

# RECORDS OF NEW AND UNCOMMON SPECIES FOR THE ISLAND OF NEW GUINEA

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## SUMMARY

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The first records of *Burhinus magnirostris* and *Grallina cyanoleuca* for New Guinea are presented. *B. magnirostris* is recorded as a breeding species. In addition, the second record of *Hirundo ariel* for New Guinea and first records for the Australian-administered Territory of Papua and New Guinea of *Bulbulcus ibis* and *Artamus cinereus* are listed. All observations were made south of Weam (latitude 8° 37' S, longitude 141° 07' E) in the south-western corner of Papua during 1969 and 1970.

## INTRODUCTION

During investigations into the biology of the Rusa Deer *Cervus timorensis* south of Weam (8° 37' S, 141° 07' E) in the Western District of Papua it has been possible to make casual observations on the avifauna of the area, which is in the most south-western part of Papua, some 250 km north-north-west of Cape York (Fig. 1), and contains three broad habitats:

Open black-soil plains with a thin scattering of *Pandanus* and alternating areas of canegrass and various shorter grasses;

Savanna woodland mainly consisting of *Melaleuca*, *Eucalyptus* and *Acacia* species;

Open parkland of short grass on the floodplains of the Bensbach River.

In addition, small isolated areas of tropical rain-forest survive in each of the above habitats, and dense riverine forest lines the Bensbach River south and north of the black-soil plains.

Visits to the area were made in October and November 1969 and February, May, July and September 1970. Efforts were made to ascertain the presence or absence of the following species during each visit. However, the fluctuation in water-level is so great, with the river rising four metres during the wettest months, December to March, and flooding extensive areas in all habitats until late July, that it was impossible to conduct regular transects. The absence of a species from these records, therefore, is regarded as not significant.

## SYSTEMATIC LIST

BULBULCUS IBIS Cattle Egret

First record for the Territory of Papua and New Guinea.

Rand and Gilliard (1967: 43) regard the Cattle Egret as a straggler to New Guinea and mention two

records of the eastern subspecies *B. i. coromandus*, but give no further data. They overlooked the observations of Hoogerwerf (1964: 74)\* who recorded large numbers of this species at Manokwari on the Vogelkop during December 1962 and March-April 1963. He quotes from Mayr (1941) that the two earlier records were from Waigeo and Yamna, both being 'probably winter visitors from China or Japan'. These two localities are close to the Vogelkop.

Three white egrets with distinctive buff plumage on the lower neck and breast were seen flying over the open parkland opposite Wando village on 19 October 1969. They were approximately 300 m distant, but the bill appeared yellow and the legs dark. These constitute the first record for the species south of the central cordillera. The origin of the birds will be doubtful until a banding programme is initiated in the area. The northern birds referred to above are probably representatives of the Chinese and Japanese breeding populations. These southern birds, however, may have come from Australia in association with migrating waterfowl.

BURHINUS MAGNIROSTRIS Southern Stone Curlew

First record and first breeding record for the island of New Guinea.

A Southern Stone Curlew was brought to me at Wando Village by local people on 16 October 1969. It was a juvenile and the skin is now in the collection of the Ecology Section of DASf and will be presented to the PNG Public Museum and Art Gallery. Subsequent observations were:

21 October 1969, three calling at night in a remnant patch of *Melaleuca* on the edge of parkland five km south of Wando;

22 October 1969, three seen during a trip down river from Wando;

\*See also *Emu* 71: 3.

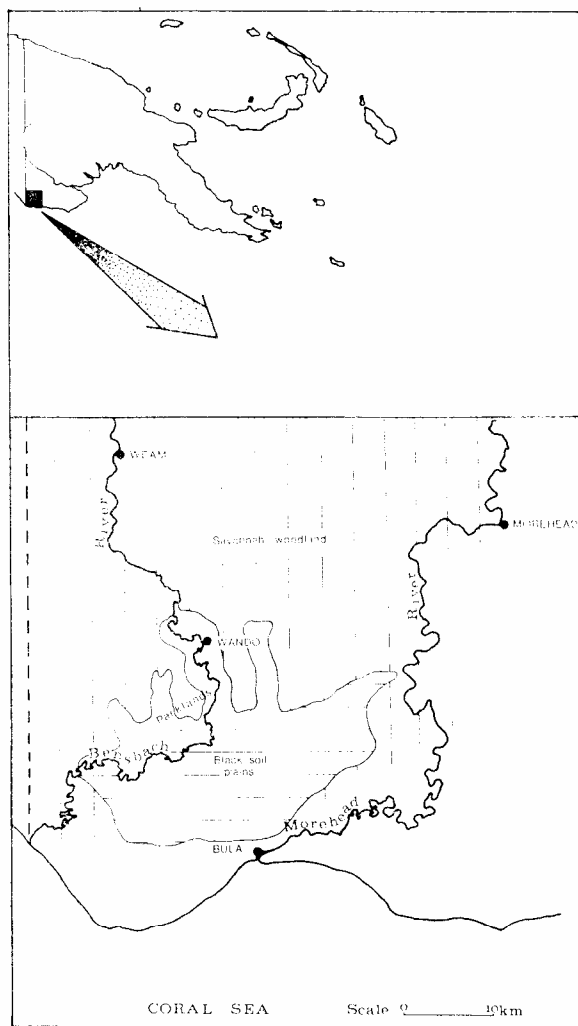


Figure 1. Map of area of southern New Guinea where records were made.

31 May 1970, calls heard at night five km south of Wando;

8 July 1970, two juveniles brought to the Ecology Research Station five km south of Wando by local people. Both were banded and released. Between 8 and 12 July the species called almost every night;

19 September 1970, calling five km south of Wando.

These observations confirm the presence of the species, which was first noted in the same area by Mr M. C. Downes of the Ecology Section, DASf. He informs me that the people of Wando village brought a juvenile to him in October 1968.

#### Details of specimens

Ecology field number 691016/26. Juvenile. Total

length 420 mm, wingspan 610 mm, weight 313 g. All rectrices and remiges heavily sheathed; down-feathers still present on the sides and back.

CSIRO Band No. 090-02611. Juvenile. Weight 270 g. All remiges heavily sheathed.

CSIRO Band No. 090-02612. Juvenile. Weight 305 g. All remiges heavily sheathed.

#### HIRUNDO ARIEL Fairy Martin

Second record for the island of New Guinea.

The Fairy Martin was first recorded in New Guinea by Bell (1968) at Nomad River, 290 km north-north-east of Wam on 10 May 1967. The present record is of small numbers flying with flocks of Tree Martins *H. nigricans* over the black-soil plains on 19 September 1970. Attention was drawn to them by their call, a soft pipit-like 'djrrrr', quite unlike the longer twittering of the Tree Martin. With careful observation at distances as close as three metres the rusty head of *H. ariel* could be seen. In addition, it was found that *ariel* had much whiter underparts and upper tailcoverts than *nigricans* and in this mixed flock could be satisfactorily separated by this character. The best guide, however, was the distinctive call-note.

#### GRALLINA CYANOLEUCA Magpie-Lark

New species for the island of New Guinea.

Magpie-Larks were first observed on 10 October 1969 when five individuals were noted flying close to the river in open parkland eight km up river from Wando. One specimen was collected, and is now in the collection of the Ecology Section, DASf; it will go to the PNG Public Museum and Art Gallery. Subsequent observations were:

15 October 1969, a male on the black-soil plains, giving the upright wing-flicking display so typical of the species and at the same time calling a sharp 'pee-o-wit . . . pee-o-wit'. Another individual was seen in flight nearby;

30 May 1970, two birds south of Wando in parkland near the river;

1 June 1970, four birds in open parkland, one in male plumage;

19 September 1970, a male and a female on a dead tree in the black-soil plains.

#### Details of specimen collected

Ecology field number 691010/4. Total length 260 mm, wingspan 445 mm, wing 160 mm, culmen 22 mm, weight 49 g. Blind in left eye.

#### ARTAMUS CINEREUS Black-faced Woodswallow

First record for the Territory of Papua and New Guinea.

This species was seen only once when a party of three was over the black-soil plains on 23 October

1969. They were wary and perched frequently on *Pandanus* branches; attempts to secure a specimen failed. Rand and Gilliard (1967: 443) list only one record for the island, at Princess Marianne Straits in southern New Guinea some 250 km north-west of where the present observation was made. Once again they have overlooked Hoogerwerf (1964: 158) who recorded the species five times, during July and October 1960 and in March 1961, at Kurik, approximately 115 km north-west of Weam.

#### DISCUSSION

Although it is gratifying to record new species for the island of New Guinea the records are not surprising. The area concerned is essentially Australian in character. The extensive wetlands harbour large numbers of waterfowl typical of northern Australia; Tree Ducks *Dendrocygna* spp., Pied Herons *Notophox picata*, Egrets *Egretta alba*, *E. intermedia* and *E. garzetta*, and the Australian Pelican *Pelecanus conspicillatus* are probably the most conspicuous species. Landbirds similarly reflect the Australian relations of the avifauna. Of the total of 144 species recorded in the area to date, seventy-seven per cent are shared with Australia. Their presence must be related to colonization during the Pleistocene, when Australia and New Guinea were joined across Torres Strait, and to later migration from northern Australia to southern New Guinea that has continued to the present day.

The Southern Stone Curlew has been shown to breed, juveniles unable to fly occurring both in the dry and wet seasons. The Magpie-Lark probably breeds because it was seen on most visits, though its conspicuous nests have not been located so far. The Black-faced Woodswallow will probably not be recorded except in the central southern lowlands of New Guinea, but local observers should critically examine flocks of Tree Martins throughout the region because the Fairy Martin could be easily overlooked.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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