactly.

Rand (1940) states the following:

(a) 'Sometimes they poke among the moss on tree trunks, and pull off moss and bark as though searching for insects, but all the stomachs I have examined contained only fruit. When in forests where *Podocarpus* occurred the stomach contents consisted of their fruit exclusively.

(b) 'In east New Guinea it favours especially *Podocarpus* fruits and when in that habitat feeds exclusively on their fruit. But when we went higher than Habbema, to 3600 and 3800 metre camps near Mt. Wilhelmina, and left the coniferous forests behind, *Macgregoria* continued to be a fairly common breeding bird'.

I interpret these remarks to imply that birds in areas outside of the *Podocarpus* forest fed on fruit other than *Podocarpus* (= *Dacrycarpus*), presumably unidentified fruit. If *M. pulchra* is fairly common breeding bird at altitudes above the coniferous forests, and if it is (at least at times) locally sedentary in habits (Beehler 1983) then its diet must largely consist of other than *Dacrycarpus* fruits, at those higher altitudes. I believe it is significant that in his summary Rand (1940) never stated that *M. pulchra* specialised on *Dacrycarpus* fruits, preferring to say merely 'it is a specialised species with no close relatives.'

Rand and Gilliard (1967) say: 'the fruit of a taxad, very common in the forest here was apparently their principal food...'. The word principal should be stressed, and it should also be noted that on that expedition only four stomachs were examined in the field, and that of those four stomachs, two contained fruit other than *Dacrycarpus* (Rand 1940). There is actually nothing in the published notes as to whether or not these stomachs contained *Dacrycarpus* fruits as well, but in one case it is unlikely as one bird whose stomach contained the fruit of an angiosperm, was taken at Murray Pass where, to quote Rand 'the same tree (i.e. *Dacrycarpus*) though present, was not fruiting.'

Baker and Croft (1977) state that *M. pulchra* occurs commonly in areas in the Star

Mountains where *Dacrycarpus* is only low and scattered: 'The upper altitudinal limit was on the summit ridges between Mts. Capella and Scorpion in an open sub-alpine shrubland of *Vaccinium*, *Rapanea* and *Rhododendron* with scattered low *Dacrycarpus* and *Papuacedrus* where the bird was commonly seen'.

I also noted *M. pulchra* poking and prying into the foliage of the shrubs, in a similar fashion to Rand's (1940) observations of the bird poking into moss and bark, but again as in my observations, no visible food was obtained. Nevertheless this behaviour must gain the bird something, and the most likely explanation is that the bird is obtaining food. I noticed on Mt. Scratchley that, particularly after the rain and cloud cleared and the sun emerged, the shrubbery was covered in small spider webs with minute spiders. It is possible that *M. pulchra* may be exploiting such minute soft-bodied arthropods, particularly as these would be unlikely to show up except in the most detailed stomach examinations.

I suggested that *M. pulchra* feeds principally on *Dacrycarpus* but that by necessity it will often feed on other fruits and perhaps on very small soft-bodied arthropods. Possibly these other fruits, such as *Rapanea involucrata*, may prove to be crucial in allowing *M. pulchra* to exist where and/or when *Dacrycarpus* is not present or not fruiting, particularly in view of the fact that *M. pulchra* may at times be quite sedentary.

The sighting of the Logrunner *Orthonyx temminckii* was the highlight of the expedition. There is a record of this species at 11,000 ft. (3354 m) on Mt. Scratchley and Mt. Knutsford in 1898 (Rothschild and Hartert 1903) but it is well known that these old records are notoriously unreliable with regard to altitude. My altimeter recorded Mt. Scratchley as 3520 m, in almost perfect agreement with the altitude indicated on the modern topographic map used. Yet in the 1896-1897 Annual Report for British New Guinea, MacGregor (1898) gave the altitude for the summit of Mt. Scratchley as 12,860 ft (3921 m). This is not a surprising error given that the methods used to obtain altitude were the boiling point of water and the aneroid barometer. At any rate my sighting is certainly the highest altitude at which *O. temminckii* has been recorded. Mt. Knutsford is not marked on modern maps, but sketch maps in the old British New Guinea annual reports show it about halfway along and slightly to the west of centre of a line between Mt. Scratchley and Mt. Victoria. Although only rarely recorded from only a few peaks in south-east New Guinea, it is probably that *O. temminckii* occurs on most peaks in the vicinity of Mt. Scratchley and Mt. Victoria which have high altitude moss forest. But because the bird is so retiring and the moss forest is such an uncomfortable place for prolonged bird observation, this species is rarely seen. Indeed this is the first known sighting by an ornithologist for many decades. Only specimens could establish whether an undescribed plumage type really does occur on Mt. Scratchley.

The active nest of the Island Thrush *Turdus poliocephalus* is believed to be one of the

very few recorded on the island of New Guinea. It is most regrettable that some notebooks and a case of slides were lost when the author moved from Papua New Guinea to Australia. Amongst these was the notebook containing the data on nest and nestlings. The observation is, however, a positive record for the time of year for active breeding by this species on the high mountains of southeast New Guinea.

The other sightings offer good historical continuity of recorded avifauna in this rarely visited high mountain area of outstanding geographical and zoological interest. A total of 22 species was recorded, one being identified to genus only and the remainder positively to species.

I am most grateful to Mr. B.J. Coates for his helpful criticism and discussion of an earlier version of this paper. I am indebted to Mr E.E. Henty, formerly a/Assistant Director, Division of Botany, Office of Forests, Lae, PNG, for identification of *Rapanea involucrata*. Thanks are due to Mr T. Siravopa who accompanied me to Mt. Scratchley at very short notice, and to Pacific Helicopters for transporting us on schedule to and from a remote location. I am grateful to the librarians at the Queensland Museum, Brisbane, Australia, for allowing me access to historical documents, and to Mr. B.W. Finch for helpful discussion.

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SOME OBSERVATIONS OF BIRDS FORAGING IN *TREMA ORIENTALIS*

D. McWirter

From 15:00 to 16:00 on 28 May 1983, from 14:45 to 16:30 on 30 May, and from 15:15 to 15:45 on 31 May, I observed a variety of birds foraging in a *Trema orientalis* adjacent to the main office of the Wau Ecology Institute (W.E.I.). The identity of the two trees mentioned below, and information about them was kindly supplied by Allen Allison, Acting Director of W.E.I. Observations were obtained with 10x40 Leitz binoculars at 30 to 40 meters.

Trema orientalis is a fairly common tree on the grounds and in the coffee groves of W.E.I. It is not one of the trees planted to provide shade for coffee; rather, it springs up adventitiously and is allowed to persist. It's a fast-growing, short-lived tree with a broad, comparatively open crown. This particular tree was an estimated 13 m tall with a crown diameter of nearly the same. The tree was in fruit and was noticeably suffering leaf damage from insects, one of which, perhaps the main one, was a lepidopteran larva 5 to 7cm long, coloured light green to brown. With one exception, the species of birds that foraged in the tree fed exclusively on fruit, caterpillars or small insects.

The following is a list of species seen in the tree, the number of each species seen when present, and what was eaten by that species, if anything:

Brown Cuckoo-Dove *Macropygia amboinensis*
1 to 2, not seen eating.
Black-billed Cuckoo-Dove *M. nigrirostris*
1, ate fruit.
Rainbow Lorikeet *Trichoglossus haematodus*
3 to 15, ate fruit.
Double-eyed Fig-Parrot *Cyclopsitta diophthalma*
2 to 3, ate fruit.
Chestnut-breasted Cuckoo *Cacomantis castaneiventris*
1 to 2, ate caterpillars.
Malay Bronze Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx minutillus*
1, not seen eating.
White-crowned Koel *Caliechthrus leucolophus*
1 to 2, ate caterpillars.

Sacred Kingfisher *Halcyon sancta*
1, ate caterpillars.
Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis*
1, used the tree as a perch to forage from, did not forage within the tree's canopy.
Black-shouldered Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina morio*
1 to 2, ate caterpillars.
Northern Fantail *Rhipidura rufiventris*
1, stayed only briefly, did not forage.
Pachycephala sp.,
1, not seen eating.
Hooded Pitohui *Pitohui dichrous*
1 to 2, ate caterpillars and other, smaller insects.
Brown Oriole *Oriolus szalayi*
1 to 2, ate caterpillars and other, smaller insects.
Marbled Honeyeater *Pycnopygius cinereus*
1, stayed briefly, did not forage.
Helmeted Friarbird *Philemon buceroides*
2 to 3, not seen eating.
Papuan Flowerpecker *Dicaeum pectorale*
1 to 4, ate small insects.

No species was in the tree for the entire observation period. Most came and fed for varying periods, then left. As a species, the Rainbow Lorikeet spent the most time in the tree. As individuals, the Chestnut-breasted Cuckoo spent the most time. The Rainbow Lorikeets spent a lot of time in the tree just climbing around and interacting with each other. Two Double-eyed Fig-Parrots sat and preened and allo-preened for 15 minutes. A White-crowned Koel sat and called for nearly 20 minutes after eating several large caterpillars.

The caterpillar eaters exhibited several ways of finding prey, several ways of manipulating prey once it was caught, and took varying time to manipulate the prey before consumption. The Chestnut-breasted Cuckoos hunted by walking along slender branches and peering about, or they sat in one place for at least five minutes while looking about. If a caterpillar was seen while hunting in the latter way, the bird would fly to the nearest branch and pick the insect off. After capture, the larvae was battered on a large branch and crunched between the bird's mandibles until pulped enough to swallow. This usually took between one and two minutes. White-crowned Koels hunted by walking on larger branches than the previous species. If a caterpillar was spotted, they leaped/flew and semi-crashed their way over to it, battered it on the nearest large branch, and consumed it in less than a minute.

The Sacred Kingfisher was a sit-and-wait hunter that flew to the prey, hovered briefly, and picked it off. The one time the kingfisher was seen handling the prey after capture, it so vigourously battered the insect on a branch that pieces of the insect were lost. Handling time before consumption was uncertain. Both the Black-shouldered Cuckoo-shrikes and the Brown Orioles moved frequently in the smaller branches while peering

around. One cuckoo-shrike hovered briefly in order to pick a caterpillar off a leaf. Both species battered their prey and ran it through their mandibles. Both averaged about a minute in handling time before consumption.

There seems to be a rough inverse correlation between the mass of the bird and handling time for similar sized prey.

The number of species present in the tree during the same time period varied from day to day. On 31 May, only three species were present, and during the same time on 30 May, seven or eight species were there. On 28 May, close track was not kept, but no more than four species were present in that time period. There was heavy rainfall for one hour prior to the 30 May observation period. This may have stimulated insect activity, or the birds may have been catching up on their feeding before retiring for the night.

Some incidental observations were made. Chestnut-breast Cuckoos and a Brown Oriole were seen taking caterpillars from other *Trema orientalis* on the W.E.I. grounds. A Rainbow Lory was seen drinking liquid from an upturned flower of a nearby African Tulip-Tree (*Spathodea campanulata*) after the rain on 30 May. Finally, as unequivocal proof that pure research pays off, I saw an unexpected lifer while making these observations - a Blue-faced Parrot-Finch *Erythrura trichroa*.

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BAIRD'S SANDPIPER *CALIDRIS BAIRDII* AT KANOSIA LAGOON - FIRST RECORD FOR THE NEW GUINEA REGION

BRIAN W. FINCH

LOCATION AND HABITAT

Four members of the Papua New Guinea Bird Society (myself, Roger Hicks, and Joan & Michael Oliver) were investigating Kanosia Lagoon, Central Province, on 24 November 1985, to see what migrant species were being attracted by the drying out process that was leaving extensive area of oozy mud with scattered drier islands and shallow pools.

Whilst the area had been too wet for the main passage of waders, and sadly most had passed over without stopping on the southward passage, the increasing suitability of habitat was attracting the later migrants, and there were over a hundred palaearctic waders present.

Species present consisted of approximately a hundred Sharp-tailed Sandpipers *Calidris acuminata*, one Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*, five Wood Sandpipers *Tringa glareola*, one Eastern Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica fulva*, and ten Japanese Snipe *Gallinago hardwickii*. A pair of Little Ringed Plovers *Charadrius dubius* turned out to be of the resident race *dubius*.

The observers had spilt up and were each checking out different parts of the lagoon. Whilst returning from the farther north-eastern portion, I saw a wader feeding in the company of a party of Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and one Marsh Sandpiper. The bird was obviously different and was thought to be a Baird's Sandpiper *Calidris bairdii*, although the species had not previously been recorded in the New Guinea region before. Two observers studied the wader for over twenty minutes taking detailed notes, and sketching the bird in the field.

Whilst the other two members of the PNGBS were making their way down the hill to the lagoon and heading towards the birds, the small flock startled, and flew further down the lagoon some 50 m away, and from this assemblage single birds and pairs peeled off and headed past us back down the lagoon towards the area in which the unusual sandpiper was first discovered. In spite of a thorough search by all four observers the bird could not be relocated amongst the thirty or more birds feeding in the shallow pools and on the dry mud with tangles of dead vegetation.

We later found the Baird's Sandpiper at the edge of a small pool. After a short time it, together with a dozen Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, flew up and after circling the far end of the lagoon, all flew out of sight.

DESCRIPTION

The bird stood up to a centimetre shorter than the accompanying Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, the body bulk was slighter but the entire length was comparable, because of the very long wings which extended well beyond, and totally obscured the tail.

Head: Wholly brownish-grey (the field notes read as cold greeny-grey), slightly browner on the crown with no obvious supercilium, this being reduced to a pale line just above, and slightly beyond, the eye. There was no darkening around the ear coverts as in most *Calidris* waders.

Throat/breast: Although the chin was not observed while the bird fed, the throat appeared cold grey, and this continued on to the lower throat where there was narrow but obscure streaking although the background colour was uniform with head. This streaking broke off quite noticeably just in front of the bend of the wing, where the white of the underparts extended upwards.

Flanks: Along the sides of the breast and flanks was a line of irregularly shaped indistinct orange-brownish spots.

Underparts: The remainder of the underparts were white without any marking or suffusions.

Upperparts: From the nape extending on to lower back, there was a series of furrowed dark and pale stripes which shaded into the cold Dunlin-grey of the lower back. The wing-coverts and inner secondaries were grey with indications of darker centres and conspicuous buffy white edges to the feathers. The flight feathers were blackish and contrasted with the rest of the wings. The primaries were very long and extended well beyond the tail, and each wing tip crossed over totally obscuring the all grey tail.

Flight: In flight with the Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, this bird differed little except in being smaller; it shared the obscure indistinct whitish wing bar of the sharp-tails, and showed an all blackish rump.

Bill: The bill was shorter than a Sharp-tailed Sandpipers', and was straight with only a slightly perceptible droop at the tip when seen from some angles, but not nearly as pronounced a droop as in Sharp-tailed Sandpipers' bills. Unlike that species the bill was completely blackish, and did not show the olive cast to the basal third of the lower mandible. The width was even along the length, tapering at the tip.

Legs: Blackish although usually obscured by water as the bird fed with the Sharp-tailed Sandpipers in shallow muddy water. Although the two species were feeding in the same depth of water, the Baird's Sandpiper was up to its belly in water whilst the Sharp-tailed Sandpipers were still keeping their underparts dry, testifying to the *C. bairdii* having much shorter legs.

General Appearance: The bird was like a large stint in proportions, but more attenuated and with a head that appeared too small for the body. The neck was short compared to other medium sized *Calidris* and the bird had a very sleek profile with the long tapering back and wings protruding beyond the tail.

Feeding: Whilst feeding in the shallow water, the bird's habits were distinct enough to enable it to be picked out from the Sharp-tailed Sandpipers even if obscured bodily by that species. The jabbing motion was more like that exhibited by the Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos* (a useful means of picking out that species from Sharp-tailed Sandpipers when plumage differences cannot be discerned). The head was held with the bill pointing vertically downwards, and inserted into the water with a series of rapid jabs, retracted, although the tip may still have remained in water, and the bird moved forward a little. Then the procedure was repeated. By contrast the Sharp-tailed Sandpipers' feeding actions were far less deliberate and more casual, the bill inserted into the water at an angle, not vertically, and with slower series of shallow jabs. The legs were slightly bent, whereas the Baird's Sandpiper seemed to keep its legs straight, although admittedly obscured by water.

DISCUSSION

All four observers had had previous experience with Baird's Sandpiper in the field, either in Canada or in the United Kingdom.

Like many vagrant birds, this individual exhibited variance from what is considered 'the norm' in its choice of feeding habitats. Instead of feeding on the dry mud it chose

to feed in water with the Sharp-tailed Sandpipers. It is quite likely that dry mud baking in an equatorial sun becomes quite sterile. Other Baird's Sandpipers that have turned up in Australia have also been found in wetter habitats than would be considered usual in the Nearctic where the bird is mainly a passage migrant through the central prairies rather than along the coasts.

The presence of obscure spotting along the flanks is suggestive of a adult bird coming out of breeding plumage, whilst the overall grey appearance with narrow but distinctive buffy white edges to coverts is more suggestive of a first winter bird.

The breeding range of this species extends from the Nearctic into western Siberia, and it is only to be expected that a few birds would wander southwards to the Australiasian region. This record would constitute the first record for the New Guinea region, whilst Australian has had four and New Zealand one record.

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ACCIPITER NOVAEHOLLANDIAE ATTACKS *CACOMANTIS CASTANEIVENTRIS*

D. McWHIRTER

On 4 June 1983, at about 15:00 hours, while sitting in the lounge of the Wau Ecological Institute hostel, I heard a rush of wings outside, behind me. A hawk had hit another bird in flight, and the impact had carried them about 10 m further into a small hollow near a coffee bush. The hawk crouched with spread wings and tail over the struggling, crying bird. The hawk's head was up and its mouth open. When the victim cried and struggled harder, the hawk pressed closer, bent its head down, and may have bitten the bird. At this point, the hawk could be identified as an adult, coloured phase Grey Goshawk, *Accipiter novaehollandiae*.

When I went outside to try and determine the identity of the other bird, the hawk flew off, but, judging from the scolding by other birds, circled around behind some trees, and stayed in the vicinity. The victim was an adult *Cacomantis castaneiventris*. It did not fly and seemed to be in shock. It had a slight wound in the throat area, the left eye was punctured, and the adjacent orbital bone looked damaged, perhaps from a bite. After setting the cuckoo down a metre from where it had previously lain, I went into the hostel to see if the hawk would return.

About fifteen minutes later, it flew in and landed in the base of the nearest coffee bush. It seemed to inspect the area visually, staying within the cover of the bush. However,

it apparently failed to see the immobile cuckoo (from where it was perched, the bush may have obscured its view). After two minutes or so, the hawk flew up to a bare branch, ruffled and preened its feathers for a minute, then flew off. Towards dusk, I went out to see if the cuckoo, which still had not moved, was dead. When I reached to touch it, it scrambled to the shelter of the nearby coffee bush. It acted more alert, but seemed incapable of sustained flight. When I checked the next morning, the cuckoo was gone.

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BLACK-HEADED GULLS *LARUS RIDIBUNDUS* AT LAE AIRSTRIP, MOROBE PROVINCE. THIRD RECORD FOR MAINLAND PAPUA NEW GUINEA.

BRIAN W. FINCH

On 19 January 1985 a group of birdwatchers including myself, while waiting for a plane to be refuelled at Lae Airport, observed waders on the airstrip. Meanwhile, I walked to the sea at the end of the airfield and saw a bird, albeit at a great distance, that had dark underwings and white flashy forewings. I thought it was probably a Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*.

The party hurried to the same point where a sewage outfall pipe was attracting numbers of terns, particularly White-winged Black Terns *Chlidonias leucopterus*. Amongst these terns was not one but three Black-headed Gulls. All three birds were in first winter plumage, with a black tipped orangy-brown bill, brown on the secondary coverts and a narrow black terminal tail band.

The other two mainland Papua New Guinea records, also discovered by the author, were both at Moitaka Settling Ponds in 1979 and 1982. These individuals were also in first-winter plumage.

Three records by one observer in six years would suggest that small numbers of Black-headed Gulls are annually visiting the coasts of Papua New Guinea. The species has yet to be recorded in Australia.

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FEMALE HOUSE SPARROW *PASSER DOMESTICUS* ON PAGA HILL, PORT MORESBY. A SECOND RECORD FOR PNG.

ROGER K. HICKS

On 10 June 1986 at 07:00 I was bird-watching on Paga Hill before going into work when I heard a familiar call, but was unable to identify the species. The source of the call was tracked down to a rubbish collection area. The bird was feeding amongst the rubbish but when disturbed flew up onto some nearby telephone wires where it was identified as a female House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*. I watched it for about two minutes before it flew into some trees and could not be relocated. I saw the sparrow once more, and again only briefly, on 12 June, when it was perched on some more overhead wires in the company of two White-breasted Wood-swallows *Artamus leucorhynchus*. Unfortunately no other bird-watchers managed to see the sparrow. I am familiar with this species and its congener, the Tree Sparrow *P. montanus* in Europe. The following description is taken from the notes I made shortly after each observation.

It was two thirds the size of a White-breasted Wood-Swallow, the only species present with which to compare it, and of a similar chunky build. It had a heavy pale seed-eaters bill. The underparts, from chin to vent, were a uniform brown-grey. The upperparts were a darker brown and heavily streaked with black on the mantle. Pale edgings to the wing coverts resulted in one obvious wing-bar and one less obvious. The most notable plumage feature was a broad pale supercilium which started behind the eye and went towards the back of the head.

The habitat on Paga Hill is mixed savanna (i.e. grassland with some trees and shrubs) with some houses and associated garden plants. This female House Sparrow first appeared after a month of continuous south-easterly winds. Assuming it was a true vagrant it would probably have originated in Australia where the nearest House Sparrows are at Cooktown, north Queensland (Pizzey 1980), some 700km SSW of Port Moresby. However the situation of Paga Hill less than 1km from Port Moresby's harbour, is probably more important than the habitat in which the sparrow was seen or the prevailing weather conditions prior to its arrival. As with the first record of this species in PNG, a party of four at Kila Kila (Ashford 1978), it is probably that this female arrived aboard ship.

Ashford, R.W. 1978. First record of House Sparrow for Papua New Guinea. **Emu** 78: 36

Pizzey, G. 1980. **A Field Guide to the Birds of Australia**. Collins. Sydney.

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EXTENSION OF RANGE OF *ALCEDO PUSILLA*

L. LAMOTHE

On 10 July 1985 a small kingfisher flew into one of the offices at the Forest Research Station, Bulolo, Morobe Province. It was photographed and identified as *Alcedo pusilla*. Beehler (1978) does not include it in his guide which covers birds above 500 m. Coates (1985) states that the species (which he calls *Ceyx pusilla*) is a lowlands one which has been recorded locally as high as 540 m on the Sogeri Plateau. The altitude at the Forest Research Station being approximately 750 m, this is a significant extension to the known range especially as higher points exist between Bulolo and the coastal lowlands.

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