

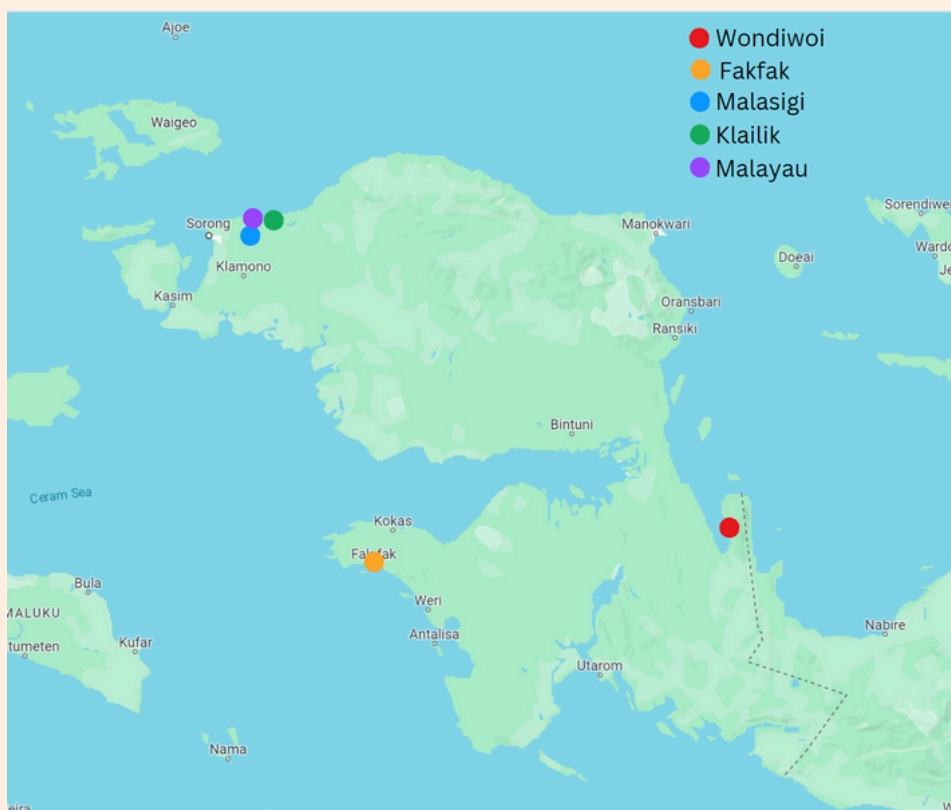


Remote West Papua

NOVEMBER 2023

ALT.INDO/BEN CROWSON

Over recent years exciting discoveries have been made in the remote regions surrounding the 'birds head' and its peninsulas in West Papua. This trip was designed with local agents to explore some of these new remote localities to try and record rare and seldom seen mammals & birds. New Guinea is an exceptionally rich island in biodiversity with some of the world's most spectacular birdlife, it's mammal fauna remains one of the least known, with many areas hugely under-surveyed and much of the data collected many decades ago. It is easily the most densely forested region of Indonesia remaining, with drives to sites being generally through forest and settlements also being surrounded by forest. This is largely due to the Melanesian culture of looking after their natural assets but government bodies have taken notice and now a network of hard-working people exists to bring economic benefits to remote areas of West Papua in line with environmental protection & conservation.



Site Map

This trip covered 3 separate areas of the region:

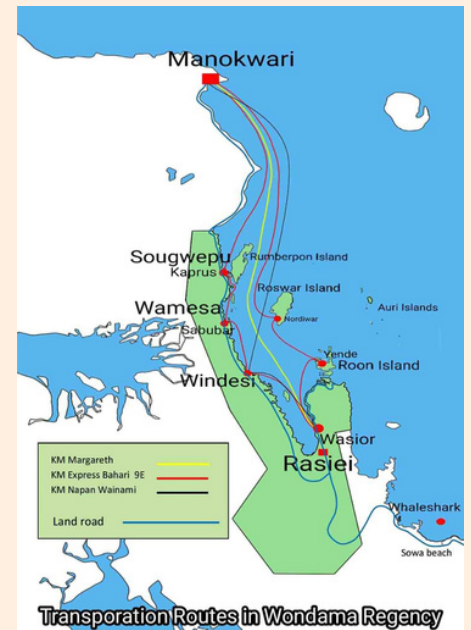
The Wondiwoi mountains on the Wondiwoi/Wandammen peninsula located in the birds neck.

Fakfak lowlands & foothills located in the Bomberai peninsula.

The Sorong lowlands leading to the foothills of the Tambrau mountains of the Birds Head.

Itinerary

- **Day 1**-Fly Makassar to Manokwari, travel to port, overnight boat to Wasior
- **Day 2**-Arrive Wasior at dawn, rest, start trek into Wondiwoi mtns, arrive Camp 1
- **Day 3**- Trek from Camp 1 to Camp 2
- **Day 4**-Trek From Camp 2 to Camp 3
- **Days 5-6**- Explore around Camp 3
- **Day 7**-Trek all the way down back to Wasior.
- **Day 8**-Stay in Wasior (Flight change to Fakfak)
- **Day 9**- Fast boat back to Manokwari, stay Manokwari
- **Day 10**- Flight from Manokwari to Fakfak, drive to forest
- **Day 11**- Explore Fakfak
- **Day 12**- Morning in Fakfak then flight to Sorong, drive to Malasigi
- **Day 13**- Explore Malasigi
- **Day 14**-Morning in Malasigi then drive to Klailik
- **Days 15-16**- Explore Klailik
- **Day 17**- Drive to Malayau, morning Malayau then depart for Sorong then home.



Transport & Facilities

Transport: The only public transportation used on this trip were the boats to/from Wasior from Manokwari, both the slow boat & fast boat were comfortable however the VIP section of the fast boat was worth the extra cost after 7 days of trekking. They go on different days both about twice a week, this changes frequently. Travelling to the sites requires private transport with high clearance, it could be possible to travel with locals to reduce costs however you need a guide to enter most locations anyway and after the waiting/headaches/foreigner taxes you'll have wished you used a private car. In Wasior no car is needed as you walk to the trail head. The guide will collect you from the port and can also take you around to stock up before your trip.

Supplies: Manokwari/Sorong/Fakfak are economic centres in their respective regions and have supermarkets, ATMs and full service. Most cafes/hotels have WiFi. Wasior is a small remote town, it has a, therefore expensive, supermarket and also rural stores that stock gum boots etc. Your guides will help with any supplies you need. Telkomsel is perhaps the world's most impressive phone network and it is the simcard you want for Papua. We even had service in open areas on the mountains which are incredibly remote.



Wondiwoi Mountains

In 2018 a British naturalist, in search of rhododendrons & orchids, ventured into the Wondiwoi Mountains, on this trip he managed to photograph and rediscover the Wondiwoi Tree kangaroo, lost to western science for the 90 years after Erst Mayr first discovered it. Indeed these were the only two westerners to scale the mountain, and this trip was to be the third. Ever since reading of this amazing discovery, the Wondiwoi peninsula stuck out on the map, who knows what else is hiding? It took 5 years for this trip to be a possibility.

This mountain range is woefully under-surveyed, it's mammal populations hitherto unknown, bird surveys minimal and often undertaken decades ago. New amphibians have been described recently and there are most likely many discoveries to be made. The range, being on a peninsula jutting out of the 'bird's neck' towards the 'birds head' has its affinities shared between the Arfaks, and the birds neck which is a transition between the Vogelkop and Central Papuan faunas. There is also an endemic element as seen with the new endemic frog species, its own form of tropical scrubwren which might be a species in its own right and, of course, the tree-kangaroo.

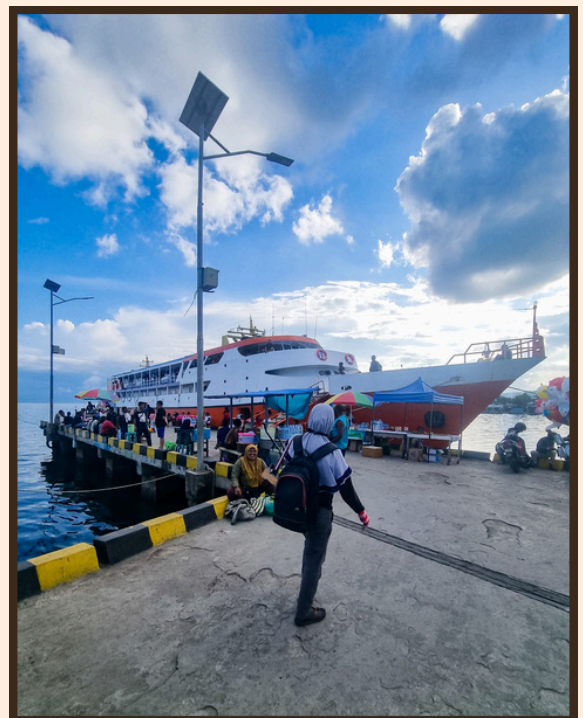
After speaking to many local agents, guides and other mammal watchers/birders this trip snapped into place. It takes a full day from Manokwari to reach Wasior, the main town on the peninsula, immediately backed by the mountain range. There is an airport but timings and tickets were unreliable at the time but there is a good boat network from Manokwari, a fast boat that goes in the day and has many stops which arrives in the evening, and a slow boat that is direct and goes overnight arriving at dawn.

Day 1

The day before I had arrived in Manokwari and had a taxi driver before I left the airport, which is common in Indonesia, I ended up commandeering the driver for all other journeys in Manokwari and he is now my contact and friend, also common in Indonesia! We drove to my friend Matias's house, who works in establishing eco-tourism within the West Papua region. Here

I rested until it was time to head to the port, it just so happened that Matias's neighbour, Franky, is from Wasior and happened to be getting the same boat, so he became my boat buddy for the 12 hour crossing and was great company and helped dampen some of the local curiosity that surrounded me, he actually had to wake me up when people were departing the boat.

In Wasior I met Eky, my head guide, who is determined to promote eco-tourism on the peninsula & its surrounding islands, and has climbed the mountain before. Wasior is a nice orderly town with a languid remote tropical outpost feeling, the tallest building is a two-story Chinese restaurant.



The KM Margareth ready to leave Manokwari

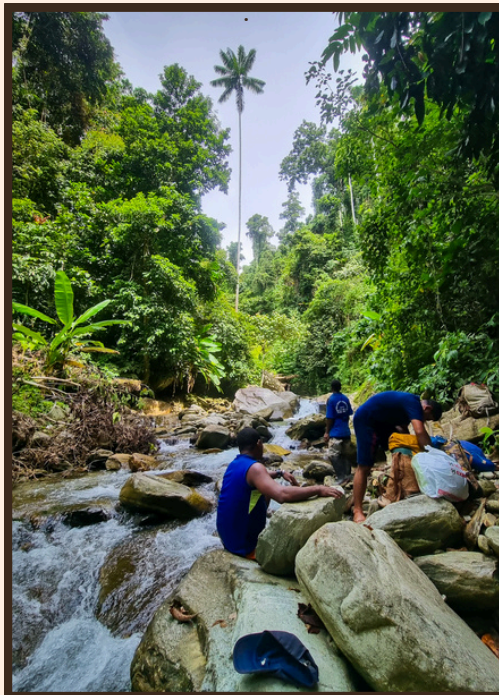
Day 1 cont.

After stocking up on supplies in Wasior we headed to the village of Ramiki at the base of the mountain, its in walking distance of Wasior, almost like a suburb. I rested at Eky's house until midday, then arrived the entourage. Julian & Rudolf, two hunters who most likely know more about the mountain than anyone else. Both are renowned in the area for their tracking skills. They were joined by Amon & Levinus, all from the village of Ramiki and all were to prove incredibly competent as guides, porters & good company. Rudolf performed an *adat* before commencing the trek, a later learned he was one of the church leaders!

It's a 15 minute walk to the trail start which, snaking through gardens, quickly arrives at a river and small waterfall which is a local hang-out spot. Here we fixed our gear and got ready for the first ascent. A 350m tall hill stands between the village and the base of the mountain proper, so we climbed up through bamboo and then down through the steep forest onto a beautiful, pristine river bed. As we arrived at the river, the first bird of the trip was a **Torrent Flycatcher**, seemingly a new record for the peninsula and an unexpected bird for the whole trip. You then must traverse the rocky river bed with pools and waterfalls for about an hour, prepare for wet feet. Whilst crossing the river, a **Hypsilurus** lizard, probably *magnus*, was swaying on some roots. Then the trail steeply ascends the side of the mountain. It is a hot and humid climb but watching the guys with their huge packs and camping gear whilst wearing sandals, is very humbling. I kept my complaints to myself.



Julian with Wasior in background



Traversing the river



Hypsilurus sp.

Day 1 cont.

The climb to Camp 1 takes roughly 5-6 hours, its steep in places and very hot at this lower elevation, a demanding climb but not arduous. It was hot by this point so the forest was generally quiet with just **Blyth's Hornbills** continually flying overhead. Camp 1 sits at 600m asl in tall lowland forest with **Yellow-legged Brushturkey** mounds surrounding it, indeed one was seen briefly the next morning. A fire was made and we hoped to go out at night, the habitat looks promising for Black-spotted Cuscus, and has been seen by the guides here before, however the heavens opened as soon as it got dark.

The night was spent showing the crew the reference guides for New Guinea and learning about Wondiwoi's fauna, all were very eager to share their knowledge of the forest and it was clear that Rudolf & Julian in particular had been hunting in these forests for a long-time. Very few people ever leave the area after camp 1 as this is where the majority of the pigs and deer are, the main quarry. Indeed both did used to hunt native wildlife and were good at it too but stopped 2 years ago after ideas for eco-tourism started to develop. I was shown pictures of them holding Vogelkop Tree Kangaroos, which has only just come to international attention as being found here. They also described both Grizzly & Wondiwoi tree kangaroos and their respective altitudinal ranges. Then Rudolf started to describe a gold and red tree kangaroo with a white head that looked 'botak'..bald. Pure conjecture without evidence of course, but really does sound like a golden-mantled tree kangaroo! It was an interesting night.

Day 2

The morning of the 2nd day was spent walking to Camp 2, it takes 3 hours winding slowly and steeply up the mountain, the forest composition changes quite sharply at 1000m asl as do the birds with **White-faced Robin** becoming common as well as **Fan-tailed Monarch**. Many **Palm Cockatoo** were flying overhead throughout the trek which ended at about midday at 1250m asl. Camp 2 is surrounded by tall hill forest on all sides, it actually had a drop toilet with privacy blinds, a bench and a table, unrivaled luxury. That night me, Eky & Julian went on our first night walk, they are not the easiest on these mountain trails but in the first 5 minutes Julian had found something, a sleeping bird that confused me as it had its head tucked in, then it emerged, **Chesnut-backed Jewel-Babbler**, another surprise species and an excellent first sighting. We saw a few **Lowland Ringtail Possums** that, while skittish, seemed common at this elevation, then a cuscus was spotted. It can be quite difficult, with how far variable some of the cuscus species are, to identify them from a distance but to me it seems to be a **Ground Cuscus** with its much larger, more gnarly build and expression and the white behind its ears. It started to rain so we headed back, a short but good quality haul.

Day 3

The next morning, eating breakfast, we watched **Lesser Birds-of-Paradise** dance in the trees surrounded the camp and then went for a short walk before heading to Camp 3. whilst watching through the forest on top of the hill a **New Guinea Harpy Eagle** briefly flew through the gap, a very impressive bird and a thrill to see one here.



Camp 2.



Chesnut-backed Jewel-Babbler



Ground Cuscus? Photo rotated 90°

Day 3 cont.

We started the steep incline towards Camp 3 and immediately came across a feeding party of **Tropical Scrubwren** of the *wondiwoi* subspp. they were far too skulking for photos but the time taken trying was rewarded by a **New Guinea Vulturine Parrot** flying in giving incredible close views. We climbed through bamboo & pandanus forest and after an hour we scaled the ridge and arrived in beautiful pristine montane forest with many bowers of the **Vogelkop Bowerbird**, the trails widen a little at this altitude and make it easier to search the surroundings. After a short steep climb off the ridge we arrived at camp 3 at 1500m asl, sat right on the edge of the mountain surrounded by huge tropical oak trees, moss and mist, its absolutely fabulous. Dotted around the camp are the giant *Musa ingens*, the world's largest banana species, which apparently when in season, attract tree kangaroos.

After setting up camp in the afternoon we walked around camp to familiarise ourselves with the new environment, then rain once again!



New Guinea Vulturine Parrot



The boys and a Vogelkop bower



Huge Musa ingens

Day 4

We now had two full days to explore the area around camp 3, Julian and Rudolf went into instant tracker mode and would spend the majority of the next two days trying to find tree kangaroos, without the need of a slow, sweaty westerner tripping over them.

They were gone by 6am when we ate breakfast, the trees around the camp were incredibly tall but alive with **Western Parotia**, **Crescent-caped Lophorina**, & **Blue-collared Parrot**, the latter seemingly a new record for the range. **Mid-mountain Berrypecker**, **Blue-grey Robin**, **Black Pitohui** & **Pygmy Drongo** also frequented the camp, the latter of the local population doing a very convincing rendition of Black-billed Sicklebill, even flying in to playback which got us falsely excited a few times.

We started towards the summit trail, ascending onto ridges through cloudy, moss-laden forests, seeing good birds with excellent views such as **White-bibbed Fruit-Dove** & **Hooded Pitohui**, birds seemed less wary here than elsewhere in New Guinea, you can sit at a **Vogelkop Bowerbird** Bower and the bird will quite happily land metres from you and start its call & display.

On the walk up I also managed to get a record shot of the local **Vogelkop Whistler** which looked and sounded quite distinctive. Picture at end of report.



Hooded Pitohui



White-bibbed Fruit-Dove



Blue-grey Robin

Day 4 Cont.

We continued up to about 1750m onto a ridge with many **Papuan Mountain Pigeons** passing through, we heard a distant **Black Sicklebill** of the *atratus* sbsp. we played the call and got a response, so we played it again and after a minutes silence it flew directly in under 2 metres above our heads!

We got our first proper view of **Arfak Smoky Honeyeater**, the local race being more brown with a less extensive, more orange wattle. Record photo at end of report.

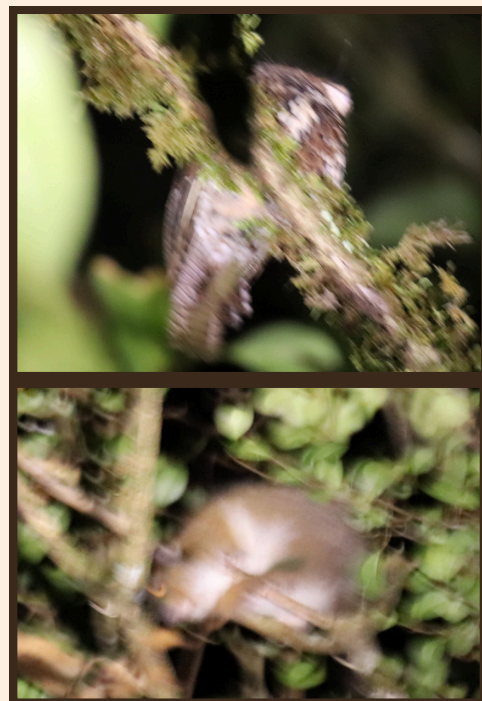
We returned back to camp and had dinner and with the threat of more rain we headed out after dark. The thermal image camera was picking up many rodents scurrying around but in the dense steep thickets, they were impossible to get a good look at. Then it picked something up on a branch overhead, a **Feline Owlet-nightjar**, unfortunately my camera had had enough of the constant moisture and refused to focus, so very blurry record shots were all that could be achieved. This particularly bit hard with the next sighting. A small **Possum** at 1700m, it was small with a white belly and rufous fur terminating in a dark grey back with a thick, black tail, it quickly ran from the light. Maybe just a red morph Lowland ringtail or perhaps, especially at this altitude, something different. It looked very much like an **Arfak Ringtail**. Higher up we came across another oddity, a black & white Cuscus, most likely **Stein's Cuscus**, Im not sure if it has been recorded from this range before but with a wet camera it'll have to wait till next time! Unfortunately the rain came in and did the next night too, a real shame on the mammal front!



Papuan Mountain-Pigeon



Black Sicklebill *atratus*



Yikes...

Day 5

With my camera dried out & Julian & Rudolf off again to search for tree kangaroos we were to summit the mountain today, about a 2.5 hour trek if not stopping. Not far from camp we were trying to call in a **Crescent-caped Lophorina** when a black & white bird landed right in front of us, a **Torrentlark**! Wholly unexpected as there was no river nearby and I haven't seen it being recorded from these mountains.

We spent a bit of time at another bower with the tame owner flying around it going about his business, I had presumed it had just flown back in behind the bower and non-chalantly got up to look at it when I saw a ginormous **Arfak Catbird** looking back at me. Unfortunately it wasn't as tame as the bowerbird and flew off. We then headed past the ridge to a particularly birdy area of the mountain, with many fruiting trees, we had visited the day before. It was fantastic. Male **Black sicklebills** and **Crescent-caped Lophorinas** feeding with female Parotias, surprise **Moluccan King-Parrots** at 1800m elevation, **Arfak Smoky Honeyeaters**, **Grey Thornbill**, **Stout-billed Cuckooshrike**, **Hooded Pitohui** & **Black Fantail** with **New Guinea Harpy Eagle** calling over the valley. As I was watching all this commotion I noticed movement right by my feet, a **Bronze Ground-Dove** was standing next to me, it quickly dashed into the undergrowth but then hung around for about 5 minutes obscured by the branches, another species I haven't seen documented for the range.



Torrentlark



Vogelkop Bowerbird



Crescent-caped Lophorina

Day 5 cont.

We had lunch before we headed up the mountain, after some strange screaming, a huge **Pheasant Pigeon** ran straight past us on the ridge below. The climb is far more arduous than the trails before it, lots of root climbing and steep banks covered in mud. Once we plateaued at 2185m I realised we were in a stunning mossy low forest full of orchids and Dr Seuss-like strange plants. Thornbills and strange-sounding Vogelkop Bowerbirds were the only noise up here. It was here Eky informed me I was the third westerner ever to stand at the summit which was as humbling as it was sad that we only had such a brief time to explore up here. longer next time for sure. **Capped White-eye** flitted through the trees with a distinctive bright yellow back, record photo at end of report. Whilst up here we smelt a very distinctive “mammaly” smell, both Amon & Eky got excited, **tree kangaroo**..

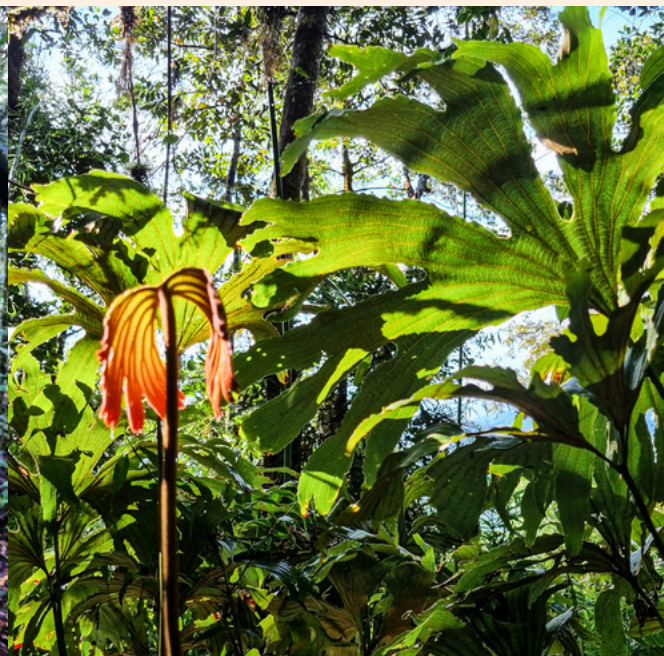
We found recent scratch marks on a nearby tree but try as we could we could not locate it. Finding a critically endangered mammal that was lost to science for 90 years on an isolated mountain range was proving tough.

On the way back down, Eky saw a **White-striped Rail**, it called distantly but wouldn't come back in. Whilst at rest a beautiful **Graphium weiskei** Butterfly landed on my knee, not a tree kangaroo but nice all the less.

Back at the camp more bad news, Julian and Rudolf had not found a tree kangaroo either..and then the rain started again.



Tree-kangaroo scratching post



Strange summit vegetation



Mystery Orchid at summit

Day 6

Today was the last day on the mountain, the phrase Eky had used before we started the trek repeated in my head “3 days in, 1 day out” but as we were already here I thought a last dash search for a tree kangaroo was necessary, Rudolf had mentioned an idea the night before, he had also smelt tree kangaroo on one of his searches and it was actually right by the dancing grounds of the **Western Parotia** on a different face of the mountain. So me Rudolf and Eky set off, pretty much completely off trail the whole way up. We found a ridge with plentiful bamboo, flocks of **Palm Cockatoo** (at 1850m) & **New Guinea Vulturine Parrot** flew across the valley and the whole ridge was absolutely saturated with **Western Parotia** calls, these were seen very well and up close & a dancing ground was found, being November he wasn't in a dancing mood.

As we crossed the ridge a faint smell caught Rudolfs attention and as we turned a corner a large animal, rufous with a flash of gold bashed at high speed into the bamboo...Rudolf whispered “...emas” or gold **tree kangaroo**, we spent as long as we could scanning the trees to see if it had climbed to safety but it was gone and we had to leave to start our descent. A very bitter-sweet moment and everything was far too swift for even a tentative ID.

We arrived back at camp to pack up at 11, maybe a 5 hour mountain trek wasn't the best way to start a day of descent as Eky confirmed we would be walking the whole way back to Ramiki the same way we came..



Western Parotia



Rudolf, Amon, Eky, the author, Julian & Levinus



Parotia Dancing Ground

Day 6 cont.

We started down the mountain, camp 2 came in quickly and that was a false reassurance, Camp 1 seemed to take far far longer and by now I was starting to lose steam, I don't think smoking Purple Butterfly tobacco with Julian helped at all. By the time we reached the river my legs were dust, definitely an overnight at camp 1 on the way back next time..by the time we had to traverse the last hill again I was delusional and it was dark.

Julian, who must be 25 years my senior had to prop me up down the hill as my jelly legs were not co-operating. I huge sigh of Joy hit me as we reached the village and Julian bought me a can of coke, the best present I've ever received.

We had rested back at the house for an hour or so when the boys thought it would be a great idea to go search for owls, so off we went with me walking like a robot through the village scrub. We didn't see an owl. The company was always worth it though, I am indebted to the village of Ramiki and its fantastic residents, Sometimes endearingly shy other times confident and laughing, the people really do make the journey. The knowledge of this forest and what it harbours only exists with these few people. As was proven when I was shown a photo of a completely unfamiliar **Dorcopsis** wallaby, If anyone knows Kris Helger please let him know I'm trying to reach him..or Tim Flannery, i'm not picky.

I must also thank Eky's wonderfully hospitable wife, she even did my laundry whilst I was on the mountain, and also to my friend Frans, a great english speaker who helped me greatly when my bahasa stumbled.



Fakfak

Situated on the Bomberai peninsula on the Birds Neck, the limestone massifs of Fakfak & Kumawa represent the most isolated mountain regions in New Guinea. Due to the limestone, gaining elevation is incredibly difficult and standing water is rare in this habitat, hence why so many mysteries exist. A new bird species, the Satin Berrypecker, was only formally described from the Kumawas in 2021 and as yet undescribed honeyeaters and Birds of Paradise from the top of the Fakfaks.

Much easier to access is the huge swathe of hill forest right behind the city of Fakfak, it can be reached by good roads in under 20 minutes from the city centre and the local forestry department has created trails and a hut/resting area and bird hides. There are a few range-restricted birds in this region with its mammal & herpetofauna diversity only recently being recognised.

Fakfak as a city is a clean & colourful town built on the hills behind the sea dotted with limestone islets, it is known in Papua for its human diversity & large Muslim population who readily integrate with the local Papuans and Bugis who also frequent the town.

Unfortunately I lost a day here due to a delayed flight, this meant just one full day which was not enough to tap the full biodiversity of this unique limestone forest.



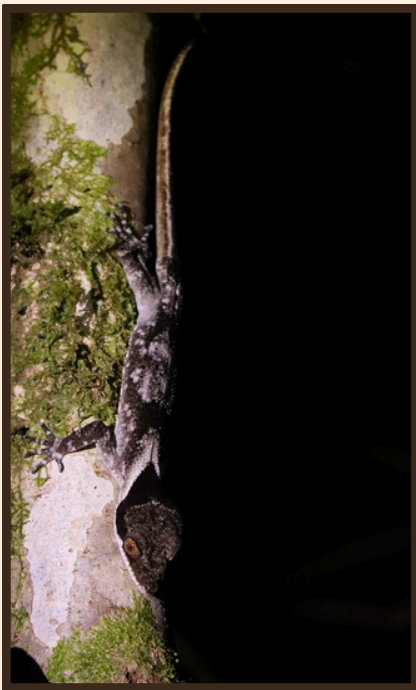
Southern Cassowary

Day 1

After arriving a day late, Apon picked me up from the airport, he showed me a photo he'd taken on his phone of a Grizzly Tree-Kangaroo just the day before, this excited me enough to try and make it our main target for the little time I had here. Black-spotted Cuscus has also been seen here so I had my eye out for these too.

We headed to the previous spot in the forest looking for signs of tree kangaroo, we saw many scratch marks on the trees again, but no distinctive smell like in the Wondiwois. It seemed it must have left the immediate area the previous morning, we hoped it hadn't gone far and would search again the next morning. Coming back out to the rest area, a brilliant & fearless **Southern Cassowary** walked into the clearing, we would encounter each other a few times in my short stay.

Just before we got set to head out at night, Apon suggested I stay in the rangers hut instead of the lovely homestay I had organised due to my time constraints, why do I do this to myself.



Cryptodactylus Sp



Pheasant Pigeon



Northern Common Cuscus

Day 1 cont.

The trail was hilly but not difficult, this was one of those forests that is just alive with frogs, snakes and other reptiles, a great place for a herpetologist. Resting on a tree as was we walked by was a very large **Cyrtodactylus** gecko, similar to **Cyrtodactylus irianjaeyensis** but it certainly excited Apon in its size and appearance. **Lowland Possums** were encountered a few times and then a **Common Echymipera** hiding in a tree stump.

Next in the thermals was something larger, a **Pheasant Pigeon**, which allowed close approach as sleeping birds tend too. **Northern Common Cuscus** were also seen and a **Marbled Frogmouth**.

Two rodents were found, the first seems to be a **Polynesian Rat** which isn't so exciting, however the 2nd was a **Bruijns Pogonomelomys**, *Pogonomelomys bruijni*, endemic to the North-west and a very beautiful rodent that allowed close approach and is very little known yet seen throughout the rest of the trip, just showing how little we know about these vast, pristine environments of New Guinea.

I lay worried about what might be crawling on my face that night with no mosquito net in a rangers hut but was woken surprisingly unmolested. Needing a wee, heading to the toilet block at first light I, blaringly eyed, happened upon our friend the Cassowary, standing above my head about 7 feet away. I cursed myself for being in Birkenstocks in the long grass, made a few compliments and we both went our seperate ways.



Marbled Frogmouth



Polynesian Rat?



Pogonomelomys bruijni

Day 2

We headed out again looking for the tree-kangaroo, coming across a few good birds in the process but no salt, it was here whilst we accessed trails from both sides of the road, i was told they do cross the road to access different areas of the forest. Just a 20 minute drive from an Indonesian city to see something so bizarre and rare crossing a main road seems to be a Papuan specialty.

With the unfortunate business of not being able to locate the local tree-kangaroo, we decided to visit a few of the bird blinds set up in the area by Apon, Birds of Paradise were on my agenda later on the trip and the lowland species found here are widespread however Fakfak lays host to a few bird species with very disjunct distributions in New Guinea including the rarely seen and beautiful **Banded Yellow Robin** seen feeding her chick whilst a **Magnificent Bird of Paradise** chided the arena with **Black Berrypeckers & Golden Monarchs** flitting past.

That night we went out again and had a strange night walk, in the fact that we saw every mammal, apart from the Echymipera, that we saw the night before and nothing else apart from good birds in the form of **Papuan Pitta, Spot-winged Monarch, Hooded Monarch & a pair of Red-necked Crane**

Day 3

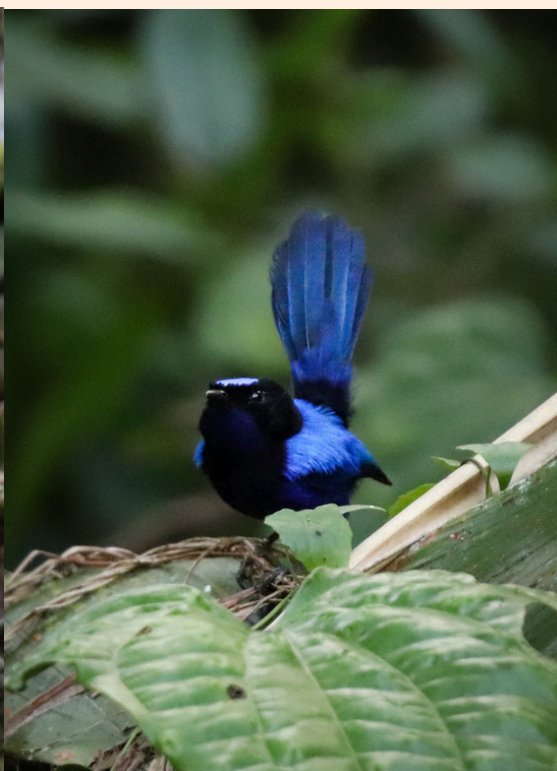
Another strangely peaceful night on the ranger hut floor and a last ditch effort for the tree-kangaroo, again not a sniff, but in the early morning light we still found a **Magnificent Riflebird**, a nesting **Spectacled Longbill** & best of all a serene **Cinnamon Ground-Dove**.

I enjoyed my ramble through Fakfak city before my flight, a genuinely peaceful and interesting destination, Then it was time to head to Sorong. Even having a chance at rare mammals in such an easy environment with so many other specialties make it a superb destination that deserves more time.

I await information of how to gain elevation here as it would hold many prizes I'm sure, vogelkop tree kangaroo have been sighted here, as well as Echidna. Combining it with a trip to the equally remote Kumawas would be a truly fantastic expedition



Banded Yellow Robin



Emperor Fairywren



Cinnamon Ground-Dove



Sorong to Tambrau

The Lowlands surrounding the city of Sorong have long been visited on day trips by birdwatchers, on their way to other destinations, to see range-restricted species such as Red-breasted Paradise-Kingfisher & Black Lory. This all changed when Charles Roring, the department of West Papua tourism & with the aid of local villagers set up an Eco-village. The now infamous Malagufuk was found to be full of rare creatures including Western Long-beaked Echidna, which was feared by western science to be largely extirpated from its former range.

The success of the village, with a hiatus during Covid, spread fast throughout Kapupaten Sorong upto the foothills of the Tambrau mountains and now many villages advertise their specialities through local guides, with many birds, mammals & reptiles that were very rarely observed and little understood now being regularly recorded. This is true eco-tourism with the guides working in association with a, strangely for Indonesia, engaged and organised tourism department with money being distributed to the local villagers, making the forest surrounding their homes more economically viable if it remains intact.

This trip focused on three villages all with distinct characters, Malasigi, true Papuan lowland forest just south of Sorong, then, on the road to Sausapour, Malayau, a swamp forest & Klailik at the base of the Tambrau foothills.

Day 1

My guide Absalom was waiting for me outside the airport with a Toyota Azanza and after lunch we headed to the village of Malasigi, about 2 hours south-east of Sorong, once the suburbs had dropped away it was mainly forests and gardens the whole drive. We arrived in the orderly village to a warm welcome, it was surrounded by lowland forest with many parrots & pigeons flying over. There is also a **Northern Cassowary** in attendance but she played coy during my visit.

After settling into a fantastically situated native lodge I was shown to the river that lay just behind and two **Western Crowned Pigeon** were settling to roost. The sunset and we headed off for a night walk.

Walking down the road towards the forest proper, we tried for night birds. A **Wallace's Owlet Nightjar** was heard calling, we saw something fly in thinking it to be the bird but it turned out to be a **Papuan Hawk-Owl** a great sighting nonetheless.



Black-capped Lory

Day 1 cont.

Once in the forest, I noticed something that would surprise me at all other locations in the Sorong region, the trails were very neatly outlined, with steps & rails fashioned out of young trees in steeper places, clearly a lot of thought had gone into these villages and their development as eco-tourism destinations. The forest was quite quiet with the threat of rain however quite skittish **Brown Dorcopsis** were seen hopping off the trail & a white **Northern Common Cuscus** was found peering out of a tree.

Day 2

This morning was to prove spectacular as we headed towards the first of four Bird of Paradise leks at dawn, once again navigating the easy and well-maintained trails we soon arrived at the first, which turned out to be a spot for **Twelve-wired Bird of Paradise**. Indeed after a few seconds the male landed and proceeded to practice its dance, on a horizontal branch instead of the usual post, it would land on a suitable “post” now and again, one time thinking it had perched up again it turned out to be an **Oriental Cuckoo** which was a surprise, not as surprising as when we headed to the next lek of the **Lesser Bird-of-Paradise** which turned out to be about 2 minutes away! This was the only species of Bird-of-Paradise that was really still dancing at this time of year and we watched at leisure as a tree erupted with dancing males. We then rounded off the morning with a **Magnificent Bird-of-Paradise**, through a hide, fluffing its breast shield to many females, but refusing to show its crest, once again not the best time of year.



Red-billed Brushturkey



Striped Possum



Papuan Hawk-Owl

Day 2 cont.

As we headed through the forest later in the morning we first of all managed to call in a **Papuan Pitta** which hopped around us in the dense undergrowth, we had a few helpers from the village with us who all had sharp eyes in their forest and were an immense help with locating skulking birds. Other birds such as **Friedled Monarch & Yellow-billed Kingfisher** were seen on the walk along the wide trails and then we heard a **Red-billed Brushturkey** thinking it would be an impossible chase, Absolom casually turns to me and says “lets go”. So we skulked through the vegetation for 200m or so, playing its call, the bird coming in and then out, we saw it quickly fly over a river and into dense scrub. Still steadfast Absolom got me to wait by a log and scampered off, about 5 minutes later he came skulking in with a grin and plonked down next to me, and as commanded, the male bird sauntered past us. Far bigger than I thought they would be, flicking its tail. A fantastic sighting.

We walked down to the river as the morning drew on, there are thermal hot springs all around the village and the blue, clear river billowed with steam, it really is a beautiful location. Later in the afternoon, the skies were scanned as we walked towards the **King Bird-of-Paradise** lek on the other side of the village, with mainly common birds but good views of **Variable Goshawk**. We saw the king but not too well, this would be remedied later. It turned out this was the direction of our night walk later that evening.

A short night walk before the rain produced a **Striped Possum**, a beautiful **King Bird-of-Paradise**, more **Papuan Pitta**, **Red-necked Crake** and an awesome, almost skeletal **Selencosmia arndsti** tarantula

Day 3

Our last morning in Malasigi started with the **Magnificent Riflebird**, through a hide, who performed well all morning, despite the rain. Whilst widespread in New Guinea, it is only in recent years that good looks have been obtained of this incredible bird, due to the spreading of local bird hides. A last walk through the forest started well with **Beautiful Fruit-Dove, Large Fig Parrot & Ivory-billed Coucal**. Then a loud wail I was now familiar with, a **Pheasant Pigeon**, once again Absalom was onto it and we were crouching in the bushes once again, it walked past us cocking its tail, I had now seen this bird in all 3 locations! As we stayed in the undergrowth a **Cinnamon Ground-Dove** sauntered past, a nice last sighting for this wonderful village.

On my way out of the forest, a surprise lay in wait. Many of the village, in traditional dress, sang and danced while leading me to the village hall for a goodbye ceremony. The hospitality here was unmatched and I encourage visiting wholeheartedly.

With our final goodbyes it was on to Klailik, passing through Sorong once more and then on the road to Sausapour. As we drove, we passed quite a few “wildlife villages”, hopefully as they are explored their own specialities can be discovered so they all get a slice of the action. Klailik had already discovered its own, hence its new name “Echidna Park”. We arrived in the late afternoon, its a broody, wet place with the foothills of the Tambrauws framing the village.



Magnificent Riflebird video still



Long-fingered Triok



Green Tree Python

Day 3 cont.

As we settled in to our new accommodation, a concrete house with a mattress and bathroom just outside, the light fell and the men & children of the village assembled. By day they go about their daily business and all that village life entails, by night, when someone's in town, they become Echidna spotters. So off they went flashlights in tow, in lines ready to woop at the sighting of this incredibly rare and unique creature.

With the echidna team gone, me, Absalom and our fabulous assistant Ester, went on our own night walk, this forest has to be one of the best places to be at night, hunter pressure must be low as mammals, birds and reptiles seemed to be in abundance. Within 5 minutes we had seen **Northern Common Cuscus & Lowland Ringtail** and a few snakes. During the walk me and “ were trying to find what was in the thermal image camera when all of a sudden I was soaking wet and a geyser 5 foot high had appeared, Ester had accidentally burst a pipe along the track, which lead to lots of “snitches get stitches” jokes for the rest of the night. Lots of **Brown Dorcopsis** were showing up but they were quite skittish, and then something moving through the trees was picked up, jumping down the tree and into the spotlight was a main target for the whole trip, a fabulous **Long-fingered Triok**. A fantastic, very poorly known mammal that through the quirks of convergent evolution is part squirrel, part Aye-Aye with its huge elongated digit, plush fur and white-tipped tail. It moved quick but stayed in the area allowing prolonged views. The night was capped off with a **Red-breasted Paradise-Kingfisher, Green Tree Python & a Common Blossom Bat** but no echidna just yet...

Day 4

Today we'd be ascending the limestone hills that surround the village, whilst waiting for everyone to get ready I walked into the forest behind the accommodation and was quickly rewarded with a pair of **Western Crowned Pigeon** quite unconcerned with my presence.

We started our climb up and passed huge limestone spires and structures, the home of our main quarry. Few other birds were around in this porous forest with little undergrowth with **Grey Crow** being of note. Being able to see far into the forest, I glimpsed a large black bird on the ground in the distance which quickly flew off. I put it out of mind and we kept climbing. Finally after an hour and a half we reached the top of the hill, with caves and valleys of limestone covered in tree roots and vines. Then the song, a **Greater Melampitta** deep in its lair. we travelled tenuously through the sharp rock hiding between the spires. We briefly saw the female and then in position, the male flew right above us on a ridge and happily hopped past us. Unbelievable. Perhaps more believable was my camera's refusal to focus, but record shots were made. All in all a fantastic birding experience.

After a long climb down, past clear waterfalls and pools, we arrived back in the village. I went back to the spot behind the accommodation & quickly called in 3 **Red-breasted Paradise-Kingfisher** who were joined by a **Rufous-bellied Kookaburra**.



Western Crowned Pigeon



Red-breasted Paradise-Kingfisher



Greater Melampitta!

Day 4 cont.

We rested for a few hours until after dark when suddenly the call went out, echidna! Shoes were thrown on and suddenly the concession towards the spot with lots of hooting through the forest proceeded. After an anxious scramble we came across the main spotters surrounding a big spiky ball. Slowly but surely it unfurled into a beautiful and bizarre **Western Long-beaked Echidna**, it nosed around in the undergrowth and then ambled with its gigantic feet through the undergrowth. Truly a fantastic day in this fantastic village full of rare wonders.

Day 5

Today started with an easy **Eastern Hooded Pitta** and then we headed through a more swamp-like forest to pick up some remaining targets, the main one on my mind being Northern Cassowary. On the way through, over a river we saw the first of 14 **Western Crowned-Pigeon** on this day. Then another target, a **Thick-billed Ground-Pigeon** was flushed from the ground. I deliberately headed into an area that looked like cassowary heaven, a swampy area with lots of fallen fruit when we heard an **Azure Kingfisher**, it flitted by the river a couple of times and whilst trying to get a better view we heard something behind us. A massive female **Northern Cassowary**, with its neon yellow neck, looked as surprised to see us as we were it. It panicked and jumped around on the spot until it thrashed through the undergrowth. A truly impressive creature. Mere minutes after celebrating, a male **Blue-black Kingfisher** flew in giving fantastic close views.



Western Long-beaked Echidna



Blue-black Kingfisher



Lowland Ringtail Possum

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It started to rain at this point so we headed out, with crowned pigeons seemingly flushing from every corner we turned, it must be a testament to the villager's restraint in hunting that so many large tasty ground birds and defenseless mammals such as Echidna are found in such close proximity to the settlement.

The rain got heavier into dusk and clouds and clouds of small flying termites billowed around any light source, we waited for a few hours for it to settle and then took our chance, as we got ready to head out of the village I noticed a little face looking back at me through the grass, it stood on its haunches and turned out to be a **Long-nosed Echymipera**, a brave creature considering all the cats & dogs in the village.

Rain was still threatening but we were determined as it was the last night of the trip. We saw a **Moluccan Naked-backed Fruitbat** & a **Lowland Ringtail** in quick procession and then the heavens opened. The guys built a rain shelter in the forest including a solid bench in about 2 minutes..which would've been comfy enough if it wasn't for the return of the termites, they consumed any light source, they didn't bite or sting but their sheer numbers made your skin crawl the minute a head torch was turned on, so we waited in the dark for about an hour and a half..and then miraculously it was over and the termites dwindled. I'm sure this is an interesting natural phenomenon but not one I'd care to experience again.

What proceeded was one of the best night walks I've ever had..the rain had brought the forest to life and rodents were everywhere..**Lowland Mosaic-tailed Rats, White-tailed Giant Rats & Bruijns Pogonomelomys** were all very active along the forest floor, **Dark Sheath-tailed Bats & Unstriped Tube-nosed Bat** were found drying out in the trees. The **Brown Dorcopsis** had also come out in numbers, possibly due to the soft wet ground, they were less fearful and allowed close approach.

More **Long-fingered Trioks** were picked up in the thermal camera and then something larger...a stonking pair of **Ground Cuscus** completely unconcerned by us were foraging in a tree, obviously living up to their pugnacious nature as one had many fresh cuts along its flanks. The night finished off with another **Striped Possum** and a scarce **White-eared Catbird**. We had recorded over half the mammals for the trip in just over 2 hours! It is true that night walks/drives always seem more productive after rain.

This was to be the end of my time in Klailik, a truly phenomenal wildlife destination with friendly people and a good trail network and spotting system, I'm truly excited for the discoveries and developments to come from this region.



Ground Cuscus



ID? Limestone forest, Klailik



Lowland Mosaic-tailed Rat

Day 6

Today was a quick visit to the village of Malayau, I wish I could of gave this place more time but Klailik was just too much fun! It has a different character to the other sites, being a dense and intensely lush swamp forest, with a pretty village surrounded by giant trees. A mere 5 minute walk through the waterlogged forest and we were met with stunning views of a male **King Bird of Paradise**. A night walk would of been most interesting here, it looked like an excellent place for Black-spotted Cuscus and indeed the locals recognised the animal.

Back in the village we had many fly-overs including the much wanted **Black Lory**, a birds head endemic.

Another incredibly friendly, orderly village that seemed to have nice accommodation and good facilities, excited about the prospects of what eco-tourism could bring.

From here it was goodbye to Papua, Absalom & his excellent team. Being a reconnaissance trip, all areas deserved more time and would have no doubt revealed more surprises but this short journey was incredibly successful. The rain dampened many night walks which was a shame on the mammal front but also heightened activity once it stopped. Papua is nothing short of spectacular, and is one of the few places on earth where you can feel truly intrepid and make new discoveries just by visiting a remote village or mountain.

I would also like to thank Carlos Bocos with help with initial logistics and IDing the small furry's and to everyone involved in the West Papua tourism association, Eky and team, Apon and Cone, Absalom and Ester, Matias & Charles Roring. Please email info@altindonesia.com for help with your trip!



King BOP Video still



Brown Dorcopsis

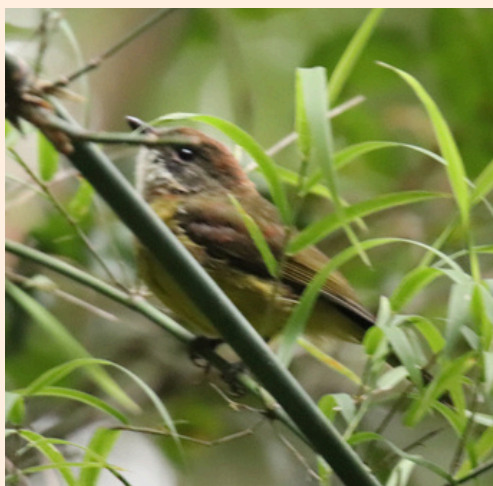
Species Checklist

Species:	Wondiwoi	FakFak	Malasigi	Klailik	Malayau
Southern Cassowary		x			
Northern Cassowary				x	
Dwarf Cassowary	droppings abv 2000m				
Red-Billed Brushturkey			x	x	
Yellow-legged Brushturkey	x				
Variable Goshawk			x		
Long-tailed Buzzard	x			x	
New Guinea Harpy Eagle	x				
White-Striped Forest-rail	x				
Red-necked Crake		x	x		
Black-Billed Cuckoo-Dove		x	x	x	
Brown Cuckoo-Dove		x	x		
Great Cuckoo-Dove	x				
Bronze Ground-Dove	x NR				
Cinnamon Ground-Dove		x	x		
Thick-Billed Ground-Pigeon				x	
Pheasant Pigeon	x	x	x		
Western Crowned Pigeon	H		x	x (14 1 day)	
Woompoo Fruit-Dove	x	x	x	x	
Pink-Spotted Fruit-Dove			x		
Beautiful Fruit-Dove			x		
Superb Fruit-Dove				x	
Mountain Fruit-Dove	x				
Papuan Mountain-Pigeon	x				
Pinon's Imperial Pigeon			x	x	x
Palm Cockatoo	x all elv	x	x		x
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	x all elv	x	x	x	x
Vulterine Parrot	x common				
Eclectus Parrot			x		x
Charmosyna sp	x				
Black-capped Lory	x	x	x		x
Coconut lorikeet			x		x
Black Lory					x
Blue-collared Parrot	x				
Moluccan King-Parrot	x	x		x	
Red-cheeked Parrot			x		
Large Fig-Parrot			x		
Ivory-billed Coucal			x	x	
Blyth's Hornbill	x	x	x	x	x
Oriental Cuckoo			x		
Marbled Frogmouth		x	x		
Papuan Hawk-owl			x		
Papuan Boobook			x		
Feline Owlet-Nightjar	x				
Wallace's Owlet-Nightjar				H	
Glossy Swiftlet	x	x	x	x	x
Uniform Swiftlet			x	x	
Mountain Swiftlet	x				
Moustached Treeswift			x		
Common Paradise-Kingfisher	H		H	H	
Red-breasted Paradise-Kingfisher			x	x	
Rufous-Bellied Kookaburra		x		x	
Blue-black Kingfisher				x	
Azure Kingfisher				x	
Yellow-billed Kingfisher			x	H	
Papuan Pitta	H	x	x		
Eastern Hooded Pitta				x	
Chesnut-backed Jewel-babbler	x				
Rusty Mouse-Warbler		x			
Mountain Mouse-Warbler	x				

Species:	Wondiwoi	Fakfak	Malasigi	Klailik	Malayau
Emperor Fairywren		x			
Plain Honeyeater				x	
Helmeted Friarbird			x	x	
Tawny-breasted Honeyeater	x	x			
Western Smoky Honeyeater	x				
Tropical Scrubwren <i>Wondiwoi</i>	x				
Grey-green Scrubwren	x				
Grey Thornbill	x				
Green-backed Gerygone	x	x			
Yellow-bellied Gerygone	x	x			
Black Berrypecker	x	x	x		
Mid-Mountain Berrypecker	x				
Spectacled Longbill		x			
Olive-backed Sunbird			x	x	x
Black Butcherbird				x	
Stout-billed Cuckooshrike	x				
Black-browed Triller					x
Little Shrikethrush	x		x	x	
Black Pitohui	x				
Northern Variable Pitohui		x			
Hooded Pitohui	x				
Greater Melampitta				x	
Papuan Babbler				x	
Vogelkop whistler?	x				
Rusty Whistler	x				
Shining Flycatcher				x	
Spot-winged Monarch		x	x		
Hooded Monarch		x		x	
Friilled Monarch			x		
Golden Monarch		x			
Fantailed Monarch	x				
Chesnut-bellied Fantail		x			
Rufous-backed Fantail	x				
Black Fantail	x				
Pygmy Drongo	x	x		x	
Black-sided Robin		x			
Blue-grey Robin	x				
White-faced Robin	x				
Banded Yellow Robin		x			
Torrent Flycatcher	x NR				
Torrentlark	x NR				
Olive Flycatcher				x	
Capped White-eye	x				
Black-fronted White-eye	x				
Torresian Crow			x		
Grey Crow				x	
Glossy Manucode	x	x		x	
Western Parotia	x				
Black Sicklebill	x				
Black-billed Sicklebill	H				
Crescent-caped Lophorina	x				
Magnificent Riflebird	H	H	x	H	
Twelve-wired Bird of Paradise	H		x		
Magnificent Bird of Paradise	H	x	x		
King Bird of Paradise			x		x
Lesser Bird of Paradise	x	H	x	H	
Spangled Drongo		x		x	
Yellow-faced Myna			x		x
Arfak Catbird	x				
White-eared Catbird				x	
Vogelkop Bowerbird	x				

Mammals	Wondiwoi	Fakfak	Malasigi	Klailik	Malayau
Western Long-beaked Echidna				x	
Brown Dorcopsis			x	x	
Arfak Ringtail?	x				
Lowland Ringtail	x	x	x	x	
Steins Cuscus	x				
Ground Cuscus	?			x	
Northern Common Cuscus	x	x	x	x	
Striped Possum			x	x	
Long-fingered Triok				x	
Common Echymipera		x			
Long-nosed Echymipera				x	
White-tailed Giant Rat				x	
Bruijn's Pogonomelomys		x		x	
Lowland Mosaic-tailed Rat				x	
Polynesian Rat		x			
Great Flying Fox	x	x			
Big-eared Flying Fox			x	x	
Dark Sheath-tailed Bat		x		x	
Moluccan Naked-backed Fruit Bat			x	x	
Unstriped Tube-nosed Bat				x	
Common Blossom Bat				x	

Appendix



Whistler from the wondiwoi's, most likely a Vogelkop whistler juvenile.



White-eye from 1600m asl in the Wondiwois, note the dark neck and yellow back, not noted in any known form of white eye in New Guinea



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Dorcopsis/Dorcopsulus wallaby from the Wondiwois, where no species seem to be recorded. It looks very different to *Dorcopsis muelleri*, the nearest of either genus to the Wondiwoi's. Signs of wallaby foraging were found up to about 1300m. If anyone has more information or links to the Australian Museum we would be most grateful.