



Sunrise Birding, LLC
<http://www.sunrisebirding.com>

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

June 2009 - *TRIP REPORT*

Leaders: Steve Bird, Gina Nichol, and local guides

Days 1 & 2 - 14th & 15th June (Sunday & Monday)

Most of the group met at Heathrow Airport for our evening flight to Port Moresby, PNG via Singapore and then Cairns, Australia, arriving in Cairns early on the morning of day 3.

Day 3 – 16th June (Tuesday)

John and Ruth had already arrived in Cairns a few days earlier and met us at the airport. We had a few hours until our flight to Port Moresby and it was a beautiful, bright day so we scouted the area near the airport and found a few birds to start off our Australia list including White-bellied Wood Swallow, Willie Wagtail, Yellow Honeyeater, Brown Honeyeater, Common Starling, Peaceful Dove and Spotted Dove. At noon, our flight to PNG took us to Port Moresby where we were greeted with a serenade by local musicians and soon transferred to our hotel near the airport. We settled into our rooms and then went out with our guides Steven and Anton to bird the grounds of the Pacific Adventist University (PAU).

As we entered the University grounds, there were a few Black Kites flying around and our first Masked Lapwings were seen on the lawn. We walked the entrance road past some ponds which held many Purple Swamphens, a few Dusky Moorhens, Little Pied Cormorants, Little Black Cormorants and Great Egret. We turned off the main road and walked through a residential area and soon noticed that the road signs corresponded to the birds we were seeing. On Bowerbird Road, we watched a pair of Fawn-breasted Bowerbirds. Kevin spotted a distant Orange-breasted Fruit-Dove and a Yellow-bellied Sunbird showed well in a close bush. A Pacific Swallow was perched on an exhaust pipe on the roof of a house and we found a Bar-shouldered Dove which looked much nicer than the book portrays. We continued by some houses adding Yellow-faced Myna, Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike and some Orange-fronted Fruit-Doves which flew into a palm and then stayed obscured. Steven checked the regular spot for the Papuan Frogmouth which was not there but a lady who was hanging her laundry asked what we were looking for and when we told her, she pointed to a tree in the back of her garden and invited us to come and see a cracking Papuan Frogmouth perched on an open branch 10 meters from the ground. We had absolutely fantastic views of this bird and then found a second bird nearby.

On a distant hill, there was a Torresian Crow which paled by comparison to the Frogmouth. We thanked our host and continued on around the corner where we had Brown Oriole and a couple of Black-backed Butcherbirds in a large tree.

We circled back around near the ponds where there were some very elegant looking Pied Herons strutting around, plus an Intermediate Egret, Pacific Black Ducks and several adult Little Grebes with young. A Black-bellied Cuckoo Shrike flew into a tree on an island in the middle of the pond and a Sacred Kingfisher flew across and then disappeared lower in the same tree. A Whistling Kite circled above while a Rufous-banded Honeyeater was spotted in the trees on the edge of the pond, occasionally dipping into the water like a flycatcher. Continuing past the ponds we had our first New Guinea (Helmeted) Friarbird in a tree above some buildings. A juvenile Nankeen Night-Heron was seen perched in a bush overhanging another pond and a lone Spotted Whistling Duck was seen perched on some tree branches about 30ft high and just above it was a Australian Ibis . We worked our way back toward the bus noting a Whistling Kite nest with two young just above the track. During a short break for some sustenance, an adult Nankeen Night-Heron was spotted and scoped perched high up in a tree. The sun was now beginning to set, lighting the sky with lovely evening colors as we continued back around toward the main ponds. Our first Singing Starling was seen perched in a tree in the middle of an open area, and on the next pond we found some nice Comb-crested Jacanas and a

large group of Wandering Whistling Ducks near the edge of the pond. Further scanning through the ducks found us a single Plumed Whistling Duck a rare bird for PNG. Our final birds of the day were a quick flyover Torresian Imperial Pigeon and a flock of Rainbow Bee-eaters hawking for insects. It was an excellent first day's birding and we returned to our hotel in Port Moresby

Day 4 - 17th June (Wednesday)

This morning we left early, setting off while it was still dark to Varirata National Park, PNG's first national park with 2500 acres of humid eucalyptus forest overlooking Port Moresby. As the sun came up we traveled through amazing scenery consisting of huge black scattered boulders amongst rich forested valleys and waterfalls. We reached the park at dawn and stopped along the entrance road to walk a small trail into the forest. Here we were greeted by the raucous calls of Raggiana's Birds-of-Paradise which were already on site performing their amazing displays. We first spotted a female soon followed by a stunning male which brought exclamations of joy from John as well as the rest of the group.

We enjoyed incredible views of up to 10 Raggiana's Birds-of-Paradise displaying and dancing for the next hour or so. Just when we thought the activity had lulled, the birds would call and gather again for another show. It was an incredible experience and a great introduction into the world of the Birds-of-paradise!

Back out on the road, Gina spotted four Channel-billed Cuckoos perched high in a tree and then as we were boarding the bus Steve heard a Yellow-billed Kingfisher calling, causing us to exit and eventually find this superb bird as it flew in and perched high on an open branch offering excellent views especially through the scope. We then moved up to an overlook with lovely views of the surrounding forest out to Port Moresby and the sea. From here we walked a forest trail adding several birds to our list including Zoe Imperial Pigeon, a group of noisy Hooded Butcherbirds, and a Barred Owllet-Nightjar that landed above our heads and quickly flew off before all but a few of the group got to see it. David spotted an Olive Flycatcher perched in the forest and David and John had a Papuan King-Parrot fly over. Also seen here were several Hooded Pitohuis, a couple of Red-cheeked Parrots, Chestnut-bellied Fantail and a brief Little Shrike-Thrush. On a roll, Howard found a Spotted Cuscus in a distant tree and we all enjoyed scope views of this unique marsupial which is depicted on the PNG 10 Kina coin. This area also produced a few Glossy Swiftlets, a Brown Cuckoo-dove and several Uniform Swiftlets flying up near the clouds.

We entered a picnic area which allowed open views of the surrounding forest and here we found a handsome Moustached Tree Swift perched on a dead stick while above and behind was a pair of Long-tailed Honey Buzzards displaying. A nice looking Dollarbird came in and perched near the Tree Swifts. One particularly spot near the edge of the forest was quite birdy and here we saw Rusty Pitohui, Varied Triller another Hooded Pitohui, and a few Boyer's Cuckoo-Shrikes which were well studied to confirm identification. One of the local rangers took us to see a Barred Owllet-Nightjar that was sticking its head out of a hole in a tree. In the forest beyond, an enormous bird crashed through the trees and despite its huge size it took a while to get good views of this Greater Black Coucal as it worked its way through the thickest tangles. The bird finally made its way down and crossed the track in front of us allowing great views.

We headed back to the open area and had our picnic lunch. Some of us were inevitably lured away from the lunch break to the nearby birdy area which held several of the same species seen earlier in addition to a female Eastern Riflebird, a Yellow-eyed Cuckoo-Shrike and a Superb Fruit-dove. Gina and Steve had quick views of a Dwarf Fruit-Dove which got away before the others saw it.

After lunch we walked to the edge of the picnic area and found a stunning Rufous-bellied Kookaburra perched on a low branch. We took another small trail up a hill where we heard the call of the much wanted Brown-headed Paradise Kingfisher and after a scan through the forest the bird was revealed at eye level perched on a horizontal branch. Both scope and binocular views of this bird were stunning and then, amazingly it flew in much closer to us and perched right above the track. The views were nothing short of spectacular as we spent several minutes watching and photographing this beautiful bird. Continuing up the trail, we stopped to see a "tree house", a reconstruction of a structure used by the Koiari people during tribal warfare. There were Pheasant Pigeons calling from the forest and we hoped they would come closer but no luck. Back out on the road we drove up to another area near the entrance gate and walked into the forest to track down a calling Eastern Riflebird. Unfortunately after much searching we had to be content at just hearing it. Our consolation however was a Black-thicket Fantail and Buff-faced Pygmy Parrot working a hole in a termite nest on the side

of a tree. The rest of the afternoon was spent birding the main road of the park. Glossy Swiftlets flew above our heads as we found Rainbow Bee-eater, Variable Pitohui and Spangled Drongos in the trees near the road. A couple of Black Myzomelas showed well as did a Pheasant Coucal, some White-bellied Cuckoo-shrikes and a flycatcher which was later identified as a Leaden Flycatcher. We also added Frilled Monarch, Black Cuckoo-shrike, Black-faced Monarch, Rainbow Lorikeet, Lemon-bellied Flycatcher, Shining Bronze-Cuckoo, White-throated Honeyeater, Brown Cuckoo-Dove, and Brahminy Kite before boarding the vehicle to head back to the hotel. One last stop by a stream produced a nice Blue-winged Kookaburra, plus great views of a Pink-spotted Fruit Dove and distant views of a Crinkle-collared Manucode.

Day 5 - 18th June (Thursday)

After breakfast, we headed to the airport for our flight to New Britain. We arrived at Walindi Resort mid-day and were immediately drawn to the deck overlooking the sea getting views of our first Eastern Reef Egrets and catching the sight of an Osprey diving for fish. There was a Torresian Crow on the beach and Howard found a Greater Flying Fox which he put in the scope for us.

After lunch we loaded the vehicle and drove out through the expanses of Palm plantations on the coast of New Britain. Along the way we had our first of many Willie Wagtails, Red-cheeked Parrots, Yellow-faced Myna and a Red-knobbed Imperial Pigeon perched on a bare tree. Our young guide Meta spotted something so we got out and found a Variable Goshawk perched up. There was a tree full of Metallic Starlings and we had a few Yellow-tinted Imperial Pigeons flying over. Our first Blue-eyed Cockatoo was seen flying over and a Stephan's Dove flew off the road and disappeared before most people could get on it.

We arrived at the Kulu River and walked out on a rocky bar immediately spotting a Sacred Kingfisher sat in a bush on the side of the river. Here we had better views of Blue-eyed Cockatoo and more Yellow-tinted Imperial Pigeons flying over and looking good in the afternoon light. A Pacific Baza flew in and perched on a tree across the river and there were Knob-billed Fruit Doves as well as Red-knobbed Imperial Pigeons seen. A Common Kingfisher flew across just before we spotted a Red-banded Flowerpecker in a tree with an Ashy Myzomela. Other birds seen near the river included (Eastern) Black-capped Lory, the endemic New Britain Friarbird, some distant Green-fronted-Hanging Parrots, two Pied Coucals, Varied Triller and a Channel-billed Cuckoo which flew over being chased by some crows. As the sun was setting we headed back through the maze of palm trees to our beach side hotel.

Day 6 - 19th June (Friday)

This morning after an early breakfast we went out on a boat to explore some of the offshore islands in Kimbe Bay. At first light we set off in idyllic conditions with flat sea conditions. We reached Restoff Island as the sun came over the horizon and immediately began to see Island Imperial Pigeons flying around and coming into perch allowing reasonable views. Another pigeon with a short tail flew past and was immediately identified as an immature Nicobar Pigeon. It circled the boat but soon left us feeling we wanted better views of this splendid looking bird. Some activity further up the shoreline revealed a Stephan's Dove which quickly disappeared around the corner and then a Collared Kingfisher was seen perched low in a tree. There was a pair of White-bellied Sea Eagles tending a nest in a tree in the interior of the island, and as we circumnavigated the island and then continued on to Big Malo Malo Island we picking up several Crested Terns. Here we had better views of adult Nicobar Pigeons as well as Metallic Starlings with nests, an Island Monarch, and a very attractive Black-tailed Whistler. Next we headed toward Schumann Island checking the terns en-route we had both Common and couple of Black-naped Terns. We then walked along the beach where three Collared Kingfishers were perched on rocks and taking advantage of the hundreds of small fish in the shoreline pools. A Beach Kingfisher was seen and scoped before it flew off toward another island. In the trees above the beach we had good views of Black Sunbird, as well as Ashy Honeyeater, and both male and female Shining Flycatchers.

As we turned to walk back toward the boat, a Lesser Frigatebird flew over. From here we headed back to Restoff Island and got out to explore the beach and interior. Steve checked one of the trails and found a Python constricting a lizard which we all manoeuvred to see. We hiked up to the highest point on the island and thanks to Kevin who carried a scope we were treated to scope views of a pair of Red-flanked Lorikeets working on a nest. As we headed back down to the beach we also added Mangrove Golden Whistler and

Scarlet-bibbed Myzomela. We then left these tropical islands and headed back to our wonderful lodge in time for lunch.

After lunch, we took the coach to explore Garu reserve. The journey once again led through palm plantations to some open fields where we found a small flock of endemic Bismarck Munias. While we were watching the Munias, a Golden-headed Cisticola came in and perched on the fence along the road allowing good views. When we reached Garu, it was pouring with rain so we waited in the vehicle for it to subside. It seemed to let up so we decided to brave it and follow a trail into the forest to a Megapode nesting area. There were several nest holes and Tansy told us about the nesting biology and harvest of Megapode eggs. The rain continued making it difficult to hear any activity in the forest so we decided to head back out toward the road. As we made our way back we flushed a Melanesian Scrubfowl which disappeared quickly into the forest. The rain was letting up so we walked the road seeing several Moustached Tree Swifts flying around. A Blyth's Hornbill flew over and then disappeared quickly, but we soon had great views of the bird again as it flew back over. Along the road we found a Northern Fantail working a tangle, a Varied Triller, and a New Britain Friarbird. The rain started up again so we got into the vehicle and continued down the road. As we drove, we saw up to 10 Melanesian Scrubfowl on the road and in the verge. We then made our way back to the lodge to dry out and enjoy a nice dinner.

Day 7 - 20th June (Saturday)

Today we were up early and heading toward Pokili Reserve. In the past few days, we had been informed that access to Pokili was questionable because of a tree that had fallen across the track and heavy rains that had made the going very muddy in some areas potentially impassable. Steve pressed on for us to be able to explore this area and Max arranged for the tree to be cleared and us to be accompanied by a 4-wheel drive vehicle to get us through the muddy areas. After seeing a Nankeen Night-Heron along the way we arrived at Pokili and made our first stop in an open area with scattered large trees. A couple of Pied Coucals were working the branches above the track as we got out and a pair of Eclectus Parrots were hanging around a nest hole where we enjoyed excellent views of this noisy, common but striking bird. Other birds in this area included Metallic Starlings, Red-knobbed and Yellow-tinted Imperial Pigeons, White-bellied and Barred Cuckoo-Shrikes, Rainbow Bee-eaters and Spangled Drongos

We continued into Pokilii forest stopping for a Stephan's Dove which allowed good views as it walked along the road in front of us. We eventually stopped and got out of the bus to be greeted by a pair of Violaceous Coucals in the trees above us. A short walk soon revealed a Variable Kingfisher perched low in the bushes and then three Collared Kingfishers perched atop a tall, dead tree. A Melanesian Scrubfowl was spotted walking along some high tree branches and Brahminy Kite and Blyth's Hornbill flew overhead. A few Black Sunbirds were seen and we had our first Long-tailed Mynas perched up in the trees. We went off the main track taking a trail through a lush forest with some incredibly large Strangler Figs. The trail led into a large area with many Melanesian Scrubfowl nest burrows. We navigated carefully around the nests and then found several of the birds perched in the trees above. A Black-headed Paradise Kingfisher was heard calling nearby in the forest so we searched and soon found this gorgeous bird perch up for all to see. We stayed with the bird for some time getting fabulous scope views and photos.

We then returned to the main track for a picnic lunch after which we slowly walked the road. It was generally quite bar Black Sunbird, Varied Triller and New Britain Friarbird. A Red-banded Flowerpecker showed well and we had excellent views of a Great Flying Fox hanging from a tree over the road. The animal was awake and moving along a branch and eventually flew off and we were amazed at just how large it was, with maybe a 4 or 5ft wingspan.

Continuing down the road we reached the open area again and found Red-knobbed and Yellow-tinted Imperial Pigeons. Not long after Patrick released our accompanying 4-wheel drive which then headed back toward the lodge. You can guess what happened next! We encountered some local people fixing the road, where unfortunately the fresh soil they had laid on the surface was too soft and our bus sunk into the mud up to the axles. We took advantage of the opportunity to continue birding but it wasn't long before the 4-wheel drive vehicle returned and pulled the bus out. Soon we were on our way back to the lodge for the night.

Day 8 – 21st June (Sunday)

Today we were up and out early heading for the airport to fly back to Port Moresby. At dawn we could see Brahminy Kites flying over the airport and across the runway we could see a Blue-eyed Cockatoo. After a short flight we arrived in Port Moresby and had a few hours before our connection so we embarked on a short tour of Port Moresby visiting the Parliament building, Steven told us about the political system in PNG as we noted several birds including Singing Starling, Fawn-breasted Bowerbird, White-bellied Wood Swallow and groups of Cattle Egrets around a pond.

Our next stop was the Botanical Garden which held several of our target species in cages. We also looked at a Stilt Village noting the contrast of this with the modern city buildings of Port Moresby in the distance while a Whistling Kite circled overhead. In the afternoon, we flew to Mount Hagen and transferred up to Rondon Ridge Lodge in Papua New Guinea's Western Highlands province. We checked into our lovely lodge and enjoyed an excellent meal.

Day 9 – 22nd June (Monday)

After breakfast we met our guide Joseph, who is well known as New Guinea's very best bird guide. We set off on a walk along a trail that led up the hill behind the lodge. Around the gardens we saw Smoky Honeyeater, Red-collared Myzomela, Blue-gray Robin, Friendly Fantail and some New Guinea White-eyes. And then a stop on a hillside overlooking a grassy area held a group of Hooded Munias. From our vantage point we scanned the forest edge and canopy and soon found Black Monarch, Island Leaf Warbler, a small flock of Yellow-billed Lorikeets, and had nice views of male and female Tit Berrypecker. A White-shouldered Fairy Wren made an appearance but the real excitement came when we saw our first female Superb Bird-of-Paradise. Some Buff-faced Scrub Wrens vied for our attention and there were several Belford's Melidectes around as well as a female Black Pitohui, Schlater's Whistler and Brown-backed Whistler. In the tree where the female had been a male Superb Bird of Paradise showed well and we added Yellow-browed Melidectes and a female King-of-Saxony Bird of Paradise. Continuing up the trail we passed by some MacGregor's Bowerbird display sites. Unfortunately a Short-tailed Paradigalla was too brief to go on our list, although a Dimorphic Fantail was much more confiding.

On reaching another open area we found a superb looking Black-breasted Boatbill and enjoyed great views of a flock of Plum-faced Lorikeets feeding on some pinkish fruits. A Hooded Cuckoo-shrike was seen and then Joseph wandered further up and began looking at something eagerly before shouting "Astrapia!" A panic ensued as we manoeuvred to get on the bird which was in a bare trunk behind the trees in front of us. There was an exclamation from each of us as we got on this incredible bird with its amazingly long tail feathers trailing behind it as it moved along a horizontal branch. The excitement of this bird literally knocked Howard off his feet and he ended up in a ditch with his feet sticking up into the air. Scopes were flying as we scrambled to stay on the bird, and eventually we all had varying views of this male Princess Stephanie's Astrapia before it disappeared below the tree line in front of us. It was absolutely fantastic! After the excitement of the Astrapia and we had all calmed down we had some flyby Papuan Lorikeets and on the other side of the trail we could hear the rattling sound of a King of Saxony Bird-of-Paradise displaying. We searched the trees and found a female but no male was on show. A couple of Orange-billed Lorikeets were scoped as they fed in the canopy of a tree and all the while several Glossy Swiftlets were winging overhead. We returned to the lodge for lunch enjoying the wonderful views from outside the restaurant.

After lunch, we checked the area around the lodge. Our first Great Wood Swallows were seen at distance and there was a Black Kite soaring. A large raptor was spotted over the distant tree line and through our scopes it appeared to fit the shape of Gurney's Eagle but was too distant to confirm identification. We surveyed the hill above the lodge and picked up Pied Chat, Fan-tailed Berrypecker, a few Hooded Munias, Long-tailed Shrike, and some White-shouldered Fairywrens. It began to rain so we sought shelter under the eaves of a building overlooking some open fields. A few birds were active in the shrubs near the edge of the field including Friendly Fantail and Schlater's Whistler. After awhile the rain subsided and we all congregated at the overlook that was so productive earlier in the day. Here we had another female Superb Bird-of-Paradise, Smoky Honeyeater and a close Red-capped Flowerpecker. Back at the lodge we scoped some distant Ornate Honeyeaters in some trees down the hill and got good views of a Mountain Myzomela in the same spot as yesterday.

Day 10 – 23rd June (Tuesday)

After breakfast we set off across the valley to another area in the western Highlands. It was a gorgeous morning as we traveled and amongst the birds seen along the way were Sacred Kingfisher and Long-tailed Shrike. The journey took a bit longer than we expected but when we arrived it was well worth it. An Island Thrush greeted us at the entrance and as we parked a Brown Sicklebill was seen in the trees above the car park as were a couple of Ribbon-tailed Astrapias and a brief Papuan Whipbird. The path to the lodge yielded Large Scrub Wren and the ever present Belford's Melidectes were common. We entered the building and went out to a veranda overlooking a feeding station which held a female Brown Sicklebill, Ribbon-tailed Astrapia and Brehm's Tiger-Parrot. The bushes surrounding the feeding area had Regent Whistler, Rufous-naped Whistler and Black-backed (Gray-streaked) Honeyeater.

Suddenly, a Sandford's Bowerbird appeared under the feeding table and most of us were able to get on this recent split from Archbold's before it disappeared back into the forest.

After some quality time watching the feeding table, we walked a quiet, muddy trail where we were visited by Friendly Fantails. A Black-backed Honeyeater showed well but other than that it was quiet. We stood out in the driveway for a while before taking another trail which had White-winged Robins and yet more friendly, Friendly Fantails. The call of a Lesser Melampitta was heard and amazingly the bird came in close and allowed stonking views as it circled us inquisitively. After several minutes with this little beauty, we moved on picking up a very nice Mountain Mouse Warbler. Back up at the lodge, there was a stunning pair of Crested Berrypeckers busily feeding in one of the trees near a walkway. As our picnic lunch was being set out we checked the feeding station again which held the same gems as earlier. Just beyond was a gorgeous Papuan Lorikeet feeding on some fruits and a nice Rufous-naped Whistler.

After lunch, we walked another trail in the forest and picked up Regent Whistler and an adult male Brown Sicklebill. A pair of Mountain Firetails showed very well feeding on the ground in an open area and there were more Papuan Lorikeets, a Black Kite overhead, some busy Large Scrub-Wrens and another Mountain Mouse Warbler. Back to the veranda, Jill had been watching an adult male Brown Sicklebill feeding for several minutes and as each of us arrived we gasped at the sight of this amazing looking bird, which with its tail measured over 3ft long! Nearby were more Brehm's Tiger-Parrots on the table and two Rufous-naped Honeyeaters in the shrubs. It was a great day with some amazing birds all seen at close range. We stuck around hoping to see the Crested Bird-of-Paradise which regularly comes into the feeding station but it was not to be. So, we headed back to our lovely lodge across the valley and enjoyed another wonderful meal.

Day 11 – 24th June (Wednesday)

This morning we said goodbye to our wonderful hosts at the lodge and headed down to the small airport in Mount Hagen. Along the way, we stopped for close views of an Ornate Honeyeater and also picked up Pied Chat and a few Great Wood Swallows that were flying around. We arrived at the airport where there were several Black Kites soaring over the runway. Some Pacific Swallows greeted us as we walked into the "terminal" and soon the first group was off in our small charter plane to Karawari, where they landed on a grass runway before being transferred by boat to the lodge.

The second group were not too far behind and as they made their way up river a few birds seen included Brahminy Kite, Whistling Kite, Great Egret and a Great-billed Heron that flew over. There were Papuan Needletails all around and a Lowland Peltops was seen perched. Some Channel-billed Cuckoos flew across and we soon had the sense that this was going to be a very special place.

After lunch we birded from the veranda overlooking the river. In the trees below we had White-bellied Cuckoo Shrike, Plain Honeyeater, Tawny-breasted Honeyeater, Mimic Meliphaga, Streak-headed Honeyeater, Dollarbird and Papuan Needletails were always around. We had originally planned to go out on the river but the boat was having mechanical problems so we walked up to the helicopter pad. From here, in light rain and rumbling thunder a New Guinea Friarbird was seen and a flock of Dusky Lorys flew over. We scoped some distant Sulphur-crested Cockatoos and then got the news that the boat was fixed so we headed down to the river. As we were headed up river, it began raining hard but that did not deter us as we were under cover in our comfortable boat. An Azure Kingfisher flew across in front of us and we spotted some Pinon Imperial Pigeons on top of a tree. A Yellow-faced Myna sat perched on another tall tree and we all got views of Orange-bellied Fruit Dove and Golden Myna. A female Twelve-wired Bird-of-Paradise was a silhouette perched on a dead stick and a Lowland Peltops was seen fairly close. Large flocks of Dusky Lorys were flying

off noisily to roost, and we had a nice pair of Eclectus Parrots perched in a bare tree. A Rufescent Imperial Pigeon flew low across the river in front of us and we had more Golden Mynas mingling with a few Dwarf Fruit Doves. Sulphur-crested Cockatoos were also seen and we ended the afternoon with four Gray Crows and a Brahminy Kite. Despite the weather, we made the most of the day adding some great birds to our trip list.

Day 12 – 25th June (Thursday)

This morning we were out before dawn heading down river to a site where we hoped to see the Twelve-wired Bird-of-Paradise. As we traveled the short distance and daylight increased we could see a tall stick above the tree canopy with a bird perched at the top. It was just a silhouette but we knew this was our target. We landed on the river bank and quietly made our way to an open area that had a close view of the stick and as we arrived a bird flew off! We stood quietly for several minutes until the bird flew back and landed in full view. It was indeed a male Twelve-wired Bird-of-Paradise! Our scopes and binoculars were trained on the bird and we admired it at close range for half an hour, each of us counting to make sure that it had all of its attendant wires. The views were nothing short of incredible as the bird turned facing toward us and then danced up and down the stick. At one point, a female appeared on the stick as well! Incredible! By now the sun was up, lighting the river and our surroundings creating a magical scene with this enigmatic bird.

On the way back toward the lodge, we added female Shining Flycatcher, Sacred Kingfisher and Pacific Black Duck. A Jobi Manucode flew over quickly and landed in a tree top where we strained to see and scope its subtle identification features. An Intermediate Egret was also seen, and then while waiting for our ride up to the lodge for breakfast some of us had a second male Twelve-wired Bird-of-Paradise perched on a stick across the river. A bonus!

After breakfast, we boarded our boat and headed up Arafundi River for the day. Whistling Kites were seen several times, with some perched close on a tall tree. A pair of Blyth's Hornbills flew over eliciting gasps of delight from the crowd. Another Lowland Peltops was seen as well as Golden Myna, Sacred Kingfisher, Black-browed Triller and a perched Variable Goshawk. A gorgeous Rufous-bellied Kookaburra and a Red-capped Flowerpecker was also seen, before we went ashore and visited a local village where we were greeted by friendly people and many inquisitive children. We walked a trail behind the village which was generally very quiet and arrived at the King Bird-of-Paradise display area just as the bird flew out. We waited for a while but the bird did not return so we decided to come back later and try again. Back out on the river, we had a young Nankeen Night-heron, a few more Pacific Black Ducks, and a number of Whistling and Black Kites near the village. The children entertained us by jumping into the river, climbing on floating trees and swimming toward us waving and smiling as we passed. We entered an area with several small lakes which held Great Egrets and a few winter plumaged Whiskered Terns. A distant Black Bittern was then spotted as it flew across and landed out of sight amongst the reeds. We cut the motor and drifted for awhile to enjoy the view and tranquillity of this beautiful area. Birding was slow until a large raptor was spotted soaring over a distant hill. The bird slowly came closer and it was indeed a Gurney's Eagle! We watched it for some time and then enjoyed a floating picnic lunch in a corner of the lake by some reeds. As we started our picnic the Gurney's Eagle appeared right overhead, before disappearing behind the close trees. After lunch we motored around to a larger lake which was quiet except for a fly over Channel-billed Cuckoo and a Little Pied Cormorant.

Eager to see our target BoP, we went back to the trail behind the village. Some noisy (Western) Black-capped Lories were seen along the way and then we spent a long time at the King Bird-of-Paradise display site. After being distracted repeatedly by butterflies, we finally heard the bird call. A quiet but mad scramble for position ensued and the scarlet and white male King Bird-of-Paradise showed but allowed only brief and difficult views. It was frustrating but some of us were able to get good views whilst others got not so good views of this elusive bird. It was getting late so we headed back down the trail some of us seeing a consolation Variable Pitohui.

On the way back down the river, and to our great delight a couple of huge Palm Cockatoos flew over. We passed some of the villagers in their canoes and beside an opening to another pond a Great-billed Heron took flight so we went back and spotted the bird perched on a tree on the other side of a small pond. Much appreciated by John we made a brief landing so as we could scope this scarce heron. A Little Pied Cormorant was perched in another tree and some Zoe Imperial Pigeons showed reasonably well in the evening light. Papuan Needletails started to appear in numbers and more flocks of Dusky Lories flew over heading for their

roost sites. Yellow-faced Mynas were seen and a few Fig Parrots flew by too quickly to be positively identified. Pinon Imperial Pigeons were also flying around and as the sun was setting we made it back to the lodge in the last remains of daylight after a great day of birding. After dinner, we were entertained by the sounds of the Karawari band complete with their own unique flip-flop/bamboo percussion!

Day 13 – 26th June (Friday)

Today we had a relaxed morning as we waited for our flights to Tari. From the veranda, we saw a pair of Great Cuckoo-Doves and enjoyed a few last views of the more common birds near the lodge. When we arrived in Tari there were hoards of people milling around for the Friday market and passing these by we headed out of town up towards the famous Ambua Lodge. Once here we were greeted by several Great Wood Swallows perched on the trees and cabin roofs. Mountain and Glossy Swifts were crisscrossing the valley sprawled in front of us and we found some wonderful looking male and female Tit Berrypeckers feeding in a fruiting tree above one of the cabins. By the time the other half of the group arrived, some of us had wandered down to the helipad. A Black Cuckoo-shrike was spotted halfway up a tall tree where a Princess Stephanie's Astrapia had just flown off, at which time another bird had caught our attention – a female Blue Bird-of-Paradise! The bird flew over our heads and up toward the fruiting tree where we soon caught up with the rest of the group. What an introduction to Ambua!

In the afternoon, we drove up the hill above Ambua and stopped to check an area for King-of-Saxony Bird-of-Paradise. Benson our local guide got out of the vehicle and quietly said, "I got it, give me the scope." In a matter of seconds we were all off the bus looking at a male King-of-Saxony Bird-of-Paradise perched and preening in a tree! Amazing! A little further on a Black-bellied Cuckoo Shrike was seen as well as a female King-of-Saxony Bird-of-Paradise, Black-throated Honeyeater and Black-backed Honeyeater. At one point a male Ribbon-tailed Astrapia landed on a large dead tree its incredibly long tail streamers floating in the breeze, an astonishing sight! We watched in awe until it flew over the road in front of us with its meter long ribbons trailing behind. Stunning! The bird landed on a bare stick and preened for several minutes in the open with tail streamers flowing as our cameras clicked like mad. Two dazzling BOPs in a matter of minutes. Fantastic!

Continuing on, a pair of Plum-faced Lorikeets showed nicely feeding on some fruits, while nearby both Large Scrub Wren and Papuan Scrub Wren were seen and a Papuan Lorikeet flew by. We then spotted a Blue-capped Ifrita working a mossy trunk and while we were marveling at its lovely blue cap, another Ribbon-tailed Astrapia flew in and landed behind it. What a day! We returned to the lodge for the evening comparing views and looking forward to our next two days of birding.

Day 14 – 27th June (Saturday)

After breakfast, we drove down from Ambua and got out to walk a road through private land at dawn. A Hooded Cuckoo-shrike was seen as well as the ubiquitous Willie Wagtail. A Superb Bird-of-Paradise was perched on a tree over the road and some of us caught sight of a pair of Black Cuckoo-shrikes copulating on a tree branch. A Variable Goshawk was sunning on a perch and both Blue Bird-of-Paradise and Lawe's Parotia were calling in the distance. We walked back up the track and added Island Leaf Warbler, Little Shrike Thrush, Schlater's Whistler and Capped White-eye on the way. Moving to another area, again on private land, we picked up a female Lawe's Parotia. We could still hear the Blue Bird-of-Paradise and Benson spotted it perched in a tall tree. It was a male and we watched it for ten minutes or more noting its tail plumes, eye liner and iridescent blue. We hoped that it would come out of the shade and show more color but instead it moved to the side and then down out of sight leaving us content with the views we had got. In the meantime, some locals brought out their pet Dwarf Cassowary, a young bird still covered in down. We then walked back out to the road where some Brown-breasted Gerygones were working the nearby tree branches.

We moved on to another area where we found a female Princess Stephanie's Astrapia being followed by a young male. A Tawny Grassbird stayed hidden in some tall reeds but we all managed some sort of views of it. Further on a couple of Canary Flycatchers were seen well while a huge Brown Sicklebill flew through quickly. It was getting sunny and too hot for birds along the road so we walked a muddy forest trail and immediately encountered a Garnet Robin in the foliage above us. The forest was lush and moss covered and seemingly devoid of birds until we heard a Northern Logrunner calling. The bird came closer but failed to show itself. Slogging through the mud we reached an area where we could see more of the forest understory. Here we picked up Loria's Bird-of-Paradise, a couple of Dimorphic Fantails and the never shy Friendly Fantail. A

Chestnut Forest Rail was calling and came closer but only Gina was able to see the bird before it disappeared and fell silent. We made our way out of the forest a bit frustrated with our boots covered with mud when suddenly a New Guinea Harpy Eagle flew overhead once again getting our adrenaline pumping. Another male King-of-Saxony Bird-of-Paradise was seen in the same tree as yesterday and John recounted his tale of a Tree Kangaroo that dropped from a tree beside him in the forest.

After lunch, we walked the road above Ambua. It was quiet save for a Ribbon-tailed *Astrapia* that flew across, and a couple of Black-breasted Boatbills, and a female Fan-tailed Berrypecker. We decided to try another spot and drove up to the Tari Gap, a high grassland habitat in the shadow of Mounts Kerewa and Ambua with tree ferns dotting the landscape at 9,200 feet. Several Island Thrushes were seen here as well as Long-tailed Shrike and Pied Chat, Mountain Swiftlet, the common Belford's *Melidectes* and another Ribbon-tailed *Astrapia*. Benson spotted an Archbold's Bowerbird feeding low in a tree but it retreated quickly and became a struggle to see. Several small groups of Goldie's Lorikeets flew fast overhead and try as we may we never managed to see them perched. Beside the road Papuan Scrub Wrens showed themselves off while an active flock of Brown-breasted Gerygones worked the trees and a Brehm's Tiger Parrot dashed past. A Mountain Firetail was found and then we enjoyed excellent views of a couple of Blue-capped Ifritas working the mossy trunk of a tree just like a nuthatch. Their blue caps standing out very well against the dark background. As the light began to fade we ended with Black-breasted Boatbill, Regent Whistler and a brief Black-throated Robin. As we returned to the lodge a Black-winged Kite was noted perched on a dead tree.

Day 15 – 28th June (Sunday)

After an early breakfast we stood out in front of the restaurant hoping to see or hear Black Sicklebill. There was no sign although the ever inquisitive Friendly Fantail did his best to keep us amused. Where a light had been on all night there were countless moth species resting on a wooden post and surrounding area, including huge Atlas Moths, several different Hawk-Moths and many other species beyond identification. The Great Wood Swallows would occasionally swoop down and take any of the moths that were seeking to make a getaway. In the fruiting tree over cabin 7 we could see a Loria's Bird-of-Paradise and nearby both Black Monarch and Mountain Peltops were found. We then jumped aboard the bus and headed down hill towards a river. A group of White-shouldered Fairy Wrens were easily seen and then we checked out an area across a field to an embankment overlooking the river with very nice views. Here we scanned the river but it was rather quiet due to the presence of some bathers. In amongst the close bushes we saw Red-capped Flowerpecker and a small flock of Capped White-eyes.

A female Papuan King Parrot flew out of a tree toward us and then across the field as did a Black-billed Cuckoo Dove. Moving on we visited a village and made arrangements to walk through some private land to check a tree where a Sooty Owl had been seen. As we watched and waited a fabulous looking Sooty Owl came out of the hole and flew off to another large tree – we had amazing views of this awesome bird. Happy with that we returned to the bus where we met a few Wigmen and Steve proved to one of them that he could shoot a pretty mean arrow! We then moved on to yet another private area where we took a short walk into an area of forest. A superb looking male Papuan King Parrot perched in the open for us and a Variable Pitohui was spotted. The reason for us coming to this spot then became apparent when one of the locals pointed us in the right direction to see a roosting Papuan Boobook perched high up in a tree. We enjoyed wonderful scope views as the bird kept a wary eye on us.

It was time for lunch so we returned to our lodge. After lunch we had a short siesta before setting off on a walk up the driveway and onto the road. We found a nice Blue-gray Robin and Rufous-backed Honeyeater, while a flock of Papuan Mountain Pigeons flew overhead. A raptor then appeared and was soon identified as a Little Eagle, it circled above us allowing pretty good views. Further up the road a Short-tailed Paradigalla flew past and into the forest, where we searched to no avail. As this was one of our target species we decided to stake out the area and this paid off when eventually the bird flew back across the road and started feeding in a tree allowing fantastic views. Our bus then pulled up and we boarded it and made our way a little further up the road. We soon stopped and got out to witness a male King-of-Saxony Bird-of-Paradise displaying on an open post. What an incredible sight this was! Further on the machine-gun call of a Brown Sicklebill led us to find him high in a moss covered tree. Nearby a group of Black Sittellas flew in and worked the branches on the top of the same group of trees. Next a Ribbon-tailed *Astrapia* appeared; as did a female King-of-Saxony Bird-of-Paradise and we got to see some close Yellow-billed Lorikeets. What a superb day! Later after dinner

several of us went out to check for night birds and were very successful at hearing a close Mountain Owlet-Nightjar, but it remained very well hidden and out of sight.

Day 16 – 29th June (Monday)

Our last morning at Ambua had us out checking the gardens after breakfast. The Great Wood Swallows were taking advantage of the host of insects attracted to the light posts overnight. And a few dead insects tossed into the air saw the Wood Swallows dive down and catch them in mid flight. A Mountain Peltops showed well and then a Short-tailed Paradigalla put in an appearance as did a Ribbon-tailed Astrapia feeding in the fruiting tree. Down towards the heliport we spotted a couple of Black Butcherbirds and in a distant tree we managed to scope a Blue Bird-of-Paradise, Loria's Bird-of-Paradise and Lawe's Parotia. It was now time to load the bus and head to the airport at Tari for our flight to Port Moresby and then on to Cairns. We said our goodbyes to Benson our guide and watched by hundreds of colorful locals we boarded our plane. After a few hours in Port Moresby we then flew to Cairns where we spent the night. Ruth and John left us at this point and we were joined by Bart as the rest of us started out on our Australia extension.

Steve and Gina

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