

# THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

May 8-26 2015

This trip came about at very short notice, when the Ministry of Tourism and Culture and the Solomon Islands Visitors Bureau (SIVB) invited me over to take a look at birding sites and facilities, and to make recommendations for the development of birding tourism. I put my book projects on hold and duly came over, travelling around with Brendan Mautoa (SIVB) for all except Kolombangara/Ghizo, and Laurie Leteko (Ministry of T & C) for Makira and Kolombangara/Ghizo only, on the following itinerary:

- Friday May 8 Brisbane to Honiara on Solomon Airlines Airbus A320, arriving at 1145. Mendana Hotel, Honiara.
- Sat May 9 Solomon Airlines Twin Otter to **Rennell** D 0730 arr. 0830' Logging roads to west of Tigoa and logging track by the very basic Nukuamanu Lodge, fine conditions.
- Sun May 10 0630-1030 logging track by Nuku'amanu GH in sunny conditions, pm 1530-1730 same track with a brief shower. Overnight Nuku'amanu Lodge.
- Mon May 11 Solomon Airlines Twin Otter to Honiara Departing 0730, but flight to Kirakira on Makira then cancelled due to heavy rain there. Mendana Hotel.
- Tues May 12 Solomon Airlines Twin Otter departed Honiara 1130, arrived Kirakira on **Makira** 1230 in dull rainy conditions. 1430-1530 road 3km past airstrip, then heavy rain so back to Freshwind GH.
- Wed May 13 Kirakira to **Ugi** boat crossing 0800-0900, Ruruga logging track on Ugi till 1200, then a rough ride back to Kirakira taking 2 hours. Freshwind GH.
- Thurs May 14 Kirakira in a tropical low, heavy rain much of the night and most of the day. Local walk 1630-1715. Overnight Freshwind
- Fri May 15 Kirakira, heavy rain much of day, 1600-1730 along road to airstrip in very dull conditions. Freshwind GH.
- Sat May 16 Area near Kirakira town 0830-0930 then flight to Honiara 1300. Overnight Mendana Hotel.
- Sun May 17 Solomon Airlines Dash 8 to Ghizo 1030-1130, boat crossing to Hambere on **Kolombangara** took 1 hour 1300-1400 and was rough and wet. Birding around **Kukundu** that afternoon.
- Mon May 18 **Kukundu** 0630-0800, then boat to Ringgi Cove 0900-1000 in calm conditions. Truck to **Imbu Rano Research Station** at 380m, arriving 1300' Afternoon walk up forest trail to near 600m in fine conditions. Overnight Imbu Ranu.
- Tues May 19 **Imbu Ranu GH area** 0630-1330, some rain mid-morning. Ringgi-Ghizo 1330-1430, bumpy and wet due to rain shower. Birding around **Gizo** town late pm. Overnight Gizo Hotel.
- Wed May 20 Birding near Gizo town 0630-0730, along start of track to Maltu, first on the right just past the power station. 1000-1100 to Honiara on Dash 8, then 1500 Twin Otter to Fera off **Santa Isabel** arriving 1600. Crossed to Buala and stayed at the very basic Mother's Union GH.
- Thurs May 21 Buala to **Tirotonga** 0730-1015 walk, overcast. Stayed at Bubuli

Homestay Lodge at 535m, and birded farmbrush near the village that afternoon in showery conditions.

- Friday May 22 0630-0800 walk to Fearful Owl site on a very rough and slippery track, reaching 585m, walking back and finding Black-faced Pitta en route, back at Lodge by 1300. Checked for Santa Isabel Rail that afternoon near village, hearing it call, then rain early evening before a marathon session for Solomons Frogmouth 2100-2330. An extraordinary day.
- Sat May 23 Santa Isabel Rail near village, then 1 hr. 45 min back to Buala, staying at the pleasant Lagoon View Lodge.
- Sun May 24 Tasia Island 1130-1230. then to Fera airstrip D 1500 to Honiara on Sol Air Twin Otter. Overnight Mendana Hotel
- Mon May 25 Honiara, then **Mt Austen** 1430-1730, with rain at the end. Overnight Mendana Hotel.
- Tues May 26 Honiara-Brisbane Sol Air A320 at 1200, then BNE-Cairns arriving 2130.

Summarizing the trip, we did really well on **Rennell**, seeing all 6 endemics plus **Silver-capped Fruit Dove** and **Island Thrush** quite close to Tigoa town, and avoiding a 4 hour ride on bad roads to the Lake Tegano lagoon at the far end of the island. Logging is a major concern here with much damage evident, new logging roads going in, and stories of logging in the World Heritage area by the lake, all very worrying.

**Makira** was a bit of a bust for us, as we lost two days out of the schedule due to cancelled flights and were unable to get up into the hills. This upset the Kolombangara plans, all due to the tropical low that came in and sat for days as these things do, the Solomons is I am told the third rainiest country in the world so be aware of that when planning a trip, definitely avoiding the December-March wetter season. However, we did go over to Ugi Island, seeing three very distinctive endemic taxa in **Ugi Black Monarch**, **Ugi White-collared Monarch** and **Ugi Rufous Fantail**, plus **Chestnut-bellied Imperial Pigeon** and a **Makira Flycatcher**, and this was very worthwhile (even though I did lose my laser pointer!)

**Kolombangara** was easily my favourite, a beautiful rugged forested volcano that rises out of the ocean and has had the entire central area above 400m set aside from the depredations of the rapacious loggers, it may even become a national park, something very rare to be able to be set up in Melanesia. The pristine forest was great for walking and we had really good looks at **Pale Mountain Pigeon**, **Oriole Whistler**, **Kolombangara Monarch**, **White-capped Monarch**, **Solomons White-eye** and (almost) a **New Georgia Dwarf Kingfisher**. In the lowlands **Roviana Rail** at Kukundu is by no means a slam dunk these days, I fear the keeping of cats by staff here may be a negative impact, and we need to do some awareness raising about how special this rare flightless rail really is.

The boat crossing from Gizo takes about an hour and expect to get wet, it can be fairly bumpy, but ideally you'd do Vella Lavella and Ranongga early in the morning on the way over, though sadly for us it was too rough. Ghizo is a good stopover and the **Gizo White-eye** was easy enough in forest remnants on the edge of town.

The final leg was Santa Isabel and some of the rarest and most wanted species in the Solomons. The walk up is not amazingly hard, I took about 3 hours by taking it steady, and once there you can explore the local habitat and hopefully use local knowledge on how to find the star birds. May 22 was one of the most amazing days I've had birding, being shown a **Fearful Owl** at nest site early on after a tough slippery walk over sharp limestone ricks, then finding a **Black-faced Pitta** in a forest patch by the track and getting great views of it. We had a field lunch of tuna and rice, and were back at the village by 1300. I tried for **Santa Isabel Rail** that afternoon and got to hear one or two calling from a dense thicket. That night we embarked on what proved to be an entertaining and unusual process of getting the rare **Solomons Frogmouth**, ultimately successful too. I got 3 mega lifers today, and 2 of them were new genera too, my thanks to Gerard, Stephen and George for their invaluable help here. Next day I managed to get **Santa Isabel Rail** too, so I did really well for the rarities of Tirotonga.

The walk back down took under 2 hours, and the Lagoon View Lodge at Buala was quite a nice spot to clean up and reorganize. Departure day saw us with enough time to work in a foray to Tigoa Island for **Island Monarch** before heading to Fera and the flight back to Honiara.

I spent a couple of hours on my last afternoon with local guide Samson up Mt Austen checking a roost site for Guadalcanal Boobook, sadly without success, but I did see **Buff-headed Coucal, Claret-breasted Fruit Dove, Pied** and **Variable Goshawk, Solomons Sea Eagle, Grey-capped Cicadabird, Brown-winged Starling, Midget Flowerpecker** and **White-billed Crow**, so it was an interesting outing.

My thanks to the many people who helped me throughout the tour, we were met with great interest and friendly people everywhere and it certainly gave me some valuable insights into organizing bird tours here, which I hope will be useful in the Solomons birding tourism development program. Good local potential guides were Bryce on Kolombangara, Venty at Hambere, Gerard, Stephen and George at Tirotonga and Samson in Honiara, my thanks to them all for their efforts. Brendan Mautoa of SIVB was a star with organizing it all at very short notice, and good company in the field, he has the makings of a fine birder. Laurie Leteko from the Ministry of Tourism and Culture was also a very helpful support and good company in the field, with valuable local contacts, my thanks to both of them. Also thanks to the Solomon Islands Visitors Bureau staff, especially Freda Unusi, Dennis and Nelson, and to their CEO Josefa Tuamoto for his support of the initiative, and to Banny Sivoro and the Ministry of Tourism and Culture for similarly adopting and funding the program, and to Mike Parker-Brown of Solomon Is Promotions for arranging the international flights.

## Species List

H denotes Heard only ✓ Denotes a lifer

**Bold type** denotes a Solomons/Bougainville endemic

### MEGAPODIIDAE

Melanesian Scrubfowl *Megapodius eremita*: A single in the garden at the primary school at Kukundu, causing me great disappointment as I'd hoped it would be the Roviana Rail, happily seen there not too much later! I was surprised not to hear it elsewhere.

### ARDEIDAE

Pacific Reef-Heron (Pacific Reef-Egret) *Egretta sacra*: Just one dark morph flying over at Kukundu.

### ANATIDAE

Pacific Black Duck *Anas superciliosa*: Just 3 birds from Kukundu on Kolombangara; this is the only duck in the Solomons.

### THRESKIORNITHIDAE

Australian White Ibis *Threskiornis molucca*: The endemic subspecies *T. m. pygmaeus* was seen on Rennell with up to 14 seen per day around Tigoa town, with odd birds out along forest tracks. Very little black in the wing tips made it rather distinctive and reminded me of Madagascar Sacred Ibis *T. bernieri*.

### PANDIONIDAE

Eastern Osprey *Pandion (haliaetus) cristata*: One rather damp looking bird was perched up on Ugi.

### ACCIPITRIDAE

Pacific Baza (Crested Hawk) *Aviceda subcristata gurneyi*: 1 at Hambere, then a couple around the Tirotonga area.

**Solomons (Sanford's) Sea Eagle** *Haliaeetus sanfordi*: One in Honiara en route to the hotel as I was arriving on May 8, Nelson kindly diverted back and we saw it grab a fish before great looks as it sat with a bulging crop in a palm by some huts, where it was well-known by the local people. I also saw a fine perched bird near Ringgi Cove as we came down the mountain on May 19, 2 over Gizo May 20 and then 2 soaring over at Mt Austen May 25. Classified as '**Vulnerable**' by BirdLife/IUCN on the basis of its low population density, ongoing forest and coastal degradation, and occasional hunting. Endemic to the Solomons Islands and the island of Bougainville (Papua New Guinea).

**Pied Goshawk** *Accipiter albogularis woodfordi*: One fine adult was perched up at Mt Austen on May 25, maybe the first time I have seen one at rest. The pale yellow eye was visible.

Variable Goshawk *Accipiter hiogaster*: I saw single birds of the pale grey rufous-breasted taxon *rufoschistaceus* around the forests at Tirotonga May 21 and May 23 and heard several others calling, then a single of the race *pulchellus* at Mt Austen May 25. These may be better split as a species endemic to the Solomons, with another in the Bismarcks.

Brown Goshawk *Accipiter fasciatus fasciatus*: One damp bird sat up in a bare tree by the GH at Tigoa at 0700 on May 11. A curious broken distribution pattern here, but it also occurs in New Caledonia.

## RALLIDAE

✓**Santa Isabel (Woodford's) Rail** *Nesoclopeus (woodfordi) immaculatus* (H): We heard this little known species in thick scrub on May 21 at Tirotonga, with maybe 2 calling there, and it was also heard whilst on the way up to the village and on the farmbrush trek. Anyway, next day we tried again here without success, but our local guide knew they were near his house and we went there early next day. Here I heard at least 4 groups calling, made a tape, and lured one bird out for a good close view, it came in silently and I just saw the grass moving as it arrived. Formerly treated as part of Woodford's Rail but each of the four islands has fairly distinct forms and it seems best treated as 4 allospecies. The bird is named after Charles Woodford (1852-1927), the resident Commissioner in the Solomons Protectorate from 1896 to 1914.

Buff-banded Rail *Gallirallus philippensis christophori*: Excellent views of 5 birds on the roads on Makira May 12, no doubt coming out of the wet grass to dry off!

✓**Roviana Rail** *Gallirallus rovianae*: One seen badly May 17 at Kukundu, chased off by Pacific Swamphens, then a fantastic experience with what I think was a pair with 2 well-grown young at a garden at the primary school May 18. The guy came on his bike to get us when they appeared, they come and feed regularly here each morning and we had great views. It is an extremely poorly known, flightless species, which was only described in 1991. It is endemic to Kolombangara, New Georgia and adjacent islets in the Western Province and is named after the small island of Roviana.

Rufous-tailed Bush-hen *Amaurornis moluccanus nigrifrons*: One was feeding out in a cassava field at Kukundu May 17, the grey underparts very apparent.

Australasian (Pacific) Swamp-hen *Porphyrio melanotus samoensis*: They were a damn nuisance at Kukundu where they kept chasing Roviana Rail late on the first afternoon, we saw half a dozen in the gardens here; also heard on the way down from Tirotonga and on Tasia Island.

## SCOLOPACIDAE

Eurasian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*: One distant bird flying over the airstrip May 20.

## LARIDAE

Crested Tern (Greater Crested or Swift Tern) *Sterna bergii*: Half a dozen at Hambere and then 6 en route to Ringgi on Kolombangara.

Black-naped Tern *Sterna sumatrana*: 6 flying by as the rain ended on the boat ride back to Ghizo May 19.

Bridled Tern *Sterna anaethetus*: A couple off Ugi May 13, and again off Ghizo May 16.

Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata*: One off Ugi seemed too big and dark above to be Bridled.

Black Noddy *Anous minutus*: Small numbers off Ugi and Ghizo, sat on posts off Gizo town.

Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus*: A couple off Ugi May 13.

## COLUMBIDAE

Metallic Pigeon *Columba vitiensis*: 3+ birds near Kirakira airstrip May 12, feeding in a fruiting tree, and one on Santa Isabel at Tirotonga May 21.

Mackinlay's Cuckoo-Dove *Macropygia mackinlayi*: Small numbers on Rennell, then Makira and Santa Isabel before 4 up Mt Austen May 25.

✓**Silver-capped Fruit-Dove** *Ptilinopus richardsii*: This beautiful fruit-dove was quite common on Rennell, where 7 were seen on May 9 and 10 on the second day May 10. Then 6 on Ugi May 13, it is endemic to Rennell and small islands off Makira, all low coral (makatea) islands.

Claret-breasted Fruit-Dove *Ptilinopus viridis lewisii*: One near Imbu Rano May 19, and an immature male at Mt Austen May 25, also heard at Tirotonga. A *Ptilinopus* at Kukundu looked very small and had a broad yellow terminal tip to the tail, but I was unsure which species, perhaps Yellow-bibbed Fruit-Dove.

Pacific Imperial Pigeon *Ducula pacifica pacifica*: An adult on Rennell May 9 was the only record.

Red-knobbed Imperial Pigeon *Ducula rubricera rufigula*: One at Hambere, 6 at Imbu Rano then 6 at Tirotonga, before a couple at Mt Austen May 25.

Island (Floury) Imperial Pigeon *Ducula pistrinaria*: Small numbers on Rennell and Makira. also Ugi, then again on Kolombangara and Ghizo.

**Chestnut-bellied Imperial Pigeon** *Ducula brenchleyi*: This was a major surprise on Ugi on May 13 when we had a flock of 8 feeding on fruits along the logging track about a km inland from landing area. Usually a hill forest species but obviously comes down to the coast to feed.

**Pale Mountain-Pigeon** *Gymnophaps solomonensis*: 4 late one afternoon May 18 flying up the valley above the research station around 530m, and I saw 8 next day from the lodge on Kolombangara. Most roost high on the mountain and fly down through the cloud (and rain) to feed in the foothills. It is endemic to the highest islands in the Solomons and is very striking with the whitish head, rump and tail and blackish wings. I had only seen this on Bougainville before.

#### FALCONIDAE

Peregrine Falcon (Peregrine) *Falco peregrinus nesiotus*: One very dark bird flew by in farmbrush above Tirotonga, looking almost blackish but much too big to be Oriental Hobby. An unexpected record.

#### CACATUIDAE

**Ducorps's Cockatoo** *Cacatua ducorpsii*: Vocal and widespread in small numbers on Kolombangara, Santa Isabel and at Mt Austen.

#### LORIIDAE

**Cardinal Lory** *Chalcopsitta cardinalis*: Small numbers around Kolombangara, Ghizo, 15 near Buala May 21 and 10 May 23, and half a dozen up Mt Austen May 25.

Coconut (Rainbow) Lorikeet *Trichoglossus haematodus massena*: Small numbers around Honiara and Kirakira.

**Yellow-bibbed Lory** *Lorius chlorocercus*: Very scarce, I saw 2 on Ugi, 4 near Kirakira and a couple at Mt Austen, but missed it on Rennell.

**Duchess Lorikeet** *Charmosyna margarethae*: 7 shot out of a coconut palm near Kirakira airstrip May 15, this is always quite a hard one with which to connect.

#### PSITTACIDAE

Finsch's Pygmy Parrot *Micropsitta finschii*: The tiny size of these, the world's smallest parrots was fully appreciated on Rennell, where we saw a couple each day and heard them far more than seen. Also heard on Kolombangara and Ghizo. It is endemic to the Solomons and New Ireland.

Song (Singing) Parrot *Geoffroyus heteroclitus*: Often heard, but only seen perched on Rennell (*hyacinthus*), with up to 30, and 2 nominate race birds at Mount Austen (Guadalcanal). It is endemic to the Bismarcks and the Solomons.

Eclectus Parrot *Eclectus roratus*: One on Ugi May 13, 5 at Hambere and 4 near Ringgi and a couple near Buala.

## CUCULIDAE

Brush Cuckoo *Cacomantis variolosus* (H): Heard near Imbu Ranu May 19.

Australian Koel *Eudynamys cyanocephala* (H): Heard only, on two dates on Makira.

## CENTROPODIDAE

**Buff-headed Coucal** *Centropus milo*: Two of this huge coucal showed very well on Mount Austen (Guadalcanal) on May 25, these nominate birds having dark bellies. It was also heard around Imburano Lodge, this being the race *albidiventris*. The loud swearing calls lend credence to the story that invading headhunters from Malaita were just too scared to land on Vella Lavella, home to such intimidating beasts, and paddled back home! Endemic to the Kolombangara group (Western Province) and Guadalcanal. The scientific epithet refers to Milo, a 5th century BC giant Greek athlete.

## STRIGIDAE

✓**Fearful Owl** *Nesasio solomonensis*: Fortunately for us our local guide knew of a nest site and was persuaded to take us on the slippery and rough walk there, reaching 585m. A big epiphyte clump high in a large tree adjacent to a huge fig was the spot, the guide gave a double coughing hoot and the bird came out to perch high in the tree looking down on us! Very nice looks and some indifferent photos of this very large owl, it looked to have two tiny ear tufts and had yellow eyes. I had not anticipated success and half expected a Boobook, so seeing this mega was just incredible.

## PODARGIDAE

✓**Solomon Islands Frogmouth** *Rigidipenna inexpectata*

One of the great prizes from Tirotonga, apparently the first night we were there one came in by one of the village houses but no-one wanted to disturb us! Anyway, next evening we waited for the heavy rain to stop, and went down to the site about 2100. Here I got distracted by frogs calling in response to the guide boys whistling, but eventually we did hear a response and the bird came gradually closer, enabling me to get tape of both the whistled call and the longer call series. Interestingly, the local boys did not want me to play tape, they were adamant the constant whistling would work, and the bird certainly came close several times but stayed out of view. Around 2300 after 2 hours of continually whistling for the bird, I declared enough and we started off up the track, only to get called back as the Frogmouth had now come into the mango tree right at the edge!

We hastened back down, and I got grabbed by a throng of villagers who propelled me to a spot under the mango, now illuminated by half a dozen flashlights! Amazingly the bird sat long enough for me to get my bins on it, but I was amazed to see it was actually grey and not the dark chocolate brown I was expecting, with fine barring on the sides of the chest, also quite large. A brief look, but a look nonetheless, I was very grateful to Casper and his brother who had kept on trying so determinedly, and against the odds succeeded.



I am assuming there is a grey morph with this species, as yet undocumented, and maybe even a sexual dimorphism as with Papuan Frogmouth? I checked with the Internet Bird Collection and Josep del Hoyo has video of a grey morph bird here, odd that it is not documented in the literature as yet. The call is of course nothing like that of Marbled Frogmouth with which this species was long lumped, and it is certainly one of the top Solomon Islands bird targets.

#### APODIDAE

Glossy Swiftlet *Collocalia esculenta*: A common swiftlet, with up to 20 seen daily on Rennell (*desiderata*), and small numbers on Makira, Ghizo and Mt Austen.

White-rumped Swiftlet *Aerodramus spodiopygius reichenowi*: About 10 along the logging tracks west of Tigoa on Rennell on May 10 were the only sighting

Uniform Swiftlet *Collocalia vanikorensis lugubris*: 4 on Rennell, 10 at Kirakira then about 10 over at Tirotonga late one afternoon.

#### HEMIPROCNIDAE

Moustached Treeswift *Hemiprocne mystacea woodfordiana*: 3 at Imburano on Kolombangara, and a couple at Gizo town, but not seen on Rennell.

#### ALCEDINIDAE

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*: One at a creek at Kukundu May 17.

✓**New Georgia Variable Dwarf Kingfisher** *Ceyx (lepidus) collectoris* (H) This forest understorey inhabitant is always a difficult bird to see. We heard it on Kolombangara, calling noisily beside the road on the way up to Imbu Ranu (when I should have stopped!) May 17 and then several times along the forest track there next day.

**Ultramarine Kingfisher** *Todirhamphus leucopygius*: A fine pair by the homestay at Tirotonga, this is a smart and little-known bird endemic to the islands of Bougainville, Choiseul, Santa Isabel and Guadalcanal.

Melanesian (Collared) Kingfisher *Todirhamphus (chloris) tristrami*: One on Rennell May 8 and 2 there next day, this race *amoenus* is very distinct, being small and very blue above, and white below. Then one of the race *solomonis* seen on Ugi May 13, and heard around Kirakira. One of the race *alberti* on Ghizo May 20 then singles around Tirotonga and Tasia Island. The Rennell bird *amoenus* in particular is very distinct and also sounds different, I can see this species being further split in due course.

Beach Kingfisher *Todirhamphus saurophaga* (H): One heard at Kukundu May 17.

Sacred Kingfisher *Todirhamphus sanctus*: Singles of this Australian migrant were seen in open habitats on Makira May 12 and then 2 at Kukundu May 18, confusingly similar to the local subspecies of Melanesian (Collared) Kingfisher.

## CORACIIDAE

Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis solomonensis*: A couple of sightings near Kirakira airstrip, with 4 on May 16. Another species which reaches its easternmost limits in the Solomons, this is a rather brightly coloured endemic subspecies.

## BUCEROTIDAE

Blyth's Hornbill *Aceros plicatus*: A spectacular species that was seen at Mt Austen and on Santa Isabel, just a couple each time. This is the only hornbill east of Sulawesi.

## PITTIDAE

✓**Black-faced Pitta** *Pitta anerythra anerythra*: May 22 was a truly extraordinary day, as walking back around the head of the valley from the Fearful Owl I played the call of the pitta at each patch of taller forest. On the third such attempt I got an immediate response and initially thought it was one of the local guys mimicking before I realized it was actually close by and down the slope. We peered anxiously in and Brendan suddenly got onto it, but I was unsighted and I couldn't get his directions before it flew further along. Panic, but I persisted and as it was responding strongly I inched down the very steep slope and anchored myself by a small tree fern whilst scanning the dense understorey low down.

Suddenly through a tiny gap in the tall tree fern trunk about 15m away I saw the bird, sat on a diagonal branch about a metre above ground. It was far more richly coloured below than the illustration in Dutson, (which I suspect was done from an old skin?) The rich orangey-buff underparts matched the colour of the local very slippery orangey clay soil; it had a whitish-buff chin and upper throat, edged diffusely below with a vague darker colour line. There was a pale iridescent blue shoulder patch and a dull greeny mantle, before the black face mask, which extended round behind the head, and a rich chestnut-brown crown that seemed to be raised at times. The bill was black, quite long and heavy, the eye dark, and the legs seemed greyish. I watched it calling for about 10 minutes at this close range, but sadly it was too obscured for my camera to focus, though I did get a nice tape.

Since 1938, this species has only been recorded at Tirotonga, where Dave Gibbs rediscovered it in 1994, and still only a handful of people have ever seen it. It is widely considered as one of the shyest of the 33+ species of the wonderful and very highly prized Pitta family. Classified as 'Vulnerable' by BirdLife/IUCN because of its rarity, it is endemic to the islands of Bougainville, Choiseul and Santa Isabel, with the Bougainville bird *pallida* a potential split.

## MELIPHAGIDAE

Cardinal Myzomela *Myzomela cardinalis*: This vivid red honeyeater was fairly common on Rennell and on Makira, where the two taxa look different and have very distinct voices. The race *pulcherrima* on Makira and Ugi had an odd deep stuttering voice, whilst *sanfordi* on Makira was much shriller, and both were quite different to *lifuenis* on the

Loyalties. It is restricted to the coast on Makira, usually in coconuts, and it seemed quite common, I saw 6 on May 13. The Rennell bird was one of the commonest passerines there, with up to 15 in a day. Endemic to south Melanesia and Samoa, and probably several species in the group.

**Crimson-rumped (Yellow-vented) Myzomela** *Myzomela eichhorni*: A single drab female in the forest by Imbu Ranu on May 27, it seems scarce.

**Red-capped Myzomela** *Myzomela lafargei*: A single male flew by and landed nearby at the rail spot at Tirotonga on May 23, it seems quite rare here

**Sooty Myzomela** *Myzomela tristrami*: This distinctive blackish myzomela was seen on three days in the rain on Makira, with 2 birds on two days and a single on another. They also fed in the coconuts as well as the forest patches.

#### CAMPEPHAGIDAE

Yellow-eyed Cuckooshrike *Coracina lineata*: We saw 3 of the sexually monomorphic barred subspecies *gracilis* on Rennell May 9, 3 near Imbu Ranu May 19 were presumably of the race *ombriosa* despite not being listed for Kolombangara in Dutson, then a male on May 21 at Tirotonga of race *pusilla*, with another next day and one at Mt Austen May 25. I anticipate some splits here as there are significant vocal differences.

White-bellied Cuckooshrike *Coracina papuensis perpallida*: One or two on 4 days on Kolombangara and then Santa Isabel in open habitats and degraded forest.

**Grey-capped Cicadabird** *Coracina (tenuirostris) remota*: 2 females at Kukundu May 18, 3 at Tirotonga May 21 and one next day, all of the race *saturator*, then one *erythropygia* at Mt Austen May 25. The call sounds quite like the rainforest birds in North Queensland.

**Solomon Islands Cuckooshrike** *Coracina holopolia*: By far the scarcest of the small cuckooshrikes. One showed well on Kolombangara at 370m (Guadalcanal) with a probably glimpsed the day before, endemic to the Solomons.

Long-tailed Triller *Lalage leucopyga affinis*: Up to 6 were seen daily near Kirakira, where it is most common along forest edges and in clearings. This race lacks a supercilium and has a white rump. It is endemic to Melanesia, from Makira to New Caledonia.

#### TURDIDAE

Island Thrush *Turdus poliocephalus rennellianus*: One was briefly seen flying across a track in dense forest on Rennell and a couple heard distantly. This subspecies is unusual in occurring at sea-level, presumably because there are few other competing species on Rennell and where there is no montane habitat. No fewer than 50 races of this widespread bird have been described and many splits are imminent!

## MONARCHIDAE

Willie-wagtail *Rhipidura leucophrys*: Small numbers at Kirakira, Gizo, Kukundu and Buala

**Cockerell's (White-winged) Fantail** *Rhipidura cockerelli albina*: One on Kolombangara at 500m, a rather distinct taxon with plain black breast. I would not be surprised to see several splits in this group.

✓**Rennell Fantail** *Rhipidura rennelliana*: Quite common in the surviving forest on Rennell, but how it will fare with logging remains to be seen, I saw up to 7 each day starting May 9.

Rufous Fantail *Rhipidura rufifrons*: Nice views of 2 *russata* near Kirakira, with small black breast band May 12 with one on May 14, then 7 of the very distinctive *ugiensis* on Ugi May 13 which looks a good split candidate. Finally 3 of race *granti* were in forest above Imbu Ranu May 18.

✓**Rennell Shrikebill** *Clytorhynchus hamlini*: 3 on May 9 and 5 on May 10 showed very well on Rennell. One of the most striking of the five Shrikebill species, which are restricted to the southwest Pacific, and it is endemic to Rennell where it seems fairly widespread where tall forest remains.

Islet (Island) Monarch *Monarcha cinerascens*: I found two individuals in coastal forest on Tigoa Island off Buala, always a nice species to record as only found on very small islets as opposed to larger islands.

**Chestnut-bellied Monarch** *Monarcha castaneiventris*: One scolding in scrub near Kirakira airport May 11, and a couple in a forest copse on May 15. On Ugi, we easily found one of my main wants, the distinctive all black *ugiensis*, which has a very different call, duly taped and now posted on IBC, I expect this to be split in due course, I saw at least 3 birds and heard several more there, all in remnant forest patches and one with the local Ugi White-collared Monarchs nearby.

**White-capped Monarch** *Monarcha richardsi*: I had four day records, with one at Hambere May 17, 15 above Imbu Ranu May 18, 4 there next day then a group of 6 in the scrub at Gizo on May 20. They have at least 5 plumages, from the fully white capped birds, to ones with a broad white supercilium like White-browed Woodswallow, to dark grey-headed and grey chested birds, ones with some whitish appearing on the head and even one that looks like a dark version of Island Monarch! It seems to be quite common and hopefully adaptable to damaged habitat.

✓**Kolombangara Monarch** *Monarcha browni*: Heard in the forest behind the primary school at Hambere on May 17, then 4 on the trail above Imbu Ranu on May 18 and one right by the lodge next day. This is a striking and uncommon bird, with a noisy harsh rattly scolding call, often with the much commoner White-capped Monarch.

**White-collared Monarch** *Monarcha viduus squamulatus*: I was particularly anxious to find this on Ugi, eventually locating two adults and an immature in thick understorey about a km inland, at about 50m altitude. These pied monarchs seem to be quite scarce no matter which species, and this one is a good candidate for a split. One bird had a black chin, throat and upper breast; the other had large pearly spots on the black breast. I did wonder if this might be sexual dimorphism as there was an immature bird with them, quite greyish above. The call was taped and needs to be compared with nominate birds, it seems to me as if Ugi may well have two endemic monarch species.

**Steel-blue Flycatcher** *Myiagra ferrocyanea*: Three sightings, 2 at Hambere May 18, 1 at Imbu Ranu and then 2 on Ghizo with the White-caped Monarch flock. Endemic to the Solomons, there are four subspecies, all with differing females.

✓**Makira (Ochre-headed) Flycatcher** *Myiagra cervinicauda*: Another genus which has speciated on Makira, where I saw a male on Ugi by the boat landing. Note that the scientific name means ochre-coloured tail, and this English name is obviously erroneous. This smart species is endemic to Makira.

Melanesian Flycatcher (New Caledonian F) *Myiagra caledonica*: Four were seen on Rennell. The males of the genus *Myiagra* are all very similar, but the female of this species has a distinctive bright orange breast. It is endemic to Rennell, Vanuatu and New Caledonia. Yet another species that has obviously colonized Rennell from the south.

#### PACHYCEPHALIDAE

**Oriole Whistler** *Pachycephala orioloides collaris*: Vocal, with its loud and very musical song on Kolombangara above 350m but not easy to see, this taxon has a yellow throated male with a black breast band, whilst the female is an odd greenish-olive above and pale below. I expect this species to be further broken up into component species, I can envisage 5 more species being involved once genetics, biogeography, morphology and vocals are taken into proper account.

✓**Rennell Whistler** *Pachycephala feminina*: Scare and hard to see on Rennell, I heard a couple in the logging tracts near Tigoa in the heat of the day, and finally saw one of the two singing along a new logging track near Nuku'amanu GH at Tigoa.

#### ACANTHIZIDAE

Fan-tailed Gerygone *Gerygone flavolateralis citrina*: Probably the commonest bird on Rennell, with up to 12 seen each day. It is endemic to Rennell, Vanuatu and New Caledonia and this distinctive pale-eyed yellow-bellied version is a good candidate for a split.

#### NECTARINIIDAE

Olive-backed Sunbird *Cinnyris jugularis*: Locally common in coastal and open habitats, including at Kirakira on Makira, where it is not listed by Dutson.

## DICAEIDAE

**Midget Flowerpecker** *Dicaeum aeneum*: This tiny Solomons endemic showed well with 3 at Buala/Tirotonga May 21, 3 at Tirotonga next day with a single the day after, then a female on Mt Austen.

**Mottled Flowerpecker** *Dicaeum tristrami*: I heard this on Makira and glimpsed a couple near Kirakira, not seen well this time. This odd flowerpecker is the furthest east of the family, and endemic to Makira.

## HIRUNDINIDAE

Pacific Swallow *Hirundo tahitica subfusca*: Just a few of this dark swallow at Honiara and Kirakira.

## ZOSTEROPIDAE

✓**Rennell White-eye** *Zosterops rennellianus*: Very scarce, I saw one on May 9 and 2 next day along the logging track near Tigoa. An atypical pale-billed white-eye, lacking any eye-ring except a very narrow ring of blue skin, and often behaving more like a creeper. It is endemic to Rennell.

✓**Ghizo (Splendid) White-eye** *Zosterops luteirostris*: A striking white-eye and quite distinct from its close neighbours in this amazing species radiation here in the Solomons. 6 birds were seen well in scrubby saplings and bushes along the start of the track to Maltu on May 20, seen as singles or twos, and often with the White-capped Monarch. It is endemic to Gizo where so little forest remains that it is classified as **Endangered** by BirdLife/IUCN, with an estimated population of a few thousand.

**Yellow-throated White-eye** *Zosterops metcalfeii metcalfeii*: A more typical and quite vocal white-eye, with up to 10 seen daily on Santa Isabel. Another species endemic to Bougainville, Choiseul and Santa Isabel, which were connected by a Pleistocene land-bridge.

**Solomon Islands (New Georgia) White-eye** *Zosterops kulambangrae*: One at Hambere in the forest behind the primary school, then about 12 in the forest around Imbu Ranu, with many more heard there. It was surprisingly bright yellow-green above and yellowy below, with a fairly obvious white eye-ring. This confusingly named bird is endemic to the lowlands and hills of the Kolombangara and New Georgia group. (Sometimes called *Z. rendovae*).

✓**Bare-eyed White-eye** *Woodfordia superciliosa*: A most unusual 'white-eye', with its long decurved bill and striking head pattern, and of course a new genus for me. The only other member of this genus is on Santa Cruz, to the southeast. It is endemic to the island of Rennell where we saw 15 on May 9, 10 on May 10 and 2 near the airport May 11, quite common and seems adapted to disturbed habitats.

## CORVIDAE

**White-billed Crow** *Corvus woodfordi*: Good views of this small crow on Santa Isabel where it was vocal around the forest at Tirotonga, I saw 4 on May 22 and heard many more. Then there were two groups of 3 up the Mt Austen track on May 25, these had a rosy pinkish-white bill, which was very unexpected, see the photo on IBC! They have a fast fluttery flight with shallow wing beats. It is endemic to Choiseul, Santa Isabel and Guadalcanal (with a similar species on Bougainville).

## STURNIDAE

**Metallic Starling** *Aplonis metallica*: Locally common in degraded lowland forest, usually seen from roadsides on Mount Austen, Gizo, Makira and Santa Isabel.

**Singing Starling** *Aplonis cantoroides*: A couple in Honiara, and 4 in Ghizo town, it is endemic to New Guinea and the Solomons.

✓**Rennell Starling** *Aplonis insularis*: A rather scarce species, I saw 4 basically flying over on May 9, with the distinctive “zik” call, then 5 next day were seen well, with a pair singing and calling by a nest hole. It is endemic to Rennell and seems scarce; this will be a forest dependent species.

**Brown-winged Starling** *Aplonis grandis*: 3 of this distinctive endemic at Tirotonga on Santa Isabel, and 2 on Mount Austen (Guadalcanal) May 25. The brown wings can be impossible to see in bad light and they look rather like large shorter tailed cuckooshrikes.

**Common Myna** *Acridotheres tristis*: One of just 2 introduced species established in the Solomons. It is common throughout Honiara. Introduced from India to control pests in coconut plantations.

**Long-tailed Myna** *Mino kreffti*: Seen in small numbers on Mt Austen, Ghizo, Kolombangara and Isabel, and very vocal. A Bismarck and Solomons endemic, split from Yellow-faced Myna *M. dumontii*.

## PLOCEIDAE

**Tree Sparrow** *Passer montanus*: Now a new colonist in the Solomons, as in PNG, I saw up to 4 at Honiara airport on May 11 and 17.

## MAMMALS

**Solomon Islands Flying-fox** *Pteropus rayneri*: The huge flying-foxes roosting close to Kukundu on Kolombangara were apparently this species but the Solomons has nine species of *Pteropus* flying-foxes, making identification of smaller species difficult.

**Pacific Flying-fox** *Pteropus tonganus*: The big flying-foxes on Rennell may be this species, which mainly occurs to the south and east of the Solomons.

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