



Birding Report – Melanesia Discoverer and Secrets of Melanesia 2014.
Written by birding guide Adam Walley

The group began with the first of many early morning starts, successfully dodging rainshowers and seeing a nice selection of birds in the Madang environs. We started out birding some secondary forest along the coast road and had our first of the many pigeons and parrots that are a highlight of Melanesian birding including Zoe's and Pinon Imperial Pigeon, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Eclectus Parrot, Western Black-capped Lory, Red-flanked and Coconut Lorikeet and Buff-faced Pygmy Parrot - the latter as usual only seen zipping overhead. Some Channel-billed Cuckoos uttered their raucous calls as they flew overhead. Forest Kingfisher sat out in the open but Yellow-billed Kingfisher stayed well hidden in the canopy. Moustached Treeswifts perched on utility wires were admired. Golden Mynas, Hooded Butcherbirds and the north coast endemic Black-browed Triller all gave good views as they visited fruiting trees but sadly the hoped for Lesser Bird of Paradise was heard only. A White-bellied Thicket-fantail performed remarkably well for this normally skulking species. We also had a perched pair of Variable Goshawk, a displaying pair of Pacific Baza that landed on an open snag and three species of kite -Whistling, Black and Brahminy. After quite a run around, the much-wanted Grand Mannikins finally sat up and perched long enough for all to see. A short stop to the mission ponds made a mockery of our earlier efforts to see the Grand Mannikins as small flocks of them perched out in the open here for as long as we wanted and were even joined by a few Chestnut-breasted Mannikin. The recently split Tricolored Grebe was also a nice find and Comb-crested Jacanas were remarkably tame here. A final stop at the Madang lily-pond produced a perched Orange-bellied Fruit Dove.

A White-bellied Sea Eagle flew right over the Spirit of Enderby as we departed Madang, sending us on our way. The afternoon was one of the few chances on the trip for some seabirding and we recorded a good number of northern migrant Red-necked Phalarope and *longipennis* Common Tern. We also saw our first tropical seabirds - Lesser Frigatebird, Brown Booby, Brown Noddy, Black Noddy, Sooty Tern and surprisingly large numbers of Bridled Tern. A mixed pod of cetaceans included 4 bow-riding Indopacific Bottlenose Dolphin and many Short-finned Pilot Whales, several males of which were logging near the ship.

Early morning we were heading into the mouth of the Sepik River for a zodiac cruise along the shores of the main river. Large numbers of Whiskered Terns fed around the flotsam in the mouth of the river and were joined by smaller numbers of Great Crested and Little Terns. Several species of heron lined the banks - mostly Great and Little Egret but also lots of Pied Heron and a very impressive tally of four Great-billed Heron. White-bellied Sea Eagles showed very well. Pigeons and parrots were surprisingly scarce this year although there were still lots of Orange-fronted Fruit Dove

and Pinon and Torresian Imperial Pigeon. We only recorded 2 Collared Imperial Pigeon - where were they all? We also saw our only Red-cheeked Parrot of the trip and several Eclectus Parrot. Passerines were generally quite hard to find although we did manage to find Dwarf Longbill, Black-browed Triller and Yellow-faced Myna. A skulking Greater Black Coucal showed to some but the New Guinea Scrubfowl calling in the sago never came close enough.

The following morning saw us closing in on Bipi Island with 4 Red-footed Boobies roosting on the mast probably waiting for us to flush up some flying fish. The tropical seas were typically quiet although we did see one of our only Great Frigatebirds of the trip. Following a morning's snorkelling excursion we spent the afternoon on tiny Pai Island. After a memorable welcome we had a chance to explore the island see the first of many super tramp or small island specialists we would see on this voyage. Perhaps the most common bird on the island is the rarely seen Bismarck Black Myzomela and squeaking just about anywhere produced good views of this bird. Other birds around included Mackinlay's Cuckoo Dove, Island Imperial Pigeon, Beach Kingfisher, Island Monarch and Shining Flycatcher.

Next up was an early morning start on Manus Island and the short drive up to Rossun village the home of the legendary Superb Pitta. After more than an hour of sliding around on forest trails and finding nothing we were ready to move on to something else when our local guide Aaron reported hearing a distant bird. Some more scrambling around and everyone could hear the bird and then it actually responded to the tape vocally, if not visually! Two hours later we finally spotted it in the canopy and everyone who had stuck it out was rewarded with a view of this appropriately named bird - surely one of the most wanted and most difficult birds to see in the world! What an amazing success given the limited time we had available! Next up we headed in to the nearby rubber plantation and were soon admiring the shy Nicobar Pigeon perched up in the scope. Success again! The rain then set in but we had a convenient shelter to hide under and resumed birding afterwards getting good views of endemic Chauka or Manus Friarbird and the very distinctive Manus Cuckooshrike. Meek's Pygmy Parrots zipped by frequently, but were never seen perched. Our first Bismarck White-eyes were also observed in the canopy and we saw our only Bismarck Whistler of the trip. Pied Cuckoo-Dove showed remarkably well, sitting out in the open for all to see in the scope and then actually flying toward us and landing just in front of us in a low bush. Other birds seen included our first Superb Fruit Dove, many Island Imperial Pigeon, Coconut Lorikeets, lots of White-rumped Swiftlet and a single Northern Fantail. At least a couple Roseate Terns were in the Lorengau harbour, potentially a species previously unreported on the island. During the afternoon's snorkel excursion off little Hawei Island Daphne explored the small island and reported an excellent bunch of birds including Manus Monarch, more Nicobar Pigeons and Bismarck Black Myzomelas and even an apparent Atoll Starling.

The next day saw us heading ashore for a rare visit to Mussau Island where we hiked to the waterfall and back. Great Egret, Common Greenshank and Little Tern greeted us at the landing - the former two probably new species for the island. The forests were relatively quiet but we still encountered a great selection of birds. Foremost was the Mussau Monarch which we encountered several times and had great views of thus joining a very select club of birders who have ever seen this species! We

again failed to find Mussau Fantail - either it is shy or absent from this area! Most people had some views of the "Russet-tailed" Thrush which seems to be reasonably common in this area. Numerous Island Monarchs and Bismarck Black Myzomelas were encountered and Blue-faced Parrotfinch showed very well. A nice bonus was seeing and hearing a pair of "Island" Leaf Warblers, the local race here is distinctive and this is one of the few islands where this bird occurs at sea level. Yellow-bibbed Fruit Dove was common but shy although everyone eventually got a scope view at this stunning bird. Stephan's Dove were seen darting across the trail on a few occasions but only if you were looking in the right direction! During the afternoon we made a quick exploration of Little Mussau Island which had more Mussau and Island Monarchs, Bismarck Black Myzomela, Beach Kingfisher and the distinctive race of Collared Kingfisher that has quite a bit of black in it. We also had a nice perched Knob-billed Fruit Dove here of the distinctive and rarely seen *inferior* race.

Next up was a rather ambitious day trip to the Lelet Plateau in central New Ireland. After a lengthy drive along the good coast road we started climbing up with the vehicle and birded the patchy forest along the Limbin Road. Almost immediately we found a pair of Paradise Drongo - arguably the best bird on the island and surely the best looking member of its family and we could admire their tail streamers to full effect as they crossed the road over our heads! We also scoped up some excellent Knob-billed Fruit Dove and a camp of Great Flying Fox. Higher up the road a small group of White-backed Woodswallows perched out on open branches and were much admired through the scope. Black Imperial Pigeons seemed unusually common with pairs flying around regularly and we tallied 16 for the morning. Near the top of the road is some of the best forest and here we scoped up some excellent Moustached Treeswifts and found some good passerines including nice looks at Black-tailed Monarch, Red-banded Flowerpecker, Red Myzomela and Bismarck White-eye. Returning down the mountain we had our only White-necked Coucal and more Paradise Drongo. Other birds along the road for the morning included White-bellied Sea Eagle, Slender-billed and Bar-tailed Cuckoo-Dove, Superb Fruit Dove, Red-knobbed imperial Pigeon, Red-flanked Lorikeet, Song Parrot, Barred and White-bellied Cuckooshrike, Varied Triller, Golden Monarch, Shining Flycatcher, Bismarck Crow, Golden-headed Cisticola, Long-tailed Myna, and Black Sunbird. Returning back towards Kavieng we checked out a couple areas for Forbe's Mannikin, with no success. We stopped for a Grey-tailed Tattler and then stopped again for some Pacific Golden Plover in a soccer field. To our surprise there were several Sharp-tailed Sandpiper with the plovers and even better a Little Curlew showed exceptionally well - potentially a new bird for the island. A final stop at the airport, in the rain, produced good numbers of endemic Hunnstein's Mannikins. We then had a lengthy zodiac ride to meet up with the ship and once aboard set sail through some beautiful channels seeing impressive numbers of Black Noddy and a pod of Spinner Dolphins.

The next morning we were away again to access the hills, this time of New Britain. Departing from Rabaul we made our way up the Wild Dog Mine access road. Our first endemic was the New Britain Friarbird and a Melanesian Megapode was glimpsed. The habitat along the road was heavily degraded but it did provide access right up to 950 meters above sea level. There were enough fruiting trees around that there were good numbers of pigeon present. We had excellent views of a lone Finsch's

Imperial Pigeon and more distant views of a perched Black. Good numbers of Yellowish and Red-knobbed Imperial Pigeons rounded out the four species encountered and we also saw Knob-billed Fruit Dove and Bar-tailed Cuckoo-Dove. A highlight was scoping up some endemic Blue-eyed Cockatoo and we also encountered our only Purple-bellied Lory of the trip. Other parrots seen included Coconut and Red-flanked Lorikeet, Song Parrot and numerous Eclectus Parrot. Violaceous Coucals were heard calling a couple of times but these heavy skulkers never showed. Similarly a Red-bellied Pitta was only heard. Endemic Black-bellied Myzomela were fairly numerous in the flowering trees and we also recorded Barred Cuckooshrike, Varied Triller, Spangled Drongo, Bismarck Crow, Bismarck White-eye, Long-tailed Myna, Red-banded Flowerpecker and Black Sunbird. Just before departing the rarely encountered Black Honey Buzzard soared over the forest, but it did not linger. The afternoon was a snorkeling afternoon in the Duke of York Islands.

The next morning we were up early and chumming on the slim chance of a Beck's Petrel. The only reward for our efforts was a distant Wedge-tailed Shearwater and Sooty and Common Terns. Heading ashore on remote Nissan Atoll we were greeted with a sea-eagle dance and there was a White-bellied Sea Eagle flying around! During a walk we quickly came to grips with the island's two very range-restricted birds - Louisiades White-eye and Atoll Starling - both of which are common on the island. The other birds seen were Brahminy Kite, Variable Goshawk, Grey-tailed Tattler, Common Sandpiper, Yellow-bibbed Fruit Dove, Island Imperial Pigeon, Coconut and Red-flanked Lorikeet, Glossy Swiftlet, Collared and Beach Kingfisher, Common Cicadabird, Island Monarch and Metallic Starling. Of greatest ornithological interest was back in the village a captive *masculina* Bronze Ground Dove with a striking red eye ring, very different from the published description!

Our final stop in PNG saw us in Bougainville, a political part of PNG but a biological part of the Solomon Islands so we were ready to enjoy a completely new avifauna. Solomons Cockatoos greeted us at the landing and once in our vehicle we headed up to nearly 1,000 meters above sea level on the Panguna Mine Road. Reasonably good low montane forest is accessible here and we spent the morning walking down the hill to 700 meters. Non passerines were distinctly absent although we did have some nice encounters with Blyth's Hornbill, Mackinlay's Cuckoo-Dove and Red-knobbed Imperial Pigeon. Passerines on the other hand were rather prolific and we encountered several flocks, one particularly good one that held great numbers of birds and stayed in one place for about half an hour. The Red-capped Myzomela was one of our first birds we saw and they showed very well. Midget Flowerpeckers zipped by regularly and after chasing around a few singleton Yellow-throated White-eyes we bumped into some large flocks of them that showed very well, quite an attractive white-eye! Good views of a Grey-throated White-eye at 800 meters was quite unexpected and appreciated! Most of the birds were in that one single flock that stayed around for a long time and it included a well-performing Bougainville Monarch along with a briefer Solomons Monarch plus Solomons Cuckooshrikes, stunning Oriole Whistlers and Steel-blue Flycatchers. The recently described Bougainville Bush Warbler whistled his "odedi" tune up a favored gully but could not be enticed to come into view. We were more fortunate with the reclusive and almost tail-less Bougainville Crow as they were quite vocal and seen on multiple occasions both in flight and perched. A very distant

pair of Brown-winged Starlings were scoped up and just before we reboarded the vehicles to return to Arawa a Solomons Sea Eagle obligingly came along and soared right over our heads. Returning out to the vessel there was a Little Tern in the harbour and the afternoon was spent being entertained by cultural dancers.

The next morning we were clearing into the Solomon Islands and boarding the zodiacs for a cruise up the wonderfully birdy Sui River. One of the first things we saw was Pacific Black Ducks. We also watched an Osprey successfully catch a fish and as we entered the mangroves tallied Brahminy Kite, Striated Heron, Common Sandpiper, Red-knobbed and Island Imperial Pigeon and impressive numbers of Cardinal Lory. Where the mangroves started to give way to riparian forest we encountered a different suite of species - Pacific Baza, our first Claret-breasted Fruit Dove, many Solomons Cockatoos, many more Cardinal Lory, some Song Parrots, several Eclectus Parrot including a pair coming in and out of their nest hole, Moustached Treeswift, Blyth's Hornbill, numerous Red-capped Myzomela and Yellow-throated White-eyes in a completely different setting than yesterday's montane forest birds, our only North Melanesian Cuckooshrikes of the trip, our first White-billed Crow and some good views of Brown-winged Starling at their large nest structures. A Little Kingfisher darted in front of the boat but best of all were the pair of Ultramarine Kingfisher that performed so well by displaying on a low branch not far away from us - what an encounter! Letting the heat of the day pass us by we returned in the afternoon for a second cruise up the river and found many birds sitting out on exposed perches and ended with some terrific views of Beach Kingfisher.

Another early start saw us heading up into the hills of Kolombangara to the Imburano Lodge at 400 masl. We gathered up at the balcony and enjoyed the terrific view over the valley and up to the volcanic peak of the island and spent an hour scoping up several great birds. Best of all were the numerous Pale Mountain Pigeon that sat out in full view. We also scoped up Solomons Cockatoo, Cardinal Lory, Song Parrot and our first Pied Goshawk. An active flock in the parking lot consumed another half hour - we weren't making it very far but seeing lots of great birds! That flock produced excellent views of Crimson-rumped Myzomela, Solomons White-eye, Steel-blue Flycatcher and Barred Cuckooshrike. Walking along the main road it seemed like every tree had a noisy flock of Cardinal Lory in it - there were hundreds about! Much briefer views were had of tiny Finsch's Pygmy Parrot and the infrequently seen Meek's Lorikeet. After constantly hearing their quavering whistles, we finally found a group of White-capped Monarch which performed wonderfully and were joined by an Oriole Whistler. It had been a great morning and then we decided to venture into the forest interior. The forest here is very impressive but the birding is tough in there and we didn't bump into any flocks although we did hear the Kolombangara Monarch. Saying farewell to this lovely place we headed back down the hill and spent the afternoon snorkeling.

Next morning we were heading ashore at the Arnavon Islands. After watching a green turtle get tagged and released we were privileged to watch 105 hawksbill turtles emerge from their nests and make their first swim - they are incredibly cute and we can only hope some of them survive! Turning our attention back to birds we came across a wader flock that was very impressive by Melanesian standards - 9 species including 4 Beach Thick-knee showing well, Pacific Golden Plover, Grey-tailed Tattler, Common

Sandpiper, Greater and Lesser Sandplover, Black-bellied Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit and Terek Sandpiper - not bad! The only passerines noted on the island were Red-capped Myzomela and Island Monarch. A few people glimpsed Melanesian Megapode and we had planned to land on a nearby island where they are easy to see but the weather quickly deteriorated and we had to abort that plan - although good views of Black-naped Tern and a very close breaching Manta Ray were compensation. The afternoon provided a final chance for seawatching and there were quite a few birds about - if mostly distant. Top seabirds observed included 2 Tropical Shearwater and the rarely seen Grey-backed Tern, a massive flock of over 500 frigatebirds (apparently Lessers), a good tally of 60 Brown Booby, plus the usual Black and Brown Noddy and Sooty Tern.

The next excursion of the trip was another early start and a drive up to Mt Austen in the hills behind Honiara. We had a good morning tallying many species we were now familiar with and added a few new species. Pied Goshawk perched in the scope showing its red eye very well and Oriental Hobby crossed the road multiple times. Yellow-bibby Lories were seen well in flight on several occasions and Buff-headed Coucals clambered around in the vines. Our luck with Ultramarine Kingfisher continued as a bird sat out in the open for as long as we wanted. The endemic Black-headed Myzomela was initially frustrating but eventually cooperated giving good views. Solomons Cuckooshrike flitted through the treetops and passerine flocks held Chestnut-bellied Monarch, Steel-blue Flycatcher and Oriole Whistler. White-billed Crows were more vocal than normal, but not easy to see and the best most people managed was a brief glimpse. We returned to Honiara and farewelled part of the group, while the rest reboarded the ship for the second leg of the journey.

Our next port of call was the southern end of Santa Isabel Island. We did not have a birding excursion planned but did an impromptu zodiac cruise where we saw our first Nankeen Night Heron of the trip and had good views of Lesser Frigatebird, Great Crested Tern, Common Tern and Pacific Reef Heron. We made an afternoon landing at Lepi village which was primarily for cultural purposes but quickly realised that the village and its vicinity was a haven for birds and to our delight offered some of the finest birding of the trip. Cardinal Lories and Solomons Cockatoos were abundant and fearless in the village. Yet another Ultramarine Kingfisher perched out in the open - right in the village! Best of all the White-billed Crows that had given us such a hard time were common and sitting out in the open here giving fantastic views of their pink bills!

Back to early morning starts and we were ashore at daybreak at Atori village and boarding our transportation for the trans-island road through northern Malaita. Though deforestation is heavy along the road, it is still quite birdy and as we drove along we saw numerous Cardinal and Yellow-bibbed Lory. A stop in some secondary forest quickly yielded excellent views of the endemic Malaita White-eye, along with Chestnut-bellied Monarch. We made a few other stops along the road and recorded Superb and Claret-breasted Fruit Dove in the same fruiting tree, our last Solomons Cockatoo and Blyth's Hornbill of the trip, Song Parrot, Barred Cuckooshrike, Steel-blue Flycatcher, Midget Flowerpecker, Long-tailed Myna and the interesting local race of Brown-winged Starling. A stop in a steep well-forested valley turned up great looks at Solomons Sea Eagle and a dark Pied Goshawk plus a surprise Metallic Pigeon. Returning to the ship in the heat of the day there were Common and Little Tern in the harbour, the latter

potentially a new bird for the island. Heading out to sea in the evening there were impressive numbers (over a thousand) of Black Noddy.

The next morning was an exploratory morning at Star Harbour on Makira Island. We started out with a zodiac cruise through an area of mangroves. It was rather rainy during the cruise but we could shelter under the mangroves and enjoyed watching a Nankeen Night Heron walking around on the mangrove roots. As the weather improved we recorded our first Makira endemics - Sooty Myzomela and Makira Honeyeater. Impressive numbers of the spectacular Duchess Lorikeet were flying overhead, sadly they were so high up that it was difficult to get on them, let alone see their amazing colors. A Bar-tailed Godwit was an unexpected find on the mudflats and hundreds of Lesser Frigatebirds soared overhead. We then decided to land at Namugha village and explore a trail leading off behind the village. The birding was slow but steady and we ticked off endemics as we went - fantastic views of Makira Honeyeater and Sooty Myzomela, a brief view of White-headed Fruit Dove, then good views of Makira Starling and the recently split Makira Cicadabird. Makira Flycatchers were heard but could not be enticed in for a view and Mottled Flowerpeckers were heard a couple times but only seen zipping past. The rare Chestnut-bellied Imperial Pigeon were common by voice but only provided frustrating flybys until several started landing in the open in the top of a tree. By the time we left the flock had 13 pigeons in it - a fantastic sighting! A shy Melanesian Megapode was also enticed into view and emerged on the trail for a good view for some. The afternoon featured another mangrove zodiac cruise although we ended up getting a downpour and no new birds - good effort anyways!

We now had a morning at sea as we headed into the rarely visited Santa Cruz Islands. A few Tropical Shearwaters showed quite well but 2 Magnificent Petrels were more unexpected and have rarely if ever been reported in the Solomons - perhaps they are breeding on Tinakula? We arrived at Nendo Island and headed ashore in the mid-day heat at Lata being greeted by our first Polynesian birds - Polynesian Triller and Pacific Imperial Pigeon. We drove to Noipe village and after a raucous welcome by the locals explored some forest in the vicinity. Sadly heavy rain affected our birding here but we still managed some views of the rarely seen endemic Santa Cruz White-eye. We also encountered White-throated Whistler, the very distinct race of Rufous Fantail, and some shy Cardinal Myzomelas that had avoided the feather catchers. Frugivores were plentiful and included Mackinlay's Cuckoo-Dove, Red-bellied Fruit Dove, lots of Pacific Imperial Pigeon, plus the poorly known Temotu Flying Fox and the widespread Pacific Flying Fox. We counted about 20 Buff-banded Rails walking or running across the roads.

The next morning saw us in the virtually unknown Duff Islands. The morning was spent on the ship and snorkeling and there was a distinct absence of any seabirds in what seemed like an ideal breeding area for them. We did have a small pod of False Killer Whales showing quite well and our first Wandering Tattler of the trip. In the afternoon and high tide we went ashore on the main island of Temauko and during a short exploration of the main village were delighted to find Palm Lorikeets to be common and confiding in the village coconuts - great stuff! Other birds recorded during our short visit were Pacific Emerald Dove, Red-bellied Fruit Dove, Pacific Imperial Pigeon, White-rumped Swiftlet, Collared Kingfisher, Cardinal Myzomela, Polynesian Triller, and White-throated Whistler. There were also quite a few waders around -

Ruddy Turnstones, Common Sandpipers, tattler species, and 2 curlews sitting up in a mangrove got us excited but proved to be Whimbrel!

Our final island to visit in the Solomons was the excellent island of Vanikoro. We headed ashore early for a visit to Usili village and walked the small amount of trails and beach suitable for walking. Within minutes we were watching the Vanikoro Flying Foxes that were feared to have gone extinct until we found them here alive and well in April. Soon after we were enjoying excellent looks at the recently described Vanikoro White-eyes. Their flock was joined by another unique looking "Rufous" Fantail, many Cardinal Myzomela, Polynesian Triller and Melanesian Whistler. We found a couple pairs of the endemic race of Vanikoro Flycatcher although the monarchs that sometimes travel with it were nowhere to be found. The afternoon offered arguably the best snorkeling of the trip as we departed the Solomons.

Early morning saw us in Vanuatu offshore of Vanua Lava in the Banks Island. There was no sign of any Vanuatu Petrel and only 1 distant Magnificent Petrel. However there was a Christmas Shearwater - this is perhaps the first sighting of this Polynesian species in Vanuatu. There was also a few Wedge-tailed Shearwater and a lone Short-tailed Shearwater migrating south. After clearing customs we spent the morning in a failed bid to land along the coast due to heavy wind and swell, so we did have the morning at sea. We failed to find any petrels close in to land but did have great looks at Wedge-tailed Shearwater, Brown Noddy, Sooty Tern and Spinner Dolphin. For the afternoon we took a walk around the village of Sola and found it to be wonderfully birdy. Vanuatu Honeyeaters were waiting for us on the beach - so much easier here than climbing up into the Santo highlands! There were also many Vanuatu White-eyes along with our first Long-tailed Triller, Southern Shrikebill and Melanesian Flycatcher. Several Red-bellied Fruit Dove were seen and a fruiting tree which had a prominently perched Pacific Imperial Pigeon in it eventually proved to have about 25 of the endemic Tanna Fruit Doves in it too - excellent!

The final early morning start had us on Santo Island landing on Champagne Beach and taking the long bumpy ride to the excellent Vathe Conservation area. Along the way we counted impressive numbers of Buff-banded Rail, Pacific Emerald Dove and heard an extraordinary number of Melanesian Whistlers through the bus windows! Arriving at the village we went for an extended walk in the lovely lowland forests. We were soon enjoying mixed flocks of our first Grey Fantail and Streaked Fantail, Fan-tailed Gerygone, South Melanesian Cuckooshrike, Silvereye, plus Vanuatu White-eye Cardinal Myzomela, Long-tailed Triller, Melanesian Whistler, Southern Shrikebill, Melanesian Flycatcher and a brief Island Thrush. The endemic and beautiful Vanuatu Kingfisher performed especially well with several opportunities to view perched birds including one that came down and landed at eye level - an unusual event for this species! Buff-bellied Monarch took some looking but waiting at a favored spot for a long time we finally came away with terrific views of this - one of the best looking birds in Melanesia. The Vanuatu Megapode was, predictably enough, only heard and after a lovely lunch along the beach we farewelled this excellent spot. The afternoon featured a zodiac cruise to a Blue Hole which was notable primarily for its ropeswing and swimming but also the impressive numbers of Vanuatu Flying Fox.

The final day of the expedition was spent in the Maskelyne Islands. We visited an island for a small nambas cultural performance in the morning and were pleased to

find Grey-eared Honeyeater to be abundant on the island along with good numbers of Red-bellied Fruit Dove. The afternoon was spent exploring another of the Maskelyne Islands although it was not very birdy so we retreated to the beach for a relaxing afternoon and a small but impressive Helmut Gurnard swimming in the shallows.

The expedition ended in Vila with 241 species, an impressive tally and a unique cross-section of the one of the world's most poorly known avifaunas.

The next [Melanesia Discoverer](#) from Madang, PNG to Honiara, the Solomon Islands departs on 11 October 2015, berths priced from \$6 995 plus on board Discovery Fund of \$600. Birding Supplement is \$500.

[Secrets of Melanesia](#) departs from Honiara to Port Vila, Vanuatu on 23rd October – 5th November. Berths priced from \$5995 plus land fees of \$600. Birding Supplement is \$450. All prices in USD.

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