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Chapter 6

Birds of the Nakanai Mountains, East New Britain Province, Papua New Guinea

Paul Igag

SUMMARY

The 2009 Nakanai Mountains RAP survey was conducted at three sites along an elevational gradient between 200 m and 1,590 m. I documented 64 species of birds representing 27 families. Seven are species endemic to New Britain Island. Species richness declined monotonically with elevation. Notable records include *Accipiter luteoschistaceus*, *Henicophaps foersteri*, *Todirhamphus albonotatus*, and *Megalurulus rubiginosus*.

INTRODUCTION

Current understanding of the distribution of bird species in the Bismarck Archipelago is incomplete, mainly due to inadequate field survey of this geographically complex tropical island. Approximately 127 species of land and freshwater breeding birds have been recorded from New Britain Island, including 13 New Britain endemics and 26 Bismarck endemics. New Britain is nested within a complex biogeographic province that includes an island arc of active volcanoes, many small fringing islets, as well as an array of large and high islands, New Britain being the largest and highest of these. As highlighted by Mayr and Diamond (2001), this insular region has been a place of remarkable evolutionary radiation and differentiation, featuring important local lineages of fantails (Rhipiduridae), monarchs and flycatchers (Myiagruidae), whistlers (Pachycephalidae), and white-eyes (Zosteropidae).

Here I report the highlights of a bird survey conducted along an elevational gradient in the Nakanai Mountains of East New Britain Province.

METHODS

The field survey was conducted between 2-27 April 2009 at three sites (Lamas, 200 m; Vouvou, 890 m; and Tompoi, ~1,600 m) in the Nakanai Mountains of New Britain island. Descriptions of the three sites surveyed are presented in the Executive Summary. At each site the author and field team conducted a program of mist-netting, line transect censuses, and incidental sightings.

RESULTS

A full list of species documented during this survey is presented in Table 6.1. Brief notes on some of the more interesting birds encountered are presented below.

Bismarck Sparrowhawk *Accipiter brachyurus* (endemic to the Bismarck Archipelago)

One individual was observed at mid-day preying on a small bird while being perched at 20 meters high under canopy in the forest at Lamas camp. At Vouvou camp an individual

was observed in the afternoon in secondary forest beside a logging road. It was perched about 10 m above ground and appeared to be waiting for an opportunity to hunt.

Slaty-backed Goshawk *Accipiter luteoschistaceus* (endemic to New Britain and Umboi Island)

One of the least-known of the Bismarck endemics. We mist-netted an individual in immature plumage in forest at Lamas Camp. An adult bird was seen by Brian Coates between Hoskins and Kimbe, back in the 1970s at a time when the area was extensively forested. There have been very few confirmed sightings. There is one unconfirmed sighting from New Ireland.

Meyer's Goshawk (*Accipiter meyerianus*)

Only one individual was seen, at Palmalmal on 6 April 2010. It was perched on a papaya tree in a small garden patch close to the guest house.

Grey Goshawk (*Accipiter novaehollandiae*)

An individual of the white morph was seen 5-7 April 2009 constructing a nest in the canopy of a *Pometia pinnata* tree in lowland forest. Two individuals were observed carrying small tree branches to the nest site; they were very vocal.

Pied Cuckoo-Dove *Reinwardtoena browni* (Bismarck and Admiralty endemic)

We found this species breeding in a cave near Vouvou camp, at 859 m elevation on the 14 April 2010. An adult bird was incubating an egg when found. There were three nests observed inside the twilight zone of the cave but only one was new and being used. These nests were placed on the edges of the limestone walls. The nests were composed of dead twigs and fern leaves. A milky white egg was present in the new nest. Structure of the nest was typical of the family, except it was more compact and leafy. A fledgling from the previous brood was observed perched on rocks within the twilight zone of the cave. The chick had dark grey feathers already developed and protruding out of the remaining down. The chick had a mass of 220 grams, and was heavy with fat. The fledgling was seen again near the same spot at the cave entrance the following day. It flushed and flew into a fig tree.

New Britain Bronzewing *Henicophaps foersteri* (endemic to New Britain and Umboi)

A single individual was sighted once on the 5 April 2010 at hill forest at the Lamas camp. An individual was flushed while feeding on the forest floor.

Red-chinned Lorikeet *Chamosyna rubrigularis* (Bismarck Endemic)

A flock of twenty was observed on 9 April 2010 feeding in a flowering tree in a small mangrove patch on the coast at Palmalmal station. They were quite noisy, scrambling all over the tree feeding on the white flowers. Their shrieking

attracted three New Britain Friarbirds (*Philemon cockerelli*) to the tree and they were vocal as well.

Song Parrot *Geoffroyus heteroclitus* (endemic to New Britain and New Ireland)

This species was observed in a small flock overhead at Lamas Camp, about 200 m above sea level on 5 April 2010. At Vouvou (859 m) two birds were observed flying over forest canopy and at Tompoi (1,590 m) the species was commonly heard and seen flying through the canopy. At Tompoi several individuals were seen and heard in beech forest and one was observed at close quarters near the helipad foraging in the low canopy (6-7 meters high).

Blue-eyed Cockatoo *Cacatua ophthalmica* (endemic to New Britain and New Ireland)

The Blue-eyed Cockatoo occurred from low to high elevations. At 200 m elevation two birds were vocal and were always present at the camp during the five days of survey. On the morning of 5 April 2010 at 7-8 am three individuals were observed from a garden clearing at a distance. They were perched on top of the forest canopy, apparently foraging. At Vouvou a maximum count of five birds was recorded on the 15 April 2010.

Violaceous Coucal (*Centropus violaceus*) (endemic to Bismarck Archipelago)

Two birds were observed dueting in the lowland forest at 200 m on 7 April 2009. Over the hour of observation, the birds remained close to each other. They scrambled about in the lower branches of the tree in which they were perched. They emitted a low *HOO* call, repeated 3-5 times and made guttural *CHERR* and *CHURR* or *AHH* when alarmed. At Vouvou (859 m), 17 individuals were observed (by calls and sightings) within 4.4 hours of point count observations.

New Britain Kingfisher *Todirhamphus albonotatus* (New Britain endemic)

A shy species that is most active during dawn and dusk. One individual was flushed from an understory perch during mid-morning in hill forest at Lamas Camp on 7 April 2010. It moved away and made soft trills akin to the calls of a paradise-kingfisher.

Rufous-faced Thicket-Warbler *Megalurulus rubiginosa* (New Britain endemic)

Two individuals were mist-netted at Tompoi camp at 1,600 m.

Ashy Honeyeater *Myzomela cineracea* (endemic to New Britain and Umboi)

Five individuals were mist-netted at 859 m.

New Britain Red-headed Honeyeater *Myzomela erythromelas* (New Britain endemic)

One individual was observed feeding on nectar in the mid-canopy at Lamas Camp (200 m).

New Britain Friarbird *Philemon cockerelli* (New Britain endemic)

This species was fairly common and vocal at Lamas Camp (200 m) and was also recorded at both Vouvou and Tompoi camps. On 14 April 2009 at 859 m, eight birds were recorded in the morning and 14 in the afternoon.

REFERENCES

Mayr, E. and J. M. Diamond. 2001. The Birds of Northern Melanesia. Harvard University Press. Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Table 6.1. List of bird species documented at three sites in the Nakanai Mountains, East New Britain.

Family	Species	Lamas (200 m)	Vouvou (859 m)	Tompoi (~1,600 m)	Distribution and residency status*	
Casuariidae	Dwarf Cassowary	<i>Casuarius bennetti</i>	X		R	
Ardeidae	Rufous Night-Heron	<i>Nycticorax caledonicus</i>	X		V	
Accipitridae	Meyer's Goshawk	<i>Accipiter meyerianus</i>	X		R	
Accipitridae	Bismarck Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipter brachyurus</i>	X	X	BE	
Accipitridae	Grey Goshawk [=white phase]	<i>Accipter novaehollandiae</i>	X		R	
Accipitridae	Slaty-backed Goshawk	<i>Accipiter luteoschistaceus</i>	X		NB	
Accipitridae	Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>	X		R	
Megapodiidae	Melanesian Scrubfowl	<i>Megapodius eremita</i>	X	X	X	R
Scolopacidae	Red-necked Stint	<i>Calidris ruficollis</i>	X		V	
Laridae	Brown Noddy	<i>Anous stolidus</i>	X		V	
Columbidae	Finsch's Imperial Pigeon	<i>Ducula finschii</i>	X		BE	
Columbidae	Bismarck/Black Imperial Pigeon	<i>Ducula melanochroa</i>		X	BE	
Columbidae	Red-knobbed Imperial Pigeon	<i>Ducula rubricera</i>	X	X	R	
Columbidae	Bronze Ground-Dove	<i>Gallucolumba beccarii</i>	X	X	X	R
Columbidae	New Britain Bronzewing	<i>Henicophaps foersteri</i>	X		NB	
Columbidae	Brown Cuckoo-Dove	<i>Macropygia amboinensis</i>	X	X	X	R
Columbidae	Mackinlay's Cuckoo-Dove	<i>Macropygia mackinlayi</i>		X	BE	
Columbidae	White-breasted Fruit-Dove	<i>Ptilinopus rivoli</i>	X	X	X	R
Columbidae	Superb Fruit-Dove	<i>Ptilinopus superbus</i>		X	R	
Columbidae	Pied Cuckoo-Dove	<i>Reinwardtoena browni</i>		X	BE	
Columbidae	Papuan Mountain Pigeon	<i>Gymnophaps albertisi</i>		X	X	R
Psittacidae	Blue-eyed Cockatoo	<i>Cacatua ophthalmica</i>	X	X	X	NB
Psittacidae	Eclectus Parrot	<i>Eclectus roratus</i>	X	X	X	R
Psittacidae	Song Parrot	<i>Geoffroyus heteroclitus</i>	X	X	X	BE
Psittacidae	Red-chinned Lorikeet	<i>Charmosyna rubrigularis</i>	X			
Psittacidae	Eastern Black-capped Lory	<i>Lorius hypoinochrous</i>	X	X	X	R
Psittacidae	Rainbow Lorikeet	<i>Trichoglossus haematodus</i>	X	X	X	R
Cuculidae	Pied Coucal	<i>Centropus ateralbus</i>	X	X		BE
Cuculidae	Violaceous Coucal	<i>Centropus violaceus</i>	X	X		BE
Cuculidae	Brush Cuckoo	<i>Cocomantis variolosus</i>	X		X	R
Cuculidae	Common Koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopacea</i>	X	X	X	R
Hemiprocidae	Moustached Tree-swiflet	<i>Hemiprocne mystacea</i>		X		R
Apodidae	Uniform Swiflet	<i>Collocalia vanikorensis</i>	X	X	X	R
Apodidae	Glossy-backed Swiflet	<i>Collocalia esculenta</i>	X	X		R
Alcedinidae	Dwarf Kingfisher	<i>Ceyx lepidus</i>	X			R

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Table 6.1. *continued*

Family	Species	Lamas (200 m)	Vouvou (859 m)	Tompoi (~1,600 m)	Distribution and residency status*	
Alcedinidae	Forest Kingfisher	<i>Todirhamphus macleayii</i>	X		V	
Alcedinidae	New Britain Kingfisher	<i>Todirhamphus albonotatus</i>	X		NB	
Alcedinidae	Sacred Kingfisher	<i>Todirhamphus sanctus</i>		X	V	
Alcedinidae	Bismarck Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo websteri</i>	X		BE	
Pittidae	Blue-breasted Pitta	<i>Pitta erythrogaster</i>	X	X	R	
Pittidae	Hooded Pitta	<i>Pitta sordida</i>	X		R	
Campephagidae	White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike	<i>Coracina papuensis</i>	X	X	R	
Campephagidae	Varied Triller	<i>Lalage leucomela</i>	X	X	R	
Sylviidae	Rufous-faced Thicket Warbler	<i>Megalurulus rubiginosa</i>			X	NB
Sylviidae	Island Leaf-Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus poliocephalus moorhousei</i>	X	X	X	R
Rhipiduridae	Bismarck Rufous Fantail	<i>Rhipidura dahl</i>	X	X	X	BE
Rhipiduridae	Willie Wagtail	<i>Rhipidura leucophrys</i>	X			R
Rhipiduridae	Northern Fantail	<i>Rhipidura rufiventris</i>	X		X	R
Myiagridae	Bismarck Pied Monarch	<i>Monarcha verticalis</i>	X			BE
Myiagridae	Shining Flycatcher	<i>Myiagra alecto</i>	X			R
Myiagridae	Lesser Shining Flycatcher	<i>Myiagra hebetior eichborni</i>	X			BE
Pachycephalidae	Common Golden Whistler	<i>Pachycephala pectoralis</i>	X	X	X	R
Dicaeidae	Bismarck Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum eximium</i>	X	X	X	R
Dicruridae	Papuan Spangled Drongo	<i>Dicrurus bracteatus</i>	X	X	X	BE
Nectariniidae	Black Sunbird	<i>Nectarina aspasia</i>	X			R
Nectariniidae	Yellow-bellied Sunbird	<i>Nectarina jugularis</i>	X			R
Meliphagidae	Ashy Honeyeater	<i>Myzomela cineracea</i>		X		BE
Meliphagidae	New Britain Red-headed Honeyeater	<i>Myzomela erythromelas</i>	X			NB
Meliphagidae	New Britain Friarbird	<i>Philemon cockerelli</i>	X	X	X	NB
Bucerotidae	Blyth's Hornbill	<i>Rhyticeros plicatus</i>	X	X		R
Sturnidae	Singing Starling	<i>Aplonis cantoroides</i>	X			R
Sturnidae	Yellow-faced Myna	<i>Minor dumonti krefftii</i>	X	X		R
Corvidae	Torresian Crow	<i>Corvus orru</i>	X	X		R
Artamidae	Bismarck Wood-Swallow	<i>Artamus insignis</i>	X			BE
Species at each site			55	36	21	

*R = Resident, V = Visitor, BE = Bismarck Endemic, NB = New Britain Endemic

Table 6.2. Summary of mist netting data for each site

Site Altitude (m)	Number of mist net days at each site	Total species captured per site	Total individuals captured per site	Net meter hours per day per site	Total net meter hours per site	Minimum number of captures (species)	Maximum number of captures (species)
200	5	10	31	1716	8580	2 (1)	14 (8)
859	8	10	75	1716	13728	2 (0)	27 (7)
1,590	5	6	27	1716	8580	3 (1)	10 (6)
Total	18	26	113		30888		