

Melanesia Discover and Secrets of Melanesia: Birding Melanesia 2015
Report By Adam Walley



Cardinal Lory pair. Copyright Adrian Hayward

The 2015 Melanesian Birding trip was another great success. The year will probably long be remembered for one of the worst droughts ever and while the dry and windy conditions made birding more difficult than usual, we persevered and ended up with an incredible tally of endemics, many of them amongst the most poorly known birds in the world! This incredible itinerary takes in part of the north coast of Papua New Guinea and all of the main islands of the Bismarcks, Solomons and Vanuatu, along with many of the smaller ones. This region is one of the world's most avian endemic-rich hotspots and is largely inaccessible and unvisited by birders. Amongst 267 species, highlights this year included Superb Pitta sitting right in the open, an unexpected Manus Fantail, one of the first observations of Mussau Triller, a stunning Solomons Nightjar, and

incredible diversity of fruit doves (12 species), imperial pigeons (12 species), myzomelas (11 species) and of course white-eyes (10 species).

The trip started off with a nice dinner in Madang and then our first of many early mornings to bird a patch of forest not far from town. Bird activity was great this morning and there were a number of fruiting trees which allowed good views of two species of birds of paradise - Lesser Bird of Paradise and Glossy-mantled Manucode. Other nice birds in the fruiting trees included Orange-bellied and Pink-spotted Fruit Dove, Zoe's Imperial Pigeon, Orange-breasted Fig Parrot, and numerous Golden Myna. A few of the north coast endemics can be found in this region and we were pleased to see them - Edward's Fig Parrot, Northern Variable Pitohui and Black-browed Triller. There are many other interesting birds here and additional highlights included outstanding views of Palm Cockatoo, flyover Channel-billed Cuckoos, Rufous-bellied Kookaburra, the very recently split Papuan Dwarf Kingfisher, an extroverted White-bellied Thicket-Fantail, a flock of bizarre Grey Crows and a single Streak-headed Mannikin. A couple final stops in more open country added Tricolored Grebe, Varied Honeyeater and great views of Great-billed Mannikin.



Great-billed Mannikins - a scarce species anywhere! Copyright Adrian Hayward

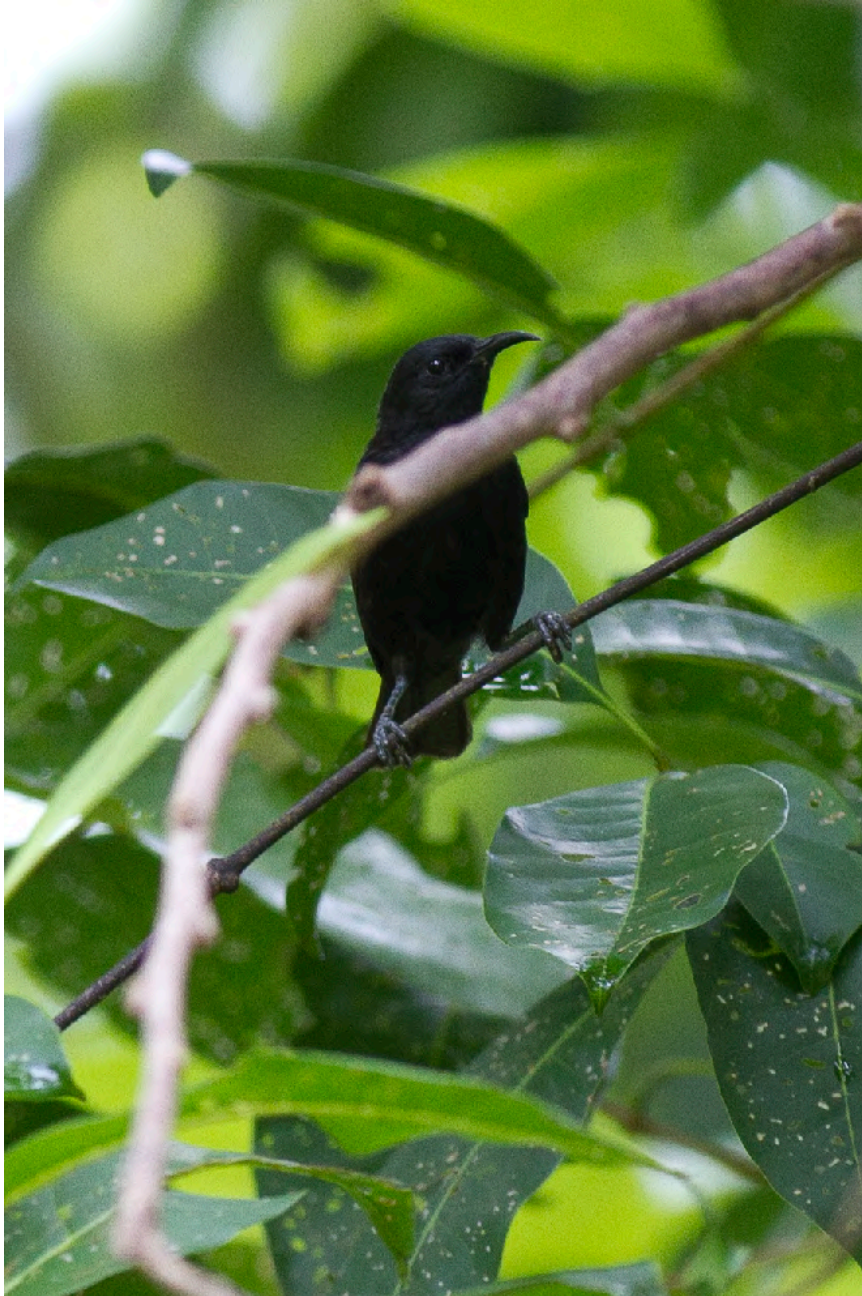
With a great start under our belts, we had lunch in Madang and then were ferried out to our home for the next three weeks, the *Spirit of Enderby*. With a late afternoon at sea we found the oceans to be extremely quiet birdwise, a trend that would sadly continue throughout the trip - possibly attributable to the *El Nino*. We did however get great views of Indo-pacific Bottlenose Dolphins and a huge group of Spinner Dolphins performing their acrobatics.

Boarding the zodiac with the rising sun we were soon slowly making our way along the banks of the mighty Sepik River. We spent much of the morning here and recorded a good selection of waterbirds - Great-billed Heron, Spotted Whistling Duck, Raja Shelduck and good numbers of Whiskered Tern being some of the more notable. In the early morning hours Orange-fronted Fruit Doves and four species of imperial pigeon sat out on open perches - Collared, Pinon's, Zoe's and Torresian. A small flock of the rarely seen Edward's Fig Parrot gave a nice flyby and Black-billed Coucals flopped out of the riverside vegetation on a couple of occasions. Interesting passerines included Large-billed Gerygone, great views of White-bellied Thicket-fantail, and the bird of the day was great views of the poorly known Meyer's Friarbird. After a wonderful cultural performance and a display of the famous Sepik carvings, we reboarded our vessel and set our sights towards the islands. The afternoon sea crossing was incredibly quiet, save for a small area that harboured about 300 Red-necked Phalaropes.



Great-billed Heron crossing the Sepik River. Copyright Rand Rudland

A relaxed start to the day was followed by a landing on tiny Bipi Island where we were greeted with a very heartfelt welcome and cultural performance. A walk around the island revealed that it was almost completely birdless - most of the small islands we visited on this trip would be similar and it appears that the drought conditions had pushed locals to start hunting and eating all their birdlife! We did have no troubles, however, in seeing large numbers of Bismarck Black Myzomela, a small-island specialist. Also of note was an Oriental Cuckoo, a rather uncommon migrant to this region. We had planned to go snorkeling for the afternoon but a strong wind cancelled that option and we were just pleased to get off the beach and back to the ship for a quiet afternoon.



Bismarck Black Myzomela. Copyright Meghan Kelly

Back to the early morning starts we were soon ashore on Manus Island and heading up to Rossun village to meet up with our local guide Aaron. We headed straight into an area where Aaron had recently been hearing the star bird of the island - Superb Pitta. While Aaron went around trying to locate the bird we spent some time with a small flock and were delighted to have a group of Manus Monarchs moving around us - this can often be a difficult species to track down. Meanwhile Aaron was having no luck finding the pitta and the morning was wearing on, so I played one last call and sure enough it started responding. After a bit of manoeuvring the bird was calling nearby and Adrian made an incredible spotting of a tiny patch of glittering blue within a tangle high up a tree. Fortunately, the bird eventually moved out to an exposed perch where we could all savor incredible views of this mega for as long as we wanted. Wow!!!



Superb Pitta - this one got the pulse racing! Copyright Rand Rudland

We then birded the roadside getting good views of several Manus Cuckooshrikes and eventually Manus Friarbirds - it was a little ironic that we had to work harder for this species than some of the others! We also had a flyby of Meek's Pygmy Parrot. We failed to find any Nicobar Pigeon at what is normally a fairly reliable rubber plantation for them, but Aaron knew of a second spot we could try and sure enough they were there - four birds offering up terrific views! It had been a pretty incredible morning and we were all big smiles as we returned to the ship for lunch.

Following lunch we headed off for a snorkeling excursion on Hawei Island and made a birding walk around this little island. This proved to be a great island for seeing some of

the small island specialists - Yellow-bibbed Fruit Dove, Bismarck Black Myzomela, Island Monarch, Melanesian Megapode and others. It had been a pretty amazing day and just before our appointed time to leave the island we were standing under a huge fig tree contemplating our success when Adrian announced that he had spotted a Manus Fantail high up in the canopy. Although it is apparently not known from this island, this did seem like the perfect island to harbor one and sure enough there it was as we gorged ourselves on views of this active little bird for the next 15 minutes. What a day!!!



This Manus Fantail was an exciting end to an amazing day. Copyright Adrian Hayward.

It would be hard to top our day on Manus but we set off early on rarely-visited Mussau Island to try! Our first surprise was three different Oriental Cuckoos around the school - last year we had the island's first, but it is now looking like they are regular here at this time of year. Heading off into the secondary forest it did not take long to find the hoped for Mussau Monarch; based on past years the only endemic we expect to see. However a few minutes later a pair of Mussau Fantails passed through, albeit rather briefly. I have looked hard for this species on our previous visits with no success so was extremely pleased with this - little did we know there would be several more to come! Other nice birds included Yellow-bibbed Fruit Dove, Meek's Pygmy Parrot, Beach Kingfisher and Blue-faced Parrotfinch. Our local guide then took us to a new area - a patch of primary forest on a steep hillside. Mussau Fantails proved to be common in this area and offered lots of great views. Incredibly enough this area also supported a pair of canopy-loving Mussau Trillers. Sadly the birds were rather elusive and no photographs were obtained, but the species appears to be known from as few as two sets of field observations, so this was a huge success! After taking a dip in the waterfall to cool down, we headed back to the ship, once again all smiles. The afternoon was more relaxed with some snorkeling and barbecued prawns enjoyed on the white-sand beach of Little Mussau Island, while those who continued birding (ie Adrian!) were rewarded with Knob-billed Fruit Dove and a Russet-tailed Thrush. Another epic day!



Mussau Fantail has been seen by few! Copyright Rand Rudland



Mussau Monarch is easier to find but has also been seen by few! Copyright Rand Rudland.

This would be our earliest start of the trip as we zodiaced in to Kavieng, New Ireland, in the wee hours. Our comfortable transport then whisked us away for a lengthy drive down the island and eventually up on to the Limbin Road to access the low mountains. Making an initial stop, the first birds spotted were a pair of Pied Cuckoo Dove sitting out on a exposed branch - a great start! This was followed up by great perched and flight views of the spectacular Paradise Drongos - this was going to be another great day! We made various stops along the road as we worked our way uphill and had considerable success - top birds added were White-bibbed and Knob-billed Fruit Dove, Black Imperial Pigeon, Bismarck Hanging Parrot, Red-chinned Lorikeet, Song Parrot, White-necked Coucal, Red Myzomela, Golden Monarch, Bismarck White-eye and Red-banded Flowerpecker. Near the top of the road there was a commotion as many Great Flying Foxes were milling around - the reason for the commotion soon became clear as a White-bellied Sea Eagle came swooping through the group and grabbed a flying fox - only for it to escape from its clutches! After a short rest, the eagle was back for a second attempt and this time secured a flying fox that it carried off to eat, what a sight!! Returning down the road we spent some more time in the best forest near the top and added some great birds - Finsch's Imperial Pigeon, Black-tailed Monarch and a New Ireland Myzomela visiting some pink flowers - this latter is a tricky endemic to find up here!

Yet another superb morning and we followed it up with a lovely picnic lunch on the beach, a long drive north, and the mandatory stop at the Kavieng airport for the

endemic Hunnstein's Mannikins. After rejoining the ship we set sail through some beautiful passages and recorded quite a few Black Noddies, Brown Boobies, and four high-flying Nicobar Pigeons transiting between islands. Another memorable day!



Finsch's Imperial Pigeon staring down at us. Copyright Rand Rudland

Another early morning start saw us ashore at Kokopo to head up the Wild Dog Mine access road in the New Britain hills. After stopping for good views of Hooded Mannikin we drove straight on up to the mine road and birded the light forest along the road. Highlights for the morning included Bar-tailed Cuckoo-Dove, White-bibbed Fruit-Dove, Yellowish Imperial Pigeon, White-necked Coucal, Violaceous Coucal (heard only), Bismarck White-eye and best of all a single White-backed Woodswallow which we had missed at the normally reliable site in New Ireland. New Britain has many endemics, but most of them are very difficult; nonetheless we did have a nice haul including Blue-eyed Cockatoo, New Britain Friarbird, Ashy Myzomela and numerous Black-bellied Myzomela. Bird of the morning was the pair of Black Honey Buzzards, one of which did a close low flyover.

After the long drive back to Kokopo we reboarded the vessel and set sail through a very windy St Georges Channel with not a seabird in sight all afternoon - quite remarkable.



A nice flyover Black Honey Buzzard was a highlight on New Britain. Copyright Rand Rudland

A more relaxed day saw us enjoying a proper breakfast and heading ashore for Nissan atoll where we were greeted with a memorable cultural performance. Afterwards we took a stroll around the island for a couple hours, but found that birdlife was almost non-existent here. The only bird that was common was the atoll-adapted Louisiade White-eye. Not finding any Atoll Starlings was quite concerning, but upon returning to Balil village we saw several, one of which perched right in the open for us. The afternoon was spent enjoying a great snorkel on the outside of the atoll.



Atoll Starling took a while to find this year. Copyright Rand Rudland

Our next stop was Bougainville and our last day in PNG, however the island is biologically part of the Solomons so most of our birds today would be new ones! Our early morning start saw us heading up the sealed road to Panguna Mine and walking downhill through the morning, starting at the high point of the road at nearly 1,000 meters above sea level. Birdlife was relatively subdued in the dry conditions but we recorded most of the usual species - good numbers of localized Yellow-throated White-eye and Red-capped Myzomela while more widespread Solomons birds included a fantastic Solomons Sea Eagle, Solomons Cockatoo, Cardinal Lory, Solomons Cuckooshrike, Steel-blue Flycatcher, Oriole Whistler (heard only) and Midget Flowerpecker, plus our only Pale Mountain Pigeon of the trip. There are several true Bougainville endemics, which of course we were keen to find. We got great views of the weird-looking Bougainville Crow but sadly only heard Bougainville Monarch on a couple of occasions. Bird of the morning, however, was a very inquisitive Bougainville Bush Warbler that gave us a great encounter in the forest interior. The Odedi was only described to science in 2006 and we are certainly one of the first groups to see it! We also observed at length, and photographed, some large swiftlets that appear to be Mayr's Swiftlet, a virtually unknown species. Another fabulous morning of birding and we followed it up with an enjoyable cultural performance at Kieta before clearing out of the country.



Midget Flowerpecker. Copyright Rand Rudland

We cleared into the Solomons at Choiseul and were soon heading up the beautiful Sui River for a morning's birding by zodiac. Some nice birds this morning were good numbers of Solomons Cockatoo, Cardinal Lory, Song Parrot, more Red-capped Myzomela, Yellow-throated White-eye, Brown-winged Starling and a great encounter with three White-billed Crows. Kingfishers are often a highlight of the river and this year was no exception as we had a superb pair of Ultramarine Kingfisher, some incredible views of Beach Kingfisher and a nice flyby of the very recently split North Solomons Dwarf Kingfisher.

After another great cultural performance and lunch we enjoyed one of the best snorkeling stops of the trip and set sail in the late afternoon.



Ultramarine Kingfishers. Copyright Rand Rudland

This morning we headed ashore on the wonderful Arnavon Islands, a community-based conservation project, where we were soon watching 129 incredibly cute baby Hawksbill Turtles making their way to the sea. Turning our attention back to birding we enjoyed what might just be the single best spot for wader watching in Melanesia - 6 species of herons and several hundred individuals representing 12 species of arctic-breeding shorebird - most unusual of which were a flock of 50 Black-tailed Godwit, surprisingly enough a potential first record for the country and again 2 Terek Sandpipers which last year were a potential first country record here! The most appreciated wading bird, however, was a very obliging pair of Beach Stone-Curlew. Eventually moving on to the forests we had nice looks at Rufous Fantail, Steel-blue Flycatcher, Red-capped Myzomela and Island Monarch. We finally tracked down some Melanesian Megapodes for great views. The afternoon was spent at sea and although it held promise, the seas were completely dead with only a handful of Black Noddy and Lesser Frigatebird observed.



Baby Hawksbill Turtle making its way to the sea. Copyright Rand Rudland



Beach Stone-Curlew. Copyright Rand Rudland

Our next island was Tetepare, the south Pacific's largest uninhabited island and a nature reserve where logging and hunting have been banned for many years. We headed ashore early in the morning escorted by a wonderfully playful group of Spinner Dolphins, spotting Green Turtles and Black-tipped Reef Shark in the shallows and enjoying hundreds of frigatebirds sailing overhead. Shortly upon arrival on the islands we realised we had arrived at an incredible place. The cessation of hunting means that birds are utterly fearless here and it was wonderful to watch Claret-breasted Fruit-Doves and Red-knobbed Imperial Pigeons happily eating fruit right above our heads and Melanesian Megapodes strutting about on the grass completely unconcerned by our presence! We concentrated on some of the more localized species and had wonderful views of many of the unique "Tetepare" subspecies of the Solomons White-eye, plus the stunning White-capped Monarchs and a very inquisitive Crimson-rumped Myzomela. Heading into the beautiful lowland forest we added Cockerell's Fantail and terrific Buff-headed Coucals. When I asked, almost jokingly, if the local guide knew the whereabouts of Solomons Nightjar he replied in full seriousness that he knew exactly where one was. The only problem was that it was on the other side of the island, but that could be remedied - we grabbed a zodiac and sped off. Soon after landing, our guide's keen eyes had found a perfectly camouflaged Solomons Nightjar sitting on the ground just a few meters from the beach - incredible and what a moment to be amongst the first birders ever to see this rare and presumably endangered species!



Solomons Nightjar - perhaps the most exciting find of the trip! Copyright Adrian Hayward

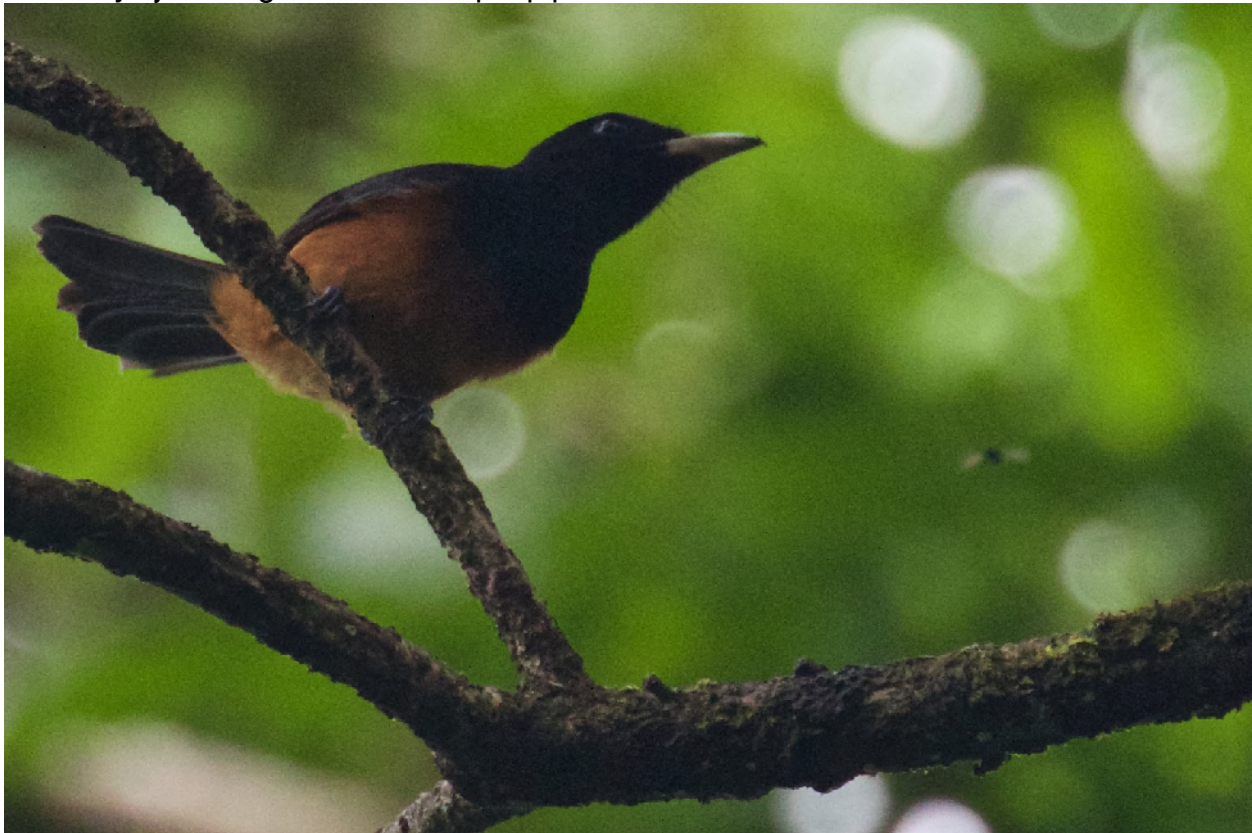
With that icing on the cake we returned to the ship, had a great snorkeling session and set sail for Guadalcanal. The afternoon was again spent at sea, and again the seas were totally quiet, save for a handful of Bridled Terns. We did have some playful Spinner Dolphins and also a fast-moving pod of the fearful False Killer Whale.

It was another early morning start at Honiara, the capital of the Solomons, as we headed ashore in the darkness. Here we farewelled part of the group and welcomed on several new members as we headed up into the low hills above town at the well-known birding site of Mt Austen. Things started out well with great views of Ultramarine Kingfisher and Buff-headed Coucal kicking things off. We soon tracked down Black-faced Myzomela, the only island endemic that can be found at these lower elevations. Several Yellow-bibbed Lorries flew by and a couple were scoped in a flowering tree, while a perched Pied Goshawk was also observed at length. Superb Fruit-Doves were a bit of a surprise at this site, more expected were large numbers of Brown-winged Starling and Long-tailed Myna. The morning became hot and quiet early on but we persisted and walked right down to the river where we were rewarded with a White-billed Crow flying along and calling. We decided to call it a morning at this stage and returned to Honiara to visit the market and board the ship which set sail after dark.



Brown-winged Starling. Copyright Rand Rudland

We had intended to visit a birdy site on Santa Isabel, but land ownership disputes caused us to seek an alternative last minute site, which proved to be a logging road on the nearby and rarely (maybe never?) birded island of San Jorge. Once ashore early morning it quickly became apparent that the birding here was as good, or better than on the main island across the way. Large numbers of Solomons Cockatoo, Cardinal Lory, and some well-behaved White-billed Crows greeted us, and we soon encountered a massive passerine flock that was dominated by impressive numbers of Yellow-throated White-eye but also offered up great views of Red-capped Myzomela, Chestnut-bellied Monarch, Steel-blue Flycatcher and Midget Flowerpecker. A Solomons Monarch or two were also present in the flock and would be the only ones of the trip, but were constantly on the move. We also had a few chances to see tiny Finsch's Pygmy Parrots creeping about on the branches - what a great bird! Following our successful exploration, we returned to the ship and spent the afternoon snorkeling and enjoying the local boys jamming with their unique pipe-band.



Chestnut-bellied Monarch. Copyright Rand Rudland

Malaita was our next island and another early start was the order of the day. We climbed into an open truck and headed out on the Trans-Island Road, getting drenched by the only significant rain of the whole trip. We made good time getting to the best birding area on the road reasonably early in the morning and the intermittent rain kept the bird activity going all morning. Malaita White-eye was amongst the first birds we saw and we were very pleased to see good numbers of this endemic through the morning. Other nice birds through the morning included a Solomons Sea Eagle

perched up in the scope, Superb and Claret-breasted Fruit-Doves, Finsch's Pygmy Parrot, Chestnut-bellied Monarch and the distinctive pale-eyed island race of Brown-winged Starling. On the way back a stop in some good habitat turned up a remarkable find - the rarely encountered Red-vested Myzomela briefly visiting a red flower. But despite a lengthy wait it did not return, so while it was the clear bird of the day, only a lucky few were able to see it. Eventually we returned to the ship for a late lunch, another interesting cultural performance and a late afternoon at sea where a highlight was watching approximately 10,000 Black Noddies flying along the east coast of Malaita - so the seas are not completely empty!



Seabird flocks were few and far between this year - here is one with the three most common species: Lesser Frigatebird, Black Noddy and Common Tern. Copyright Rand Rudland

Yet another early morning saw us heading ashore at Star Harbour on the endemic-rich island of Makira. The forests around here are secondary and probably do not hold all of the lowland endemics, but we still had a great morning tracking down the majority of them! First to fall was the island's endemic genera - *Meliarchus* - the Makira Honeyeater; and it certainly is a bizarre bird. Next up were a handful of White-headed Fruit Doves flying past, one of which landed right in the open on a breadfruit tree - what a stunning fruit dove this one is! We also added Makira Starling and the unique Mottled Flowerpecker was particularly abundant and showed extremely well. A flowering tree that was full of pink flowers was also full of Sooty Myzomelas and impressive numbers of Duchess Lorikeets feeding happily above our heads. We tried a zodiac cruise

through some mangrove forest which did not add any new species but was quite scenic and we got more great views of Makira Honeyeaters.



Makira Honeyeater, in a genera of its own! Copyright Rand Rudland

The afternoon was spent at sea and showcased the best seabirding we would have on the trip, including good numbers of Wedge-tailed Shearwater, our only Tahiti Petrel, Red-footed and Brown Booby, some Sooty Terns at last, a White Tern and a Pomarine Jaeger.

We had a morning at sea and it was again quite productive. We recorded a fairly impressive 6 Collared Petrels - most or all of which were likely the "Magnificent" Petrel taxa. We also saw 2 Tropical Shearwater and a couple of White-tailed Tropicbirds. We had arrived in the rarely visited Santa Cruz islands and would spend the next three days exploring these remote outposts of the Solomons. We arrived at Nendo island late morning in time for a quick pre-lunch snorkel and then boarded our transportation into the interior of the island at Noipe where a very impressive cultural performance was waiting for us. The birders of course wanted to head into the forests and we quickly came to grips with how slow and quiet Santa Cruz birding is - especially in the heat of the day! Nonetheless we persisted and found quite a nice patch of forest. The beautiful songs of Santa Cruz White-eye were frequently heard and we grabbed a few glimpses, but it was not until Todd made a good sound recording and played it back that we got some very good looks at this poorly-known species. We also saw a small number of Cardinal Myzomela - it is here that the birds are trapped to make red feather money.

The distinctive local races of Fiji Whistler and Rufous Fantail were also in this forest and we had our first encounters with Pacific Imperial Pigeon and Red-bellied Fruit Dove but otherwise it was very hard work. As the afternoon wore on, we made one final bid to try and find the bizarre Sanford's White-eye in the one patch of forest where I have seen them before and this worked out to plan with three of them passing overhead in the canopy at the last moment. We had to work hard today, but got the rewards.



We saw lots of flying fish at sea, Leopardwings are the most spectacular. Copyright Rand Rudland

The very rarely visited Duff Islands were our next port of call. Early morning seabirding was rewarding with 5,000 Sooty Terns counted along with White-tailed Tropicbird and White Tern. The wind, swell and tide all make logistics difficult here, but some great work by our expedition leader Aaron saw us all getting ashore around mid-day. Landing on an idyllic beach we were greeted by Bar-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel and others. We explored nearby coconuts and found Cardinal Myzomela to be abundant here. The Duffs have no endemics, but does seem to be a particularly good place to find the localized Palm Lorikeets, and indeed the coconuts here had several. We then moved on to the village for a cultural performance, a nice walk across the island and several more Palm Lorikeet, arriving back at the ship after dark.



The Duff Islands seems to be the place to see Palm Lorikeet. Copyright Meghan Kelly

Vanikoro Island is an exceptional place and would be our last stop in the Solomons. Of course, it was off ashore early and we had a quick highlight with an unexpected pair of Rusty-winged Starling. Later in the morning we found the same or another pair excavating a cavity in a tree that appeared to be their nest. After this initial excitement, things got very quiet. We eventually tracked down a Vanikoro Flycatcher, but it was starting to look like the island's two poorly known endemics might elude us. So we worked harder and went off-track and uphill into the incredibly quiet forests and were finally rewarded with some fantastic looks at a pair of Vanikoro Monarch. Before leaving the island we decided to try my favorite white-eye spot one last time and just before leaving finally came up with great views of a pair of Vanikoro White-eyes. We had certainly had to work hard for our birds again this morning!

The afternoon featured a lengthy zodiac cruise and as we drove up to the small mangrove island that houses the La Perouse monument we were surprised to see a very large wader roost here. It soon became apparent, much to our delight, that several of the curlews in this roost were in fact Bristle-thighed Curlews and in the end we counted a minimum of 11 of these much-wanted waders, a great final touch to a very successful day!



We eventually found Vanikoro Monarch! Copyright Meghan Kelly

Early morning we were in Vanuatu and spent a couple hours in the best area to see Vanuatu Petrels at sea. The fact that we again failed to record this species is suggestive that the birds are simply not around their breeding island, at least in any numbers, at this time of year. So instead we carried on to our landing site on the island of Vanua Lava and after clearing customs set out birding the village of Sola. Despite being a village, this area is full of birds and seemed especially birdy after the quiet forests of Santa Cruz. A nice surprise was a big fruiting fig tree right at the landing that harboured several Tanna Fruit Doves and we had some great scope views of this. The main target here, however, was the Vanuatu Honeyeater which on its other islands is a hill or montane species, but here in Sola is a common garden bird and we saw several. The third Vanuatu endemic we recorded was Vanuatu White-eye which was present in good numbers. Long-tailed Triller and Gray Fantail were other new birds recorded here.



Vanuatu Honeyeater is a common bird in Sola.
Copyright Meghan Kelly

During the afternoon session we went snorkeling near Kwatea Island. Most of us had a good snorkel and enjoyed watching Pacific Flying Foxes flying just a few inches above the water, plus a group of Spinner Dolphins checking out the zodiacs. Adrian managed to swim ashore and added species like Streaked Fantail and Melanesian Flycatcher, which the rest of us would have to wait to catch up with until tomorrow. We set sail with about an hour's daylight left, dreaming of a late afternoon Vanuatu Petrel, but it was not to be.

Our last early morning start saw us heading ashore to the wonderful island of Santo. We landed on the famous Champagne Beach, boarded our trucks and made good time traveling across the island towards Big Bay and the fabulous Vathe Conservation Area. A first stop proved somewhat frustrating as the beautiful endemic Buff-bellied Monarch was only seen by a few and Vanuatu Kingfisher was only seen in flight as it shot between hidden perches on several occasions. So we headed on to the main birding area and quickly had wonderful scope views at the lovely endemic kingfisher. The Buff-

bellied Monarch did prove to be quite difficult initially but after some persistence we all managed terrific views at this monotypic genera. Other nice birds seen in this very birdy area were Metallic Pigeons, Red-bellied and Tanna Fruit Doves, Fan-tailed Gerygone, Streaked Fantail, Southern Shrikebill, Melanesian Flycatcher, Vanuatu White-eye and Island Thrush. Part of the group were very fortunate in seeing a Vanuatu Megapode flush off its arboreal perch and it seemed like that would be it, but a random stop on the drive back turned up a few more megapodes that most of the group were able to get good views of as they ran or walked along the forest floor.



Vanuatu Kingfisher. Copyright Meghan Kelly

We returned to the ship for a very late lunch and then headed up the Metuvele River for what was supposed to be a scenic cruise, but it proved to be really birdy, and included good views of South Melanesian Cuckooshrike. Remarkably an all dark imperial pigeon crossed the river; there are few if any records of Vanuatu Imperial Pigeon at sea level here so I was skeptical of what we had just seen, but a second bird then gave a great flyby and there was no doubt that we were looking at this species. The bird was refound on its perch before it flushed off and a third bird was also seen. Quite a remarkable find and the swim/rope swing into the Blue Hole capped the day off very nicely.

Our final day of the expedition saw us heading ashore for a leisurely start at the rarely birded island of Ambryn. We were visiting mainly for a cultural performance and the birds were mainly species we had become quite familiar with - Grey-eared Honeyeater was a new species for us, however, and was one of the most common birds on the island. After lunch we had one final major wildlife highlight in store as with the help of our local guide we obtained terrific views with three different Dugongs that swam close by the zodiacs. Quite an unexpected highlight to finish off the trip.



Dugong surfacing! Copyright Rand Rudland

Our final morning saw us heading ashore in Port Vila, back in “civilization”. It had been a wonderful trip, packed full of endemic and poorly known birds. Thanks to such a friendly, energetic and positive group, it was a real pleasure exploring this region with you!

BIRD LIST - Follows IOC Taxonomy, Version 5.4

Gill, F & D Donsker (Eds). 2015. IOC World Bird List (v 5.4). doi : 10.14344/IOC.ML.5.4.

Anatidae - Ducks, Geese and Swans

Spotted Whistling Duck (*Dendrocygna viduata*) - 4 on the banks of Sepik River was a nice surprise.

Raja Shelduck (*Tadorna radjah*) - 3 along the Sepik River was also a surprise.

Pacific Black Duck (*Anas superciliosa*) - 1 on the Sepik River and 3 at Choiseul.

Megapodiidae - Megapodes

Melanesian Megapode (*Megapodius eremita*) - A regional endemic that gave great views on the Arnavons and even better on Tetepare; also seen on Hawei Island and heard on Makira.

Vanuatu Megapode (*Megapodius layardi*) - The “*scrab dak*” is pretty shy on Santo so it was great to see 5 different birds in and around the Vattthe Conservation area and most of the group got a good view of one or more of them.

New Guinea Scrubfowl (*Megapodius decollatus*) - An impromptu boat trip to an offshore of island off Madang just before the official tour started produced several of these infrequently seen north coast endemics.



Melanesian Megapode. Copyright Rand Rudland

Procellariidae - Petrels

Collared Petrel (*Pterodroma brevipes*) - 6 seen at sea between Nendo and volcanic Tinakalu - 5 dark morphs and 1 intermediate. Most or all were probably the *magnificens* taxa which was described as recently as 2010. The species could well be breeding on Tinakalu.

Tahiti Petrel (*Pseudobulweri rostrata*) - 1 at sea east of Makira.

Wedge-tailed Shearwater (*Puffinus pacificus*) - far less common than normal, but still seen regularly with records on 8 dates. The highest daily count was 110, this was west of Makira. Interestingly burrows that were suspected to be of this species were seen on San Jorge.

Tropical Shearwater (*Puffins balloni*) - 3 at sea between Tinakulu and Nendo, 1 offshore of Vanikoro. This is a very poorly understood taxa!

Short-tailed Shearwater (*Puffinus tenuirostris*) - 2 at sea off of Vanikoro.

Podicepsidae - Grebes

Tricolored Grebe (*Tachybaptus tricolor*) - 5 at a small pond near Madang, a recent split and very localized in Melanesia.

Phaethonidae - Tropicbirds

White-tailed Tropicbird (*Phaethon lepturus*) - 2 at sea near Nendo and 4 at sea near the Duff Islands.

Ardeidae - Herons

Nankeen Night Heron (*Nycticorax caledonicus*) - singles seen on Bougainville, Arnavon Islands and Makira.

Striated Heron (*Butorides striata*) - singles at Choiseul and Tetepare and 3 on the Arnavon Islands.

Eastern Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus coromandus*) - a single flying over the open ocean near Tetepare. The species is considered a vagrant in the Solomons.

Great-billed Heron (*Ardea sumatrana*) - 2 birds seen quite well at the Sepik River.

Great Egret (*Ardea alba*) - seen at the Sepik River and the Arnavon Islands.

Intermediate Egret (*Egretta intermedia*) - seen at Madang and the Arnavon Islands.

Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*) - seen at the Sepik River and the Arnavon Islands.

Pacific Reef Heron (*Egretta sacra*) - commonly encountered with records on 8 dates.

Fregatidae - Frigatebirds

Great Frigatebird (*Fregata minor*) - seen on four dates: at least 20 amongst huge numbers of Lessers at Tetepare; plus singles at Manus, Makira and Vanua Lava.

Lesser Frigatebird (*Fregata ariel*) - seen almost daily, often in large numbers although surprisingly none were encountered in Vanuatu. The peak count was over 1,000 at Tetepare.

Sulidae - Boobies

Red-footed Booby (*Sula sula*) - 9 birds recorded on 6 dates - a poor showing from this species this year.

Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster*) - 63 birds recorded on 10 days with a high count of 50 around New Ireland.

Phalacrocoracidae - Cormorants

Little Black Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax sulcirostris*) - a single at the mouth of the Sepik River.

Pandionidae - Ospreys

Eastern Osprey (*Pandion cristatus*) - 11 birds recorded over 5 dates, with sightings at Choiseul, Arnavon Islands, Tetepare and Malaita.

Accipitridae - Kites, Hawks and Eagles

Pacific Baza (*Aviceda subcristata*) - recorded on four dates: 1 near Madang, 1 on Bougainville, 2 on Choiseul and 1 on Makira.

Black Honey Buzzard (*Henicopernis infuscatus*) - this is an uncommon New Britain endemic so it was great to see 2 birds up at the Wild Dog Mine, one of which soared right over our heads.

Pygmy Eagle (*Hieraaetus weiskei*) - a bit of a surprise to see this species soaring on a couple of occasions near Madang.

Variable Goshawk (*Accipiter hiogaster*) - seen on 5 dates: 2 near Madang, 2 on Bipi, 6 on Manus, 3 on New Britain and 3 on New Ireland.

Pied Goshawk (*Accipiter albogularis*) - a regional endemic that gave great perched views at Mt Austen and 2 further sightings in the area. Also seen on San Jorge Island and again on Vanikoro where the local race *sharpei* is quite distinct.

Swamp Harrier (*Circus approximans*) - 5 seen on Santo.

Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*) - 10 seen around Madang.

Whistling Kite (*Haliastur sphenurus*) - 3 along the Sepik River.

Brahminy Kite (*Haliastur indus*) - common in PNG and the Solomons with 53 birds counted over 12 dates.

White-bellied Sea Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*) - 5 along the Sepik River gave great views, another on Manus and our final bird put on a spectacular show on New Ireland attacking Great Flying Foxes - the first one it grabbed escaped, but the second was not so fortunate and was watched being caught carried away to be eaten!

Sanford's Sea Eagle (*Haliaeetus sanfordi*) - an impressive Solomons endemic that we saw a few times: our first was on Bougainville being attacked by a Brahminy Kite; we then had one fly past at eye level on Tetepare and saw 3 more on Malaita, including nice scope views of a young bird.



White-bellied Sea Eagles. Copyright Rand Rudland

Rallidae - Rails

Buff-banded Rail (*Gallirallus philippensis*) - recorded on four dates: 12 on Nendo, 1 on Vanua Lava, 3 on Santo and 4 on Ambryn.

Australasian Swamphen (*Porphyrio melanotus*) - a single on the Arnavons and 8 on Tetepare, this is part of the recent 6-way split of the Purple Swamphen.

Burhinidae - Stone-curlews

Beach Stone-Curlew (*Esacus neglectus*) - terrific views of this widespread but shy species with a pair on the Arnavon Islands and Pete also had a pair on Makira.

Charadriidae - Plovers

Pacific Golden Plover (*Pluvialis fulva*) - a common non-breeding visitor to airfields and lawns of Melanesia, we recorded 43 birds on 9 dates.

Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*) - 2 at the Arnavon Islands and a single at Vanikoro.

Lesser Sand Plover (*Charadrius mongolus*) - about 100 feeding on the mudflats at the Arnavon Islands.

Greater Sand Plover (*Charadrius leschenaultii*) - at least 10 at the Arnavon Islands; an additional 5 distant sand-plover spp. at the Kavieng airstrip may have been these.

Jacanidae - Jacanas

Comb-crested Jacana (*Irediparra gallinacea*) - singles seen at two stops near Madang.

Scolopacidae - Sandpipers

Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*) - a flock of about 50 at the Arnavon Islands was a surprise, even more surprising is that this is potentially a country first for the Solomon Islands!

Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) - at least one at the Arnavon Islands, another at Makira and 4 more at the Duff Islands.

Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*) - a widespread non-breeder in the region, we had 31 birds recorded on 7 dates throughout the trip.

Bristle-thighed Curlew (*Numenius tahitiensis*) - a completely unexpected highlight was at least 11 of these scarce west-Alaskan breeders roosting in the mangroves near the La Perouse monument on Vanikoro!

Grey-tailed Tattler (*Tringa brevipes*) - seen on four dates: 4 at the Arnavon Islands and singles at San Jorge, Makira and the Duff Islands.

Wandering Tattler (*Tringa incana*) - only recorded at Vanikoro where most or all of the 50-odd tattlers roosting in the mangroves appeared to be this species based on vocalizations.

Terek Sandpiper (*Xenus cinereus*) - once again we saw 2 birds at the Arnavon Islands. Our sighting here last year was potentially the first country record for the Solomons Islands and also involved 2 birds, so it is tempting to speculate that they could in fact be the same individuals!

Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*) - regularly seen with 16 birds counted over 6 dates.

Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) - see on three dates: 10 on New Ireland, 12 at the Duff Islands and 8 at Vanua Lava.

Red-necked Stint (*Calidris ruficollis*) - about 20 seen on the mudflats at the Arnavon Islands.

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (*Calidris acuminata*) - also about 20 on the mudflats at the Arnavon Islands.

Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*) - a small patch of water north of the Sepik River held about 300 of these pelagic waders.

Laridae - Terns

Brown Noddy (*Anous stolidus*) - relatively few seen this year with 34 birds recorded over 7 dates.

Black Noddy (*Anous minutus*) - this is normally an abundant species in the region, but like almost all of the seabirds was way down this year. We recorded it on 7 dates with the only outstanding counts being approximately 1,000 around Bipi Island and 10,000 off the coast of Malaita.

White Tern (*Gygis alba*) - singles at sea east of Makira and near the Duff Islands.

Greater Crested Tern (*Thalasseus bergii*) - the most consistently recorded species of the trip, seen on 19 of the 22 days.

Lesser Crested Tern (*Thalasseus elegans*) - only Adrian saw this species from the ship near Nissan atoll. This tern is considered a vagrant to the region.

Little Tern (*Sternula albigrons*) - seen on just 2 dates: 10 at the mouth of the Sepik River and another 10 on the same day well out to sea, in association with a large flock of Red-necked Phalaropes; and a single bird seen extremely well sitting on a buoy outside of Kokopo New Britain.

Bridled Tern (*Onychoprion anaethetus*) - regularly recorded in small numbers with 20 birds counted over 7 dates.

Sooty Tern (*Onychoprion*) - often an abundant species at sea, but certainly not this year! We only recorded it on a mere 4 dates with small numbers around Malaita, Makira and Nendo and then a good count of 5,000 around the Duff Islands.

Roseate Tern (*Sterna dougalli*) - this very widespread but uncommon species was recorded on 3 dates: 1 near Nissan atoll, 4 just offshore of the Arnavon Islands and 1 in Thousand Ships Bay, San Jorge. All birds were in breeding plumage.

Black-naped Tern (*Sterna sumatrana*) - regularly seen with 114 birds over 8 dates.

Common Tern (*Sterna hirundinacea*) - seen almost daily and often in large numbers in PNG and the Solomons, but none in the Santa Cruz islands or Vanuatu.

Whiskered Tern (*Chlidonias hybrida*) - about 30 feeding at the mouth of the Sepik River was far fewer than in previous years.



Black-naped Tern. Copyright Rand Rudland

Stercorariidae - Skuas

Pomarine Skua (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) - single birds seen at sea east of Makira and near Nendo.

Columbidae - Pigeons and Doves

Metallic Pigeon (*Columba vitiensis*) - 4 birds at the Vatthe Conservation Area of Santo.

Slender-billed Cuckoo-Dove (*Macropygia amboiensis*) – seen near Madang, good numbers on New Ireland and also on New Britain.

Bar-tailed Cuckoo-Dove (*Macropygia nigrirostris*) – 3 seen on the Limbin Road of New Ireland and a single on the Wild Dog Mine Road of New Britain.

Mackinlay's Cuckoo-Dove (*Macropygia mackinlayi*) – a widespread regional endemic this was one of the most consistently seen of the landbirds with sightings on 12 dates.



Mackinlay's Cuckoo-Dove. Copyright Meghan Kelly

Pied Cuckoo-Dove (*Reinwardtoena browni*) – a shy Bismarcks endemic we were fortunate to see a pair sitting out on a exposed branch early morning on the Limbin road of New Ireland.

Crested Cuckoo-Dove (*Reinwardtoena crassirostris*) – a shy Solomons endemic, we heard a distant bird calling persistently in the hills of Bougainville but it was just too far away.

Pacific Emerald Dove (*Chalcophaps longirostris*) – a single near Madang, another single on Nendo and then abundant in Vanuatu where seen in particularly good numbers on Santo but also Vanua Lava and Ambryn.

Stephan's Emerald Dove (*Chalcophaps stephani*) – seen on 6 dates with observations at Mussau, New Ireland, New Britain, Tetepare, San Jorge and Makira.

Nicobar Pigeon (*Caloenas nicobarica*) – a great bird that gave us good views near Rossun village on Madang and a second sighting from the ship of 4 high-flying birds transiting between islands off the north end of New Ireland.

Wompoo Fruit Dove (*Ptilinopus magnificus*) - the very distinctive call was heard near Madang.

Pink-spotted Fruit Dove (*Ptilinopus perlatus*) – a pair sat out on an open tree near Madang, here of the distinctive north coast race *plumbeicollis*.

Tanna Fruit Dove (*Ptilinopus tannesis*) – great views of about 6 birds visiting a fruiting fig tree right beside our landing site on Sola, Vanua Lava. Also seen on Santo with a small number at Champagne Beach and at the Vatthe Conservation Area.

Orange-fronted Fruit Dove (*Ptilinopus aurantiifrons*) – about 40 counted along the Sepik River.

Superb Fruit Dove (*Ptilinopus superbus*) – recorded on 3 dates: 1 near Rossun village, Madang; 2 at Mt Austen, Guadalcanal; 3 on Malaita.

Red-bellied Fruit Dove (*Ptilinopus greyii*) – a regional endemic that was seen daily in the Santa Cruz Islands and in Vanuatu. Best views were around the Vatthe Conservation Area on Santo where we had about 20 birds.

White-bibbed Fruit Dove (*Ptilinopus rivoli*) – a stunning fruit dove, we saw this species well on New Ireland where we had 3 birds, and 1 in flight on New Britain. This is the nominate form – watch for it to get split off from other forms in the future.

Yellow-bibbed Fruit Dove (*Ptilinopus solomonensis*) – another stunning fruit dove that offered up great views on 3 dates: Hawei Island, Mussau and Makira.

Claret-breasted Fruit Dove (*Ptilinopus viridis*) – yet another stunner and a Solomons endemic. Tetepare offered by far the best views with a dozen birds feeding happily above our heads. Also seen on Choiseul, Guadalcanal and Malaita.

White-headed Fruit Dove (*Ptilinopus eugeniae*) – this Makira endemic is one of the best looking of all fruit doves and we had 2 in flight plus a 3rd bird that kindly landed in a breadfruit tree for some great views.

Orange-bellied Fruit Dove (*Ptilinopus iozonus*) – 4 birds seen near Madang.

Knob-billed Fruit Dove (*Ptilinopus insolitus*) - 4 of the seemingly rare *inferior* race on Little Mussau in the exact same *Casuarina* tree as last year, another 4 of the more common *insolitus* race gave great views on New Ireland.





Claret-breasted (above) and Yellow-bibbed Fruit Dove(below). Two of the finest looking of the 12 species of fruit dove seen during the trip. Copyright Adrian Hayward

Pacific Imperial Pigeon (*Ducula pacifica*) - seen daily through the Santa Cruz Islands and Vanuatu, with the best views coming around the Vatthe Conservation Area on Santo.

Red-knobbed Imperial Pigeon (*Ducula rubricera*) – a common species endemic to the Bismarcks and Solomons that we recorded on 9 dates.

Finsch's Imperial Pigeon (*Ducula finschii*) – a Bismarck endemic that can often be quite tricky to find so we were very pleased with a bird perched above us on New Ireland.

Island Imperial Pigeon (*Ducula pistrinaria*) – a small island specialist that we recorded on 8 dates, but in much reduced numbers compared with previous years. Undoubtedly it has featured prominently in the diet of local people with the drought-induced crop failures this year.

Vanuatu Imperial Pigeon (*Ducula bakeri*) – one of the big surprises of the expedition was seeing 3 of these uncommon Vanuatu endemics right down at sea level near the

Metuvele Blue Hole on Santo. One bird was seen perched for a short while. While the species is well-known from the island of Santo, it has rarely, if ever been recorded down at sea level.

Pinon's Imperial Pigeon (*Ducula pinon*) – heard near Madang and about 15 seen along the Sepik River.

Black Imperial Pigeon (*Ducula melanochroa*) – a generally uncommon Bismarcks endemic but the Limbin Road of New Ireland is a good place to see it: we had about 10 birds flying around during our morning there, mostly in pairs.

Collared Imperial Pigeon (*Ducula mullerii*) – a big river specialist we had good views of around 30 at the Sepik River.

Zoe Imperial Pigeon (*Ducula zoeae*) – 4 seen near Madang and only heard along the Sepik river.

Torresian Imperial Pigeon (*Ducula spilorrhoa*) – about 15 seen along the Sepik River.

Bismarck Imperial Pigeon (*Ducula subflavescens*) – 6 seen along the Wild Dog Mine Road of New Britain, this is a Bismarcks endemic.

Pale Mountain Pigeon (*Gymnophaps solomonensis*) – a Solomons endemic that we only encountered on the Panguna Mine Road of Bougainville, with a skittish pair observed.



Red-knobbed Imperial Pigeon. Copyright Rand Rudland

Cuculidae – Cuckoos

Buff-headed Coucal (*Centropus milo*) – a Solomons endemic that looks and sounds very weird. We had great views of a pair of the buff-bellied *albidiventris* race on Tetepare and then good views of the black-bellied *milo* race on Mt Austen.

White-necked Coucal (*Centropus ateralbus*) – a Bismarcks endemic that we saw well on the Limbin Road of New Ireland and also near to Kokopo New Britain.

Ivory-billed Coucal (*Centropus menbeki*) – heard only near Madang.

Violaceous Coucal (*Centropus violaceus*) – a shy Bismarcks endemic that we only heard distantly along the Wild Dog Mine Road of New Britain.

Black-billed Coucal (*Centropus bernsteinii*) – a couple of birds gave reasonable flight views along the Sepik River as they flushed out of tall grass.

Pacific Koel (*Eudynamys orientalis*) – reasonable views of a male on the Limbin Road of New Ireland and also heard on Choiseul and Tetepare.

Pacific Long-tailed Cuckoo (*Urodynamis taitensis*) – Adrian had flight views of one on Vanikoro; this New Zealand breeder is rarely seen in the Solomon Islands.

Channel-billed Cuckoo (*Scythrops novaehollandiae*) - 5 of these gigantic cuckoos flew overhead during our morning's birding around Madang.

Brush Cuckoo (*Cacomantis variolosus*) – recorded on 3 dates with singles near Madang, on the Wild Dog Mine Road of New Britain and the Panguna Mine Road of Bougainville.

Oriental Cuckoo (*Cuculus optatus*) – generally considered to be an uncommon non-breeding visitor the region we recorded 5 birds over 3 successive days with singles at Bipi Island and Rossun Village, Manus Island as well as 3 birds together on Mussau Island. The birds were not calling and species identification is admittedly a bit of an assumption based on previous records for the region.



Oriental Cuckoo on Mussau. Copyright Rand Rudland

Caprimulgidae - Nightjars

Solomons Nightjar (*Eurostopodus nigripennis*) – arguably the highlight of the entire expedition was getting amazing views of this species on the ground at Tetepare. The species is almost never seen and is presumably endangered. The bird was at the base of a large tree, just a few meters away from the beach!

Hemiprocnidae – Treeswifts

Moustached Treeswift (*Hemiproctus mystacea*) – this charismatic species was recorded on 8 dates through PNG and the Solomons.



Moustached Treeswift - a stunning bird. Copyright Rand Rudland

Apodidae – Swifts

Glossy Swiftlet (*Collocalia esculenta*) – seen on 11 dates throughout the trip, often in large numbers. There is a huge amount of variability from island to island. We saw at least 6 different races: *kalili*, *hypogrammica*, *tametamele*, *becki*, *makirensis*, *uropygialis*.

White-rumped Swiftlet (*Aerodramus spodiopygius*) – recorded on 6 dates: Manus, Mussau, New Ireland, Bougainville, Nendo and the Duff Islands. These come from 5 races: *delichon*, *eichorni*, *noonaedanae*, *reichenowi*, *desolatus*.

??Mayr's Swiftlet (*Aerodramus orientalis*) – there are probably no confirmed field observations of this large swiftlet but we are fairly sure we had the undescribed Bougainville race at 875 meters above sea level on the Panguna Mine Road. The birds were flying around at low level with other swiftlet species for several minutes allowing terrific views and some record shots were also obtained. The main feature was the

largish head (compared to Uniform Swiftlet). The birds had uniformly dark brown backs with no rump patch evident. The undersides were variably pale and the birds seemed to have a pale mark above the eye although this is not apparent in the photographs. There were about 10 birds flying around that fit this description.



A record shot, but it shows the big-headed jizz of this possible Mayr's Swiftlet. Copyright Rand Rudland

Uniform Swiftlet (*Aerodramus vanikorensis*) – the most common swiftlet of the trip we saw this species on 10 dates. Another highly variable swiftlet, of which we saw the following races: *yorki*, *coultasi*, *pallens*, *lugubris*, *vanikorensis*.

Coraciidae – Rollers

Oriental Dollarbird (*Eurystomus orientalis*) – This widespread species was recorded on 4 dates: Sepik River, Choiseul, Makira and Malaita.

Alcedinidae – Kingfishers

Rufous-bellied Kookaburra (*Dacelo gaudichaud*) – a colorful and noisy kingfisher, we had 2 sightings near Madang and another along the Sepik river.

Ultramarine Kingfisher (*Todiramphus leucopygius*) – a Solomons endemic that we had lovely views of both at Choiseul and Mount Austen including some great scope studies.

Vanuatu Kingfisher (*Todiramphus farquhari*) – a stunning Vanuatu endemic, we saw a total of 3 at the Vatthe Conservation Area with some great scopes views.

Melanesian Kingfisher (*Todiramphus tristrami*) – any visitor to Melanesia is struck by the incredible variability amongst the “Collared Kingfisher” so it was no surprise that this was recently split up into 5 species and the last word is likely not out yet! We recorded this taxa frequently during the trip with records on 7 dates of the following races: *nusae*, *matthiae* (one of the most distinctive races!), *bennetti*, *tristrami* plus the really variable *alberti*. Everything up to San Jorge was this species.

Pacific Kingfisher (*Todiramphus sacer*) – this is another product of the splitting of Collared Kingfisher and the one we saw regularly during the latter portion of the trip with sightings on 7 dates involving the races: *santoensis*, *juliae*, *mala*, *solomonis*, *vicinus*, *ornatus* and *melanodera*! Everything from Malaita onwards was this species!

Beach Kingfisher (*Todiramphus saurophagus*) – this striking large kingfisher was seen regularly with observations on 5 dates – the best views were certainly along the Sui River mangroves!

Yellow-billed Kingfisher (*Syma torotoro*) – only heard on a few occasions near Madang.

Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) – four observations of this very widespread species: Madang, Mussau, San Jorge and Makira.

Papuan Dwarf Kingfisher (*Ceyx solitarius*) – the “Variable Dwarf Kingfisher” was split up into 12 species just before the trip began and we saw 2 of the new species including this one that flew overhead near Madang.

North Solomons Dwarf Kingfisher (*Ceyx meeki*) – another product of the 12-way splitting of Variable Dwarf Kingfisher. We had reasonable flight views along the Sui River at Choiseul, and heard another bird on San Jorge.



Beach Kingfisher taking off. Copyright Rand Rudland

Bucerotidae – Hornbills

Blyth's Hornbill (*Rhyticeros plicatus*) – seen on 6 dates through the trip with best views coming at Madang and Mt Austen.



Regularly seen and heard overhead were Blyth's Hornbills. Copyright Rand Rudland

Falconidae – Falcons

Oriental Hobby (*Falco severus*) – brief views at Mt Austen.

Cacatuidae – Cockatoos

Palm Cockatoo (*Probosciger aterrimus*) – terrific views of this wacky bird at Madang and also heard along the Sepik River.

Solomons Cockatoo (*Cacatua ducorpsii*) – a Solomons endemic that was seen on 6 dates, often in good numbers, with the best observations coming at San Jorge.

Sulphur-crested Cockatoo (*Cacatua galerita*) – good numbers at Madang and the Sepik River.

Blue-eyed Cockatoo (*Cacatua ophthalmica*) – we saw 3 of these New Britain endemics up the Wild Dog Mine road.



Palm Cockatoo. Copyright Rand Rudland.

Psittaculidae – Old World Parrots

Buff-faced Pygmy Parrot (*Micropsitta pusio*) – heard only near Madang.

Meek's Pygmy Parrot (*Micropsitta meeki*) – singles of this Admiralty endemic seen reasonably well in flight on consecutive days at Manus and Mussau.

Finsch's Pygmy Parrot (*Micropsitta finschii*) – seen on three dates in the Solomons – Guadalcanal, San Jorge and Malaita. The best views came from San Jorge where we watched them creeping around on the tree trunks for some time.

Eclectus Parrot (*Eclectus roratus*) – recorded on 10 dates through PNG and the Solomons including a female seen entering her nest hole.

Red-cheeked Parrot (*Geoffroyus geoffroyi*) – a few seen around Madang and along the Sepik River.

Song Parrot (*Geoffroyus heteroclitus*) – a regional endemic that we recorded on 7 dates including a count of 15 on Malaita.

Palm Lorikeet (*Charmosyna palmarum*) – a localized endemic it was great to see and hear about 25 in the coconuts and secondary forests of the Duff Islands, seemingly the easiest place to see this species anywhere, provided one can get onto the island!

Red-chinned Lorikeet (*Charmosyna rubrigularis*) – a nomadic Bismarcks endemic that was present in reasonable numbers this year at the higher part of the Limbin Road of New Ireland.

Red-flanked Lorikeet (*Charmosyna placentis*) – recorded on three consecutive days: New Ireland, New Britain and Nissan atoll.

Duchess Lorikeet (*Charmosyna margarethae*) – a stunning and nomadic Solomons endemic that we caught up with in a big way on our last chance of the trip, at Makira Island. Here we found upwards of 50 birds feeding in a few pink flowering trees.

Black-capped Lory (*Lorius lory*) – a few seen near Madang and along the Sepik River.

Yellow-bibbed Lory (*Lorius chlorocercus*) – this lovely Solomons endemic was observed on 3 dates: Guadalcanal, Malaita and Makira.

Cardinal Lory (*Pseudeos cardinalis*) – one of the most common Solomons endemics we had it 7 days in a row, often in large numbers. The best encounter came at the Arnavon Islands where a pair flew in and landed right in front of us.

Coconut Lorikeet (*Trichoglossus haematodus*) – one of the most common and widespread landbirds in Melanesia, we recorded it on 17 dates.

Edward's Fig Parrot (*Psittaculirostris edwardsii*) – this is a rarely seen north coast endemic which we had decent flight views of near Madang and again on the Sepik River.

Orange-breasted Fig Parrot (*Cyclopsitta gulelmitertii*) – a pair of these sat out in the open near Madang. The race here is the very drab *amabilis*.

Bismarck Hanging Parrot (*Loriculus tener*) - 2 flight views of this tiny parrot along the Limbin Road at New Ireland.



Duchess Lorikeet in a flowering tree. Copyright Rand Rudland

Pittidae – Pittas

Superb Pitta (*Pitta superba*) – one of the major highlights of the tour was getting prolonged views of this much-wanted mega calling right out in the open at its only known location in the vicinity of Rossun village on Manus Island.

Meliphagidae – Honeyeaters

Ashy Myzomela (*Myzomela cineracea*) – a New Britain endemic that we saw a couple times on the Wild Dog Mine Road.

Red Myzomela (*Myzomela cruentata*) – we saw about 12 along the Limbin Road of New Ireland, race *erythrina*.

New Ireland Myzomela (*Myzomela pulchella*) – a very tricky New Ireland endemic to track down so it was great to find 1 in a pink flowering tree on the upper Limbin Road.

Cardinal Myzomela (*Myzomela cardinalis*) – a Melanesian endemic that we first found on Nendo, where they are the source of red feather money. We then found them to be much more common on the other Santa Cruz islands and in Vanuatu, where they are not trapped!

Bismarck Black Myzomela (*Myzomela pammelaena*) – a rarely seen small island specialist that we encountered in large numbers on three days running: Bipi Island, Hawei Island and Mussau and Little Mussau Islands.

Red-capped Myzomela (*Myzomela lafargei*) – we did well with this localized north Solomons endemic, getting good views on 4 dates: Bougainville, Choiseul, San Jorge, and the Arnavon Islands.

Crimson-rumped Myzomela (*Myzomela eichhorni*) – it took quite a while to track down this New Georgia endemic on Tetepare, but when we finally did the views could not have been better!

Red-vested Myzomela (*Myzomela malaitae*) – of the many myzomelas we saw, this is by far the rarest. We had a single female-type visiting a flowering tree along the Trans-Island Road of Malaita, unfortunately it proved quite elusive and only a lucky few got to see it.

Black-headed Myzomela (*Myzomela melanocephala*) – a Guadalcanal endemic that we saw 4 of during our morning up Mt Austen.

Sooty Myzomela (*Myzomela tristrami*) – this is a common Makira endemic and we saw about 30, most of them were in flowering trees.

Black-bellied Myzomela (*Myzomela erythromelas*) – a stunning New Britain endemic that we saw about 10 of along the Wild Dog Mine road.



Crimson-rumped Myzomela - one of 10 species of myzomela seen during the trip. Copyright Adrian Hayward

Grey-eared Honeyeater (*Lichmera incana*) – a fairly localized species that was very common on Ambryn.

Meyer's Friarbird (*Philemon meyeri*) – we saw (and heard) this confusing and poorly-known honeyeater very well along the banks of the Sepik River, a nice bonus!

New Guinea Friarbird (*Philemon novaeguinaei*) – a few around Madang and along the Sepik River.

New Britain Friarbird (*Philemon cockerelli*) - a New Britain endemic that was seen well along the Wild Dog Mine road.

Manus Friarbird (*Philemon albitorques*) – eventually we had good looks at several around and in Rossun village on Manus Island, where it is an island endemic and the island's symbol.

Makira Honeyeater (*Meliarchus sclateri*) – a Makira endemic species and genera that is common around Star Harbour and seen well a few times.

Varied Honeyeater (*Glavicalis versicolor*) – a localized species in PNG, but common in the Madang area where we saw several.

Mimic Honeyeater (*Meliphaga analoga*) – 2 seen near Madang.

White-bellied Honeyeater (*Glycifohia notabilis*) – this infrequently seen Vanuatu endemic is a common garden bird around Sola on Vanua Lava and we saw a number of them.

Acanthizidae – Australasian Warblers

Fan-tailed Gerygone (*Gerygone flavolateralis*) – a pair seen well at Vatthe Conservation Area on Santo, Adrian also saw a pair in the Banks islands.

Large-billed Gerygone (*Gerygone magnirostris*) – a riparian specialist, we saw 4 along the banks of the Sepik River.

Yellow-bellied Gerygone (*Gerygone chrysogaster*) - a small flock of 4 seen near Madang.

Cracticidae – Woodswallows and Butcherbirds

Ivory-backed Woodswallow (*Artamus insignis*) – a striking Bismarck endemic that is usually straightforward on New Ireland – not this time! Fortunately we had good views of a single bird the next day at the Wild Dog Mine Road on New Britain.

Hooded Butcherbird (*Cracticus cassicus*) – 2 seen and others heard near Madang.

Campephagidae – Cuckooshrikes

South Melanesian Cuckooshrike (*Coracina caledonica*) – multiple sightings of this large cuckooshrike on Santo, both at the Vatthe Conservation Area and the Metuvele Blue Hole.

Barred Cuckooshrike (*Coracina lineata*) – seen on 7 dates in the Bismarcks and Solomons with the best views coming from Tetepare.

Boyer's Cuckooshrike (*Coracina boyeri*) – a pair near Madang.

White-bellied Cuckooshrike (*Coracina papuensis*) – observations on 6 dates in PNG and the Solomons.

Manus Cuckooshrike (*Coracina ingens*) – good numbers seen around Rossun village on Manus Island, where it is a recently split but very distinctive island endemic.

Common Cicadabird (*Coracina tenuirostris*) – singles seen on Manus and Mussau, these are the races *admiralitatis* and *matthiae*.

Grey-capped Cicadabird (*Coracina remota*) - recently split off the previous species and endemic to the region, we saw this at Bougainville, San Jorge, and Malaita. The races we saw were *saturiator* and *erythropygia*.

Solomons Cuckooshrike (*Coracina holopolia*) – a pair on Bougainville were the only sighting!

Black-browed Triller (*Lalage atrovirens*) – 6 seen near Madang, this is a north coast endemic.

Varied Triller (*Lalage conjuncta*) – good numbers seen on both New Ireland and New Britain.

Mussau Triller (*Lalage conjuncta*) – one of the top finds of the trip, this being the least known of the Mussau endemics. Our sighting was one of the first ever of this species. We had a flighty pair up in the canopy of a patch of primary forest just below a ridge, at 130 meters above sea level, loosely associated with a mixed-species feeding flock.

Polynesian Triller (*Lalage maculosa*) - seen only on Vanikoro where we had 6 birds.

Long-tailed Triller (*Lalage leucopyga*) - several seen in Vanuatu at both Vanua Lava and Santo.



Barred Cuckooshrike. Copyright Adrian Hayward

Pachycephalidae – Whistlers

Bismarck Whistler (*Pachycephala citreogaster*) – a good run of sightings with birds seen on consecutive days at Manus Island, Mussau Island and New Ireland – races *goodsoni*, *sexuvaria*, and *citreogaster*.

Oriole Whistler (*Pachycephala oriolodes*) – frustratingly we only heard this species, on several occasions, at Bougainville and Guadalcanal. The fact we failed to see this common Solomons endemic is indicative of how slow the birding was at times this year!

Melanesian Whistler (*Pachycephala chlorua*) - good numbers seen and more heard on Vanikoro and Santo, also heard on Ambryn.

Fiji Whistler (*Pachycephala vitiensis*) – occurs in the northern Santa Cruz islands where we saw it on both Nendo and the Duff Islands. These races until very recently were considered to be part of a different species, the White-throated Whistler, but that has now been lumped within Fiji Whistler.

Little Shrikethrush (*Colluricincla megarhyncha*) – a single seen near Madang.

Oriolidae - Orioles

Northern Variable Pitohui (*Pitohui kirhocephalus*) – a very skulky group of about 4 birds were seen near Madang, this is a north coast endemic and a recent split.

Brown Oriole (*Oriolus szalayi*) - 1 seen near Madang.

Dicruridae – Drongos

Spangled Drongo (*Dicrurus bracteatus*) – several near Madang and again on New Britain.

Paradise Drongo (*Dicrurus megarhynchus*) - several encounters of this fantastic endemic of New Ireland with good flight and perched views. The best looking of all drongos!

Fantails – Rhipiduridae

Willie Wagtail (*Rhipidura leucophrys*) – a common species in PNG and the Solomons, we saw it on 10 dates.

Northern Fantail (*Rhipidura rufiventris*) – we had sightings on three dates: Manus Island, New Ireland and New Britain.

Cockerell's Fantail (*Rhipidura cockerelli*) – a widespread, but uncommon, Solomons endemic, our only sighting came inside the forest on Tetepare where we had a very inquisitive bird.

White-bellied Thicket-fantail (*Rhipidura leucothorax*) – normally very skulking, we were treated to great views on consecutive days, near Madang and again on the Sepik River.

Grey Fantail (*Rhipidura albiscapa*) - seen daily in Vanuatu – Banks Islands, Santo and Ambryn.

Streaked Fantail (*Rhipidura verreauxi*) – good looks at several at the Vatthe Conservation Area on Santo, Adrian also saw a few in the Banks Islands.

Mussau Fantail (*Rhipidura matthiae*) – having failed to find this largely unknown species on my previous two visits, I was very pleased to see a total of 12 birds this time, mostly in or near a patch of primary forest although some were in secondary scrub as well!

Manus Fantail (*Rhipidura semirubra*) – we were hoping to visit Tong Island to search for this species, but windy conditions meant this would be impractical. Imagine our delight at obtaining great views of this species on little Hawei Island – an island it is seemingly not known from. One of the highlights of the trip for sure!!

Rufous Fantail (*Rhipidura rufifrons*) – recorded on four islands: the Arnavons, San Jorge, Nendo, and Vanikoro. These represent the races *commodo*, *agilis* and *melanolaema*. The latter two races in particular are highly distinctive and must be ripe for splitting.

Monarchidae – Monarchs

Vanikoro Monarch (*Mayrornis schistaceus*) – this endemic has only been seen by a handful of lucky birders who have gotten to this island. We got great views of a pair, although it did require going off-trail through the beautiful lowland forests to find it!

Buff-bellied Monarch (*Neolalage banksiana*) – an endemic genera to Vanuatu, this little beauty played hard to get at first, but we ended up seeing about 8 in and around the Vatthe Conservation Area of Santo.



Buff-bellied Monarch. Copyright Meghan Kelly

Southern Shrikebill (*Clytorhynchus pachycephaloides*) – 3 birds seen at the Vatthe Conservation Area of Santo.

Manus Monarch (*Symposiarchus infelix*) – we were fortunate to connect with this Manus endemic in the forests near Rossun.

Mussau Monarch (*Symposiarchus menckei*) - about a dozen of these Mussau endemics were seen during our morning on the island, a common species here, but one very few have managed to see!

Black-tailed Monarch (*Symposiarchus verticalis*) - one seen very well towards the top of the Limbin Road on New Ireland.

Solomons Monarch (*Symposiarchus barbatus*) - a Solomons endemic seen on two occasions on San Jorge but did not hang around for long.

Island Monarch (*Monarch cinerascens*) - a tramp species that that we saw on 4 dates - on Hawei Island, Mussau Island, Nissan Atoll and the Arnavon Islands. These sightings cover the races *fulviventris*, *perpallidus* and *impediens*. The latter race is noticeably darker than the others.

Bougainville Monarch (*Monarcha erythrostickus*) - a Bougainville endemic that we annoyingly heard only on the Panguna Mine Road of Bougainville on a few occasions.

Chestnut-bellied Monarch (*Monarcha castaneiventris*) - a Solomons endemic that we saw well on San Jorge, Malaita and Makira and also heard on Choiseul and Guadalcanal. The birds on Makira are of the large race *megarhynchus*.

White-capped Monarch (*Monarcha richardsii*) - a pair of this New Georgia endemic gave terrific, prolonged views on Tetepare.



White-capped Monarch on Tetepare. Copyright Rand Rudland

Golden Monarch (*Carterornis chrysomela*) - a single female was seen well on the Limbin Road of New Ireland.

Steel-blue Flycatcher (*Myiagra ferrocynae*) - this widespread Solomons endemic was seen well on 6 dates: Bougainville, Choiseul, Arnavon Islands, Guadalcanal, San Jorge, and Malaita.

Melanesian Flycatcher (*Myiagra caledonica*) - several seen well at the Vathe Conservation Area of Santo, including a pair building a nest. Also seen at Ambryn and Adrian had one in the Banks Islands.

Shining Flycatcher (*Myiagra alecto*) - records on 3 dates: seen on Hawei Island, the Wild Dog Mine Road of New Britain, and heard along the Sepik River.

Vanikoro Flycatcher (*Myiagra vanikorensis*) - a few seen on Vanikoro, where the race *vanikorensis* is distinct from the Fijian birds.

Corvidae - Crows

White-billed Crow (*Corvus woodfordi*) - a Solomons endemic. Several good observations on San Jorge, a single at the Lunga River on Guadalcanal and 3 along the Sui River of Choiseul.

Bougainville Crow (*Corvus meeki*) - a shy Bougainville endemic. We did well to see about 5 birds on the Panguna Mine Road. They appear tail-less in flight.

Grey Crow (*Corvus tristis*) - an aberrant corvid, we had nice looks at a flock of 6 near Madang.

Torresian Crow (*Corvus orru*) - a few in open country near Madang.

Bismarck Crow (*Corvus insularis*) - a few of these Bismarck endemics seen on both New Britain and New Ireland.

Paradisaeidae - Birds of Paradise

Glossy-mantled Manucode (*Manucodia ater*) - a pair were seen well as they visited a fruiting tree.

Lesser Bird of Paradise (*Paradisaea minor*) - we saw about 6 during our mornings birding near Madang, some of them quite well. All birds seen were females.

Hirundinidae - Swallows

Pacific Swallow (*Hirundo tahitica*) - seen on 10 dates throughout the trip.

Cettidae - Cettia Bush Warblers

Bougainville Bush Warbler (*Horornis haddeni*) - we had great views of this subtly-plumaged beauty. We saw it along the Panguna Mine Road, where it is a Bougainville endemic described as recently as 2006!

Cisticolidae - Cisticolas

Golden-headed Cisticola (*Cisticola exilis*) - 1 seen on the higher part of the Limbin Road.

Zosteropidae - White-Eyes

Sanford's White-eye (*Woodfordia lacertosa*) - a small group of about 3 birds came through a patch of forest near Noipe village. This is a bizarre-looking and uncommon Nendo endemic.

Bismarck White-eye (*Zosterops hypoxanthus*) - a Bismarck endemic, we saw half a dozen each at the Limbin Road of New Ireland and the Wild Dog Mine Road of New Britain.

Yellow-throated White-eye (*Zosterops metcalfi*) - we saw large numbers of this north Solomons endemic over 3 dates: Bougainville, Choiseul, and especially large numbers at San Jorge.

Louisiade White-eye (*Zosterops griseotinctus*) - good numbers seen and heard on Nissan Atoll. Only found on a few scattered small islands throughout the region.

Solomons White-eye (*Zosterops kulambangrae*) - great looks at many on Tetepare, where the island race *tetiparius* is quite distinctive and a good bet for a future split.

Malaita White-eye (*Zosterops stresemanni*) - good numbers seen on Malaita, where it is the island's only easily-found endemic!

Santa Cruz White-eye (*Zosterops sanctaecrucis*) - quite a few seen and lots heard in the canopy of the forest we birded on Nendo. A rarely seen endemic!

Vanuatu White-eye (*Zosterops flavifrons*) - a common Vanuatu endemic that we saw daily - on Vanua Lava, Santo, and Ambryn.

Silverye (*Zosterops lateralis*) - seen on both Vanua Lava and Santo, sometimes sharing the same tree with Vanuatu White-eye.

Vanikoro White-eye (*Zosterops gibbsi*) - it took a long time, but we eventually tracked down a pair for good views. This island endemic has only been seen by a handful of birders and was described as recently as 2008!



A classic white-eye: Vanuatu White-eye. Copyright Meghan Kelly

Sturnidae - Starlings

Metallic Starling (*Aplonis metallica*) - seen almost daily in PNG and the Solomons, normally in large numbers, but absent from the Santa Cruz islands and Vanuatu.

Singing Starling (*Aplonis cantoroides*) - seen on 7 dates in PNG and the Solomons, often in villages.

Atoll Starling (*Aplonis feadensis*) - after a surprisingly long search on Nissan atoll, we finally got a good look at this bird which is restricted to a few atolls in the region. We then ended up tallying 9 birds around the village.

White-eyed Starling (*Aplonis brunneicapillus*) - Adrian saw one of these endangered starlings fly across the Sui River at Choiseul.

Brown-winged Starling (*Aplonis grandis*) - seen on 3 dates: a pair at Choiseul, large numbers on Guadalcanal and about 10 of the pale-eyed *malaitae* race on Malaita.

Makira Starling (*Aplonis dichroa*) - two pairs of this Makira endemic seen at Star Harbour, both sightings were distant.

Rusty-winged Starling (*Aplonis zelandica*) - a surprise to find a pair of these localized endemics right in Usili village at Vanikoro. Even better, we then saw the same or another pair at what appeared to be a nesting cavity, where they could be watched at length and Todd even managed to record some vocalizations.

Yellow-faced Myna (*Mino dumontii*) - a few seen near Madang and at the Sepik River.

Long-tailed Myna (*Mino kreffti*) - these stunning mynas were regularly observed through the Bismarcks and Solomons with observations on 8 dates, often giving their weird calls.

Golden Myna (*Mino anais*) - great views of 12 birds near Madang.

Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*) - fortunately there are very few introduced bird species in Melanesia. We did see several of these pests in Honiara and on Santo.



Long-tailed Myna. Copyright Rand Rudland

Turdidae - Thrushes

Russet-tailed Thrush (*Zoothera heinei*) - Adrian saw a single bird on Little Mussau island. The local race here, *eichhorni*, is a good candidate for a split one day.

Island Thrush (*Turdus poliocephalus*) - we saw 2 birds at the Vathe Conservation Area. This is the race *vanikorensis*, the only one of the Melanesia's approximately 18 races that we saw. This "species" is shy, rare and even possibly extinct on many of the islands it inhabits.

Dicaeidae - Flowerpeckers

Red-capped Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum geelvinkianum*) - 2 seen well near Madang.

Red-banded Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum eximium*) - a Bismarck endemic that we saw in good numbers on both the Limbin Road of New Ireland and the Wild Dog Mine Road of New Britain.

Midget Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum aeneum*) - a Solomons endemic that we saw numerous times, with sightings from 5 islands: Bougainville, Choiseul, Guadalcanal, San Jorge and Malaita.

Mottled Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum tristrami*) - this Makira endemic performed very well, we saw about 12 and on multiple occasions had birds feeding on berries right in front of us.



Mottled Flowerpecker. Copyright Rand Rudland

Nectarinidae - Sunbirds

Black Sunbird (*Leptocoma sericea*) - seen on 3 dates: Sepik River, New Ireland and New Britain.

Olive-backed Sunbird (*Cinnyris jugularis*) - seen on 9 dates in PNG and the Solomons.

Estrildidae - Munias and Parrotfinches

Blue-faced Parrotfinch (*Erhthrura trichroa*) - seen well on Mussau Island.

Streak-headed Mannikin (*Lonchura tristissima*) - a single of this rather scarce PNG bird was seen near Madang.

Chestnut Munia (*Lonchura atricapilla*) - this Asian species is established on Santo and we saw about 50 there.

Great-billed Mannikin (*Lonchura grandis*) - a scarce bird, it was nice to see 12 near Madang.

Hooded Mannikin (*Lonchura spectabilis*) - about 10 seen around Kokopo New Britain.

Hunstein's Mannikin (*Lonchura hunsteini*) - 6 of these New Ireland endemics were seen well at the Kavieng airstrip.

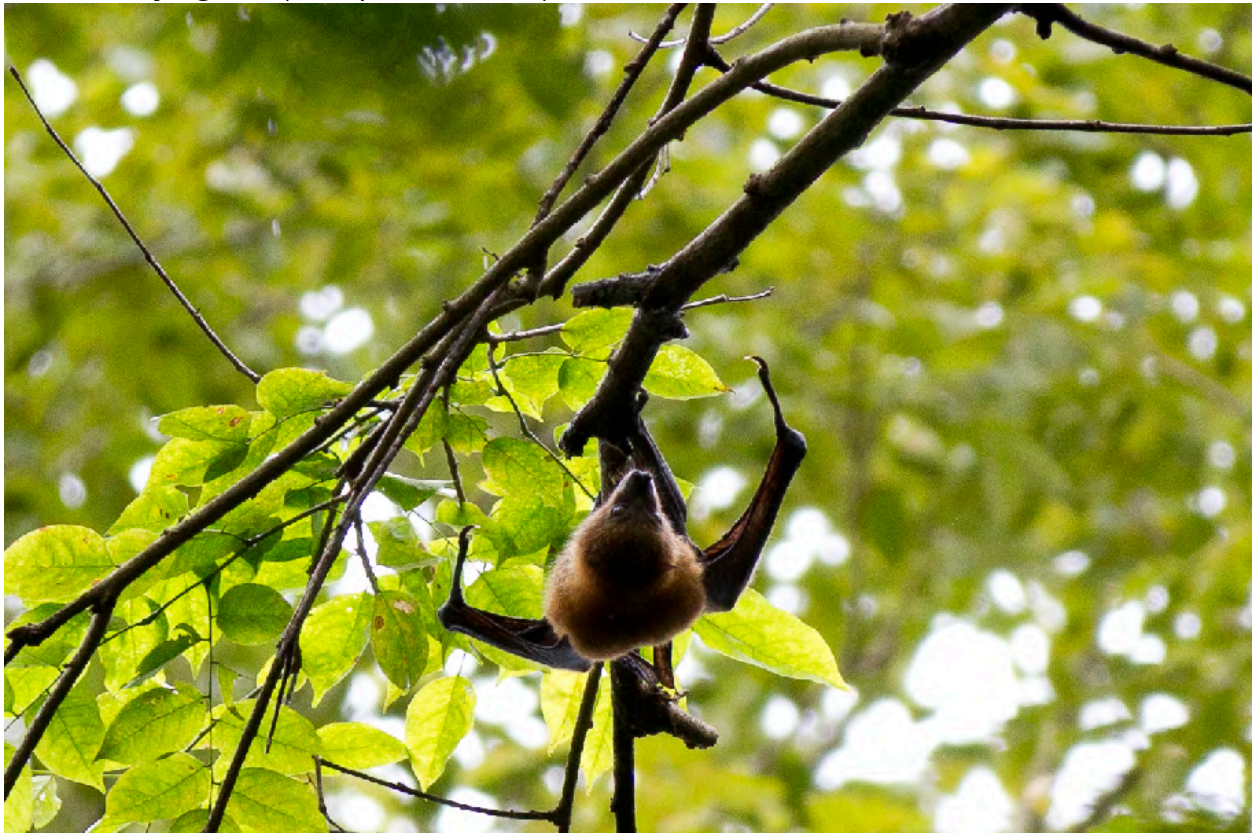
MAMMAL LIST - Taxonomy based on : Flannery, Tim. Mammals of the South-West Pacific & Moluccan Island. 1995. Reed Books.

Muridae - Mice and Rats

Polynesian Rat (*Rattus exulans*) - 1 photographed by Todd at the Vatthe Conservation Area. The species is not native to Melanesia, but nowadays found on most islands in the region.

Pteropidae - Flying Foxes

Vanuatu Flying Fox (*Pteropus anetianus*) - 6 seen at the Vatthe Conservation Area, Santo.



Vanuatu Flying Fox. Copyright Meghan Kelly

Spectacled Flying Fox (*Pteropus conspicillatus*) - 200 seen roosting in a large tree in Madang.

Great Flying Fox (*Pteropus neohibernicus*) - singles at Manus Island and on New Britain. Large numbers seen at the Sepik river and especially on New Ireland where they were being hunted by a White-bellied Sea Eagle!

Temotu Flying Fox (*Pteropus nitendiensis*) - we saw about 10 of these very poorly known endemic bats on Nendo.

Pacific Flying Fox (*Pteropus tonganus*) - we saw a handful on the Duff Islands, huge numbers at Vanikoro where many were roosting in a big tree, and then large numbers in the Banks Island where they were transiting over the sea between Vanua Lava and Kwatea Island.

Vanikoro Flying Fox (*Pteropus tuberculatus*) - we saw just 2 of this virtually unknown species, that was in fact feared to have gone extinct until we relocated it here a couple years back. We have seen much larger numbers in our other visits!



One of the most exciting moments of the trip was watching this White-bellied Sea Eagle catch and carry away a Great Flying Fox. Copyright Rand Rudland.

Emballonuridae - Sheathtail Bats

Lesser Sheathtail-Bat (*Emballonura nigrescens*) - just 1 seen flying around on Nissan atoll - we normally see a lot more!

Rhinolopus - Horseshoe Bats

New Guinea Horseshoe Bat (*Rhinolopus euryotis*) - Jane skipped the birding on New Britain and went on the town tour of Rabaul where she gripped us off by photographing this species in the Japanese caves.

Vespertilionidae - Evening Bats

??**Large Melanesian Bentwing-Bat** (*Miniopterus propitristis*) - a couple of large micro-bats flying around in the late afternoon on Nendo were thought to probably be this species, although it is generally considered to be uncommon.

Delphinidae - Oceanic Dolphins

False Killer Whale (*Pseudorca crassidens*) - we observed a group of about 10 racing along as we sailed off Tetepare.

Indo-pacific Bottlenose Dolphin (*Tursiops aduncus*) - a group of 10 came charging in to the bow just minutes after we first set off from Madang. These would be the only ones of the trip.

Spinner Dolphin (*Stenella longirostris*) - with all the choppy sea conditions, this was not a great trip for observing cetaceans. The Spinners, however, put on a good shows for us. First seen was a huge pod of about 500 at sea off Madang. At Tetepare we had a large group interacting with the zodiacs for quite a while and also a few leaping around the ship. More sightings were had near Nendo. In the Banks Island we had a group again interacting with zodiacs while we had snorkelers in the water and a lucky few got to see them underwater! Finally we had some bowriding on our last evening off Ambryn.



Spinner Dolphin. Copyright Rand Rudland

Sirenidae - Dugongs

Dugong (*Dugong dugon*) - a great surprise on our last trip when we had fabulous views of 3 Dugong which comprised a lone animal plus a cow and calf. They were a bit wary of the boats but approached quite closely for a while!

AND A FEW MORE PHOTOS!

This trip is not just about birds - the area is part of the Pacific triangle and the underwater life here is the most diverse on earth. We had snorkeling opportunities on most afternoons. Equally, the cultural diversity is unparalleled and each island brings unique people, dances, song and craftsmanship. We got a good sampling during our time ashore.



Clown Anemonefish. Copyright Meghan Kelly



Banded Sea Krait. Copyright Meghan Kelly



White-eyed Moray. Copyright Meghan Kelly



Longfin Spadefish. Copyright Meghan Kelly



Coral reef. Copyright Meghan Kelly



Common Lionfish. Copyright Meghan Kelly



Nendo Man, Ambryn Dancer and Sepik Sing-Sing. Copyright Rand Rudland





