

# West Papua - 2018

24<sup>th</sup> June – 24<sup>th</sup> July 2018

## HIGHLIGHTS

Either for rarity value, excellent views or simply a group favourite.

- Biak Scrubfowl
- Snow Mountain Quail
- Salvadori's Teal
- Papuan Harrier
- Grey-headed Goshawk
- White-striped Forest-Rail
- New Guinea Woodcock
- Western Crowned Pigeon
- Palm Cockatoo
- Goldie's Lorikeet
- Painted Tiger-Parrot
- Geelvink Pygmy-Parrot
- Red-breasted Pygmy-Parrot
- Sooty Owl
- Papuan Boobook
- Archbold's Nightjar
- Mountain Owlet-nightjar
- Numfor Paradise-Kingfisher
- Hook-billed Kingfisher
- Yellow-billed Kingfisher
- Lesser Melampitta
- Papuan Pitta
- Spotted Jewel-babbler
- Greater Ground-Robin
- Vogelkop Bowerbird
- Orange-cheeked Honeyeater
- MacGregor's Honeyeater
- Tit Berrypecker
- Crested Berrypecker
- Papuan Treecreeper
- Wattled Ploughbill
- Biak Monarch
- Black-breasted Boatbill
- Western Parotia
- Arfak Astrapia
- Black Sicklebill
- Pale-billed Sicklebill
- Long-tailed Paradigalla
- Greater Superb Bird of Paradise
- Vogelkop Superb Bird of Paradise
- Twelve-wired Bird of Paradise
- Wilson's Bird of Paradise
- Magnificent Bird of Paradise
- Red Bird of Paradise
- Lesser Bird of Paradise
- Black-chinned Robin
- Green-backed Robin
- Mountain Firetail
- Great-billed Manakin
- Blue-faced Parrotfinch

## SUMMARY:

This epic trip started on the islands of Biak and Numfor with all the target birds seen including Biak Scrubfowl, Biak Scops-Owl, Biak Paradise-Kingfisher, Geelvink Pygmy-Parrot and the stunning Numfor Paradise-Kingfisher. Moving on to the Snow Mountains, daily birding from a very pleasant Hotel instead of camping (which used to be compulsory due to access) made birding this area much more comfortable. The group enjoyed great views of the giant MacGregor's Honeyeater, Snow Mountain Quail, Painted Tiger Parrot, Greater Ground Robin, Lesser Melampitta, Superb Bird-of-Paradise, Splendid Astrapia, New Guinea Woodcock and Archbold's Nightjar to name but a few. In Nimbokrang stunning views were obtained of Lesser Bird-of-Paradise, Pale-billed Sicklebill and Twelve-wired Bird-of-Paradise, whilst other highlights included Magnificent Riflebird, King Bird-of-Paradise, Jobi Manucode and Papuan Nightjar. On to the Arfak Mountains where the conditions were tough but the rewards were very high. Here the group had encounters with Magnificent Bird-of-Paradise, the rare and elusive Long-tailed Paradigalla, Western Parotia, Arfak Astrapia, Black Sicklebill, the incredible Vogelkop Bowerbird attending to its bower, Modest Tiger Parrot, Lesser Ground Robin, Mottled Berryhunter, Mountain Owlet-Nightjar, White-striped Forest Rail, Spotted Jewel-Babbler and lots more. The last destination was the island of Waigeo, which did not disappoint. The accommodation, set on a coral reef, is stunning and from this base a short drive took the group to some pristine lowland forest where mind-blowing views of Wilson's Bird-of-Paradise, Western Crowned Pigeon and Red Bird-of-Paradise were obtained.

One of the major highlights of the trip.



This highly prized pair of Western Crowned Pigeons performed beautifully.

## Biak Island- 26<sup>th</sup> June

Having departed the UK on 24<sup>th</sup> June, we all arrived on Biak Island on the same flight from Makassar early morning of the 26<sup>th</sup>, which left most of the day for birding. Royke Mananta, our great friend and guide for the trip, met us at the airport with our local drivers and drove us the short distance to our hotel to drop our bags off and get set for going out and exploring the island.

Our first destination was Makerbo Forest, an area renowned for being home for the majority of the endemic bird species on the island, and it lived up to its reputation. Birding from the road we soon heard **Biak Paradise-Kingfisher** calling and it did not take long before our first endemic was in the bag. We soon added one of the tougher birds to find by calling up a superb **Biak Monarch**, which, on occasions, perched right out in the open for all to see. This species is still little known with currently no information on its nesting habits and few juvenile birds being observed in the field. At this time we also had good looks at a pair of **Emperor Fairywrens** as they quickly moved through the scrub.

Inside the forest we came across a feeding flock and the wide trail enabled everyone to get a good look at most of the birds moving through. The flock contained our first of many **Biak Black Flycatchers** (this



species turned out to be very common on the island), the **Biak Gerygone** was a little harder to get on to but not as difficult as the **Biak Leaf-Warbler** (still lumped by the IOC with Island Leaf-Warbler) which just gave fleeting views. **Biak Fantail** (currently lumped by the IOC with Northern Fantail), **Biak Triller** (another bird currently lumped by the IOC, this time with Black-browed Triller) and **Little Shrike-Thrush** were also seen and further down the track we observed a small flock of **Biak Lorikeets** perched in a nearby tree.

**Moustached Treeswift** is always a great bird to see and our adult had a fledgling perched on an open branch which, at first, looked a great candidate for a nightjar! **Red-capped Flowerpeckers** were everywhere.

We had already heard **Biak Scrubfowl** a couple of times but as we retraced our steps back to the vehicles one started calling quite close to the path. We attempted to call it in but it failed to move any closer. Eventually heavy rain forced us to retreat back to the vehicles where we took the opportunity to take tea and have a well-earned siesta.

The rain stopped late afternoon so we ventured out again along the same track inside the forest. **Golden Monarch** soon gave itself up and we observed a number of **Long-tailed Starlings** and a single **Hooded Butcherbird**. On the parrot front we had plenty of fly over **Eclectus Parrot**, **Red-cheeked Parrot**, **Black-winged Lory** and **Sulphur-crested Cockatoo**. Exploring further up the track than earlier we heard a **Hooded Pitta** calling to our right and, with the Biak Island sub-species split by some authorities, it was important for all of us to see this bird. Royke started to call the bird in and eventually it popped right out on the track below us.

Unfortunately, due to the long grass in the middle of the track, some of the group were blocked but eventually it showed really well to all. We headed back to the vehicles for refreshments but not before adding a **Claret-breasted Fruit Dove** and a pair of **Yellow-bibbed Fruit Dove** to the list.

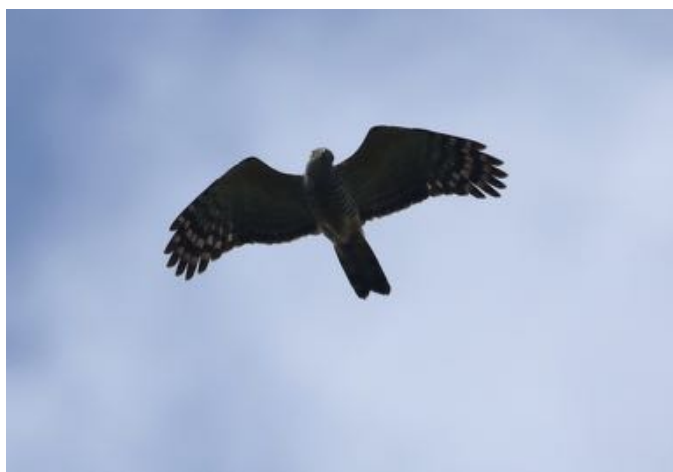


As darkness set in we headed out on our quest to find the elusive **Biak Scops Owl**, trying again but failing to call in **Biak Scrubfowl** on the way. Soon enough we had the Scops Owl calling ahead of us but, try as we might, it would not come in close continuing to circle around us. At one point I managed to pinpoint the bird in my torch but, before everyone could get on to it, the bird flew off. Eventually we had to call time and headed back to our comfortable hotel.

## *Biak Island- 27<sup>th</sup> June*

It rained heavily overnight but our second day on the island dawned bright and sunny which was encouraging. After breakfast we headed out in pretty much the same direction as yesterday but this time we birded the slightly degraded forest around Adibai.

Birding was much slower compared to yesterday but we were pleased to see one of the key species early doors in the shape of a pair of **Biak White-eyes**, which showed really well along with numerous **Black Sunbirds** and one or two **Olive-backed Sunbirds**.



Continuing to bird along the road and dodging the showers, we had great looks at the various displaying **Great Cuckoo-Doves** and eventually scope views of a perched bird. This island subspecies is quite striking and distinct compared with the mainland bird showing a bright white head and underparts, surely another candidate for a future split. During this time **Pacific Baza** was seen well along with **Brahminy Kite** and **Variable Goshawk**.

**Geelvink Cicadabird** (lumped by the IOC with Common Cicadabird, but split by some authorities) showed briefly this morning but was

seen much better later on during our island excursions. **Geelvink Imperial Pigeon** also gave itself up (yet another subspecies on the island which is split by some authorities from Spice Imperial Pigeon). **Biak Scrubfowl** despite being heard again, remained unseen and, despite a number of attempts, we just could not get any sort of response from **Biak Coucal** which was rather worrying as it should have been in the area.

Trying a forest trail Chris called out that he had briefly seen a bird walking through the leaf litter. Thinking that it might be a scrubfowl we tried the call but nothing...!!! Spreading out, we tried in vain to relocate the bird until one of our drivers pointed out a bird further down the trail which turned out to be a very nice **Red-necked Crake**. Quite a surprise as the guide books indicate that they do not occur on Biak...whatever, it was a good find and really appreciated by the group.

Our plan was to try for **Biak Scops Owl** again so we drove the short distance to Makerbo Forest and tried a different trail from last night. Alas we had no joy, only hearing a very distant owl calling which would not respond. We did however have extremely good views of a perched **Papuan Frogmouth** at the end of the day.

## *Biak Island and Numfor Island-28<sup>th</sup> June*

As our boat to Numfor Island was not due to depart until mid-afternoon we took the opportunity to head out to the Adibai area after breakfast and bird the road in the hope of finding that elusive **Biak Coucal**.

On arrival in the area we had views of plenty of the species seen earlier in the trip including **Yellow-bibbed** and **Claret-breasted Fruit Dove**, **Eclectus** and **Red-cheeked Parrot**, **Black-winged Lory** and we even had better views of more elusive species such as **Biak Gerygone** and **Biak Leaf Warbler**. The weather was not helping us much in our search for the coucal with constant heavy downpours but, as we walked a section of



road which dropped away below us, the sun came out and a couple of **Biak Coucal** started to call. One was quite close to the road and some of us got views of the bird as it flew from nearby trees. It was amazing that such a large black bird could camouflage itself so well in the canopy of thinly leaved trees. A pair of **Biak Coucal** then played games with us for the next hour or so and, during a period of showers and tea and biscuit breaks, most of us managed some sort of view of the birds.

Eventually we had to call time on the coucal hunt and headed back to the Hotel to pack and have lunch before heading down to the harbour to board our boat. The tide was not as high as expected but we all boarded without mishap (although one of us was rather soggy). Thankfully the sea was pretty calm and the wind not strong as we were all too aware that some trips do not manage to get to Numfor due to inclement weather.

Although the boat was pretty nifty, she was fairly steady and we managed to see **Brown Booby**, **Lesser Frigatebird**, **Brown Noddy**, **Bridled Tern** and **Great Crested Tern** on the crossing, which took about three hours, but the brown phase **Red-footed Booby** was the undoubted highlight as we approached Numfor.

As we entered the bay where we needed to disembark we saw numerous **Torresian Imperial Pigeon** before David pointed out a flyby **Beach Kingfisher** followed by our first **Torresian Crow** of the trip.



Again the tide was working against us and the crew had to change our disembarking plan by taking us to some nearby moored boats that we could get on to and then access land. We were all off safe and sound but our lift to our accommodation was nowhere to be seen. Thankfully the local police stepped in and, after checking our paperwork was all in order, ferried most of us on the back of motorbikes to our Homestead where we were to spend the night. Our late arrival meant that there was no point in going out birding so we settled in to our accommodation and enjoyed our evening meal together. The owners of the Homestead mentioned that there were some nocturnal

birds which used the garden to feed in at night and, after showing them pictures in our field guide, we realised that these were **Papuan Frogmouth**. A couple of the group decided to stay up and see them, which they did, whilst the rest of us went to bed. It rained really heavily throughout the night.

## *Numfor Island and Biak Island-29<sup>th</sup> June*

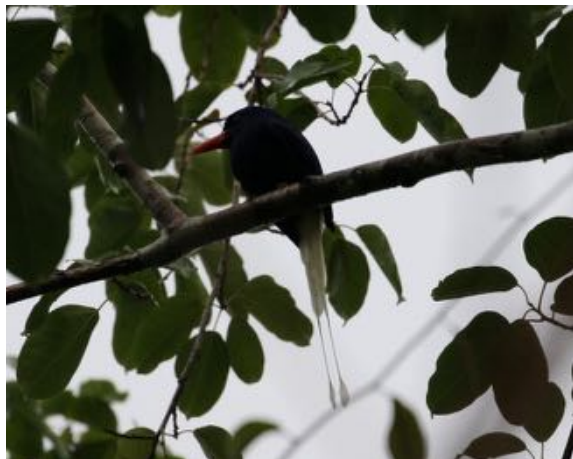
We had all morning and most of the afternoon, if we needed it, to locate the special birds of Numfor Island, so we had an early breakfast and headed out before first light to our first stake out. Pretty much as soon as we got out of the cars we could hear the distinctive call of **Numfor Paradise-Kingfisher** on both sides of the road. Initially they did not respond to playback but, after a while, we had a couple of birds fly over our heads and eventually we had one perched up for scope views....what a cracker.

Whilst watching the kingfishers an **Island Leaf Warbler** (the bird on this island is split by some authorities as **Numfor Leaf Warbler**) was calling nearby but only some of us got a look at the bird. As a **Great-billed Heron** flew over the road the clouds around us started to get really threatening, suddenly the heavens opened so we retreated to the vehicles as quickly as we could. It absolutely chucked it down for a good 20 minutes but eventually the sky cleared and the sun came out, blessing us with its presence for the rest of the day.

We tried the leaf warbler again but it was not playing ball, so our local guide suggested a track nearby which he said was sometimes good for **Biak Scrubfowl**. A short distance from the cars we started to line ourselves up with a view of the track ahead getting in position to try and call the scrubfowl out. Suddenly a bird popped out on to the track ahead of us, it was a **Hooded Pitta**. This was much appreciated as the Numfor Island sub-species is a sought after addition to anyone's list. After this distraction Royke started playing the call of the scrubfowl and within a few minutes we got a response. There were probably two birds and initially they just

kept within the forest edge teasing us with fleeting views until bang, one bird came right out in to the open and on to the track. **Biak Scrubfowl** well and truly in the bag. Elated we headed back to try for the leaf warbler again and thankfully it gave good views to us all.....amazing what a bit of sunshine can do!!

Royke suggested that we move on but instead of getting back in the cars he suggested that we bird the road as he thought it might be good for one of the more difficult species to see on the island, namely **Geelvink Pygmy Parrot**. Totally inspired as, within minutes, he spotted a pair of these tiny little parrots feeding in a tree right next to the road. They stayed with us for ages and we managed to get fabulous views; a real treat.



Continuing further up the road we managed to see the Numfor island subspecies of **Geelvink Cicadabird**, and the Numfor island subspecies of **Long-tailed Starling** before a pair of **Numfor Paradise Kingfishers** came in to check us out. To be honest there was not much left for us to see on the island. I mentioned **Island Monarch**, whereupon David and Chris found one (note to self: 'must do that more often!'). We also had great views of another **Geelvink Pygmy Parrot**, but we all came to the conclusion that our time would be best spent by heading back to Biak where there was a bit of unfinished business. Royke made the calls, we headed back to our digs to collect our stuff and we were transported to the harbour on the other side of the island to catch our boat.

Alas many things on West Papua do not seem to go quite as planned and, on arrival at the harbour, the boat was there but no one was at home. The friendly locals helped us out and eventually found the captain and his crew. Safely on board we said our goodbyes to Numfor and headed out on a beautifully calm sea. There was not too much in the way of seabirds on the crossing but we did manage **Brown Booby**, **Great Frigatebird**, **Lesser Frigatebird**, **Brown Noddy**, **Bridled Tern**, **Sooty Tern** and **Great Crested Tern**.



The undoubted highlight however was a significant group of Pilot Whales and Dolphins, spread out over a large area, as we approached Biak Island. Thankfully our skipper knew that we would want to spend some time with these cetaceans so slowed the boat down to a crawl so that we could appreciate them. The numbers were hard to assess but there were around 50+ **Indo-pacific Bottlenose Dolphins**, 200+ **Short-finned Pilot Whales**, 500+ **Fraser's Dolphins**, some of which were in pods of over

100 individuals plus a couple of possible **Risso's Dolphins** further out and only showing briefly. It was amazing and a privilege to spend some time with these awesome creatures but, all too soon, it was time to move on.

Disembarkation was uneventful and our vehicles were waiting for us to head out. Time was pressing so we quickly dropped our stuff off at the hotel and drove up to Makerbo Forest to try for **Biak Scops Owl** again. We headed to the site where we had partial success on the first night of the trip but, yet again, the bird would not play ball. It responded quite well initially but soon moved away and would not return. Royke is not one to give up so, back at the vehicles, we drove along trying various stops and playing the owl call but with no response. We did manage to see another **Papuan Frogmouth**, a couple of **Large-tailed Nightjars**, spotlight some fine looking frogs and Kevin saw an unidentified mammal cross the road but no owls unfortunately. We headed back to the hotel and readied ourselves for the next stage of our adventure.....the Snow Mountains.

## Snow Mountains (Wamena)-30<sup>th</sup> June

This was to be mostly a travel day but we were hopeful that, should everything go to plan, we might get some birding done late afternoon. Royke informed us that there was a slight delay with our flight, so we took a leisurely breakfast before heading over to the airport. Sure enough our flight was slightly delayed but we arrived in Wamena via Jayapura in fairly good time. Our vehicles and drivers were waiting for us at the airport and took us to a very nice hotel on the outskirts of town where we checked in and had some lunch.

By mid-afternoon we were ready to go out and headed to the lower slopes of the Snow Mountains to try our luck at adding something good to our list. Expectations were high but the degraded nature of the woodland and habitat at this altitude did not inspire us greatly. The first area we tried was close to a river and reportedly good for **Grey Thornbill**. We fired up the i-pod and gave it a quick burst. Soon enough a group of three birds responded really well and came in to have a look. All was looking good until David pointed out the white band in the outer tail feathers; **Brown-breasted Gerygone**....dam and blast!!! Most saw the **Capped White-eyes** but, if not, there were sure to be loads tomorrow.



Crossing the road we tried a small area of woodland where a **Baliem Whistler** was calling and eventually we all had good looks of this range restricted endemic. Around the corner and on to the river bed a couple of **Ornate Melidectes** popped up on to a dead tree giving great scope views. We decided not to go any further along the river bed and headed back to where the vehicles were parked up and walked up the grassy slopes nearby and in to some better habitat. We soon had a **Papuan Harrier** fly through, along with an apparent **Oriental Hobby**, but **Mountain Kingfisher** remained as just heard. Also at this spot some of the group got on to a brief **Stout-billed Cuckooshrike**. Soon enough we could hear

the raucous call of one of the species of bird most of us in the group wanted to see, namely **Greater Superb Bird-of-Paradise**. After what seemed like ages the bird eventually showed itself but so briefly that not all of us got a view. Frustrated, we would have to wait until tomorrow to try and get better views.

As the sun went down we headed back to the hotel and enjoyed a very pleasant evening meal chatting about what tomorrow might bring.

## Snow Mountains-1<sup>st</sup> July

A huge advantage this year to birding the Snow Mountains is the tarmaced road which has been built up to the high tops which means, for the first year, there is the real option to stay in a comfortable hotel in Wamena and not have to camp in the mountains. This was really brought home to us this morning as it was obvious that there had been some seriously wet weather overnight on the high ground. As a result we decided to concentrate on the lower to mid-elevation slopes today and go up higher tomorrow.

On the drive up we observed many **Pied Bush Chat** but suddenly Tracey spotted a bird cross the road in front of the lead vehicle. We stopped, reversed up and had fantastic views of a **Buff-banded Rail** as it foraged by the side of the road. Further up we birded a piece of remnant forest from the road for a good couple of hours having breakfast by the vehicles. **Red-collared Myzomela** and **Capped White-eye** were present in good numbers and a male **Greater Superb Bird-of-Paradise** was consistently calling nearby. The search was on to find the BoP and as the troops spread out the inevitable happened and someone found something good. We all dashed to the call of '**Streaked Berrypecker**' and we all obtained decent looks at this rare New Guinea endemic as a pair fed in the lower branches of the forest.



Meanwhile the BoP kept calling so we entered the wood to try and get an angle on it. More **Capped White-eyes** were seen and a **Marbled Honeyeater** perched in the open, some got a glimpse of the **Greater Superb Bird-of-Paradise** but the viewing was pretty impossible, so most of us headed back up on to the road. Those that stayed in the wood saw a **Black Fantail** (there would be many more on the trip) and those on the road had good looks at a female **Greater Superb Bird-of-Paradise** obviously attracted by the calls of the male.

Eventually our patience was rewarded when the male **Greater Superb Bird-of-Paradise** decided to come closer to the edge of the road and what a fine bird indeed. The iridescent blue-green breast shields showed really well in the morning sunshine contrasting against the mainly black body feathers. At last we could all truly tick our first BoP of the trip.

After refreshments (hot drinks were always available as our team of drivers were constantly building small fires by the side of the road and boiling water for us) we drove a little further up in to an area of grassland. At various points we stopped and walked small sections of the road until Tracey spotted a group of passerines feeding just over the brow of a small hill. We walked up and there was our main quarry for this habitat, three fine **Black-breasted Mannikins**. Although Mannikins don't float everyone's boat, these birds, although common where they occur, are range restricted and an important bird to see in the Snow Mountains. At this time we also saw a perched up **Long-tailed Honey-Buzzard** and a bit further up the road we had distant views of our first **Great Woodswallows** of the trip.



We now entered the mid-elevation wooded zone with its beautiful pristine forests but, perhaps due to the clear weather conditions, bird activity dropped off during the late morning and early afternoon. We persevered and added some good species. **Common Smoky Honeyeater** was seen on most of our stops and **Belford's Melidictes**, having been heard a couple of times, eventually made it on to the list. Tracey was on good form and found us a pair of **Rufous-sided Honeyeater** with **Grey-streaked Honeyeater** being seen on multiple occasions.

At our roadside lunch stop we had a couple of female **Splendid Astrapias** which caused great excitement, being our second bird-of-paradise for the trip. David pointed out a **New Guinea Thornbill** and **Buff-faced Scrubwren** and **Lorentz's Whistler** were also added at this time. **Fan-tailed Berrypecker** was also seen along with **Friendly Fantail**, **Dimorphic Fantail** and we had further looks at **Baliem Whistler**.

Towards the end of the day we stopped at a point where we could hear a distant **Brown Sicklebill** and had great looks at a pair of **White-winged Robins**. We tried calling in the sicklebill but the weather closed in and it started to rain. The sicklebill just wasn't responding so we retreated back to the vehicles and headed back towards Wamena. One last stop in the drizzle resulted in finding a small feeding flock which included the Snow Mountain sub-species of **Island Leaf Warbler** but nothing else of note. The rain became heavier so we called it a day and drove down to our warm, comfortable hotel for the night.



## Snow Mountains-2<sup>nd</sup> July



We set off before sun up and headed straight for the high tops, not stopping on the way. It was a beautiful sunny morning, if not a little cold, when we turned off the new tarmac road and on to a gravel track which eventually skirts the edge of Lake Habbema. Our aim was to get to a ridge which is a hot spot for **MacGregor's Honeyeater** a short way along this track.



Our first good bird of the day was a very brief **Painted Tiger Parrot** which disappeared without trace in to some low level foliage and just would not come back out. We needed to press on but minutes later the front vehicle beckoned us forward and there, on the track, were three fantastic **Snow Mountain Quails** (one male and two females). They performed exceptionally well and we probably spent too long with them but, after all, this was one of the key species for the area and we had not expected to come across them so easily. This time we really did need to get a move on so, driving past many **Island Thrushs** and **Short-bearded Melidectes**, which were new birds for most of us, we arrived at the appointed spot.

Breakfast was served and during this time we had better views of both **Island Thrush** and **Short-bearded Melidectes**, to make up for earlier, plus a very nice male **Nankeen Kestel**. We kept on scanning the nearby hill forest but alas our main quarry was not to be seen anywhere. Mark took the opportunity to scope the nearby lake and found a **Salvadori's Teal** which everyone was happy with and agreed it would save as a long walk later in the week.



After a good couple of hours we decided to walk a section of the track in the hope that we might get a view of a MacGregor's by taking a different perspective. We were soon on to a couple of **Alpine Pipits** by the side of the track and then a very fine **Orange-cheeked Honeyeater** was added to the list. The honeyeater is endemic to the higher peaks of the Snow Mountains but is locally common and we managed to see over thirty individuals of this species whilst in the area. Chris then spotted what he was sure was a **(Western) Crested Berrypecker** ahead of us so we hot-footed to the location. After a bit of a wait, we were delighted to find a pair of these exquisite creatures foraging in bushes below us.



It was now obvious that the MacGregor's were not in the area. Royke suggested that we return to the vehicles and drive to another stakeout further down the track and this we did. After a short walk we were on a plateau looking down in to a valley bordered by Lake Habbema. Our local fixer confirmed that this was a good spot and promptly headed down in to the valley to see if he could find one for us. There was a fly-by from a **Fan-tailed Cuckoo** and scanning the lake a further **Salvadori's Teal** was found along with a small group **Pacific Black Ducks**, but no big honeyeater.....!!!!



Again it was time to move on so we slowly headed back to the tarmac road carefully checking the slopes either side on route. I suddenly spotted a **Painted Tiger Parrot** shoot across in front of us and land in a nearby bush. We exited the vehicles and approached the area carefully obtaining excellent views. This western version of the species is quite different to those seen in the east and could be elevated to full species at some stage and is likely to be renamed Snow Mountain Tiger Parrot. Splitting aside, it was a lovely bird and made up for the earlier one which most of the group did not see.

It was now time for lunch but the distractions were far too great and, whilst the water was being boiled, we ventured out again. Heading back up the tarmaced road we had stunning views of a male **Papuan Harrier** before being distracted by a small group of passerines. These turned out to be **Western Alpine Mannikins** (or Snow Mountain Mannikin) and another restricted range endemic got itself on to our lists. We tried a gully in the forest for **Greater Ground Robin** but the bird was not responding. Above us we could hear parrot species feeding in the trees and, back on the road, we discovered the culprits. Both **Papuan (Stella's) Lorikeet** and **Plum-faced Lorikeet** were present and further up the hill we also glimpsed **Yellow-billed Lorikeet** and **Orange-billed Lorikeet**. Further looks at **Belford's Melidectes** and **Splendid Astrapia** were also obtained. Not a bad lunch stop, although I don't remember having anything to eat!



The cars then took us back up the hill to some woodland where we hoped to find the elusive **MacGregor's Honeyeater**. Many **Mountain Swiftlets** were present and at this time we also had **Papuan Scrubwren** and **Large Scrubwren**. We could hear **Papuan Treecreeper** some way below us but, try as we might, the little devil would not come any closer (this was a recurring theme for this species in the Snow Mountains). As we were looking for the treecreeper a sudden shout of 'MacGregor's' went up and a bird flew across the valley below us and in to the trees on the opposite side. Alas most of the group missed it as we were fairly well spread out at the time. We headed to where the bird had landed as it was quite close to the road and spent about an hour trying to relocate it without any luck.....Grrrrrrrr!!

Royke as mentioned before is not one to give up and he had another location up his sleeve. Back at the lunch stop we climbed up and off the road and then down in to a gully which eventually headed in to some lovely pristine mossy forest, like something out of the Jurassic. This was the head of the Ibele Valley. We waited. Then there was a rush of wings as a large black bird with orange wing flashes and bright orange wattles on its face flew in. At last, **MacGregor's Honeyeater** had showed itself to all of the group. There were two birds present and we watched them as they hopped about through the trees doing their business. A fantastic experience and surely one of the birds of the trip, such a shame they are no longer classified as a BoP, but who really cares, they are just stunning birds. After prolonged views they eventually moved on and disappeared in to the nearby forest.

Elated we started to head back to where the vehicles had parked up but, to our surprise, Royke stopped us and pointed out that this area was also a stakeout for some nocturnal species. As the light started to fade, and the song of the **Island Thrush** died down, a **New Guinea Woodcock** flew over our heads and landed nearby, whilst, almost at the same time, an **Archbold's Nightjar** flew behind us. What a great ending to an epic day.

We drove down to Wamena very happy campers.....but no, we weren't camping....what joy!  
Refreshed and showered we had a lovely evening meal before the checklist and then bed.

## *Snow Mountains-3<sup>rd</sup> July*

Heading out early this morning our aim was to get to the Ibele Valley late morning, checking out the road on the way up. Breakfast and lunch were loaded in vehicles so that we could maximise our opportunities in the field. Checking the tree tops as we drove up only provided us with another **Fan-tailed Cuckoo** before we found the first **Mountain Firetail** feeding in roadside vegetation. To be honest, the birding was really slow so we pushed on to our breakfast stop higher up.



The drivers, after searching out some wood, lit the usual fire to boil up the water whilst we tried our luck at **Papuan Treecreeper**. Guess what....no joy. We did however see **White-winged Robin**, a large feeding flock of **Black Sitella** and a family group of **Mountain Robins**.

With breakfast out of the way we drove the short distance to the head of the Ibele Valley and slowly followed the steep, muddy, slippery trail through wonderful moss covered forest. We stopped at a number of locations on the way down before coming to a rise where, to our left, a **Greater Ground Robin** called

briefly. Some of us got some sort of view but nothing tickable. Then, to our right, a pair of **Papuan Logrunners** started calling. These shy birds gave us the run around but, eventually, we all managed to see either the male or female as they circled around us.

Back-tracking, we staked out a section of woodland where we could all see down the track and tried for **Lesser Melampitta**. A bird started calling and, after a long wait, it was obvious that it was edging nearer and nearer to the track. Eventually it popped out in to the open but only for an instance as it was immediately chased off by a larger brown bird which was probably a **Greater Ground Robin**. Talk about annoying. We stayed put in the hope that the birds might return which was a good move as Chris pointed out a large black bird flying towards us from the opposite end of the track, we all got on to it as **Archbold's Bowerbird** flew right over our heads.

In the meantime the drivers had come down with our lunch and lit a fire! It was actually a bit chilly so this was much appreciated by some. It also started to rain but, by the time we had finished eating, it had stopped. We headed back in to the forest to give the robin and melampitta a go again. Maybe because of the rain and the darker conditions (it had been sunny for most of the day) the birds were obviously more active.



We soon encountered a **Greater Ground Robin** singing very close to the track and eventually it showed incredibly well sat on a mossy branch right out in the open. This shy pitta-like bird was almost impossible until the recent discovery of the Ibele Valley population. As we stood waiting for the robin to show again a **Lesser Melampitta** also started to sing very close to us, a renowned skulker, the bird eventually showed really well and down to just a few feet at times. Job done it was time to go and, after negotiating the climb back up (we even saw another **MacGregor's Honeyeater** on the way), we headed back to Wamena in the half-light to our digs.



## Snow Mountains-4<sup>th</sup> July



Up early again, this time to initially concentrate on the mid-elevation species missing from our list. The rear vehicle had a perched up **Bronze Ground Dove** on the way and the front vehicle found a large feeding flock, so we pulled over and decided to have breakfast here.

Whilst the water was being boiled we walked down the road. There were many **Mountain Swiftlets** around and a few **Great Woodswallows**, one of which was perched up and gave good views through the scope. **Plum-faced Lorikeets** were wizzing around and a **Black-throated Honeyeater** was located. A large group of **Black Sitella** caused a bit of a stir but there was nothing else to be found with them and a **Sultan's Cuckoo-Dove** was scoped. Further down the road David pointed out a **Mountain Peltops** perched up but the **Mountain Kingfisher** calling nearby would not come out to play. We then heard a **Black-breasted Boatbill** inside the forest. Thankfully there was a short trail leading in and this enabled us to get great views of this super little bird.



Breakfast was just being served up when Royke shouted out that he was sure he could hear the high pitched call of a **Wattled Ploughbill** nearby. Everyone was now on full alert. It did not call again so we walked away from the vehicles and up a short slope to try and find this uncommon endemic. After about twenty minutes, and thinking the worst, there it was again, a barely audible high pitched whistle. The bird now continued to call on and off but it took another twenty minutes for everyone to get a decent look at what appeared to be a female **Wattled Ploughbill**. We eventually obtained really good views of the bird creeping around at eye level on some mossy branches and confirmed it as a female type bird.



After our late breakfast we walked up to an area which can be good for **Brown Sicklebill** but not for us. We did have great views of **Yellow-billed Lorikeet** and **Orange-billed Lorikeet**, much better than a couple of days ago. We also saw a **Common Smoky Honeyeater** with very orange facial skin, but it was definitely a Common Smoky. Another **Mountain Kingfisher** gave us the run around again but stubbornly would not show. A little further along we found a **Mid-mountain Berrypecker** and then a perched up **Black-mantled Goshawk**. On a ridge just above the road we had great looks at our first **Sooty Melidectes** and **(Western) Crested Berrypecker** also showed well.



It had been a great morning and early afternoon by the time we reached a point (which happened to be 3,500m above sea level) where we stopped for lunch. **Mountain Robin**, **White-winged Robin** and **Black-throated Robin** entertained us whilst we enjoyed our refreshments, with **Papuan Treecreeper** calling in the distance.

We spent the rest of the day in the beautiful surroundings of the high mountains searching for **Papuan Grassbird**. The scenery here is just breathtaking, with Mount Trikora looming in the distance at 4,750m and Lake Habbema below us. Our first attempt at **Papuan Grassbird** was quite successful with Jeff and Royke getting good views and some of the rest of the group seeing the bird in flight and creeping around on the ground. That was it however, this bird would not flush again and we tried many other areas with suitable habitat over the next few hours without a sniff. On our travels we did have further looks at a pair of **Snow Mountain Quail**, a few **Orange-cheeked Honeyeaters** and many **Alpine Pipits**.



We were all feeling rather tired after a long day in the field so we decided to call time and, after an uneventful drive back to Wamena, we arrived back at our comfortable hotel in good time.

## *Snow Mountains-5<sup>th</sup> July*

It was another early start to get to the head of a trail we wanted to do but we had to get permission from the local head man to cross his land. Unfortunately, on arrival, he was nowhere to be seen and despite lengthy negotiations between our fixers and the villagers they were not prepared to let us walk the trail. All land is perceived as owned in New Guinea and that includes West Papua and you enter at risk without permission.....not a risk we were willing to take. The villagers did however agree to let us have access to another trail but this was untried and untested. We attempted it but it was so steep and slippery that it forced us back.

Disappointed and now back on the road we did a bit of birding while we awaited our drivers who had gone in to town to try and find the head man. A **Mountain Fruit Dove** (still lumped by the IOC with White-bibbed Fruit Dove) flew across the road at eye level and we found a fantastic male **Tit Berrypecker**, which turned out to be the only one we saw on the trip. We also saw **Mid-mountain Berrypecker**, **Island Leaf Warbler** and a **Bar-tailed Cuckoo-Dove**. We had been lucky with the weather throughout our stay in the Snow Mountains with little rain but today we could have done with some. The sky was clear and by late afternoon it was becoming really hot. The bird activity dropped off so we decided to make for a shady spot for a break.

After a very leisurely lunch we started to walk the road downhill. Thankfully it clouded over and almost immediately the birds came out. We hit a bit of a purple patch. A fly over **Black-mantled Goshawk** was nice and we had further good looks at **Papuan (Stella's) Lorikeet**, **Yellow-billed Lorikeet** and **Orange-billed Lorikeet**. We added **Lorentz's Whistler** to the list and a **Dimorphic Fantail** eventually popped out and gave good views.



**Splendid Astrapia** was present and in roadside foliage a fantastic **Goldie's Lorikeet** was found feeding very close to the road.....a really good find and much appreciated. **Sclater's Whistler** and **Baliem Whistler** were also seen when a small finch popped up, a male **Blue-faced Parrotfinch**. As we turned a corner two grey passerines flew away from us and, as we approached, we identified them as **Slaty Robin** (an adult and young bird).

Eventually time started to run out and the vehicles picked us up to take us back to Wamena but not before stopping at some likely looking dead snags for perched birds. Here we had great scope views of a displaying **Greater Superb Bird-of-Paradise** before a pair of **Chestnut Forest Rails** started calling in the forest below. Royke found a trail and most of the group followed him in. Alas, despite a super effort and with the birds coming in really close, they remained unseen. Last bird of note for the day was **Black-breasted Mannikin** as we said our goodbyes to the exceptional Snow Mountains.

## *Wamena /Sentani /Nimbokrang-6<sup>th</sup> July*

Our flight out of Wamena was seriously delayed due to a technical issue with another aircraft which resulted in the runway being closed.....it's all part of the experience! So we settled in to the airport 'VIP' lounge where we were able to get a bit of comfort until our flight was called. After a three hour wait the runway had finally been reopened and we were off to Sentani on the north-east coast of West Papua.

It was only a short flight but afforded fabulous views of the Snow Mountains and the forested valleys below. We landed in Sentani and cleared the baggage hall without any dramas. We were met by our local guide and drivers and headed off to Nimbokrang, our base for the next four nights. After a couple of hours we arrived at our very nice Homestay and, after unloading our bags, enjoyed a tasty lunch before heading out for some birding.



It was fairly late in the day but just the right time to see the various mannikin species (oh joy) which are a speciality of the region come in to roost in the local rice paddies.....so that's where we headed. First up was a male **White-shouldered Fairywren** followed by the first of many of our main quarry **Great-billed Mannikins**. A number of small groups of **Coconut Lorikeets** were also seen flying over at this time and then our first stunning **Crimson Finch** was located close to the track.

As the evening drew on there were literally hundreds of **Great-billed Mannikins** present, we estimated over 400 by the end of the day and, sifting through them, we eventually found small groups of both **Hooded Mannikin** and **Chestnut-breasted Mannikin** but it took ages before we found our one and only **Streak-headed Mannikin**.

**Black-billed Coucal** were now calling in earnest and eventually one was located perched up and viewed through the scope. We ended the day trying to tease out both **Spotless Crake** and **Pale-vented Bush-hen**, but they remained in cover with only a **Buff-banded Rail** showing in flight.

## Nimbokrang Forest-7<sup>th</sup> July

The steamy lowland forests surrounding Nimbokrang offer some of the toughest birding around but the rewards, if you are willing to work hard, can be high. Reputably this area used to be one of the best birding areas in West Papua but sadly extensive logging and habitat clearance over the last few years has degraded the forest and thus affected the bird populations. Despite this we knew that most of the key species remain and with some persistence they can be found.

After an early breakfast we headed out well before sunrise to get in to position for a very special performance from a very special bird. We were taken on a long walk to an opening in Nimbokrang Forest where, after a short wait, a male **Lesser Bird-of-Paradise** started to call and display at the top of a nearby tree. A further three males joined it in the display tree and they proceeded to put on a fine performance for us over the next hour. Various females were attracted to the display lek and we were privileged to see the final moves from what was undoubtedly the alpha male before he mated with one of the females.



Whilst all this was going on **Collared Brushturkey**, **Pale-billed Sickiebill** and **Rusty Pitohui** could be heard nearby. A few of us searched for the culprits but to no avail. Still being heckled by the sickiebill we encouraged our local guide to find one for us but, no sooner had we done this, then the birds stopped calling. We tried to locate them and were taken to a couple of likely areas but failed to score. This was going to be tough.

As we wandered out of the forest and in to a clearing with a view of the tree tops we could at last see many, many birds. Our local guide wanted to move us on but this seemed like an opportunity to add some good birds to our list so we set up the scope and stuck fast. There were loads of pigeon and dove species flying around and we quickly nailed **Orange-bellied Fruit Dove**, **Claret-breasted Fruit Dove**, **Pinon's Imperial Pigeon** and **Zoe's Imperial Pigeon**. The fruit doves kept perching on some dead snags to our right and at one point a small dove popped up. In the scope it was obviously a **Dwarf Fruit Dove**, the books suggest this is completely out of range but it was certainly this species. A pair of **Blyth's Hornbills** flew over and we called in a **Long-billed Honeyeater** which showed really well. Parrots were also in evidence with the usual **Eclectus Parrot** and **Red-cheeked Parrot** but we also had our first **Black-capped Lory** of the trip.

Still at the same clearing we were getting further looks at **Emperor Fairywren** when some small doves flew in to our left. After a bit of manoeuvring one of the birds could be seen perched up and was identified as **Beautiful Fruit Dove**. A **Glossy-mantled Manucode** flew in and perched up in a tree on the opposite side of the clearing replaced by a pair of **Boyer's Cuckooshrike** shortly after. **Meyer's Friarbird** was seen as was **Black-browed Triller**; a **Black Butcherbird** was called in but a nearby **Ivory-billed Coucal** did not respond.



The clearing had been very productive but it was time to move on but, no sooner had we started to head back on to the forest trail, a pair of **Rufous-bellied Kookaburra** started calling above us. It took a little while but eventually we located the birds and we added another key species to our list. Further in we tried to find a calling **Yellow-billed Kingfisher** without any joy but then succeeded in finding a pair of **Buff-faced Pygmy Parrots** right next to the path. This was soon followed by a great find by Kevin of a **Hook-billed Kingfisher** perched up at eye level in the forest which gave walk away views through the scope. An added bonus was the bird being mobbed by a couple of **Ochre-collared Monarchs**.



As we continued on we had fleeting views of both **Pygmy Longbill** and **Rufous Monarch** in a small feeding flock which also included **Little Shrikethrush** and **Northern Fantail**. At an opening in the forest we had views of a **White-bellied Thicket Fantail** and a fleeting **Papuan Babbler**. In grassy areas as we approached the end of the trail and near the vehicles a **Golden-headed Cisticola** was observed by some of the group.

Slightly later than anticipated we headed back to our lodgings and, after lunch and a short rest, we headed south west from Nimbokrang to an area of forest known as km8, because its 8km down the road!!!! Stepping on to the forest trail we were soon in to some good birds with a number of the group getting on to a female type **King Bird-of-Paradise** along with **Rufous-backed Fantail** and a fly through **Papuan King Parrot**.

Further along the trail it was obvious that wellies were required, although we had been told it was dry (lesson learnt) and after half an hour we arrived at a hill where the forest had been cleared. Climbing to the top we set up the scope and, whilst our local guide took a nap, we started birding.

**Collared Sparrowhawk** flew through and there were constant small flocks of **Coconut Lorikeets** on their way to roost along with smaller numbers of **Eclectus Parrot**, **Red-cheeked Parrot** and **Black-capped Lory**. There was also a flock of smaller lorikeets which flew through but these remained unidentified. **Wompoo Fruit Dove** was located as were many more **Orange-bellied Fruit Doves** and **Claret-breasted Fruit Doves**.

A huge **Channel-billed Cuckoo**, which is always a great bird to see, flew in to the clearing and landed in the tree near us for great views as did our first **New Guinea Friarbirds** of the trip. Soon after a small flock of **Grey Crows** flew behind us a shout of **Pale-billed Sicklebill** went up. The bird was seen crossing between trees and had disappeared in to the foliage at the top of one of them. We strained our eyes to try and re-locate the bird but no joy. A tense few minutes passed and then the bird flew out and landed again on an open vine. We managed to get it in the scope before it moved on. Not the greatest of views but we had at least all seen it. Must do better tomorrow!!!

The light started to fade and the **Twelve-wired Bird-of-Paradise** that sometimes crosses the clearing was a no show, so we started to head back. We had a quick go at seeing a **Sooty Thicket Fantail** which was calling at the base of the hill but it would not come out of its thicket. At the end of the trail the people at the front saw a **Papuan Pitta** on the path but it soon hopped back into the forest and was impossible to find in the fading light.

Very satisfied with our days birding we headed back to our accommodation and enjoyed a very nice dinner before hatching a plan for tomorrow which involved finding more Birds-of-Paradise.

## *Jalan Korea (Nimbokrang) - 8<sup>th</sup> July*

Another early start on a clear morning saw us drive to Jalan Korea swamp forest a short distance from Nimbokrang where we left our vehicles and followed a forest trail in the dark to a site for **Twelve-wired Bird-of-Paradise**. We arrived in good time and the display post was pointed out to us. We waited in anticipation, the light came up but no bird. Its raucous call could be heard nearby so we tried another display post. Sure enough the male was there but despite a very cautious approach the bird flew and only the first couple of people to arrive saw the bird.....blast!!

We spent the next hour or so in the hope that the bird would return but we were not in luck. Cutting our loses we moved on to another area, another clearing in the forest, this time to search for **King Bird-of-Paradise**. You know when you have one of those mornings when nothing goes exactly as you would like it.....well this was one. The King was at his display tree but visibility was pants as you had to peer up in to the many branches above hoping that the bird would move in to your field of view. Most of us did see the bird eventually but it was less than ideal.

Whilst near this clearing, and waiting for our local guide to return (who seemed to have gone AWOL), we managed to get good looks at a pair of **Black-sided Robins** and much better views of **White-bellied Thicket Fantail** making up for yesterday's fleeting views. Between these two locations we also had incredible views of an **Ivory-billed Coucal** on the main track feeding on the ground. Not something we had expected from this extremely shy bird which normally keeps to thick cover.

Back at the vehicles again we birded the entry track which afforded good views of the forest either side whilst lunch was brought up to us. We soon got in to a feeding flock which contained **Mimic Honeyeater**, **Green-backed Gerygone** and **Yellow-bellied Longbill**, which was extremely mobile and difficult to get on too. Also there were many **Lesser Bird-of-Paradise** on show, mostly female or immature males. A **Dwarf Koel** flew in and perched up nicely for everyone to see and **Puff-backed Honeyeater** was also added to the list. We also saw the mainland sub-species of **Great Cuckoo Dove** and a male **Shining Flycatcher**.



Further along we had great views of both **Grey-headed Cuckooshrike** and **Black Cicadabird** before David pointed out a **Double-eyed Fig Parrot** perched on a dead snag in a tree next to the track, which we managed to scope before it flew off. **Meyer's Friarbirds** were much in evidence and we also observed a number of **New Guinea Friarbirds** for comparison. **Black Butcherbird** was also seen and, as we turned to make our way back, the first **Brown Oriole** of the trip was located. As we retraced our steps, **Lowland Peltops** was pointed out perched in the open and a **Northern Variable Pitohui** was eventually seen well.

Back at the vehicle a fairly late lunch was served and we managed a short siesta before heading out again. A short walk along the track did not add anything particularly of note, just the species seen previously, so we were beckoned in to the cars and taken to a couple of bridges where we were afforded good views across the forest. There were lots of **Claret-breasted Fruit Dove** and **Orange-bellied Fruit Dove** flying around and perched up. Eventually, after much searching, we found our first **Coroneted Fruit Dove**. **Large-billed Gerygone** was kicking about in the shrubs around the first bridge and, scanning the trees, a fine **Purple-tailed Imperial Pigeon** was located sitting in a nearby tree. The **Ivory-billed Coucal** was still doing its thing: hopping and running along the track and gave great views again whilst our local guide found a **Yellow-faced Myna**.



As we headed out better views were obtained of **Rufous-bellied Kookaburra** and, as the light faded we headed to a spot for some nocturnal species. The rear vehicle obtained views of **Papuan Spine-tailed Swift** before we all arrived at a stream crossing and a stakeout for **Papuan Nightjar**. Eventually the bird showed a couple of times in the half light and with no owls calling we moved on. We tried another site nearby for frogmouth and owls but again nothing was calling so we headed back to the homestay.

## Nimbokrang Forest-9<sup>th</sup> July

Another very early start saw us back at the km8 site south west of Nimbokrang. Our aim was to see **Magnificent Riflebird**. We were taken to a different location than the one a couple of days ago and, as we walked the forest in the dark, both **Marbled Frogmouth** and **Papuan Boobook** were calling nearby. We gave them a quick go but no luck and we were encouraged to move on.

As we neared our destination we could hear male **Magnificent Riflebirds** calling but, frustratingly, they could not be located. Eventually as we manoeuvred around over the next hour or so we managed decent looks at both male and females and, later, Mark found a female which gave prolonged views as it fed high up in the trees. We also had good looks at a calling **White-crowned Cuckoo** in the canopy. In this same area we could hear **Rusty Pitohui** calling and eventually one showed well as it moved quickly through the branches at eye level. As we watched the pitohui a large bird flew in above us and to our great excitement it turned out to be a female **Pale-billed Sicklebill**. It gave stunning views as it fed in a fruiting tree before eventually flying off, only to be replaced by a male. What a piece of luck and so much better than the views a couple of days ago. Every fine detail of the birds could be seen including the males flank plumes with opalescent tips.

Another **King Bird-of-Paradise** was located but again only afforded brief views whilst a **Hook-billed Kingfisher** was far more confiding. Our first and only **Hooded Monarch** for the trip was also seen well at this time. Walking up a wooded slope our local guide could hear the high pitched call of a **Blue Jewel-Babbler** ahead of us and over the brow of the slope. He pushed forward and unfortunately flushed it before we could get on to the bird. We could then hear it calling again in the valley below us but it certainly wasn't going to return.

On the path back both **Yellow-bellied Gerygone** and **Green-backed Gerygone** were seen and there were fleeting views of both **Papuan Babbler** again and **Dwarf Longbill**. **Yellow-bellied Longbill** was also seen before we spent an age getting decent looks at a **Sooty Thicket Fantail** which was eventually achieved.

We returned to the homestay where, during lunch, confusion over a double booking by another bird group was negotiated and resolved. We had a short rest and decided between us that we would return to km8 and check out the clearing we had been to a couple of days ago. This time (with wellies on) we did the trail in good time, seeing the same **Rufous-backed Fantail** and a **Papuan King Parrot** on route.

To be honest, we didn't really add anything major by coming here but it was a nice way to end the day and we saw many of the species mentioned before including good number of parrots and friarbirds. We did get much better looks at **Boyer's Cuckooshrike**, and **Brown Lory** was a nice find but, as the light faded, we woke our local guide up (yes he was sleeping again!) and headed back.

It was pretty much dark by the time we had reached the bottom end of the trail and both **Papuan Boobook** and **Marbled Frogmouth** could be heard calling nearby. A short burst from the i-pod and boom, there was the **Marbled Frogmouth** perched right out in the open. Unfazed it stayed there for ages and was still there when we moved on, but we hadn't moved on quite yet. A short burst from the i-pod and again success. The **Papuan Boobook** was sat right above our heads and looking down at us. What a fantastic end to the day.





## Nimbokrang to Sentani-10<sup>th</sup> July



Royke had kindly arranged to take us to a private location this morning in the hope of nailing **Twelve-wired Bird-of-Paradise**. It meant another very early start but we were used to that by now. We arrived at Alex Waisimon's Property in the dark and taken to a tower hide which overlooked a display post. We settled down and waited. We could hear the **Twelve-wired Bird-of-Paradise** calling nearby and, in the half-light, a bird flew in and perched on top of the post. **Oriental Dollarbird**.....not what we wanted!!! The

dollarbird eventually moved on and was replaced by another dark shape but this time it was a **Jobi Manucode**. Not the bird we really wanted to see but much appreciated all the same. The **Jobi Manucode** returned a couple of times before being pushed off by a similar sized but predominantly yellow and black bird. A male **Twelve-wired Bird-of-Paradise** for all to see at last and it performed beautifully. We watched the bird for some time and then a female flew in and the male went in to overdrive, hopping up and down his display post, until she flew off.

Very satisfied we headed back to Alex's house where his family had laid on tea and biscuits for us. Fed and watered we thanked our hosts and headed off to another site before the heat of the day set in. Inside the forest we briefly heard **Blue Jewel-Babbler** and had further sightings of **Coronated Fruit Dove** and **White-crowned Cuckoo**. It was getting a bit late in the day but we tried for **Shovel-billed Kookaburra** and, much to our surprise, one started calling back. At one stage it came in really close but as we started to search it flew across the path giving flight views to just a few of the group. Try as we might we could not re-locate the bird and eventually it stopped calling all together. It was now getting really hot so we decided to head back to Alex's place briefly to have a nosy round his new lodge.

We had a look at some of the other hides and viewing platforms plus a quick look at the accommodation, which seemed very nice, but, despite Chris finding a **Papuan Nightjar** on the path, bird activity had completely dropped off. We said goodbye to Alex and thanked him for his hospitality but before heading back to the homestay there was one last surprise. A little further down the road there was a good site for **Fawn-breasted Bowerbird** which we tried and were successful in finding a single bird.

So ended our birding at Nimbokrang. We had lunch at the homestay, packed and headed out on the drive back to Sentani. Arriving in very good time we were taken to a very comfortable hotel where we had a chance to have a much appreciated hot shower and re-pack our bags for the next exciting instalment of our adventure.

## Sentani /Manokwari /Arfak Mountains-11<sup>th</sup> July

Today was scheduled to be mostly a travelling day and that's exactly how it panned out. Our morning flight out of Sentani to Manokwari, on the Bird's Head peninsula, was delayed. On arrival in Manokwari we were met by our three drivers with 4x4 vehicles and we set off in to town to get supplies. We had to shop for six nights and have enough supplies for the family in the village who would be looking after us. It took quite some time and, at the end of our shopping spree, we had filled eight trolley loads, much to the amusement of the locals

Fed, watered and loaded up we headed out and up the long steep and winding road in to the Arfak Mountains, you definitely need a four wheeled drive up here. The views were incredible all the way up the mountain road and, towards the end of our journey, we stopped a couple of times and added **Papuan Mountain Pigeon**, but the light was going fast so we pushed on.

We arrived at Syoubri Village and drove up the muddy, slippery slope to Arfak Lodge. It was now nearly dark and we questioned why no lights were on in the Lodge. Apparently the village had been without lights for weeks, we were told. A generator was 'borrowed' and man-handled up the slippery slope. Eventually it was wired up, fired up and we had illumination. Our accommodation was basic and one of our group, who was feeling rather unwell anyway, decided to return to Manokwari with the drivers that night. Hasty arrangements were made and we said so long to our comrade.

The family living next door to us prepared a fine dinner and we retired to our rooms hoping that the weather would be kind to us; it was obvious that there had been some heavy rain recently!

## Arfak Mountains-12<sup>th</sup> July



We had an early start in order to position ourselves in some hides a short distance away. Thankfully the stars were out and it was a clear sky, if not a little chilly. We donned wellies and set off in the dark, through the village and then down a slope and in to the forest. There were two hides so the group was split up and taken to their respective viewing locations. Both hides scored with **Magnificent Bird-of-Paradise** and the shy **Green-backed Robin**. One hide had, however, been slightly better so we vowed to return on another morning.

The sun was now up so we headed back on to the main track (which was really a rough road leading to the next village) and birded the area for a couple of hours. We obtained good views of a single **Goldenface** and, at the same

time, Tracey found us our first **Olive-crowned Flowerpecker** and **Hooded Pitohui** of the trip. Royke could hear a pair of **Rusty Mouse-Warblers** nearby, so we entered the forest and, after some time, eventually we all had good views of this sometimes difficult to observe bird. Back on the main track again we had **Brown-breasted Gerygone** and **Black-fronted White-eye** before, at last, finding a couple of **Grey Thornbill**. I then spotted a **Rufous-naped Bellbird** low down by the side of the track, but, before everyone could get on to it, it disappeared in to the forest not to be seen again.

Lunch was now calling to us so we slowly made our way back up to lodge. During lunch we found out that Zeth, our local guide, who has an awesome reputation for finding birds, was apparently unwell so would not be joining us for the day. We made some plans for the afternoon, with the majority setting off with Royke to see what we could find around the lodge, whilst Kevin took the opportunity to head up one of the steeper trails with Zeth's brother to a hide overlooking a **Western Parotia** display court.

With Royke guiding us we headed up one of the nearby trails which firstly climbed through some degraded forest used by the villages for farming before entering prime forest. As is often the case, the forest edge was most productive and Royke had soon heard a couple of **Western Parotias**. After a short while we located the birds as they clambered through the trees, both of which were in female type plumage. We followed the **Western Parotias** and obtained better and better views until we were distracted by a nearby feeding flock.

First up was a **Vogelkop Whistler**, soon followed by a **Black Fantail** and then a **Friendly Fantail**. **Island Leaf Warbler** and **Capped White-eye** were present but best of all was a lovely **Yellow-breasted Boatbill**. **Dwarf Longbill** made a fleeting appearance before a **Vogelkop Melidectes** was found but obscured from view through the trees for most of us. After a bit of repositioning, and with the birds moving a little closer, we all managed to obtain decent looks and another key species for the area was added to our lists. At this time we also saw quite a few **Arfak Honeyeaters** and these turned out to be one of the more common birds seen during our stay in the Arfak Mountains.

Returning to the lodge we met up with Kevin who had done rather well scoring with the expected **Western Parotia** but he had also encountered **Vogelkop Bowerbird**, **Ashy Robin** and had a rare sighting of a **Dwarf Cassowary**.....lucky boy. We all enjoyed an excellent meal together before retiring to bed early.

## *Arfak Mountains-13<sup>th</sup> July*

Today had the potential to be the toughest day of the trip so far as we had decided to make the climb up to German Camp on Mount Indon and stay up there for a couple of nights. We packed our kit, said our goodbyes to Jeff who had decided to remain at the lodge, and commenced our trek.

The good news was that Zeth was feeling a little better and would be joining us and, the other good news was the weather was looking fine at that moment. Zeth soon proved his worth by finding us a couple of **Trumpet Manucodes** and a **Scrub Honeyeater** not far from the lodge. As we pressed on and after crossing a small stream, a male **Black Pitohui** was located and gave exceptionally good views.

We were now in some lovely pristine forest and as we gently climbed we found both **Mid-mountain Berrypecker**, **Fan-tailed Berrypecker** and further looks a **Goldenface** before one of our main targets was found. Well, when I say found the first sighting of **Long-tailed Paradigalla** was of one flying over our heads....just a black shape really and not very tickable. A little further on, however, Zeth stopped and started pointing frantically at some bushes next to the path and there was another one. It saw us and started to make its way up the trunk of a tree almost above us so you had to be a contortionist to get a decent look. Eventually it reached the higher parts of the tree and flew off, presumably to join its partner.

A little further on, the loud high pitched call of our next target bird could be heard but it was difficult to pinpoint its location. Then, as if by magic, it was there, perched up on a branch over the path, a fabulous **Mottled Berryhunter**. A key species for those bird family enthusiasts and a great find. This was quite a colourful individual with a very rusty face, so we presumed it was a female. What next..?

Well we did not have to wait long before our next good bird. This time we could hear the harsh grating call of a bird-of-paradise above us. After shifting around a bit and with directions from Zeth, we could see a male **Vogelkop Superb Bird-of-Paradise** perched on a branch in the open. At the time the birds occurring here were treated as a sub-species but, soon after our return from West Papua, the IOC formally split the Superb Bird-of-Paradise in to three distinct species.....Vogelkop being one of them.

Zeth then took us to a number of hides looking over a **Vogelkop Superb Bird-of-Paradise** court, but despite us staying in the area for about an hour, the bird did not appear. We re-grouped back on the path when a bird flew in to some trees to our right which, much to our delight, turned out to be our first **Modest Tiger Parrot** of the trip. So commenced a fairly frantic hour or so!

The **Modest Tiger Parrot** eventually flew off after giving stela views, **Vogelkop Scrubwren** took its place and a **Lesser Ground Robin** started calling. We toyed with the robin for a little while and it showed pretty well for a skulker. Trying to get better views, we entered a short way in to the forest and below us was a drenched tangle of mossy branches in a hollow. The **Lesser Ground Robin** popped up a couple of times as did a pair of **Mountain Mouse-Warblers** and some of the group got on to a single **Ashy Robin**.



It was now definitely time to move on and start the steeper climb up to camp. The first section was over a boulder-strewn dried up riverbed and quite easy going. We then got to the steeper section of the path and boy it was muddy and slippery. Most of our attention was drawn to keeping our footing so there was little birding to be done and, as we got further up, it started to rain.....and cripes did it rain. We arrived in camp absolutely soaked, dumped our bags off in the tent and had a much appreciated hot cup of tea.



Thankfully, by late afternoon, the rain had eased and, by the time we had walked out of camp it had stopped all together. We were going to be taken to see a very special bird. On the way we saw **Ashy Robin** and heard **Garnet Robin** before arriving at the incredibly impressive tented bower of a **Vogelkop Bowerbird**. Setting ourselves up in the hides in front of the bower our guide moved a couple of the items in front of the bower in order to attract the attention of the male bowerbird who, we presumed, was sitting up somewhere nearby watching what was going on. Within minutes the male **Vogelkop Bowerbird** appeared and started to move the items back in to their rightful place. We watched silently and awestruck by this most iconic of species working its magic in front of what must be the most incredible structure built by any bird. Eventually the bird finished tidying up and moved off. We had our 'David Attenborough' moment in front of the bower before moving off ourselves and heading back to camp.

As we walked back a **Spotted Jewel-babbler** started calling nearby. We gave it a quick go but, as the rain had started to fall again, we made tracks. Dinner was pretty much ready by the time we got back and we were grateful to get some hot food inside us. Most of us were pretty tired after a long day so we retired to bed. Just as we were settling down there was a loud crack and a few expletives as a bed broke underneath one member of our group. Minutes later there was another loud crack and the same person had broken another bed.....a few more expletives followed..... along with a lot of sniggering!!! It's all part of the experience.

## *Arfak Mountains-14<sup>th</sup> July*

Most of us had had a pretty sleepless night as there had been torrential rain throughout. We had awoken early in order to be in position to try and see **Black Sicklebill** but it was still raining heavily. Making our way around the sodden campsite in the dark we enjoyed a hot beverage before setting off. Thankfully, just a short distance outside of camp, the rain eased significantly and, after about a 30 minute walk, we arrived at the appointed location. Ushered in to three different hides we waited for the light to come and the bird to appear.

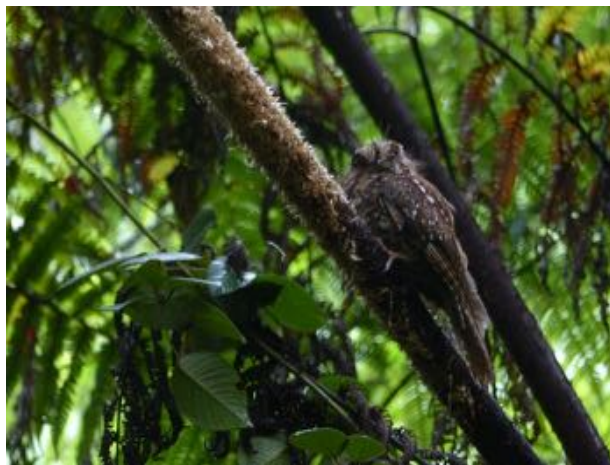
It was probably something to do with the weather but the bird did not come in to display. We could hear the male **Black Sicklebill** calling nearby and, knowing it would stop at any time, we exited the hides and searched for the culprit. Thankfully the bird was on show and during the morning session we probably saw about four individual **Black Sicklebills** in the area including two females.

It had been reported to us that **Papuan Treecreeper** was easier to come by here than in the Snow Mountains and this proved to be the case. During the morning session we managed to see at least four of these lovely birds along with further looks at **Rufous-sided Honeyeater** and **Vogelkop Bowerbird**. Heading back to camp Zeth heard a **Spotted Jewel-Babbler** again but alas only he and Kevin managed to see it.

Back at camp we had a bite to eat and, with the rain easing all the time, decided to take a punt at finding **Arfak Astrapia** even though it was late morning and perhaps not the best time to find them. It was a fairly steep climb up to the site but on the way we had some good birds with **Vogelkop Scubwren** putting in an appearance again, our first **Canary Flyrobin** of the trip and Mark found a **Rufous-naped Bellbird**, which we all managed to get on too. Stopping at an opening we started to search for the astrapia with immediate success. In fact there were two **Arfak Astrapia** on show, both female types, but good enough. Boyed with our success we started the climb down only to be stopped in our tracks by a perched up **Modest Tiger Parrot** and then an **Ashy Robin**.

Further down and approaching camp Zeth again heard the call of a **Spotted Jewel-babbler**....third time lucky? The viewing here was much better with a clearing below us where the bird was calling from. A quick burst of call and there it was, right out in the open walking around on the forest floor. An absolute cracker and a fine way to end the morning.

Back in camp we managed to jam in on a **Cinnamon-browed Melidectes** before sitting down to lunch. A calling **Garnet Robin** was a bit of a distraction but remained unseen. Over lunch we concluded that there was little to be gained by staying another night in camp and, with Zeth still feeling unwell, decided we would go back down to the lodge. It did not take us long to get our gear together and, as it started to rain again, we set off. A short distance from camp we were shown a lovely **Mountain Owlet-Nightjar** perched up on a branch before being shown another one near an abandoned building.



Now started the steep slippery route back. It probably was not that far distance wise but the terrain was so difficult it took ages. Eventually we all arrived at the lower slopes safe and sound. The sun came out and we did a little birding seeing **Regent Whistler**, **Black-throated Robin**, **Smoky Robin** and another **Rufous-naped Bellbird**.

As we approached the lodge it was obvious that the overnight rain had caused some serious issues. The villager's fields had been devastated and the river had burst its banks and gone down a completely different course. One of the houses at the top of the valley was under severe threat of being taken out by a fallen tree trunk. We picked our way through the debris and arrived at the lodge. Jeff was there to greet us and shared his good sightings whilst we had been away which included **Stout-billed Cuckooshrike** and **Black-billed Sicklebill**. Dinner was excellent again tonight.....pass the mung beans!!!

## Arfak Mountains-15<sup>th</sup> July

Another early start saw us hiking through the forest and climbing up to a spot where hides had been set up looking over a **Western Parotia** display court. Fairly early on in the walk, and missing being wet, I decided to fall in the river.....whatever!! Arriving before first light we settled in to the hide and awaited the performance. It took a while but eventually a fantastic looking male **Western Parotia** arrived in its arena and cleared the display court of any offending leaves. A little late some females arrived on the scene to inspect the court. The male at one stage landed on the ground below us and started to display but only for an instant before flying off and that was it.



Heading back down we managed to find a pair of **Perplexing Scubwren** and another **Goldenface** but a calling **Arfak Catbird** remained unseen. By the time we had arrived back at the lodge it was time for lunch and then a siesta for some, whilst a few of the group decided to try their luck at **Magnificent Bird-of-Paradise** again. Unfortunately one of our group had received some bad news from home and had to leave us today, so, with flights reorganised and a taxi booked to take them back to Manokwari, we said our goodbyes.

We had agreed to meet the **Magnificent Bird-of-Paradise** team on the track near the hides later in the afternoon and, on arrival, were greeted with the news that they had in fact been successful. They had also seen a **Muller's Three-striped Dasyure**, a marsupial carnivore endemic to New Guinea. Zeth was still unwell so we had his brother with us who had been given the location for a **Greater Sooty Owl**. Luckily the bird was at home and gave good views.

Again we split up with some trying the Magnificent Bird-of-Paradise hide, and the rest of us, led by Zeth's brother, attempting to find **White-striped Forest Rail**. It was another steep and slippery climb for the 'rail team' but it was negotiated without incident. Arriving at the site we tried calling the rail and got an immediate response. Eventually it came in close enough for us to locate it and we had cracking views of the male bird. Over the next few minutes it came in so close that you did not need to use your bins.

Back on the main track we met up with the 'BoP'ers' who unfortunately had not connected, and made our way back slowly to the lodge. We received news that our fellow traveller who had gone back to Manokwari a few days ago was feeling much better and was on his way back with our vehicles. Dinner was taken on his arrival and we were to bed early again.

## Arfak Mountains-16<sup>th</sup> July

We awoke to a beautifully clear morning with no threat of rain, which was great news as we planned to bird the road this morning and get there before first light. Breakfast was taken and we headed out in the 4x4's. Arriving on the main road we headed downhill a little way before parking up at our first stop.

As the sun came up the birds started calling in earnest and before long we found a fine male **Red Myzomela** and one of our key targets for today was in the bag. I could hear the distinctive call of **Blue-collared Parrot** and expected the birds to be flying high up above us, but a small loose flock flew low through the valley at eye level and then perched in a nearby tree giving great scope views.....what a bonus. Zeth pointed out a **White-faced Robin** on the opposite side of the road and **Mountain Honeyeater** was also seen.

Then came a trio of lorikeet species, all in flight, but seen pretty well by all of us. First up was a pair of **Josephine's Lorikeets**, followed by a couple of **Fairy Lorikeets** and then a pair of **Papuan Lorikeets**. An **Arfak Catbird** started calling from the forest below us but we could not tease it out (although later on that morning a couple of the group did manage fleeting views of one). As we were waiting for the catbird to come out and play a shout of '**Masked Bowerbird**' went up and a female flew over our heads and landed in a group of trees a little further down the road. We repositioned but alas could not relocate the bird.

Repositioning did have its bonuses however as next to the tree line there was a group of **Lesser Bird-of-Paradise** feeding and at least four **Yellow-legged Flyrobin**. As we stood scanning for other species a **Metallic Pigeon** flew through and this was followed by a very close **Moluccan King Parrot** which flew through so low that some of the group missed it; at this time **Ornate Fruit Dove** remained a heard only.

It was now starting to get rather warm under the clear blue sky and some of us sought water and shelter from the vehicles. Just as we approached them a **Pesquet's Parrot** flew over calling, its red belly and underwing markings showing really well. We headed up hill as quickly as we could to try and relocate the bird but it had obviously continued through.

Back in the vehicles we started driving slowly back to the lodge stopping where ever we located bird activity....which wasn't very often to be honest. That's the downside of a sunny day in the mountains but it had been a fantastic morning with some excellent sightings and it was better than being soaked to the skin. We did see a raptor in flight on the way back (which most thought was **Grey-headed Goshawk**) but that was



pretty much it. Arriving back at the lodge we had lunch and planned to go back on the road later in the afternoon.

We tried a completely different location in the afternoon and higher up than this morning. Here we tried to call in **Black-billed Sicklebill** without any luck but there was plenty to keep us amused. **Black-winged Monarch** and **Frilled Monarch** were seen really well and there were many species seen previously over the last few days including **Ornate Melidectes**, **Arfak Honeyeater**, **Vogelkop Scrubwren**, **Vogelkop Melidectes**, **Goldenface** to name but a few.



Zeth somehow found a fantastic male **Red-breasted Pygmy-Parrot** perched up which stayed with us for ages giving absolutely stunning scope views and David found a rare **Papuan Sitella**. Another flock of **Blue-collared Parrots** flew in to add to this morning's sighting and again landed for more scope views....what's going on? **Mountain Peltops**, **Stout-billed Cuckooshrike** and **Black-bellied Cuckooshrike** were seen. Finally an adult **Blue-faced Parrotfinch** showed well and much better than the one in the Snow Mountains.

We ended the day trying again for **Black-billed Sicklebill** but, as the light faded, we decided to head back to the lodge for dinner, then the daily log and then bed.

## *Arfak Mountains to Manokwari-17<sup>th</sup> July*

Not such an early start this morning but after breakfast we were in position at the same place as yesterday morning to give the sicklebill one last go. The weather did hamper us all day with persistent rain on occasions and thick fog.....not ideal for birding. In an attempt to find some clearer conditions we headed down a bit further with some success but it was still raining on and off.

We had fantastic views of a perched adult **Grey-headed Goshawk** which gave amazing scope views before it flew off. **Red Myzomela**, **Mountain Honeyeater**, **Dwarf Longbill**, **Mountain Peltops**, **Black-bellied Cuckooshrike** and **Black Pitohui** were all seen again. **Papuan Treecreeper** showed really well and was much appreciated whilst **Western Parotia** were much in evidence again.

Further back up the road, and with the rain easing, we had great looks at **Rufous-throated Bronze Cuckoo** and another perched up flock of **Blue-collared Parrots**. **Slaty Robin**, **White-faced Robin**, **Black-fronted White-eye** were seen and then David found a **Chestnut-bellied Fantail**.

Eventually a **Black-billed Sicklebill** flew across the road and over our heads and was then probably seen flying in to the trees in the distance. It was now time to head back to the lodge, pack our bags, have some lunch and then drive down to Manokwari.

We stopped briefly to try for the sicklebill again, which was a big mistake, as a couple of the local villagers took umbrage to us looking over their tribal land. After putting on a bit of a show they were placated and moved on their merry way.

The weather really was not our friend today and got steadily worse as we progressed downhill. At various stops we did manage to see **Fairy Lorikeet**, **Metallic Pigeon**, **Sultan's Cuckoo-Dove**, **Little Shrikethrush**, **Grey Crow**, a very brief **Golden Cuckooshrike** and a very nice showy **Black-chinned Robin**. But, by the time we had reached the lower slopes, we had had enough, so continued on to our very nice hotel in Manokwari where a hot shower was much appreciated.

## *Manokwari / Sorong / Waigeo-18<sup>th</sup> July*

After a comfortable night we had a fairly leisurely breakfast before heading to the airport where our flight, inevitably, was delayed. We arrived in Sorong in pretty good time however and in plenty of time to catch our ferry. We positioned ourselves at the rear of the boat (with all the smokers) and headed out of port; our destination, the magic island of Waigeo.

The crossing took just less than two hours and on route we added **Great Egret**, **Lesser Frigatebird**, **Greater Crested Tern**, **Roseate Tern**, **Black-naped Tern** and **Whiskered Tern**, we also had an encounter with a small pod of **Spinner Dolphins**. On arrival in Waisai Harbour we found our first **Singing Starlings** before we disembarked and headed to our lodgings not far away.

We arrived at our Dive Resort where we would be staying for the next three nights and it was absolutely stunning. The accommodation set out on stilts in the ocean gave access to the surrounding coral reef with our open air communal eating area looking out across the bay. Some of us decided to do a bit of snorkelling whilst the rest of the group birded the entrance road. The birders managed to see **Brahminy Kite**, **Striated Heron**, **Little Pied Cormorant**, **Beach Kingfisher**, **Sacred Kingfisher**, **Palm Cockatoo**, **Papuan Black Myzomela** and **New Guinea Friarbird**.

With us all back together again we enjoyed a beer or two watching **Moustached Treeswifts** and **White-breasted Woodswallows** hawking over our heads, **Eclectus Parrots** and **Red-cheeked Parrots** in large numbers going to roost and a **Glossy-mantled Manucode** perched up in the half light as the sun went down. What an idyllic spot this is.

## Waigeo-19<sup>th</sup> July

This was to be another early start, with our guides and drivers joining us for breakfast before we headed out. We were taken to a patch of private forest along the Trans Saporken Road, about 8km west of Waisai. Parking up on a forest track we were taken along a forest trail and up to a viewing point where we waited patiently. A **Papuan Boobook** called nearby but remained out of view. Then above us we could hear a male **Red Bird-of-Paradise** calling and eventually it came in to view briefly perching in the display tree. It was an immature male, not quite at its best and seemed to have been pushed off by another bird. That bird was a full adult male which now came in to the open. What a stunner.....the long curling black tail streamers stood out against the red flank plumes and the green iridescence of the face and crest took the breath away. All too soon it was over and he moved off. Although we could still hear him nearby, the lack of females meant that that he would probably not return.

Our attention was now drawn to a **Raja Ampat Pitohui** which had not stopped calling since first light. We soon had it in our sights and another of the island endemics was on the list. Our guide now said he would take us to see **Dusky Megapode**.....blimey, this was panning out to be a good morning. Sure enough he took us to the area a short walk away and, with a little bit of encouragement, a pair showed really well at close quarters. Next!!!!

Well 'next' was not going to be quite so easy as we were now going to try and find the very shy **Western Crowned Pigeon**. We drove some of the trails stopping at a number of locations. We were shown a fantastic adult **Waigeo Cuscus** curled up in a tree and had good looks at some female type and sub-adult male **Red Bird-of-Paradise** but no luck with the big pigeon. Our guides told us that they could occur anywhere and would be most likely seen on the tracks ahead of us. We stopped and tried a short trail in to the forest seeing **Stephan's Emerald Dove** on the deck and **Dwarf Fruit Dove** perched up in nearby trees.



It was suggested that we walk from the vehicles on the main track for a while which turned out to be an inspired decision. After about a couple of hundred metres the track turned to the left and as we slowly walked around the corner we were halted by two huge birds walking ahead of us, a fantastic pair of **Western Crowned Pigeons**. We had stonking views as the birds gradually moved away from us and disappeared over a hump in the track and then in to the forest not to be seen again. High fives all round.

Moving on we walked a very narrow section of the main track. A **Papuan Pitta** was calling to our right so we went in. After giving us a bit of a run around the bird eventually showed perfectly. Along this trail we also added **Tawny-breasted Honeyeater**, **Grey Whistler** and had further looks at **Dwarf Longbill**, whilst **Common Paradise Kingfisher** and **Yellow-billed Kingfisher** remained as heard only. **Wilson's Bird-of-Paradise** were also calling all around us but just one lucky person managed to see one.....there's always tomorrow!!!

It was now time to head back to our accommodation for lunch, on the way stopping for a fine perched up **Rufous-bellied Kookaburra**. Lunch and a quick siesta or swim were taken and we headed out again late



afternoon to bird the road leading to our morning destination. First up was **Palm Cockatoo**, which some of us had missed yesterday, followed by a pair of **Beautiful Fruit Dove** (and yes they are). At this time we also had a fly over by a decent sized group of **Great and Lesser Frigatebirds**. **Eastern Osprey** and **White-bellied Sea Eagle** were seen along with a party of around twenty **Channel-billed Cuckoos**. Finally a pair of **Brown-headed Crow** flew high over our heads, the photos taken by Jeff confirming the identification without any shadow of doubt. We ended a memorable day back at our beautiful lodgings with a beer or two as the sun set.

## Waigeo-20<sup>th</sup> July

Guess what.....up before the crack of dawn and out again but we were all certainly up for this one as, for some birders, this morning's target is perhaps the most sought after species in the world, namely **Wilson's Bird-of-Paradise**. We were driven to the same piece of private forest as yesterday and, as we walked to the hides, both **Papuan Boobook** and **Marbled Frogmouth** were calling.

The group was split but we were assured that both hides looked over active display grounds and this was no



lie. The larger of the two hides provided crippling prolonged views of a male **Wilson's Bird-of-Paradise** as he tended his arena, whilst the smaller hide had a stunning male displaying to females. We watched in awe at this truly amazing bird at the same time trying to puzzle together the various different feather tracks. It is hard to describe the complexity of plumage of the male bird with its blue 'brains' bulging out of its head,



glimmering red mantle and wings, bright blue legs and curled tail feathers. The larger of the two hides also had a pair of **Dusky Megapode** strolling around and heard **Pheasant Pigeon** in the distance. After well over an hour of wonderful viewing it was time to pull ourselves away and move on.



Back at the vehicles and after a short drive we found the pair of **Western Crowned Pigeon** at the same location as yesterday. This time one of the birds was perched up in a nearby tree and stayed there for ages, displaying every now and again.....absolutely brilliant. Further on we managed to find a small feeding flock which contained **Mimic Honeyeater**, **Puff-backed Honeyeater** and **Rusty Pitohui**. We had great looks at **Rusty Mouse-Warbler**, our first **Spot-winged Monarch** and Chris found a **Spotted Honeyeater**. At this time we also managed to see at least one **Common Paradise Kingfisher** although they remained very elusive despite being very vocal.





Very satisfied with our morning session we headed back to our resort where we took lunch, interrupted by a fly over **Gurney's Eagle**.

Afterwards some of the group went back on the road with our local guides for another birding session whilst the remainder stayed behind to do some snorkelling.

We all regrouped in the evening for drinks when a small flock of **Raja Shelduck** flew past the dining area. We enjoyed a sumptuous evening meal before the daily log and then bed.

### *Waigeo to Sorong (Talim Wisata Alam) - 21<sup>st</sup> July*

Having had a successful couple of days on Waigeo we took the opportunity to take the earlier ferry back to the mainland which gave us the chance to do some birding around Sorong. The crossing was pretty uneventful and on arrival we were taken to a very nice restaurant for lunch before heading out. Unfortunately the weather gods were not with us today and we experienced some very heavy downpours. **Red-billed Brushturkey** was heard but failed to show but we did manage good looks at **Orange-fronted Fruit Dove**, **Superb Fruit Dove** and a party of **Papuan Babbler**, which was much appreciated as our previous views had been pretty fleeting. During our time here the all too familiar call of **Yellow-billed Kingfisher** followed us around until Jeff spotted a bird perched up in the canopy.....at last it was on our list, well done Jeff. We gave a calling **Golden Myna** a good go without any luck before the skies darkened again and it absolutely lashed it down. Eventually we had to give up and headed back to our very nice hotel in town.

### *Sorong to Makassar - 22<sup>nd</sup> July*

The internal flight to Sulawesi left in the morning on time but, due to the cancellation of our original connecting flight to Singapore, most of us had an extra night in Makassar. Royke kindly offered to take us out birding so we jumped in to a couple of taxis and headed to Bantimurung Bulusaraung NP making a couple of roadside stops on the way. We had limited time but saw some good birds including **Knobbed Hornbill**, **Sulawesi Dwarf Hornbill** and **Sulawesi Streaked Flycatcher** before heading back to the hotel.

## Makassar to Singapore-23<sup>rd</sup> July



Our morning flight from Makassar arrived in Singapore on schedule and, with time spare, some of us pulled ourselves away from the VIP Lounge and headed in to the city. We decided to visit the **Gardens in the Bay** with its night time light show which was pretty amazing. We also saw some birds.....but nothing of real note. Eventually it was time to catch our flight back to the UK.

We all agreed that this had been a hard but very rewarding trip. I have to thank you all for your patience, support and bird finding skills. The trip was great fun and it was an absolute pleasure traveling with you all. Here's to the next time.

Derek



-----  
**Photographs courtesy of Jeff Cooper, Tracey Lambert and Mark Adams.**

ZOOTHERA GLOBAL BIRDING – West Papua Tour Report – 2018