

NEW BRITAIN
JULY 15-21 2016
Led by Phil Gregory, Sicklebill Safaris

Participants: Robert Atkinson (New Zealand), Dennis Buss (USA), Barbara Churchley (USA), David Copas (UK), Debby Reynolds (UK), Sue and Grahame Lyons (Australia).

New Britain makes for a nice introduction to New Guinea (despite the best efforts of Air Niugini to mess things up), and this pre-trip for this diverse international group began at the famous Walindi Dive Resort, a great place to stay with superb snorkeling as well as some decent birding not too far away. We also set up a boat trip to the Kimbe Bay islands with a number of useful hard-to-get lifers for the group there. Highlights here included **Beach Thick-knee**, **Black Noddy**, **Nicobar Pigeon**, **Mackinlay's Cuckoo-Dove**, **Island Imperial Pigeon**, **Beach Kingfisher**, **Red-bibbed (Sclater's) Myzomela**, **Island Monarch**, and **Mangrove Golden Whistler**. The Garu Wildlife Management Area gave us **Red-knobbed**, **Finsch's** and **Yellowish Imperial Pigeons**, **White-mantled Kingfisher**, **Violaceous Coucal**, **White-necked Coucal**, **Ashy Myzomela** and **Bismarck Flowerpecker**. A new area for me out at Kilu River gave us **Pink-legged Rail**, **Pale-vented Bush-hen**, **Spotted Whistling Duck** and more **Nicobar Pigeons** amongst other species whilst Numundo Plantation was also rewarding with **Buff-bellied Mannikin**.

Rabaul was next after some unexpected flight disruptions again courtesy of Air Niugini, and here we went wartime site viewing for the little time left that afternoon. Unfortunately a dispute amongst the landowners meant we could not access the Wild Dog mine area as we had hoped, and we got taken to a rather disappointing lowland forest area instead, not something I will schedule in future. The scarce **Black-headed White-eye** was duly added here and **Bar-tailed Cuckoo-Dove**, but not much else (and the guides pinched most of the beer, which I deducted from their tip later....). Next day was a highlight with a short a boat trip to the extraordinary moonscape of the **Melanesian Scrubfowl** colony on the slopes of currently dormant Tarvurur volcano.

Many people helped us with the trip, particular thanks to Sue & Rowan Gregory and Andrew Bowes for dealing with the various flight problems caused by industrial action at Air Niugini (Air Agony); thanks to those who contributed to the cost of the much more expensive Rabaul flight we were able to arrange to avoid losing a whole day hanging about at Jackson's Airport. Joseph and the staff at Walindi were excellent, and we enjoyed the company and help from Suzy and Henny at the uniquely sited Rabaul Hotel. My general thanks to the group for going with the flow and coping with whatever situation arose with generally commendable aplomb, and sorry we could not get Robert across that first day. Thank you all for coming, I do hope you enjoyed it and regard it as one of the more unusual adventures.

Itinerary

July 15th Friday Cairns or Brisbane to Port Moresby, then big dramas getting on the flight to Hoskins with poor Robert being left behind until late next day. The rest of us got to Walindi around 1800.

July 16th Saturday Garu in the morning, afternoon to Kilu River, overnight Walindi.

July 17th Sunday Kimbe Bay boat trip 0600-1100, pm out to Kilu River, overnight Walindi.

July 18th Monday. Air Niugini cancelled our flight but we rescheduled with PNG Air to Rabaul after some birding around the lodge area. Arrived Rabaul Hotel late pm and went to see Yamamoto's bunker and the Rabaul Museum at the Yacht Club.

July 19th Tuesday Vunga area in lowland forest 0700-1500. Good weather.

July 20th Wednesday Tarvurur volcano scrubfowl colony 0730-1030 with Henny, then pm out to Kerevat/Warangoi forest remnants.

July 21st Thursday Flight from Rabaul to Port Moresby and end of the pre-trip.

Species name in **bold** denotes either a Bismarck or Bismarck and Solomons endemic

* Heard only

Taxonomy and vernacular names largely follow the IOC 6.2 and Gregory (in press)

SPECIES LIST

MEGAPODIIDAE

MELANESIAN SCRUBFOWL (*Megapodius eremita*)

Flight views at Garu then an amazing experience at the colony on the slopes of Tarvurur volcano where we had good views of the adults and saw about 30 in flight as we approached. Here the local lads dig out something like a thousand eggs per day and maybe something approaching 100,00 per annum, going as much as 2 m deep into the soft volcanic ash, with a real risk of a cave in and getting suffocated! They don't harvest in the wet season, and Monday is a day free from collecting, otherwise it starts every day at 0800 till late pm, and some ace diggers get 50 eggs per day. Many of the trees and shrubs have died off since 2007 so it's now a moonscape pitted with holes and diggings, it is just astonishing how the birds continue to survive. Eggs sell for K2 each so this is a very important local asset.

ANATIDAE

SPOTTED WHISTLING DUCK (*Dendrocygna guttata*)

27 flying over at the Kilu River late in the afternoon of July 16th were a good record of a scarce species here

PACIFIC BLACK DUCK (*Anas superciliosa*)

A couple out near Garu.

ARDEIDAE

BLACK BITTERN (*Dupetor flavicollis*)

Four birds seen on the edges of oil palm around Garu July 15th.

GREAT EGRET (*Ardea alba modesta*)

8 at Walindi on arrival day and 2 next day.

INTERMEDIATE EGRET (*Egretta intermedia*)

7 on the airstrip at Kokopo, this is a scarce bird in the Bismarcks.

PACIFIC REEF-HERON (*Egretta sacra*)

A couple around Walindi.

LITTLE EGRET (*Egretta garzetta nigripes*)
One at Walindi on July 16th was unexpected.
NANKEEN NIGHT HERON (*Nycticorax caledonicus*)
One at Kilu River.

ACCIPITRIDAE

PACIFIC BAZA (*Aviceda subcristata*)
Sightings from Garu and Vunga, the race *A. s. bismarckii* has blackish bars on the breast.
BRAHMINY KITE (*Haliastur indus*)
A few around Walindi, Garu and Rabaul.
WHITE-BELLIED SEA-EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*)
A fine adult on Restorf Is. in Kimbe Bay.
VARIABLE GOSHAWK (*Accipiter hiogaster*)
The distinctive taxon *A. h. dampieri* was seen at Garu and Kilu River (a pair), and is quite different to mainland PNG birds.

RALLIDAE

PALE-VENTED BUSH-HEN (*Amaurornis olivacea ruficrissalis*)
Fantastic scope views of two foraging along the muddy edge of the Kilu River on July 16th, one of my best views in years of what is usually a very difficult bird to see.
NEW BRITAIN (PINK-LEGGED) RAIL (*Rallus insignis*)
Joseph had a site for one coming down to drink at the Kilu River late afternoon, and sure enough it turned up about 1745 on July 16th, for fine scope views. The pink legs, dark brown upperparts and closely dark barred underparts were very distinct and this was just my second sighting of this elusive endemic. Luckily for delayed Robert it also came back slightly later the next day, so he caught up with it.

BURHINIDAE

BEACH STONE-CURLEW (*Esacus magnirostris*)
A pair on Restorf Is looked like they had a nest in the fringing vegetation at the point, it is a rare bird here and very prone to disturbance, this was just my second record from here.

CHARADRIIDAE

GREY PLOVER (*Pluvialis fulva*)
One partial summer bird flying by Restorf Is July 17th was unexpected.

SCOLOPACIDAE

WHIMBREL (*Numenius phaeopus variegata*)
5 and then a flock of 15 seen at Walindi, with one at Rabaul later, all overwintering here.
COMMON SANDPIPER (*Actitis hypoleuca*)
One at Rabaul harbour.

LARIDAE

BLACK NODDY (*Anous minutus*)
Up to 70 off Big Malo Malo, and some seen right by the boat so the white cap and black plumage colouration was easily noted.

GREAT CRESTED TERN (*Sterna bergii*)

Just a couple seen off Walindi, terns overall were very scarce this year

COLUMBIDAE

AMBOYNA (SLENDER-BILLED) CUCKOO-DOVE (*Macropygia amboinensis*)

A few seen on New Britain. This is now split from the West Papuan Sultan's Cuckoo-Dove, which has a very different call, and obviously from Brown Cuckoo-Dove of Australia, which is both vocally and morphologically very different. I was surprised the new edition of Pratt & Beehler did not split it out.

BAR-TAILED (BLACK-BILLED) CUCKOO-DOVE (*Macropygia nigrirostris*)

One at Vunga near Rabaul gave fine scope views of this rich rusty cuckoo-dove, much smaller and redder than the Slender-billed and with a finely barred tail.

MACKINLAY'S CUCKOO-DOVE (*Macropygia mackinlayi*)

A couple seen on the Kimbe Bay Islands, this is mainly a small island endemic.

STEPHAN'S DOVE (*Chalcophaps stephani*)

We did well for them this trip, with superb looks near Garu, with both males and females in the track. This was Debby's 5000th species, narrowly avoiding Bismarck Crow, which I deliberately suppressed!

* **NEW BRITAIN BRONZEWING** (*Henicophaps foersteri*)

One was calling not too far away out at Garu but regrettably never crossed the track. It's a very rare bird and almost never seen.

NICOBAR PIGEON (*Caloenas nicobarica*)

One of the birds of the trip, we saw an adult flying off Restorf Is giving nice flight views, and it was also seen on the main island out at Kilu River which was unusual. Yay!

KNOB-BILLED (RED-KNOBBED) FRUIT-DOVE (*Ptilinopus insolitus*)

Rather scarce this trip, we eventually got a scope view of one on the last afternoon.

RED-KNOBBED IMPERIAL-PIGEON (*Ducula rubricera*)

Fine views on New Britain of this large and striking bird.

FINSCH'S IMPERIAL-PIGEON (*Ducula finschii*)

Initially heard, then a great sighting of one sat up at Garu. Always a scarce and elusive sub-canopy bird, one of my favourites with that great growling call.

ISLAND (GRAY) IMPERIAL-PIGEON (*Ducula pistrinaria*)

Common on the islets in Kimbe Bay, where the cooing call is a typical sound.

YELLOW-TINTED (YELLOWISH) IMPERIAL-PIGEON *Ducula (spilorrhoea)*

subflavescens

This distinctive island form is split by many authorities and is a Bismarck endemic. We saw a few nicely around Garu and at Numundo, also flying over at Walindi.

CACATUIDAE

BLUE-EYED COCKATOO (*Cacatua ophthalmica*)

Seems to be declining each time I come, we saw a few very noisy birds around Garu, and got some fine views.

PSITTACIDAE

COCONUT (RAINBOW) LORIKEET (*Trichoglossus haematodus massena*)

Seen on New Britain in small numbers, this is the subspecies *massena*, which has dark

bars on the red of the chest.

PURPLE-BELLIED (EASTERN BLACK-CAPPED) LORY (*Lorius hypoinochrous*)

They were fairly common in forest at Garu and Kilu River, and have a great call.

RED-FLANKED LORIKEET (*Charmosyna placensis*)

Small numbers at Kilu River and seen well in the scope.

BUFF-FACED PYGMY-PARROT (*Micropsitta pusio*)

5 seen feeding and flying at Garu, then astonishing views of two foraging like nuthatches on the bark of a tree at Walindi, they seem to browse the lichen on the branches. This genus includes the world's smallest parrots.

SONG (SINGING) PARROT (*Geoffroyus heteroclitus*)

Just a couple of singles flying over calling at Garu, nice to hear them but they don't really sing, and sound very like Red-cheeked Parrot!

ECLECTUS PARROT (*Eclectus roratus*)

Fairly common, with up to 50 that first day at Garu and Kilu, a superb bird with an astonishing sexual dimorphism.

CENTROPODIDAE

VIOLACEOUS COUCAL (*Centropus violaceus*)

Joseph spotted one as we came back from Garu and we got a fairly good look as it sat in a thicket, they are always elusive and need a bit of luck to see well.

WHITE-NECKED (PIED) COUCAL (*Centropus ateralbus*)

Good views of this endemic at Garu.

CUCULIDAE

BRUSH CUCKOO (*Cacomantis variolosus*)

Quite commonly heard, and seen at Garu.

APODIDAE

GLOSSY SWIFTLET (*Collocalia esculenta*)

Common on New Britain, in the lowlands only.

WHITE-RUMPED SWIFTLET (*Aerodramus spodiopygius*)

Very sparse, we only saw it near Rabaul at the Japanese war memorial.

UNIFORM SWIFTLET (*Aerodramus vanikorensis*)

A few around Walindi and Rabaul.

HEMIPROCNIIDAE

MOUSTACHED TREESWIFT (*Hemiprocne mystacea*)

This striking species was seen at Kilu River, this race *aeroplanes* being somewhat smaller than mainland birds.

ALCEDINIDAE

COMMON KINGFISHER (*Alcedo atthis*)

Nice views at Walindi and on the river at Warangoi.

WHITE-MANTLED KINGFISHER (*Todirhamphus albonotatus*)

A male of this very uncommon bird eventually showed very well at Garu and was calling well, a good pick-up as it always a bit tricky to find.

MELANESIAN KINGFISHER (*Todiramphus tristrami*)

Collared Kingfisher traditionally had some 49 races, now shown to be various distinct cryptic and not so cryptic species. New Britain birds *T. (c.) tristrami* have richly coloured rusty underparts and distinct calls, and splitting was way overdue. They are now classified as a part of Melanesian Kingfisher.

BEACH KINGFISHER (*Todiramphus saurophaga*)

Two of this great bird showed very nicely on Restorf Island, a spectacular bird that can be hard to find, and I finally got a recording of it.

SACRED KINGFISHER (*Todiramphus sanctus*)

A few of this Australian migrant were at Walindi and Rabaul.

* **BLACK-HEADED PARADISE-KINGFISHER** (*Tanysiptera nigriceps*)

This bird was heard quite close by at Garu, but is very wary. It resembles Buff-breasted Paradise-K, but with a black cap and slightly different call, and is unique to New Britain, where much of its habitat has been lost to oil palm.

* **NEW BRITAIN DWARF KINGFISHER** (*Ceyx sacerdotis*) (H)

Heard in the forest at Vunga but always very hard to see.

MEROPIDAE

RAINBOW BEE-EATER (*Merops ornatus*)

Seen in small numbers, a winter migrant from Australia.

CORACIIDAE

* **DOLLARBIRD** (*Eurystomus orientalis*)

Heard at Garu.

BUCEROTIDAE

BLYTH'S HORNBILL (*Aceros plicatus*)

Small numbers of this fantastic bird seen at Garu, over Walindi Resort and then at Vunga. The wings make an amazingly loud and distinctive whooshing in flight.

MELIPHAGIDAE

ASHY MYZOMELA (*Myzomela cineracea*)

We had brief looks at this quite large drab endemic around Walindi Resort and at Garu, and then for some at Vunga, but I only saw it in flight each time!

SCLATER'S (SCARLET-BIBBED) MYZOMELA (*Myzomela sclateri*)

Endemic to small islands off the Bismarcks, we had very good views of up to 10 on Restorf Is. where both males and females were active around the blossoming shrubs. Also a couple on big Malo Malo

NEW BRITAIN FRIARBIRD (*Philemon cockerelli*)

We saw a few around Garu and Walindi. They call monotonously long before dawn at Walindi, on Phil's first ever visit he spent ages tracking this nocturnal caller down and was not impressed when he eventually found the culprit!

CAMPEPHAGIDAE

YELLOW-EYED (BARRED) CUCKOO-SHRIKE (*Coracina lineata*)

Two at Vunga of the race *C. l. sublineata*, The call is quite distinct to Australian birds but

sounds like those on mainland PNG, a split might well be involved here as these NG birds show much less or no barring as well.

WHITE-BELLIED CUCKOO-SHRIKE (*Coracina papuensis*)

The large-billed race *C. p. sclateri* was seen once at Kilu River.

GREY-CAPPED CICADABIRD (*Coracina remota*)

We saw a male *C. r. heinrothi* at Walindi, calling very like the raspy mainland New Guinea birds. This taxon is now split by the IOC as Grey-capped Cicadabird *C. remota* and more splits are pending, these island taxa have very distinct vocalizations and are clearly allospecies. The whole complex badly needs unraveling.

VARIED TRILLER (*Lalage leucomela*)

A few seen at Garu and Walindi, this is the race *L. l. falsa*.

PACHYCEPHALIDAE

MANGROVE GOLDEN (BLACK-TAILED) WHISTLER (*Pachycephala melanura*)

P. m. dahli Brief views of a male on Big Malo Malo, and then two on Restorf later, which I was able to record quite nicely.

DICRURIDAE

(BISMARCK) SPANGLED DRONGO (*Dicrurus (bracteatus/carbonarius) laemostictus*, Just 4 seen at Garu, *D. b. laemostictus*, endemic to New Britain, they sound quite unlike Australian birds and call more like *carbonarius* on mainland New Guinea, which is a likely split as Papuan Spangled Drongo. I split this as Bismarck Spangled Drongo in my new guide

RHIPIDURIDAE

NORTHERN FANTAIL (*Rhipidura rufiventris*)

Robert saw one at Garu, and there was a nice one at Kilu River, this is *R. r. finschii*, endemic to New Britain, with a whitish belly, light grey mantle and broad white fringes to secondaries and tertiaries.

BISMARCK FANTAIL (*Rhipidura dahli*)

Robert saw one at the forest site near Rabaul, but none of us got onto this unresponsive bird.

WILLIE-WAGTAIL (*Rhipidura leucophrys*)

The race *R. l. melaleuca* was widespread on New Britain.

MONARCHIDAE

ISLAND MONARCH (*Monarcha cinerascens*)

One on Big Malo Malo showed quite well, and it was heard once on Restorf, this is a classic small island tramp species.

SHINING FLYCATCHER (*Myiagra alecto*)

Seen at Walindi and c.4 birds at Vunga, these were of the taxon *M. a. chalybeocephala*.

* **VELVET (DULL or LESSER SHINING) FLYCATCHER** (*Myiagra hebetior*)

Heard at Garu and the Kilu River, these are of the race *M. h. eichorni*; the call is quite distinct to that of Shining Flycatcher.

CORVIDAE

BISMARCK CROW (*Corvus (orru) insularis*)

An obvious split, more distinctive than some of the Australian corvid species- short wings, distinctive flight, very different vocals, and distinct habits. They were quite common around Walindi and Hoskins

HIRUNDINIDAE

PACIFIC SWALLOW (*Hirundo tahitica*)

Small numbers at Walindi of the race *H. t. ambiens*.

ACROCEPHALIDAE

AUSTRALASIAN REED-WARBLER (*Acrocephalus australis*)

This interesting taxon *A. a. sumbae* was seen briefly and heard at Numundo. There are suggestions that it may actually be a split from Australasian Reed Warbler, which was itself split from Clamorous Reed *A. stentoreus*. Note Dutson lists this Bismarck bird as the taxon *toxopei*.

TIMALIIDAE [ZOSTEROPIDAE]

BLACK-HEADED WHITE-EYE (*Zosterops hypoxanthus*)

Two at Vunga on July 19 were a good find as this race *Z. h. hypoxanthus* is scarce in the hills of New Britain

STURNIDAE

METALLIC STARLING (*Aplonis metallica*)

Common throughout with some big colonies of hanging nests seen on Big Malo Malo and at Rabaul, where a fly past late on the afternoon of July 18th at the Rabaul Hotel numbered over 1500 birds in a couple of dense swirling flocks.

SINGING STARLING (*Aplonis cantoroides*)

Just a few seen, in much smaller numbers than the Metallic.

MELANESIAN (LONG-TAILED) MYNA (*Mino kreffti*)

The short-tailed Long-tailed Myna in quite common but local on the Bismarcks, the best were seen at Garu.

DICAEIDAE

BISMARCK (RED-BANDED) FLOWERPECKER (*Dicaeum eximium*)

Everyone got nice looks at Garu of this attractive little flowerpecker with the grey flanks and the red spot on the grey chest band of the male. This is the race *D. e. layardorum*.

NECTARINIIDAE

BLACK SUNBIRD (*Leptocoma sericea*)

Common on the Bismarcks, this taxon is *N. a. caeruleogula*,

OLIVE-BACKED (YELLOW-BELLIED) SUNBIRD (*Cinnyris jugularis*)

Quite common at the lower altitudes on the Bismarcks, this is *N. j. flavigaster*.

PASSERIDAE

EURASIAN TREE SPARROW (*Passer montanus*)

A few around Kimbe and Garu it is a new arrival after the initial colonization at Kimbe in

2007. They were known from Biak in West Papua but these were the first for PNG then, and the spread is continuing apace on the mainland too.

ESTRILDIDAE

HOODED MANNIKIN (MUNIA) (*Lonchura spectabilis*)

Brief looks at the nominate race in long grass at the scrubfowl colony at Tarvurur.

BUFF-BELLIED MANNIKIN (*Lonchura melaena*)

Some fine views at Numundo, and more distantly at Hoskins. this is the nominate race.

Mammals

MACROPODIDAE

Dusky Pademelon (*Thylogale brunii*)

One dark brown rather plain pademelon in the track at Garu is this species, it was the first time Joseph or I had ever seen one here too!

PTEROPIDAE

Greater Flying-fox (*Pteropus neohibernicus*)

Small numbers seen at the forest sites on New Britain, this is a huge species and unfortunately for it good to eat!

Pteropus sp.

A smaller flying fox was also seen at Walindi.

DELPHINIDAE

Spinner Dolphin (*Stenella longirostris*)

Great views of about a dozen of them leaping and bow-riding with us off Walindi.

Indo-Pacific Bottle-nosed Dolphin (*Tursiops (truncatus) aduncus*)

One or two were with the Spinner Dolphins off Walindi.

Reptiles

Pacific Ground Boa *Candoia aspera*

One dead at Numundo

Python sp (? *Morelia amethystina*, Amethystine Python)

One quite sizeable one was dead at Numundo, sadly killed even though harmless.

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