

# SURVIVING WILD PAPUA

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## Introduction

The island of New Guinea in Southeast Asia is the second largest island in the world. The western or Indonesia half of New Guinea is Papua. The eastern half is the country of Papua New Guinea. West New Guinea is officially named Papua, although the local preferred name is West Papua. To further the confusion, western New Guinea contains the provinces of West Papua and Papua. For this trip report, Papua is used for the entire Indonesian region and the provinces will be labeled accordingly.

New Guinea has a total of eleven currently recognized *Nepenthes* species (Jebb & Cheek 1997; Cheek & Jebb 2001). During the two and a half week trip, the group led by Chien Lee encountered nine *Nepenthes* taxa and three *Utricularia* taxa. We also encountered a number of orchids, gingers, and a few *Rhododendron* species. In addition, we observed whale sharks and numerous avian species including several birds-of-paradise.

Prior to this trip, I have travelled to Borneo and Sumatra with Chien. Many members of the trip also travelled with Chien several times as well. This report provides a summary of the two and a half week trip in 2014. Although this paper focuses on the adventurous portions of the trip for entertainment value, there were many other positive aspects of the trip that are briefly mentioned.

## Biak Islands

The trip began on July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2014, on the Biak Islands off the northern coast of Papua Province. Near a sandy beach with limestone cliffs, the group saw the Biak form of *Nepenthes insignis* (Fig. 1). Unfortunately only a few plants remained at the location. Most of the plants looked in poor health due to lack of water. We talked to the locals and asked them to watch over the plants in the future. I also had ventured out to several coastal limestone isles on my own looking for more plants, but did not come across any.

In the afternoon, we stopped at a bird park. Chien noticed a bird specimen had escaped its exhibit and was on the tree top. One of the highlights of the park was the free roaming cassowary (*Casuaris casuaris* × *unappendiculatus*).

## Western Sudirman Range

Next day we flew on a small propeller plane to the main island of New Guinea and started to as-



Figure 1: *Nepenthes insignis*.

ceed the western Sudirman Range of Papua Province on 4x4 vehicles. One vehicle required fuel and the trucks split up. My vehicle became the first to leave the city and we drove past the giant staghorn ferns (*Platycerium wandaë*) due to miscommunication. When all our vehicles reconvened, we stopped to see the mainland form of *N. insignis* growing from the ground to the treetop. On the ground nearby, a single *Nepenthes mirabilis* plant also grew. Further in the forest, a colony of *Nepenthes ampullaria* covered the detritus laden floor.

We continued the drive and came across moth orchid (*Phalaenopsis amabilis*) and *Dendrobium spectabile*. We arrived at our lodging close to midnight, after off-roading for about ten hours. During the ride, our driver would floor the gas pedal as we approached a hillside and the tires slipped as the truck climbed. We later noticed that the front tires were bald and that the tires were never rotated! The rear tires had complete treads. Overall, the drive was rough and made worse as the extra diesel fuel tanks were stored inside most vehicles with the fumes permeating. Unfortunately our backpacks were stacked against the tanks and diesel rubbed against our gear.

When the third morning came, we set off to obtain permission to explore the area from the local police station, which is a requirement of foreign visitors in many parts of Papua. On the way, Chien spotted an arboreal Hikida's forest dragon (*Hypsilurus hikidanus*) with olive green patches and occasional blue dorsal spines. After the short intermission, we arrived at our destination. We were asked to wait while the law enforcement reviewed our paper work. Due to their strict protocol, our color passport copies were not accepted, and they insisted on making their own copies. Their copier was out of service. Furthermore, digital photos of the passports were declined. Chien traveled to three photocopy shops in order to fulfill the task. Unfortunately five minutes prior to his return, our drivers left for coffee. Chien tried to catch them by foot unsuccessfully. By the time the drivers returned, morning was over.

Upon arriving at our destination, we asked a villager permission to venture on his property. He was unresponsive to the idea, thinking that we were crazy to travel around the world to photograph plants. This reaction came as a complete surprise as Chien had visited the landowner the previous year in a scouting trip and discussed bringing tourists, which the landowner seemed fine with.

After speaking to him for quite some time, he thawed and allowed us to proceed, but was very wary and thought we were after some natural resource of value. A group of villagers accompanied us out to the site. Immediately we came across a pink and white flower of a ginger-lily (*Alpinia* sp.). Soon we came across the target species, *Nepenthes klossii*. *Nepenthes klossii* was impressive in situ. From photographs, the pitchers looked similar to *Nepenthes aristolochioides* with the unusual domed shape – although one can argue *N. aristolochioides* pitchers are more bulbous and refined looking. However after seeing both species in the wild, I am much more impressed by *N. klossii* with adult pitchers that are typically over 20 cm in length compared the diminutive 7 cm pitchers of *N. aristolochioides*. *Nepenthes klossii* also has thick stems and massive in stature. I rate *N. klossii* high out of the many species that I have seen in situ. A small *Nepenthes maxima* also grew at the site.

As I finished setting up my tripod for photographing *N. klossii*, two drunken villagers arrived. The leader carried a bottle containing homemade distilled liquor, which was illegal in this alcohol-free province.

The leader tried to grab the camera out of a female member of our party, Gina Morimoto, who was by herself. Luckily she was able to fend off the person, but drops of blood from his cut forehead dripped onto her, as he was just in a fight. One nice villager attempted to cool the main troublemaker with money, but the drunk threw the bill on the floor and requested twice the amount. From this moment on, the drunks disrupted our group and no further photographs were allowed to be taken. They seemed to spread anger amongst the other male villagers, and some of them even started to cut



Figure 2: *Nepenthes klossii*.

and uproot one or two *Nepenthes* plants. The friendly villager offered us to wait for things to cool down at his home, while the person whom we asked for visitation permission remained neutral and uncaring at our situation. Our party started exiting the habitat at the opposite direction from where we came from. A few of us left our footwear at the beginning of the bog and unfortunately I had to retrieve mine alone. Chien thought I would be safe by myself, but I was concerned as approximately forty villagers had gathered around us. I collected my sandals without any incident and raced back to the others. We proceeded to walk barefooted in the friendly villager's backyard. I thought about parasites as the area reeked of manure, unbeknownst if the odor came from pigs, natural fertilizer for crops, or from a lack of plumbing. However wearing sandals were not an option as they could easily be dislodged in the spongy ground. We decided against entering the host's home as the crowd did not dissipate. We proceeded to our vehicles, which the main troublemaker picked up a large stone and was about to smash a windshield when Gina persuaded him not to continue by her hand gestures. We drove off from the site, a little shaken, but unhurt. Chien had travelled multiple times to this village and all were without incident. The hostility we faced was an anomaly.

That afternoon, we traveled to another *N. klossii* site (Fig. 2). This site was a completely different experience than the first. It was for the most part deserted except for one local who stopped his journey and watched over us the entire time with a friendly smile. We had plenty of time to set up our shots and explore the area. Some of the plants grown here were *N. maxima*, *N. klossii* × *maxima*, *N. (klossii* × *maxima)* × *klossii*, *Utricularia bifida*, *U. caerulea*, *Dendrobium obtusum*, *D. subclausum*, *Glomera erythrosma*, and *Spathoglottis parviflora*. As terrific as this site was, evidence of draining such as diversion trenches could be seen. We were concerned that this site may be lost in a few years.

At midmorning of July 30<sup>th</sup>, we headed out to a lake to see Venus slipper orchid (*Paphiopedilum wilhelminae*). Chien had previously visited the site without any issue. We prearranged a boat with a local villager and motored out to the orchid site. This orchid is rare from being over-collected to the point where only a couple plants typically exist at a site. Luckily we were able to witness several blooming flowers.

When I wrapped up photographing the orchid and switched to the lithophytic bladderwort that is most likely *Utricularia striatula* at a quick glance, a boat approached the shore before I could snap a photo. From our previous experience, we quickly grabbed all our equipment and proceeded to our boat. The other boat docked and several people ran toward us shouting, "No photo!" Chien parlayed

with the leader, explaining that we had permission from the police. The leader retorted that we had no permission to be on the land. Chien asked if we could seek permission from his chief, but he replied that the chief did not want to see us and we should leave. The leader seemed to realize that we didn't mean any trouble and let us leave the shore in peace. This encounter surprised Chien as our boat operator, from a nearby village, said that a visit to the lake and shore would be no problem during the prior year's scouting trip.

As we had over an hour left for our boat rental, we cruised around the lake to kill time. We dared not set foot on another beach. When the coast was clear, one of the party members, William Hoyer, wanted to try his newly purchased fly fishing gear. William was immediately told not to cast by our boatman. As we circled around the lake, we noticed that portions of the lake seemed to be sectioned off. People seemed to stay in their sections harvesting fish and plants. As we headed back, we received glaring stares from the local fishing boats as we passed by.

When we returned to the channel where we entered the lake from, the boat that confronted us at the orchid site waited on the left bank. We pulled up beside them and they screamed at our boatman. The leader whom we communicated with earlier was not present, which made parlaying more difficult. The boat prevented us from moving inland. On the right bank, thirty people ran towards us from the field. A second boat pulled up behind us and docked behind us on the right side. We were blocked on all sides. Now fifty people gathered on both shores, including a few brandishing machete-like golok blades. Screams from all angles directed at us and also at each village faction. A person on the right bank charged at us held the golok blade on one hand, but was pulled back by his comrades. Likewise a person from the first boat that blocked us stepped into our watercraft and attempted to cross the channel to assail the person with the golok, but was restrained by his comrades. More people poured in from the fields, increasing the crowd count to eighty. All of the sudden a person onshore screamed, picked up a large log, and swung it like a battering ram pendulum towards me as I was the closest person. Instinctively I ducked and so did a few others in our boat. It turned out that one of our party members candidly took photos of the crowd, which incensed the person with the log. After the photographer put his camera down, the local backed down, but the tension has escalated. Over a hundred villagers flocked the shores. Some people started entering the water and moved toward our boat. People in the boat behind us furiously scolded and kicked mud at our boatmen which splattered us passengers as well. Without warning, two people from the first boat entered ours and guided the watercraft toward land. They must have felt empathic. While the boat was slowly pulled along by the people from the first boat, more local men, women, and children arrived to watch the spectacle enlarging the crowd size to 150 people.

When the boat finally reached land, a female group member got off the boat first. She was immediately stopped by a local, who insisted that she remove her shoes for inspection. She did not seem to comprehend what the local said despite understanding Indonesian. The locals wanted to search us to make sure that we didn't steal anything and hide them in our shoes and belongings. Chien figured out that the locals thought we were smuggling gold from earlier when we attempted to dock. Chien interjected by explaining that we will demonstrate that we had nothing if they allowed us to get ashore into town first. As a result, we were allowed to proceed. Our group walked towards the town as the crowd increased to 200 in size. The crowd surrounded and followed us, all the while yelling and laughing at us. We all maintained a neutral demeanor and kept walking, as to not incense the mob. During this chaos a distinguished looking older man in a polo shirt emerged. He was taller than most Papuans and spoke to us in English. He suggested that we go to the police station to sort out the matter. We agreed and continued approaching the town with approximately 250 locals surrounded us. When we reached the main street, a local man that William met the previous day spoke to him in

pidgin, while no other Papuan we encountered understood. William and the local suddenly made a ninety degree left turn away from the police station and towards our lodging. I was concerned that this abrupt change in destination would irritate the crowd further. When we arrived at the lodge, one of us opened the gate of the picket fence with just enough room for one person to slide through and pulled each of us in. His face showed great concern since the battering ram incident. Over 300 people encircled the lodge, staying outside of the picket fence that the villagers leaned or stood on. However, they yelled and held rocks like they were going to throw at the building. Our trucks were in the driveway blocked by the mob. Behind the lodge was the lake and there was not a back exit. We packed as quickly as we could and hoped to leave when the crowd dissipated.

The police arrived. One officer brandishing a pistol holster tried dispersing the crowd to no avail. The law enforcement presence made the previous day's bureaucracy seem worthwhile. The lodge staff made the best out of the situation by serving us lunch, which we had not considered. About half an hour after eating, a group of local people asked to speak to Chien. Another half an hour passed, Chien emerged and explained the situation to us – the locals were upset, as being on the lake itself was taboo. The permission we received from the police (as typical of regular Indonesia visitation process) and agreement with our local boatman was not enough. We needed permission from every local stakeholder, as several different villages surrounded the lake. Chien empathized with the villagers and elaborated that he would not like it if strangers showed up unexpectedly in his backyard. Furthermore, the locals thought we had taken precious metal from the area. They wanted not only shoe inspection, but our clothes as well. When Chien explained that we came to photograph their beautiful plants and animals, many of the villagers thought that was a complete lie. Unbeknownst to the most of us, one of the world's largest gold and copper reserves is in Papua province. Most of the proceeds go to a U.S. company, while the locals barely receive any benefits. That is why many of the locals are very distrusting of foreigners.

We were asked by the local elders to come out and shake their hands to demonstrate that it was a misunderstanding. Our group walked outside and the English speaking Papuan, who earlier had suggested us to go to the police station, spoke to us explaining the situation. He said that the locals expected us to leave the first thing in the morning. When he finished, we shook hands with approximately eight elders. Our boatman was also present, although he did not speak to us. Afterwards, the elders left and within minutes the 300 person crowd dissipated. Unbelievably, no one lingered in front of our street. Time passed and the pidgin speaking friend gave us nonverbal cues to leave the area immediately, which we had already decided. We left shortly after. We were unable to pay the boatman for his services as he left with the crowd. Due to the incident, we skipped two destinations that were scheduled in the afternoon – a montane *Drosera rotundifolia* L. site and another *N. klossii* location. At least the plants should be well protected from poaching for the time-being. As a precaution, I don't recommend any tourists visiting the area as the situation could still be volatile.

We drove an hour towards the airport where we originated from and stopped to take a look at the view of the valley below. My driver made some hand gestures that looked like rifle shooting. Minutes later, Gina told Chien about it. When Chien returned, the driver revealed that there were bandits in this part of the highway and people were killed. We quickly resumed our travels. Our caravan made a few stops along the way and arrived at the city circa 21:30. Dinner was quickly served. We really wanted have a stiff drink and ease the recent hardships, but it was not possible as the region prohibited alcohol.

#### Cenderawasih Bay

Our boat departed around noon on July 31<sup>st</sup>. The watercraft was an outrigger canoe rigged with two engines. The boat leaked with a crew member continuously bailing water. Our local guide indi-



cated that the boat ride should take two hours. At one point, we passed a shipwreck from the previous week. Our local guide mentioned two people died and other crew members were missing. I believe one person was either a police or military officer. The wrecked boat was identical to the one we were on. Our boat also contained no life preservers. We hoped it wasn't an omen of things to come.

During the boat ride, one engine kept stalling as we drove against the waves and currents. Eventually it died and we landed on a small island nearby. The island's shoreline could be walked around in twenty minutes. A family of five inhabited the island. They happened to have a socket tool that fitted our engine bolt.

After repairs, we proceeded towards our destination. Our local guide for this portion did not know exactly where the final destination was. Our guide had explained that he knew the location very well. Thus, we were astonished to find that this was not the case at all. As we already tripled our expected trip time, the sun was beginning to set. We decided to circle back to a bay with a campsite that we passed ten minutes earlier. It turned out that the camp was a village cooperative. Luckily there was vacancy at the site for our group as our local guide did not make any reservations in advance as he claimed they had no phones. Chien found out that the site had a phone and also provided transportation. It seems that our guide circumvented the cooperative for his own gain.

Next morning, August 1<sup>st</sup>, we were eager to snorkel with whale sharks (*Rhincodon typus*). Three sharks were spotted nearby. When we arrived, there was already a diving group from Thailand waiting to see the sharks. They had been in the area for a week and this was the first time they encountered the whale sharks. The Thai group was kind enough to let us in the water after an hour of waiting, as there were already too many people in the water. We spent little over an hour in the water with the large fish. One of us got "bit" by a whale shark as he sat down next to where the sharks were. The person's movements had mimicked the motion that attracted the sharks. As whale sharks are filter feeders, the person only got scared to much of our amusement as he leapt through the air. Although an amazing experience, there were jellyfish in the water and several people from our group were stung.

We had a quick lunch and prepared to leave the area as our boatmen were nervous that the return journey would take just as long. Our group was in favor of leaving at night when the sea was calmer, which is also when the park boat transports. Instead of a mutiny, we decided to leave as the crew was clearly uncomfortable leaving in the dark. The journey back was uneventful and much quicker as we were with the winds.

#### Arfak Mountains

August 2<sup>nd</sup> was mostly a travel day. We left on a medium sized modern fiberglass ship that powered through the waves. Although this was the nicest ship during our travels, there were certain issues with it. It trapped rank water and the two deck hands manually wiped the rain off the windshields.

Arriving at the hotel, we gathered supplies. We were thirsty for alcohol after the near mob lynching experience in the western Sudirman Range. At the hotel where we stayed at, I asked about the cost of a beer. The manager said that the café have them for US\$100 per can! The café did not have any and unbeknownst to me, I later found out the reason for the high price was that prohibition was in effect for this area. We were accustomed to the availability of alcohol from our earlier stay on the Biak Islands.

On August 3<sup>rd</sup>, we ascended Arfak Mountains in off-road trucks. Along the way we saw bottle-brush orchid (*Dendrobium smillieae*). We also stopped at a butterfly farm to see New Guinea bird-

wing butterflies (*Ornithoptera priamus poseidon*), goliath birdwing butterflies (*Ornithoptera goliath samson*), and ant plants (*Myrmecodia erinacea*). Driving half an hour more, we came across *Nepenthes maxima* with a green pitcher with red interior spots (Fig. 3). A black colored crab spider (Family Thomisidae) hid underneath the operculum near the filiform appendage.

We arrived at Zeth Wonggor's lodging just before lunch. Zeth is a well-known bird guide, whose services were used by Sir David Attenborough for BBC's filming of Attenborough in Paradise. We journeyed after the meal to see several bowers of the Vogelkop bowerbird (*Amblyornis inornata*). Unfortunately we did not see the birds themselves as the most visible one was recently consumed by a predator according to Zeth.

In the early morning of August 4<sup>th</sup>, we split into two groups. My group went to see the magnificent bird-of-paradise (*Cicinnurus magnificus*). The other group went to see the western parotia (*Parotia sefilata*). When the two groups finished, some of us went to see the feline owllet-nightjar (*Aegotheles insignis*).

When lunch was over, the two groups swapped sites. This time my group went to the western parotia site with two hides adjacent to each other. We were very fortunate to see the male perform its spectacular ballerina dance for forty-five seconds to attract a mate, which he succeeded in doing! Having watched a video documentary on the dance prior to the trip and then witnessing the event firsthand was amazing.

At night, we looked for the elusive cuscus. We first spotted a feather-tailed possum (*Distoechurus pennatus*). Then we spotted several cuscus eye shines. Eventually Chien attempted to handle a northern common cuscus (*Phalanger orientalis*). However the leaning tree trunk where Chien was standing gave away. Both the marsupial and handler were fine after the incident.

For August 5<sup>th</sup>, we hiked to the summit bog looking for *Nepenthes*. On the way there, we saw more bowers of the Vogelkop bowerbird. These bowers were even more spectacular than the ones we saw previously as the location was further away from humans. As a result, the birds did not use blue plastic trash pieces left by humans for display (as the color blue is difficult to locate in nature (C.C. Lee, pers. comm. 2014)). The bowerbirds preferred plastic material as they do not decay. Further up the mountain, we came across cowl-carrying orchid (*Dendrobium* cf.  *cuculliferum*) and bunny orchid (*Liparis gibbosa*). Upon reaching the summit, we saw blue flowered ant plants (*Myrmephytum arfakianum*) that grew both epiphytically and terrestrially, red mottled *Nepenthes maxima* (Fig. 4), lush *Sphagnum* of lime green, brown and golden terminal buds. We also saw orchid species of *Dendrobium subclausum*, *D. fruticicola*, *Glomera* sp., and *Bulbophyllum pristis*. We attempted to locate another *Nepenthes* species that grew beyond its normal elevation range, but were unsuccessful.

That night, we did another night hike, but we did not see any cuscus. We did see several tree frogs (*Litoria* sp.).



Figure 3: *Nepenthes maxima*.

In the early morning of August 6<sup>th</sup>, the group split up into two once again. We had a free morning, so half of us, including myself, went to photograph the magnificent bird-of-paradise (*Cicinnurus magnificus*) again. While the male did perform its mating dance again, I was unable to photograph as I was helping out another member out with their camera at that precise moment. The male mated with a female and it was over. The other group did the same with western parotia (*Parotia sefilata*), but did not see any male displays.

As the day was still young, we drove several hours with one of our bird guides and his family to another location. *Nepenthes maxima* with green with brown mottled pitchers grew here. There were also *N. maxima* plants bearing green pitchers with red spots and another form with mostly red pitchers (Fig. 5). This location additionally grew ant plants with chimney-like structures (*Hydnophytum caminiferum*) and white flowers with pale violet anthers. Equally impressive were *Dendrobium cuthbertsonii* orchids with pink flowers larger than the plant body. These orchid flowers looked similar to *Rhododendron* and *Tecomanthe volubilis* species that bloomed in the area. Other orchids found in the area were *Bulbophyllum pristis* and *Glomera hamadryas*. We left the area and drove for some time. Eventually our guide and his family hopped off the pickups to hitch a ride back to their village while we went our separate way.

#### Raja Ampat Islands

August 7<sup>th</sup> was a rest day after flying into the coastal city of Sorong. We gathered our supplies for the next trip portion after checking into the hotel. One of the best things about this region was that alcohol could be easily obtained. In addition to the hotel bar, there was a liquor store up the street.

On the morning of August 8<sup>th</sup> we embarked on a boat ride from Sorong to two neighboring islands – Salawati Island and Batanta Island. Unfortunately our captain was missing. When he finally arrived, we had an hour delay. The boat ride was long and somewhat uncomfortable. Either the pas-



Figure 4: *Nepenthes maxima*.



Figure 5: *Nepenthes maxima*.



senger was freezing outside from the ocean spray or overly hot inside crammed with the gear. There were wooden benches inside the cabin, but we taller individuals had to crouch down, making it very uncomfortable. We noticed that the life vests were securely tied down on the side boards, such that in the event of an emergency one could not undo the knots in time! We remedied the situation and informed the captain of the reasoning.

We first travelled to see the king bird-of-paradise (*Cicinnurus regius*) on Salawati Island. We heard the bird often, but only saw it a few times high up in the canopy. While waiting we saw a male olive-backed sunbird (*Cinnyris jugularis*) with a bright yellow belly. Afterwards we stopped at the local visitor administration office to pay for the visitation, which we were charged with a new fee that Chien had never heard of before.

Returning to our boat, we went to Batanta Island 1 km away. We were to stay at the wonderful outdoor accommodation with washing sinks where Chien stayed the prior year. This village is also said to have refrigerated drinks and ice cream, which is a luxury in Indonesia. When we arrived, we easily located the general store with the cold food items, but the said lodging had been washed out! In addition, apparently no other visitors came since the storms and the camp was never rebuilt. The villagers were really hospitable and converted an empty house for our lodging and provided a patio area for hammocks. We had time to spare and we explored the port area. A common kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) perched nearby and many sulphur-crested cockatoo (*Cacatua galerita*) were in the far distance. We also came upon a full-sized white-lipped tree frog (*Litoria infrafrenata*) asleep in a tree. Further down the shore grew urn vines (*Dischidia nummularia*).

An hour later, we left to see the first of two birds-of-paradise that are found on Batanta Island; these birds are not found on Salawati Island despite the short 1 km body of water separation. The male red bird-of-paradise (*Paradisaea rubra*) perched very high in a tree, performing summersaults around a branch to attract a mate.

Returning to the village, we had dinner that night in a different house. If we had thought the villagers were exaggerating about Chien being the last visitor, the guestbook proved otherwise.

Early next morning on the 9<sup>th</sup> of August, we rose before dawn to see the Wilson's bird-of-paradise (*Cicinnurus respublica*), which is the second species found on the island. Heavy rain poured and we had to wade across two streams that gushed out to the sea with the water level reaching our thighs from the storm. Luckily the rain stopped shortly after and we arrived at our destination. The group divided into two again. My group first saw the female Wilson's bird-of-paradise. Twenty minutes later, the male arrived and danced for the female. Within two minutes the ritual was over.

We finished lunch at the village pier and traveled to our last destination. On the boat journey, a flock of lesser frigatebirds (*Fregata ariel*) dive bombed in a feeding frenzy. After the excitement, we arrived at the pristine limestone island with thatched cottages on stilts above the aqua colored ocean water right next to the white sand shoreline.

On the morning of August 10<sup>th</sup>, we started the day with water activities near our lodging. Raja Ampat is one of the new hotspots for diving and the marine biodiversity did not disappoint! Most of us spent the morning snorkeling, but a few of us went scuba diving instead.

When we returned to the shore, it happened to be negative tide. As such, we saw several giant clams (*Tridacna* sp.) below our cottages being exposed to the air when normally they would be submerged in water. William spotted a reef stonefish (*Synanceia verrucosa*) below his deck that was well camouflaged with the white sand and coral. Mantis shrimp and various species of large crabs were seen as well.

That afternoon, we took a boat to another island that had six human skeletal remains in an alcove. Our guide did not know the bones' history. We went by several other limestone islands with Chien



Figure 6: *Nepenthes insignis*.

scanning for *Nepenthes*. We came across an orchid with leaves that looked like a Venus slipper orchid *Paphiopedilum* Pfitzer from the leaves only. We also saw *Spathoglottis portus-finschii* and *Dendrobium bracteosum* orchids, *Myrmecodia platytyrea* ant plant, and an elegant imperial-pigeon (*Ducula concinna*) that was white with emerald colored wings. As we were about to head back, Chien spotted a *Nepenthes* plant growing on a limestone cliff. This occurred immediately before Chien was about to give up searching. It looked immediately similar to *N. insignis* Biak form (Fig. 6). Upon closer inspection, Chien thought it might be a new species! There was only the single plant inaccessible from the boat as it grew on a vertical cliff. We found a beach nearby and climbed to a high vantage point to survey the surroundings. I thought one person may be able to scale the cliff where the plant grew, but it would take at least half an hour to do, which we did not have the time for as the sun was about to start setting. Finding the taxa gave us such joy from all the life threatening hardships we faced earlier. We left the beach and surveyed the cliffs during the boat ride back. Chien found another *Nepenthes* plant of the same taxa with a stem reaching the seawater! Chien had never seen anything like it before. As we were rapidly losing sunlight, we departed towards the island where we stayed.

After a delicious dinner, we watched denizens of the coral reefs from atop of the pier. We saw a cuttlefish, numerous blacktip reef sharks (*Carcharhinus melanopterus*), narrow-lined puffer (*Arothron manilensis*), and a Raja epaulette shark (*Hemiscyllium freycineti*) that “walks” on the seafloor with their fins.

Our final day of the tour was August 11<sup>th</sup>. We had some spare time in the morning prior departure from the wonderful Raja Ampat area. We spent the time looking at the second of day of negative tide. I also scanned the island for *Nepenthes*, but did not find any.

We ended up leaving about two hours behind schedule as we waited for the sea calm down. While at sea, the rain started coming down and the boatmen rolled down the side clear rubber tarps and tied them down to keep out the moisture. This also meant that the temperature inside the boat built up like a vivarium with lights. Those of us inside were overheating, while those outside were freezing. Eventually a side tarp was rolled up a little to provide air circulation. Otherwise, I think the high interior temperatures could have caused heat illness.

As we approached an inhabited island, a 1.2 m wave hit the boat. The boat was not designed to handle rough waters and that wave could have swamped us. Once we reached the island’s pier, the captain refused to continue any further as we were about to hit the open sea. While we waited, the

weather cleared up with the sun coming out, but the captain was adamant with his decision. All of us passengers were desperate to return as our flights were for the next morning – some of us were going on the extension trip, while others were returning home. The captain went out of his way to help us – he refunded half of his fees and he called other islands trying to secure another boat for us. A couple of hours passed and the captain said that he secured a fiberglass boat for us. The second boat was supposed to be made of fiberglass and had two 185 horsepower engines. What seemed to be another hour passed when a boat arrived. Some of us looked at each other, hoping that it was not our boat, but it was. Although the boat was fiberglass, it was a 4.9 m boat with three crew members and only one 85 horsepower engine. The boat had a frame for tarp roof and benches on each side. As it was about to get dark, we decided to get on.

Our group of ten travelers and the three crewmembers squeezed tightly in the boat. We further overloaded the watercraft with all of our gear. The first half an hour was pleasant as we talked about how calm the sea was and how our previous boat captain should have taken us. We saw various other boats cross the channel. During this time, a flying fish flew into my back.

Then the weather turned. The rain started to pour down. A crew member that was sitting up front with our gear moved to the rear next to the engine. I sat in the starboard side second from the front, immediately behind Chien. Directly across from Chien, on the port side was Gina. Next the waves started pounding us on the starboard side. Chien received the blunt of the waves, while Gina quickly threw her camera backpack underneath the luggage tarp in front and grabbed onto the tarp as that was the only support. We were being drenched. Chien tried to stay seated, but the boat rocked too much and he was forced to follow Gina's suit and grab hold of the tarp. I threw on whatever disposable plastic sheet raingear that I had in my possession, but my proper rainwear was under the tarp in my backpack. William sat immediately behind me. He mentioned out loud to quickly locate his emergency radio beacon in his dry bag underneath the tarp that if the boat is going down. Good luck with retrieving it! Our only light source was a blinking LED on an inexpensive flashlight. It was now at night, pitch dark, and we were out on the open sea. As there was no navigational equipment, the crew navigated by using the faint city lights far off in the distance that I couldn't see. We also had no life preservers. One person on the boat did not know how to swim. There was no two-way radio onboard and I doubt there were flares. The rain poured profusely down as the waves increased in size. As the surf crashed into the boat, it would propel us off the seats and then gravity will pull us back down on the hard fiberglass surface. The waves continued slamming us for the next two hours as we didn't realize we were heading into the storm. Being on the boat became a test of endurance. I wondered what I would do if the boat capsized. I also pondered if I survived, would my new DSLR camera be ruined? There were a few instances when our boat's single engine stalled out. Luckily, a crew member was able to get it running one time with a screwdriver. Another time, I was told by someone who understood the Bahasa Indonesia language that a crew member exclaimed, "That was not supposed to come off," referring to an engine part. He repaired the issue by sticking the screwdriver to keep the part on. William attempted to keep the morale high by telling jokes and singing "Jack the Necrophiliac." Due to the seating position that I was at, I could not see the waves despite the constant seawater splashing on the right side of my face. I was told that the waves were about 2.1 m in size, which they could easily have capsized the boat. Three hours into the boat ride, the waves subsided. The crew member that was manning the engine was exhausted and was relieved by another. As we neared civilization, the crew followed the dim city lights now visible to me. They were unfamiliar with our destination city; fortunately, we were able to use Chien's GPS at this point to head toward the correct direction. Half an hour later, we finally made it to the port where we departed from.

Earlier when we left from this port, William had been cautious about avoiding contact with the port water as it was a disease vector. He now stepped directly in without care. We unloaded as quickly as possible. Some of us were shivering from the cold and wetness. We drove back to the hotel with a bar where we had previously stayed. Unfortunately, the bartender had left for the night and they would not let us pour our own drinks. Luckily, we had called ahead and dinner was prepared and beers were still available.

As we ate dinner past midnight, we were all very tired. We hurriedly ate and drank beer as half of the group was continuing onto Doorman Top extension and they had an early flight, while the rest of us were going home. We said our goodbyes and wished each other well.

In the early morning, before the sun was up, Chien and the extension people left the hotel. The rest of us went separately to the airport. We ran into each other before the departure gates and said our farewells.

## Epilogue

During the trip, we encountered some dire situations despite the preparation done in advance. Luckily we made it through without any serious harm and came back with some great stories. Chien remained calm during the most stressful of times, which in turn kept the crowd in check and avoided a powder keg from igniting. Unexpected events occur in third world countries in remote areas not frequented by tourists.

Since our trip, Chien has returned to Papua multiple times without any incidents. Unfortunately due to the potentially volatile situation with the *Nepenthes klossii* region, he has not returned there and has no plans to. The Biak form of *N. insignis* are hanging on and another population has been located. Some of the orchids that we have seen on the travels have since been poached (C.C. Lee, pers. comm. 2015). Chien has been able to revisit the suspected new *Nepenthes* species in Raja Ampat and determined that it is in fact *N. insignis* Biak form.

Reflecting on the trip, I have realized that I rather rely on my own physical abilities and survival skills to handle outdoor hardships like I experienced in Sumatra than what we encountered in the boats or with the mobs in Papua. The Papua trip is the closest thing that I have experienced to what the Victorian explorers may have endured, but I have heard that the Wild Papua extension may have been even closer.

Since the 2014 Papua trip, several people from my group have gone or are signed up for another wild adventure with Chien, myself included.

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