



New Ireland and Tench Extension

13th-18th April 2013

Report by Chris Collins, Tour Leader

Introduction

Following the conclusion of the WPO at Kavieng, WildWings offered clients the opportunity to join a two part extension, with a three night stay at Rubio Resort to look for New Ireland endemics and then an overnight trip to Tench Island to look for the specialities which occur on this rarely visited island.

Both options proved highly successful and during our time at Rubio, we made two visits to the Lelet Plateau, as well as exploring areas closer to the lodge. This resulted in an impressive list of Bismarck endemics and other localised species including Knob-billed Fruit-Dove, Finsch's Imperial-Pigeon, Bismarck Imperial-Pigeon, Bismarck Hanging-Parrot, White-backed Woodswallow, Paradise Drongo, Black-tailed Monarch, Red-banded Flowerpecker and Hunstein's Munia.

After an extremely productive stay on New Ireland, the group broke into three with John and Jemi extending their stay at Rubio, Graham and Erling heading home, whilst everyone else returned to Kavieng where we boarded our specially chartered liveaboard for the trip to Tench Island.

Our vessel proved absolutely perfect and we awoke on the morning of 17 April with the first rays of light in the sky and Tench Island a mile or so away. We were soon ashore and after our skipper had talked with the local inhabitants, we were free to explore this little part of paradise. Our main targets were two highly range restricted species, Atoll Starling and Bismarck Black Myzomela, and we enjoyed great looks of both and also found good numbers of Melanesian Scrubfowl and Island Monarch.

The sheer number of breeding seabirds was, however, also really impressive, with Brown and Red-footed Boobies and Black Noddies, White Terns and a both Great and Lesser Frigatebirds amongst the species we found.

As on the WPO, the following system was used to record all species:

1-10 = actual number seen

11-100 = A

101-1,000 = B

1,001-10,000 = C

Systematic List

Birds

Melanesian Scrubfowl *Megapodius eremita*

This species was seen extremely well on Tench Island (17 April) where it was common. It was also heard during the excursions on both 15 and 16 April on New Ireland.

Great Frigatebird *Fregata minor*

Common on Tench Island (17 April), with one bird also seen on 15 April.

Lesser Frigatebird *Fregata ariel*

At least two birds were seen not far from Rubio Resort on 17 April. This species was vastly outnumbered by the Great Frigatebirds on Tench, with only two Lessers positively identified.

Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster*

Decent numbers were seen on the Tench Island trip (17 April), with A logged.

Red-footed Booby *Sula sula*

A common breeding bird on Tench, with B logged.

Eastern Cattle Egret *Bubulcus (ibis) coromandus*

A lone bird on Tench, with A then logged the following day as we departed New Ireland.

Striated Heron *Butorides striata*

A total of three birds were seen, with two on 13 April (journey from Kavieng to Rubio) and one on 16 April.

Rufous Night-heron *Nycticorax caledonicus*

A single individual was logged on the journey back to Kavieng on 16 April.

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

Seen in small numbers on a daily basis on New Ireland (13-16 April).

Pacific Baza *Aviceda subcristata*

A lone bird was seen on 15 April not far from Rubio.

Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus*

The most regularly encountered raptor, with daily sightings on mainland New Ireland and a total of 25 individuals logged between 13-16 April.

White-bellied Sea-Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster*

Single birds were seen on both 14 and 15 April.

Variable Goshawk *Accipiter hiogaster*

A total of ten individuals were recorded between 14-16 April, with the highest numbers being on the Lelet Plateau Road.

Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*

A was logged during the journey from Kavieng to Rubio (13 April), with the only other record being two birds on the journey from Kavieng to Port Moresby (18 April).

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*
Three birds were seen on Tench Island (17 April).

Wandering Tattler *Tringa incana*
One on the beach near Rubio (14 April).

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*
Three were logged on the journey back to Kavieng on 16 April.

Black Noddy *Anous minutus*
An extremely common breeder on Tench Island (17 April: C).

White Tern *Gygis alba*
Numerous on Tench (17 April) but not as common as the previous species, with A recorded.

Sooty Tern *Onychoprion fuscatus*
Somewhat surprisingly, only two birds were seen on the trip to Tench (17 April).

Bridled Tern *Onychoprion anaethetus*
A low A was logged on the Tench trip (17 April).

Black-naped Tern *Sterna sumatrana*
Two birds near Kavieng on 16 April were, somewhat surprisingly, the only records.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*
A was logged on 16 April near Kavieng.

Arctic Skua (Parasitic Jaeger) *Stercorarius parasiticus*
A lone bird at sea whilst sailing back to Kavieng from Tench was the only record (17 April).

Slender-billed Cuckoo-Dove *Macropygia amboinensis*
Seen on a daily basis on trips to the Lelet Plateau and in the environs of Rubio (14-16 April), although only in smallish numbers (ie low A or single figure counts).

Pied Cuckoo-Dove *Reinwardtoena browni*
This handsome Pigeon, which is endemic to the Bismarck and Admiralty archipelagos, was seen near Rubio (13 April: 2) and on one of our visits to the Lelet Plateau (14 April: 4).

Stephan's Dove *Chalcophaps stephani*
Seen in small numbers on the excursions to the Lelet Plateau and around Rubio (14-16 April).

Superb Fruit-Dove *Ptilinopus superbus*
A lone bird on the excursion to the Lelet Plateau on 14 April was the sole record.

White-bibbed (White-breasted) Fruit-Dove *Ptilinopus rivoli*
Two were seen on 14 April during the excursion to the Lelet Plateau, with a perched female giving us some great scope views.

Knob-billed Fruit-Dove *Ptilinopus insolitus*

This fantastic looking Dove, which is endemic to the Bismarck archipelago and St Matthias Island, was seen in good numbers (A or B) on a daily basis from 13-16 April, with the highest numbers being on the Lelet Plateau on 14 April.

Pacific Imperial-Pigeon *Ducula pacifica*
Three birds were seen on the Tench trip (17 April).

Red-knobbed Imperial-Pigeon *Ducula rubricera*
This smart Pigeon which was also recorded on the WPO was seen on a daily basis on mainland New Ireland.

Finsch's Imperial-Pigeon *Ducula finschii*
This localised species (which is pretty much endemic to New Britain and New Ireland) was seen on 14 April (2 birds) during the excursion to the Lelet Plateau.

Bismarck Imperial-Pigeon *Ducula melanochroa*
This endemic has a very similar range to the previous species and we enjoyed some good views on both visits to the Lelet Plateau, with the higher count being a low A which was logged on 14 April.

Yellowish Imperial-Pigeon *Ducula subflavescens*
This handsome Pigeon, which is sometimes treated as a race of the more widespread Torresian Imperial-Pigeon, was well seen on three days, with records close to Rubio and on the transfer between there and Kavieng.

Coconut (Rainbow) Lorikeet *Trichoglossus haematodus*
Seen in small numbers on a daily basis on mainland New Ireland.

Purple-bellied Lory *Lorius hypoinochrous*
Recorded on three dates in the lowlands of mainland New Ireland, although there were only single figure counts on each occasion.

Red-chinned Lorikeet *Charmosyna rubrigularis*
This localised endemic (only found on New Britain and New Ireland) was common along the higher parts of the Lelet Road, with B logged on both visits.

Red-flanked Lorikeet *Charmosyna placensis*
Generally found at lower elevations than the previous species and seen on all four dates on mainland New Ireland.

Finsch's Pygmy-Parrot *Micropsitta finschii*
This tiny parrot was only seen on two dates, with six on 13 April and two on 16 April.

Singing Parrot *Geoffroyus heteroclitus*
Possibly not the best named species on the planet given its 'song' is so raucous (!!), but recorded on three dates, although only in small numbers.

Eclectus Parrot *Eclectus roratus*
Seen on a daily basis on mainland New Ireland.

Bismarck (Green-fronted) Hanging-Parrot *Loriculus tener*
As its name suggests, this species is endemic to the Bismarck archipelago. A total of seven birds were seen across three dates on New Ireland, with at least two birds seen well through scopes.

Brush Cuckoo *Cacomantis variolosus*

A single bird was seen on the Lelet Plateau excursion on 14 April, with others heard in the same area a couple of days later.

Shining Bronze-Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx lucidus*

The only record was a lone bird on 13 April.

Oriental Cuckoo *Cuculus optatus*

A total of three birds were recorded.

Pacific Koel *Eudynamys orientalis*

This species was heard on a daily basis on mainland New Ireland but was not seen.

Channel-billed Cuckoo *Scythrops novaehollandiae*

Two birds were seen on 15 April.

Violaceous Coucal *Centropus violaceus*

Endemic to New Britain and New Ireland, two birds were seen on 15 April whilst exploring the forests along the Karu Village road.

White-necked (Pied) Coucal *Centropus ateralbus*

This Coucal is also endemic to the Bismarcks and proved to be easier to find than Violaceous, with daily sightings of one or two birds, with several seen close to Rubio.

Glossy Swiftlet *Collocalia esculenta*

Generally the commonest Swiftlet, with A or B recorded on each day on mainland New Ireland.

White-rumped Swiftlet *Aerodramus spodiopygius*

Recorded on both 14 and 15 April, with A logged on both dates.

Mayr's Swiftlet *Aerodramus orientalis*

There are several recent records from the Lelet Road of this extremely poorly known species. After watching and photographing Swiftlets along this road on 14 April, it seemed that a percentage of the birds were indeed this species, as they were larger, higher flying (eg unlike the Glossy Swiftlets that always fly low over the forest) and had grey rumps. Research on this is, however, continuing.

Uniform Swiftlet *Aerodramus vanikorensis*

Seen on a daily basis on mainland New Ireland, with A logged on each date.

Moustached Treeswift *Hemiprocne mystacea*

Although we enjoyed some nice views of this species on the WPO, it is always a popular bird and it was seen in small numbers (single figure count or A) on each day on New Ireland.

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

A single bird was seen on a daily basis at Rubio.

Collared Kingfisher *Todiramphus chloris*

A total of eleven birds were recorded across three dates.

Beach Kingfisher *Todiramphus saurophagus*

Two birds were well seen during the transfer from Kavieng to Rubio on 13 April, with three more seen on the subsequent two days.

Rainbow Bee-eater *Merops ornatus*

A low A was logged on the Lelet Plateau Road on 14 April, with a lone bird then seen a couple of days later.

Blyth's Hornbill *Aceros plicatus*

This spectacular bird was recorded on three dates, with the highest number not far from Rubio on 15 April when a low A was logged.

Red-bellied Pitta *Pitta erythrogaster*

Although this species was heard on several occasions, it did not prove particularly tape responsive and unfortunately was not seen.

Red Myzomela *Myzomela cruentata*

This species was fairly common and was logged on three dates.

Bismarck Black (Ebony) Myzomela *Myzomela pammelaena*

This highly range restricted endemic was one of our targets on Tench Island (17 April) and we enjoyed some good looks at it whilst ashore where it proved to be reasonably common.

Bismarck (White-backed) Woodswallow *Artamus insignis*

As its name suggests, this is another highly localised endemic and a low A was logged on the Lelet Road on 14 April, with a lone bird in the same general area a couple of days later.

Barred Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina lineata*

Small numbers were seen on the excursions to the Lelet Plateau (14 and 16 April).

White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina papuensis*

The commonest Cuckoo-shrike on mainland New Ireland, with daily sightings.

Cicadabird *Coracina tenuirostris*

A low A was logged along the Lelet Plateau Road on 14 April.

Varied Triller *Lalage leucomela*

Seen on a daily basis on mainland New Ireland, with the highest counts (A) on the two trips to the Lelet Plateau (14 and 16 June).

Bismarck (Golden) Whistler *Pachycephala (pectoralis) citreogaster*

The taxonomy of the Golden Whistler complex remains unresolved, although the birds in the Bismarcks are now regarded as an endemic species by some. On the excursion to the Lelet Plateau on 14 April, we saw at least six individuals and others were heard on subsequent days.

Ribbon-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus megarhynchus*

This spectacularly tailed Drongo is endemic to New Ireland and was seen on a daily basis, with the highest count being on our trip to the Karu Village Road on 15 April.

Northern Fantail *Rhipidura rufiventris*

Seen on a daily basis on mainland New Ireland in small numbers.

Willie-wagtail *Rhipidura leucophrys*

As with the previous species, this bird was seen on each day on mainland New Ireland, although all counts were either in single figures or a low A.

Golden Monarch *Carterornis chrysomela*

This is surely one of the most colourful Monarchs in the world and we enjoyed multiple good sightings on mainland New Ireland, with the highest count being on the trip to the Lelet Plateau on 14 April when a low A was logged.

Island Monarch *Monarcha cinerascens*

This small island specialist was one of our targets on Tench Island (17 April) and it was reasonably numerous, with a low A recorded.

Black-tailed Monarch *Symposiachrus verticalis*

Another Bismarck endemic, with three individuals seen along the Lelet Plateau Road on 14 April and a lone bird the following day on the Karu Road.

Shining Flycatcher *Myiagra alecto*

Three birds were recorded on 14 April whilst exploring along the Lelet Plateau Road, with one the following day on the Karu Road.

Bismarck (Torresian) Crow *Corvus (orru) insulans*

The taxonomy of these birds has not been fully resolved as they are variously treated as either an endemic species, or a subspecies of the more widely distributed Torresian Crow, although their voice is certainly different from the latter.

It was, however, a common bird, with A logged each day of our stay on mainland New Ireland.

Pacific Swallow *Hirundo tahitica*

A widespread species which was fairly common on New Ireland.

Golden-headed Cisticola *Cisticola exilis*

This species was first seen in Kavieng during our early morning excursion on 13 April to look for Munias with three logged. A further three birds were then recorded across two subsequent dates.

Black-headed White-eye *Zosterops hypoxanthus*

This White-eye is endemic to the Bismarcks and Manus and was well seen on the Lelet Plateau excursion on 14 April with A logged. The only other record was a lone bird the following day.

Metallic Starling *Aplonis metallica*

Seen in good numbers on a daily basis on mainland New Ireland and certainly the commonest starling.

Singing Starling *Aplonis cantoroides*

Six birds on 13 April were the only sightings of the extension.

Atoll Starling *Aplonis feadensis*

This species, which has a tiny world range, was one of the major targets of the trip to Tench Island (17 April) and was fairly common, with A logged.

Long-tailed Myna *Mino kreffti*

Recorded on a daily basis on mainland New Ireland with the highest count being on the Lelet Plateau trip on 14 April when a low A was logged.

Red-banded Flowerpecker *Dicaeum eximium*

Another Bismarck endemic and seen on a daily basis on mainland New Ireland, with the highest count being on the Lelet Road on 14 April.

Black Sunbird *Leptocoma sericea*
Recorded each day of our trip on mainland New Ireland.

Olive-backed Sunbird *Cinnyris jugularis*
Only three individuals of this fairly widespread Sunbird were recorded.

Hunstein's (Mottled) Munia *Lonchura hunsteini*
This highly localised endemic is only known from Lavongai Island and a small part of New Ireland, however, it proved easy to find near Kavieng Airport, with B logged on both 13 and 16 April.

Forbes' (New Ireland) Munia *Lonchura forbesi*
This poorly known New Ireland endemic, was seen by those on the early transfer back to Kavieng on 16 April.

Buff-bellied (Bismarck) Munia *Lonchura melaena*
This endemic was also only seen by on the early transfer back to Kavieng on 16 April.

Cetaceans

Risso's Dolphin *Grampus griseus*
A pod, which probably numbered a couple of dozen animals, was seen extremely well as we cruised back to Kavieng after the trip to Tench Island (17 April).

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