

## 27 Dec 2018 – 11 Jan 2019: Bougainville and New Ireland area by Frank Rheindt

This trip constituted a continuation of a string of unseasonal, ill-advised birdwatching ventures over the last 3 to 4 years. Knowing full well that most of Melanesia is shrouded by the monsoon season's clouds around year's end, I nevertheless selected Bougainville on the basis of precipitation charts that showed a dip in rainfall during December to January. My plan was to combine Bougainville with smaller Bismarck island groups around New Ireland that appeared to have constantly high rainfall with limited seasonality. In retrospect, this decision was extremely silly: Although rain was not the main problem on Bougainville, heavy monsoon winds were, as they whipped through the montane forests with gale force and triggered a complete absence of bird activity. On Mussau and other New Ireland satellites, likewise, rain was not necessarily prohibitive, but the season was visibly at its annual low, with hardly any bird activity outside the 8-9am window. What disappointment to reap such low success after so much investment and effort!

**Bougainville:** This is the politically most unstable part of PNG. Although I encountered many friendly people, I found this to be a generally problematic place to travel in, with rampant alcohol-triggered antagonism and open hostility towards people who look as if they could be from Australia (for obvious Panguna-related reasons). Widespread gun possession in the island's interior does not instill confidence either. My visit in Dec/Jan 2018/19 coincided with the climax building towards the impending June 2019 independence referendum, which will doubtless result in an outcome that the national government may not be prepared to honor. In some way, I felt that I may be visiting shortly before another civil war.

Traveling with minimal preparation – as I foolishly do – my initial plan was to visit the highest mountain (Mt Balbi) based on work contacts I have. Rather late, I noticed on Google Earth and trip reports that this volcano naturally lacks most of the good forest characterizing the southern mountains, and that three key birds have never been found outside the southern Crown Prince Range. A last-minute change of mind then saw me traveling to Arawa in the south, where I let Google Earth guide me to the nearest village accessible by road in relation to the highest peak in the Crown Prince Range (-6.374, 155.590). However, the expensive jeep hire was in vain as the villagers were extremely hostile to the idea of a tourist entering their clan's land, swiftly sending me back to Arawa. Fortunately, I was then put in touch with friendly Zhon Bosco ([bougtours@hotmail.com](mailto:bougtours@hotmail.com)), whom I should have contacted before my trip if I had done minimal internet research, and who set me up with Panguna-local Francis and his sons for a 4 day trek towards the higher elevations around the Crown Prince Range. Francis and family guided me on a trek from a village above Panguna (below the local peak Mt Lovimboi) to a ridgetop where Francis had killed a Moustached Kingfisher a few years prior (with photo evidence). The exact site of Francis's discovery is -6.344, 155.5366 at ~1230m elevation. The habitat where he took me looked ideal: good ridgetop forest characterized by tall trees and spiny palm growth. The area is still pristine and I am convinced the kingfisher remains in it. However, my visit was characterized by a

complete lull in bird sound and activity. Three days in perfect habitat at good enough elevations, yet I missed even some of the montane endemics that I expected to be easy, such as Hooded Whistler, while otherwise common montane fare such as Hamlin's White-eye were only encountered by me on the third day! When I got sick with high fever on the third day, I aborted the futile trek, hiking back to Panguna on the fourth day.



*My guide Francis, visibly comfortable with keeping me safe.*

**Buka:** I mainly passed through here en route to Bougainville, but spent a little time using Buka town as a base for limited suburban birding and for visiting a small offshore island (landing at -5.470, 154.692) for supertramp birding, successfully finding the local Mangrove Golden Whistler and other supertramps. I also made a serious effort trying to get to Nissan from Buka, but the heavy monsoon winds spoiled my plans here yet again.

**New Ireland:** I did not target the highland endemics of this island on this trip, knowing that it would be the worst season, but did use the main town of Kavieng (pronounced: Cave-Yeng) as a stop-over to surrounding satellites. I ended up birding Kavieng Airport on multiple occasions, but not much beyond.

**Djaul:** Following difficulties of securing boat transport to Mussau because of local sensitivities with certain weekdays, I inserted a brief 2-day trip to Djaul to target its few endemics. I consider my fortuitous visit to Djaul the most successful part of this trip. Despite general unseasonal timing for the region, Djaul's forests were teeming with active (although not necessarily vocal) birds, and I managed to connect with all species on my wishlist over a very short timeframe. I was guided by four extremely nice and knowledgeable young gentlemen based in a small Tigak-speaking village on the northwestern coast of Djaul (probably "Leion"), not one of the villages of the original Tiang-speaking inhabitants in the east.

**Mussau:** After Bougainville, this was the second big target destination of my trip. I was keen to spend as much time as it takes to see even some of the less readily encountered endemics (e.g. triller, island thrush) and expected favorable conditions on an island that appears to be equally rainy all year long. Difficulties of finding a boat during this windy season meant that I ended up with much less time than initially planned. Crossing the 160km of open Pacific Ocean in a little boat with outboard motor during the monsoon winds was a traumatic experience, with body pain many days after the event. Although

friendly and hospitable, the Seventh Day Adventist islanders invariably expect you to spend the best morning hours with prayer rather than in the field. But even on the one day when I was able to sneak away in time, morning bird activity was short-lived and feeble, and the remainders of the days were generally dead. As on Bougainville, even birds I expected to be common ended up being challenging to see. Although I found most endemics in the end, I left a couple of painful gaps. My base was with villagers from what Google Earth calls “Katalusa” on the east coast of the island, although the locals had a different name for their village. A full day was wasted bashing through the undergrowth while following my over-confident hosts along non-existing trails through clan land up to ~350m (which felt as if we should have reached at least 1000m!). Much more productive birding (though still not brilliant) was then had on the remaining day in secondary forest lining the main road from “Katalusa” towards Boliu on the south coast.

**Emirau:** This island was usually called “Emira” or just “Mira” by the locals. On the return from Mussau, my boat surprisingly stopped over on Emirau for 30min, but I found the island uninspiring and completely converted to scrub and coconut. Various small-island endemics that I hoped for (Atoll Starling, Pacific Imperial Pigeon) were absent and unknown to the locals, who correctly pointed out the more common sister species, making me think that the supertramps must be relegated to even smaller islands (perhaps including islets off Emirau).

**New Hanover:** Nobody calls this island by its official (and supposedly native) name Lavongai. As I was forced off Mussau a day earlier than expected due to the Sabbath, I jumped the boat when it unexpectedly stopped over on Nuslik (a New Hanover satellite) for petrol. The prospect of New Hanover Mannikin was more tempting than a dull day in Kavieng before my international return flight. From Nuslik the local inhabitants took me to Tungag-speaking Tukulisawa village, truly the place with the highest amount of children I have ever seen. Birding in my limited time here was hampered by the constant accompaniment by dozens of children and by a lack of terrestrial mobility, given that Tukulisawa is surrounded by mangrove. With a combination of patience and perseverance, I managed to access grassland on dry soil for the mannikin besides bagging a few nice birds in the mangroves.

**Itinerary** (sites mentioned in the trip list are in **bold**):

**27 Dec 2018:** After an all-night flight from Singapore, I arrived in Port Moresby in the early morning, with plenty of time to board my late-morning flight to Buka. Crossing the narrow straits between Buka and Bougainville, I soon boarded a crowded public van to take me to **Arawa**, where I settled in the Gold Dust Inn and arranged for a jeep for the next morning – against the wise advice from the Gold Dust Inn personnel. An evening session of “rail-watching” in the Inn’s neighborhood provided mouth-watering but insufficient views of Woodford’s Rail.

**28 Dec 2018:** The driver of my \$200 morning rental jeep arrived on time, taking me on a 90-min drive to a village (-6.374, 155.590) at the end of a gravel track that appears to be the closest one can get to the foot of the Crown Prince Range by vehicle. Negotiations with the villagers ended in failure despite mediation by my driver. I had to return to

Arawa immediately. There I was set up with local tourist agent Zhon Bosco, who took me to Francis, a clansman from near Panguna who showed me his photo of a dead Moustached Kingfisher he had killed a few years ago. We arranged for Francis to take me on a trek through the highlands above Panguna over the next few days. The mid and late afternoon was spent with low-key birding along the main road from **Arawa** towards Buka, where a lack of activity provided a bad omen for the following days. I narrowly escaped an altercation with drunk, non-uniformed locals in a jeep claiming to be policemen and wanting to confiscate my supposedly Australian passport.

29 Dec 2018: After continuing bad luck with rails over the last two days, I seized the twilight of dawn to go to **Arawa's** neighborhood rail spot near the Gold Dust Inn, just barely capable of running away from a group of drunken rowdies charging after me in the last minutes of darkness. A prearranged jeep with Francis inside picked me up one hour after dawn, taking me to a village above **Panguna** at -6.332, 155.506 (roughly 960m elevation). From there, Francis, his kids and I hiked down into the valley to a big local school serving the surrounding villages, and eventually back up again into less disturbed and then undisturbed montane forest. By the end of the day, we had reached the surroundings of Francis's kingfisher spot (-6.344, 155.5366; at ~1230m elevation). His lads chose a location roughly 800m away towards the forest edge to erect their camp. A pre-dusk hike to the actual kingfisher spot with Francis was marred by strong winds and yielded nothing.

30 Dec 2018: I had high hopes for today – the second day of my **Panguna** hike – but the best part of the morning around the kingfisher spot resulted in a complete lack of a dawn chorus and almost no birds. During the afternoon, we explored a peak opposite the kingfisher spot, erecting my tent near its highest point, but if anything, activity subsided even more with increasing winds. By this point, I still hadn't seen what should be some of the most common montane endemics of the area.

31 Dec 2018: The third day in montane forest along my **Panguna** hike continued with gale-like winds around the highest ridges where my tent was situated. I decided to relocate to lower elevations, where the impact of the winds wasn't as extreme, and where I finally found my first Hamlin's White-eyes, supposedly one of the most common birds up here! An onset of illness prompted me to seek out even lower elevations. We arrived in Francis's home village at roughly 920m elevation (-6.338, 155.524), where I set up my tent in his yard and slept away through New Year's Eve with heavy fever.

1 Jan 2019: Still weak and shaken from my bout of fever, I insisted on aborting this pointless and ill-timed expedition and walked back down to the school in the valley and up again to the village next to **Panguna**. Zhon Bosco had already heard through feeble cell phone reception that I would be ready to get picked up for my return to Arawa. On the drive back down to the coast, Zhon Bosco generously allowed me almost an hour's roadside birding along the pass between Panguna and Arawa, but the winds hit this area particularly strongly and there was not a bird to be seen. Down near the coast, Zhon took me on a brief spin to a Catholic mission at the opposite end of the bay from **Arawa** (-6.196, 155.546), then returned me to the Gold Dust Inn for a meal and picked me up again for a late afternoon mainly around the same Catholic mission. This afternoon constituted my best birding on Bougainville, with at least a little bit of lowland action in

the form of a single Ultramarine Kingfisher and some lesser tidbits. Woodford's Rail remained at large.

2 Jan 2019: Disillusioned with the winds, I gave up on Bougainville and took a prearranged morning van back to Buka. A Woodford's Rail passing the road en route would probably have been countable for many people, but I opted against it. By recommendation of John Bosco, I put myself up at Destiny Hotel in Buka and spent some time in vain making inquiries about boats going to Nissan Island, which would have been a good way to derive at least some of good fortune out of an improperly timed trip to this part of the world. At last I partly succeeded, at least in organizing a small boat to a little island not far from **Buka** town (see introduction for location) where a selection of supertramp species obliged. Before dusk, I managed to find Hutjena Primary School outside Buka for my last unsuccessful try for Woodford's Rail, which – I am led to believe by Zhon Bosco – is extremely responsive during other months of the year.

3 Jan 2019: Early-morning bush-bashing around **Buka** yielded little in the way of birds. When arriving back at Buka harbor, Nissan boatmen remained elusive and I started to realize that the sea is too rough for most people to attempt a crossing to Nissan. This removed the last reason for me to stay in Buka, so I immediately proceeded to buying a plane ticket to Kavieng via Rabaul. After finding a guest house in Kavieng upon my mid-afternoon arrival, there was a bit of time left to observe Hunstein's Mannikin at **Kavieng Airport** and to make first negative inquiries at the harbor about boats going to Mussau.

4 Jan 2019: An early morning visit to Kavieng harbor revealed that boats would not go to Mussau either today or tomorrow because of the Holy Sabbath. Rather than losing two days' time, I instead organized a boat to **Djaul** via one of the many people approaching me who coincidentally turned out to be from Djaul. A mid-afternoon arrival in my village on the northwestern coast of Djaul (see description in the introduction) left me with enough time for a pleasant and successful afternoon sortie in the company of four young naturalist lads who knew their birds quite well. It was a good start for Djaul birding. I spent the night in simple village accommodation.

5 Jan 2019: A full day of birding on **Djaul**, and possibly my most pleasant day of the trip... Djaul was comparatively the birdiest island I visited, and all the main targets including the three endemic monarch types, fell into place one by one. I was exhausted but satisfied by the end of the day and descended into my simple accommodation.

6 Jan 2019: Based on yesterday's success, I decided to leave **Djaul** in the late morning, giving me another chance for an early-morning stroll to add the dwarf-kingfisher and the ground-dove to my tally. Arriving back in Kavieng, I set myself up in the same guesthouse as before and immediately started inquiries at the harbor about boats to Mussau. With a little bit of an extra charge, I secured one boat leaving in the wee hours of tomorrow, spending the rest of my daytime at **Kavieng Airport** getting confused by immature mannikins. The skipper of the boat arrived at the guesthouse after dark to receive a partial down payment.

7 Jan 2019: My little boat, with eight souls in it, left Kavieng harbor in the dark of the predawn hours. What followed were the 10 most traumatic hours of the entire trip, beating even my heavy fever during the Bougainville hike. It was a windy day, and the

waves shook the boat around, with no safe place to hold onto to buffer the sheer force of the boat's bottom constantly hitting the brick-like ocean. I arrived on the east coast of **Mussau** having aged by 10 years. The skipper instantly set me up with a family from his own east-coast village, who graciously hosted me during my stay. The house they set me up in was another 2 km hike south along the coast – a distance that took my wasted body the entire remainder of today's daylight hours, with no more significant birding action.

8 Jan 2019: I awoke at dawn and walked to my **Mussau** host family's principal dwelling two kilometers north from the accommodation along the depauperate coastal strip, seeing few birds along the way. My host family was eager to show me their clan's land, and with any other land access being problematic, I eagerly accepted their invitation. Little did I know that it would entail sitting through the entire morning prayer sessions, which ended only when peak morning bird activity was well underway. I pressed ahead from the coast into the hinterland, but the trail soon petered out. With the help of a few of young lads' sharp machetes, we laboriously made our way up to the top of a hill ridge which could not have been much higher than 350m according to Google Earth, although it felt like a strenuous montane trek. The entire day was characterized by Mussau's seasonal lull in activity, with only the most common endemics, such as Mussau Monarch, making an appearance. Back down near the village, I lodged my trip's only Mussau Flycatcher in the remaining minutes of daylight and proceeded to my accommodation deflated.

9 Jan 2019: This morning I made sure to go straight to the connecting road between the coastal village and the Boliu intersection in the island's south. Some lads from the host family joined me soon to provide the clan's representation. The road crosses 2-3 patches of secondary forest, and although bird activity was not brilliant, it was much preferable to yesterday's near-complete absence of birds. In the afternoon, the lads took me along narrower side-paths to some hilly forest to the north, where activity was poorer again. Today, on this second day on **Mussau**, I managed to see most of the remaining endemics, but a couple of sore gaps remained. When returning to the accommodation exhausted, I found out that I was not going to be privy to any additional birding on Mussau, as the last boats for a while were only going to depart on the following morning (Thursday) because of the upcoming Sabbath break (Friday/Saturday). This terminated my hopes of finding the more elusive endemics.

10 Jan 2019: At daybreak, I walked from the accommodation south along the beach for ~1-2km to reach the boat's pick-up spot. After departure delays because of overloading, I left Mussau in a small boat filled with ~9 people. A ~30min stop-over near **Emirau's** northwestern tip left me unimpressed by the island, with at least this side of it thoroughly degraded. The boat's main southbound crossing from Emirau was much less choppy than a few days ago. A second surprise stop-over for refueling was made on **Nuslik**, a tiny islet off of northern New Hanover, where I made a snap decision to leave the boat and invest the last day – that I was prevented from spending on Mussau – into some **New Hanover** birding. From Nuslik, a local man and his sons transferred me to the coastal village of Tukulisawa in his boat, where it was initially challenging to find accommodation and make things work. With the help of some village youths who knew

better English than anyone else, I finally deposited my baggage in a safe house and walked around for some low-key birding. It emerged that Tukulisawa was surrounded by wet mangroves, making it challenging to reach the crucial grasslands for New Hanover Mannikin on foot. As fate has it, the village boat had left in the morning to transport a girl who'd fallen from a coconut palm to the mission clinic on the far side of the island, and this boat now returned with the corpse of the girl and offered me a ride to a nearby river delta with adjacent grasslands where the girl was to be interred. A grizzly, sorry scene unfolded as our boat slowly navigated along the coast to the tune of loud and heart-wrenching ritual crying, with random fishermen's dugout canoes occasionally latching on to join in the mourning. I did see the mannikin and made it back to Tukulisawa, where an owling session against the backdrop of the village's mourning ceremony provided views of the New Hanover endemic race of New Ireland Boobook. 11 June 2019: On my last full day, I started birdwatching in Tukulisawa's mangroves in the early morning – accompanied by village youths – well before the first households resumed their ritual mourning, and continued until ~11am, when it became clear that a local boat which was supposed to pick me up would never show. My host in the village offered me his own boat's transfer from **New Hanover** to Kavieng for ~\$150, which I had to accede to. We arrived in Kavieng in the mid-afternoon, giving me a chance for another confusing immature mannikin session at **Kavieng Airport**. An ill-advised but eventually successful owling session in the not-entirely-safe suburbs of Kavieng concluded this trip's birding experience. The following day, my flight to Port Moresby via Rabaul would leave pre-dawn, followed by my international flight back home to Singapore.

Trip List:

1. *Megapodius eremita* – Melanesian Scrubfowl: 1 seen quietly walking away on forest floor on Djaul, where this species' odd vocalizations were sometimes heard distantly; 1 sound-recorded and observed walking on the forest floor on Mussau
2. *Anas superciliosa pelewensis* – Pacific Black Duck: ~6 Arawa
  - a. *Calonectris leucomelas* – Streaked Shearwater: ~8 on crossing from Kavieng to Mussau and 1 on crossing back to New Hanover were seen with bare eyes from shaking boat, with typical shearwater jizz on a bird with dark upperparts and pale underparts showing pale grizzling on rump and upperwing (as opposed to solid dark-brown upperparts), making me confident of their ID despite the suboptimal viewing conditions; even so, I am not adding them to the list as confirmed because of shabby views
  - b. prob. *Nycticorax caledonicus mandibularis* – Nankeen Night Heron: 1 flushed bird provided uncountable views in Arawa mangroves (near Catholic Women's Centre)
3. *Bubulcus coromandus* – Eastern Cattle Egret: 1 on runway at Port Moresby airport
4. *Egretta sacra sacra* – Eastern Reef Egret: 1 white + 1 black morph along northeast coast of Bougainville between Buka and Arawa; ~20 (all black except 1

- white-morph) on a little frigatebird-roosting island off Djaul; ~3 Mussau; 1 Emirau; 1 New Hanover
5. *Fregata ariel ariel* – Lesser Frigatebird: Frigatebirds were almost constantly seen high overhead when close to the beach or at open sea especially in the Bismarcks, less so on Bougainville, but distant ones were rarely identified. Whatever frigatebirds I did identify were all Lesser – adults in the great majority – and it is perhaps a bit surprising that scanning through hundreds of frigatebirds did not reveal a single Great Frigatebird. In particular, identified sightings around Buka included a total of ~12 Lesser Frigatebirds, mostly over town and from an offshore island off Buka. At Rabaul Airport 3 were identified as Lesser Frigatebirds. On a little offshore islet off Djaul at dusk, I witnessed a magnificent spectacle of ~1000-2000 frigatebirds coming in to roost and sleep, dozens of which were confirmed as Lesser. In the general surroundings of Djaul, more Lesser Frigates were seen, as well as sporadic ones on the boat trip back to Kavieng. Around Kavieng itself, ~10 were identified as Lesser, as well as a conservative total of ~25 in the waters between Mussau, Emirau and New Hanover. Then ~20 were identified on the crossing from New Hanover to Kavieng. Total numbers would have been much higher as numerous individuals not listed above were left unidentified.
  6. *Sula leucogaster plotus* – Brown Booby: ~4 adults on return boat trip from Djaul to Kavieng; ~8 on boat crossing from Kavieng to Mussau; ~10-20 on crossing from Emirau to New Hanover
  7. *Sula sula rubripes* – Red-footed Booby: on crossing between Emirau and New Hanover, 1 white-tailed intermediate morph was confirmed as Red-footed, but ~8 more white morphs present here were not conclusively ID'ed from Masked Booby because they were only seen with bare eyes from vehemently shaking boat
  8. *Pandion cristatus* – Eastern Osprey: 1 on Bougainville near Buka crossing; 1 on offshore island off Buka; 1 near southwestern tip of New Ireland on boat ride from Djaul to Kavieng; 1-2 New Hanover
  9. *Aviceda subcristata bismarckii* – Pacific Baza: 1 seen perched on Djaul
  10. *Haliastur indus flavirostris* – Brahminy Kite: 1-2 Arawa, ~6 around Buka, ~7 en route between Arawa and Buka
  11. *Haliastur indus girrenera* – Brahminy Kite: 2 Djaul, 2 Mussau, 1 Emirau, 1 New Hanover
  12. *Haliaeetus leucogaster* – White-bellied Sea-eagle: 1 near southwestern tip of New Ireland on boat ride from Djaul to Kavieng
  13. *Haliaeetus sanfordi* – Solomons Sea-eagle: 1 presumable adult or old immature flying over quite high at Catholic Women's Centre near Arawa was countable despite the great distance because of distinct sea-eagle shape and the discernment of warm brown coloration at least on underwing coverts, contrasting with black-looking wing feathers
  14. *Accipiter hiogaster bougainvillei* – Variable Goshawk: 1 seen briefly flying past at Catholic Women's Centre near Arawa, but conclusively identifiable based on

solid reddish underparts (diagnostic of local subspecies), contrasting yellow cere and pale grey upperparts

15. *Accipiter hiogaster lavongai* – Variable Goshawk: perched sightings of adult singletons on three islands, including on Nuslik (off New Hanover), in Kavieng town, and on Djaul
  - a. prob. *Accipiter albogularis / imitator*: 1 black-and-white adult distantly flying along Buka crossing and towards nearby island seen from hotel verandah; large size of the bird and degraded habitat make me think that *A. albogularis* is more likely
  - b. prob. *Falco severus* – Oriental Hobby: 1 quickly flying over in the early morning at local bush village above Panguna at ~920m elevation was only seen with bare eyes, but was a small hobby-like falcon with some red tinge on the body; even so, I consider views insufficient to conclusively count it.
  - c. prob. *Nesoclopeus woodfordi tertius* – Woodford’s Rail: What lack of fortune... After multiple hours of time investment around Arawa and Buka almost exclusively for this bird, only one frustratingly fleeting and uncountable visual encounter was achieved in long grass in Arawa, along with only 2-3 brief and half-baked vocal encounters; clearly the season was not good for this bird, which – at other times – is supposed to be very vocally responsive according to Zhon Bosco... At last, on the return drive from Arawa to Buka, one was seen crossing the road, and on the basis of brief glimpses from the co-driver’s seat at ~60km/h, I was able to discern quite a big, tall and upright blackish crane with a contrasting light green bill and seemingly black legs (although I could be wrong about this). Alas, in the end, I decided not to count this sighting, as I definitely want to get better views of this in my life – which doesn’t seem to be hard in the right season.
16. *Gallirallus philippensis lesouefi* – Buff-banded Rail: 1 seen New Hanover; 2-3 observed beautifully while bathing in a ditch along the airport fence at Kavieng
17. *Vanellus miles miles* – Masked Lapwing: 1 on runway at Port Moresby Airport
18. *Pluvialis fulva* – Pacific Golden Plover: 11 on a football pitch on the outskirts of Buka; ~10 Rabaul Airport; ~40 Kavieng Airport; 1 on school’s football pitch on New Hanover
19. *Numenius phaeopus variegatus* – Eurasian Whimbrel: 1 Arawa, 1 Djaul, 1 New Hanover
20. *Tringa brevipes* – Grey-tailed Tattler: 1 along muddy shore on New Hanover showed a long white supercilium and uttered a subdued, nasal “tloo-loo-lee” and “tloo-ee”, confirming ID; on Mussau ~2-3 tattlers remained unidentified in the distance but were probably this species
21. *Actitis hypoleucos* – Common Sandpiper: 1 Arawa; 2-3 Buka; ~3 Kavieng; ~3 Mussau; min 1 Nuslik; ~4 New Hanover
22. *Phalaropus lobatus* – Red-necked Phalarope: ~15 between Emirau and New Hanover were clearly identifiable as phalaropes despite shaky and brief views

- from moving boat; I am here admitting them as Red-necked Phalaropes in the absence of any Grey Phalarope sightings anywhere in the region or nearby
23. *Anous minutus minutus* – Black Noddy: 1 confirmed and several additional probables between Emirau and New Hanover; good views of ~350 between New Hanover and Kavieng
  24. *Thalasseus bergii cristata* – Great Crested Tern: ~3 between Emirau and New Hanover, 1 Nuslik, ~8 Kavieng harbor
  25. *Sterna sumatrana sumatrana* – Black-naped Tern: ~3+2 off Kavieng
  26. *Sterna hirundo longipennis* – Common Tern: ~40 between Emirau and New Hanover; ~20 off Kavieng; 1 Nuslik; ~250 between New Hanover and Kavieng
    - a. *Sternula albifrons sinensis* – Little Tern: ~3-4 seen bare-eyed from shaky boat between New Hanover and Kavieng and identified based on jizz, but not here counted
  27. *Macropygia amboinensis carteretia* – Slender-billed Cuckoodove: 1+1+1 seen on Djaul (always briefly), where many were heard
  28. *Macropygia mackinlayi arossi* – Mackinlay’s Cuckoodove: 3-4 seen well while perching (and often vocalizing) on Mussau; several flushed views and/or fly-overs as well as vocal encounters on the Panguna hike, but without a single nice perched countable view
  29. ***Reinwardtoena browni browni* – Pied Cuckoodove**: good perched views of 1 solitary adult and 1 adult with a smudgy-faced smaller juvenile on Djaul
  30. *Chalcophaps stephani stephani* – Stephan’s Emerald Dove: 1+1 perched individuals seen very well on Djaul; total of ~8 (some of them seen very well perching) on Mussau, where this bird came out into house gardens to feed



*Stephan's Emerald Dove on Djaul, taken with my Lumix*

31. *Caloenas nicobarica nicobarica* – Nicobar Pigeon: unexpected sighting of 1 flushed from a makeshift path in mangrove edge on Djaul and then briefly perching for open views for ~10sec. On Mussau, 1 seen well flying by in early morning, and one more flushed from forest understory with views of white tail
32. *Gallinolumba beccarii johannae* – Bronze Ground Dove: 1 seen well and out in the open for a good ~5sec walking the trail on Djaul; I’m attributing the sighting to this subspecies even though Djaul is not listed in the distribution of the species by Guy Dutton’s book
33. *Gallinolumba beccarii eichhorni* – Bronze Cuckoo Dove: ~3 seen well on Mussau
  - a. *Ptilinopus superbus superbus* – Superb Fruit-Dove: single-note series identical to recordings of this species heard in mangroves at Catholic Women’s Centre near Arawa
34. *Ptilinopus rivoli rivoli* – White-bibbed Fruit-Dove: 1 male skillfully detected feeding in the tree canopy and shown to me by my bush guides on Djaul

35. *Ptilinopus solomonensis bistictus* – Yellow-bibbed Fruit-Dove: heard often along Panguna hike but inactive and skittish during this season, with only 1 female observed perched at ~1200m
36. *Ptilinopus solomonensis johannis* – Yellow-bibbed Fruit-Dove: common on Mussau, where a conservative total of perhaps ~30 was seen
  - a. *Ptilinopus viridis lewisii* – Claret-breasted Fruit-Dove: double-syllabled series matching recordings of this species heard in mangroves at Catholic Women’s Centre near Arawa
37. ***Ptilinopus insolitus insolitus*** – **Knob-billed Fruit-Dove**: total of ~5 singletons on Djaul; 1 New Hanover
38. *Ptilinopus insolitus inferior* – Knob-billed Fruit-Dove: 1 on Mussau perched out in the open before dusk on the final evening after a long and stressful struggle to obtain good views of this subspecies



*Knob-billed Fruit-Dove taken with my Lumix on Mussau*

39. *Ducula rubricera rubricera* – Red-knobbed Imperial Pigeon: total of ~8 seen on Djaul, where more heard
40. *Ducula pistrinaria pistrinaria* – Island Imperial Pigeon: ~8 Arawa; total of ~35 around Buka (about half of which were seen on offshore island visited)
41. *Ducula pistrinaria vanwyckii* – Island Imperial Pigeon: common on Mussau, where perhaps ~15 were seen well perching out but many more heard or seen otherwise; impressive overhead inter-island flocks between Mussau and Emirau out in the open sea, the vast majority of which should have certainly contained this species, numbering in the hundreds; on New Hanover, no good perched sighting was achieved but the species was heard commonly, and distant inter-island flocks heading to smaller offshore islands were seen; on Djaul, the species was heard only at dusk on the little offshore island where the 1-2 thousand frigatebirds came to roost
42. *Gymnophaps solomonensis* – Pale Mountain Pigeon: 1 flushed from nest (with single egg) and seen well perched at local peak at ~1420m elevation along Panguna hike
43. *Cacatua ducorpsii* – Solomons Cockatoo: ~8 fly-by’s along northeast coast of Bougainville between Buka and Arawa; ~8 Arawa; ~10 along Panguna hike; min 1 Buka
44. *Micropsitta finschii viridifrons* – Finsch’s Pygmy-Parrot: 1+1 observed well on Djaul
45. ***Micropsitta meeki proxima*** – **Meek’s Pygmy Parrot**: ~3-4 good sightings of 1-3 birds each on Mussau, but the species was heard and glimpsed more widely
46. *Chalcopsitta cardinalis* – Cardinal Lory: total of ~40 along northeast coast of Bougainville between Buka and Arawa; ~15 Arawa; ~75 around Buka (about ~10 of which were seen on offshore island visited)

47. *Trichoglossus haematodus massena* – Coconut Lorikeet: ~10 Arawa; ~15 along Panguna hike; ~3 on offshore island off Buka and ~10 in outskirts of Buka town; total of ~20 seen across Djaul plus another ~20-30 exclusively on a little islet off Djaul coming there to roost in the late afternoon and making quite some noise; min 2 Kavieng
48. *Trichoglossus haematodus flavicans* – Coconut Lorikeet: min 2 seen well enough on New Hanover; on Mussau undoubtedly rare, and only uncountable early-morning or late-evening views of three pairs were had at great distance
49. ***Lorius hypoinochrous devittatus* – Purple-bellied Lory**: total of ~8 seen well on Djaul, where more were heard; min 2 New Hanover; all sightings allowed me to see white cere
50. *Charmosyna placentis pallidior* – Red-flanked Lorikeet: total of ~3-4 seen well (only 1 male) perched in palm trees at Catholic Women’s Centre near Arawa; ~5 Kavieng; 1 female seen well but many more glimpsed in flight and heard on Djaul; ~10 New Hanover
51. *Geoffroyus heteroclitus heteroclitus* – Song Parrot: 1 male New Hanover
52. *Eclectus roratus solomonensis*: 1 male fly-by during vehicle journey from Arawa to Buka; 3+3 in Buka outskirts; ~5 Kavieng; total of ~10 Djaul
53. ***Centropus ateralbus* – White-necked Coucal**: on Djaul ~3-4 encounters of 1-3 individuals each; two were immatures with brown-streaked crowns, but there was great individual variation in adults from mostly white ones (except dark-brown tail and some of the remiges) to those with a plumage almost identical to Buff-headed Coucal *Centropus milo* but with the invariable presence of a white wing patch; not a single individual with a dark crown or forehead was seen, perhaps a trait unique to Djaul?
- Cacomantis variolosus addendus*: heard only (but always feebly) along Panguna hike
  - Cacomantis variolosus macrocercus*: heard at Kavieng Airport where I had untickable views of a perched one at great distance; heard also on Djaul
  - Cacomantis variolosus websteri*: heard only on New Hanover
54. ***Ninox variegata variegata* – New Ireland Boobook**: 1 seen on outskirts of Kavieng, possibly the easiest owl in the world, coming in straight to the first sound attempt



*New Ireland Boobook taken with my iPhone near Tukulisawa on New Hanover*

55. *Ninox variegata superior* – New Ireland Boobook: this subspecies took a bit more work in the mangroves on New Hanover, but eventually a pair was seen well with villagers
- Ninox jacquinoti eichhorni* – West Solomons Boobook: heard only along Panguna hike, but calling very inconsistently and most often distantly
56. *Hemiprocne mystacea woodfordiana* – Moustached Treeswift: 1 on offshore island off Buka

57. *Hemiprocne mystacea aeroplanes* – Moustached Treeswift: ~7 Kavieng; 1 Djaul
58. *Collocalia esculenta lagonoleucos* – Glossy Swiftlet: ~30 Arawa; ~40 along Panguna hike
59. *Collocalia esculenta tametamele* – Glossy Swiftlet: ~4 Rabaul Airport
60. *Collocalia esculenta kalili* – Glossy Swiftlet: ~5 Kavieng; total of ~20 Djaul
61. *Aerodramus spodiopygius reichenowi* – White-rumped Swiftlet: ~4 Arawa, looking very capped in appearance
62. *Aerodramus spodiopygius eichhorni* – White-rumped Swiftlet: ~6 Emirau; ~350 on Mussau, where this was the commonest species
63. *Aerodramus vanikorensis lugubris* – Uniform Swiftlet: ~20 Arawa
64. *Aerodramus vanikorensis pallens* – Uniform Swiftlet: ~10 Kavieng; total of ~20 Djaul; ~30 New Hanover
65. *Aerodramus vanikorensis coultasi* – Uniform Swiftlet: greatly outnumbered by White-rumped Swiftlet on Mussau, and always flying substantially high here, with only ~2-3 singletons seen well enough
66. ***Todiramphus leucopygius* – Ultramarine Kingfisher**: 1 female seen well at Catholic Women’s Centre near Arawa
67. *Todiramphus chloris alberti* – Collared Kingfisher: a shy pair at a clearing at ~1200m along Panguna hike, and a very distantly perched and vocalizing individual near Arawa
68. *Todiramphus chloris novaehiberniae*: ~5 on Djaul should belong to this subspecies (whose range is somewhat ill-defined in Dutson’s guide) given their complete absence of any buff coloration (even on lores) but otherwise dark crown and mantle
69. *Todiramphus chloris nusae* – Collared Kingfisher: ~4 New Hanover; ~5 seen in Kavieng; birds on these two islands looked virtually indistinguishable to “*novaehiberniae*”, with no sign of any buff coloration on the white loreal spot, flanks, collar and underparts
70. *Todiramphus chloris matthiae* – Collared Kingfisher: total of ~20 on Mussau – what an impressive and distinct form... Could this be an introgressed population between Collared and Beach Kingfisher?
71. *Todiramphus saurophagus saurophagus* – Beach Kingfisher: total of ~6 seen on offshore island off Buka, all of which sported white crown; 1 white-crowned individual on small islet off Djaul; 1 white-headed individual briefly seen on Nuslik (off New Hanover)
72. ***Ceyx mulcatus* – New Ireland Dwarf Kingfisher**: 1 seen perched on Djaul seemed to be typical of this taxon, with a black bill, dark-blue face and crown, rufous loreal patch, whitish throat and faint-orange underparts; 1-2 on New Hanover, identical to Djaul birds, were confusingly found in the interior of mangroves only ~150m inland from Common Kingfisher on beach front



*New Ireland Dwarf Kingfisher taken with my iPhone on New Hanover*

73. *Alcedo atthis hispidoides* – Common Kingfisher: 1+1 in New Hanover mangroves were confusingly identical in color distribution to *Ceyx* dwarf kingfishers there, with the Common never more than 10m from the seashore while the *Ceyx* dwarves were a few hundred meters further inland in closed mangrove; both species shared red legs, a fully black bill, and a white throat on otherwise orange underparts, but the *Ceyx* showed a sizable, roundish orange loreal patch which was much reduced and dingier in the Common Kingfisher. More importantly, Common Kingfisher had a much less dark back color forming a contrastingly light-blue line down the mantle onto the uppertail. One additional bird poorly seen perching on a seaside tree on departure from Mussau very likely referred to this species but is not here counted
74. *Aceros plicatus* – Blyth's Hornbill: 1+2 along northeast coast of Bougainville between Buka and Arawa; ~3 along Panguna hike; ~2 Arawa
75. *Pitta erythrogaster novaehibernicae* – Red-bellied Pitta: I had two sightings of a presumable male and one sighting of a presumable female on Djaul in heavy undergrowth, each encounter lasting ~20-60sec and yielding good recordings of song and alarm call. The birds on Djaul are currently unascrbed to subspecies, so I am only provisionally placing them under *novaehibernicae* here. They both sported a red belly, blue breast, red crown, and greenish-blue mantle merging into fully blue wings. The face was generally buffy brownish-rufous, but in the male, a distinct and wide pale-greyish line ran through the face forming a conspicuous spectacle, which – if not found in other regional populations – would render Djaul birds somewhat distinct... Their courtship vocalization (which I taped) is just a regular variation of the Red-bellied Pitta theme although their alarm call was new to me.
76. *Myzomela cruentata vinacea* – Red Myzomela: on Djaul only 2 good sightings of an adult each, but more were seen in high canopy against bad light where they were not pursued further
77. *Myzomela cruentata lavongai* – Red Myzomela: ~6 New Hanover
78. ***Myzomela pammelaena hades* – Bismarck Black Myzomela:** ~150 on Mussau where extremely common especially close to coast
79. *Myzomela pammelaena ramsayi* – Bismarck Black Myzomela: ~10 on Nuslik (off New Hanover); total of ~10 seen flying across from a little islet off New Hanover towards Tukulisawa on the main island on repeated occasions (white underwing in flight on all-black birds); min 1 on Patio Island (off New Hanover)
80. ***Myzomela lafargei* – Red-capped Myzomela:** only a total of ~4 along the entire Panguna hike, all of which were very unobtrusive
81. *Coracina papuensis perpallida* – White-bellied Cuckooshrike: ~6 at Catholic Women's Centre near Arawa
82. *Coracina papuensis sclateri* – White-bellied Cuckooshrike: 1+2 New Hanover
83. *Coracina tenuirostris saturatior* – Common Cicadabird: 1 female along Panguna hike
84. *Lalage leucomela sumumae* – Varied Triller: total of ~15 seen on Djaul, where this species is vocally conspicuous and more were heard and sound-recorded;

males of the local endemic subspecies indeed have very little buff, but they do show a tiny bit on the lower belly or vent

85. ***Pachycephala citreogaster citreogaster*** – **Bismarck Whistler**: total of ~15 seen on Djaul, where more heard; the ID of the birds on Djaul was initially fairly complicated because males are bright-saturated with yellow below and have an all-black tail, which fits better with Mangrove Golden Whistler, but Dutson's book claims Bismarck Whistler for Djaul; in the end, the females provided confirmation as they had warm olive-brown upperparts and uppertails (no black on tail), and a cinnamon breast band...
86. ***Pachycephala citreogaster sexuaria*** – Bismarck Whistler: total of ~15 seen on Mussau, the female here being extremely cinnamon-tinged overall
87. ***Pachycephala orioloides bougainvillei*** – Oriole Whistler: only one pair and a single male, all along Panguna hike around 1100-1200m
88. ***Pachycephala melanura whitneyi*** – Mangrove Golden Whistler: total of ~2 males and ~3 female-colored birds on small offshore island off Buka
89. ***Rhipidura leucophrys melaleuca*** – Willie Wagtail: ~20 along northeast coast of Bougainville between Buka and Arawa, and in Arawa town; total of ~20 around Buka (including 2-3 on offshore island visited); ~2 Rabaul Airport; ~8 Kavieng; ~8 Djaul; min 1 Mussau; min 1 New Hanover
90. ***Rhipidura rufiventris setosa*** – Northern Fantail: total of ~20 on Djaul, where common
91. ***Rhipidura rufiventris mussai*** – Northern Fantail: only 2+1 on Mussau, although the pair performed quite a show in response to playback of my sound recording of their song; the local taxon struck me as very dark, and the song utterly unfamiliar, although this may be due to my inexperience



An extremely cooperative pair of Northern Fantail on Mussau, taken with my Lumix

92. ***Rhipidura [drownei] drownei*** – **Bougainville Brown Fantail**: ~3 along Panguna hike between ~1200-1400m; the depiction of a faint supercilium for this taxon in Dutson's field guide must be an artifact of specimen preparation of the type(s), as all my individuals sported a distinct and clear white supercilium
93. ***Rhipidura rufifrons commoda***: 1 seen well and sound-recorded on offshore island off Buka
94. ***Rhipidura matthiae*** – **Mussau Fantail**: only about a handful of singletons on Mussau, almost only in better forest habitat
95. ***Symposiachrus menckei*** – **Mussau Monarch**: regular sightings across Mussau totaling ~25, mostly singletons, including dark-backed immatures, predominantly in better secondary forest but also a few in degraded lowland scrub
96. ***Symposiachrus [verticalis] ateralbus*** – **Djaul Pied Monarch**: This very distinct Djaul endemic readily came in to playback, with probably a total of ~12

individuals sighted, including frequent “juvenile” type plumages according to Dutson’s book



I was positively impressed by the giant Djaul Pied Monarch (here taken with my Lumix)

97. *Monarcha cinerascens impediens* – Island Monarch: total of 3 on offshore island off Buka
98. *Monarcha cinerascens perpallidus* – Island Monarch: 1+1 on Djaul; on Mussau not uncommon along coast (total of ~12 seen and more heard) although I also had a singleton higher up in the hills at ~350m; min 1 on Nuslik (off New Hanover)
99. ***Monarcha erythrostictus* – Bougainville Monarch:** total of only ~3 along Panguna hike at ~1200m
100. ***Carterornis [chrysomela] pulcherrimus* – Djaul Golden Monarch:** Out of the three endemic Djaul monarchs, this was the least common one, with one good sighting of a pair shortly after landing, but then only another ~3-4 singletons, often fleetingly in the high canopy; it sometimes gave a subdued clicking vocalization, but not with sufficient constancy to allow me to record it
101. *Carterornis chrysomela chrysomela* – Golden Monarch: on New Hanover 2 females observed well and sound-recorded, 1 male glimpsed (which – in the heat of the moment – looked oddly yellow-backed like the Djaul taxon, but I may have been mistaken)
102. *Myiagra ferrocyanea cinerea* – Steel-blue Flycatcher: 1 pair seen at Catholic Women’s Centre near Arawa; total of 3-4 males seen on offshore island off Buka; 1 male seen on outskirts of Buka; also heard along Panguna hike
103. *Myiagra alecto chalybeocephala* – Shining Flycatcher: 1 pair Kavieng Airport; ~3 in mangroves on New Hanover
104. ***Myiagra hebetior* – Mussau Flycatcher:** only 1 individual – what appeared to be an immature – was observed during the entire stay on Mussau shortly before dusk in swamp forest edge close to the coast; the bird had rufous upperparts, broad black patterning on remiges rendering wings largely black, a blackish tail with rufous outertail feathers, and whitish underparts with a wide rufous breast band
105. ***Myiagra [eichhorni] cervinicolor* – Djaul Velvet Flycatcher:** I had about ~5 encounters with this monarch on Djaul, most often pairs, also a singleton, and once a very responsive group of ~6 individuals, mostly female-colored; I managed to get good recordings and some poor Lumix photos of the female-plumaged birds



The amazingly distinct Djaul Velvet Flycatcher, taken with my Lumix

106. ***Corvus meeki* – Bougainville Crow:** only 1 seen perched on dead tree along Panguna hike at a clearing at ~1200m; more were heard in the distance

throughout, although local porters recounted that the species has become very rare in recent years

107. ***Corvus insularis*** – **Bismarck Crow**: total of ~8 at Rabaul Airport, including distant perched views on edge of runway; total of ~20 seen around Kavieng, including one feeding its young at nest, with light-blue eye visible; total of ~15 on Djaul, mostly in flight; excellent views of 1 closely perched on Nuslik (a little islet off New Hanover), and ~5 more on New Hanover
108. ***Hirundo tahitica subfusca*** – Pacific Swallow: total of ~15 around Buka
109. ***Cettia haddeni*** - **Odedi**: 1 seen well, coming in to tape recording, along Panguna hike at ~1000m
110. ***Phylloscopus [poliocephalus] bougainvillei*** – **Bougainville Leaf Warbler**: only 1 seen well along Panguna hike, although it was heard ~5 more times
111. ***Phylloscopus [poliocephalus] matthiae*** – **Mussau Leaf Warbler**: total of ~10 sightings of pairs or singletons, more heard, on Mussau
112. ***Acrocephalus australis toxopei*** – Australian Reed Warbler: 1+1 seen Rabaul Airport; ~5 Kavieng Airport
113. ***Cisticola exilis polionota*** – Golden-headed Cisticola: 1 female seen Rabaul Airport; ~3 seen Kavieng Airport; ~6 New Hanover
114. ***Zosterops metcalfii exiguus*** – **Yellow-throated White-eye**: total of ~40 seen along Panguna hike and many more heard, where this was the most common passerine, although sightings were mostly distant or fleeting in keeping with the generally poor bird activity during this season; also 1 during flat tire stop along coastal road between Buka and Arawa, and heard around Arawa
115. ***Zosterops [rendovae] hamlini*** – **Grey-throated White-eye (=Hamlin's White-eye)**: What I expected to be a common species at high elevations turned out to be rare, and was first encountered only on my third day during the Panguna hike, with a total of ~8 individuals between ~1200-1400m; the book's depiction is quite misleading, as the birds' throat and breast are not nearly as greenish as illustrated and perhaps only slightly darker than the belly, and the white eye-rings are wider...
116. ***Aplonis grandis grandis*** – Brown-winged Starling: 2 adults seen at Catholic Women's Centre near Arawa; 1-2 seen along Panguna hike at clearing at nearly ~1200m; 2 seen on outskirts of Buka
117. ***Aplonis metallica nitida*** – Metallic Starling: big blood-red eyes; ~15 in mangroves at Catholic Women's Centre near Arawa; ~25 Djaul; on Mussau this was the commonest passerine with perhaps ~300 seen; ~15 Emirau; ~5 New Hanover; ~8 Kavieng
118. ***Aplonis cantoroides*** – Singing Starling: common along northeast coast of Bougainville between Buka and Arawa, and the commonest bird in Arawa and Buka towns; also ~10 at Rabaul Airport; common around Kavieng town; ~20 on Djaul including ~3 on little offshore islet where frigatebirds roost; 1 on Nuslik (off New Hanover); ~5 New Hanover; ~2 Patio Island (off New Hanover); adult birds invariably sported an intense orange-yellow (not red) eye color, while streaky immatures had a whitish eye

119. *Mino kreffti* – Long-tailed Myna: ~15 along northeast coast of Bougainville between Buka and Arawa; ~10 Arawa; ~3 seen along Panguna hike
120. ***Zoothera eichhorni* – Mussau Thrush**: not uncommon on Mussau during my stay, with a total of ~20 sightings, but more sightings could easily have been achieved as it was easy to draw them in by playback of their high-pitched single alarm note or their thrush-like “chuck, chuck” alarm series.



I never managed a better Mussau Thrush photo with my Lumix, but photographers who know what they're doing would have had an easy time with this species

121. ***Dicaeum eximium phaeopygium* – Red-banded Flowerpecker**: on Djaul only two sightings, once a singleton and once an adult with an immature, but although seen well and in a countable fashion, the sightings did not suffice to make out details on the rump to assess subspecific distinctness of this endemic Djaul form...
122. *Dicaeum eximium eximium* – Red-banded Flowerpecker: ~3 New Hanover
123. ***Dicaeum aeneum aeneum* – Midget Flowerpecker**: at least 2 Arawa; ~10 seen along Panguna hike, where this bird was – for long stretches – the only vocalizing species, although usually remaining out of sight
124. *Leptocoma sericea corinna* – Black Sunbird: total of ~20 on Djaul; ~4 New Hanover
125. *Cinnyris jugularis flavigaster* – Olive-backed Sunbird: ~3 along northeast coast of Bougainville between Buka and Arawa; ~10 Arawa; also ~5 in villages at the end of Panguna hike; ~4 seen in Buka outskirts (and more heard on offshore island visited); ~4 Djaul; total of ~8 Mussau; ~4 New Hanover; ~2 Kavieng
126. *Erythrura trichroa eichhorni* – Blue-faced Parrotfinch: total of ~25 on Mussau, where not uncommon in degraded and less degraded habitat but typically unobtrusive
127. *Lonchura spectabilis spectabilis* – Hooded Mannikin: ~5 Rabaul Airport
128. ***Lonchura hunsteini* – Hunstein’s Mannikin**: At Kavieng Airport various flocks amounting to ~70 individuals seen well, including immatures with completely unstreaked crowns and straw bellies that almost passed for Buff-bellied Mannikins if I had not noticed their identical bill shape and proportions with Hunstein’s and then homed in on their lack of a black vent and their generally brownish (less blackish) upperparts indicating immaturity



a group of Hunstein’s Mannikins at Kavieng Airport (left) and a New Hanover Mannikin near Tukulisawa (right), taken with my iPhone

129.        ***Lonchura nigerrima*** – **New Hanover Mannikin**: 2 on New Hanover after much effort in small strip of coastal man-made grassland; impressively distinct