West Papua: Oct-Nov 2015

Sooty Owl, Arfak Mountains
West Papua, October-November 2015
The Arfak Mountains, Nimbokrang, Sorong Lowlands and Waigeo Island

Introduction

This report outlines a trip taken with Shaun Coyle, Tim Sykes, and Duncan Wilson to a selection of the main birding sites in West Papua. The four sites we visited were the Arfak Mountains on the Vogelkop Peninsula; the lowland forests around the settlement of Nimbokrang on the north coast near to Jayapura; the island of Waigeo in the Raja Ampat Archipelago; and the lowlands around Sorong on the western edge of the Vogelkop Peninsula.

Pre-trip Planning

Previous trip reports recommend planning a trip to West Papua in advance. This is mainly on account of the fact that the majority of land in West Papua is privately owned, and to access requires permission from local communities and landowners. These communities have set up homestays and guiding options in a number of the main birding destinations, and these can be in high demand during the peak season.

In two of the locations visited (Arfaks & Nimbokrang) we used local guides and the accommodation that they provided. In order to do this we followed advice and attempted to contact these prior to arrival; and as far as possible plan a time when tour groups were not booked in, in order to give us the best chance of securing their services. This approach was only partially successful.

In the third location we booked a homestay on the island of Waigeo for the duration of our stay, this proved to be completely unsuccessful!

Despite these potential setbacks, we found that getting to the sites was straightforward, and there were always options where our first efforts had failed. These will be described in relation to each site below.

Further preparation involved reading and distilling information from all recent trip reports we could find on West Papua, the most useful and/or interesting being those that visited independently and provided logistical information. Trip reports were sourced from Cloudbirders. Further information was also sought from Birds-Indonesia website.

A new field guide to the Birds of New Guinea was published in late 2014 (Pratt & Beehler ‘Birds of New Guinea’ 2nd Edition). A second new field guide to the Birds of New Guinea including Bismarck Archipelago and Bougainville (Gregory, Birds of New Guinea) is due for publication in 2016. There is also a mammal guide to New Guinea (Flannery ‘Mammals of New Guinea’), but don’t expect to see many mammals unless they are specifically targeted.

Bird sounds for the trip were sourced from Xeno Canto.
Thanks to all, especially those who have produced the available information and provided bird sounds.

Further thanks go to Andy Mears (& Chris Gooddie) for their annotated bird list and trip report from their 2014 visit; and to Mehd Halaouate for helping us organise a driver to get to the Arfaks, and for his unexpected company for a few days in Nimbokrang with his two Swedish clients.

**General Travelling Logistics**

As I sit writing this in early 2016, It has probably never been easier to get to West Papua. A number of recent changes have certainly helped independent travel here:

- The Indonesian Government has made the 30 day visa-on-arrival for tourists from the UK (and many other countries) free, when entering from Jakarta at least;
- The system of police checks and travel permits in West Papua ‘Surat Jalan’ has been mostly reduced/removed for areas that receive any numbers of tourists – we didn’t need to visit the police once (other than a very brief courtesy visit in Nimbokrang with our guide), or carry documentation, and all that was required in locations visited was to pass our details on via our accommodation;
- In a similar fashion, the route in to the country doesn’t necessarily need to be via Biak or Jayapura. We entered via Manokwari, but e.g. Sorong also has flights from other parts of Indonesia;
- We didn’t need to provide photocopies of passport/visas for any permits, and didn’t need a passport photo either, for any of the destinations we visited;
- It is now relatively easy to book your own domestic flights for Indonesia over the internet (with websites such as www.tiket.com);
- The Raja Ampat Islands are gearing up as a tourist destination (mainly for diving and snorkelling) but this means a new low cost public ferry service to the island of Waigeo has put the endemic birds here on a much more cost effective footing than having to charter to get to either Waigeo or Batanta. An excellent resource for information on these islands, including contact details for homestays and local guides is the Stay Raja Ampat website;
- The local guides are building or have built new accommodation for visiting birders, or tourist homestay options are available. We took tents but didn’t use them;
- Basic English is spoken in many places.

There are still however uncertainties over whether you should state on your visa application (for a 2 month visa), or on entry to the country, that you intend to travel on to West Papua; and on our visa applications we left this vague – having read stories of visas being stamped ‘not valid for travel to Papua’!
Costs

During our visit the exchange rate was £1 = IDR20,895 from a debit/credit card and £1 = IDR20,050 for a money converters in Jakarta International Airport. IDR = Indonesian Rupiah.

The flights from the UK and internal flights around Indonesia made up the single largest cost of the trip. My long haul flight with Turkish Airways was £403.00 (a return London to Jakarta), and a total of four internal flights came to £228.00.

In the Arfak mountains we used the services of Zeth and Eliakim Wonggor. This included guiding for part of the visit, use of hides, accommodation, porters, cooks (not food costs though), etc. This came to IDR7,700,000 for the group, and was an excellent service. Travel to and from Manokwari cost IDR2,000,000 each way as 4x4 vehicles are required.

In Nimbokrang we used the services of Pak Jamil. With his new accommodation, food, and guiding, we were charged IDR900,000 a day per person. Car transport was an additional IDR500,000 per day (per group). This seemed expensive relative to other locations, and certainly resulted in a higher overall cost than we had anticipated. He is not running a lodge, the accommodation whilst nice is still relatively basic (no AC, basic shared rooms, no mozzzy nets, basic cold showers etc). I would say we were only accompanied by Jamil on a third of visits into the forest (because of health issues), the other times generally being guided by his support guides Alex and/or William (both very nice people with good local knowledge). You are however paying for access to forest patches in various local ownership and with access negotiated by Jamil and his team. Hopefully a little of this money finds its way to conserving some of these local forest patches. The operation, on the whole, is well set up.

On Waigeo we stayed at a basic homestay, and used local landowner guides, who have set up hides or viewing areas on their land for the Birds of Paradise. The costs of which were relatively standard and are detailed below. The remaining costs for Manokwari, Sorong and the Sorong Lowlands are also set out in relevant sections below.

A log of costs is provided on the excel doc here. Add on a few additions to this for meals when in the towns, snacks etc, and tips to guides, and the trip cost around £1,400.00 all in. We went as a group of four, which probably the most efficient approach in terms of the shared guide, transport and accommodation costs; and it also helped on not having problems getting into the bird hides/blinds of the various Birds of Paradise display grounds – which tend to be four max.

Equipment

A couple of points to consider are requirement for camping equipment and requirement for rubber boots/wellies. For all locations we visited no tent was necessary. A sleeping bag and thermarest/sleeping mat are however recommended, as it gets cold in the Arfak mountains, and the basic accommodation is wooden boards or camp beds made of tree whips bound together. In the other locations we used homestays or hotels.
Wellies/rubber boots are also recommended, although during our trip in 2015 the El Niño event meant that we didn’t require them at all – all the forests were very dry. I think this is unusual!

**Weather**

Notorious for being very wet in most parts of New Guinea, we actually encountered very little rain during the trip. November is traditionally the start of a monsoon period in northern New Guinea, but even during the drier periods there can be substantial amounts of rain. However the El Niño event that was ongoing in 2015 meant that the country had been mostly dry for what appeared to be some time. The lowlands were virtually mud free, and the mountains were drought stressed, with the epiphytic bryophytes and Lichens in the montane forests all brown and withering. This meant easy access to all birding locations and very little time lost to rain; but on the other hand some families of birds were not territorial, vocal or easy to see.

**Itinerary & Birding Locations**

**Itinerary**

Our Itinerary is provided in the table below, and the map below provides an overview of the locations of the main sites visited.

**GPS locations**

GPS files for birding sites and logistics described below are provided as a [KMZ file here](#).

The locations of these files can also be seen on [this Google Maps page](#).

We used the free android App Navigator available on a tablet/smart phone as a Sat Nav and GPS. The base map for Indonesia is downloadable so can be used off line and although it doesn’t include every road but was a great resource to getting us to the locations, with detailed maps for Manokwari, Sorong, Sentani and eg the Makbon Road also shown.

**Taxonomy**

The following resource provides information on status of a number of New Guinea birds from 2011: Gregory, P. (2011): An Overview of Recent Taxonomic Changes and Additions to the Avifauna of New Guinea. Muruk Vol 10 No.1 August 2011 P2-40

Further recent information is contained within the text for the species accounts in the second edition of the Pratt and Beehler field guide to the birds of New Guinea. In 2016 this will be supplemented by a taxonomic review by the same authors.

This report has attempted to follow the taxonomy in the most recent field guide - Pratt & Beehler (2014). Brackets in some cases provide alternative names – sometimes more popular than that provided in the new field guide.
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Map 1: Sites Visited

- Nimbokrang
- Arfak Mountains
- Sorong Lowlands
- Waigeo Island
A summary of logistics and main highlights for each site is provided below:

The Arfak Mountains

Introduction
The Arfak Mountains of the Vogelkop Peninsular are an endemic rich area comprising montane rainforest forests with a number of unique Birds of Paradise, as well as the very special Vogelkop Bowerbird.

Logistics

To reach the Arfaks, our first destination in West Papua, we flew from Jakarta, via Makassar to the city of Manokwari on the north east coast of the Vogelkop Peninsular. This was known as Dorey Harbour in Alfred Russel Wallace’s days, and like him, it was our first contact with the island of New Guinea, with the overnight flight flying over the mountains of the Vogelkop at dawn.

In Manokwari, we had arranged a 4x4 vehicle and driver to take us to the village of Syoubri 2-3 hours drive away. There were plenty of taxis outside of the airport awaiting the flight, so I imagine that finding someone and sorting a 4x4 vehicle on the spot would not be too difficult. We used a guy called Ali, but he doesn’t speak any English (+62 (0)813 4419 9938). The cost of a one way trip with a couple of birding stops along the road was IDR2,000,000. This is a considerable sum, but split between four, and seems to be the standard going rate whilst we were there. We sorted our return trip to Manokwari via Zeth Wonggor for the same price.

If you are alone then transport costs could be reduced by getting to the start of the mountain road inland and then hitching to the Syoubri turn off (left turn by the massive Mokwam Valley sign). From here it is less than 1hrs walk downhill, or probably a longer wait for a lift. There was quite a bit of 4x4 pickup traffic along the main mountain road. Of course the need to bring some food supplies (see below) will also dictate how much walking in can be done. Another option - it is also said that you can find public shared vehicles going to Mokwam area at Wosi Market in Manokwari.

We stopped-off en-route at the large Hadi Supermarket in Manokwari to buy food. The village shop in Syoubri has a very limited range of goods, so you should plan to buy all your food for the Arfaks in Manokwari, including sufficient to feed three or four porters / guides for a few days if you plan to camp away from the village at any stage (useful for seeing higher elevation species). It is a good idea to buy more food than you will actually need as your generosity in feeding locals will be appreciated. We spent about £100 on food between the four of us, and had plenty left over, which we donated to the village. There is no available refrigeration so this should be factored in with your choices.

For the Arfak mountains, we attempted to contact Zeth Wonggor in the months leading up to the trip via his family and through email & text, with details provided from previous trip reports. On arrival in the Arfaks however, we found out that none of these messages had got through, and Zeth was not expecting us. Another birding group was present on our first day only, who were using Papuan Bird Club (PBC) as ground agents/guides, otherwise we had the place to ourselves. Despite this we were not able to secure the guiding services of Zeth, who had agreed to go with the PBC group to Waigeo the day after we arrived. We therefore used the services of one of Zeth’s brothers.
– a very capable bird watching guide called Eliakim Wonggor. Eliakim is much younger than Zeth, but knows the local area around Syoubri, knows all the birds and various stakeouts well, and speaks good English. We used Eliakim for 5 days during our stay, with the remaining time visiting local habitats within ownership on our own. He charged us IDR300,000 a day for his services. Zeth charges IDR500,000 a day for guiding.

Eliakim’s contact details are: (+62 (0)852 4372 3860) or email: eliakimwonggorsyoubri@gmail.com
He would be another suitable contact at present for getting in touch with Zeth and the family to book time at Syoubri. A contact number for Zeth is also given in a trip report by Yann Muzika as (+62(0)852 5405 3754). There is no phone signal at Syoubri, and no internet, so contact is intermittent.

At Syoubri we stayed at Zeth’s Homestay (Sifo Syoubri Losmen) on the edge of the village. There were two accommodation options, and we took the more basic option at a cost of IDR100,000 a night per person. If the homestay is full then you could also stay in the village or camp. A third accommodation building was however just starting to be built as we left in Oct 2015. The basic accommodation is basic, no electricity and wooden boards for beds. The more ‘up market’ accommodation has a generator for the evenings and beds.

There is another accommodation option not far outside of Syoubri village, heading back toward the coast, run by the Kwau community (a village further down the valley). If you stay here you have access to different forest areas, and will not be able to use the trails and hides set up around the forest at Syoubri by Zeth.

At Syoubri we visited three main areas. The forest ‘below’ Syoubri; the forest above Zeth’s Homestay; and the higher elevation forest above the village where overnight camping is recommended. This latter location has a number of old and one active satellite camp along the various forest ridges. These are the German Camp (a large active camp and where we camped to spend time in these higher forests), the Japanese camp, and Camp David/Camp Attenborough – both of the latter were not in use. We also spent some time walking the access road to Syoubri, as there is open forest along this road too. In previous reports Garden Houses are also mentioned. These are generally reachable from the main accommodation, so we did not stay at these locations, pushing slightly higher to the German Camp – which for now appears to be a preferred satellite location.

There are trails around each of the locations, and each year display grounds of a number of species of Birds of Paradise are found and small blinds/hides are set up for visiting tourists. This allows close up views of these otherwise secretive birds. During 2015 there were display ground stakeouts for Magnificent Bird of Paradise, Western Parotia, and Black Sicklebill. In addition there were also blinds set up at the bower of the Vogelkop Bowerbird. Zeth and Eliakim also know areas of the forest where Arfak Astrapia and Long-tailed Paradigalla frequent. We also enquired with Zeth about the possibility of Dwarf Cassowary and Tree Kangaroos. It is possible to hire Zeth and spend 3-4 days on an expedition to visit more remote areas where these specialities can still be found.
Highlights

Birds of Paradise:

**Magnificent Bird of Paradise** – A male displaying and attending his display ground in the forest below Syoubri village from a hide for over an hour on our first afternoon was an eye-opening start to our birding in New Guinea. A female type was also seen briefly in a group of fruiting trees along the access road one afternoon loosely associating with around 10 Western Parotia and Superb Bird of Paradise.

**Western Parotia** – A favored display ground produced males and females on every visit. Although only one period of full display and mating. On a second occasion two females approached the display ground, but all the activity, including mating, occurred in the trees – and without any displaying from the male. A second adult male was also occasionally seen from this display area. One afternoon on the access road a group of fruiting trees attracted a flock of c10 Western Parotia. Mostly female, but 2-3 male/sub adult males also present.

**Black Sicklebill** – A personal trip highlight was seeing the pre-dawn horizontal display of Black Sicklebill on a ridge in the higher elevation forest. It took two mornings to see the full display as the staked out bird decided to display behind the hide on the first morning, then spend some time high in the canopy of a nearby tree. On the second morning, however, we were treated to a few minutes of display in front of the hide from this massive and iconic bird. A handful of sightings from the German Camp to Camp David were also made during the daytime, and the species was regularly heard in the higher elevation forest.

**Long-tailed Paradigalla** – During our visit a number of favored fruiting trees were being used in the forests above the homestay. This is a known stakeout for the species. We saw two birds together here on three separate visits (possibly a female with offspring?). A bird was also seen within 100m of the German Camp.

**Black-billed (Buff-tailed) Sicklebill** – Heard Only. A bird calling one morning deep in valley below the Japanese Camp, and a second bird heard on a few occasions around the Long-tailed Paradigalla stakeout.

**Superb Bird of Paradise** – A handful of sighting in the forest around Syoubri, including two males, one in a fruiting tree on the access road, and a second around the main Long-tailed Paradigalla stakeout. Sadly, no display grounds were staked out for this species in 2015.

**Trumpet Manucode** – A couple of birds seen in the forests below Syoubri village.

**Magnificent Riflebird** – Heard Only. Distant singing birds along the road from Manokwari to Mokwam area.
[Arfak Astrapia] – Eliakim had brief views of a non-adult bird above the Japanese Camp, but by the time we had all ran to where he was viewing from it had vanished. The main stakeout during our visit appeared to be the forest around the Japanese Camp.

Other Main Targets:

Vogelkop Bowerbird – Regularly encountered in the forest above Syoubri and also along the access road. Bowers, active and old were relatively frequent, especially in the higher elevation forests. A number of hides were set up around active bowers and our best views were from one of these. On another occasion we watched a singing bird in front of his bower by a small trail, just above the German Camp.

Masked Bowerbird – A female seen moving through the canopy in the forest patch below Syoubri, which represented the first individual Eliakim had seen in the forests around the village. This species is normally found at lower elevations along the drive in from Manokwari.

Sooty Owl – An amazing looking Tyto and one of the birds of the trip. Two pairs seen. A pair around the German Camp were actively calling at dusk and dawn during our nights camping there, with brief views flying over the camp, unfortunately obscured by heavy mist. A second pair were calling on and off during our stay at Zeth’s Homestay. On one evening we taped the pair into the clearings around the homestay for great views.

Papuan Boobook – Calling on and off around Zeth’s Homestay. A bird was taped in on the first evening, giving great views around the homestay clearing.

Papuan Frogmouth – Calling on and off around Zeth’s Homestay. We taped a bird in on the first evening, which gave good views around the homestay clearing.

Mountain Owlet-nightjar – Four individuals seen in day roosts around the Garden House areas. We/Eliakim failed to find Feline Owlet-nightjar in the day roost, and although there were potential Owlet-nightjar calls during night-times around the homestay, nothing was close or frequent enough to record for playback.

Spotted Jewel-babbler – Another bird of the trip. A bit of effort for this one, as there were only a few calling individuals due to the exceptionally dry conditions. We eventually managed to see two different birds either side of Camp David, one giving numerous brief but very good views.

Papuan Logrunner – Seen by TS only very briefly around the Japanese camp area. Not heard calling at all, perhaps due to dry conditions.

Papuan Treecreeper – Seen a few times, particularly around the Japanese Camp area.

Tit Berrypecker – Pairs and individuals seen in the forests above Syoubri on a few occasions.
Mottled Berryhunter (Mottled Whistler) – Calling birds around the Japanese Camp and around the Paradigalla stakeout area. The latter was seen on a couple of occasions moving quickly through the canopy and in flight.

Goldenface (Dwarf Whistler) – Close views of a single bird in the forest patch below Syoubri was the only sighting.

Pygmy (Papuan) Drongo - views of a single bird in the forest patch below Syoubri was the only sighting.

Robins – Lesser Ground Robin was seen a few times along trails, particularly around the German Camp and the main Paradigalla stakeout area. Garnet Robin was seen and sometimes heard around the German Camp and Camp David (always seen in the canopy). Smoky Robin was seen and heard on a few occasions around the Japanese Camp and trails to the German Camp. Blue-grey (Slaty) Robin was seen and heard regularly in the forests above the homestay, and from the Western Parotia hide. Ashy Robin was common around the German Camp and seen/heard in a few other locations. Green-backed Robin was seen from the Magnificent BoP display ground, and White-faced Robin from the Mokwam to Manokwari road. Papuan Flyrobin was seen in a few locations, including an individual on a nest at the Japanese Camp. We failed to see Black-throated Robin, which is often found around and above the Japanese Camp area, and some of the robins associated with hill forest and lower elevation habitats, that weren’t birded.

[Lesser Melampitta] – not definitively seen or heard. One probable was calling from the Paradigalla stakeout on the second afternoon, and SC had what was most likely one, very briefly, in a similar area.

Pigeons & Doves – Fruit Doves included Mountain (White-bibbed) and (Eastern) Superb. I don’t think we ventured low enough for the others. Papuan Mountain Pigeon was seen on a few occasions, with the best views along the access road. Rufescent Imperial Pigeon was seen once at the Japanese Camp. Black-billed Cuckoo Dove was regularly seen, Bronze Ground Dove was seen on a number of occasions, including finding an active nest, and Great Cuckoo Dove was heard distantly from around Syoubri.

Parrots – A small group of Pygmy Lorikeet was seen from the access road, Fairy Lorikeet was seen in the forest above Syoubri and along the access road, Papuan and Plum-faced Lorikeet were seen around the Japanese Camp, Yellow-billed Lorikeet were the most frequent in forest above Syoubri, Red-breasted Pygmy Parrot was seen at the Japanese Camp and on the main access road, Brehm’s Tiger Parrot was heard regularly around the German and up to the Japanese Camp, and seen around the Japanese Camp. Modest Tiger Parrot was seen on a couple of occasions around the Long-tailed Paradigalla stakeout area of forest above the riverbed. Moluccan King Parrot was seen one afternoon in flight along the main access road. Blue-collared Parrot was seen high above the main access road on the final afternoon.

Other Highlights – Long-tailed Buzzard, Blyth’s Hornbill, Eastern (Pacific) Koel, Dwarf Koel (H), Chestnut-breasted Cuckoo, White-eared Bronze Cuckoo, Rufous-throated Bronze Cuckoo (TS only), Mountain Swiftlet, Black-eared (Spotted) Catbird, White-shouldered Fairywren, Red-collared
Map 2: 3D Map of the Arfak Mountains, Syoubri Birding Sites (mostly based on GPS co-ordinates – trails not shown)
**Nimbokrang**

**Introduction**

Nimbokrang is an Indonesian transmigration settlement to the south west of the Cyclops Mountain range, in the lowlands of northern New Guinea. The town is split into two parts and is situated along lowland rivers with logged and disturbed primary lowland forest in close proximity. It is well known as currently the easiest location to get close to the lowland forest birds of West Papua. Pak Jamil, a Javan immigrant to West Papua and former bird trapper turned guide, has been showing visiting birders around the forests of Nimbokrang since early visitors in the 1990s (see for example David Gibbs’s consolidated trip report – Gibbs, 1996).

**Logistics**

Contact was made with Pak Jamil via his mobile number (+62 (0)852 5433 2796) a few weeks prior to the trip. Jamil responded quickly saying the dates we required were free and we could use his services and homestay. This was the only bit of pre-trip planning that worked out.

Jamil charged IDR900,000 a day per person for guiding, lodging, food, community costs and use of the private forest patches where we birded. This included the fees for using other guides Alex, William and Danche. Danche (or Dance, Dante) is an expert Cassowary hunter/tracker and can be requested if you want to spend a day in the forests to have a chance at seeing Northern Cassowary. Jamil speaks reasonably good English, as does Alex. All organising of visits to the forest were done through these two.

Transport was on top of the above costs. If you want meeting from the airport at Santani and dropping off there, this cost us IDR750,000 each way. We were also charged IDR500,000 a day for use of a car. On a couple of days we even shared this with another birding group but the price remained constant. If you are a on your own, you can get a lift on an Ojek with one of the guides.

Jamil and his team have stakeouts for the most sought after species present in the lowlands here. The main sites we visited are set out in the map below. Stakeouts and favoured areas for certain birds may change on a year by year basis, and an early discussion with Jamil and/or Alex about how best to use your time to target the birds you are most interested in seeing is recommended. As far as I could gather, they make agreements with local landowners to allow birding groups onto these areas, so part of your fees should go to the local landowner who allows you to visit their forest area.

We visited well known sites such as Jalan Korea (the former Korean logging road); KM8 forest patch (a patch of slightly higher elevation forest); the lowland forest areas north of Nimbokrang for Cassowary; and three forest patches on the edge of Nimbokrang – a forest patch south west of the settlement (for Twelve-wired, Lesser BoP and Pale-billed Sicklebill), a forest patch south east of the settlement (for Shovel-billed Kookaburra), and the well known forest patch east of Nimbokrang and closest to Jamil’s homestay (which we dubbed the ‘plank’ forest as a series of wooden planks provide makeshift boardwalks to allow the logging operation that is currently ongoing here). A further site about 45km away in the hill forests south of Nimbokrang is also visited for a number of
other species, principally New Guinea Vulturine Parrot – we ran out of time to make it here, giving additional time to seeing Shovel-billed Kookaburra instead.

**Highlights**

**Birds of Paradise:**

**Twelve-wired Bird of Paradise** – A stakeout of a display perch on our first morning in the forest patch to the south west of Nimbokrang provided excellent prolonged views at dawn, including displaying to a female with the wire brushing and dancing around the perch. Also seen occasionally and heard in other forest patches visited.

**Pale-billed Sicklebill** – Regularly heard in the forest patch to the south west of Nimbokrang, and a female was eventually tracked down here for good views, with assistance from Alex.

**Lesser Bird of Paradise** – Common in most forest patches, but not always easy to see. Males were seen in a display tree at the forest patch south west of Nimbokrang.

**King Bird of Paradise** – A male seen in the forest patch ‘plank forest’ east of Jamil’s house and a pair seen at a staked out display tree on Jalan Korea.

**Magnificent Riflebird** – Seen at KM8. A display area was staked out by Alex, giving brief views for some of us. The best vocalist of the birds of paradise in my opinion (not too hard!)

**Magnificent Bird of Paradise** – Heard in the forest patch at KM8. Jamil knows display grounds for this species, which can be staked out if requested.

**Glossy Manucode** – Common in all forest areas visited

**[Jobi Manucode]** – No definitive sightings of this species, which occurs alongside the similar looking and much commoner Glossy Manucode.

**Other Main Targets:**

**Shovel-billed Kookaburra (Kingfisher)** – This took some effort. We concentrated on a territory or two known in forest just south east of Nimbokrang, but also tried a ‘new’ site in the forest patch to the south west of Nimbokrang. We eventually had very brief views of a bird going to roost on our final evening and then staked out the area at dawn, seeing the bird come out of roost and calling in canopy of a large tree. Standing under the bird it became inquisitive and dropped down from its high point to an open branch just above our heads for a few seconds of mind blowing views. This sighting was in the forest patch south east of Nimbokrang at the current main stakeout.

**Other Kingfishers** – **Hook-billed Kingfisher** was relatively common by voice, but is crepuscular and can even call through the night. We spot-lit one high in the canopy in the eastern forest patch close
to Jamil’s house (plank forest). **Yellow-billed Kingfisher** was also relatively common by voice and a pair was taped in along Jalan Korea. **Papuan (Variable) Dwarf Kingfisher** was seen once in the forest at KM8 and heard a couple of other times. **Common Paradise Kingfisher** was seen at Jalan Korea. **Rufous-bellied Kookaburra** was relatively common in most forest patches.

**Papuan Hawk-Owl** – Heard Only. A pair at the near edge of the eastern forest patch, and a second pair within the forest patch were calling intermittently during visits at dusk and dawn.

**Marbled & Papuan Frogmouth** – Marbled Frogmouth was common by voice in the eastern forest patch and seen on a couple of occasions. Papuan Frogmouth was also seen once at this location. Jamil sometimes has nesting Papaun Frogmouth in his back garden, but they were not present during our visit.

**Northern Cassowary** – A trip out with Danche was an interesting experience, but we failed to see the Cassowary. We did hear footsteps of one crunching dry leaves, as well as some droppings and footprints, but no bird. At lunch time a massive prolonged downpour, one of the few of the entire trip, saw us retreating back to Nimbokrang. We stayed close to the river, presumably due to the very dry conditions attracting birds to the wettest areas of the forest.

**Victoria Crowned Pigeon** – Up to 10 birds (including a flock of c7 birds) seen in the floodplain forests close to the river on the Northern Cassowary walk. Just before the torrential downpour. Compensation for the lack of Cassowary sightings! Jamil has a pair in a cage at the back of his house, apparently confiscated from a trapper. They are being kept for ‘breeding’. I suggested to Alex that they should be released as they looked more like pets.

**Other Pigeons & Doves** – **Wompoo & Orange-bellied Fruit-Dove** were the two most frequent Fruit-Doves recorded, with Orange-bellied the most numerous. **Coroneted Fruit-Dove** was seen once in the south west forest patch. **Pink-spotted & Beautiful Fruit-Doves** were heard only. **Pinon’s Imperial Pigeon** was the commonest Imperial Pigeon seen in all forest patches; **Zoe’s Imperial Pigeon** was seen on Jalan Korea and the south west forest patch, **Purple-tailed Imperial Pigeon** was seen on Jalan Korea. We didn’t encounter any large fruiting trees that can attract high numbers of Fruit-Doves. **Brown (Slender-billed) Cuckoo-Dove** was common, **Great Cuckoo-Dove** and **Stephan’s Emerald Dove** were both seen in the south west forest patch.

**Parrots** – **Palm Cockatoo** was seen in the south west forest patch, **Sulphur-crested Cockatoo** was recorded at a few sites in low numbers, **Brown Lory** was seen at the eastern and south western forest patches – usually above canopy in flight in small groups, **Rainbow (Coconut) Lorikeet** was frequent, **Black-capped Lory** was seen in the south western forest patch, **Buff-faced Pygmy Parrot** was seen in a few locations, with best views at the south eastern forest patch, a pair of **Papuan King Parrot** were seen in flight over Jalan Korea; **Salvadori’s Fig Parrot** was seen in the eastern forest patch; **Double-eyed Fig Parrot** was seen in the south west forest patch; **Red-cheeked Parrot & Eclectus Parrot** were common and widespread.

**New Guinea Harpy Eagle** – Heard Only. A single bird was heard calling fairly distantly from near the road at KM8.
Red-legged (Collared) Brush Turkey – A single bird flushed from a minor trail whilst looking for Cassowary was seen by some of us.

[Blue Jewel-babbler] – Not seen or even heard during our stay. We put this down (again!) to the dry conditions (always good to have a decent excuse for failure).

Red-bellied (Habenicht’s) Pitta – Heard Only. Nimbokrang is within range of the (sometimes disputed) sub-species habenichti. This form is part of the proposed split of the species, as accepted by some authorities, and would become Habenicht’s Pitta. We heard it on the first morning near the Twelve-wired Bird of Paradise display tree at dawn. Thinking we would have other opportunities we didn’t follow it up. This was however the only individual we heard calling.

Long-billed Cuckoo – Heard Only. A bird was heard calling on Jalan Korea

Fawn-breasted Bowerbird – A bird at its display grounds in farmland along a minor road to the south east of Nimbokrang. Also present here were Grand, Chestnut-breasted & Hooded Mannikin, Crimson Finch and a Hooded Pitta in adjacent scrub.

Swamp (Papuan) Harrier – A bird seen in farmland on eastern edge of Lake Sentani

Papuan Nightjar – A few observed on the edge of the south western forest patch one evening hawking over the forest edge. No calling noted. Care should be taken as eg Large-tailed Nightjar was also heard at Nimbokrang in the eastern forest patch.

Papuan Spinetailed Swift – Seen along Jalan Korea, and at the south western and south eastern forest patches

Lowland Peltops – Seen at Jalan Korea and south west forest patch

Map 3: Aerial Map of Birding Sites around Nimbokrang (based on GPS co-ordinates, trails not shown – guiding necessary)
Waigeo Island

Introduction
The Raja Ampat Islands have two unique Birds of Paradise, Wilson’s Bird of Paradise and Red Bird of Paradise. The former occurs on Waigeo and Batanta islands, and the latter also occurs on some adjacent islands. The islands themselves are beautiful tropical islands, mostly still undeveloped, with limestone cliffs, coral reefs and white sandy beaches where the forest still comes down to the sea in many places. Development looks like it is changing some areas, particularly around Waisai.

Logistics

Getting to Waigeo has got a lot easier in the last couple of years as a daily public ferry service is now in operation from the town of Sorong on the mainland to Waisai harbour, Waigeo. A slow and fast ferry go daily, with the latter going in the afternoon at 2pm and taking roughly 2 hours. This cost us IDR130,000 each for an economy ticket. Further details are provided on the website Stay Raja Ampat.

If visiting the Raja Ampat Islands as a tourist you are now required to pay a tourist permit fee (‘PIN’) of IDR1,000,000, which is valid for 12 months. This can be purchased in Sorong, or on arrival in the islands, as officials meet the ferry at Waisai to take the fee off visiting tourists. The fee is supposed to fund conservation and community projects on the islands, but like all recent large increases in permit fees for National Parks and ‘protected’ areas across Indonesia, it is uncertain just how much hypothecation of this revenue occurs. Aside from officials meeting the ferry, there were no further checks of permits during our stay on Waigeo.

On Waigeo we headed to the coastal village of Saprokren, were a number of beach resorts and homestays operate. We stayed at Warimpurem Homestay, which is located at the end of the metalled road. We had pre-booked the homestay next door (Yenkangkanes) using the contact details on the website Stay Raja Ampat, and even received a confirmation from them. However on arriving there, we found the accommodation full. We were shown next door, which was a broadly similar set up, and the same cost – IDR350,000 full board per person per day.

We visited display grounds of Wilson’s & Red Birds of Paradise by organising local guides (who have set up hides/blinds on their land) through the homestay. Various options are available. We chose the closest, which are located east of the homestay. For the Wilson’s Bird of Paradise this was Demas Dimara (+62 (0)852 4475 1458) – he speaks no English, so we arranged this trip through the homestay.

We also birded along the metalled access road, and an unsurfaced track that runs north inland from about 1km east of the homestay (the first inland vehicle track east of the homestay). This track leads up hill to a junction. The left turn leads up an even steeper section with forest on either side. This is where we went into the forest for the Red BoP. The right hand turn leads to a section of concrete road that goes down to a cliff face and active brickworks. Walking through this leads to a forest patch where we were taken to see the Wilson’s BoP. Walking along the roads on your own is ok, but the forests are all privately owned.
We also organised a boat ride through the homestay, heading west and north along the coastline into a large bay one morning to attempt to see Western Crowned Pigeon in a more remote forest patch (using a local guide called Melke). This trip is normally combined with a stop on the way back at a small island that can produce a few interesting bird species, including Spice Imperial Pigeon.

Highlights

Birds of Paradise:

Wilson’s Bird of Paradise – Perhaps the iconic bird of West Papua. We visited a display ground past the brickworks on the inland road from the homestay, taking the eastern (right hand) turn. The hide/screen was set back a little from the display ground but the male bird was extremely active during the visit with about 1.5hrs viewing of attending the arena, calling, preening and even a small amount of display.

Red Bird of Paradise – Relatively common in forest edge and forest habitats, mostly female types seen. A dawn visit to a display tree provided a number of displaying males and attending females and immatures.

Glossy Manucode – Common in all forest edge and forest habitats visited.

Other Main Targets:

[Western Crowned Pigeon] – We organised a trip to a more remote area of forest on a boat, where the previous month a group had seen good numbers of Crowned Pigeon. Unfortunately they could not be found during our visit.

Other Pigeons & Doves – Great Cuckoo-Dove was seen a couple of times, Stephan’s Emerald Dove was commonly heard and occasionally seen, Wompoo Fruit-Dove & Pink Spotted Fruit-Dove were recorded a couple of times, Claret-breasted Fruit-Dove was the commonest Fruit Dove around the homestay area, Pinon’s Imperial Pigeon was recorded daily, Pied Imperial Pigeon was seen in low numbers around the coast, [Spice Imperial Pigeon] was not recorded but is said to occur commonly on an island on the way to/from the Western Crowned Pigeon forest area. We didn’t stop as we got caught in a torrential downpour during the return boat trip.

Brown-headed Crow – A pair with young on the main road east of the homestay. Other individuals and small groups also noted flying around forest edge. Encountered daily in small numbers.

Raja Ampat Pitohui – This bird has been hiding in amongst the Variable Pitohui complex, but is now regarded as a species in its own right. It even seems to act and behave in a slightly different way to the Variable Pitohui’s that it bears a resemblance to. We saw this species on the inland road heading west up a steep hill to the Red Bird of Paradise area, and also heading east past the brickworks to the forest area where the Wilson’s Bird of Paradise display ground is present.
**Kingfishers** – **Rufous-bellied Kookaburra** was fairly common, with a nesting pair just east of the homestay from the main road, **Beach Kingfisher** was seen from the boat trip to the Western Crowned Pigeon area, **Common Paradise Kingfisher** was common within forest from the inland road (eg around the Red Bird of Paradise display tree), **Yellow-billed Kingfisher & Hook-billed Kingfisher** were both heard.

**Parrots** – **Palm & Sulphur-crested Cockatoo** were recorded daily in low numbers around the homestay and nearby forest patches, **Rainbow (Coconut) Lorikeet** was seen in small flocks on occasion, **Black-capped Lory** was noted on the inland road (but these birds were known to have come from a ill thought out introduction back to the wild), **Red-cheeked Parrot & Eclectus Parrot** were numerous.

**Gurney's Eagle** – Seen twice. Both times from the main road east of the homestay.

**Papuan Frogmouth** – Seen on the inland road after dawn high in the canopy, in the area past the brickworks. Also heard late at night from the homestay.

**Hooded Pitta** – A couple of individuals calling in coastal scrub near to the homestay.

**Spotted Whistling Duck** – A group of 23 in small balancing pools by airstrip.


Other Wildlife – **Indo-pacific Bottle-nosed Dolphin** and **Spinner Dolphins** from the Ferry to and from Waigeo, and **Indo-pacific Bottle-nosed Dolphin** around the coastline. **Waigeo Spotted Cuscus** recorded from the main coast road near to the homestay at dawn one morning.
Map 4: Saproken Area, Waigeo (the additions are illustrative rather than precise mapping)
Sorong Lowlands

Introduction

A couple of roads heading inland from Sorong provide opportunities to visit lowland forest areas on the north west tip of the Vogelkop Peninsular.

Logistics

We stayed at the Lovensia Hotel at the northern end of Sorong. A number of the hotels were full, but there are plenty of options. The room cost IDR300,000/IDR260,000 for a small room (we shared as a twin as we had our thermarests etc). Rooms had AC and WiFi.

We visited two lowland sites on the two spare mornings we had in Sorong. The first was the Makbon Road, which is only partially metalled, but was accessible by two wheel drive during our visit. This inland road heads north east to the coastal village of Makbon and passes through areas of part logged forest. We stopped in suitable locations and birded from the road only.

The second site is the nature reserve in logged forest at KM14 south of Sorong ‘Taman Wisata Alam Sorong’. This comprises an access road that goes through patches of forest for c10km or so and eventually ending at an industrial site. Small forest trails also lead off the main track, into patches of forest.

In order to access these sites, we hired a taxi. We used a young Indonesian guy called Tufri, who spoke good English and seemed pleased to get out of the city – despite the occasional problems with the road surface, especially on the Makbon Road. His phone number is (+62 (0)823 9888 9522).

Highlights – Species not seen elsewhere:

Red-billed Brush-Turkey – Heard Only. Frequent along the Makbon Road

Dwarf Fruit-Dove – Seen on both Makbon Road and KM14

Orange-fronted Fruit-Dove – Seen on the KM14 road

Yellow-capped Pygmy Parrot – Seen on the KM14 road

Red-throated Myzomela – Seen on the KM14 road

Golden Myna – Seen on the Makbon Road

Other notable species: Long-tailed Buzzard, Brown (Slender-billed) Cuckoo-Dove, (Eastern) Superb Fruit-Dove, Pink-Spotted Fruit-Dove, Coroneted Fruit-Dove, Orange-bellied Fruit-Dove, Pinon’s Imperial Pigeon, Greater Black (Ivory-billed) Coucal, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Red-cheeked Parrot, Eclectus Parrot, Rufous-bellied Kookaburra, Hook-billed Kingfisher (H), Yellow-billed Kingfisher (H), Blyth’s Hornbill, Hooded Pitta (H), White-eared Catbird (H), Scrub Meliphaga, Tawny-breasted

Final Thoughts

Thanks to Shaun, Tim and Duncan for all the early trip organisation, and for excellent company in the field; and also for reading a draft of this report and providing corrections, comments and amendments to increase its usefulness. Thanks also to all the local guides and other people who helped us in the various parts of West Papua we visited.

GarethKnass
Berkshire, UK
Map 5: Sorong Lowlands Area

- Makbon Road
- Turn off to Makbon
- Start of Makbon Road
- Lovensia Hotel
- Public Ferry
- Start of KM14 Road
- KM14 Road
- Start of KM14 Road
- Makbon
- 3.3 Pague Putra Mandisa (PPM) quarry, Makbon
A Selection of Photos

Magnificent Bird of Paradise - At its display ground, Arfak Mountains

Displaying Magnificent Bird of Paradise, Arfak Mountains
Black Sicklebill - On its display post, pre dawn, Arfak Mountains
Western Parotia, Arfak Mountains – A male sat above its display ground post display.

Long-tailed Paradigalla, Arfak Mountains
Bower of the Vogelkop Bowerbird, Arfak Mountains

Vogelkop Bowerbird, Arfak Mountains
Displaying Twelve-wired Bird of Paradise, Nimbokrang
Victoria Crowned Pigeon - One of a group of c7 individuals, Nimbokrang

Marbled Frogmouth, Nimbokrang
Pale-billed Sicklebill - Female, Nimbokrang
Male Lesser Bird of Paradise at its Lek, Nimbokrang

Papuan Harrier – Seen on the airport run, near Lake Sentani – taxonomically considered by some to be part of Eastern Marsh Harrier, by others part of Swamp Harrier, but also sometimes treated as a species in its own right.
Wilson’s Bird of Paradise – Preening, Waigeo, Raja Ampat Islands

Wilson’s Bird of Paradise, Waigeo, Raja Ampat Islands
Displaying Red Bird of Paradise, Waigeo, Raja Ampat Islands

Palm Cockatoo – Sunning itself early morning, Waigeo, Raja Ampat Islands
Brown-headed Crow, Waigeo, Raja Ampat Islands – An impressive looking corvid!

Waigeo Spotted Cuscus – Considered to be at least partly diurnal, we saw one active at dawn near Saprokren, Waigeo, Raja Ampat Islands.