



ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

Papua New Guinea New Britain Extension III

Trip Report

1st to 5th September 2016 (5 days)



Golden Masked Owl by Glen Valentine

Tour Leaders: Adam Walley & Wayne Jones

Trip report compiled by Adam Walley



Female Eclectus Parrot by Dennis Braddy

Day 1: An early morning start out of Port Moresby saw us arriving at Hoskins airport and settling into Walindi Lodge in time for lunch. Walindi is one of the friendliest and most comfortable lodges in the country, not to mention with one of the best views! We picked up a few birds on the lodge grounds, including Pacific Reef Egret and Melanesian Kingfisher, before heading off to the Kulu River for our first birding foray. As we drove through miles of oil palm plantations, we got great looks at two of the few species that seem to do well in such a monotypic habitat: Black Bittern and Stephen's Dove. Arriving at the river, pigeons and parrots were active – many Eclectus Parrots, a few

endemic Blue-eyed Cockatoos, Purple-bellied Lorries, lots of Red-knobbed Imperial Pigeon and a couple of Yellowish Imperial Pigeon. We went for a short walk along the edge of the “buffer zone” of riparian forest that abuts the oil palm plantation and scored with good views of two of the major specialities of the extension: Melanesian Megapode and Nicobar Pigeon! Well pleased, we returned to the lodge for a delicious dinner and headed back out into the plantation in the darkness, armed with a torch. We were out seeking the enigmatic Golden Masked Owl, an essentially unknown grail bird until its discovery last year in the plantations of Walindi. This year the owl(s) were being seen – sporadically at best – in a different oil palm plantation. Within minutes of entering the plantation, we found it, sitting on its typical roadside perch! The bird offered exceptional views as it sat quietly, counting us amongst the first ever birders to see this fine bird. After a time, it flew up and landed on a palm frond, where we admired it for some more time before leaving it in peace. Wow!!!

Day 2: An early morning start saw us heading back through the seemingly endless palm plantations into the Garu Wildlife Management Area. A pleasant assortment of birds sat out on bare branches in the early morning light: Variable Goshawks, Red-knobbed Imperial Pigeon, numerous Eclectus Parrots, Purple-bellied Lorries, Red-flanked Lorikeets, White-necked Coucals, Moustached Treeswift, Blyth's Hornbills, Long-tailed Mynas and Metallic Starlings. We heard the much-wanted Black-capped Paradise Kingfisher at multiple locations, but only managed repeated flight views. We also heard two White-breasted Ground Doves, calling at close range, but unfortunately, they could not be coaxed into view either! Moving on along the road, we were very pleased to find an endemic White-mantled Kingfisher sitting high up on a bare branch, soon joined by Knob-billed Fruit Dove. A couple of Ashy Myzomelas were also in the area and several tiny Buff-faced Pygmy Parrots were flying up high and seen creeping along tree branches. We then entered a couple of rather rough forest trails, with little to show for our efforts beyond unsatisfactory glimpses of the Paradise Kingfisher, but finally picked the right trail, where, in rapid succession, we scored scope



Long-tailed Myna by Dennis Braddy



views of the Black-capped Paradise Kingfisher, an active pair of Black-tailed Monarch, and a highly responsive Velvet Flycatcher...excellent!



New Britain Boobook by Colin Valentine

both Red-flanked and the scarcer Red-chinned Lorikeets, although viewing was a bit difficult given the height of the tree! A perched view of a Song Parrot was a nice bonus and other endemics in the area included Blue-eyed Cockatoo, New Britain Friarbird, and Ashy Myzomela. We then walked a track through some reasonably intact forest. A good find was the Black Imperial Pigeon, another White-mantled Kingfisher was here, along with Melanesian Megapode, and then good views were enjoyed of a most intriguing Immature Accipiter. It had a short, squared tail and was much smaller than the Bismarck Crows that were harassing it. It may well have been the almost unknown Slaty-mantled Goshawk, however, the identification criteria of these confusing accipiters are as yet in such a state that the bird is best left unidentified! On the walk back down the hill, we found two Channel-billed Cuckoos, sitting completely out in the open for as long as we wanted. After another great dinner, we made a second nocturnal foray into the plantation and again quickly found the Golden Masked Owl, this time, we watched it at leisure as it expertly caught a rodent (probably a Polynesian Rat) and carried it off to an oil palm!

Day 3: Another early morning start saw us boarding a dive boat and heading offshore towards Restorff Island. En route, we picked up many Black Noddies, a few Common and Great Crested Terns, a single Roseate Tern, a distant Brown Booby and a very distant Frigatebird. Arriving at Restorff, we were greeted by some of the “super-tramp” birds we had come to see: many Island Imperial Pigeons, a single Nicobar Pigeon, and several Sclater’s Myzomela. We carried on to Malu-Malu Island and were greeted there by three Beach Kingfishers, and after a patient wait: Mangrove Golden Whistler, Island Monarch, Sclater’s Myzomela, Shining



Red-knobbed Imperial Pigeon by Dennis Braddy



Bronze Cuckoo and Mackinlay's Cuckoo Dove. Another sighting of note was watching an Osprey catch a parrotfish! We then returned back to Restorff and landed on the beach, getting better looks at some of the birds like Sclater's Myzomela, Mangrove Golden Whistler and Island Monarch. We then took to the water for snorkelling – admiring the great diversity of colourful coral and fish species that are a hallmark of Kimbe Bay, and indeed the entire Pacific triangle!

After an extended period in the water, we had a delightful picnic lunch and made our way back to Walindi, via a large roost of Black Noddy that also contained a Pacific Golden Plover and a Grey-tailed Tattler. After a short break, we walked up a moderately steep track and set the scope up on a close pair of roosting New Britain Boobooks, staring down at us from the tangles they were roosting in with huge orange eyes. Just before we made it back to the vehicle, the heavens opened up and it absolutely bucketed down upon us! Despite the downpour, a few of us opted to carry on back to the Kulu River where a Violaceous Coucal played hide and seek with us, some people getting good views. We also had our best looks at a Nicobar Pigeon, perched nicely in the scope!

Day 4: We had time for only a very short birding excursion to some nearby grasslands before heading back to Hoskins airport. Here we flushed several King Quail and had some brief views of Buff-bellied Mannikins. In addition to several Buff-banded Rail and White-browed Crake, we also saw good numbers of Australian Reed Warblers, a Papuan Grassbird, and a most surprising quartet of Mackinlay's Cuckoo Dove. Overhead flew a variety of shorebirds – Black-bellied and Pacific Golden Plover, Black-tailed Godwit, and Ruddy Turnstone. We headed on to the airport, checked in, and then heard the dreaded “we regret to inform you...” meaning our flight was delayed several hours. Several hours later it was the even more dreaded “we regret to inform you...” and our flight was rescheduled to the next morning. We headed back to Walindi and made yet another foray to the Kulu River, seeing the usual assortment of birds there. We had one final dinner at Walindi.

Day 5: A very early start saw us heading back to the airport where we were greeted by excellent views of a large number of Buff-bellied Mannikins. An “interesting” check in process saw us boarding the plane and departing more or less on time. Everyone connected with their onward plans and despite the rather unfortunate flight setback, it had been an extremely successful New Britain tour with virtually all of the possible species seen well!

Annotated Checklist of Birds Recorded

Nomenclature and taxonomy follows the IOC 6.3 List of: Gill, F. and M. Wright. 2016. Birds of the World: Recommended English Names. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.

Key to abbreviations

BA – endemic to the Bismarck Islands

NB – endemic to New Britain Island

H – Heard only

Key to bracketing

Round bracket refers to the alternative name for the species



Ducks, Geese & Swans Anatidae**Pacific Black Duck***Anas superciliosa*

Seen daily within the oil palm plantations.

Megapodes Megapodiidae**Melanesian Megapode***Megapodius eremita*

Seen daily, mostly birds flushed up from the ground. We did get to see them walking on the ground at the Kulu River.

Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies Phasianidae**King Quail***Excalfactoria chinensis*

Numerous birds were flushed from grasslands near Walindi, with both males and females giving reasonable flight views.

Hérons, Bitterns Ardeidae**Black Bittern***Dupetor flavicollis*

We had a few great views of birds in the oil palm plantations, where they are unusually relaxed for this species.

Nankeen (Rufous) Night Heron*Nycticorax caledonicus*

Several sightings in the oil palm plantations, both by day and by night.

Great Egret*Ardea modesta*

A couple of sightings near Walindi.

Intermediate Egret*Ardea intermedia*

Considered a vagrant to New Britain and not previously recorded on our tours here, we had a flock of about 20 in the grasslands near Walindi.

Pacific Reef Heron*Egretta sacra*

Good views of both light and dark morph birds along the coastline.

Frigatebirds Fregatidae**Lesser Frigatebird***Fregata ariel*

A very distant frigatebird at Restorff Island was likely to be this species.

Boobies Sulidae**Brown Booby***Sula leucogaster*

A distant bird near Restorff Island.

Ospreys Pandionidae**Eastern Osprey***Pandion cristatus*

A pair at Malu-Malu Island, one of which was observed catching a parrotfish.

Kites, Hawks & Eagles Accipitridae**Pacific Baza (Crested Hawk)***Aviceda subcristata*

Observed at the Kulu River and at Garu Wildlife Management Area.

Black Honey Buzzard (NB)*Henicopernis infuscatus*

A bit of scanning in the late morning heat at Garu was rewarded with a single soaring bird of this scarce island endemic.

Variable Goshawk*Accipiter hiogaster*

Good numbers were seen daily.



Accipiter spp.

A very interesting immature accipiter was watched at length both in flight and perched at Hela. It appeared much smaller than a typical Variable Goshawk and may well have been one of the very poorly known forest accipiters that lurk around on the island! Plumage features seemed to most closely fit Slaty-mantled Goshawk, but it will have to be left unidentified...

Brahminy Kite*Haliastur indus*

This common and widespread raptor was seen regularly throughout our time in New Britain.

White-bellied Sea Eagle*Haliaeetus leucogaster*

A single bird was seen briefly at Restorff Island.

Rails, Crakes & Coots Rallidae**Buff-banded Rail***Gallirallus philippensis*

A single bird near Hoskins airport, then good views of at least five in grasslands around Walindi.

White-browed Crake*Porzana cinerea*

Good views of three in grasslands around Walindi.

Plovers and Lapwings Charadriidae**Pacific Golden Plover***Pluvialis fulva*

A single bird in an offshore Black Noddy roost in Kimbe Bay. Several in flight over grasslands near Walindi and many at the Hoskins airport.

Grey (Black-bellied) Plover*Pluvialis squatarola*

A single bird in flight over grasslands near Whimbrel.

Sandpipers, Snipes Scolopacidae**Black-tailed Godwit***Limosa limosa*

Five birds were seen in flight at the Walindi grasslands.

Whimbrel*Numenius phaeopus*

Seen daily, including birds on the beach in front of the lodge.

Common Greenshank*Tringa nebularia*

Four birds in flight over the Walindi grasslands.

Grey-tailed Tattler*Tringa brevipes*

One in front of Walindi and another in the Black Noddy roost in Kimbe Bay.

Common Sandpiper*Actitis hypoleucos*

Seen in front of Walindi.

Ruddy Turnstone*Arenaria interpres*

Two birds were seen in flight near Walindi.

Gulls, Terns & Skimmers Laridae**Black Noddy***Anous minutus*

Large numbers out in Kimbe Bay included great views, especially at a large roost that contained hundreds of birds.

Greater Crested Tern*Thalasseus bergii*

Good numbers were seen offshore from the lodge and during the boat trip.

Roseate Tern*Sterna dougallii*

A single bird from the boat did not hang around long.

Common Tern*Sterna hirundo*

Seen well in small numbers in Kimbe Bay.



Pigeons, Doves Columbidae

Amboyna Cuckoo-Dove

Macropygia amboinensis

Small numbers were seen daily at various forest sites.

Mackinlay's Cuckoo-Dove

A good trip for this super-tramp species with two at Malu-Malu Island, another on Restorff and then a most unexpected sighting of four on the New Britain mainland at Numundo!

Stephan's Emerald Dove

Chalcophaps stephani

This species is abundant in the oil palm plantation and seen very well during our drives through there.

Nicobar Pigeon

Caloenas nicobarica

Really nice scope views of this much-wanted and classy bird in oil palm plantations along the Kulu River. Another bird was seen flying off of Restorff Island on our arrival there.

White-breasted Ground Dove (H)

Alopecoenas jobiensis

A rarely seen species, we had two birds calling close to the road at Garu but they remained invisible to us!

Knob-billed Fruit Dove (BA)

Ptilinopus insolitus

Good views of a handful in Garu Forest.

Red-knobbed Imperial Pigeon (BA)

Ducula rubricera

This impressive species was pleasantly common throughout our time on the New Britain mainland.

Finsch's Imperial Pigeon (BA)

Ducula finschii

This smaller, shyer and scarcer imperial pigeon was scooped up just as we were about to leave Garu Forest.

Island Imperial Pigeon

Ducula pistrinaria

We saw this species very well on our boat trip in the bay, abundant on offshore islands.

Black Imperial Pigeon (BA)

Ducula melanochroa

A flyover at Hela Forest.

Yellowish (Torresian) Imperial Pigeon (BA)

Ducula subflavescens

Seen daily in small numbers, including at Malu-Malu Island.

Cuckoos Cuculidae

White-necked (Pied) Coucal (BA)

Centropus ateralbus

This handsome coucal was seen well on a number of occasions on New Britain Island.

Violaceous Coucal (BA)

Centropus violaceus

This shy bird was heard on a daily basis, only a couple people managed a good look at the Kulu River.

Pacific (Australian) Koel

Eudynamys orientalis

Heard at Hela.

Channel-billed Cuckoo

Scythrops novaehollandiae

An exceptional scope view of two birds perched in a bare tree at Hela.

Shining Bronze Cuckoo

Chrysococcyx lucidus

Two birds at Malu-Malu Island, the second of which showed extremely well.

Brush Cuckoo (H)

Cacomantis variolosus

Heard calling at Walindi Lodge.

Barn Owls Tytonidae

Golden Masked Owl (NB)

Tyto aurantia

Easily the top sighting of the trip. A mythical bird that we found with ease on both attempts to see it in the oil palm plantation. We obtained excellent views on both occasions, including watching it catch a rodent, most likely a Polynesian Rat. The abundance of rats here is obviously the reason why this virtually unknown owl visits the plantations at night.



Owls Strigidae**New Britain Boobook (NB)***Ninox odiosa*

After a bit of an uphill walk, we were rewarded with unbeatable views of two of these terrific owls staring down at us from their roost with their huge orange eyes.

Treeswifts Hemiprocnidae**Moustached Treeswift***Hemiproctne mystacea*

A single bird was seen at Garu.

Swifts Apodidae**White-rumped Swiftlet***Aerodramus**spodiopygius*

Just one noted at Kulu River, there were undoubtedly more around.

Uniform Swiftlet*Aerodramus**vanikorensis*

Recorded fairly daily throughout the island.

Kingfishers Alcedinidae**Black-capped Paradise Kingfisher (NB)***Tanysiptera nigriceps*

This much-wanted bird gave us quite the run-around, but we eventually obtained good scope views at Garu Forest.

White-mantled Kingfisher (NB)*Todiramphus albonotatus*

Another much-wanted endemic kingfisher, we had good views at Garu and again at Hela.

Melanesian Kingfisher*Todiramphus tristrami*

A recent split, we had one at Walindi Lodge and a pair at Garu.

Beach Kingfisher*Todiramphus saurophagus*

Very good views of three at Malu-Malu Island.

Sacred Kingfisher*Todiramphus sanctus*

Seen at the Kulu River and around Hoskins.

Bee-eaters Meropidae**Rainbow Bee-eater***Merops ornatus*

Observed at Malu-Malu Island and the Kulu River.

Hornbills Bucerotidae**Blyth's Hornbill***Rhyticeros plicatus*

A most impressive species, seen daily in various forest fragments around the island.

Cockatoos Cacatuidae**Blue-eyed Cockatoo (NB)***Cacatua ophthalmica*

This great bird was fairly common in forest sites throughout New Britain.

Parrots Psittacidae**Buff-faced Pygmy Parrot***Micropsitta pusio*

A flock of six of these tiny parrots were seen high up a tree at Garu.

Eclectus Parrot*Eclectus roratus*

This stunning large parrot was wonderfully common throughout the trip.

Song Parrot*Geoffroyus heteroclitus*

A fly-over view at Garu was improved upon with a fine male scoped up at Hela.



Red-chinned Lorikeet (BA)*Charmosyna rubrigularis*

At least one bird was scoped up in a flowering tree at Hela, there were probably more in that tree!

Red-flanked Lorikeet*Charmosyna placensis*

Seen at Garu Forest and Hela Forest.

Purple-bellied Lory*Lorius hypoinochrous*

Some really nice views of this great-looking bird at most of the forest patches we visited.

Coconut (Rainbow) Lorikeet*Trichoglossus haematodus*

Small numbers were seen on a few occasions.

Honeyeaters Meliphagidae**Ashy Myzomela (NB)***Myzomela cineracea*

We had several observations, at Garu, Hela, and even Walindi Lodge although most were rather brief.

Slater's Myzomela (BA)*Myzomela sclateri*

This little beauty was seen well and in good numbers on small offshore islands in Kimbe Bay.

Black-bellied Myzomela (NB)*Myzomela erythromelas*

Several birds were seen quite well high up a flowering tree at Hela.

New Britain Friarbird (NB)*Philemon cockerelli*

We saw this species on a regular basis in New Britain.

Cuckooshrikes Campephagidae**Barred Cuckooshrike***Coracina lineata*

A single bird at the Garu Forest.

White-bellied Cuckooshrike*Coracina papuensis*

A pair at the Kulu River.

Common Cicadabird*Coracina tenuirostris*

Three birds, including male and female, at Hela.

Varied Triller*Lalage leucomela*

Several sightings at Garu.

Whistlers Pachycephalidae**Mangrove Golden (Black-tailed) Whistler***Pachycephala melanura*

Reasonably good views at Malu-Malu and better views at Restorff.

Drongos Dicruridae**Spangled Drongo***Dicrurus bracteatus*

A pair at Garu and another at the Kulu River.

Fantails Rhipiduridae**Willie Wagtail***Rhipidura leucophrys*

This very widespread but charismatic bird was common.

Northern Fantail*Rhipidura rufiventris*

Three birds at the Kulu River, and a pair at Garu

Monarchs Monarchidae**Black-tailed Monarch (BA)***Symposiachrus verticalis*

An active pair inside the forest at Garu.

Island Monarch*Monarcha cinerascens*

Reasonable views at both Malu-Malu and Restorff Islands, another super-tramp species.



Shining Flycatcher*Myiagra alecto*

Seen at the Kulu River and Garu Forest.

Velvet (Lesser Shining) Flycatcher (BA)*Myiagra hebetior*

A male gave excellent views in the forest interior at Garu.

Crows, Jays Corvidae**Bismark Crow (BA)***Corvus insularis*

Common on New Britain Island.

Swallows, Martins Hirundinidae**Tree Martin***Petrochelidon nigricans*

A handful were seen near Walindi, interestingly no Pacific Swallows were present on this tour!?!

Reed-Warblers and Allies Acrocephalidae**Australian Reed Warbler***Acrocephalus australis*

Common in the grasslands near Walindi.

Grassbirds and Allies Locustellidae**Papuan Grassbird***Megalurus megalurus*

Rarely seen here, we had one near Walindi.

Starlings Sturnidae**Metallic Starling***Aplonis metallica*

Good numbers of these flocking starlings were seen throughout the extension.

Long-tailed Myna*Mino kreffti*

This species was seen on numerous occasions.

Flowerpeckers Dicaeidae**Red-banded Flowerpecker (BA)***Dicaeum eximium*

Just a couple of observations, at Garu and at Walindi.

Sunbirds Nectarinidae**Black Sunbird***Leptocoma sericea*

Good numbers were found throughout the mainland.

Olive-backed Sunbird*Cinnyris jugularis*

A few birds showed well around our accommodations at Walindi.

Old World Sparrows, Snowfinches Passeridae**Eurasian Tree Sparrow***Passer montanus*

A few birds showed around the Hoskins airport.

Waxbills, Munias & Allies Estrildidae**Buff-bellied Mannikin (Bismark Munia) (BA)***Lonchura melaena*

After just a couple of brief views near Walindi, we had excellent views of about 150 at the Hoskins airport on our second attempt to fly out of there!



Mammals Recorded

Great Flying-fox

Pteropus neohibernicus

A handful seen at the Kulu River and at Walindi.

??Polynesian Rat (I)

Rattus exulans

Rodents regularly seen crossing the road in the oil palm plantations were thought to be this introduced species, as was the rodent that the Golden Masked Owl caught in front of us.

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