

**FIELD REPORT**

**PAPUA NEW GUINEA HIGHLIGHTS**

**JULY 16–29, 2023**



The mysterious Doria's Goshawk © Max Breckenridge

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Seven intrepid travelers and I began our Papua New Guinea adventure in the capital, Port Moresby. It was going to be a big first day with a trip to Varirata National Park on the cards. PNG's only national park certainly didn't disappoint, and we kicked off the day in style, marveling at the raucous and extravagant display of lekking Raggiana Birds-of-Paradise. The males were particularly excitable due to the presence of several meticulous females—one male eventually doing enough to pass on his genes to the next generation! We explored the lovely clearings of the park and hiked along the creek to the viewpoint recording almost 60 species in a place where birding conditions can prove challenging at times. Highlights included a splendid male Growling Riflebird posing well, good views of several fruit-dove species, an incessant White-crowned Koel, cute Spot-winged and Frilled monarchs, a friendly White-faced Robin, quick Black Berrypeckers, the lovely Rufous-bellied Kookaburra, and a roosting Barking Owl. Leaving the park, some roadside birding revealed a singing White-bellied Whistler and Lemon-bellied Flycatchers, the impressive Blue-winged Kookaburra, and two wonderful sightings of a nesting pair of Eclectus Parrots and unusually close looks at a pair of Red-cheeked Parrots. The jet lag was starting to wear on some of us, so we made our way back to the very comfortable Airways Hotel, thoroughly satisfied with our first day in PNG.



One of the most memorable sightings you can have in PNG - displaying Raggiana Bird-of-Paradise at Varirata NP. © M Breckenridge

After a remarkably smooth check-in the following morning, we were on our way to the steamy lowlands of Kiunga and the Fly River. A small flock of Australian Pratincoles were there to greet us on our arrival at Kiunga Airport, as were our local contact, Samuel, and our excellent guide, Glen. We spent two and a

half days birding the forests and rivers around Kiunga with much reward. Highlights included a couple of birdy afternoon sessions along the Boystown Rd, a surprise party of the mythical Campbell's Fairywren in forest north of town, and a wonderful day exploring the Fly, Elevela, and Ketu Rivers.

Our charter flight with pilot Sam was right on time, and we farewelled the lowlands for the pleasant climes of Tari and the fabulous Ambua Lodge. The birding around Ambua and along the Highlands Highway to Tari Gap is always good, but this year was especially birdy. The availability of fruit is particularly crucial for birds in PNG, and it appeared to be a good season around Ambua. A pair of the rare and nomadic Spotted Berrypecker and a wacky Short-tailed Paradigalla were two of the first birds we encountered at the lodge, and stayed faithful to the same tree for the remainder of our stay. Other good birds seen around the lodge during our stay included a fabulous male Greater Lophorina, the blue-eyed Lawe's Parotia, chance sightings of both Modest and Madaraz's tiger-parrots, a beautiful male White-breasted Fruit-Dove, shy Black Pitohui, Buff-banded Rail on the lawn, a female MacGregor's Bowerbird, Fan-tailed Monarch, Black-mantled Goshawk, and the resident Great Woodswallows that continued to feast on the abundance of moths attracted by the lights—another highlight of Ambua, where the moth diversity is something to behold.

Each day we ventured uphill from the lodge by bus and enjoyed several great sessions along the Highlands Highway below Tari Gap. The change in altitude is stark as you creep up the hill here, and we did very well with some of the classic highland forest species, as well as a few surprises. An Alpine Pipit was probably the rarest sighting, but the highlight was possibly a distant, but very vocal New Guinea Eagle we scoped up on our second morning! We enjoyed: brief sightings of the cosmic male Crested Satinbird; alien-like King-of-Saxony Bird-of-Paradise; the machine-gun sounding male Brown Sicklebill that showed well; robins, well represented with White-winged, Black-throated, and Blue-gray all seen well; Regent and Sclater's whistlers; a pair of the scarce Gray Thornbill; stunning male Ribbon-tailed Astrapias; gorgeous Papuan Lorikeets; Red-collared Myzomela; yodeling Belford's Melidectes; and the strange Lesser Melampitta was also observed..

On our final session we struck gold when the beautiful song of the Mottled Berryhunter was heard, eventually revealing a pair of these shy, monotypic New Guinea specials. But it wasn't over yet; soon after seeing the berryhunters, I heard the distinctive but far less musical call of another special bird, Wattled Ploughbill. A bit of whistling proved fruitless initially, and we were just about to give up when I noticed a pair had snuck in low—we proceeded to have fantastic views of these strange and beautiful birds—a fantastic end to our stay at Ambua.



A strange member of the bird-of-paradise family - the Short-tailed Paradigalla showed very well at Ambua Lodge for us. © M Breckenridge

Another quick and pleasant charter flight with Sam the next morning, and we were soon in the highland city of Mount Hagen. Our transfer whisked us uphill to the rustic Kumul Lodge, where the cool air and renowned bird feeders greeted us. We spent our first afternoon around the lodge enjoying the more confiding birds such as Brehm's Tiger-Parrot, Belford's Melidectes, Smoky Honeyeater, Island Thrush, Rufous-naped Bellbirds, female Brown Sicklebill, and a couple of impressive adult Ribbon-tailed Astrapias.

The following day we started in the village of Kama, where Lesser Bird-of-Paradise mostly behaved and Magnificent Bird-of-Paradise showed very nicely. Torrent Flycatchers were in their usual spot beside the Lai River, and a few of the more intrepid members of the group managed to get a short view of a pair of stunning Torrent Larks after a short but slightly treacherous hike! Our highlight at the feeder for the day was an incredibly obliging male Painted Tiger-Parrot—undoubtedly the most difficult of the tiger-parrots, and it completed our set—quite a feat for one week in the highlands! That afternoon we spent an enjoyable stationary session at Murmur Pass, where we watched the birds come to us at a beautiful viewpoint over a clearing. Multiple male Brown Sicklebills were showing, and we tallied over 50 species in less than two hours.

Our final day had arrived, but not before making the steep slog up the road at Tonga for excellent looks at the incomparable male Blue Bird-of-Paradise. It is always a terrific bookmark to this amazing trip. But the fun wasn't over quite yet! A nationwide emergency fuel-rationing had quietly come into effect overnight, and, as such, our flight to Port Moresby had been canceled to an unknown date! Luckily, some wheeling and dealing on behalf of yours truly, but mostly thanks to the wonderful PNG Air staff at Mount Hagen Airport, we somehow snatched enough seats on the last plane out of Hagen that afternoon!

It was a great relief when that plane eventually sat down, and even more so when we made it back to the lovely Airways Hotel for a celebratory final dinner.

Thanks are in order for all the local contacts without whom this tour would not be possible: Leonard, Samuel, Glen, Joseph, John, and Wilson; all the staff, drivers, and security; the office staff at VENT, particularly Penny for her tireless efforts coordinating a complex tour; and of course to you, the participants.



The rare and beautiful Painted Tiger-Parrot put on a surprise show for us at Kumul Lodge.  
© M Breckenridge

## **ITINERARY**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Locations</b>
Tuesday 18 <sup>th</sup> Jul	PM: Brisbane Airport AM: BNE-POM
Wednesday 19 <sup>th</sup> Jul	AM: Varirata National Park PM: Varirata National Park – eucalyptus woodland
Thursday 20 <sup>th</sup> Jul	AM: POM-UNG PM: Kiunga – Boystown Rd
Friday 21 <sup>st</sup> Jul	AM: Boat trip – Fly River, Elevata River PM: Boat trip – Ketu River, Kwatu

Saturday 22 <sup>nd</sup> Jul	AM: Kiunga – Tabubil Rd (km17) PM: Kiunga – Boystown Rd
Sunday 23 <sup>rd</sup> Jul	AM: UNG-TIZ PM: Ambua Lodge, spotlighting
Monday 24 <sup>th</sup> Jul	AM: Central Highlands Hwy – below Tari Gap PM: Central Highlands Hwy – below Tari Gap
Tuesday 25 <sup>th</sup> Jul	AM: Central Highlands Hwy – below Tari Gap, Ambua Lodge PM: Central Highlands Hwy – Tari Gap, below Tari Gap
Wednesday 26 <sup>th</sup> Jul	AM: Ambua Lodge, TIZ-HGU PM: Kumul Lodge
Thursday 27 <sup>th</sup> Jul	AM: Kama PM: Murrur Pass
Friday 28 <sup>th</sup> Jul	AM: Tonga, Kumul Lodge PM: HGU-POM

### **KEY**

- <sup>H</sup> – Heard only
- <sup>L</sup> – Leader only
- <sup>I</sup> – Introduced species
- <sup>E</sup> – Species is endemic to New Guinea (PNG & West Papua)

## **BIRDS**

### **Species total: 240**

Heard only: 26

Leader only: 0

### **MEGAPODES (*Megapodiidae*)**

Yellow-legged Brushturkey <sup>E</sup> (*Talegalla fuscirostris*) – One seen poorly running down the track at Varirata NP. Heard at most locations around Kiunga.

### **PHEASANTS, GROUSE & ALLIES (*Phasianidae*)**

Brown Quail (*Synoicus ypsilophora*) – Two flushed from the roadside at Tari Gap.

### **PIGEONS & DOVES (*Columbidae*)**

(Feral) Rock Pigeon <sup>I</sup> (*Columba livia*) – At least one observed in Port Moresby and Tari.

Amboyna Cuckoo-Dove <sup>E</sup> (*Macropygia amboinensis*) – Singles heard and seen at Varirata NP, Kiunga and near Kumul Lodge.

Black-billed Cuckoo-Dove <sup>E</sup> (*Macropygia nigrirostris*) – Singles observed along the Boystown Rd at Kiunga and tens below Tari Gap.

Great Cuckoo-Dove <sup>E</sup> (*Reinwardtoena reinwardti*) – A couple of individuals in the grounds of Ambua Lodge.

Stephan's Dove (*Chalcophaps stephani*) – Single observed flying across Boystown Rd at Kiunga.

Peaceful Dove <sup>H</sup> (*Geopelia placida*) – Singles heard near Varirata NP.

Pheasant Pigeon <sup>EH</sup> (*Otidiphaps nobilis*) – Heard only along the main track at Varirata NP.

Sclater's Crowned-Pigeon <sup>E</sup> (*Goura sclateri*) – Wonderful views of not one, but two different nesting females along the Ketu River near Kiunga.

Wompoo Fruit-Dove (*Ptilinopus magnificus*) – Heard in the lowland forests around Kiunga and Varirata NP, with good looks near Kiunga.

Pink-spotted Fruit-Dove <sup>E</sup> (*Ptilinopus perlatus*) – Common in the lowlands and hills. Singles observed at Varirata NP and around Kiunga.

Beautiful Fruit-Dove <sup>E</sup> (*Ptilinopus pulchellus*) – Great looks at a male in Varirata NP, also heard frequently around Kiunga.

White-breasted Fruit-Dove (*Ptilinopus rivoli*) – Great views of an adult male along the driveway at Ambua Lodge. Also seen at Murrumbidgee Pass and heard at Tari Gap.

Orange-bellied Fruit-Dove <sup>E</sup> (*Ptilinopus iozonus*) – Common in the lowlands. Singles/tens observed around Kiunga.

Dwarf Fruit-Dove <sup>E</sup> (*Ptilinopus nainus*) – Good scope views of a single along the Boystown Rd near Kiunga.

Purple-tailed Imperial-Pigeon <sup>E</sup> (*Ducula rufigaster*) – Good views of a single in the riverine forest near the Elevara River.

Pinon's Imperial-Pigeon <sup>E</sup> (*Ducula pinon*) – Singles observed along the rivers near Kiunga.

Collared Imperial-Pigeon <sup>E</sup> (*Ducula mullerii*) – Tens observed along the rivers near Kiunga.

Zoe's Imperial-Pigeon <sup>E</sup> (*Ducula zoeae*) – Singles observed at Varirata NP and around Kiunga.

Torresian Imperial-Pigeon (*Ducula spilorrhoa*) – Singles observed in flight around Port Moresby.

Papuan Mountain-Pigeon <sup>E</sup> (*Gymnophaps albertisii*) – Common overhead in the highlands. Good views along the Elevara River near Kiunga.



A female Sclater's Crowned-Pigeon does her best to remain motionless on her nest. © M Breckenridge

### **CUCKOOS (*Cuculidae*)**

Greater Black Coucal <sup>EH</sup> (*Centropus menbeki*) – Heard around Kiunga.

Lesser Black Coucal <sup>E</sup> (*Centropus bernsteini*) – Single seen well along the Boystown Rd near Kiunga.

Pheasant Coucal (*Centropus phasianinus*) – Single observed along the entrance road at Varirata NP.

Dwarf Koel <sup>EH</sup> (*Microdynamis parva*) – Single heard in the forest north of Kiunga.

Pacific Koel (*Eudynamis orientalis*) – Heard and observed each day around Kiunga.

Channel-billed Cuckoo (*Scythrops novaehollandiae*) – Singles observed along the rivers near Kiunga.

Rufous-throated Bronze-Cuckoo <sup>E</sup> (*Chrysococcyx ruficollis*) – Good views of a calling individual below Tari Gap. Heard most days in the highlands.

White-crowned Koel <sup>E</sup> (*Cacomantis leucolophus*) – Good views of a single at Varirata NP, heard around Kiunga.

Chestnut-breasted Cuckoo (*Cacomantis castaneiventris*) – Heard at Varirata NP and seen briefly near Kiunga.

Fan-tailed Cuckoo (*Cacomantis flabelliformis*) – Singles heard and observed at Ambua Lodge and Kama near Kumul.

Brush Cuckoo (*Cacomantis variolosus*) – Singles heard at several locations with at least two birds observed.

### **FROGMOUTHS (*Podargidae*)**

Marbled Frogmouth (*Podargus ocellatus*) – A single seen several times at night at Ambua Lodge.

### **SWIFTS (*Apodidae*)**

Papuan Spinetailed Swift <sup>E</sup> (*Mearnsia novaeguineae*) – Common around Kiunga.



Glossy Swiftlet (*Collocalia esculenta*) – The default swiftlet throughout the trip.  
Mountain Swiftlet <sup>E</sup> (*Aerodramus hirundinaceus*) – Tens each day in the highlands.  
Uniform Swiftlet (*Aerodramus vanikorensis*) – Tens each day in the lowlands.

### **RAILS, GALLINULES & COOTS (*Rallidae*)**

Buff-banded Rail (*Gallirallus philippensis*) – Single feeding on the lawn at Ambua Lodge one afternoon.

### **PLOVERS & LAPWINGS (*Charadriidae*)**

Masked Lapwing (*Vanellus miles*) – Individuals observed around Port Moresby.

### **PRATINCOLES & COURSERS (*Glareolidae*)**

Australian Pratincole (*Stiltia isabella*) – Up to twenty individuals on the Kiunga Airstrip.

### **CORMORANTS & SHAGS (*Phalacrocoridae*)**

Little Pied Cormorant (*Microcarbo melanoleucos*) – Single along the Elevela River.

### **HERONS, EGRETS & BITTERNS (*Ardeidae*)**

Black Bittern (*Ixobrychus flavicollis*) – A single bird observed from the boats along the Elevela River.  
Great Egret (*Ardea alba*) – Several individuals along the Fly River.  
[Eastern] Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis [coromandus]*) – Common around Port Moresby.

### **HAWKS, EAGLES & KITES (*Accipitridae*)**

Long-tailed Honey-Buzzard <sup>E</sup> (*Henicopernis longicauda*) – Great looks at a single bird circling and perched up at Murrumbidgee Pass.  
Pacific Baza (*Aviceda subcristata*) – Several pairs observed at Varirata NP and along the rivers near Kiunga.  
New Guinea Eagle <sup>E</sup> (*Harpyopsis novaeguineae*) –  
Papuan Marsh-Harrier <sup>E</sup> (*Circus spilothorax*) – A couple of individuals observed below Tari Gap.  
Variable Goshawk (*Accipiter hiogaster*) – Individuals observed around Kiunga.  
Black-mantled Goshawk <sup>E</sup> (*Accipiter melanochlamys*) – A single bird observed several times at Ambua Lodge.  
Doria's Goshawk <sup>E</sup> (*Megatriorchis buergersi*)  
Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*) – Common around Mount Hagen and a couple in Port Moresby.  
Whistling Kite (*Haliastur sphenurus*) – A single bird along the Fly River near Kiunga.  
Brahminy Kite (*Haliastur indus*) – The common raptor. Seen most days in the lowlands and highlands.  
White-bellied Sea-Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*) – A pair observed along the Fly River near Kiunga.

### **OWLS (*Strigidae*)**

Barking Owl (*Ninox connivens*) – Fantastic views of a roosting individual at Varirata NP.  
Papuan Boobook (*Ninox theomacha*) – Heard by most at Ambua Lodge and seen by the leader one night.

### **HORNBILLS (*Bucerotidae*)**

Blyth's Hornbill (*Rhyticeros plicatus*) – Great looks at several individuals from the lookout at Varirata

NP and around Kiunga.

**KINGFISHERS (*Alcedinidae*)**

Azure Kingfisher (*Ceyx [Alcedo] azureus*) – Singles observed at Varirata NP and Kiunga.

Papuan Dwarf-Kingfisher<sup>EH</sup> (*Ceyx solitarius*) – Singles heard only in the forest at Varirata NP.

Rufous-bellied Kookaburra<sup>E</sup> (*Dacelo gaudichaud*) – Individuals seen well at Varirata NP and around Kiunga.

Forest Kingfisher (*Todiramphus macleayii*) – A pair observed in eucalypt forest along the entrance road to Varirata NP.

Sacred Kingfisher (*Todiramphus sanctus*) – Singles around Kiunga.

Hook-billed Kingfisher<sup>E</sup> (*Melidora macrorrhina*) – Excellent views of an individual in the riverine forest near Kiunga expertly found by our local guide Glen. An almost impossibly difficult bird to find as they hunt nocturnally and call from dense canopy during the day.

Yellow-billed Kingfisher<sup>H</sup> (*Syma torotoro*) – Individuals heard at Varirata NP and around Kiunga.

Mountain Kingfisher<sup>EH</sup> (*Syma megarhyncha*) – A single bird heard at Ambua Lodge on several occasions.

Common Paradise-Kingfisher<sup>H</sup> (*Tanysiptera galatea*) – A single heard in riverine forest near the Elevala River.



A true denizen of the riverine forest near Kiunga - a Hook-billed Kingfisher, usually nocturnal, stares back at us. © M Breckenridge

**BEE-EATERS (*Meropidae*)**

Rainbow Bee-eater (*Merops ornatus*) – A few individuals observed along the entrance road at Varirata NP and at Kama near Kumul.

**ROLLERS (*Coraciidae*)**

Dollarbird (*Eurystomus orientalis*) – Probably the commonest bird along the rivers near Kiunga.

### **COCKATOOS (*Cacatuidae*)**

Palm Cockatoo (*Probosciger aterrimus*) – Good looks at a pair along the Fly River, heard elsewhere around Kiunga.

Sulphur-crested Cockatoo (*Cacatua galerita*) – Singles observed at Varirata and around Kiunga.

### **OLD WORLD PARROTS (*Psittaculidae*)**

Papuan King-Parrot <sup>E</sup> (*Alisterus chloropterus*) – Great views for some of a pair at Ambua Lodge.

Eclectus Parrot (*Eclectus roratus*) – Common in the lowlands and hills, with excellent views of a nesting pair near Varirata NP.

Red-cheeked Parrot (*Geoffroyus geoffroyi*) – Common in the lowlands and hills.

Painted Tiger-Parrot <sup>E</sup> (*Psittacella picta*) – A remarkable sighting of an adult male foraging in plain view just above the feeders at Kumul Lodge – a rare bird in PNG.

Brehm's Tiger-Parrot <sup>E</sup> (*Psittacella brehmii*) – A stalwart at the Kumul Lodge feeders.

Modest Tiger-Parrot <sup>E</sup> (*Psittacella modesta*) – Good looks at a single male feeding over the driveway at Ambua Lodge.

Madarasz's Tiger-Parrot <sup>E</sup> (*Psittacella madaraszii*) – A pair of this cryptic mid-elevation parrot observed feeding in mistletoe several times at Ambua Lodge.

Orange-breasted Fig-Parrot <sup>E</sup> (*Cyclopsitta gulielmitertii*) – Singles observed around Kiunga.

Double-eyed Fig-Parrot (*Cyclopsitta diophthalma*) – Singles observed around Kiunga.

Plum-faced Lorikeet <sup>E</sup> (*Oreopsittacus arfaki*) – Tens of these rapid little parrots observed at Tari Gap and Murmur Pass.

Red-flanked Lorikeet (*Hypocharmosyna placentis*) – Small numbers around Kiunga.

Papuan Lorikeet <sup>E</sup> (*Charmosyna papou*) – Regularly encountered throughout the highlands with several views of perched birds. A stunningly dimorphic and long-tailed lorikeet.

Yellow-billed Lorikeet <sup>E</sup> (*Neopsittacus musschenbroekii*) – The common lorikeet in the highlands. A couple of pairs observed at Ambua Lodge and Murmur Pass.

Orange-billed Lorikeet <sup>E</sup> (*Neopsittacus pullicauda*) – A couple of pairs at Murmur Pass.

Black-capped Lory <sup>E</sup> (*Lorius lory*) – The common large lorikeet of the lowlands. Seen well around Kiunga.

Yellow-streaked Lory <sup>E</sup> (*Chalcopsitta scintillata*) – Good views of a pair and a flock overhead near Kiunga.

Goldie's Lorikeet <sup>E</sup> (*Glossoptila goldiei*) – Brief views of two separate pairs at Tari Gap and Murmur Pass.

Coconut Lorikeet (*Trichoglossus haematodus*) – The common lorikeet throughout.

### **PITTAS (*Pittidae*)**

Hooded Pitta <sup>H</sup> (*Pitta sordida*) – A couple of individuals heard only near Kiunga.

### **BOWERBIRDS (*Ptilonorhynchidae*)**

Black-eared Catbird <sup>H</sup> (*Ailuroedus melanotis*) – Heard distantly in the forest north of Kiunga.

Archbold's Bowerbird <sup>E</sup> (*Archboldia papuensis*) – Some of the group were luckily enough to observe a female in the carpark and near the cabins during our stay at Kumul Lodge.

MacGregor's Bowerbird <sup>E</sup> (*Amblyornis macgregoriae*) – Good views of a single along the driveway at

Ambua Lodge.

Flame Bowerbird<sup>EH</sup> (*Sericulus ardens*) – Heard only in riverine forest along the Elevala River near Kiunga.

Yellow-breasted Bowerbird<sup>E</sup> (*Chlamydera lauterbachi*) – Good views of several individuals near Kumul.

### **FAIRYWRENS (*Maluridae*)**

Campbell's Fairywren<sup>E</sup> (*Chenorhamphus campbelli*) – One of New Guinea's rarest birds, we were very fortunate enough to encounter a small party in forest north of Kiunga.

Emperor Fairywren<sup>E</sup> (*Malurus cyanocephalus*) – Brief views of a pair in riverine forest along the Elevala River near Kiunga.

White-shouldered Fairywren<sup>E</sup> (*Malurus alboscapulatus*) – Good looks at a party next to the road below Tari Gap near Ambua.

### **HONEYEATERS (*Meliphagidae*)**

Plain Honeyeater<sup>E</sup> (*Pycnopygius ixoides*) – Good views of several along the Boystown Rd near Kiunga.

Marbled Honeyeater<sup>EH</sup> (*Pycnopygius cinereus*) – Heard at Kama near Kumul.

Streak-headed Honeyeater<sup>E</sup> (*Pycnopygius stictocephalus*) – Good views of singles at Varirata NP and near Kiunga.

Mountain Meliphaga<sup>EH</sup> (*Microptilotis orientalis*) – Heard around Kama and Tonga near Kumul.

Mimic Honeyeater<sup>E</sup> (*Microptilotis analogus*) – At least one observed near Kiunga.

Elegant Honeyeater<sup>E</sup> (*Microptilotis cinereifrons*) – Multiple individuals observed at Varirata NP.

Black-throated Honeyeater<sup>E</sup> (*Caligavis subfrenata*) – Good views of several birds below Tari Gap near Ambua Lodge. Heard around Kumul Lodge.

Obscure Honeyeater<sup>EH</sup> (*Caligavis obscura*) – Heard in the forest north of Kiunga.

Ornate Melidectes [Honeyeater]<sup>E</sup> (*Melidectes torquatus*) – Several birds observed at Kama near Kumul Lodge.

Belford's Melidectes<sup>E</sup> (*Melidectes belfordi*) – Common and boisterous in the upper highlands at Tari Gap and around Kumul Lodge.

Yellow-browed Melidectes<sup>E</sup> (*Melidectes rufocrissalis*) – The dominant melidectes at Ambua Lodge, but most individuals probably not pure as they hybridise with Belford's Melidectes here. Also observed at Tonga near Kumul.

[Common] Smoky Honeyeater<sup>E</sup> (*Melipotes fumigatus*) – Pleasingly common in the highlands at all sites, particularly the feeders at Kumul Lodge.

Dusky Myzomela (*Myzomela obscura*) – A single bird observed along the entrance road to Varirata NP.

Elfin Myzomela<sup>E</sup> (*Myzomela adolphinae*) – Good looks at a single bird at Kama near Kumul Lodge.

Red-collared Myzomela<sup>E</sup> (*Myzomela rosenbergii*) – Several individuals at Tari Gap near Ambua and Murmur Pass near Kumul Lodge.

Green-backed Honeyeater (*Glycichaera fallax*) – At least two of these inconspicuous honeyeaters observed along the track at Varirata NP.

Rufous-backed Honeyeater<sup>E</sup> (*Ptiloprora guisei*) – Several individuals below Tari Gap near Ambua and Murmur Pass near Kumul Lodge.

Gray-streaked Honeyeater<sup>E</sup> (*Ptiloprora perstriata*) – Several individuals observed each day in the highlands.

White-throated Honeyeater (*Melithreptus albogularis*) – Nice looks at several birds along the entrance road at Varirata NP.

Tawny-breasted Honeyeater (*Xanthotis flaviventer*) – Singles observed around Kiunga.

Helmeted Friarbird (*Philemon buceroides*) – Fairly common around Kiunga.

### **THORNBILLS & ALLIES (*Acanthizidae*)**

Mountain Mouse-Warbler <sup>E</sup> (*Crateroscelis robusta*) – Brief views of a calling individual at Kumul Lodge.

Large Scrubwren <sup>E</sup> (*Sericornis nouhuysi*) – Several birds observed around Ambua and Kumul Lodges.

Buff-faced Scrubwren <sup>E</sup> (*Sericornis perspicillatus*) – Several birds observed most days in the highlands.

Papuan Scrubwren <sup>E</sup> (*Sericornis papuensis*) – A pair observed below Tari Gap near Ambua.

Gray Thornbill <sup>E</sup> (*Acanthiza cinerea*) – A pair of these cryptic and nondescript alpine inhabitants were observed below Tari Gap near Ambua.

Green-backed Gerygone (*Gerygone chloronota*) – Good views of a calling bird along the Boystown Rd near Kiunga. A couple of individuals heard along the track at Varirata NP also.

Yellow-bellied Gerygone <sup>E</sup> (*Gerygone chrysogaster*) – Singles observed at Varirata NP and around Kiunga.

Brown-breasted Gerygone <sup>E</sup> (*Gerygone ruficollis*) – Several individuals observed below Tari Gap near Ambua and Tonga near Kumul Lodge. The only gerygone in the highlands.

### **PSEUDO-BABLERS <sup>e</sup> (*Pomatostomidae*)**

Papuan Babbler <sup>E</sup> (*Pomatostomus isidorei*) – Several individuals observed briefly as part of a mixed feeding flock near Kiunga.

### **LOGRUNNERS (*Orthonychidae*)**

Papuan Logrunner <sup>EH</sup> (*Orthonyx novaeguineae*) – A single heard calling repeatedly, but distantly in the elfin forest below Tari Gap near Ambua.

### **QUAIL-THRUSHES & JEWEL-BABLERS (*Cinclosomatidae*)**

Blue Jewel-babbler <sup>EH</sup> (*Ptilorrhoa caerulescens*) – At least a single heard distantly in the forest north of Kiunga.

Chestnut-backed Jewel-babbler <sup>EH</sup> (*Ptilorrhoa castanonota*) – A single heard at Varirata NP.



The rare and nomadic Spotted Berrypecker (female) from Ambua Lodge. © M Breckenridge

### **CUCKOOSHRIKES (*Campephagidae*)**

Stout-billed Cuckooshrike <sup>E</sup> (*Coracina caeruleogrisea*) – Good views of a pair along the track at Varirata NP.

Hooded Cuckooshrike <sup>E</sup> (*Coracina longicauda*) – A pair observed below Tari Gap near Ambua.

Boyer's Cuckooshrike <sup>E</sup> (*Coracina boyeri*) – Singles observed at Varirata NP and near Kiunga.

Black-faced Cuckooshrike (*Coracina novaehollandiae*) – Tens/singles observed near Varirata NP and along the river near Kiunga.

White-bellied Cuckooshrike <sup>L</sup> (*Coracina papuensis*) – A single observed along the entrance road at Varirata NP.

Golden Cuckooshrike <sup>EH</sup> (*Campochaera sloetii*) – A pair of calling birds refused to show in the forest north of Kiunga.

Varied Triller (*Lalage leucomela*) – Seen and heard at various locations in the lowlands.

Black-bellied Cicadabird <sup>E</sup> (*Edolisoma montanum*) – Several individuals observed below Tari Gap near Ambua and at Murrur Pass.

Gray-headed Cicadabird <sup>E</sup> (*Edolisoma schisticeps*) – Singles observed around Kiunga.

Black Cicadabird <sup>E</sup> (*Edolisoma melas*) – Good views of a pair at Varirata NP.

### **SITTELLAS (*Neosittidae*)**

Black Sittella <sup>E</sup> (*Daphoenositta miranda*) – A couple of good looks at a small family party (feeding young) below Tari Gap near Ambua.

Papuan Sittella <sup>E</sup> (*Daphoenositta papuensis*) – Somewhat distant, but great looks at a family party from the viewpoint at Murrur Pass.

**PLOUGHBILL<sup>E</sup> (*Eulacestomatidae*)**

Wattled Ploughbill<sup>E</sup> (*Eulacestoma nigropectus*) – Fantastic views of a pair were had below Tari Gap near Ambua. We had tried hard for this species, so it was a great relief when this pair snuck in after I whistled them up. The only member of its monotypic family.

**AUSTRALO-PAPUAN BELLBIRDS (*Oreoicidae*)**

Rufous-naped Bellbird<sup>E</sup> (*Aleadryas rufinucha*) – Singles of this skulker observed around Ambua and Kumul Lodge, including a confiding pair around the feed table at the latter.



A gorgeous male White-breasted Fruit-Dove at Ambua Lodge. © M Breckenridge

**TIT & CRESTED BERRYPECKERS<sup>E</sup> (*Paramythiidae*)**

Tit Berrypecker<sup>E</sup> (*Oreocharis arfaki*) – Excellent looks at a pair feeding low down in the carpark at Ambua Lodge. A couple of small flocks also observed below Tari Gap near Ambua and Murmur Pass.

Crested Berrypecker<sup>E</sup> (*Paramythia montium*) – Brief views of a couple of birds at Tari Gap and Kumul Lodge.

**WHISTLERS & ALLIES (*Pachycephalidae*)**

Rusty Pitohui<sup>E</sup> (*Pseudorectes ferrugineus*) – A few small flocks observed at Varirata NP and around Kiunga.

Variable Shrikethrush<sup>E</sup> (*Colluricincla fortis*) – A couple seen briefly along the track at Varirata NP.

Sepik-Ramu Shrikethrush<sup>E</sup> (*Colluricincla tappenbergi*) – Good looks at a calling individual along the driveway at Ambua Lodge. Also heard near Kumul.

Black Pitohui<sup>E</sup> (*Melanorectes nigrescens*) – Close views of a pair of these secretive birds along the driveway at Ambua Lodge.

Regent Whistler<sup>E</sup> (*Pachycephala schlegelii*) – Singles heard and observed most days in the highlands.

Sclater's Whistler <sup>E</sup> (*Pachycephala soror*) – A couple of males observed around Ambua Lodge.  
Brown-backed Whistler <sup>E</sup> (*Pachycephala modesta*) – A couple of pairs observed below Tari Gap near Ambua.

Gray Whistler (*Pachycephala simplex*) – At least one observed in forest along the track at Varirata NP.

White-bellied Whistler <sup>E</sup> (*Pachycephala leucogastra*) – A single seen well in the eucalypt forest along the entrance road at Varirata NP. The lowland counterpart of Black-headed Whistler.

Black-headed Whistler <sup>EH</sup> (*Pachycephala monacha*) – At least a pair heard at Kama near Kumul Lodge.

### **OLD WORLD ORIOLES (*Oriolidae*)**

Brown Oriole <sup>E</sup> (*Oriolus szalayi*) – Commonly seen and heard at Varirata NP and around Kiunga.

### **BOATBILLS (*Machaerirhynchidae*)**

Black-breasted Boatbill <sup>E</sup> (*Machaerirhynchus nigrioectus*) – Multiple vocal and confiding individuals below Tari Gap near Ambua.

### **WOODSWALLOWS, BELLMAGPIES & ALLIES (*Artamidae*)**

Great Woodswallow <sup>E</sup> (*Artamus maximus*) – Tens observed each day at Ambua Lodge where the staff handfeed them moths each morning in the carpark.

White-breasted Woodswallow (*Artamus leucorhynchus*) – A few individuals observed in the lowlands.

Mountain Peltops <sup>E</sup> (*Peltops montanus*) – Brief, but clear views of two birds in the carpark at Ambua Lodge.

Lowland Peltops <sup>E</sup> (*Peltops blainvillii*) – Great looks at several birds perched up along the Boystown Rd near Kiunga.

Hooded Butcherbird <sup>E</sup> (*Cracticus cassicus*) – Vocal and conspicuous at Varirata NP and along the river near Kiunga.

### **MOTTLED BERRYHUNTER <sup>E</sup> (*Rhagologidae*)**

Mottled Berryhunter <sup>E</sup> (*Rhagologus leucostigma*) – Brief views were had of a pair of this monotypic species below Tari Gap near Ambua. Its beautiful song was heard here and at Murrumbidgee Pass near Kumul Lodge.

### **FANTAILS (*Rhipiduridae*)**

Black Fantail <sup>E</sup> (*Rhipidura atra*) – Singles observed below Tari Gap near Ambua.

Sooty Thicket-Fantail <sup>EH</sup> (*Rhipidura threnothorax*) – A single heard in forest north of Kiunga.

Willie Wagtail (*Rhipidura leucophrys*) – “William” was observed every day of the trip.

Friendly Fantail <sup>E</sup> (*Rhipidura albolimbata*) – Omnipresent in the forests of the highlands.

Chestnut-bellied Fantail <sup>E</sup> (*Rhipidura hyperythra*) – Several individuals observed along the track at Varirata NP.

### **DRONGOS (*Dicruridae*)**

Spangled Drongo (*Dicrurus bracteatus*) – Singles observed at Varirata NP and around Kiunga.

### **BIRDS-OF-PARADISE (*Paradisaeidae*)**

Trumpet Manucode (*Phonygammus keraudrenii*) – A couple of birds seen distantly on the river near Kiunga. Several others heard.



Crinkle-collared Manucode <sup>E</sup> (*Manucodia chalybatus*) – Singles heard and observed at Varirata NP.

Glossy-mantled Manucode <sup>E</sup> (*Manucodia ater*) – Singles seen regularly around Kiunga, also heard at Varirata NP.

King-of-Saxony Bird-of-Paradise <sup>E</sup> (*Pteridophora alberti*) – We were treated to a number of excellent views of males and females while in the highlands.

Lawe's Parotia <sup>E</sup> (*Parotia lawesii*) – Good looks at a single female in the gardens at Ambua Lodge.

Greater Lophorina <sup>E</sup> (*Lophorina superba*) – Great looks at a male and female feeding down low at Ambua Lodge. A second male seen well at Kama near Kumul.

Magnificent Riflebird (*Ptiloris magnificus*) – Several males calling in forest along the Boystown Rd near Kiunga.

Growling Riflebird <sup>E</sup> (*Ptiloris intercedens*) – Excellent views of a male along the track at Varirata NP, scoped up in the sun.

Brown Sickbill <sup>E</sup> (*Epimachus meyeri*) – Great looks at a number of males and females across the highlands, including the feed table at Kumul Lodge.

Short-tailed Paradigalla <sup>E</sup> (*Paradigalla brevicauda*) – An adult male allowed for repeated excellent views during our stay at Ambua Lodge, frequenting a fruiting tree between the bungalows.

Stephanie's Astrapia <sup>E</sup> (*Astrapia stephaniae*) – Good looks at a few individuals at Ambua and a spectacular adult male at Murrumbidgee Pass.

Ribbon-tailed Astrapia <sup>E</sup> (*Astrapia mayeri*) – Fantastic looks at a number of spectacular adult males across the highlands. Their noisy flight and trailing streamers overhead is quite something.

King Bird-of-Paradise <sup>E</sup> (*Cicinnurus regius*) – Scope views of a female under the canopy of the forest near Kiunga.

Magnificent Bird-of-Paradise <sup>E</sup> (*Cicinnurus magnificus*) – Great scope views of a calling adult male at Kama near Kumul.

Blue Bird-of-Paradise <sup>E</sup> (*Paradisaea rudolphi*) – One of the highlights of the trip spending a session with a male at Tonga near Kumul on our final morning in the highlands.

Lesser Bird-of-Paradise <sup>E</sup> (*Paradisaea minor*) – Decent views of a spectacular adult male at Kama near Kumul.

Raggiana Birds-of-Paradise <sup>E</sup> (*Paradisaea raggiana*) – Up to 12 males displaying above our heads at Varirata NP was a fantastic way to kick off the tour.

Greater Birds-of-Paradise <sup>E</sup> (*Paradisaea apoda*) – Great looks at a displaying adult male near Kiunga. Immature males and females regularly seen and heard around Kiunga.

#### **IFRITA <sup>E</sup> (*Ifritidae*)**

Blue-capped Ifrita <sup>E</sup> (*Ifrita kowaldi*) – Good looks at several of these strange, nuthatch-like birds below Tari Gap near Ambua and at Kumul Lodge.

#### **MONARCH FLYCATCHERS (*Monarchidae*)**

Golden Monarch <sup>EH</sup> (*Carterornis chrysomela*) – A single individual heard in riverine forest near Kiunga.

Black-faced Monarch <sup>H</sup> (*Monarcha melanopsis*) – A single heard in forest along the track at Varirata NP.

Fan-tailed Monarch <sup>E</sup> (*Symposiachrus axillaris*) – Good looks at a pair along the driveway at Ambua Lodge.

Spot-winged Monarch <sup>E</sup> (*Symposiachrus guttula*) – At least two individuals observed along the track at

Varirata NP.

Frilled Monarch <sup>E</sup> (*Arses telescopthalmus*) – Several individuals at Varirata NP and around Kiunga.  
Torrent-lark <sup>E</sup> (*Grallina bruijnii*) – A pair of these stunning, but shy torrent inhabitants observed clearly, but briefly near Kumul Lodge. This site was particularly scenic, but very difficult to access.  
Shining Flycatcher (*Myiagra alecto*) – A couple of males and females observed along the rivers near Kiunga.

#### **MELAMPITTAS <sup>E</sup> (*Melampittidae*)**

Lesser Melampitta <sup>E</sup> (*Melampitta lugubris*) – Brief, but close views of a calling bird in the forest below Tari Gap near Ambua. Heard on several other occasions in the highlands.

#### **SHRIKES (*Laniidae*)**

Long-tailed Shrike (*Lanius schach*) – Regularly seen around disturbed habitat in the highlands. A widespread species, but with a somewhat isolated population in PNG.

#### **CROWS, JAYS & MAGPIES (*Corvidae*)**

Gray Crow <sup>E</sup> (*Corvus tristis*) – A few small groups at Varirata NP and around Kiunga.  
Torresian Crow (*Corvus orru*) – A few around Port Moresby.

#### **SATINBIRDS <sup>E</sup> (*Cnemophilidae*)**

Loria's Satinbird <sup>E</sup> (*Cnemophilus loriae*) – Quite common at Ambua Lodge this year, with several males observed here. Also seen well at Murrumbidgee Pass.  
Crested Satinbird <sup>E</sup> (*Cnemophilus macgregorii*) – A dazzling male observed clearly, but briefly at Tari Gap.

#### **BERRYPECKERS & LONGBILLS <sup>E</sup> (*Melanocharitidae*)**

Black Berrypecker <sup>E</sup> (*Melanocharis nigra*) – A couple of individuals at Varirata NP.  
Mid-mountain Berrypecker <sup>E</sup> (*Melanocharis longicauda*) – A single observed below Tari Gap near Ambua.  
Fan-tailed Berrypecker <sup>E</sup> (*Melanocharis versteri*) – Singles observed most days in the highlands.  
Spotted Berrypecker <sup>E</sup> (*Melanocharis crassirostris*) – We were very fortunate to have repeat views of a pair visiting a fruiting tree at Ambua Lodge. These nomadic fruit-eaters are typically very difficult to encounter.  
Yellow-bellied Longbill <sup>E</sup> (*Toxorhamphus novaeguineae*) – Brief views of a few individuals along the Boystown Rd near Kiunga.

#### **AUSTRALASIAN ROBINS (*Petroicidae*)**

Lesser Ground-Robin <sup>EH</sup> (*Amalocichla incerta*) – A single heard calling in the elfin forest below Tari Gap near Ambua.  
Torrent Flycatcher <sup>E</sup> (*Monachella muelleriana*) – Distant views of a pair at the bridge over the Lai River near Kumul.  
Lemon-bellied Flycatcher (*Microeca flavigaster*) – Vocal and common in the eucalypt forest along the entrance road at Varirata NP.  
Papuan Flycatcher <sup>E</sup> (*Microeca papuana*) – Several birds seen well along the road below Tari Gap near

Ambua and at Murrur Pass.

Garnet Robin <sup>EH</sup> (*Eugeryone rubra*) – A single calling in forest below Tari Gap near Ambua.

White-faced Robin (*Tregellasia leucops*) – A single seen well along the track at Varirata NP.

Black-sided Robin <sup>E</sup> (*Poecilodryas hypoleuca*) – Good scope views of a single in riverine forest beside the Elevela River near Kiunga. Commonly heard, but difficult to observe.

Black-throated Robin <sup>E</sup> (*Poecilodryas albonotata*) – Good views of a pair below Tari Gap near Ambua.

White-winged Robin <sup>E</sup> (*Peneothello sigillata*) – Good views of a pair at Tari Gap near Ambua, also present at Kumul Lodge.

Blue-gray Robin <sup>E</sup> (*Peneothello cyanus*) – Singles observed at Ambua Lodge, Tari Gap and Murrur Pass.

Papuan Scrub-Robin <sup>EH</sup> (*Drymodes beccarii*) – Heard only at Varirata NP.



This Alpine Pipit was a very unexpected sighting near Tari Gap. © M Breckenridge

#### **GRASSBIRDS & ALLIES (*Locustellidae*)**

Papuan Grassbird <sup>E</sup> (*Cincloramphus macrurus*) – Singles heard and observed most days in the highlands around grassy or secondary habitat.

#### **SWALLOWS (*Hirundinidae*)**

Pacific Swallow (*Hirundo tahitica*) – Small numbers seen throughout the trip.

#### **LEAF WARBLERS (*Phylloscopidae*)**

Island Leaf Warbler (*Phylloscopus poliocephalus*) – A couple of individuals at Ambua Lodge and near Kumul.

#### **WHITE-EYES, YUHNAS & ALLIES (*Zosteropidae*)**

Black-fronted White-eye <sup>H</sup> (*Zosterops minor*) – Heard overhead at Varirata NP.

Capped White-eye <sup>EH</sup> (*Zosterops fuscicapilla*) – Heard overhead below Tari Gap near Ambua.

New Guinea White-eye<sup>E</sup> (*Zosterops novaeguineae*) – Tens heard and briefly seen at Kama and Tonga near Kumul.

### **STARLINGS (*Sturnidae*)**

Metallic Starling (*Aplonis metallica*) – Common along the rivers near Kiunga.

Yellow-eyed Starling<sup>E</sup> (*Aplonis mystacea*) – Great looks at a pair of this localised starling along the Elevala River near Kiunga.

Singing Starling (*Aplonis cantoroides*) – Small numbers around Port Moresby.

Yellow-faced Myna<sup>E</sup> (*Mino dumontii*) – Fairly common in the lowlands, with good looks at Varirata NP and around Kiunga.

Golden Myna<sup>E</sup> (*Mino anais*) – Great looks at a pair along the Elevala River near Kiunga.

### **THRUSHES & ALLIES (*Turdidae*)**

Island Thrush (*Turdus poliocephalus*) – A stalwart of the feed table at Kumul Lodge with several individuals usually in attendance – not seen elsewhere.

### **OLD WORLD FLYCATCHERS (*Muscicapidae*)**

Pied Bushchat (*Saxicola caprata*) – Common in disturbed habitat across the highlands.

### **FLOWERPECKERS (*Dicaeidae*)**

Red-capped Flowerpecker<sup>E</sup> (*Dicaeum geelvinkianum*) – Singles seen and heard most days of the trip, with good views at Varirata.

### **SUNBIRDS & SPIDERHUNTERS (*Nectariniidae*)**

Black Sunbird (*Leptocoma aspasia*) – A couple of individuals around Kiunga.

### **WAXBILLS & ALLIES (*Estrilidae*)**

Hooded Munia<sup>E</sup> (*Lonchura spectabilis*) – Small numbers observed most days in the highlands.

Blue-faced Parrotfinch (*Erythrura trichroa*) – Brief views of a pair at Ambua Lodge.

### **OLD WORLD SPARROWS (*Passeridae*)**

Eurasian Tree Sparrow<sup>I</sup> (*Passer montanus*) – Small numbers throughout the trip around cities/towns.

### **WAGTAILS & PIPTS (*Motacillidae*)**

Australasian Pipit (*Anthus novaeseelandiae*) – Singles on the airstrip at Tari.

Alpine Pipit<sup>E</sup> (*Anthus gutturalis*) – A quite unexpected sighting of a confiding individual beside the road just below Tari Gap. Normally found between 10,000-15,000 ft.

## **MAMMALS**

### **FLESH-EATING MARSUPIALS (*Dasyuridae*)**

Speckled Dasyure<sup>E</sup> (*Neophascogale lorentzi*) – One individual observed below Tari Gap near Ambua and on the feed table at Kumul Lodge.

### **PHALANGERS (*Phalangeridae*)**

Ground Cuscus <sup>E</sup> (*Phalanger gymnotis*) – Fantastic views of an individual spotlight in a tree low above the driveway at Ambua Lodge one night. This species of cuscus is unique for spending the day in burrows before emerging at night to forage.

## **REPTILES**

### **MONITOR LIZARDS (*Varanidae*)**

Peach-throated Monitor (*Varanus jobiensis*) – Close views of an individual in Varirata NP – its always a treat to see larger reptiles in PNG as they are heavily persecuted by the locals in places.

## APPENDIX I

Birds recorded at Brisbane Airport – 18<sup>th</sup> July

1. Australian Brushturkey (*Alectura lathamii*)
2. Rock Dove <sup>I</sup> (*Columba livia*)
3. Crested Pigeon (*Ocyphaps lophotes*)
4. Bar-shouldered Dove (*Geopelia humeralis*)
5. Little Pied Cormorant (*Microcarbo melanoleucos*)
6. Great Egret (*Ardea alba*)
7. Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*)
8. Laughing Kookaburra <sup>H</sup> (*Dacelo novaeguineae*)
9. Rainbow Lorikeet (*Trichoglossus moluccanus*)
10. Superb Fairywren (*Malurus cyaneus*)
11. Red-backed Fairywren (*Malurus melanocephalus*)
12. Yellow-faced Honeyeater (*Caligavis chrysops*)
13. Noisy Miner (*Manorina melanocephala*)
14. Brown Honeyeater (*Lichmera indistincta*)
15. Blue-faced Honeyeater (*Entomyzon cyanotis*)
16. Mangrove Gerygone (*Gerygone levigaster*)
17. Black-faced Cuckooshrike (*Coracina novaehollandiae*)
18. Grey Shrikethrush (*Colluricincla harmonica*)
19. Olive-backed Oriole (*Oriolus sagittatus*)
20. Australian Magpie (*Gymnorhina tibicen*)
21. Willie Wagtail (*Rhipidura leucophrys*)
22. Grey Fantail (*Rhipidura albiscapa*)
23. Spangled Drongo (*Dicrurus bracteatus*)
24. Magpie-lark (*Grallina cyanoleuca*)
25. Torresian Crow (*Corvus orru*)
26. Tawny Grassbird <sup>H</sup> (*Cincloramphus timoriensis*)
27. Welcome Swallow (*Hirundo neoxena*)
28. Silvereye (*Zosterops lateralis*)
29. Common Myna <sup>I</sup> (*Acridotheres tristis*)
30. Mistletoebird (*Dicaeum hirundinaceum*)
31. Double-barred Finch (*Stizoptera bichenovii*)

