

west slopes of Main Island. Nests tended to be clumped rather more than the Figure suggests as the dots have been separated a little for clarity and there were often quite distinct sub-groups within a colony. Very few, if any, pairs were nesting in isolation, out of sight and hearing of others.

These results confirm The Snares as a major breeding place for this albatross. More important is the colony on the Forty Fours estimated at 23 - 24,000 pairs by Robertson (1974). The Solander Islands' population has not been counted but appears to be quite small while about 2,000 pairs breed on the Sisters Islets. This gives a world population of about 30,000 breeding pairs.

We are grateful for the help of fellow expedition members and for information, comments and suggestions from M.C. Crawley and P.M. Sagar.

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JOHN WARHAM and S.L. BENNINGTON, *Department of Zoology, University of Canterbury, Christchurch 1, New Zealand.*

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THOUGHTS ON AN ORNITHOLOGICAL MYSTERY FROM BOUGAINVILLE ISLAND, PAPUA NEW GUINEA.

Although ornithological journals are not the place for speculation, in some circumstances partially substantiated notions may promote further scientific inquiry and solutions to biological puzzles. In August 1972, Professor Jared Diamond visited several rain-forest localities on eastern Bougainville Island, North Solomons Province, Papua New Guinea, to study birds. While working on the slopes of Mount Balbi, between 1140 and 1340 m, he heard a bird song "so remarkable as to warrant description, in the hope of alerting some future observer to the problem of its identification" (Diamond 1975, *Condor* 77:21). Diamond said of its voice and habits:

Its author is said by local informants to be confined to the mountains and is called "kopipi" in the native language used at Rotokas, "odedi" in the language of the mountain people inland of Kieta. The most striking features of the song are the beauty and human quality of its pure, whistled tones. The thrush-like pattern consists of two-note and three-note rising phrases at time intervals of a few seconds. The pitch is high, and occasional notes are slightly trilled. In pattern and in quality the song suggests that of the Hermit Thrush of North America (*Catharus guttatus*). I heard the song during the dawn chorus and later during rainy mornings, sometimes from several individuals simultaneously from several directions.

In 1979, at the invitation of Don Hadden, a local ornithologist, I visited eastern Bougainville Island to survey birds in the mountain forest west of Panguna. Hadden had heard odedi on a number of occasions in the hills around Panguna. In addition, he had recently

collected a new thicket warbler in the mountains not far from these localities, and he had speculated that the mystery call might belong to this new bird.

On 14 June I heard odedi while on a steep forested ridge on the way to Hadden's collecting locality on the plateau-like summit area NE of Panguna. I estimated that the bird was more than 100 m away and I did not see it. I would have overlooked the call altogether, if the local guide had not pointed it out to me. We had discussed the bird, and he described it to be small, brown on the breast and darker on the back, with white spotting on tips of wing and tail; my informant also mentioned that it sang from a tree and not from the ground; most importantly, he mentioned that it was a small bird with a big voice.

I spent five days camped in the wet mountain forest at the summit of the plateau where Hadden had collected the new thicket warbler, at c. 1200 m. I never heard odedi at this camp, though Hadden and I captured two more of the thicket warblers, one on a nest, and we took specimens of *Zoothera talasea*, a thrush previously known only from New Britain and Umboi Islands, to the west of Bougainville.

On returning from the field, I read through the work of Cain & Galbraith (1956, *Ibis* 98:262-295) on birds of the eastern Solomon Islands. In it, I noted their description of the voice of the small shade warbler *Vitia parens* (p. 269): "a mellow musical whistle, surprisingly deep

and thrush-like, 'wuwuwi, wuwuwi' and 'weedleedle we wiwi wew', coming from the undergrowth on Naghasi Ridge". They describe the habitat for this bird as "ridge forest". *Vitia parens* a small non-descript warbler, dark brown above and slightly paler below.

I believe that odedi is probably a *Vitia* -- either *parens* or some island relative. I support this idea with the following: (1) the phonetic names given the bird by Bougainvilleans -- "kopipi" and "odedi" closely match the second part of the native name applied to *V. parens* on San Cristobal -- "harighi", and match the key phrase in Cain & Galbraith's song description; both are three syllables, and end on a higher note -- like 'wuwuwi'; (2) my local informant said that the bird is small, like a *Vitia* in being brown, and with a big voice. This coincides with Cain & Galbraith's description; (3) Diamond (pers. comm.) spoke with nine Bougainvilleans about the bird, and while there were conflicting descriptions of plumage coloration, informants who mentioned size (5 of 9) all said it was "small"; (4) both Diamond (1975) and Cain & Galbraith (1956) describe the calls as thrush-like; (5) Diamond (Condor 73:481; Emu 76:1) has collected *Zoothera talasea* on New Britain and Umboi Islands; his field notes on the birds reported no striking vocalizations; (6) my single experience in the field indicated that odedi lived on sharp ridges and was absent from more level habitat; this corresponds with Cain & Galbraith's comment that *Vitia* is a bird of ridge forest; (7) we never heard odedi at the high plateau camp, although we captured two and five specimens, respectively, of the new thickset warbler and

thrush.

To date *Vitia parens* is known only from San Cristobal in the eastern Solomon Islands. If *Vitia* does occur on Bougainville, it will constitute a northwestern range extension of 750 km for the genus.

There are points that might be used to argue that odedi is not *Vitia parens*. The diverse local descriptions given to Diamond mention a variety of characters not shown in *Vitia parens*. My local information, and two of Diamond's informants mention that odedi lives up in trees, not on the ground; Cain & Galbraith mention that their bird sings from the undergrowth. The situation is further clouded because Cain & Galbraith's identification of the vocalizations of *Vitia* are based on identification by local informants, not personal observation.

The identity of odedi, whether *Vitia* or otherwise, remains to be proved by whoever can invest the time and effort. The purpose of this note is to suggest possibilities, and to stress that more work is required on the birds of the Solomon Islands.

I thank Don Hadden and his family for their generous help while I visited Bougainville. Thanks also to Eliot Harding, Francis Munau, and the youth group at Sirian Village, who made the trip possible. The field trip was funded by the Smithsonian Institution. J.M. Diamond and R.F. Pasquier made helpful criticisms of an earlier draft.

BRUCE BEEHLER, *MNH 114 Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC 20560, USA.*

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THE LITTLE GRASSBIRD *MEGALURUS GRAMINEUS* IN THE NORTH-EASTERN KIMBERLEY, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Of the current texts dealing with the distributions of Australian birds, none records the Little Grassbird *Megalurus gramineus* from north of the Tropic of Capricorn (23½°S) and west of longitude 130°E (Macdonald 1973; Slater 1974; Readers Digest 1976; Pizzey 1980). Storr (1980) also makes no mention of the Little Grassbird. The discovery of a population of Little Grassbirds in the north-eastern Kimberley Division of Western Australia, at Kununurra (15° 47' S, 128° 44' E), is reported here.

On 25 November 1980, between 16:00 and 17:30, I located two parties of Little Grassbirds near Kununurra. The first group was found in a 5 m² patch

of cumbungi (*Typha* sp) 1.5 m in height, on the edge of the East Packsaddle Swamp, 4 km SW of Kununurra. A rank sedge field, 0.5 m in height and 2 to 20 m across, surrounded the cumbungi. The second group was located 50 m to the east in a circular cumbungi stand 300 m² in area and 2 m in height. This stand was surrounded by water 0.3 - 0.5 m deep, was variously vegetated by *Eleocharis* sp and *Marsilea* sp, and at its closest point was 8 m from the edge of the swamp.

Each group had evidently completed breeding and consisted of three individuals (two adults and a juvenile bird). The four adult birds were similar in their plumage, being grey-brown, heavily streaked with dark