

## Trip Report: Papua New Guinea (Varirata National Park, PAU and Tari)

21<sup>st</sup> - 28<sup>th</sup> July 2013

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Our second visit to Papua New Guinea (PNG) was centred around four days in the highlands of Tari (Hela province), book-ended by short visits to David M-K's local hot spots in Varirata National Park (Central province) plus a quick stop at Pacific Adventist University (PAU) on the outskirts of Port Moresby. David M-K joined us for all of the birding, himself adding over 20 highlands lifers whilst I added 64 lifers from the 131 species identified (including 80 New Guinea endemics).



*Brown-headed Paradise-Kingfisher [Varirata National Park]*

David M-K, Ivan and Alfred were our hosts in Port Moresby and from there we travelled the less than 40 minutes to Varirata National Park. This was our first real exposure to low and mid-elevation birding on the New Guinea mainland so, despite having time for only two short visits, our trips there and to PAU added significant numbers to both my trip and life list. We were indeed fortunate that the flow of birds was almost non-stop, especially during our morning visit, delivering what David M-K described as one of the most productive mornings that he has experienced there. Highlights included excellent views of a Brown-headed Paradise-Kingfisher in the forest understorey, Yellow-billed Kingfishers in the eucalypt woodland, two Black-billed Brush-Turkeys walking along a trail, female and male Raggiana Bird-of-paradise in full breeding plumage, Red-cheeked Parrots 'kissing', a pair of Dwarf Koels, several colourful fruit-doves sunning themselves in the morning light, and two Lesser Black Whipsnakes apparently courting on the entrance road.

In the Tari valley we stayed at the comfortable Ambua Lodge, where on-site forest trails and roadside birding up to the Tari Gap exposed us to many species not seen during our 2010 visit to Kumul Lodge. The weather was quite wet, especially in the afternoons, but we were able to get out into the field at some stage on every morning and afternoon. Guiding services were limited (the lodge's only bird guide, Joseph, was available to us for only one morning walk down from Tari Gap) and we spent most of the time either birding and hiking the road (three mornings and one afternoon in the company of a staff member and van driver) or on-site trails (one morning and three afternoons, either alone or with a staff member)<sup>1</sup>.

The lodge's 'Three Bridges' trail was the only extensive forest trail that we had access to in the Tari valley, and it proved productive for a range of forest species. The full circuit took some two plus hours at birding pace and highlights included glimpses of a Spotted Jewel-Babbler that David M-K tempted to approach us, a Papuan Treecreeper embedded within a mixed flock, a rarely seen Black-billed Sicklebill working the mossy branches of a tall tree, a pair of Torrent-larks along a fast-flowing stream, a single Black Pitohui and several Short-tailed Paradigallas (at least one with a surprisingly long tail). The lodge gardens also delivered several birds-of-paradise visiting a large fruiting tree and multiple spot-light sightings of Jungle Hawk-Owls.



*Papuan Lorikeet [Tari valley]*

The gravel road through the Tari valley has recently been upgraded for the heavy transport associated with the PNG LNG project and the traffic, comprised of periodic convoys of semi-trailers and 4WD's, was quite disruptive to our birding. Small scale but extensive logging enterprises are also now established up to and above the Bailey bridge - the previously productive Benson's trail is now a clearing - leaving only the final few kilometres from ca. 2450m up to the Tari Gap at ca. 2700m ASL intact. Despite these impacts our roadside birding still delivered highlights such as close up views of Papuan Lorikeets, Ribbon-tailed Astrapias, Modest Tiger-Parrots and Crested Berrypeckers at fruiting trees, glimpses of a Lesser Ground-Robin crossing a forest trail, neck-breaking views of a party of Black Sittellas working the canopy of what felt like the tallest tree along the roadside and several bird-of-paradise, robin and whistler species. Smart little Speckled Dasyures feeding on mossy branches were the only mammals whose ID we were able to confirm.

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<sup>1</sup>Successfully overcoming bouts of 'FOMO' (Fear of Missing Out) that afflicted us as we optimized our time!



*Papuan Lorikeet [Tari valley]*



*Smoky Honeyeater [Ambua Lodge]*



*Ribbon-tailed Astrapia [Tari valley]*



*Short-tailed Paradigalla [Ambua Lodge]*



*Papuan Grassbird; Papuan Scrubwren [both Tari valley]*



*Great Woodswallows [Ambua Lodge]*



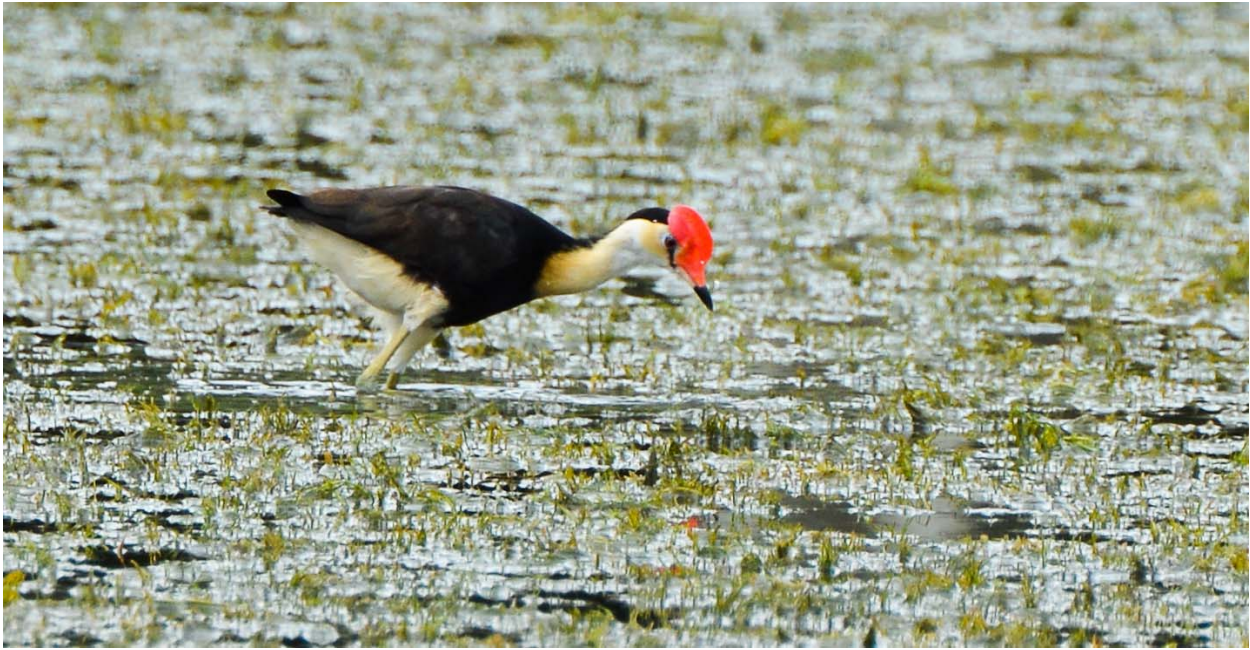
*Black-breasted Boatbill [Tari valley]; Blue-Gray Robin (immature) [Ambua Lodge]*



*Speckled Dasyure [Tari valley]*



*Lesser Black Whipsnakes [Varirata National Park]*



*Comb-crested Jacana [Pacific Adventist University]*



*Red-cheeked Parrots [Varirata National Park]*



*Mountain Firetail [Tari Gap]*

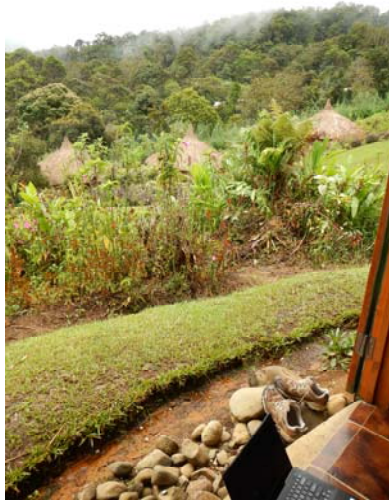


*Papuan Frogmouth [Pacific Adventist University]*



*Ribbon-tailed Astrapia (female) [Tari valley]*





*View from our hut at Ambua Lodge – the white of the main road is just visible cutting through the forest*



*The beauty of the savannah and forest at orchid-strewn Tari Gap*



*Dawn view from Tari Gap towards distant mountain ranges*



*Benson's Trail used to start here; Regular traffic impacted our birding – here with Joseph at Tari Gap*



*Mist shrouded monuments to a section of forest lost below Tari Gap*

## 1. Bird Trip List<sup>2</sup>

(Confirmed personal sightings only for DJS – excludes birds heard only unless otherwise indicated. Where included in the following books, birds are listed here in order of appearance on plates of: i) Beehler, Pratt and Zimmerman's 'Birds of New Guinea', Princeton, 1986; and ii) Coates and Peckover's 'Birds of New Guinea and the Bismarck Archipelago', Dove, 2001). Various taxonomic additions as per 'The Clements Checklist of Birds of the World', Cornell, 2007 with updates through December 2010 are also noted.

Locations where species seen in sequence of travel:

**POM** = Port Moresby [at sea level] (afternoon of July 21<sup>st</sup>, morning of July 22<sup>nd</sup> and morning of July 28<sup>th</sup>);

**PAU** = Pacific Adventist University grounds [at ~sea level], between Port Moresby and Varirata National Park (half an hour mid-afternoon on July 21<sup>st</sup>);

**V** = Varirata National Park on an escarpment outside Port Moresby, including eucalypt woodland on the approach road and forest trails and clearings within the park [ca. 400m up to 800m ASL] (a couple of hours on each of the afternoon of July 21<sup>st</sup> and morning of July 28<sup>th</sup>);

**A** = Ambua Lodge at ca. 2100m ASL in the Tari valley between Tari township and Tari Gap, including the lodge's gardens, on-site forest trails (principally the 'Three Bridges' trail that includes three river crossings on suspension bridges constructed from logs and vines) and nearby roadside (principally during the afternoon of July 22<sup>nd</sup>, afternoon of July 24<sup>th</sup>, morning and afternoon of July 25<sup>th</sup> and afternoon of July 26<sup>th</sup>);

**T** = Tari valley including roadside birding of the forest between Ambua Lodge [ca. 2100m ASL], the Bailey bridge [ca. 2400m ASL] and the upper elevation grasslands at Tari Gap [ca. 2700m ASL], plus short side-trails accessing the forest (morning and afternoon of July 23<sup>rd</sup>, morning of July 24<sup>th</sup> and morning of July 26<sup>th</sup>);

**Black-billed Brush-Turkey** (*Talegalla fuscirostris*) **E** [V]: Just before we had to depart mid-morning for the airport, a pair were well seen walking along the Koiari Treehouse trail in front of us as we stalked a Brown-headed Paradise-Kingfisher.

**Little Pied Cormorant** (*Phalacrocorax melanoleucos*) [PAU]: Several at the main pond.

**Little Black Cormorant** (*Phalacrocorax sulcirostris*) [PAU]: Several at the main pond.

**Australian Ibis** (*Threskiornis molucca*) [PAU]: Beehler refers to this as Sacred Ibis (*T. aethiopicus*). Several at the main pond.

**Cattle Egret** (*Bubulcus ibis*) [POM]: Several on the grass along the roadside heading towards PAU.

**Intermediate Egret** (*Mesophoyx intermedia*) [PAU]: Several on grass near to the main pond.

**Australasian Grebe** (*Tachybaptus novaehollandiae*) [PAU]: Several at the main pond.

**Pacific Black Duck** (*Anas superciliosa*) \* [PAU]: Several at the main pond.

**Plumed Whistling-Duck** (*Dendrocygna eytoni*) \* [PAU]: Several at the main pond.

**Wandering Whistling-Duck** (*Dendrocygna arcuata*) \* [PAU]: Several at the main pond.

**Australian Kestrel** (*Falco cenchroides*) [T]: Sometimes referred to as Nankeen Kestrel. One perched early-morning in the grasslands at Tari Gap and one flying over Tari airport.

**Australian Hobby** (*Falco longipennis*) [V]: One perched early-morning alongside the road in the eucalypt woodlands in the valley approaching Varirata NP. Only a brief glimpse (as it had flown by the time we backed up) but the face markings precluded confusion with DMK's much desired Oriental Hobby.

**Brahminy Kite** (*Haliastur Indus*) [PAU; T; V]: Seen occasionally in the highlands and flying near to the entrance to Varirata NP.

**Purple Swamphen** (*Porphyrio porphyrio*) [PAU]: Several at the main pond.

**Dusky Moorhen** (*Gallinula tenebrosa*) [PAU]: Several at the main pond.

**Comb-crested Jacana** (*Irediparra gallinacea*) \* [PAU]: One photogenic individual walking across the main pond, albeit at considerable distance. We did not pursue closer shots, instead heading off quickly towards Varirata NP.

**Masked Lapwing** (*Vanellus miles*) [POM]: Several on grass along the roadside outside of town.

**Emerald Dove** (*Chalcophaps indica*) [V]: Beehler refers to this as Emerald Ground-Dove. One was seen on the ground beside the road as we departed Varirata NP for the airport on our return to Australia.

**Great Cuckoo-Dove** (*Reinwardtoena reinwardtii*) [A]: Several of these impressively large birds seen feeding in fruiting trees, especially the tall, Bird-of-paradise attracting tree above cabin 7.

**Black-billed Cuckoo-Dove** (*Macropygia nigrirostris*) **E** [A]: Seen moving between the tall trees near to the car park.

**Pink-spotted Fruit-Dove** (*Ptilinopus perlatus*) **E** \* [V]: The first bird seen during our short morning in Varirata NP. Several more were subsequently seen from the picnic area as they perched in the early-morning sunlight, albeit too far away for good photographs

**Orange-bellied Fruit-Dove** (*Ptilinopus iozonus*) **E** \* [V]: Several seen from the picnic area as they perched in the early-morning sunlight.

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<sup>2</sup> **First sighting ever for DJS**; \*= photo; **E** = New Guinea endemic species

**Dwarf Fruit-Dove** (*Ptilinopus nanus*) [E] \* [V]: One seen from the picnic area as it perched in the early-morning sunlight.

**Papuan Lorikeet** (*Charmosyna papou*) [E] \* [T; A]: This spectacular, long-tailed montane parrot was seen on all the days that we were based at Ambua Lodge, including excellent views of perched individuals and pairs along the lodge's trails and, especially, when feeding at eye-level below Tari Gap. At least one dark morph individual was also seen near Tari Gap. I have incorporated the silhouette of a Papuan Lorikeet that I photographed feeding upside down into an updated website logo that includes both a northern and southern hemisphere species.

**Black-capped Lory** (*Lorius lory*) [E] [V]: Beehler refers to this as Western Black-capped Lory. A pair briefly seen perched in a roadside tree during our late-afternoon visit to Varirata NP.

**Rainbow Lorikeet** (*Trichoglossus haematodus*) [PAU; V]: Local ssp. *Trichoglossus haematodus nigrogularis* (sometimes referred to as Coconut Lorikeet) seen around the picnic area during our early-morning in Varirata NP.

**Plum-faced Lorikeet** (*Oreopsittacus arfaki*) [E] [T]: Also referred to as Whiskered Lorikeet. Our guide Joseph found two females feeding quietly in a roadside fruiting tree below Tari Gap and we later enjoyed a low-level fly past by a red-capped male.

**Yellow-billed Lorikeet** (*Neopsittacus musschenbroekii*) [E] [T; A]: Occasionally heard calling and seen flying overhead, but best seen when a pair perched in the clearing where the now devastated Benson's trail once started. Several also seen as they fed in a tall tree on the lodge's 'Three-Bridges' trail. Many other lorikeets seen and heard flying over were unidentified, but could easily have been this species or Orange-billed Lorikeet (*Neopsittacus pullicauda*).

**Eclectus Parrot** (*Eclectus roratus*) \* [V]: One seen flying across the picnic area.

**Red-cheeked Parrot** (*Geoffroyus geoffroyi*) \* [V]: One pair very well seen as they 'kissed' in the sub-canopy of a tree adjacent to the picnic area.

**Sulphur-crested Cockatoo** (*Cacatua galerita*) [V]: One seen and hear calling in the late afternoon as it flew below the lookout.

**Modest Tiger-Parrot** (*Psittacella modesta*) [E] [T]: DMK found our first one feeding quietly in a roadside shrub just below Tari Gap, with another pair subsequently seen further down the road.

**Brehm's Tiger-Parrot** (*Psittacella brehmii*) [E] [T]: One perched briefly in a dead tree on the edge of the clearing where the now devastated Benson's trail once started.

**Rufous-throated Bronze-Cuckoo** (*Chrysococcyx ruficollis*) [E] [T]: Heard on several occasions and well seen once, sitting mid-story in a roadside tree.

**Dwarf Koel** (*Microdynamis parva*) [E] [V]: A quiet pair was very well seen in the early-morning in the sub-canopy of a tree adjacent to the picnic area. The first time DMK had seen this species in Varirata NP.

**Pheasant Coucal** (*Centropus phasianus*) [V]: One dark-coloured individual flew across the Varirata NP entrance road where it passes through the eucalypt woodlands in the valley below.

**Brown-headed Paradise-Kingfisher** (*Tanysiptera danae*) [E] \* [V]: Located mid-morning by DMK (without resorting to use of playback!) in the understorey along the Koiari Treehouse trail. After we were distracted by a pair of Black-billed Brush-Turkey's we got back onto it and all enjoyed good views of this bird that veritably glows in the forest gloom.

**Yellow-billed Kingfisher** (*Syma torotoro*) [V]: DMK heard several calling as we drove through the eucalypt woodlands close to the entrance to Varirata NP and we located one perched in the early-morning sun.

**Mountain Kingfisher** (*Syma megarhyncha*) [E] [A] **heard only**: Heard calling on our first afternoon near the final bridge next to the hydro-electric water channel towards the end of the lodge's 'Three-Bridges' trail and also near the cabins on our final morning. One may have popped in and out in response to playback near a tree fall along the same trail across the stream from the heli-pad, but otherwise frustratingly elusive. Seeing this was probably my biggest miss of the trip and somewhat surprising since we had heard it calling on our very first walk on the 'Three-Bridges' trail.

**Blue-winged Kookaburra** (*Dacelo leachii*) \* [V]: Several of these lovely large kookaburras were seen in woodland on the approach to Varirata NP during both of our visits.

**Dollarbird** (*Eurystomus orientalis*) [V]: Several seen flying and perched during both of our visits.

**Rainbow Bee-eater** (*Merops ornatus*) [V]: Several seen flying and perched during both of our visits.

**Jungle Hawk-Owl** (*Ninox theomacha*) [E] \* [A]: Beehler refers to this as Papuan Boobook. Heard calling each evening around the lodge grounds and seen at close range on two nights – with at least four individuals spotlighted during a 20 minute period. FOMO successfully mitigated! No owl-nightjars were heard at all – apparently they are now much harder, if not impossible to find at both Ambua and Kumul lodges.

**Papuan Frogmouth** (*Podargus papuensis*) \* [PAU]: Our first lifer of the trip. Jeff (who we picked up at PAU for our afternoon visit to Varirata NP) and his daughter showed us a pair on a day roost in a large tree in front of their house on a road named, appropriately enough, Frogmouth Circuit!

**Uniform Swiftlet** (*Aerodramus vanikorensis*) [V]: Beehler refers to this as *Collocalia vanikorensis*. Several seen from the lookout.

**Mountain Swiftlet** (*Aerodramus hirundinacens*) [E] [A; T]: Commonly encountered in the highlands.

**Glossy Swiftlet** (*Collocalia esculenta*) [A]: Commonly encountered in the highlands.

**White-breasted Woodswallow** (*Artamus leucorhynchus*) \* [V]: Seen in the woodland approaching Varirata NP.

**Great Woodswallow** (*Artamus maximus*) [E] \* [A; T]: Approximately a dozen spent their day flying around the gardens and variously perching on the rooftops and tall trees. Occasionally seen flying overhead and calling noisily as we birded the road down from Tari Gap.

**Spotted Jewel-Babbler** (*Ptilorrhoa leucosticta*) [E] [A]: DMK enticed one calling individual to approach us at a mossy corner along the lodge's 'Three-Bridges' trail. After we had glimpsed each other it scurried away and fell silent, not to be seen again.

**Island Thrush** (*Turdus poliocephalus*) [T]: Seen at upper elevations, mainly in and near to the grasslands at the top of Tari Gap.

**Lesser Ground-Robin** (*Amalocichla incerta*) [E] [T]: On several occasions heard calling from the roadside forest at upper elevations near to Tari Gap. After Joseph had taken us down a short mossy trail one was coaxed into view as it circled around us.

**Northern Logrunner** (*Orthonyx novaeguineae*) [E] [T] **heard only**: Beehler refers to this as Logrunner (*O. temminckii*). Heard calling once from the roadside forest near to the Tari Gap, but otherwise frustratingly elusive despite several visits to likely habitat and use of playback.

**White-bellied Cuckoo-Shrike** (*Coracina papuensis*): [V]: One seen in the woodland approaching Varirata NP.

**Hooded Cuckoo-Shrike** (*Coracina longicauda*): [E] [A]: Small groups were seen moving through trees on the lodge's grounds.

**Boyer's Cuckoo-Shrike** (*Coracina boyeri*) [V]: One seen in the woodland approaching Varirata NP.

**Black-bellied Cuckoo-Shrike** (*Coracina Montana*) [E] [T]: Noisy groups encountered on several occasions between the lodge and Tari Gap. Responded to playback.

**Brown Oriole** (*Oriolus szalayi*) [E] \* [V]: One seen from the picnic area as it perched in the early-morning sunlight.

**Papuan (Tawny) Grassbird** (*Megalurus macrurus* or *M. papuensis* or *M. timoriensis*) [E] \* [T]: Although Clements lists this as a subspecies of the Tawny Grassbird (*Megalurus timoriensis macrurus*) this form is split as an endemic species, Papuan Grassbird, *M. macrurus* on the IOC list or elsewhere as *M. papuensis*. Commonly seen and heard in the upper elevations around Tari Gap, including one confiding individual that posed for close-range photographs.

**Brown-breasted Gerygone** (*Gerygone ruficollis*) [E] [T]: Seen on several occasions foraging in roadside trees.

**Island Leaf-Warbler** (*Phylloscopus poliocephalus*) [T]: Seen on several occasions foraging in roadside trees.

**Mountain Gerygone** (*Gerygone cinerea*) [E] [T]: Beehler refers to this as Grey Gerygone. Seen on several occasions foraging in roadside trees.

**Papuan Thornbill** (*Acanthiza murina*) [E] \* [T]: Beehler refers to this as New Guinea Thornbill. Heard and seen on several occasions foraging in roadside trees.

**Mountain Mouse-Warbler** (*Crateroscelis robusta*) [E] [T]: Regularly heard and well seen once when two emerged from a tangle of vegetation in response to playback.

**Papuan Scrubwren** (*Sericornis papuensis*) [E] \* [T]: Groups regularly heard and seen foraging in roadside trees.

**Large Scrubwren** (*Sericornis nouhuysi*) [E] [T; A]: Regularly seen foraging in roadside trees.

**Buff-faced Scrubwren** (*Sericornis perspicillatus*) [E] [A]: A small group well seen near to the final bridge next to the hydro-electric water channel towards the end of the lodge's 'Three-Bridges' trail.

**Dimorphic Fantail** (*Rhipidura brachyrhyncha*) [E] [T]: Regularly heard and occasionally seen foraging in roadside trees at upper elevations.

**Black Fantail** (*Rhipidura atra*) [A]: Black male and brown female well seen in a mixed flock along the 'Three-Bridges' trail that included our first Papuan Treecreeper.

**Black Monarch** (*Symposiachrus axillaris*) [E] [T; A]: Seen once along the 'Three-Bridges' trail and once along a trail near to the Bailey bridge on the road up to the Tari Gap.

**Friendly Fantail** (*Rhipidura albolimbata*) [E] \* [T; A]: Common in the highlands.

**Willie-wagtail** (*Rhipidura leucobrrys*) [PAU; V; A]: Common in open areas.

**Blue-gray Robin** (*Peneothello cyanus*) [E] \* [A]: Common and confiding along the 'Three-Bridges' trail, but not seen anywhere else.

**Pied Bushchat** (*Saxicola caprata*) \* [A; T]: Beehler refers to this as Pied Chat. One seen in the grassland at the Tari Gap. Another individual was seen daily around the main lodge buildings.

**White-winged Robin** (*Peneothello sigillata*) [E] \* [T]: A pair seen in roadside vegetation.

**Black-throated Robin** (*Poecilodryas albonotata*) [E] [A]: One was finally tracked down in trees at the entrance to the lodge – the appearance was overall much darker than the Beehler illustration.

**Canary Flycatcher (Flyrobin)** (*Microeca papuana*) [E] \* [A; T]: Regularly heard and occasionally seen. From my perspective, the 'Flyrobin' name better captures its appearance and behaviour!

**Black-breasted Boatbill** (*Machaerirhynchus nigripictus*) [E] \* [T; A]: These lovely little birds were seen on several occasions either alone or in pairs. One of the few species responsive to playback.

**Garnet Robin** (*Eugerygone rubra*) [E] [T]: A male seen briefly only once.

**Mottled Whistler** (*Rbagologus leucostigma*) [E] [A]: A female was finally tracked down in the tree at the entrance to the lodge that also held the Black-throated Robin.

**Slater's Whistler** (*Pachycephala soror*) [T; A]: Family (?) groups encountered on several occasions inside the forest. Responsive to playback.

**Regent Whistler** (*Pachycephala schlegelii*) [E] [T]: Seen a couple of times in roadside trees.

**Gray Whistler** (*Pachycephala simplex*) [V]: The last lifer of our trip – seen quietly perched in the under-storey along the Koiari Treehouse trail whilst we stalked a Brown-headed Paradise-Kingfisher.

**Brown-backed Whistler** (*Pachycephala modesta*) [E] [A; T]: Frequently seen foraging in mixed flocks or alone in roadside bushes and trees.

**Blue-capped Ifrita** (*Ifrita kowaldi*) [E] \* [T]: One of the poisonous birds of New Guinea! A small group seen once in roadside trees near to the Tari Gap.

**Rufous-naped Whistler** (*Aleadryas rufinucha*) [E] \* [A; T]: Very different body shape and behaviour from the other whistlers,

being often seen on the ground or in low bushes. Heard and seen daily.

**Black Pitohui** (*Pitohui nigrescens*) [E] [A]: We missed its reputed visits to the fruiting tree above cabin 7, but we were relieved to encounter one on the 'Three-Bridges' trail across the stream from the heli-pad.

**Hooded Pitohui** (*Pitohui dichrous*) [E] [V]: Another of the poisonous birds of New Guinea, with this apparently attributable to the insects of a similar colour scheme that it eats! Well seen as it foraged in 'its' fruiting tree adjacent to the picnic area.

**Red-capped Flowerpecker** (*Dicaeum geelvinkianum*) [E] [A]: Beehler refers to this as Papuan Flowerpecker (*D. pectorale*). Several seen in a tall tree near to the lodge car park.

**Crested Berrypecker** (*Paramythia montium*) [E] [A; T]: After having somehow missed this large berrypecker at Kumul lodge, I finally saw several during this trip. An infrequent visitor to fruiting trees in the lodge grounds and along the roadside.

**Tit Berrypecker** (*Oreocharis arfaki*) [E] [A]: Small parties of males and females visited tall fruiting trees in the lodge grounds.

**Fan-tailed Berrypecker** (*Melanocharis versteri*) [E] [T; A]: Individuals seen foraging low down along trails and in clearings.

**Capped White-eye** (*Zosterops fuscicapilla*) [E] [A]: Beehler refers to this as Western Mountain White-eye. A small party located once, together with scrubwrens, in the canopy of a tree above the final bridge next to the hydro-electric water channel towards the end of the lodge's 'Three-Bridges' trail.

**Black Sitella** (*Daphoenositta miranda*) [E] [T]: Beehler refers to this as *Neositta miranda*. A party of these tiny birds seen foraging nuthatch-like in the canopy of what felt, to our necks, like the tallest roadside tree! The tail colour was a distinctive ID feature.

**Papuan Treecreeper** (*Cormobates placens*) [E] \* [A; T]: To our surprise we found one in a mixed flock along the lodge's 'Three-Bridges' trail and backed this up with a second sighting near to the Bailey bridge.

**White-throated Honeyeater** (*Melithreptus albogularis*) \* [V]: One seen in the woodland approaching Varirata NP.

**Rufous-backed Honeyeater** (*Ptiloprora guisei*) [E] \* [T; A]: Seen regularly in roadside flowering bushes and also seen once in the lodge gardens.

**Black-backed Honeyeater** (*Ptiloprora erstriata*) [E] [T]: Beehler refers to this as Grey-streaked Honeyeater (*P. perstriata*). Seen on a couple of occasions, principally at elevations above that where the similarly marked Rufous-backed Honeyeater was seen.

**Pygmy Honeyeater** (*Toxorhamphus pygmaeum*) [E] [V] **heard only**: Beehler refers to this as *Oedistoma pygmaeum*. Heard in trees adjacent to the picnic area.

**Mountain Myzomela** (*Myzomela adolphinae*) [E] [T]: Seen on several occasions in roadside trees.

**Dusky Myzomela** (*Myzomela obscura*) [V]: One seen in trees adjacent to the picnic area in the company of Black Myzomela.

**Red-collared Myzomela** (*Myzomela rosenbergii*) [E] [T]: Seen on several occasions in roadside trees.

**Black Myzomela** (*Myzomela nigrata*) [E] [V]: Beehler refers to this as Papuan Black Myzomela. One seen in trees adjacent to the picnic area in the company of Dusky Myzomela.

**Mimic Honeyeater** (*Meliphaga analoga*) [E] [V]: Beehler refers to this as Mimic Meliphaga. One seen in trees adjacent to the picnic area.

**Black-throated Honeyeater** (*Lichenostomus subfrenatus*) [E] [T]: Seen on a couple of occasions in roadside trees.

**Smoky Honeyeater** (*Melipotes fumigatus*) [E] \* [A; T]: Beehler refers to this as Common Smoky Honeyeater. This bird has an amazing ability to change its facial skin colour between bright yellow and red-orange, although unlike at Kumul lodge we encountered almost exclusively yellow coloured individuals in Tari. Commonly encountered in the highlands where excitement at seeing movement in a tree was often shortly followed by the words 'it's only a Smoky'.

**Belford's Melidectes** (*Melidectes belfordi*) [E] \* [A; T]: A noisy forest inhabitant commonly encountered in the highlands. Right up with the Smoky Honeyeater in turning initial excitement into disappointment when its identity was revealed!

**Yellow-browed Melidectes** (*Melidectes rufocrissalis*) [E] [A]: Similar to the much more common Belford's Melidectes.

Individuals seen at fruiting trees in the lodge gardens and along the 'Three-Bridges' trail provided good opportunities to confirm the clear yellow eyebrow.

**Helmeted Friarbird** (*Philemon buceroides novaeguineae*) [PAU; V]: Clements only recognizes one species whilst IOC splits *P. buceroides* into *P. buceroides* (Helmeted Friarbird), *P. novaeguineae* (New Guinea Friarbird) and *P. yorki* (Hornbill Friarbird). Several seen on both visits to Varirata NP.

**Blue-faced Parrot-Finch** (*Erythrura trichroa*) [A]: At least one seen in a late-afternoon mixed flock along the 'Three-Bridges' trail.

**Mountain Firetail** (*Oreostruthus fuliginosus*) \* [T]: Small groups seen on two occasions at upper elevations close to the grasslands of the Tari Gap.

**Yellow-faced Myna** (*Mino dumontii*) [E] [PAU; V]: Pairs seen perched up in trees in both locations.

**Long-tailed Shrike** (*Lanius schach*) [T]: One seen perched on a bush in the grasslands at the Tari Gap.

**Fawn-breasted Bowerbird** (*Chlamydera cerviniventris*) [PAU; V]: One seen perched in both the PAU grounds and the woodlands on the approach to Varirata NP.

**Loria's Satinbird** (*Cnemophilus loriae*) [E] [A]: Beehler refers to this as Loria's Bird-of-paradise. In addition to more frequent visit by females, we enjoyed excellent views of two males in the fruiting tree above cabin 7, complete with their ceres flashing mint-green when caught by the light.

**Raggiana Bird-of-Paradise** (*Paradisaea raggiana*) [E] \* [V]: The national bird and the logo of many PNG entities. On our afternoon visit we experienced a fly-over by several males and females before we had even entered Varirata NP and then enjoyed decent views of three or four calling males during a visit to their lek area near to the lookout. The birds were in full

breeding plumage and we then had the bonus of excellent early-morning views of the males' tail wires when several males and females came to feed in trees near to the picnic area.

**Brown Sicklebill** (*Epimachus meyeri*) [E] [T]: Only females were seen in roadside trees, however the machinegun-like call of males was occasionally heard in the distance.

**Ribbon-tailed Astrapia** (*Astrapia mayeri*) [E] \* [A; T]: Excellent close-up views of males and females, especially when feeding on eye-level fruit near to the roadside. Characteristic flight sound as the males pulled their impossibly long tail feathers behind them!

**Princess Stephanie's Astrapia** (*Astrapia stephaniae*) [E] \* [A; T]: Only females were seen in roadside trees and visiting the large fruiting tree above cabin 7.

**Black-billed Sicklebill** (*Epimachus albertisi*) [E] [A]: Beehler refers to this as Buff-tailed Sicklebill. Apparently this is a rather uncommonly encountered species. We were disappointed to miss its reputed visit to the fruiting tree above cabin 7, but we were then delighted to encounter one on our last hike along the 'Three-Bridges' trail, where it was seen foraging along the mossy limbs of a tall tree. Possibly DMK's bird of the trip? (and 'why not?'). At the very least it was good compensation after we failed to find a Black Sicklebill during a misty, early-morning trip to a usually reliable ridge below the lodge. That was the only time when we ventured (if only briefly) below the lodge, and as FOMO set in we made an early call to call it quits and head back up to anticipated greater success at the Tari Gap.

**Lawes's Parotia** (*Parotia lawesii*) [E] [A]: Several females well seen in the fruiting tree above cabin 7.

**Superb Bird-of-paradise** (*Lophorina superba*) [E] [A]: Several females well seen in the fruiting tree above cabin 7.

**King-of-Saxony Bird-of-paradise** (*Pteridophora alberti*) [E] [T; A]: The sight and sound of a male displaying and swinging its 'antennae' from the top of a distant tree was enjoyed from the road. We also heard and saw several antennae-less males and females in other tall trees along the roadside and along the 'Three-Bridges' trail.

**Spangled Drongo** (*Dicrurus bracteatus*) [V]: One seen in trees near to the picnic area.

**Crinkle-collared Manucode** (*Manucodia chalybatus*) [E] [V]: One seen flying across open woodland towards Varirata NP.

**Short-tailed Paradigalla** (*Paradigalla brevicauda*) [E] \* [A; T]: One with a surprisingly substantial tail was exceptionally well seen and photographed whilst feeding at eye-level behind cabin 5. Others, with the conventional cut-off rump were seen along the 'Three-Bridges' trail and near to the Bailey bridge.

**Torrent-lark** (*Grallina bruijnii*) [E] [A]: Seen on several occasions along the 'Three-Bridges' trail, each time after flushing a pair along the fast flowing stream.

**Black Butcherbird** (*Craicticus quoyi*) \* [A]: One individual seen around the lodge grounds.

**Hooded Butcherbird** (*Craicticus cassicus*) [E] [V]: Several illuminated by the early-morning sunshine as they perched in tall trees near to the picnic area.

**House Sparrow** (*Passer domesticus*) [POM] (Introduced): Small flocks around town.

**Eurasian Tree Sparrow** (*Passer montanus*) [POM] (Introduced): Several seen in a tree in front of Ella Beach.

Combined total: 131 species (128 seen, 3 heard only), including 80 New Guinea endemics and 64 lifer species for DJS.

## 2. Mammal Trip List

**Speckled Dasyure** (*Neophascogale lorentzii*) [T]:

## 3. Reptile Trip List

**Lesser Black Whipsnake** (*Demansia vestigiata*) [V]:



One of the thundering waterfalls along Ambua Lodge's 'Three Bridges' trail; All natural suspension bridge



*New logos incorporating Psittacidae from Australasia (left) and the Neotropics (right)*