West Papua: Mupi Gunung, Numfor and Malagufuk, Sept-Nov 2017

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Introduction

During a 6-week independent trip to West Papua, we had the opportunity to explore a few localities that are seldom visited by birders: Mupi Gunung in the Arfak mountains, Numfor island and Malagufuk in the Klasow valley. Although Numfor is now regularly visited by bird tour companies, little information on this island is available for independent birders. Mupi Gunung and Malagufuk seem so far to have been largely overlooked by birders visiting West Papua although the former is described in the Lonely Planet guide as a very good place for bird and mammal watching. The aim of this trip report is to provide information related to these three locations and encourage birders to visit them. Sites that are firmly on the standard West Papuan birding road (Kwau/Sioubri, Biak, Nimbokrang, Wamena, Waigeo) and that we also visited during our trip already benefit of a lot of birding and logistics information and are not covered here.

Mupi Gunung

Mupi Gunung (-1.11277, 134.02882) is a tiny settlement located 30km to the south of Manokwari, at 1130m asl in the Arfak mountains. It is ideally surrounded by very good forest and is the starting point of a good network of trails allowing exploration up to 1700m with seemingly no or very little hunting pressure as locals have converted to ecotourism. Benoît had great memories of this site from a previous visit in 2015 and was very keen to return. For Noëlle, Hervé and Marc, it was not at first really obvious what Mupi Gunung would provide in comparison with the classic Kwau/Sioubri area, but in the end the overall experience and birding quality at this remote location exceeded our expectations, with many species added here that were not seen in Kwau/Sioubri, although this partly reflects the fact that our stay at the latter well-know locations was relatively brief (6 days) and often spoilt by the rain. In addition, Mupi Gunung provides great opportunities to see rare mammals and more generally it allows sampling lower elevations forests which quite often are just briefly covered during traditional Arfak mountains birding trips.
Logistics

Our 5-day visit to Mupi Gunung was organized by Hans Mandacan (hansmandacan@gmail.com, tel: +6281344214965), with whom Benoit had exchanged various e-mails and facebook messages prior to our trip. Hans operates as a guide in the Arfak mountains and also owns the Papuan Lorikeet Guesthouse in Kwau. He speaks good English. As it is often the case in Papua, he is not a birder and has incomplete knowledge of the local avifauna but he knows some of the most spectacular species, especially the Birds of Paradise, and where to look for them.

Total price for our stay at Mupi Gunung was 18,000,000 IDR (4,500,000 IDR / person) all inclusive (car transports, porters and guides, accommodation, food / cooking and village contribution fee). We did not have to transfer the money beforehand but paid directly to Hans.

Accessing Mupi Gunung first involved a 2-hour drive from Manokwari (starting at 4 AM) followed by a remarkably strenuous 7-hour hike starting at 60m asl and eventually reaching the settlement nearly 1100m further up. Visitors must be reasonably fit for this trek and we recommend using wellington boots as they help avoid the occasional leeches along muddy and slippy trails.

We were accommodated in a house with two double-rooms equipped with simple mattresses and advise to bring inflatable camping mattresses and sleeping bags. The house has a covered terrace where we had our meals. This terrace offered a conveniently sheltered viewpoint for birding when it was raining. The overall organization, including cooking, was very good. Mupi Gunung villagers were remarkably friendly and worked hard to make our stay a great experience. Two of them that acted as guides were hired by Hans prior to our trip in order to set up two red fruits feeding stations that turned out to attract a nice selection of Birds of Paradise. At the beginning of our stay we were
guided either by Hans or by some of the villagers, but once we knew the trails we were allowed to freely explore the forest.

Day 1 was spent traveling from Manokwari and trekking up to Mupi Gunung, before having 3 full days based at the settlement. Day 5 included an early morning birding session followed by the return journey. In retrospect and although our stay in Mupi Gunung was very successful, we wish we had at least 1 or 2 extra days to better cover its very rich and little-known avifauna and give chance for additional mammals.

**Birds**

The access trail (-1.054049, 134.057221) first goes through hills covered by second-growth forest and tall bamboos and soon reaches good lowland forest. Birds recorded along this section included Grey-headed Goshawk and Yellow-billed Kingfisher. A small bridge is built at the first river crossing (-1.076454, 134.045341) where during the walk back we saw a Torrent Flycatcher. Some of us walked 200m upstream to relocate it and eventually found a party of 5 birds. This species was not seen elsewhere during our 6-week trip. Immediately after the first river crossing, the trail goes through spectacular, almost untouched forest from c. 450m to 630m asl where we recorded Fairy and Coconut Lorikeets, Papuan Dwarf-Kingfisher, Papuan Pitta, Rusty and Northern Variable Pitohuis and Spot-winged Monarch. This trail section certainly yields many more interesting birds but we were mainly hiking and only made few birding stops. The second river crossing (-1.098431, 134.032543) is the place where we made a lunch break on the way up. It gave an Azure Kingfisher and for some of us the only Torrent Lark of the trip.

![Overview of the Mupi Gunung trail network](image-url)
Then there is a tough hike uphill that leads at 830m to a clearing from where we saw a Pygmy Eagle. The last few hundred meters before arriving to the village proved to be particularly productive during our walk back, with highlights including Vulturine Parrot (2 in flight), Chestnut-backed Jewel-Babbler (1 pair), Wallace’s Fairywren (1 pair) and Papuan Black Myzomela. Other birds recorded along the access trail included Long-tailed Buzzard, Eclectus Parrot, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Slender-billed Cuckoo-Dove, Stephen’s Dove, Frilled Monarch, Tawny-breasted Honeyeater, Fairy Gerygone, Golden Monarch, Rufous-backed and Drongo Fantails.

The village clearing made a good viewpoint during early morning and lunch breaks. From there we saw Pygmy Eagle (2 birds), Collared Sparrowhawk (1), Great Cuckoo-Dove, Papuan Mountain Pigeon, Papuan Lorikeet, Mountain Peltops (up to 4), Masked Bowerbird (1 male) and Trumpet Manucode (1). At night we also had great views of Papuan Boobook.

The shrubby / second growth area immediately to the east of the village yielded a pair of Wallace’s Fairywren (-1.112143, 134.029542). Other birds recorded here included Double-Eyed Fig-Parrot (1 breeding pair), Elfin and Red Myzomelas, Western Smoky Honeyeater, Black Berriypecker, Stout-billed and Black-bellied Cuckoooshrikes, Hooded Pithouhi, Black-winged Monarch, Lesser BOP, Black-fronted White-Eye and Arfak Catbird (the latter heard only). From there, a short trail goes further down in a North-East direction and leads to a hide overlooking an active lek of Magnificent Bird-of-Paradise that was also regularly frequented by a pair of Papuan Scrub-Robin during our stay.

![Map of Mupi Gunung settlement area](image)

Just north of the village, a hide overlooking a red fruit feeding station was best visited in the early morning when it gave the only Crinkle-collared Manucodes of the trip (4+ birds) plus Magnificent Riflebird, Western Parotias (up to 3 males) and Magnificent BOP. We had another pair of Wallace’s Fairywren on the way to this hide.
To the south/south east of the village, there is an excellent trail that first goes down to a stream before gently ascending uphill. A pair of Wallace’s Fairywren was seen once in the first trees just after the shrubby area immediately past the stream. We only walked the first 4 kilometers along this trail but it might certainly be worth exploring further. Best birds recorded along here included Pheasant Pigeon (1 seen after playback and another heard, -1.122751, 134.030210) and Chestnut-backed Jewel-Babbler (1 pair in the area frequented by Pheasant Pigeons). Other noticeable species were New Guinea Harpy-Eagle (heard only), Papuan Pitta, Papuan Lorikeet, Rufous-throated Bronze-Cuckoo, Papuan Scrub-Robin, Chestnut-bellied Fantail, Arfak Catbird (heard only) and Drongo Fantail (up to 5). Somewhere along this trail, one can access a hide overlooking a lek of Western Parotia. A Ring-tailed Possum (D’Alberti’s or Reclusive) was also seen close to the village along this trail.

![Map of trails](image)

**Trails leading to the Pheasant Pigeon area, to the 1700m ridge and the “Cassowary gully”**

To the south/south west of the village, a steep trail leads after a 2 km walk to a ridge at 1700m asl. The first section of this trail is where the villagers showed us a Black Tree Kangaroo. Further uphill, a Feline Owlet-Nightjar was heard during one early morning walk. The start of the 1700m ridge is the place where the villagers have settled a hide overlooking another red fruit feeding station. Here we had excellent opportunities to see and photograph Arfak Astrapia (2 females), Black Sicklebill (2 females) and Long-tailed Paradigalla (1). It is possible to walk along the ridge in a south-west direction but after about 400m, the trail ends and the ridge becomes impassable. Near the end of this trail, we spent some time exploring a gully down to the left that we called the “Cassowary gully” (-1.132313, 134.020470) as footprints and many fresh droppings of Dwarf Cassowary were found here. Our stay in Mupi Gunung was certainly too brief to allow a serious, prolonged search for the Cassowary, but anyone planning a visit should seriously consider to allow enough time for this species. This gully produced Bronze Ground-Dove, Rufescent Imperial-Pigeon, Red-breasted Pygmy-
**Parrot, Orange-crowned Fairywren, Mottled Berryhunter** and **Garnet Robin**. Other birds recorded from the ridge included **Ornate Fruit-Dove, Cinnamon-browed Honeyeater, Mid-moutain Berrypecker, Regent Whistler** and **Ashy Robin**.

Other birds we saw in the Mupi Gunung general area and not mentioned previously in this report included: **Slender-billed** and **Black-billed Cuckoo-Doves, Superb** and **Mountain Fruit-Doves, Eastern Koel, Brush and Chestnut-breasted Cuckoo, Large-tailed Nightjar, Glossy Swiftlet, Blyth’s Hornbill, Rusty Mouse-Warbler, Vogelkop Bowerbird, Red-collared Myzomela, Rufous-sided Honeyeater, Vogelkop Melidectes, Spectacled Longbill, Grey Thornbill, Vogelkop Scrubwren, Olive-crowned Flowerpecker, Little Shrike-Thrush, Goldenface, Sclater’s Whistler, Fan-tailed Monarch, Northern and Black Fantail, Superb Bird of Paradise, Blue-grey and White-faced Robins, Grey Wagtail**. During his 2015 visit, Benoit also recorded **White-rumped Robin, Marbled Honeyeater** and **Moutain Meliphaga**. There is little doubt that with more birders visiting Mupi Gunung, its bird list should substantially increase.

**Numfor**

**Logistics**

Numfor can be challenging to access. According to trip reports, most birding groups seem to charter speedboats from Biak but these are reportedly very expensive and somewhat unpredictable due to sea condition. For these reasons we decided to investigate the possibility to travel by scheduled ferry and plane. ASDP ferries connect Numfor to Biak and Manokwari only once or twice a week and time schedule should be checked here [https://www.indonesiaferry.co.id/](https://www.indonesiaferry.co.id/) and double-checked either by contacting them on facebook ([https://www.facebook.com/asdp191/](https://www.facebook.com/asdp191/)) or by phone (see facebook page). Susi Air ([http://www.susiair.com/](http://www.susiair.com/)) operates flights from Manokwari, Numfor and Biak which we were told are “Perintis” (subsidies) from Indonesian government and they sell tickets with manual system, thus it is necessary to contact Susi Air at Manokwari ([manokwari@susiair.com](mailto:manokwari@susiair.com), 0811 212 3932 or 0811 480 6707) for reservation and get information for flight schedule.

After studying various options during the trip planning, we decided to travel by ferry from Manokwari to Numfor on a thursday, bird Numfor island on friday and take the morning flight to Biak on saturday. And it worked!

The ASDP ferry from Manokwari to Numfor (35,000 IDR/person) scheduled at 11 AM departed two hours late and arrived to the south of Numfor at 6 PM.

From there we chartered a vehicle (300,000 IDR) to make the 32km drive to Yenburwo at the northern tip of the island where we were expecting to stay at a hotel but ended up being dropped off in front of some sort of christian seminary (-0.934914, 134.872417), which was just as well although quite noisy during the night. The total for the four of us for 2 double rooms for 2 nights was 400,000 IDR. We had brought some food from Manokwari that the staff of the seminary kindly cooked for us on the first evening. We used our food for breakfasts and for the lunch during our day in the field and went to a restaurant close to the seminary on the second evening that served good fish.
For our single birding day on Numfor we chartered a vehicle (poorly negociated at 1,000,000 IDR) with the help of the driver who transported us from the ferry terminal to the christian seminary.

The Susi Air flight from Numfor to Biak costs 314,900 IDR/person plus an extra charge (from 10 kg) of c.15,000 IDR / kg for our big checked luggages. Although seats were booked beforehand from Susi Air office at Manokwari, tickets had to be paid at Numfor airport the morning of departure (it is the way it works!) and we called Susi Air office in Numfor (+62 813 5415 4933) the day before departure to double-check our reservation.

**Birds**

The birding started during the ferry crossing. Birds seen shortly after leaving Manokwari included *Little* and *Great Frigatebirds* and *Little, Common, Whiskered* and *Greater Crested Terns*. Further along 2 *Aleutian Terns* were seen and photographed, this species is almost unknown in Papuan waters and is not mentioned yet in the Papuan field guides! Half-way between Manokwari and Numfor we also had 1 *Tahiti Petrel*, c.10 *Brown Booby*, 20+ *Black Noddy* and *Bridled* and *Sooty Terns*.

With little information available and just one full day to look for birds in Numfor, we decided to explore a track that was looking promising on GoogleEarth. It worked perfectly as after starting birding at dawn, we had bagged all our targets at 2 PM. This track starts south of Namber village (-1.072340, 134.830216) and first goes through a mix of cleared lands, shrubbery and small woodlands before entering good forest. We left our vehicle and driver on the main road and walked the first five kilometers of the track, it was birdy all along the way. The driver picked us up about halfway while we were walking back to the main road.
Main highlights seen along the birding track:

**Numfor Paradise-Kingfisher**: 7 seen and another 10+ heard. Stunning, common and unmissable!

**Hooded Pitta ssp *mefoorana***: 2 seen and another 4+ heard.

**Barred Cuckooshrike ssp *maforensis***: 1 pair of this rarely reported and distinctive subspecies gave prolonged views (-1.077815, 134.855340). This was probably our most remarkable sighting on Numfor.

**Numfor Leaf-Warbler**: 3 seen and another 3 heard, the first one at -1.072078, 134.848574

Other highlights seen along the birding track included **Biak Scrubfowl** (1), **Geelvink Imperial Pigeon** (5+ seen and more heard), **Black-winged Lory**, **Geelvink Pygmy Parrot** (12+), **Geelvink Cicadabird** (4), **Biak Black Flycatcher** (5) and **Island Monarch** (2).

Other birds recorded here were **Lesser Frigatebird**, **Common Emerald Dove**, **Slender-billed Cuckoo-Dove ssp *maforensis***, **Superb Fruit-Dove**, **Yellow-bibbed Fruit-Dove** (common), **Claret-breasted Fruit-Dove** (1 seen and 10+ heard), **Eclectus Parrot** (10+), **Sulphur-crested Cockatoo** (10), **Red-cheeked Parrot**, **Channel-billed Cuckoo** (1 heard), **Brush Cuckoo**, **Glossy Swiftlet**, **Pacific Swallow**, **Oriental Dollarbird**, **Sacred Kingfisher**, **Black and Olive-backed Sunbirds**, **Red-capped Flowerpecker**, **Hooded Butcherbird**, **Shining Flycatcher**, **Willie Wagtail**, **Gray’s Grasshopper-Warbler**, **Spangled Drongo**, **Metallic Starling**, **Long-tailed Starling ssp *brevicauda***.

Another good place we visited is the **Numfor airfield** at Yenburwo, which is very close to town and readily accessed from the christian seminary at -0.934746, 134.872586. Here we had a nice selection of waders with a single **Little Curlew** the major highlight. Other birds seen at the airfield included **Variable Goshawk**, **Pacific Golden Plover** (45 birds), **Lesser Sand Plover** (6), **Greater Sand Plover** (1),
Black-tailed Godwit (1), Marsh Sandpiper (1), Common Sandpiper, Red-necked Stint (6), Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (8+), Turnstone (1) and Moustached Treeswift.

Birds seen elsewhere on Numfor were Whiskered Tern, Striated Heron, Little Egret, Great Egret, Whimbrel and Torresian Crow.

Malagufuk (Klasow valley)

Malagufuk (-0.804815, 131.643519) is another place Benoit had already visited during a former trip to West Papua. It is a small village surrounded by good lowland forest and located in the Klasow valley, 60km east of Sorong. It has a good network of trails and hunting pressure is reduced as locals here too have converted to ecotourism. According to wildlife guide Charles Roring who is mainly operating in West Papua, Klasow valley is the most recommended birding site in the Sorong area. Our overall feeling is that it might be an excellent alternative to the roadside birding which is usually opted by birders when visiting the Sorong area.

Logistics

Charles Roring (manokwaripapua.blogspot.com, charlesroring.blogspot.com) was contacted beforehand and kindly helped us organize our 3-day stay here. He arranged contacts with another local guide called Nico Yohanesn Nauw (082399985681). Nico speaks reasonably good English and in retrospect we could have organized our stay in Malagufuk directly with him, although it was nice to meet both of them at our hotel in Sorong the evening prior to our trip as Charles provided us with
detailed information. It should be noted that Charles did not charge us for his support in organizing our trip.

Total price for our stay at Malagufuk was 8,000,000 IDR (2,000,000 IDR / person) all inclusive and split as follows:

- transport: 2 x 1,000,000 IDR = 2,000,000 IDR
- Nico’s services: 3 days x 400,000 IDR = 1,200,000 IDR
- Accommodation: 100,000 IDR x 2 nights x 4 pax = 800,000 IDR
- Cooking: 100,000 IDR x 3 days x 2 cooking women = 600,000 IDR
- Village tax: 50,000 IDR x 3 days x 4 people = 600,000 IDR
- Food: 2,000,000 IDR
- Local guides: 100,000 IDR x 2 x 3 days = 600,000 IDR
- Batteries, cigarettes for the locals etc: 200,000 IDR

We did not have to transfer the money beforehand but paid directly to Nico (including for the food that he purchased the day prior departure), the car driver and all the people (porters, guides, cooks etc) who worked for us. If you visit this place, it is best to have a detailed quotation so that to make sure your money goes directly into the hands of the people who are supposed to receive it.

Accessing Malagufuk first involved a 2-hour drive from Sorong followed by a 1h30-long easy hike through flat lowland forest. We were accommodated in a house with two double-rooms equipped with simple mattresses and it is advisable to bring inflatable camping mattresses and sleeping bags. Malagufuk villagers were friendly and our stay there was very enjoyable. Two villagers acted as guides. At the beginning of our stay we were guided by Nico and these two villagers but towards the end of our stay we insisted on going birding alone as Nico was suffering a very noisy and annoying cough which we felt was hampering the detection of the shier bird species and we did not enjoy the villagers being accompanied by a dog. As it is often the case in lowland forest, the risk of getting lost especially when walking off-trail must be seriously considered here and we strongly advise to always carry a GPS and make sure you have spare charged batteries.

We only spent 3 days in this area. On day 1 we departed from Sorong by vehicle at 4 AM for the two-hour drive up to the entrance of the Malagufuk access trail. After birding along the road, we entered the trail and walked slowly, arriving at the village for lunch. Afternoon of day 1, day 2 and morning of day 3 were spent exploring the various trails around the village. Malagufuk was left after lunch on day 3, arriving at Manokwari at the end of the afternoon after a couple of roadside birding stops. In retrospect and although our time spent here was very successful, we wish we had at least 1 or 2 extra days to better cover the very rich and little-known Malagufuk’s avifauna and give more chance at seeing cassowaries.

**Birds**

On the day of arrival we decided to spend the first hours of daylight along the road, close to the entrance of the trail that leads to Malagufuk (-0.776801, 131.632329), before walking towards the village. Highlight here was a flock of 3 Black Lories (the only sighting of the trip). Other birds recorded along the road included Moluccan King-Parrot (2), Black-capped Lory (at least 2), Large Fig-
Overview of the Malagufuk area

The 3.5 km-long trail leading from the road to Malagufuk village is worth visiting several times and it is recommended to explore the narrow side trails that run more or less parallel to the main trail. It is also possible to walk along the river flowing to the east of the trail. The general area near the start of the trail gave some outstanding birding including **Thick-billed Ground-Pigeon** (1 seen near the river at -0.778364, 131.635282), **Western Crowned-Pigeon** (2 seen) and **Red-billed Brush-Turkey** (1 seen, several heard). Other interesting birds recorded in the access trail area included **Hook-billed Kingfisher** (heard only), **Eastern Hooded Pitta**, **Sooty Thicket-Fantail** and **Twelve-wired Bird of Paradise**. Two **Brown Forest Wallabies** were also sighted here.

The village clearing and its forested edges were very birdy. Best birds seen here included **Large Fig-Parrot**, **Yellow-capped Pygmy-Parrot**, **Black-capped Lory**, **Lesser Black Coucal**, **Papuan Spinetail Swift** and **Golden** and **Yellow-faced Mynas**. **Papuan Frogmouth** was seen at night at the southern edge of the clearing.

It is of note that during our stay, an immature and an adult cassowaries, both of unconfirmed origin, were repeatedly seen in the village clearing where they came to be fed by villagers. According to Nico, the immature (which we failed to identify with certainty as the range of Southern and Northern Cassowaries is unclear in this part of Papua) arose from an egg collected in the wild by one of the villagers that subsequently hatched in the village, whereas the adult (which we identified as a Northern) was said to us to be a genuinely wild bird who started to be fed by villagers in the forest until being eventually habituated to the point of frequenting the village clearing where it was hand-
fed with no fear of the locals. In-between their village visits, these birds seemed to be absent from the village during long periods when they were assumed to roam freely in the nearby forest. While the story of the immature bird sounds credible, the adult story left us somewhat incredulous and of course we did not tick them. Nevertheless, numerous footprints of what were most presumably other, genuine wild cassowaries, were seen several kilometers away from the village, most notably along the main access track and on one occasion Benoit also bumped on a hunter from a neighboring village who had just caught one. Although we failed to see any true wild Cassowary in the forest despite some dedicated searches, these suggest that the forest surrounding Malagufuk should be seriously considered by birders wanting to search for this mega birds.

A trail going through some good swamp forest can be accessed from the north-eastern edge of the village clearing. Walking off trail here, we had wonderful views of a Red-breasted Paradise-Kingfisher (-0.799702, 131.645566). Other interesting birds seen in this area included Purple-tailed Imperial Pigeon, Moluccan King-Parrot (2), Yellow-billed Kingfisher (1 active nest) and Papuan Dwarf-Kingfisher (1 pair). On one morning, a brown birds mixed flock comprising Rusty Pitohui, Papuan Babbler and a female King Bird of Paradise gave prolonged views, enabling to positively identify the rare Tawny Straightbill. Black Thicket Fantail (-0.800396, 131.646846) as well as the commoner Sooty Thicket Fantail were both seen along the trail. Red-billed Brush-Turkey was heard only.

Another trail runs to the south of the village towards the Klasow river. A few hundred meters before the river is a lek of Lesser Bird of Paradise (-0.827610, 131.651655) that was very active in the early morning and afforded good views of displaying males perching on exposed branch, a spectacle we had failed to see properly in the Nimbokrang area. Other interesting birds recorded along this trail included Red-billed Brush-Turkey (heard only), Grey-headed Goshawk and Cinnamon Ground-Dove. When venturing one night here with our guides, we saw one Brown Forest Wallaby and heard Papuan Boobook and Marbled Frogmouths. Another Wallaby was also seen along this trail during daylight.