

*A short bird, paradise and people-watching trip to -*

# Papua New Guinea

16<sup>th</sup> September to 7<sup>th</sup> October 2001

Barry-Sean Virtue and Steve Anyon-Smith

*A few observations, a diary, and a bird and mammal list*

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## **Our Itinerary**

Lae – 3 nights

Lababia Wildlife Management Area – 3 nights

Goroka – 4 nights

Crater Mountain Wildlife Management Area – 4 nights

Madang – 5 nights

Kau Reserve – 2 nights



## People

### Locals

Much has been said or written of the dangers of travel in PNG on account of the rascally nature of the local people. I don't doubt that there must be significant person and property crime in the country. Many houses and towns looked like prisons. The security industry is doing well.

Barry-Sean and I found only friendly, welcoming, softly spoken, beautiful and pleasant people. Those in the coastal areas of Lae and Madang were particularly charming. At one stage we resorted to asking the most desperate looking characters we could find whether they were "raskols", only to be greeted with big grins, an open hand and a willingness to discuss their world, or more likely the Aussie football results. In my experience drawn from travel to several of the world's poorer countries, the people of PNG are at the top of the chart for friendliness.

I wondered how many foreign travellers are killed in PNG each year compared to the number of British backpackers killed each year in Australia?

### Ex-pats

There is a considerable, but possibly shrinking ex-pat community in PNG. Those we met were great company, full of information, and although they faced the frustration of dealing with the local bureaucracy, unmotivated and poorly paid workers, the climate, and various other bits and pieces I'd rather not have on a daily basis, they're still there!

Once more, they were helpful and accommodating.

### Religious Zealots

Religious zealots were numerous, varied, obvious and (mostly) extreme. It is my considered opinion that they should be the first against the wall come the revolution. I failed to note any redeeming qualities at all.



### **Weather**

Although I thought rain was illegal on a holiday, apparently this doesn't apply to PNG. Don't believe anything you read in guidebooks or told to you by friends. The weather



proved reliably unreliable. Humidity, however, could be counted upon. The locals appeared to be immune to the weather.

## Insects

Any large insects have been hunted down and eaten. The smaller ones like mozzies and those bloody things that want to take up residence in your eyes were more of an inconvenience than a reason to stay at home. Leeches were rare, small and odd colours.

## Food

We had no problems whatsoever with the food. We ate anything. This included food sold at the places where only locals ate, pies, water in creeks, unknown things handed to us by smiling locals, airline food, and the small flying things accidentally ingested by trying unsuccessfully to take up residence in your eyes (see note re insects above).

## Beer

Beer was good. Sometimes even better than that. SP (South Pacific) Lager was the most popular and not a bad drop.



## Transport

There was room for improvement here. The public motor vehicles (PMVs), which were mainly minibuses, were curious in their behaviour, even for the third world. Don't expect them to stop once they start their journey for sissy things like toilet breaks or to buy food, even if the journey lasts several days. Or they seemed like several days anyway.

Most bizarrely, we had an internal air flight cancelled on us because the plane was needed for “urgent missionary work”. If missionary work is necessary (and it isn’t) it surely couldn’t be more urgent than our burning need to be in a forest!

There are no taxis outside of Port Moresby, and most of those would not be recognised as such in any event.

Walking or “go by leg” proved quite reliable.

## Costs

PNG is not as cheap to travel in as one might expect. Accommodation in towns is relatively expensive. However fresh food, “public” transport, guide services and accommodation in villages is very inexpensive.

During the time of our holiday the Kina was worth 56 Australian cents or 28 US cents. A stubbie of beer at the Goroka Bowlers was K3 and at the Bird of Paradise Hotel in Goroka - K4.



## **Wildlife**

### Birds

Scared, and deservedly so. Even the really little ones are frightened. The birds in South East Asia are really tame compared to this lot. Having said that, there are still a lot of birds in the forests of PNG. They are incredibly beautiful and varied. The bird of paradise display sites generally guarantee good views of these, the world's most beautiful things. Otherwise pray for mixed feeding flocks and stay with them as long as you can. I had one mixed flock with over twenty species and with different birds dropping in and out all the time. Whatever you do, don't point at them or yell out for your mates to come over to have a look, or they will vanish!

### Mammals

There aren't any. Well, there are, but you'll be very lucky to see them unless you spend a lot of time at night far away from established villages. We didn't do this but aside from some sea monsters, flying foxes, unidentifiable microbats, and the odd nervous bandicoot or rodent, don't buy a notebook specifically for your mammal sightings.

### Reptiles

Not too many of these were obvious either. There were lots of small and often colourful skinks, a few neat looking geckos, one fantastic large green tree monitor that attracted every nearby bird, one tiny snake and that was about it. I assume they've gone the same way as anything else remotely edible for humans in areas within a month's walk of habitation.

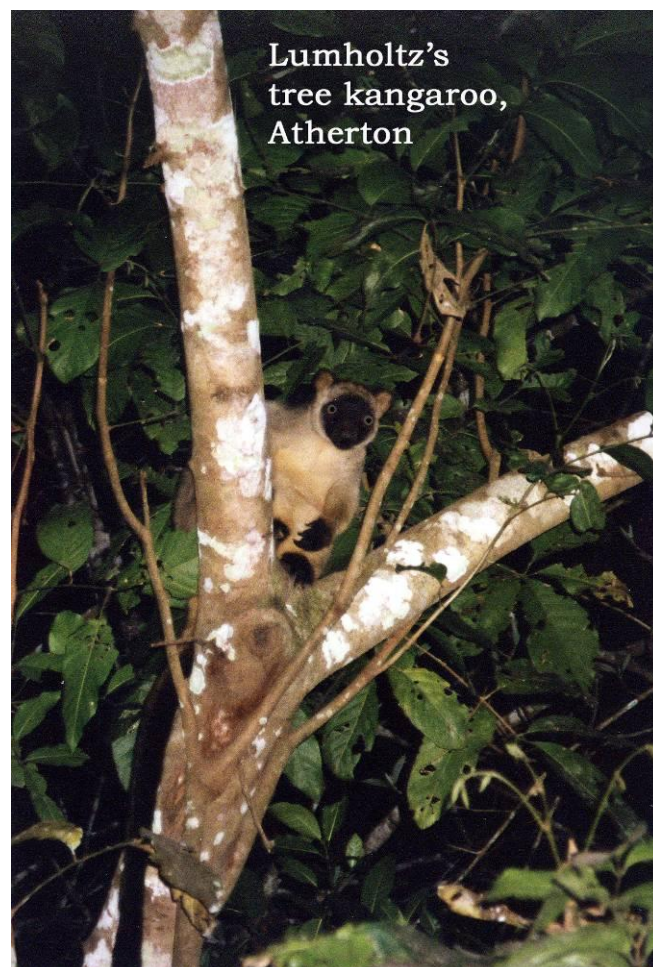
### Vegetation

This stuff is often less edible, has a tendency to aggregate over vast areas and is more inclined to stay in one spot (unless pursued by malaysians or japanese – my lack of use of capitals is deliberate). Orchids were a real highlight - PNG has more than any other country. Some of the fruiting figs were amazing in terms of the manner of their fruiting. The forests on Mt Gahavasuka near Goroka were as varied and attractive as I've seen outside of the cloud forests of South America.



## Diary

We had a day or two at Cairns on the way.....



## **Day 1 – Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> September 2001**

We left Cairns at 1130 and arrived at Port Moresby at 1255. On the way we marvelled that PNG locals could drink up to eight bottles of beer on such a short flight. The reasonable consequence was an untidy mass of dark-skinned pissed idiots exiting the plane.

Young Barry-Sean-Sean and I considered a taxi trip to the Port Moresby Botanic Gardens but the ever-present threat of being raped, stabbed and eaten by the locals kept us cowering in the domestic terminal. We made a start on our bird list by the presence of Australian pratincoles, Torresian crows and cattle egrets languishing on the relative safety of the airport runway.

We left Port Moresby at 1800 and arrived at Lae at 1845. During the flight I sat with a charming Filipina named Nelia who worked as a dentist in Lae, and an equally charming local guy, Oscar, who gave us a lift into town from the airport when our scheduled transport failed to materialise.

We stayed at Rainforest Habitat, a “value added” kind of zoo cum research facility in the grounds of the University of Technology in Lae. Habitat offers very reasonable accommodation and is managed somehow by Oz ex-pat couple Peter and Dianne Clark. I felt like death with a dose of The Dreaded Nunga but Barry-Sean leapt at the opportunity of downing some cleansing ales with our hosts.

## **Day 2 – Monday 17<sup>th</sup> September 2001**

Peter had us up at 0530 and off birdwatching with a very competent and friendly local birder, Elliot Harding. Elliot took us to a few sites around Lae. Most of the forest has been trashed but nevertheless we saw some good things, many of which we were not to see again. Highlights for me were yellow-faced myna, New Guinea scrubfowl and red-cheeked parrot. It transpired that my favourite PNG birds were generally quite common.

I was a little confused at the number of local guys named “Noel”. I later realized that Elliot was saying “morning now” in “tok pisin”.

We had a tour of “Habitat” - a real achievement for the Clarks and the others that kept it going. Well worth a look if you’re in Lae.

We adjourned for cool drinks to the Lae Yacht Club, or, as Barry-Sean preferred to call it, the “Raj Yacht Club”. We were thus firmly introduced into some Lae sub-culture. There were really friendly ex-pats on the inside, with violent and dangerous criminals on the outside, perhaps. It’s worth going for a drink at this fine establishment if only to admire the charm and beauty of the local women employed by the club (I’m serious).

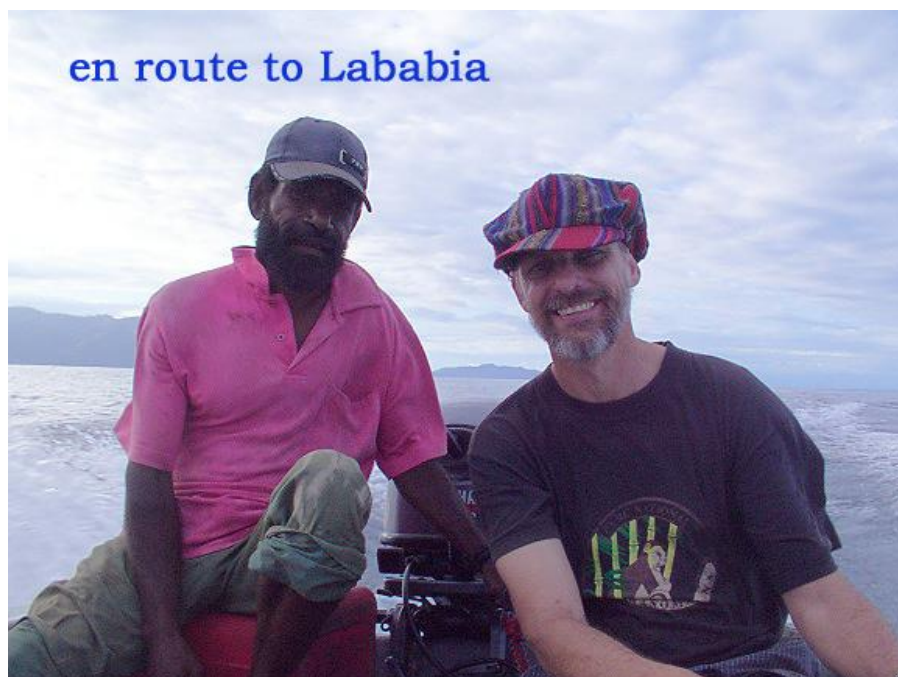




four good reasons  
to visit Lae Yacht  
Club

### Day 3 – Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> September 2001

The Clarks suggested we might wish to go to Lababia Wildlife Management Area, a couple of hours down the coast by banana boat. I'd read about this place so we decided to go and spend three nights there. Our 1300 boat arrived on time at 1520 (you learn these things) and off we sped in the company of breast-feeding mums, friendly to the point of nuisance locals, and stunning coastal scenery. We were rapt to see a few pods of short-snouted spinner dolphins, various terns (mainly gull-billed), magnificent and lesser frigatebirds and lots of jumping tuna. Only the occasional boat was seen, and judging by the flocks of seabirds everywhere, the fish appeared to be abundant.



en route to Lababia

The guesthouse at Lababia was great, the people were amongst the most charming I've ever met, and now a week after I'm back home, it's this village I think of when I think of PNG. The community functioned as a community should. People were recognized for their skills, community ex-pats with higher education were returning to help, and most importantly, they had a strong environmental ethic. We asked a number of people the same questions and got the same answers. These guys caught a lot of fish, but only kept what they could eat on the day, and they left most of the critters in the forest alone. They admitted to hunting pigs (that shouldn't be there anyway) and cassowaries. They didn't hunt cuscus, tree kangaroos or fat birds. We saw palm cockatoos, hornbills, great cuckoo-doves and other tasty things right behind the village. Leatherback turtles nest on the beaches. They don't eat them either but this wasn't always the case. More on that later.

We paid \$A165 pp for three nights with all meals (which were very good), tours, guides and transport from Lae - great value.



#### **Day 4 – Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> September 2001**

Yesterday we arrived too late to do any birding so we had high expectations for some exciting finds, and as a direct consequence, it pissed down with rain. It stopped at 1000. For 5 minutes. This was enough time for us to get well into the forest to be nice and stranded for when it rained harder than ever. A sensational view of some blue jewel-babblers as they scurried about our feet at an imitation of their call was some compensation.

The rain stopped again late in the afternoon allowing us to see many Raggiana bird-of-paradise (BOP) in their display trees behind the local school, as well as a low flying palm cockatoo and a pair of eclectus parrots.

We travelled by boat to Lababia Island, just offshore. We caught a few mack tuna on the way. A couple of thousand frigatebirds came to roost on the island late each afternoon, providing quite a spectacular sight. Black-capped lories, various fruit-doves and imperial



pigeons were also commonly seen, as were grey crows. New Guinea scrubfowl were present but we failed to see any.

The threat of rain stopped my cuscus hunt along the beach but I did get very close and stunning views of the very rare Papuan hawk-owl behind the accommodation. I also scared some kind of wallaby without seeing it.





## Day 5 – Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> September 2001

Not raining!!!

Our guide, Levi, a skilled and pleasant chap, took us for a 0600 paddle along a small river that runs behind the village to the north of the accommodation. This was possibly the most prolific area for birds we found on our trip. It was here that we got the impression that any hunting that might go on in this area must be on a very small scale indeed. There were a variety of different parrots, all in large flocks, fat pigeons like the great cuckoo-dove, six sightings of rufous-bellied kookaburra, hornbills, kingfishers, Raggiana BOPs and lots of little things like white-bellied thicket-fantail. I'd love to do that little boat trip again.

We walked unguided on the trail that leads into the forest directly behind the lodge to the David Suzuki Lookout, which is the worst lookout I've seen. Saw several female king BOPs, various monarchs and great views of crinkle-collared manucodes with their chicks.

Many parrots and pigeons roosted close to the lodge late in the afternoon.

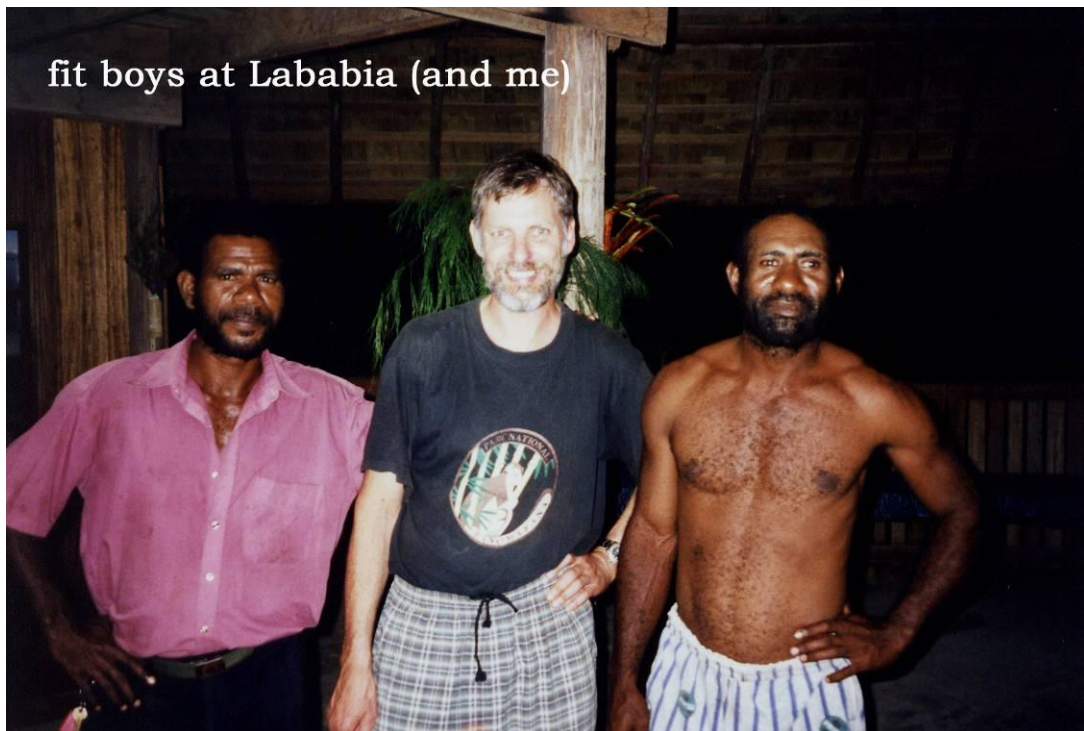
The village drama group performed a "production" called "Lukautim gut torosel" (roughly translated as "look at the poor bloody turtles") in the evening. We had front-row seats for this somewhat bizarre performance. Villagers living to the north and south of Lababia were invited to attend in an attempt to get them involved in leatherback turtle conservation. The life cycle of the turtles was dramatically acted, along with an explanation of the good reasons for their continuing survival. There wasn't a white man in sight except us. It was simply fabulous. Made me think of what a community can achieve. I can't ever remember belonging to a community. I could live in Lababia (well, at least for a while....). Full marks!





Just one thing - if you go to this place make sure that you ask what everything costs from whoever is in charge and don't pay anything to anyone else. Keep all receipts. More than one person asked us for the full cost of everything although we'd paid before leaving Lae. There were no arguments, it just seemed like everyone there was in charge of something or at least they thought that they were.





fit boys at Lababia (and me)

#### **Day 6 – Friday 21<sup>st</sup> September 2001**

Rain. Chatted with June Nero B.A., a lovely 23 year old who had returned to her village to contribute her skills. Her father is the local schoolteacher.

Left in the rain to head back to Lae in the banana boat. Peter and Dianne picked us up from the Yacht Club. Spent a fair part of the rest of day changing traveller's cheques. Horrible things. Never again.



Lababia departure lounge



## Day 7 – Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2001

We caught the Balus Bus to Lae airport for an Airlink service to Goroka. These guys fly in old Brazilian-built Bandierante aircraft. We were met in Goroka by Silas Sutherland, the local cool dude, Aussie, and meeter and greeter for the Crater Mountain Wildlife Management Area. Although we weren't due to fly to Crater Mountain until the next day, Silas said he'd try to get us there straight away. But first we went to meet the US-based wildlife researchers in town. Then we were whisked off to meet Silas's wife Janine, son Oscar and more significantly, their pets. These consisted of a spotted cuscus and a number of Goodfellow's tree kangaroos. The cuscus was very affectionate and big enough to bash up tree kangaroos when they got too close. Unusual pets that were saved from the cooking pots.

Sadly the airstrip at Herowana (our destination at 1100m in Crater Mountain) was fogged in by the time our aircraft was ready for us.

We stayed at the Lutheran Guest House, which cost us K40 per person including breakfast. This was okay except for the resident religious zealots. As the guest house had no liquor license Barry-Sean and I went to the Goroka Bowling Club for drinks. Initially they were reluctant to let us in. No white tourists drink at the Bowlers, in fact we were the first white visitors that weren't married to a local ever to drink there. We were keen to either meet the Gorokans, get the shit kicked out of us, or get mildly intoxicated, and the Bowlers was conveniently close to the guest house. The locals were very pleased to see us and came to shake our hands and explain that we weren't in any danger after all, at least not during daylight hours anyway. Good spot.





### **Day 8 – Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2001**

The very caring Seventh Day Adventist Air Services cancelled our flight, without telling us, as they had “urgent missionary work” to do. I have never heard of anything less likely than urgent missionary work. Had the local missionary ran out of small boys or something?

So back to the Bowlers, then the Palpal Kaikai Bar and Big Pig Pokie Place for lunch. This was where the locals ate and so did we. Lamb flank stew. Yummo. Once more we represented something of a curiosity for the locals.

Ed, a representative of the New York Zoo, and our new hero, picked us up at 1430 for a birding trip to Mt Gahavasuka. This 2450m high mountain is 11km from Goroka and accessed by a very poor road indeed. Actually it was one of the worst roads I’ve seen and I’ve seen a few. Never mind, within five minutes of arrival we’d seen male Princess Stephanie’s astrapia, a male superb BOP and many male King of Saxony BOPs. A few minutes later and brown sicklebill was added to our growing list. I was starting to feel much better about the world. The forest is mercifully low, incredibly diverse and structured in such a way that you get reasonable views of the birds, even those in the canopy. No people to see either. We also saw spotted and fantailed berrypeckers and a host of very large honeyeaters. Picked up 18 lifers in three hours.

Jack Daniels got an airing.

### **Day 9 – Monday 24<sup>th</sup> September 2001**

The seventh day adventist terminal at Goroka airport is trendy. It consists of a number of shipping containers welded together. All morning was spent (*read: wasted*) trying to find a “plane” to take us to Herowana village. At 1215 we finally left. A very disconcerting prayer



for the safety of the plane and its cargo was delivered by the pilot of an aged Cessna 340. One of our fellow passengers was Avit, the Herowana village head-man.



The K100 per person flight was brief and spectacular. We just managed to get over a high pass before it fogged in for the day. We were met by a fair proportion of the villagers after we bounced along the grass, mercifully cleared of pigs and such. Joshua, Avit's son, well one of many actually - having three wives does that, took me for a half hour walk in the forest before the regular afternoon deluge. We saw ten new birds in that time.

And that was it. Rain and more rain. We were calling the Jack Daniels "John" out of respect for the locals who were "dry". John was called for on this occasion.





### **Day 10 – Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> September 2001**

The promise of an exciting day saw us up at 0530 and off to the Raggiana BOP display tree with our guide Obet. There were many males displaying. In fact Raggiana BOPs were the most common forest bird larger than “whistler” size. To see twenty or more in a walk was not unusual. Our guide was told by Avit to stay with us until 0800 and no amount of reassurance that he could go away earlier would persuade him to do so. Although he had no watch, we couldn’t convince him that it was 0800 when it wasn’t.

And then a mammal!!! Well a Black-Tailed Giant-Rat (in capitals) is a mammal and the biggest rat I’ve ever seen.

Spent the rest of the non-raining part of the day birding, finding a nesting pair of Papuan frogmouths and lots of pretty passerines like the very common but beautiful dwarf whistler, various fantails and monarchs and the odd pigeon or two.

Avit came to visit during the afternoon bucketing. He explained that he could provide paw-paws, bananas, women, pineapples or anything else the village had. We took immediate interest in the thought of having pineapples, but politely declined the offer of women, no matter how well disposed they were towards “white blokes”, although I was left with a lingering unfulfilled vision on the origins of Velcro.....

Avit asked what we were drinking and we told him it was a special tea. He didn’t believe us but wasn’t too worried as long as we didn’t try to share it with any of the villagers.



### Day 11 – Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> September 2001

Our day began at 0530 again. We now had a different guide for our visit to a hide to see the MAGNIFICENT BOP (all capitals) display site. Wow! A very pretty bird indeed! I then walked the three kilometers back to the guesthouse only to realize that I'd left my camera behind so back I went along with nine kids and a tiger. Who would name a kid "Tiger"? I suppose some of the same people that would name kids "Brad Fittler" or "Geoff Toovey". I'm not joking. PNG men are so obsessed with Australian football stars that they name their kids after them. Clearly somebody must have been a keen golf follower as well.





I left Barry-Sean at the village for my optional three hours frog-march to the camp located near a parotia display ground. An extremely cross-eyed guide, his son, and Tiger were my companions. What followed was character building. Our bush-house was rather damp. In fact the palm leaf floor was very damp as a consequence of the palm leaf roof being somewhat porous. This wouldn't have mattered if it hadn't rained all afternoon and most of the night. We had "dinner" early to relieve the boredom. I've redefined the word "sleep" after this night as I sat crippled under an umbrella trying to keep my rolled up sleeping bag from getting wet like I was. Still, the birds.....

### **Day 12 – Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> September 2001**

0530 and off for half an hour's walk to the hide. We sat sat sat. Finally we gave up. It was then that my guide informed me that there were plenty of Carola's and Lawe's parotias there the previous afternoon when he disappeared without saying anything to me to do some maintenance work on the hide. The mystery of why the birds didn't front was solved. A large flock of tit berrypeckers, a regent whistler and a few other little things were sighted but needless to say the catch of the day had well and truly escaped.

More John.

### **Day 13 – Friday 28<sup>th</sup> September 2001**

We had a couple of hours' walk in the forest and picked up trumpet manucode and bicoloured mouse-warbler before the missionary air force (MAF) and our intrepid pilot Scott arrived to transport us back to "civilization". MAF charges K86 for this service. The other costs at Herowana were so low they were not worth recording.



Our "Religious zealot of the week" award went to an old German lady we met at the Lutheran Guest House who travelled the world collecting models of nativity scenes. She then puts on exhibitions of her work. But only in Eastern Bloc countries. Serious nutter, but pleasant enough. Her husband doesn't understand her. Surprising.

Barry-Sean and I decided to go to the Bird (Bird of Paradise Hotel) in downtown Goroka and have an extended lunch. We lunched, or rather drank, with a very knowledgeable and



thirsty Dr Michael Heads, Goroka Uni's senior biology lecturer. Here we found out what's really going on, or at least those bits we could understand. Anyway Mike knew his way around a BOP and a beer. A fine and instructional afternoon resulted. We did our best to try and organize transport to Mt Gahavasuka for the morrow. We then drank more beer and attacked a pizza.

#### **Day 14 – Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> September 2001**

Uncertainty reigned. After umpteen plan changes we borrowed the New York Zoo's brand new Toyota Landcruiser for the day and went back up the mountain. Such trust. Unfortunately the birds were having the day off. While we had no trouble seeing the four resident BOPs, others were elsewhere. We picked up a few honeyeaters and odds and sods but not everything we could hope for. That's birding in tropical forests, I guess.

#### **Day 15 – Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> September 2001**

Our charming cook, James, of the Lutheran had a spat with our least favourite religious zealot, a southern good ol' boy from Suth Carowliner. This wally thought quite erroneously that he didn't have to pay for his accommodation, on the flimsy pretext that he was a fellow Lutheran. Now James is a tolerant sort of chap so he impounded the Yank's passport until he came up with the readies. How he achieved this we never discovered.

We set forth to the PMV terminal in Goroka for our adventure to Madang. After circling town for a couple of hours looking for potential fares, we set off at breakneck speed or at least we did until we got to the edge of town. This was where any road maintenance had effectively ended and had done so since 1975 when the Australians left. Do not contemplate hiring a car in PNG. You won't know where the holes in the road are.

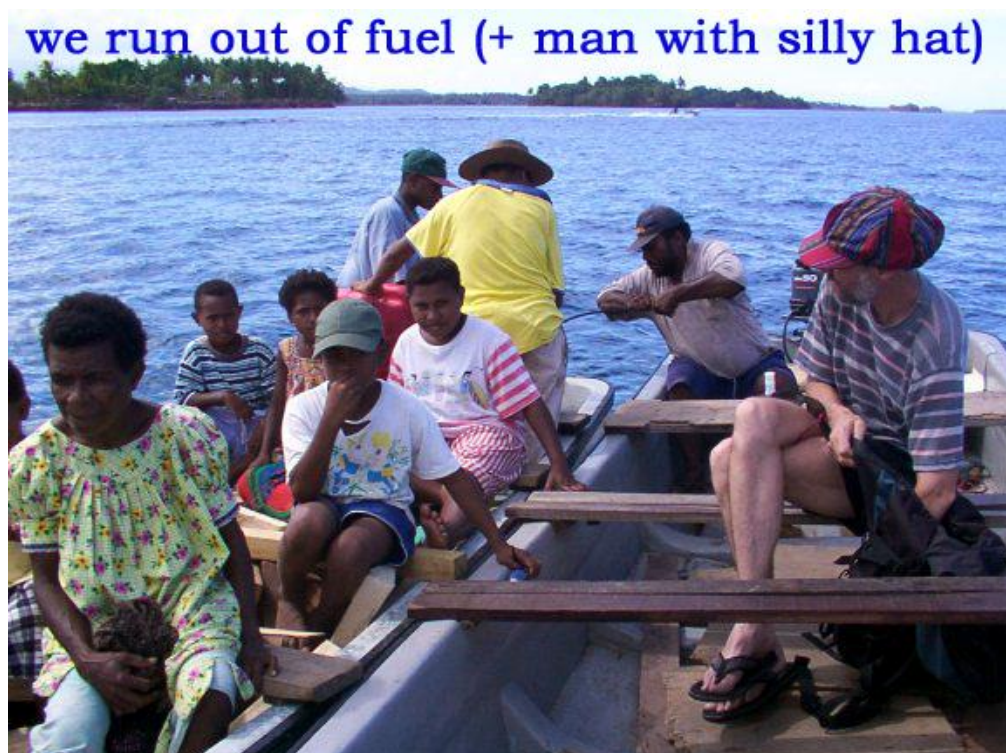
The trip took about nine hours. This included police bribe stops, and argue with passengers over the fare (K30) stops, but no rest, meal or toilet breaks. This lack of comfort was partly compensated by the knowledge that our booked accommodation had a bar.

We stayed at the Madang Lodge, which cost K65 per twin in a budget room (fridge and fan, share facilities). The lodge has key attractions. It is on the water (birds!), it has a bar that is on the water (beer and birds!) and it has a courtesy bus to take you anywhere nearby for free (places with birds!).

#### **Day 16 – Monday 1<sup>st</sup> October 2001**

This was Pig Island Day. The lodge's courtesy bus dropped us in town where we chartered a boat to take us to Pig Island in the morning and pick us up later in the day (K30 total). There were a surprising variety of birds on this tiny island. There were many New Guinea scrubfowl, a couple of beach kingfishers, a pair of island monarchs building a nest, at least three different fruit-doves and sundry little brown birds.

I chose the waters of Pig Island to get stung by something really interesting. This caused a partial meltdown of my nervous system, a distinct lack of pulse, a feeling of strangeness, and considerable pain. An hour later I was drinking beer.



**Day 17 – Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2001**

The Madang Visitor and Cultural Bureau is a must see. Not only do they have a very good museum, the staff are fabulous. If you want to go anywhere by PMV from Madang, a staff member will meet you in town and find the right PMV for you. Otherwise you wouldn't have a clue. In our case we wanted to go to Kau Forest Reserve (about 15km away) so Connie from the visitor centre met us in town with a letter he'd written to the chief at Kau

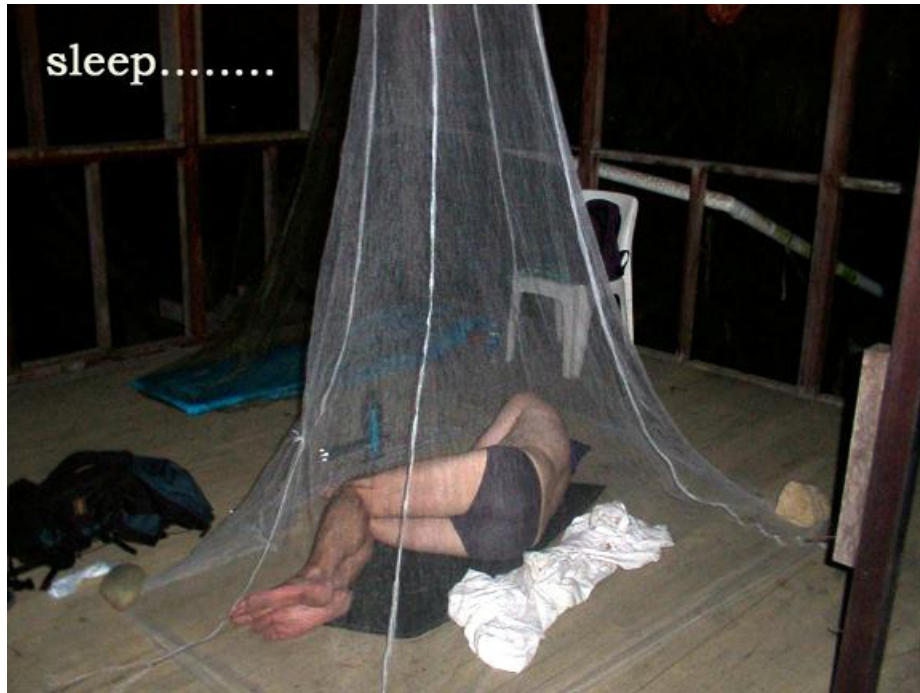
asking that we might stay a couple of nights – as they have no formal accommodation. So we grabbed some food and set off with our gear.

We met the chief, a lovely old guy who speaks good English. He was welcoming and we soon had ourselves set up and off into the forest. You can pay K5 per guide per activity, which we did the first time, but after that you can wander about at will. There is no fee for staying at Kau but we gave the chief a donation on the way out.



The forest at Kau is a delight. There are heaps of good birds, creeks and rivers to swim in, and friendly local people to meet. Our birding “highlight of the day” was a New Guinea eagle that sat in an emergent tree and then wheeled off to show us its undercarriage. It was only one of many good raptors seen.





### **Day 18 – Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2001**

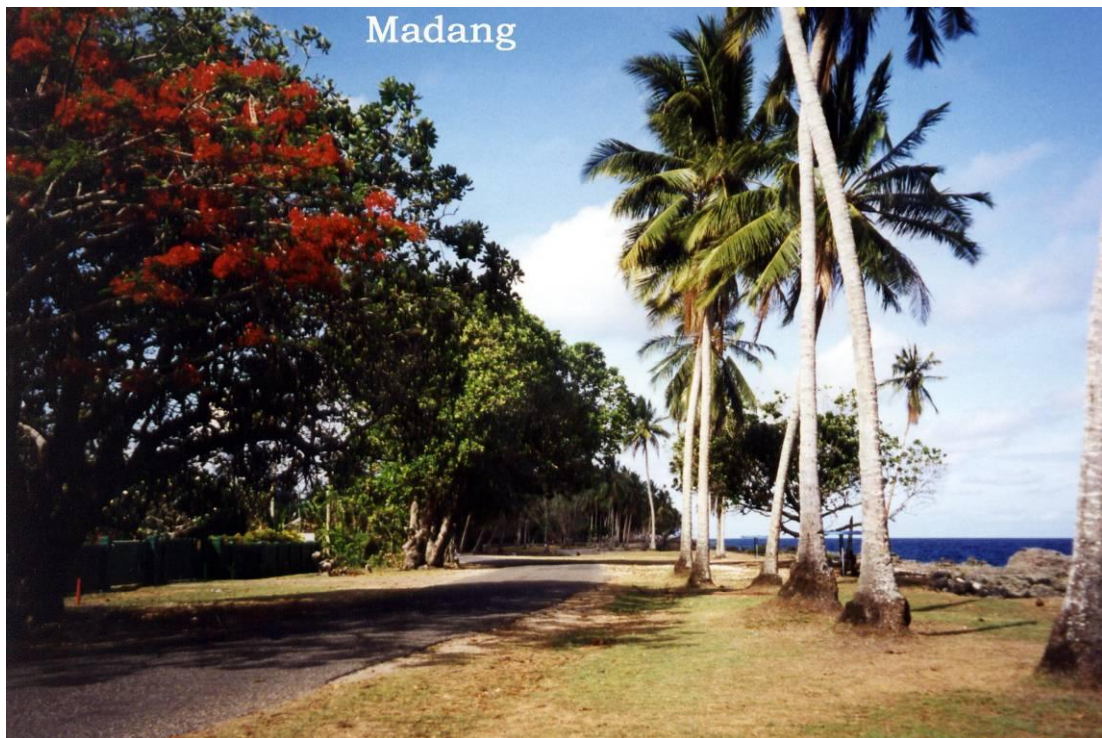
The day produced almost 50 birds, which is really good going in lowland forest. These included brown-collared brush-turkey, a brilliant male king BOP, grey-headed goshawk, common paradise kingfisher and golden monarch - now there's a pretty bird.

Spotlighting for cuscus failed in its prime objective, producing a bandicoot and hearing boobook owls and a frogmouth.

### **Day 19 – Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> October 2001**

I had a final walk at Kau and after a slow start ran into two mixed foraging groups of birds that collided with one another. One group consisted of small birds, mainly monarchs and fantails, while the other was led by a noisy mob of New Guinea babblers and included several king and lesser BOPs, manucodes and a variable pitohui. 22 different birds were identified in this mixed group! What a way to leave a place!

We got a lift back to town as soon as we stepped on to the road. While wandering along the seaside I saw a dugong close to the shore. Nice.



#### **Day 20 – Friday 5<sup>th</sup> October 2001**

We met Connie in town and caught a PMV to the Balek Wildlife Area. There are a few native fish, terrapins and eels somehow living in the sulphur-rich water that flows from the bottom of a limestone hill. There were a few nice birds but that is no reason to go here. Kau is the same distance in the opposite direction and much better.

A strong on-shore wind gave us views of a heap of frigatebirds, black and brown noddies, terns, a pomerine skua and some very large tuna, all from the bar at the lodge.

#### **Day 21 – Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> October 2001**

This was our last full day in PNG and we decided to go to the market and buy some trinkets. We marvelled at a pair of Victoria's crowned pigeons preening themselves in a big tree in the town. I am advised that these were probably someone's pets but they could easily have flown away, albeit for a short and violent period. We accepted the spotted whistling duck on the town lily pond. The carvings and shell jewellery at the markets were cheap and of good quality. We bought enough stuff to tie the customs people up at Sydney Airport for some time.

We had a few cleansing ales at the lodge before saying "laukim you behind" to the friendly but generally not too talented bar staff. Mind you, on wages of K1.30 per hour I wouldn't be very skilled either.





**Day 22 – Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> October 2001**

We spent a few pleasant hours at the Port Moresby Botanical Gardens before our departure. The gardens are not very extensive but are very well maintained and include a small and not too depressing zoo with native critters like tree kangaroos, various birds and things that hop.



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30<sup>th</sup> December 2005



## **Bird List** (sorry if the taxonomy is slightly dated or confusing)

Abbreviations used:

L – Lae

Lb – Lababia Wildlife Management Area

G – Goroka town

Ga – Mt Gahavasuka

H – Heroana (Crater Mountain Wildlife Management Area)

M – Madang

P – Pig Island (off Madang)

K – Kau Wildlife Reserve

PM – Port Moresby

1. Great Frigatebird *Fregata minor*

A few seen in amongst the thousands of lessers at Lababia Island

2. Lesser Frigatebird *Fregata ariel*

L – a few

Lb – thousands roost here at night

M – 30 or more seen from lodge during strong onshore winds. Singles at other times.

3. Little Black Cormorant *Phalacrocorax sulcirostris*

M – Common around the town

L – Occasional

4. Spotted Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna guttata*

M – one seen among 20 or so wanderings on lily pond in Madang town.

5. Wandering Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna arcuata*

M – 20 or so seen in lily pond in Madang town.

6. Pacific Black Duck *Anas superciliosa*

L – two at Rainforest Habitat in Lae town

7. White-faced Heron *Egretta novaehollandiae*

L – one seen

8. Pacific Reef-Egret *Egretta sacra*

M – a couple of dark-phase birds flying past Madang Lodge bar

9. Intermediate Egret *Mesophoyx intermedia*

L – a few seen west of Lae

10. Great Egret *Ardea alba*

PM – who cares about egrets on airports anyway

M - some on the airport runway

11. Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

PM - a number of these highly sought-after birds in the airport grounds  
(good thinking)

12. Pacific Baza *Aviceda subcristata*

L - one sitting in a tree near the airport

13. Long-tailed Honey-buzzard *Henicopernis longicauda*

Fairly common throughout, especially at Heroana

14. Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus*

Single birds seen at L and G

15. Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

Large numbers everywhere. They mustn't taste very good.

16. Whistling Kite *Haliastur sphenurus*

L - one

17. Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus*

Common throughout, even in the highlands

18. Eastern Marsh-Harrier *Circus spilonotus*

L - quite common

M - two seen at the airport

19. Variable Goshawk *Accipiter hiogaster*

M - one rufous bellied bird with a bloody big green lizard in its gob in  
the middle of Madang town

20. Gray-headed Goshawk *Accipiter poliocephalus*

K - one splendid sighting of a bird flying low along the river

21. Collared Sparrowhawk *Accipiter cirrocephalus*

K - one seen perched in a tree near the "guesthouse"

22. Long-tailed Buzzard *Batastur longicauda*

H - several sightings, common  
Commonish elsewhere as well

23. New Guinea Eagle *Harpyopsis novaeguineae*

K - great views of one perched in an emergent tree, which then gave good  
views in flight

24. Gurney's Eagle *Aquila gurneyi*



25. Brown Falcon *Falco berigora*

26. Australian Kestrel *Falco cenchroides*

27. Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

28. New Guinea Scrubfowl *Megapodius affinis*

29. Brown-collared Brush-turkey *Talegalla jobiensis*

30. Comb-crested Jacana *Irediparra gallinacea*

31. Swinhoe's Snipe *Gallinago megala*

32. Far Eastern Curlew *Numenius madagascariensis*

33. Common Sandpiper *Tringa hypoleucos*

34. Australian Pratincole *Stiltia isabellae*

35. Pacific Golden-Plover *Pluvialis fulva*

36. Masked Lapwing *Vanellus miles*

37. Gull-billed Tern *Sterna nilotica*

38. Great Crested-Tern *Sterna bergii*

- Lb - one seen
39. Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*
- Lb - small numbers among the more common gull-billeds
40. Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus*
- M - a few in large mixed flocks of mainly frigatebirds feeding in tuna schools from the Madang Lodge bar (gentlemen's birding)
41. Black Noddy *Anous minutus*
- M - same as above
42. Pomarine Jaeger *Stercorarius pomarinus*
- M - one or two birds mixed up with the above noddies
43. Rock Dove *Columba livia*
- G - a couple  
M - a lot more
44. Slender-billed Cuckoo-Dove *Macropygia amboinensis*
- Lb - common
45. Black-billed Cuckoo-Dove *Macropygia nigrirostris*
- H - fairly common but hard to get good views  
Ga - common
46. Great Cuckoo-Dove *Reinwardtoena reinwardtii*
- Lb - three seen overflying the small river early in the morning  
K - one seen
47. Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica*
- K - one seen
48. Peaceful Dove *Geopelia placida*
- L - common
49. Wompoo Fruit-Dove *Ptilinopus magnificus*
- Lb - very common  
K - common
50. Ornate Fruit-Dove *Ptilinopus ornatus*
- K - fairly common in flocks of orange-bellieds
51. Superb Fruit-Dove *Ptilinopus superbus*
- Lb - one seen
52. Coronated Fruit-Dove *Ptilinopus coronulatus*

P - fairly common  
K - several pairs seen

53. White-breasted Fruit-Dove *Ptilinopus rivoli*

H - probably quite common. A couple seen but cryptic in tree tops.

54. Orange-bellied Fruit-Dove *Ptilinopus iozonus*

M - abundant around the town  
K - the most common fruit dove identified - large numbers  
P - a few

55. Pinon Imperial-Pigeon *Ducula pinon*

Lb - common and easily seen roosting behind the lodge at night  
K - one radically different looking bird came to visit us

56. Pied Imperial-Pigeon *Ducula bicolor*

Lb - commonly seen flying above the canopy and over the sea  
L - seen flying all over the place

57. Papuan Mountain-Pigeon *Gymnophaps albertisii*

K - one flock of about 10 birds overflying the village

58. Victoria Crowned-Pigeon *Goura victoria*

M - a pair seen sitting inexplicably in a large tree in the town. Weren't nailed there and had all their feathers. I have been advised that it is "a bit naughty" to count these. Too late now.

59. Red-cheeked Parrot *Geoffroyus geoffroyi*

L - common at Erap Cattle Station  
Lb - occasional

60. Eclectus Parrot *Eclectus roratus*

Lb - a couple of pairs flying noisily overhead

61. Papuan King-Parrot *Alisterus chloropterus*

H - fairly common in forest and (apparently) in the village banana trees

62. Palm Cockatoo *Probosciger aterrimus*

Lb - fabulous views of a single bird low in flight

63. Sulphur-crested Cockatoo *Cacatua galerita*

Followed us everywhere we went. Seems to be fairly common.

64. Dusky Lory *Pseudeos fuscata*

Lb - common in the tree tops here  
G - a few seen flying around town

65. Rainbow Lorikeet *Trichoglossus haematodus*



Common throughout but they certainly don't land on your head or lick honey off your fingers like they do at home

66. Goldie's Lorikeet *Psitteuteles goldiei*  
H - a few flew low over the airstrip. Bastards of things.
67. Black-capped Lory *Lorius lory*  
Lb - abundant and noisy here
68. Purple-bellied Lory *Lorius hypoinochrous*  
M - a pair seen at Balek Wildlife Park
69. Brush Cuckoo *Cacomantis variolosus*  
G - common in the town  
H - a few
70. Chestnut-breasted Cuckoo *Cacomantis castaneiventris*  
H - several seen in the forest, calling incessantly
71. Fan-tailed Cuckoo *Cacomantis flabelliformis*  
H - one seen
72. White-eared Bronze-Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx meyeri*  
H - a couple seen feeding on figs, but silent
73. Australian Koel *Eudynamys cyanocephala*  
P - a pair seen (wow)
74. Pheasant Coucal *Centropus phasianinus*  
L - common around the airport
75. Lesser Black Coucal *Centropus bernsteini*  
L - less common than above but common enough around the airport
76. Papuan Hawk-Owl *Uroglaux dimorpha*  
Lb - great and definitive views of a bird sitting low in a tree while spotlighting
77. Papuan Frogmouth *Podargus papuensis*  
H - great views of a pair on their nest and in flight during daylight. Seriously big birds.
78. Moustached Treeswift *Hemiprocne mystacea*  
H - one pair  
M - one
79. Glossy Swiftlet *Aerodramus esculenta*

80.	Mountain Swiftlet	<i>Aerodramus hirundinacea</i>
81.	Uniform Swiftlet	<i>Aerodramus vanikorensis</i>
82.	Papuan Needletail	<i>Mearnsia novaeguineae</i>
83.	White-throated Needletail	<i>Hirundapus caudacutus</i>

None of the above interest me enough to bother writing about them

84.	Azure Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo azurea</i>
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Lb - common along the river south of the village  
K - very common along the river and creeks

85.	Little Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo pusilla</i>
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Lb - a few seen along the river

86.	Rufous-bellied Kookaburra	<i>Dacelo gaudichaud</i>
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Lb - very common here. At least six sightings in a rain reduced day  
K - one seen  
M - one seen near the town

87.	Forest Kingfisher	<i>Todirhamphus macleayii</i>
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L - common  
M - common in town

88.	Collared Kingfisher	<i>Todirhamphus chloris</i>
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P - a couple

89.	Beach Kingfisher	<i>Todirhamphus saurophaga</i>
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P - a bird or two here. Also suspected in Madang town.

90.	Sacred Kingfisher	<i>Todirhamphus sanctus</i>
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Fairly common at most places visited.

91.	Common Paradise-Kingfisher	<i>Tanysiptera galatea</i>
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K - two birds seen, both in mixed foraging groups

92.	Blue-tailed Bee-eater	<i>Merops philippinus</i>
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L - uncommon in flocks of more common rainbows

93.	Rainbow Bee-eater	<i>Merops ornatus</i>
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L - very common  
G - one pair in town

94.	Dollarbird	<i>Eurystomus orientalis</i>
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L - a couple seen near the airport  
K - one

95.	Blyth's Hornbill	<i>Aceros plicatus</i>
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Lb - two sightings around the village and another heard flying over the forest. Probably relatively common here





109. Yellow-bellied Gerygone *Gerygone chrysogaster*  
P - two seen
110. Large-billed Gerygone *Gerygone magnirostris*  
M - one seen at Balek Wildlife Park
111. Long-billed Honeyeater *Melilestes megarhynchus*  
Common throughout
112. Mountain Myzomela *Myzomela adolphinae*  
G - commonish in large trees around town
113. Red-collared Myzomela *Myzomela rosenbergii*  
Ga - fairly common on the mountain in the mid-storey
114. Mountain Meliphaga *Meliphaga orientalis*  
H - yes
115. Scrub Honeyeater *Meliphaga albonotata*  
H - yes
116. Puff-backed Honeyeater *Meliphaga aruensis*  
K - yes
117. Mimic Honeyeater *Meliphaga analoga*  
L, Lb - yes
118. Varied Honeyeater *Lichenostomus versicolor*  
Abundant in coastal areas especially in towns
119. Yellow-tinted Honeyeater *Lichenostomus flavescens*  
PM - a pair seen in flowers outside the botanic Gardens
120. Tawny-breasted Honeyeater *Xanthotis flaviventer*  
H - seen in the gardens
121. Plain Honeyeater *Pycnopygius ixoides*  
Seen wherever long-billed seem to be, common
122. Meyer's Friarbird *Philemon meyeri*  
K - two birds seen on exposed treetops
123. Helmeted Friarbird *Philemon buceroides*  
One of the most common birds seen and at most locations
124. Belford's Melidectes *Melidectes belfordi*

- Ga - several seen on our first visit here. Rather uncommon
125.        Yellow-browed Melidectes                      *Melidectes rufocrissalis*
- Ga - as per Belfords
126.        Ornate Melidectes                              *Melidectes torquatus*
- G - very common in the town
127.        Smoky Honeyeater                              *Melipotes fumigatus*
- Ga - the common honeyeater on the mountain
128.        Rufous-banded Honeyeater                      *Conopophila albogularis*
- PM - one seen among yellow-tinteds outside the Botanic Gardens
129.        Yellow-legged Flycatcher                      *Microeca griseiceps*
- Ga - several sightings
130.        Canary Flycatcher                                *Microeca papuana*
- Ga - a few seen
131.        White-faced Robin                                *Tregellasia leucops*
- H - abundant in forests here
132.        Blue-gray Robin                                    *Peneothello cyanus*
- H - one seen only
133.        White-eyed Robin                                *Pachycephalopsis poliosoma*
- H - two sightings of this very shy bird on the same day
134.        Dwarf Whistler                                    *Pachycare flavogrisea*
- H - very common and beautiful little bird
135.        Golden Whistler                                    *Pachycephala pectoralis*
- P - two males seen
136.        Sclater's Whistler                                *Pachycephala soror*
- H - common  
            Ga - reasonably common
137.        Regent Whistler                                    *Pachycephala schlegelii*
- H - one female bird seen
138.        Black-headed Whistler                              *Pachycephala monacha*
- G - common around the town  
            H - a few in gardens in the village

139. Rufous Shrike-Thrush *Colluricincla megarhyncha*  
 Seen almost everywhere in forests. Prominent in mixed foraging groups
140. Gray Shrike-Thrush *Colluricincla harmonica*  
 Common in lowlands around L and M
141. Variable Pitohui *Pitohui kirhocephalus*  
 K - one seen in a large mixed foraging group
142. New Guinea Babbler *Pomatostomus isidorei*  
 K - about ten or so birds that formed a noisy nucleus for a large mixed foraging group
143. Blue Jewel-babbler *Ptilorrhoa caerulescens*  
 Lb - four birds that reacted quickly to an imitation of their call ran noisily at our feet
144. Willie-wagtail *Rhipidura leucophrys*  
 The most common and widespread bird in PNG
145. Northern Fantail *Rhipidura rufiventris*  
 Common in all lowland forests visited
146. Friendly Fantail *Rhipidura albolimbata*  
 Ga - fairly common
147. Chestnut-bellied Fantail *Rhipidura hyperythra*  
 H - common in mixed feeding parties
148. Sooty Thicket-Fantail *Rhipidura threnothorax*  
 K - one seen
149. White-bellied Thicket-Fantail *Rhipidura leucothorax*  
 Lb - one seen
150. Black Fantail *Rhipidura atra*  
 H - fairly common
151. Dimorphic Fantail *Rhipidura brachyrhyncha*  
 H - fairly common
152. Rufous-backed Fantail *Rhipidura rufidorsa*  
 Lb - common  
 K - a couple seen
153. Black Monarch *Monarcha axillaris*



- H - occasional  
Lb - two seen
154. Rufous Monarch *Monarcha rubiensis*  
K - common. In all mixed feeding parties
155. Island Monarch *Monarcha cinerascens*  
P - one nesting pair located
156. Black-winged Monarch *Monarcha frater*  
H - common
157. Spot-winged Monarch *Monarcha guttulus*  
Lb - two sightings  
K - common. In all mixed feeding parties
158. Hooded Monarch *Monarcha manadensis*  
K - a few sightings
159. Golden Monarch *Monarcha chrysomela*  
K - two sightings of this glorious little bird
160. Frilled Monarch *Arses telescopthalmus*  
Lb - one pair seen
161. Rufous-collared Monarch *Arses insularis*  
H - very common. In all mixed feeding parties  
K - as above
162. Shining Flycatcher *Myiagra alecto*  
Common at all lowland sites visited
163. Yellow-breasted Boatbill *Machaerirhynchus flaviventer*  
H - two sightings  
K - one sighting
164. Papuan Drongo *Chaetorhynchus papuensis*  
H - a couple of pairs
165. Spangled Drongo *Dicrurus bracteatus*  
L - common  
Lb - a few  
K - common
166. Gray Crow *Corvus tristis*  
Lb - three seen on Lababia Island  
M - several seen near the town  
K - four seen together

167.        Torresian Crow                                *Corvus orru*  
Common near habitation in the lowlands
168.        Glossy-mantled Manucode                    *Manucodia atra*  
K - fairly common but hard to get good views
169.        Crinkle-collared Manucode                   *Manucodia chalybata*  
Lb - a few pairs seen, including good views of one with a chick. Some US researchers told us that Lababia was "famous" for having birds at sea level that normally belong up the hill a bit
170.        Trumpet Manucode                               *Manucodia keraudrenii*  
H - good views of one bird. Probably common here but I couldn't split the calls (too stupid)
171.        Brown Sickiebill                                *Epimachus meyeri*  
Ga - reasonably common but fairly shy. Several females seen but only two males
172.        Superb Bird-of-paradise                       *Lophorina superba*  
Ga - several seen. Fairly common here
173.        Magnificent Bird-of-paradise                  *Cicinnurus magnificus*  
H - one male seen on display ground with others heard calling nearby
174.        King Bird-of-paradise                           *Cicinnurus regius*  
Lb - four females seen, three of them together  
K - two males and three females seen on one occasion. Quite common here
175.        E Princess Stephanie's Astrapia                *Astrapia stephaniae*  
Ga - common with great views of several males and a few females on both occasions we visited this mountain
176.        King-of-Saxony Bird-of-paradise                *Pteridophora alberti*  
Ga - very common with several males and a couple of females seen. Can be heard calling at most points anywhere in the forest.
177.        Lesser Bird-of-paradise                           *Paradisaea minor*  
K - reasonably common here but difficult to see. Two females seen on one day  
M - one male seen at Balek Wildlife Reserve
178.        E Raggiana Bird-of-paradise                      *Paradisaea raggiana*  
Lb - several birds seen at the display trees behind the school  
H - very common in the forest behind the airstrip. Twenty sightings in one morning. The most common mid-sized bird here
179.        White-breasted Woodswallow                      *Artamus leucorhynchus*

- L - common in open areas near the airport
180. Great Woodswallow *Artamus maximus*
- Ga - two seen with swiftlets above the mountain. There were probably many more
181. Mountain Peltops *Peltops montanus*
- H - common bird here, some nesting
182. Lowland Peltops *Peltops blainvillii*
- K - common in exposed treetops
183. Hooded Butcherbird *Cracticus cassicus*
- L - common in open forest near the airport  
Lb - fairly common in forests
184. Torrent-lark *Grallina bruijni*
- H - two seen flying up a creek in the rain at dusk
185. Brown Oriole *Oriolus szalayi*
- H - Occasional in the gardens in the village
186. Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina novaehollandiae*
- PM - one in the Botanic Gardens
187. Boyer's Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina boyeri*
- PM - one in the Botanic Gardens  
L - one seen
188. White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina papuensis*
- L - common in open forests near the airport  
K - one pair seen hawking over the top of the forest
189. Common Cicadabird *Coracina tenuirostris*
- H - common
190. Gray-headed Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina schisticeps*
- Ga - two pairs seen feeding on figs
191. Black-bellied Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina montana*
- H - two seen in gardens
192. Black-browed Triller *Lalage atrovirens*
- K - a couple of pairs seen high in exposed canopy hawking
193. Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach*



A number of birds seen from the PMV after leaving Goroka for Madang

194. Singing Starling *Aplonis cantoroides*  
Common and widespread
195. Metallic Starling *Aplonis metallica*  
L - one colony of nests at Erap Cattle Station  
K - occasional
196. Yellow-faced Myna *Mino dumontii*  
L - fairly common  
Lb - behind school  
K - a few seen  
M - a few seen
197. Pied Bushchat *Saxicola caprata*  
L - fairly common in open areas  
G - one seen
198. Pacific Swallow *Hirundo tahitica*  
Everywhere
199. E Black-fronted White-eye *Zosterops minor*  
H - common. Mixed with less common New Guineas
200. New Guinea White-eye *Zosterops novaeguineae*  
H - fairly common at one site  
Ga - several small flocks
201. Golden-headed Cisticola *Cisticola exilis*  
L - common in long grass near the airport
202. Island Leaf-warbler *Phylloscopus poliocephalus*  
Ga - one, great
203. Australasian Bushlark *Mirafrja javanica*  
L - common in open areas near the airport
204. House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*  
PM - a single bird seen in the Botanic Gardens
205. Streak-headed Munia *Lonchura tristissima*  
K - one bird seen in gardens
206. Hooded Munia *Lonchura spectabilis*  
H - a small flock seen daily in tall grass next to the airstrip
207. Chestnut-breasted Munia *Lonchura castaneothorax*

- L - common in grass around the airport
208.        Australasian Pipit                                *Anthus novaeseelandiae*
- G - several seen in the airport grounds
209.        Red-capped Flowerpecker                                *Dicaeum geelvinkianum*
- Seen at almost all sites visited in small numbers
210.        Black Sunbird    *Nectarinia aspasia*
- Common and widespread
211.        Olive-backed Sunbird    *Nectarinia jugularis*
- Everywhere
212.        Black Berrypecker    *Melanocharis nigra*
- H - common  
K - common
213.        Fan-tailed Berrypecker    *Melanocharis versteri*
- Ga - four birds seen in canopy chasing one another in what looked like a display
214.        Spotted Berrypecker    *Melanocharis crassirostris*
- Ga - a few seen on our first visit
215.        Yellow-bellied Longbill    *Toxorhamphus novaeguineae*
- K - commonly heard and less commonly seen
216.        Slaty-chinned Longbill    *Toxorhamphus poliopterus*
- H - common but shy
217.        Dwarf Honeyeater    *Toxorhamphus iliolophus*
- H - a few
218.        Tit Berrypecker    *Oreocharis arfaki*
- H - one large flock of about thirty birds seen

## Mammals

### *Short-snouted Spinner Dolphin*

Several pods of “non-spinning” animals were seen as we travelled between Lae and Lababia and return and at Lababia during our stay.

### *Dugong*

One seen once from the promenade at Madang.

### *Black-tailed Giant Rat*

One aptly named animal seen near Heroana village in Crater Mountain Wildlife Management Area. The local chief confirms these are “common”. Yum.

### *Spectacled Flying-Fox*

Good numbers seen flying around Lae.

### *Great Flying-Fox*

Tens of thousands of these guys in Madang township, notwithstanding the locals and their skill with sling-shots.

### *Bandicoot sp.*

One seen on the floor of the forest in Kau Wildlife Reserve at night. Apparently there are two species here and this one wisely didn't hang around to have its underbelly inspected for distinguishing marks.

### *Antechinus? sp.*

One seen bouncing Antechinus-like across the floor of the forest at Lababia Wildlife Management Area at night.

### *Wallaby, Dorcopsis? sp.*

Probably one heard hopping in Lababia Wildlife Management Area at night.

### *Missionary sp.*

Common to abundant throughout, particularly in the highlands. Tend to congregate near Lutheran Guest Houses and the like, especially at night and early in the morning. Approachable but obnoxious and potentially dangerous especially when in numbers. Difficult to separate to species level without risking contamination. These appear not to be actively hunted by the locals, more's the pity.



