

West Papua, Indonesia

Marathon birding, furry things that live in trees, mud, and talking horse jokes in the Arfak Mountains and on the islands of Biak and Waigeo in West Papua



Feline Owlet-Nightjar

3rd to 23rd May 2017

Dion Hobcroft and Steve Anyon-Smith

Short Summary

Well-behaved termites all held hands long enough to ensure our holiday was silky smooth. On account of the birding brilliance of Zeth Wonggor (in the Arfak Mountains) and Dion Hobcroft (generally), we missed very few of our target birds. If you are serious about birds and other wildlife and you are tolerant of rapid changes in accommodation standards, diet, and access to cold beer (or any beer at all for that matter) and have a working knowledge of mud, then West Papua welcomes you!

The Plan

The plan, quite simply, was to see as many birds, mammals and anything else that got in our way as we could. The execution of this brilliant plan saw us cherry-pick a few sites en route to and from the Arfak Mountains, which was to be the focus of the trip. So Biak Island to the north of the mainland and Waigeo Island in the Raja Ampat group to the west were added to the menu. Also visited were a couple of sites out of Sorong, our “mainland” exit port.

The Arfaks are located in the Vogelkop (Birds Head) Peninsula south of the port city of Manokwari. We accessed these wild forested mountains via the village of Syoubri, about 70 km from the coast. The Arfaks are home to a range of endemic and other hard-to-find birds along with a host of forest-dwelling mammals. Many of the birds are spectacular – the area supports many different birds-of-paradise. For mine the Vogelkop bowerbird, or more particularly its bower – possibly the most impressive non-human structure anywhere - was reason enough to leave home.

The island of Biak hosts a scrum of endemic birds and is well served by flights from ports to the east and west. We planned a few days exploring this substantial island before testing the mountainous mainland.

The large and beautiful island of Waigeo punches well above its weight when it comes to observable wildlife. Avian specialties abound with Wilson’s and red birds-of-paradise, along with the strange brown-headed crow and a surprising number of see-able mammals.

Sorong is the port that allows ferry access to Waigeo and flights back to Australia. A couple of forested sites are nearby and we allowed a couple of days to explore these.

I’d never travelled outside of Sydney with Dion Hobrcoft. There may be better birders than Dion; if so I haven’t met them. He proved to be excellent company from well before sunrise until way after most sensible folk have gone to bed. Uniquely, Dion liked my talking horse, dog, elephant, gorilla and even talking tapeworm jokes. I don’t think I have ever laughed so much on a holiday. Thanks Dion – and not just for the lessons on birding skill sets.



Itinerary

- Biak Island, Asana Biak Hotel, four nights
- Arfak Mountains, Syoubri Lodge, five nights and “Camp German”, two nights
- Manokwari, Hotel Mokwam, one night
- Waigeo Island, Warimpurem Homestay, three nights
- Sorong, JE Meridien Hotel, three nights
- Garuda Indonesia provided some aeroplanes for us the sleep in to and from West Papua

Birding Guides and logistics

Biak Island

Contact: Benny, email: info@discoverpapua.com

We were fortunate to get the services of Benny and his team at late notice. Benny has an excellent vehicle, is very professional, obliging and reliable and isn't expensive. He charges \$US80 a day for the car, driver, fuel and coffee / lunch (along with a friendly chap who boils water and serves food....) and another \$US40 for a guide. The guide we had was a nice enough guy and if you had never been to West Papua or Papua New Guinea before, he might be regarded as useful. We retained him out of a sense of decency. He had his heart in the right place and knew the birding sites.

Best of all, Benny was happy to leave the hotel before sunrise and get back at night after we had finished spotlighting. These guys understand the needs of birders and were always early for agreed pick-up times.



Arfak Mountains

Contact: Zeth Wonggor, email Prokorus Wonggor (Zeth's brother) wonggorprokorus@gmail.com and he will text Zeth and get back to you



Zeth is a native of the Arfak people and is a very well respected member of his community. He has been guiding for 27 years. Zeth's knowledge of the local birds extends to all of their calls, habitats, flight patterns, sexual preferences, birthdays and critically, where they will be in ten minutes time. If Zeth can't find you a bird then you are very unlikely to see it.

He is almost unnaturally calm and pleasant at all times. As a guide he is on a mission to get you to see everything you wish to see. Zeth didn't mind if we wandered off by ourselves to revisit hides or use the track network. Although you should check with him first!

Zeth charges 800,000 rupiah day (~\$A80) for his guiding services.

Myriad other fees apply for porters, cooking, firewood, community contribution, lodging etc. None are unreasonable.

Return transfers to Syoubri from Manokwari cost in the region of 2,600,000 rupiah (~\$A260) per 4WD vehicle.

Waigeo Island

Contact: <http://www.stayrajaampat.com/accommodation/warimpurem-homestay/>

The homestays near Saporkren village profit from birders and other tourists coming to see Wilson's and red birds-of-paradise so just ask them for a birding guide and they will get one for you. Our guide was Bram (Abraham) and he knew the hides and the calls of most of the birds. He owned a pair of binoculars. He is friendly and obliging and charges 200,000 rupiah per person for a morning's outing. Nobody cares if you return to the sites by yourself.

Acknowledgements

Shita from the Papua Bird Club (info@papuabirdclub.com) provided logistic support at a critical time – thanks Shita! She can arrange bird tours in West Papua.

Dion – for most of the wildlife photos and for editing this report – a new experience for me!

Notes on accommodation

Asana Biak Hotel

Contact: Just google it and book through one of the internet companies that get off on this sort of stuff

The hotel is located fifty feet from the Biak Airport. It is said to be the best hotel on the island. That doesn't



mean too much. Because the Garuda cabin crew stay at the Asana and the first flight out is before sunrise, this means a very early hotel breakfast is available. The rooms have an aroma of decay and lovers of moulds, should such people exist, would tick off some superb examples without having to get out of bed. The plumbing and electricals seem to work. The hotel has a fabulous swimming pool, a fairly decent 24hr restaurant – and, cold Bintang!

Recommended; not too much choice really.

Arfak Lodge, Syoubri Village

Contact: email Prokorus Wonggor (Zeth's brother) wonggorprokorus@gmail.com

This the lodge that you stay in if Zeth Wonggor is guiding you. There is another private lodge on the village outskirts that it not associated with Zeth. I am guessing that visitors to this lodge may not find easy access to higher elevations.

Somewhat surprisingly the lodge has access to micro-hydro power for lighting and charging appliances. The lockable rooms have thin mattresses and pillows. Boiled water in large thermoses is available. There is a western-style toilet and concrete tub for a cold bucket shower.

Food is cooked in a nearby shed by women from the village for a small fee. You need to bring your food with you from Manokwari. Some fruit or vegetables is normally available for sale in the village. A healthy surplus of food should be bought above what you expect to eat.

It wasn't explained to us in as many words, but I think it is expected that food is supplied for the porters you need to carry your stuff up the mountain to "Camp German". So lots of rice, noodles, tins of fish / meat, nuts, eggs etc.

You don't have much choice – recommended anyway.



Camp German, Arfak Mountains



This superb site for birds and mammals is a couple of hours or so walk uphill from Syoubri village. The track to it is not too steep or dangerous but much of it is very muddy most of the time.

A number of covered structures exist at the camp. These house a cooking shed, porter's quarters

and covered and raised bush timber bed sites. Dion erected his tent on top of one of these. I preferred the local mud-fields – once more these are under cover. Unless you have a mosquito net and an indestructible air mattress then you need a tent.

Boiled stream water is available for drinking. A curious western-style long drop toilet – named after a visiting Jared Diamond – and a local stream serve as the amenities.

Warimpurem Homestay, Waiqeo Island, Raja Ampats

Contact: <http://www.stayrajaampat.com/accommodation/warimpurem-homestay/>

This superb homestay is just east of Saporkren Village on the road from the Waisai ferry wharf. Transfers cost 350,000 rupiah.

Homestays in the Raja Ampat group of islands are available on a full-board basis (350,000 rupiah per person per day). They present excellent value for money. At Warimpurem there are full sized western-style mattresses, sheets, pillows and mosquito nets. The timber and palm thatch rooms are right on the water. A western-style toilet and telephone shower are provided. Our hosts, Hery and Enggelina produced by far the best food we had on our holiday.

Highly recommended.



Hotel Mokwam, Manokwari

Contact; *do yourself a favour and stay somewhere else*

The rooms are marginally better than the street outside. Look up the definition of “marginal”. Thinking about it, maybe the street, no, probably not, I guess the roof didn’t leak.

The air conditioning worked but I think this was not intended and probably nobody knew how to turn it off. The hand basin in the bathroom drained onto the floor – or your feet. The toilet flush didn’t work, there was no bog roll, the hot water had been sealed off and a large plastic garbage bin sat under the stalactite-encrusted shower-head.

A tour of the local shops revealed grim news indeed – no beer anywhere.

Not recommended.

JE Meridien Hotel, Sorong

Contact: jemeridien.sorong@yahoo.com or hotel booking websites.

This is a good hotel and conveniently located across the road from the airport. The rooms are very good and everything works.

The machine that sits on the room's wall and growls every 15 minutes has an on/off switch. We never worked out what it was supposed to do. The reception has English-speaking staff on hand and the café has good meals and cold beer! Taxis and ojek (motorcycle taxis)



are always available for hire at the front door and passing share taxi drivers all know the words "Meridien Hotel". Our stay was a very pleasant one.

The hotel is on the side of town closest to the nearest forest – Taman Wisata Alam Sorong a.k.a. "Hutong Lindu".



Highly recommended.

West Papuan People

All the West Papuans we met were gentle, honest and welcoming. They were fun to be with. They smile almost constantly. They have a charm about them sometimes lacking in the folk that live across the border in PNG. If

you find you don't like the West Papuans – then “problem belong you”.

West Papuans seem not to have been infected with the cargo cult mentality that is common on the eastern side of the border.

Perhaps surprisingly the locals are quite punctual when it comes to fulfilling obligations - even those made days earlier.

Other Indonesian people

No complaints from me here either. Virtually everyone you meet, rich or poor, busy or bored, city or country, will stop what they are doing and smile, wave or engage in conversation. I haven't visited any area in Indonesia where there was a population of people I didn't like. That is not to say that I might always agree with them – on things like hunting or logging for example, but their friendliness cannot be faulted.



There was one exception. In the extremely unlikely event that you are the taxi driver that took us from the Sorong ferry wharf to the JE Meridien Hotel and you are reading this – then “get a woolly nulla up ya”. Idiot.

Just before I typed this I went walking at a local beach in Sydney. Lots of people out and about, and barely any acknowledgement of my existence from any of them.

Weather

There may have been a day or two when it didn't rain in the afternoon. The mornings were generally always fine (except on Biak). When it rained it didn't interfere with our program too much, and sometimes it was a mercy – forcing us, or me anyway, to take a break from Extreme Birding.

Daytime temperatures reached about 30 in the lowlands and 24 in the mountains. Rarely was heat an issue, as much of the time the tracks and birding roads were shaded. The nights were cool in the Arfaks, mild on Waigeo and air conditioned elsewhere!

Safety and Security

Quite simply there are no safety or security issues that we could identify in the areas we visited. Happily we failed to intersect with many other tourists, so they were safe as well.

Food

West Papua is not a foodies' paradise. The staples are rice and noodles. Chicken and fish put in appearances but forget about beef, pork or heaven forbid, lamb. Fruit and vegetables were available in restaurants and from roadside stalls and shops. The quality and variety is not as high as in SE Asia. Enggelina at Warimpurem Homestay is an outstanding cook. Her meals were delicious, nutritious and varied. The meals at hotels and local restaurants were pretty good without being exciting.

We have no-one else to blame but ourselves for what we ate in the Arfak Mountains. The endless rice and noodles will give me nightmares for years to come. Our visit to the Manokwari supermarket was a tad rushed as the driver aimed to get us to Syoubri village and return home before it got dark. In hindsight we could have helped our own cause by buying a greater variety of food. Dion didn't seem to mind – after all – how many good birds did we see?

Beer and wine

Bintang, pretty much the only beer available in Indonesia, is getting harder to find outside of major tourist hotels and some of the larger supermarkets.

A 500ml can of Bintang beer in a supermarket in Sorong costs 30,000 rupiah or about \$A3.00. Beer on Waigeo Island doesn't cost anything. There isn't any; at least not at Saporkren Village, the only village near our homestay. As a repeat offender in Raja Ampat, I knew to buy beer in the supermarket in Sorong. This was a masterstroke with pleasing consequences.

Beer in the hotels is quite expensive – around \$A6.50 for a 330ml bottle. That didn't stop us.

We didn't take beer to the Arfaks out of respect for the fact that not a single person in the village drinks, smokes or chews betel nuts. We smuggled a bottle of malt whisky. This had to be strictly rationed to stop all of it being slurped on the first night. I wonder when someone will find where I hid the empty bottle?

A bottle of Jacob's Creek shiraz in a hotel restaurant was priced at \$A190. Enough said.

Transport

We know planes. These landed at Jakarta, Makassar, Biak, Jayapura, Manokwari, Sorong, Makassar (again), Denpasar and Sydney. We flew exclusively with Garuda Indonesia. They now fly a very modern fleet, are rarely late, and provide good meal services – even on the 35 minute flight from Manokwari to Sorong!

Aside from the Sorong – Waisai Ferry, all other transfers were with vehicles hired from local drivers. These are inexpensive with taxi hourly rates at about \$A10. 4WDs cost more but not too much.

Roads in Indonesia can rarely cater for the traffic that uses them. Traffic jams in towns are frequent. Sealed roads have surprises for new players. A local downpour can cause flash flooding that doesn't have much interest in going anywhere. Often there is no "downhill".

Rather wonderfully we had no long travel days by road; and those transfers we did have allowed birding stops along the way.

Sorong and Waisai are connected by a very fast, comfortable and cheaply priced ferry service. The fares are about \$A13 each way. The ferry schedule can be viewed here: <http://www.stayrajaampat.com/ultimate-raja-ampat-guide/information/how-to-get-to-raja-ampat/>



Insects and other pests

I took doxycycline as an antimalarial as malaria is common in much of West Papua. During our visit dawn and dusk mosquitoes were generally uncommon, with the exception being the insides of bird hides. Most of the forests were mozzie-free. We found no leeches, ticks or flies-that-want-to-live-in-your-eyes. Dion was partially consumed by chiggers at one off-track site on Biak. Perhaps I should be offended – they didn't go near me.

The Environment

Forests that stretch to the horizon can be seen in the Arfaks. The same inspiring scenery can be seen from planes travelling over the Vogelkop Peninsula. Many of these areas have little or no human population.



Zeth told us that there is substantial hunting of birds from some roadsides, but deep inside forests hunting has lessened. We spotted a few guys with bows and arrows.

I had always associated new roads through forests with bad news for wildlife. I'm often wrong, too. Zeth advised that the road connecting Syoubri and other villages with Manokwari has allowed the locals to sell excess produce in the town. This has taken the pressure off local hunting as cash can be spent on protein they might have otherwise sourced by spending days in the forest. Many of the tracks into the interior of the forest have fallen into disuse.

The areas around Manokwari and Sorong tell a different story with much hunting. As near as I could tell the hunting was as likely to be cultural rather than based on a need for food. If only we could get the hunters to hunt each other? No, scrap that idea – I think that model has been tried already.

I met a local chap who works for WWF Indonesia who told me a tale of woe with respect to the rampant trapping of birds, even within so-called national parks, across Indonesia. Dion confirmed this with some amazing statistics on how whole species of birds could be wiped off an island within a very short space of time due to trapping.

The forests of Waigeo are in good shape. Thankfully clear-felling is thus far not a happening thing on the island (unless you're building or extending an airport). Trapping, generally by snares, of large terrestrial birds, e.g. western crowned pigeon and dusky megapode, is widespread. I suspect that areas close to villages and waterways are the most impacted, but I don't really know. Megapodes are still common and western crowned pigeons are still present and likely to be more common away from human access points.

It was thrilling to see cuscuses and striped possums along the road in front of our homestay on Waigeo. We were told that the villagers don't hunt them anymore because tourists will pay to look at them.

Biak is a bit of a mess. Wholesale logging in the fairly recent past has seen once grand forests reduced to scrubby semi-wastelands. The only hope here is that because the soil is pretty hopeless for cropping eventually some sort of forest might return. Villagers struggle to get anything to grow in the tightly-packed limestone-based soil. The remaining forests are quite birdy and the rural population is fairly low and confined to the roadsides.

If you are offended by the sight of plastic rubbish, more or less everywhere, then don't go to Indonesia. Even the Vogelkop bowerbirds have collected their share of it.....



Wildlife

Birds seen and site notes – see table

Collectively we saw 235 species of birds. Another twenty-odd were heard only and dwarf cassowary was confirmed as still having the ability to have a crap. We used the second edition of Pratt and Beehler's *The Birds of New Guinea*, which covers the islands. This proved to be an excellent and informative guide.

Statistics can be misleading. Some easily seen birds, e.g. in wetlands, were not targeted. We cleaned up on most of the regional endemics at a time of year when there were few flowering or fruiting trees.

On Biak the only serious "dip" was Geelvink pygmy-parrot.

In the Arfaks we managed all the resident birds-of-paradise and bowerbirds, missing only a few parrots due to seasonal factors.

On Waigeo we were likely out-of-range of the Waigeo brush-turkey, but found pretty much every other bird on our wish list.

Sorong was a little disappointing. Although we managed more than 80 species, many of these were commonly found elsewhere. Several targets were missed, although we found a good site for blue-black kingfisher. During a visit to Sorong late in 2014 I went to Taman Wisata Alam Sorong, known locally as “Hutong Lindu”. At that time it was very birdy indeed and I couldn’t wait to return. Three years later it was almost deathly quiet. Whether seasonal factors, an intervening El Nino event or human intervention is to blame is unclear.

Notes on some of the more desirable seen birds – see also table and diary notes

Dusky Megapode	One flushed off the Saporkren - Waisai Road. Seen at Wilson's bop hide and elsewhere on tracks.
Biak Megapode	One seen running along the old logging road at Makmakerbo, Biak
Pygmy Eagle	One or two seen well at the striped forest-rail site near Syoubri vilage, Arfaks
Gurney's Eagle	Two seen soaring over forest on Waigeo
Variable Goshawk	One seen en route to Adibai, Biak and two others on the Syoubri - Manokwari road
Grey-headed Goshawk	One seen at Hutong Lindu, Sorong
Black-mantled Goshawk	One seen near its nest on the ascent to Camp German, Arfaks
Long-tailed Honey Buzzard	Two seen soaring over the Syoubri - Manokwari road
Oriental Hobby	One seen on Waigeo - perhaps a new record for the island. Also at Sorong mangroves.
White-striped Forest Rail	One seen well at known site near Syoubri village, Arfaks
Barred Rail	One seen, others heard, at Sorong mangroves
Great Cuckoo Dove	Biak subspecies seen at Makmakerbo, others heard. Probably fairly common. Also Hutong Lindu, Sorong
Bronze Ground Dove	One seen well along the entrance road to Syoubri village
Cinnamon Ground Dove	Seen by Dion at a Wilson's bop hide on Waigeo
Wompoo Fruit Dove	Small numbers seen on the Waigeo track
Pink-spotted Fruit Dove	Small numbers seen on the Waigeo track
Orange-fronted Fruit Dove	Small numbers seen in Sorong mangroves
Coroneted Fruit Dove	One seen at Hutong Lindu, Sorong
Beautiful Fruit Dove	Seen by Dion on the Waigeo track
Yellow-bibbed Fruit Dove	Two or more seen at Adibai, Biak and again at Makmakerbo, Biak
Claret-breasted Fruit Dove	Fairly common on Biak and Waigeo
Mountain Fruit-Dove	Common in the Arfaks, seen daily
Geelvink Imperial Pigeon	Fairly common at Adibai, Biak, less so at Makmakerbo, but seen on each outing
Pied Imperial Pigeon	Common near Saporkren village, Waigeo
Torresian Imperial Pigeon	One seen on Biak
Purple-tailed Imperial Pigeon	One seen on the Waigeo track
Shining (Rufescent) Imperial Pigeon	One seen near Camp German, Arfaks
Pinon's Imperial Pigeon	Common on the Waigeo track, also seen at Hutong Lindu, Sorong
Banded (Zoe's) Imperial Pigeon	Fairly common at Hutong Lindu, Sorong

Papuan Mountain Pigeon	Regular in the Arfaks
Palm Cockatoo	Small numbers seen most days on Waigeo and at Hutong Lindu, Sorong
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Seen every day at every site
Eclectus Parrot	Seen most days at almost every site
Red-flanked Lorikeet	A few seen at Hutong Lindu, Sorong
Yellow-billed Lorikeet	Seen daily near Camp German, Arfaks
Papuan Lorikeet	Several seen on flowering trees near the corner of the Syoubri turnoff from the Manokwari road
Black-capped Lory	Seen daily in small numbers at Hutong Lindu, Sorong
Black-winged Lory	Fairly common at sites on Biak, seen on each outing
Biak Lorikeet	Small flock seen at fruiting fig tree at Makmakerbo, Biak
Coconut lorikeet	Fairly common on Waigeo, less so at Hutong Lindu, Sorong
Blue-collared Parrot	Two seen and heard overflying the Syoubri to Manokwari road
Yellow-capped Pygmy Parrot	Fairly common on consecutive days at Hutong Lindu, Sorong
Red-breasted Pygmy Parrot	A few sightings near Camp German, Arfaks
Double-eyed Fig Parrot	Two seen at Hutong Lindu, Sorong
Biak Coucal	Seen three times, regularly heard, fairly common on Biak
Greater Black Coucal	Seen well at Hutong Lindu, Sorong, regularly heard
Lesser Black Coucal	Two seen at Sorong mangroves
Papuan (Blyth's) Hornbill	Three sightings on Biak; previously unrecorded there, regular at other lowland sites
Papuan Frogmouth	Seen at Warimpurem Homestay, Waigeo; heard elsewhere
Jungle (Papuan) Boobook	Seen at Camp German, Arfaks, heard elsewhere
Feline Owlet-nightjar	Seen at Zeth's day roost, Syoubri village, Arfaks; also came in to spotlight near Camp German
Common Paradise Kingfisher	Common on the Waigeo track
Biak Paradise Kingfisher	Seen well at Makmakerbo, Biak, on the logging track; heard elsewhere
Hook-billed Kingfisher	Dion saw a few on the Waigeo track; seen by both of us at the same place the next day
Rufous-bellied Kookaburra	Common on Waigeo, also seen Hutong Lindu, Sorong
Blue-black Kingfisher	Fairly common in mangroves at Sorong but shy
Beach Kingfisher	Seen on Biak well away from any water or beach
Variable Dwarf Kingfisher	Seen by Dion on the Waigeo track
Little Kingfisher	Seen by Dion in Sorong mangroves
Azure Kingfisher	Seen by me on Biak at waterfall site (don't go there if you don't like steep climbs)
Hooded Pitta	Seen a couple of times on Biak at Makmakerbo
Papuan Logrunner	A couple seen fleetingly near Camp German, Arfaks
Spotted Jewel-babbler	Fairly common and seen or glimpsed daily in the Arfaks
Lesser Ground Robin	Fairly common in the Arfaks
Vogelkop Bowerbird	Fairly common in the Arfaks, seen daily although shy
Masked Bowerbird	A male seen distantly on the Syoubri to Manokwari road; another and females seen overflying it
Orange-crowned Fairywren	A family seen on the descent from Camp German to Syoubri village, Arfaks
Emperor Fairywren	Fairly common on Biak; also seen Hutong Lindu, Sorong
White-shouldered Fairywren	Seen near the lodge, Syoubri village, Arfaks
Rufous-sided Honeyeater	Reasonably common around Camp German, Arfaks
Arfak (Western Smoky) Honeyeater	Common in the Arfaks, seen daily
Cinnamon-browed Honeyeater	Not uncommon around Camp German and above but difficult to see well
Vogelkop Honeyeater	Not uncommon around Syoubri village sites but difficult to see well

Vogelkop Scrubwren	Common in the Arfaks, seen daily
Biak Gerygone	Uncommon; seen about five times at the sites visited
Biak Triller	Fairly common and noisy at Biak sites
Papuan Treecreeper	Fairly common in the Arfaks, seen or heard daily
Papuan (was Varied) Sittella	Seen briefly above Camp Japan, Arfaks, by Zeth
Raja Ampat Pitohui	Common and obvious on Waigeo track
Northern Variable Pitohui	Seen once on the descent to Manokwari, Arfaks
Hooded Pitohui	Fairly common around Syoubri village, Arfaks, sites
Papuan Babbler	Group seen at Hutong Lindu, Sorong
Rusty Shrike-thrush (Pitohui)	Seen on the Waigeo track and at Hutong Lindu, Sorong
Little Shrike-thrush	Biak subspecies(?) seen at Makmakerbo logging track. Others seen at mainland sites.
Vogelkop Whistler	A few seen on the descent to Manokwari, Arfaks
Mottled Berryhunter	Dion saw a few on the entrance road to Syoubri village, Arfaks
Biak Myiagra (Flycatcher)	Fairly common at Biak sites
Biak Monarch	Seen several times on the Makmakerbo logging track; not uncommon there
Brown-headed Crow	A family group seen well on consecutive days on the Waigeo track
Glossy-mantled Manucode	Fairly common on the Waigeo track; also seen Hutong Lindu and Sorong mangroves
Western Parotia	Common in the Arfaks, seen daily and at display hides
Arfak Astrapia	Dion discovered a nesting female at Camp Japan, Arfaks. Only bird seen.
Black-billed Sicklebill	A few seen, including a displaying male, at Zeth's site off the Manokwari road, Arfaks
Black Sicklebill	Not uncommon and seen daily near Camp German and above, Arfaks, male displaying
Superb Bird-of-paradise	Fairly common at Arfak sites; seen daily although only one male acquiring breast shield
Long-tailed Paradigalla	A single adult seen well on the ascent and in flight on the descent to Camp German from Syoubri village, Arfaks
Magnificent Riflebird	A male flew over the road on the descent to Manokwari, Arfaks
Magnificent Bird-of-paradise	Several females and two males seen at hide in Syoubri village; others seen in trees in Arfaks
Wilson's Bird-of-paradise	Male seen well by Dion at hide; a few females also seen along Waigeo track
Red Bird-of-paradise	Fairly common on Waigeo track
Lesser Bird-of-paradise	A few seen on the descent to Manokwari, Arfaks
Black-chinned Robin	One seen well on the descent to Manokwari, Arfaks
Black-sided Robin	One seen by Dion from Wilson's bop hide along the Waigeo track
Black-throated Robin	Regular in the Arfaks around Camp German and higher
Ashy Robin	Fairly common around Camp German, Arfaks
Smoky Robin	A few sightings near Camp German, Arfaks
Green-backed Robin	Seen well at Magnificent bop hide, Syoubri village; also seen in the village
White-faced Robin	One seen on the descent to Manokwari, Arfaks
Biak White-eye	Uncommon on Biak - seen at both Adibai and Makmakerbo in small numbers
Long-tailed Starling	Common on Biak
White-eared Catbird	Seen by Dion on Waigeo track
Arfak Catbird	Seen briefly a couple of times in the Arfaks; heard fairly often
Yellow-faced Myna	Fairly common on Waigeo track; also seen Hutong Lindu, Sorong
Blue-faced Parrotfinch	Seen fleetingly several times on the descent to Manokwari, Arfaks; heard calling regularly
Streak-headed Mannikin	A pair seen in Syoubri village, Arfaks; also seen Hutong Lindu, Sorong



Much has changed since this satellite photo was taken in 2005 – some sites may be marked in the wrong place





List of Birds Seen

Note that the numbers in the table in the third and subsequent columns correspond to the Day Number of the trip that each bird was first seen at each site. The diary section adds further comment to what happened on these days.....

“Page” means the plate number in Pratt and Beehler

Page	West Papua Province		Biak	Arfak	Wgo	Sor
3	Dusky Scrubfowl	Megapodius freycinet			14	
3	Biak Scrubfowl	Megapodius geelvinkianus	2			
7	Wedge-tailed Shearwater	Ardenna pacifica			13	
8	Brown Booby	Sula leucogaster			13	
9	Lesser Frigatebird	Fregata ariel			13	
9	Great Frigatebird	Fregata minor			13	
10	Sooty Tern	Onychoprion fuscatus			13	
11	Whiskered Tern	Chlidonias hybrida			13	
11	Black-naped Tern	Sterna sumatrana	2			
11	Common Tern	Sterna hirundo				16
11	Greater Crested Tern	Thalasseus bergii			13	
14	Striated Heron	Butorides striata			14	19
15	Great Egret	Ardea alba				19
15	Intermediate Egret	Ardea intermedia	5*			
15	Pacific (Eastern) Reef Egret	Egretta sacra			14	
16	Pacific Baza	Aviceda subcristata	1			17
16	Pygmy Eagle	Hieraaetus weiskei		6		
16	Brahminy Kite	Haliastur indus	1		14	13
17	(Eastern) Osprey	Pandion haliaetus			14	

Page	West Papua Province		Biak	Arfak	Wgo	Sor
17	Gurney's Eagle	Aquila gurneyi			14	
20	Variable Goshawk	Accipiter hioaster	1	12		
20	Grey-headed Goshawk	Accipiter poliocephalus				17
20	Black-mantled Goshawk	Accipiter melanochlamys		7		
21	Long-tailed Honey Buzzard	Henicopernis longicauda		10		
23	Oriental Hobby	Falco severus			15	19
25	White-striped Forest Rail	Rallricula leucospila		6		
26	Barred Rail	Hypotaenidia torquata				19D
30	Whimbrel	Numenius phaeopus				19
31	Common Sandpiper	Actitus hypoleucos	1			
35	Rock Dove	Columba livia	1			
35	Spotted Dove	Streptopelia chinensis	1			17
35	Brown Cuckoo Dove	Macropygia amboinensis	1			
35	Sultan's Cuckoo Dove	Macropygia doreya			14	
35	Black-billed Cuckoo Dove	Macropygia nigrirostris		6		
35	Great Cuckoo Dove	Reinwardtoena reinwardti	4		14	17
36	Bronze Ground Dove	Alopecoenas beccarii		6		
36	Cinnamon Ground Dove	Gallicolumba rufigula			15D	
36	Asian Emerald Dove	Chalcophaps indica	1			
38	Wompoo Fruit Dove	Ptilinopus magnificus			15	
38	Pink-spotted Fruit Dove	Ptilinopus perlatus			15	
38	Orange-fronted Fruit Dove	Ptilinopus aurantiifrons				17
38	Coroneted Fruit Dove	Ptilinopus coronulatus				18
38	Beautiful Fruit Dove	Ptilinopus pulchellus			14D	
39	Yellow-bibbed Fruit Dove	Ptilinopus solomonensis	3			
39	Claret-breasted Fruit Dove	Ptilinopus viridis	1		14	
39	Mountain Fruit-Dove	Ptilinopus bellus		6		
40	Geelvink Imperial Pigeon	Ducula geelvinkiana	1			
40	Pied Imperial Pigeon	Ducula bicolor			14	
40	Torresian Imperial Pigeon	Ducula spilorrhoea	2			
41	Purple-tailed Imperial Pigeon	Ducula rufigaster			15	
41	Pinon's Imperial Pigeon	Ducula pinon			14	17
41	Zoe's Imperial Pigeon	Ducula zoeae				17
41	Papuan Mountain Pigeon	Gymnophaps albertisii		12		
42	Palm Cockatoo	Probosciger aterrimus			14	17
42	Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Cacatua galerita	1	6	14	17
42	Eclectus Parrot	Eclectus roratus	1		13	17
43	Red-flanked Lorikeet	Chamosyna placentis				17
43	Yellow-billed Lorikeet	Neopsittacus musschenbroekii		7		
44	Papuan Lorikeet	Chamosyna papou		10		
44	Black-capped Lory	Lorius lory				17
45	Black-winged Lory	Eos cyanogenia	1			
45	Biak Lorikeet	Trichoglossus rosenbergii	1			
45	Coconut Lorikeet	Trichoglossus haematodus			14	17

Page	West Papua Province		Biak	Arfak	Wgo	Sor
46	Red-cheeked Parrot	Geoffroyus geoffroyi	1		13	17
46	Blue-collared Parrot	Geoffroyus simplex		12		
48	Yellow-capped Pygmy Parrot	Micropsitta keiensis				17
48	Red-breasted Pygmy Parrot	Micropsitta bruijnii		8		
48	Double-eyed Fig Parrot	Cyclopsitta diophthalma				18
50	Biak Coucal	Centropus chalybeus	1			
50	Greater Black Coucal	Centropus menbeki				17
50	Lesser Black Coucal	Centropus bernsteini				19
50	Papuan (Blyth's) Hornbill	Rhyticeros plicatus	2	12	13	17
51	Chestnut-breasted Cuckoo	Cacomantis castaneiventris		9		
51	Brush Cuckoo	Cacomantis variolosus	1			
52	Shining Bronze Cuckoo	Chalcites lucidus	4			
52	White-eared Bronze Cuckoo	Chalcites meyerii		7?D		
52	Little Bronze Cuckoo	Chalcites minutillus	3			
53	Papuan Frogmouth	Podargus papuensis			14	
54	Biak Scops-Owl	Otus beccarii	1			
54	Jungle (Papuan) Boobook	Ninox theomacha		7		
55	Large-tailed Nightjar	Caprimulgus macrurus	2			
55	Feline Owlet-nightjar	Aegotheles insignis		6		
57	Moustached Treeswift	Hemiprocne mystacea	1		14	
57	Papuan Spinetailed Swift	Mearnsia novaeguineae				18
57	Glossy Swiftlet	Collocalia esculenta	1	6	14	17
57	Uniform Swiftlet	Aerodramus vanikorensis	1			
58	Pacific Swallow	Hirundo tahitica	1		13	17
59	Common Paradise Kingfisher	Tanyiptera galatea			14	
59	Biak Paradise Kingfisher	Tanyiptera riedelii	2			
60	Rainbow Bee-eater	Merops ornatus	1		13	17
60	Dollarbird	Eurystomus orientalis	1		14	17
60	Hook-billed Kingfisher	Melidora macrorrhina			15	
60	Rufous-bellied Kookaburra	Dacelo gaudichaud			14	17
61	Blue-black Kingfisher	Todiramphus nigrocyaneus				17
61	Collared Kingfisher	Todiramphus chloris			14	17
61	Beach Kingfisher	Todiramphus saurophagus	1			
61	Sacred Kingfisher	Todiramphus sanctus	1			19
62	Variable (Papuan) Dwarf King	Ceyx lepidus			15D	
62	Little Kingfisher	Ceyx pusillus				19D
62	Azure Kingfisher	Ceyx azureus	3			
63	Hooded Pitta	Pitta sordida	1			
64	Papuan Logrunner	Orthonyx novaeguineae		7		
64	Spotted Jewel-babbler	Ptilorrhoa leucosticta		7		
65	Rusty Mouse-warbler	Crateroscelis murina		6	15	
65	Mountain Mouse-warbler	Crateroscelis robusta		8		
65	Lesser Ground Robin	Amalocichla incerta		7		
66	Vogelkop Bowerbird	Amblyornis inornata		7		
67	Masked Bowerbird	Sericulus aureus		12		

Page	West Papua Province		Biak	Arfak	Wgo	Sor
68	Orange-crowned Fairywren	Clytomyias insignis		9		
68	Emperor Fairywren	Malurus cyanocephalus	1			18
68	White-shouldered Fairywren	Malurus alboscapulatus		6		
69	Ruby-throated Myzomela	Myzomela eques			14	17
69	Dusky Myzomela	Myzomela obscura	1			
69	Red Myzomela	Myzomela cruentata		12		
69	Red-collared Myzomela	Myzomela rosenbergii		9		
70	Green-backed Honeyeater	Glycichaera fallax				17
70	Rufous-sided Honeyeater	Ptiloprora erythropleura		7		
71	Long-billed Honeyeater	Melilestes megarhynchus		12	14	17
71	Helmeted Friarbird	Philemon buceroides			14	17
72	Brown-backed Honeyeater	Ramsayornis modestus				17
72	Tawny-breasted Honeyeater	Xanthotis flaviventer		12	14	17
73	Arfak (West Smoky) H' eater	Melipotes gymnops		6		
73	Spotted Honeyeater	Xanthotis polygrammus			16	18
74	Cinnamon-browed Melidectes	Melidectes ochromelas		8		
74	Vogelkop Melidectes	Melidectes leucostephes		6		
74	Ornate Melidectes	Melidectes torquatus		6		
75	Puff-backed Meliphaga	Meliphaga aruensis			15	17
75	Mimic Meliphaga	Meliphaga analoga			14	17
75	Yellow-gaped Meliphaga	Meliphaga flavirictus		12		
76	Pale-billed Scrubwren	Sericornis spilodera			15	
76	Vogelkop Scrubwren	Sericornis rufescens		6		
76	Grey-green Scrubwren	Sericornis arfakianus		6		
76	Tropical Scrubwren	Sericornis magnirostra		6		
76	Large Scrubwren	Sericornis nouhuysi		8		
77	Yellow-bellied Gerygone	Gerygone chryzogaster				17
77	Fairy Gerygone	Gerygone palpebrosa		12		
77	Green-backed Gerygone	Gerygone chloronota				17
77	Biak Gerygone	<i>Gerygone hypoxantha</i>	2			
77	Large-billed Gerygone	Gerygone magnirostris				19
77	Brown-breasted Gerygone	Gerygone ruficollis		6		
77	Grey Thornbill	Acanthiza cinerea		6		
78	Mid-mountain Berrypecker	Melanocharis longicauda		6		
78	Fan-tailed Berrypecker	Melanocharis versteri		8		
78	Tit Berrypecker	Oreocharis arfaki		7		
79	Dwarf Longbill	Oedistoma iliolophus			14	17
79	Pygmy Longbill	Oedistoma pygmaeum			14	18
79	Yellow-bellied Longbill	Toxorhamphus novaeguineae		6	14	17
79	Olive-crowned Flowerpecker	Dicaeum pectorale		6	14	17
79	Red-capped Flowerpecker	Dicaeum geelvinkianum	1			
79	Black Sunbird	Leptocoma aspasia	1		14	17
79	Olive-backed Sunbird	Cinnyris jugularis	1	12	14	17
80	Lowland Peltops	Peltops blainvillii			14	

Page	West Papua Province		Biak	Arfak	Wgo	Sor
80	Mountain Peltops	Peltops montanus		8		
80	Black Butcherbird	Melloria quoyi				17
80	Hooded Butcherbird	Cracticus cassicus	1		14	17
80	Great Woodswallow	Artamus maximus				
80	White-breasted Woodswallow	Artamus leucorhynchus			13	17
81	Stout-billed Cuckooshrike	Coracina caeruleogrisea		12		
81	White-bellied Cuckooshrike	Coracina papuensis				19
81	Biak Triller	Lalage leucoptera	1			
81	Black-browed Triller	Lalage atrovirens				17
82	Boyer's Cuckooshrike	Coracina boyeri				18
82	Grey-headed Cicadabird	Edolisoma schisticeps				17
82	Black-shouldered (Pap) Cicadabird	Edolisoma incertum		6		
82	Common Cicadabird	Edolisoma tenuirostre	2			
82	Black Cicadabird	Edolisoma melas			15D	
83	Papuan Treecreeper	Cormobates placens		8		
84	Raja Ampat Pitohui	Pitohui cerviniventris			14	
84	Northern Variable Pitohui	Pitohui kirhocephalus		12		
84	Hooded Pitohui	Pitohui dichrous		6		
85	Papuan Babbler	Garritornis isidorei				18
85	Rusty Pitohui	Pseudorectes ferrugineus				17
85	Little Shrike-thrush	Colluricincla megarhyncha	2		14	17
86	Goldenface	Pachycare flavogriseum		6		
86	Regent Whistler	Pachycephala schlegelii		7		
86	Sclater's Whistler	Pachycephala soror		6		
86	Vogelkop Whistler	Pachycephala meyeri		10		
87	Grey Whistler	Pachycephala simplex		12	15	17
87	Mottled Berryhunter	Rhagologus leucostigma		11D		
88	Biak Myiagra (Flycatcher)	Myiagra atra	1			
88	Shining Myiagra (Flycatcher)	Myiagra alecto	2			18
89	Biak Monarch	Symposiachrus brehmii	2			
89	Friilled Monarch	Arses telescopthalmus			14	17
89	Black (Fantailed) Monarch	Symposiachrus axillaris		7		
89	Spot-winged Monarch	Symposiachrus guttula			14	
90	Yellow-breasted Boatbill	Machaerirhynchus flaviventer			15	
90	Black-breasted Boatbill	Machaerirhynchus nigripectus		7		
90	Golden Monarch	Carterornis chrysomela	1		15	18
90	Black-winged Monarch	Monarcha frater		12		
91	Northern Fantail	Rhipidura rufiventris	2		14	17
91	Willie-wagtail	Rhipidura leucophrys	1		14	17
91	Friendly Fantail	Rhipidura albolimbata		6		
92	Black Fantail	Rhipidura atra		5		
92	Dimorphic Fantail	Rhipidura brachyrhyncha		9		
93	Brown-headed Crow	Corvus fuscicapillus			14	

Page	West Papua Province		Biak	Arfak	Wgo	Sor
93	Torresian Crow	Corvus orru	3			
93	Glossy-mantled Manucode	Manucodia ater			14	18
94	Western Parotia	Parotia sefilata		6		
95	Arfak Astrapia	Astrapia nigra		9		
96	Black-billed Sickbill	Drepanornis albertisi		10		
96	Black Sickbill	Epimachus fastosus		7		
97	Superb Bird-of-paradise	Lophorina superba		6		
97	Long-tailed Paradigalla	Paradigalla carunculata		7		
98	Magnificent Riflebird	Ptiloris magnificus		12		
98	Magnificent Bird-of-paradise	Cicinnurus magnificus		6		
98	Wilson's Bird-of-paradise	Cicinnurus republica			15	
99	Red Bird-of-paradise	Paradisaea rubra			14	
100	Lesser Bird-of-paradise	Paradisaea minor		12		
101	Black-chinned Robin	Poecilodryas brachyura		12		
101	Black-sided Robin	Poecilodryas hypoleuca			14D	
102	Black-throated Robin	Plesiodryas albonotata		8		
102	Ashy Robin	Heteromyias albispecularis		7		
102	Smoky Robin	Peneothello cryptoleuca		8		
102	Blue-grey Robin	Peneothello cyanus		6		
103	Green-backed Robin	Pachycephalopsis hattamensis		6		
103	Garnet Robin	Eugerygone rubra		6		
103	Olive Flycatcher	Kempiella flavovirescens		6		
103	Papuan Flycatcher	Devioeca papuana		8		
103	White-faced Robin	Tregellasia leucops		12		
104	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	Passer montanus	1		13	17
105	Island Leaf Warbler	Seicercus maforensis		6		
106	Biak White-eye	Zosterops mysorensis	1			
106	Capped White-eye	Zosterops fuscicapilla		6		
107	Sooty-headed Bulbul	Pycnonotus aurigaster	1			
107	Spangled Drongo	Dicrurus bracteatus	1		14	17
107	Pygmy Drongo	Chaetorhynchus papuensis		12		
107	Metallic Starling	Aplonis metallica	1			17
107	Long-tailed Starling	Aplonis magna	1			
107	Singing Starling	Aplonis cantoroides			14	17
108	White-eared Catbird	Ailuroedus buccoides			15D	
108	Arfak Catbird	Ailuroedus arfakianus		7		
108	Brown Oriole	Oriolus szalayi				17
108	Yellow-faced Myna	Mino dumontii			14	17
109	Blue-faced Parrotfinch	Erythrura trichroa		12		
110	Streak-headed Mannikin	Lonchura tristissima		6		17

* seen at Manokwari Airport

D - seen by Dion only

Birds that were "heard only" are not recorded.

Mammals

West Papua has a rich mammal fauna. Aside from some of the bats, the rest of is very difficult to see. We were extremely happy with our mammal sightings. We managed seven different possums, with some of these rarely ever seen. We managed three at Camp German in the Arfaks and another three on Waigeo. A number of bats, three cetaceans (sea monsters) and a Black-tailed Melomys were also seen. See table below and diary notes.

Biak Glider	<i>Petaurus biacensis</i>	One seen by Dion on Biak
Sugar Glider	<i>Petaurus breviceps papuanus</i>	Two seen and others heard on Waigeo track
Striped Possum	<i>Dactylopsila trivirgata</i>	Two seen by the roadside outside Warimpurem Homestay, Waigeo
Reclusive Ringtail	<i>Pseudochirops coronatus</i>	One seen near Camp German, Arfaks
Masked Ringtail	<i>Pseudochirulus larvatus</i>	Two or three seen near Camp German, Arfaks
Northern Grey Cuscus	<i>Phalanger orientalis</i>	One on Biak at Adibai; a few seen by the roadside outside Warimpurem Homestay, Waigeo
Stein's Cuscus	<i>Phalanger vestitus</i>	A few seen at Camp German, Arfaks
Short-finned Pilot Whale	<i>Globicephala macrorhynchus</i>	A pod of ~30 seen in the Dampier Straits
Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphin	<i>Tursiops aduncus</i>	Several pods seen off Warimpurem Homestay, Waigeo
Spinner Dolphin	<i>Stenella longirostris</i>	Two large pods seen in the Dampier Straits
Black-tailed Melomys	<i>Melomys rufescens</i>	One seen at Wilson's bop hide, Waigeo
Queensland Blossom Bat	<i>Syconycteris australis</i>	One seen inside the bathroom at Syoubri Lodge
Great Bare-backed Fruit Bat	<i>Dobsonia magna</i>	Common at Warimpurem Homestay, Waigeo
Beaufort's Bare-backed Fruit-Bat	<i>Dobsonia beauforti</i>	A few seen at Adibai on Biak
Spectacled Flying-Fox	<i>Pteropus conspicillatus</i>	A couple at Warimpurem Homestay, Waigeo
Round-eared Tube-nosed Bat	<i>Nyctimene cyclotis</i>	Seen on limestone ridge on Biak
Common Tube-nosed Bat	<i>Nyctimene albiventer</i>	Seen on Waigeo
Rousette Bat	<i>Rousettus amplexicaudatus</i>	Seen in gardens on Waigeo

Diary

Day minus 1 – 2nd May 2017

Once more my lead-in to this holiday wasn't too flash. Try to stay young; about 32 would be ideal. My back had gone on holidays. It was slowly circling waiting for an opportunity to re-connect itself but it wasn't sure what it was getting itself into. The thought of several consecutive flights in planes of an ever-decreasing size gave cause for uncertainty. And although I didn't know it, one of my teeth was planning a get-square long before the first of these flights reached cruising altitude.

Other than that I was excited to be going to one of the best little-visited remaining patches of forest on the planet – in the Arfak Mountains.

Day 0 – 3rd May 2017

I've decided that Day 1 of any holiday is when you start looking at stuff; so this is Day 0.

Trains took me to Sydney Airport for our Garuda A330-300 flight to Jakarta. I'm generally quite stressed the day I leave home with the vague unease associated with the thought that I'd forgotten something important, like my wife. No, she wasn't on the checklist this time.

Arriving at 0750 I found my travel companion, a Mr Dion Hobcroft, just ahead of me in the check-in queue. I hadn't travelled with Dion before and was hoping I could be on my best behaviour. Three weeks is too long for that.

We checked in. As we passed through security I was singled out for scanning by a man with a big machine that had lots of moving parts and lit up my whole body. I asked the guy staring at it how my prostate was doing. He gave me a strange look.

Next was some malt whisky tasting at the duty free shop. Why not? Bought a bottle of Monkey Shoulder blended malt. Now all we need is a plane.

The flight was uneventful, child free and would have been pleasant enough if I hadn't found an abscess on one of my teeth. I wanna go home. I was trying to form an image of a dentist / mechanic on the island of Biak, our first port of call, and that image wasn't pretty. Watched the movie Hacksaw Ridge. Almost everyone died.

We arrived at Jakarta and then some weeks later at the world's largest building, the new Jakarta Airport terminal. Whole civilisations rose and fell while we were taxiing.

Although we had checked our luggage through to Biak, opinions varied on whether we had to pick it up and re-check it at Jakarta. We waited until every last bag come off the carousel just in case....

Changing money was an ordeal. Seriously, it took 30 minutes. One functionary put the rupiah through a counting machine eight times before counting it manually anyway.

Our flight to Biak via Makassar left at 2300 Sydney time and arrived in Biak just before sunrise. A little on the Biak story here - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biak>

Day 1 – 4th May 2017

We arrived at 0510 in the pre-dawn gloom. It would have been less gloomy if it hadn't been bucketing down with rain. Our guide, Jefta, and driver took us the ten metres to our digs, the Asana Biak Hotel, literally across the road from the terminal. We checked in, dumped our bags in the room, noting the familiar smell of decay therein, before having a quick shower and a cup of coffee.

My tooth was irritating me and I'd had virtually no sleep; zombies were in better shape – so let's go birding!!

We puzzled over why we had so many people in our van. It turns out that one of them had the sole purpose of boiling water and putting out some food for morning tea and lunch.

Our first birding site is known as Adibai. After driving through many kilometres of logged wasteland we started seeing a few crown trees in some selectively logged and partially regrown forest. Occasional spits of rain gave way to a delightful overcast and windless day. The bird list soon included variable goshawk, claret-breasted fruit-dove, Geelvink imperial-pigeon, black-winged lory, Biak coucal, emperor fairy-wren, Biak triller, Biak myiagra, Biak white-eye and long-tailed starling.

Much appreciated coffee and lunch was taken on the quiet roadside, then a late morning return to the hotel allowed for a couple of hours of blissful sleep.

At 1500 we were off to a site known as Makmakerbo. Along the way we found Birders Gold – a fruiting fig tree close to the road. Here there were small flocks of black-winged lorries and some stunning Biak lorikeets, allowing long and close views of each. Dion called in a hooded pitta – a gem of a bird if ever there was one.

We had planned to walk an old logging track. Persistent rain hunted us away. So we returned to a pass through the limestone ridge that runs parallel to the coast and just inland from Biak town. The road traverses some very tall unlogged forest and as the sun had already set we tried for Biak scops-owl. One responded immediately to playback, flying across the road a few times before perching in full view. We had thus quickly seen all of Biak's owls....

We spot-lit along the road seeing round-eared tube-nosed bat. Dion saw a Biak glider. I missed the latter. Dion was hesitant to remind me of this too often as he had missed the Biak coucal earlier.....

Well-earned Bintangs, dinner and a very sound sleep were recorded.

Day 2 – 5th May 2017

Up at 0415 and out of the hotel at 0500. Back to Makmakerbo, stopping briefly to photograph a New Guinea ground boa that Dion had found crossing the road. Once more our arrival coincided with persistent and sometimes heavy rain. We walked along the old logging track anyway. Two hours later the rain



stopped and the forest exploded with birdlife. The birdsong was continuous and was just as noisy when we left at 1130 as it had been all morning. We added several endemics, with Biak gerygone, Biak monarch (wow!), Biak paradise-kingfisher and Biak megapode. There were lots of others that didn't have the word "Biak" in them including golden monarchs,



many of the same birds we saw yesterday, and a pair of Blyth's hornbills, apparently hitherto unrecorded on Biak.

Back at the Asana and I wasted no time getting into the hotel's excellent swimming pool – just large enough to do some laps.

My newest best friend, Dion, had the forethought to pack special tooth infection antibiotics. These he gifted me, allowing some hope that greasy pliers might not be needed inside my gob after all.

Jefta picked us up at 1530 to take us to a site to search for Geelvink

pygmy-parrot – fast becoming our bloody Biak boggy bird. We failed in our quest. As the light faded and rain threatened we retreated to the hotel, where we enjoyed a delicious meal. I chatted with Yoris in Manokwari. He is a friend of Benny, our tour agent on Biak. Yoris is arranging a driver to take us to the Arfak Mountains, our next port of call after we leave the island.

Day 3 – 6th May 2017



waterfall on Biak

The excitement never stops! Up once more at 0415 and away to the north side of the island to a site with a dramatic limestone waterfall. A very pretty place where a local dude frog-marched us up and down some muddy hills, through gardens, edge forest and along slippery and occasionally treacherously steep tracks. Although the sun was shining there

were very few birds calling or to be seen. Never mind, Dion was thrilled to get his Biak coucal. Now I really should have seen that glider. The only other birds we added to the trip list were azure kingfisher and Torresian crow, the latter being a surprising rare beast on an island that would appear to be ideal for them.

We were back at the hotel in the late morning. I did some washing before enjoying lunch with a couple of Bintangs. A relaxing swim in the otherwise deserted swimming pool preceded some languid poolside diary and bird note updates.

Still having one full day on Biak, we've become victims of our own success, having seen most of the see-able birds.

Oh, and I almost forgot, Dion and I got married.

We left at 1500, once more for Adibai. In contrast to the morning's lack of birds, here the forest was practically heaving with feathered stuff. These included four extra Blyth's hornbills, a couple of little



we get married

bronze-cuckoos, yellow-bibbed fruit-doves and many of the birds we had seen at this site on the earlier visit.

Spotlighting at Adibai proved rewarding with Dion spotting a northern grey cuscus. Although Biak scops-owls and Papuan frogmouths were calling nearby, we didn't bother to call them in.

Back at the Asana we joined the remains of a wedding party, satisfied the urgent need for an infusion of Bintang and ravaged the available food. As the only white men in the place we attracted the attention of the bride's sister who came over for a chat and a photo shoot. A Monkey's Shoulder shot completed a fine day that had a bit of everything.

Day 4 – 7th May 2017

If only there were more hours of darkness I'd be cock-a-hoop at getting up at 0415 every morning. Having no better plan, we went back to Makmakerbo. As soon as we arrived, so did the rain. Whilst the Geelvink pygmy-parrot again eluded us we found plenty of other birds with the best being open views of the local subspecies of great cuckoo-dove. Another added to our list was shining bronze-cuckoo.

I'd had enough of criss-crossing Biak and decided to forego the afternoon's ultimately fruitless pygmy-parrot quest in favour of being slothful. Swimming, writing and staring wistfully across the sea to Yapen Island aligned more with my idea of a balanced holiday. 90% birding and 10% balance.....

Melati, the ever-smiling waitress in the restaurant was the recipient of one of my dreaded stuffed toys. She was so happy she said she was going to have a little cry. Her colleagues rushed to see what all the fuss was about. Back to the pool and I was soon set upon by a mixed bag of local kids. The other dreaded holiday distraction – my photo album – was



Biak kids

produced and we had fun identifying photos of animals and identifying the aged and slightly decrepit farang by his old school picture.

Enda, the wife of the hotel's general manager, joined me in the restaurant. She ostensibly sells batik and a few

other trinkets in the hotel's foyer. She told me she rarely sells anything at all but does what she can to be a "good wife". Dion returned from his afternoon with Benny but failed to add to the trip list. He found me in our room engrossed by Grand Sumo on the partially functioning TV.

Day 5 – 8th May 2017

A very long though entertaining day. Our flight to Jayapura and onwards to Manokwari left Biak at 0555. The 737-700 arrived at Jayapura after just 55 minutes. The view of unbroken virgin forests from the plane was inspiring.

West Papua's capital and largest city – population 330,000 – is located in a spectacular setting of high mountains and seemingly disconnected bits of open water. The airport is substantial and very busy. We had a few hours to kill so I decided to walk the streets. I quickly gave up on this idea on the basis that we still weren't absolutely certain that we didn't need permits to travel in West Papua and I didn't want to attract undue attention to myself. So sitting inside the terminal, doing sudokus (or trying to) and occasionally chatting to curious locals was the best I could manage.

A Brazilian CRJ1000 – a plane I really like, even though it doesn't look like it can fly - took us to Manokwari, a somewhat grotty and haphazard town of 150,000 souls. We were the only foreigners on board. Once more, much trackless forest could be seen out of the window.

Yoris, a West Papuan English-speaking Mr Fixit met us at the airport. He passed us to Son, our East Timorese Toyota Hilux driver, who soon led us to a very decent and surprisingly well-stocked supermarket. Happily we could buy everything we thought we might need for the Arfaks in the one shop. We spent \$A120 on enough food to feed several villages – or so I thought at the time. The check-out process was hilarious. A check-out dude's assistant's assistant who looked like he should have played front-row for the Bulldogs carefully taped our purchases into several cardboard boxes. I was tempted to take his photo but the general atmosphere of peace and tranquillity may have compromised so I let it fly.

We reacquainted ourselves with torrential rain, a substantial part of which, at that very moment, was migrating into our luggage in the tray of the Hilux. Pity we didn't know it at the time.

We were then on our way to the Arfak Mountains as fast as the traffic-blocking petrol station queues, flooded roads and crowded streets would allow us. Earlier we had been told that getting to the Arfaks in the afternoon would not be possible as the driver would have to get back to town in the dark. I now understand what this means.

The first 40km or so was on fairly good sealed roads. The road then crosses a bridge over a river. The fun starts at this point. Full credit to our driver; he clearly knew the road and managed the journey confidently and intelligently. Fainthearted passengers beware – at times the road was incredibly steep, occasionally washed out and – muddy.

Syoubri village welcomed us at 1600. After an anxious wait “King” Zeth Wonggor emerged from his casa and thus we met the most famous guide in West Papua. The gentle and unassuming Zeth has Sir David Attenborough and Jared Diamond et al on his guiding list.



We chewed the fat with Zeth for some time. It was well chewed indeed by the time it was decided that persistent and torrential rain would not allow any birding play. I took the drowned clothing from my pack and hung it in front of our lodge so that it could absorb more water, if possible, from the humid mountain air.

Our lodge, which was more than adequate, sits at the higher end of Syoubri village at about 1400m asl. The local forest can be called mid-mountain / cloud forest grading to true cloud forest with an increase in altitude. The Arfak Mountains locals are the Hattam, Meyah and Sougb indigenous peoples (collectively the “Arfaks”), who speak mutually unintelligible languages. More on the Arfaks and its importance to biodiversity can be viewed here - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arfak_Mountains

The first of our instant noodles (“food” that will be aggressively avoided now that I’m home) was enjoyed in front of a warm fire.

Day 6 – 9th May 2017

I confess – I took a sleeping pill last night – being so excited to get out and about in a wildlife-filled forest! We were up at 0400, a time that is not considered early if birding in the forests of West Papua, nor is it considered even remotely early if your travel partner has the surname Hobcroft.



Queensland blossom bat

I shared a lovely cold shower with a Queensland blossom bat. I roused the snoring Mr Hobcroft who needed no prompting when I explained there was a mammal in the bathroom.

Breakfast, 3-in-one coffee + biscuits with peanut butter, was soon out of the way so that we could join Zeth in the “magbop” hide (the magnificent bird-of-paradise hide for the uninitiated).

The magbops – up to half a dozen of them – performed or viewed all manner of bizarre display feats that lasted the best part of an hour and a half. Dion called in a green-backed robin as a bonus bird and the day was off to a flying start (every pun intended).



Magnificent bird-of-paradise

Next on the birding menu was a trek a short way up an adjacent “hill” to see the white-striped forest-rail, which eventually sauntered up and yelled at us. Tick; nice. Vogelkop scrubwren (glad we got that out of the way) was followed by a pygmy eagle flypast.

A lady in the village offered us some freshly-cooked donuts, just what you would come to expect in a remote West Papuan village. Our cooking team then boiled some water for coffee and made us lunch. All was well with the world.

While all this was going on Zeth had tracked down a perched feline owlet-nightjar, surely the best of this elite small family of birds.

After the owlet-nightjar viewing I lurked in the forest ticking off a few new birds in the process. Recent first-hand experience had taught me to take advantage of day parts that didn't include rain in them. Added to my list were western smoky honeyeater, blue-grey robin, Sclater's whistler and mid-mountain berrypecker.

Back to the lodge; Dion sleeping; rain.

By 1430 the rain eased to the extent that we felt tentatively confident that we wouldn't be washed away if we ventured along the village's entrance road. After a slow start the birds appeared in a rush, with bronze ground-dove, mountain fruit-doves, ornate melidectes, grey thornbill, black-shouldered cicadabird, hooded pitohui, magbops, western parotias, island leaf-warbler and streak-headed mannikin to name a few.

It was a night of whisky, talking horse jokes and early to bed.

During the night I had a dream – that I owned three pairs of clean dry socks. It was only a dream.

Day 7 - 10th May 2017

A marvellous day if ever there was one. We were off to Camp German, a little bit up the hill. About 600m in altitude up as it turns out. My Dunlop KT26 joggers were up to the task. Soon they were less happy, wet (drowned actually), and muddy. Never mind, the track passed



through enchanting forest with lots of orchids and other interesting flowering plants and birds-a-plenty. Zeth pointed out leaves and other plant chunks that had medicinal qualities.

Our four porters – Zachariah, Thaddeus, Simeon and Demas walked a short-cut route, said not to be suitable for the faint of heart, ahead of us. You

can glean from the names of our porters that Christian missionaries have been active in the Arfaks...



Anyway, back to our ascent. The track was never treacherous or particularly steep and if you watched your footing you didn't need to fall over too many times. After many birding stops, the best being to watch a fantastic long-tailed paradigalla, and later to hear its foot-stamping dance, we arrived at Camp German to find some substantial shelters and other facilities – not too shabby at all. Other birds seen on the climb included: black-mantled



goshawk (+ nest), yellow-billed lorikeet (at a nest), lesser ground robin (on its nest) and a pair of Arfak catbirds (with no nest in sight). At the camp the pre-lunch bonus birds were female black sicklebill and rufous-sided honeyeater.

The post-lunch pre-rain double extra bonus birds were Papuan logrunner, ashy robin and Vogelkop

bowerbird. The bowerbird was stealing coveted plastic rubbish from another bird's stupendous bower.

Rain and fog killed much of the afternoon's fun. I tried cooking my shoes and drying my socks in front of a fire with mixed success. After a few minutes back in the mud-fields they had returned to their former state.

The rain stopped at sunset. Spotlighting was compulsory. Zeth told us that the cuscuses and other possums didn't show until after 2000. He was right again. Seconds after the clock ticked over we were staring at a very impressive Stein's cuscus. It sat dumbly in the spotlight and no amount of disturbance on our part could persuade it to shift. Minutes later and a formidable and very rarely seen reclusive ringtail possum came into view. Unlike its cousin it wasn't hanging around (reclusive, perhaps?). Great views of this impressive deep chocolate-brown possum were



enjoyed as it scrambled away. Mountain and feline owlet-nightjars were calling and a Papuan boobook was seen above our campsite. Dion later found what turned out to be a masked ringtail; hitherto unrecorded in the Arfaks. A great day had become so much better.

Dion was woken by some idiot screaming. That was me. I hadn't been dreaming of satisfactory women. Instead I woke with cramps in both parts of both legs and being confined to a constricting sleeping bag I struggled to do anything about it. I screamed out something like "ARRFAKK", but slightly different. Man up Steven.

Day 8 – 11th May 2017

After fighting with demons most of the night, Zeth and Dion woke me so that we could arrive at the black sicklebill display site before the guest of honour. My muddy wet shoes were now somewhat cold, wet and muddy so I went for the thong option. Almost immediately some impressively viscous mud grabbed my right flip-flop and refused to give it back. It suffered a blowout. I continued sans footwear. In the dark.

A male sicklebill performed its indescribably amazing display before abruptly freezing in place for about ten minutes. It then flew off without any pre-warning. Zeth advised that another male was watching it. Maybe it was embarrassed?



On the way back to camp we managed great views of smoky robin, spotted jewel-babbler, Papuan treecreeper and crappy views of red-breasted pygmy-parrots.

A small ruckus ensued as Zeth and the porters discovered that I had been walking in bare feet. They weren't concerned for my welfare, nor should they be, they just hadn't seen white feet before.

A very much welcomed coffee preceded a trek higher into the mountains to search for Arfak astrapia. For once Zeth proved fallible and the bird was not seen, and overall the birding was slow. Lots of orchids though, both in the ground, in the trees and fallen from on high.

Washing in the local stream proved

efficacious.

Meanwhile Dion had trekked back up to Camp Japan and found a female astrapia that he thought might be nesting nearby.

This was the first day of our journey that didn't see any rain. Dinner consisted of rice, noodles, small amounts of canned tuna, choko tendrils and sweet chili sauce.

Spotlighting started slowly before two sightings of masked ringtails in quick succession followed by another Stein's cuscus. A feline owlet-nightjar flew in to the spotlight and landed just in front of us. Fabulous stuff.



Day 9 – 12th May 2017

Coffee and muesli bars and up to Camp Japan (1950m asl) to test my luck with the Arfak astrapia. Once more the eyes of Dion spot an astrapia disappear into a tree and not come out. Sure enough, it had a nest high up, just under the tree's leafy crown. This was one bird I didn't expect to see. Also seen well was red-breasted pygmy-parrot and not-so-well, a rufescent imperial-pigeon.

As we'd largely cleaned up on the critters of Camp German we determined we would return to the relative luxury of Arfak Lodge. We managed to navigate the track without falling down. Birds seen on the descent included a family of orange-crowned fairy-wrens, dimorphic fantails and our old friend, the long-tailed paradigalla.

After unpacking, washing and general mucking about I made a silly plan to walk the Syoubri village entrance road. I clearly suffered from the delusion that too much birding was never enough. Or maybe I had been hanging around Dion too long?

It was fun to meet and chat with villagers, take a few photos and then plod slowly up the road on a warm most sunny afternoon. There were plenty of birds about and if I'd known their calls I may well have teased out something I hadn't already seen. The return up the hill to the lodge was a death march. The only bright spot was donating a stuffed toy to the lady who gave us the donuts. She was overwhelmed and offered me rotis. I passed on this occasion, but perhaps should not have.

After the inevitable instant noodles for dinner, Zeth visited and we chatted about tourism, birders, the future and Arfak culture. Zeth then advised some shocking news. We had to get up at 0400 the next day to allow us time to get to the black-billed sicklebill display site before the bird did. We sipped thoughtfully on our whisky before a mercifully early night.

Day 10 – 13th May 2017

A full moon was useful as plodded up toward the main Manokwari road. A rather splendid sunrise heralded a pair of Papuan lorikeets crossing it. This made Dion happy as we thought we would miss this bird, such was the lack of flowering trees.

As the light improved we dropped into a forest on the road's western side. This had a slightly different aspect and a different feel about it. Zeth soon heard a black-billed (or buff-tailed) sicklebill calling and the incomparable Dion soon had it nailed in the crown of tree.

Western parotia hides beckoned. The first such hide was rather cramped and knowing Dion's love of waiting interminably for things to happen from within hides I decided to leave him to it. In any event I didn't want my failing body to contort into an unrecoverable shape. This proved, for once, to be a masterstroke as I soon had clear views of a displaying black-billed sicklebill and its female attendant. We then visited a different parotia hide nearby. A male parotia landed on top of the said hide before landing in its display site, giving a brief performance and then buggering off for the day.

Zeth had some enthusiasm for my idea of sitting on the roadside to see what would fly across it. Nothing, as it happened. A pheasant pigeon called from within the forest. Zeth played with his phone. Yes, he does have a phone and although I have his number he prefers to be contacted via his brother by email (see details above, somewhere). Don't ask me why because I do not know.

A car stopped and various folk jumped out. This wasn't unusual as many West Papuans wished to have their photos taken with us. However these guys were known to Zeth and



camp cooks, Syoubri Lodge

would offer us a ride back to the village. This explains why Zeth was keen for me to sit by the road.

We met Alpha, a female student (studying “Terrorism and Hostility” aka Tourism and Hospitality) from Denpasar, was joined by Matthias, a guide and English teacher from Manokwari, and their driver. While we chatted on the roadside the Hovercraft was busy pointing out a Vogelkop whistler. Does this man ever stop? Two long-tailed honey-buzzards flew overhead.

Back at the lodge and Matthias offered us lunch – chili fish, yellow rice and noodles! Culture, politics and conservation were also on the menu. So was rain.

Dion took the opportunity to get a lift back to the main road as Matthias and his troupe left us. He managed quite a few good birds, including feeding Papuan lorikeets. Meanwhile Zeth and I were gasbagging about village life, religion and the prospects of the local wildlife.



somebody, Matthias, Alpha and Zeth

Day 11 – 14th May 2017

We gave Zeth the day off to go to church. Dion went to the magbop hide while I went to a parotia hide that Zeth had told us about. The male parotia squawked and landed nearby. I stared from the hide as the bird preened itself - for 40 minutes. Meanwhile most of the local mosquito population worked out where I was. Eventually the

bird came to its display ground where it tossed a few leaves about, uttered another squawk and flew away. Birding was otherwise very slow indeed.

Meanwhile Dion had left the magbop hide and walked the road. Here he found a rufescent imperial-pigeons, blue-faced parrot-finches and mottled berryhunter. That’s Dion.

As the afternoon was mostly cloudy, cool and sometimes wet, I decided to sit it out. I gave the last of my toy kangaroos to the daughter of the young lady who cooked our food. She was fascinated by it and tried very hard to remove its nose. More power to the Chinese manufacturers that she failed.

Dion journeyed to the parotia hide in the afternoon to see the sum total of one black fantail. Huh, human after all. He got bucketed on in the bargain.

Zeth arrived with our account. All was neatly written in Bahasa. Many of the items, 13 in all, remain a mystery. That's okay – our stay was joyous and not expensive. Many of the villagers profited in one way or another from our visit.

Zeth mentioned a couple of things that made me very happy. Apparently he spoke at church about what we had discussed earlier in the week about sustainable tourism or whatever it was I was ranting on about. Apparently it was very well and thoughtfully received by the congregation. He went on to say that the people in the village said I was a good man because I met and interacted with them. Maybe the toys and baseball caps helped....

The afternoon rain continued into the night, becoming torrential.

Dinner consisted of rice. That was about it really. Oh, and the last of the chili sauce. And the whisky. And the coffee.



Day 12 – 15th May 2017

A monster headache, lack of sleep, age, a diet severely lacking in beer, red wine and dead animals, and something odd in my nether regions (or should I say, something slightly more odd than usual) combined to dampen my enthusiasm, for just about anything really.

A driver from Manokwari picked us up at 0615. Zeth wanted to go to town and so did the porters, presumably to meet up with some women folk. They had all shaved and wore their best clothes.....



The plan was to look for birds along the roadside as we dropped to different altitudes. After a slow start in still and overcast conditions, Dion (who else?) spots a male masked bowerbird on a distant ridge. I'm pretty sure it was on the Indonesian side of the border. It was so far away that when it flew, the speed of light became a factor in how long it took us to see it move. This single

event shaped the rest of the morning. Birds exploded from all directions. Among the best were western parotia, lesser bird-of-paradise, masked bowerbird (again), magnificent riflebird, black-chinned robin, white-faced robin, blue collared parrots and Blyth's hornbills.

And blue-faced parrot-finches finally made their way onto my list. We were told we were staying in Manokwari at the Irian Jaya Hotel. This was a fiction as we turned up at the Hotel Mokwam. It didn't look to be much – and it wasn't. I smelled a rat when reception asked for the room tariff up front.

Across the road was a buffet style, pay for what you eat restaurant that wasn't too bad at all. Returning to the hotel I slept – for 16 hours.

Day 13 – 16th May 2017

The exotic name of “Manokwari” combines with an exotic location to deliver nothing much good; at least for the parts we visited. It is unplanned, enjoys no discernible footpaths, has rubbish everywhere and entertains the random electrical wiring that South East Asia does so well. Happily it has an airport, allowing a rapid form of escape.

Nevertheless a long sleep did much for my enthusiasm. We lurked menacingly around the alleged site for the Mokwam Hotel breakfast. We bailed in favour of the shop across the road.

Yoris had arranged a driver to take us to the airport at 0900. He failed to materialise so we nabbed a cab. The area around the airport was jammed with people who had come to spot the president (I think) from Jakarta. Curiously it was the West Papuan indigenes who had packed the fence and the roads.

The flight to Sorong on a CRJ1000 is a very short one – just eight minutes at cruising altitude. Full credit to the Garuda cabin crew to provide drinks and a snack box in this time.

Next stop was the Raja Ampat Tourism Office, across the road from Sorong airport, to get our Raja Ampat Marine Park permits. These now cost \$A100. That done we wandered the short distance to the JE Meridien Hotel to procure a taxi, first to a supermarket that sells beer, and then to the Sorong ferry wharf for the fast ferry to Waisai on Waigeo Island.

The ferry crossing is a pleasant one, despite the back of the boat – the only place where you might see some wildlife – being filled with smokers. We found a few birds – greater and lesser frigatebirds, wedge-tailed shearwater, brown booby and sooty tern. These paled against the 40-odd spinner dolphins that came into our bow-wave and leapt about on milky smooth seas as we approached Waisai.

Our driver was waiting dutifully to transfer us to Warimpurem Homestay near Saporkren village, west of Waisai. Our “travel day” ended half an hour before sunset as we were greeted at the homestay and shown to our bungalow. The accommodation is really quite lovely with full-thickness double-bed mattresses, mosquito nets, towels, sheets etc. the bathrooms have western-style toilets and telephone showers. Everything that the hotel in Manokwari didn't have.

Birding guide Bram came to visit us, so we chatted about what was possible to see and what was not. Dion didn't seem too distressed that the brush-turkey he wanted to see does not occur on "our" part of the island.

Dinner was delicious – red snapper in a mild curry with rice, greens, bean soup (that included something with tentacles) and fresh fruit. And warm beer.

Day 14 – 17th May 2017

Woke at 0451 to find that I hadn't set the alarm for 0430 properly. The boys were ready to go to the Wilson's bird-of-paradise hide. I was also ready to go after breakfast and bathroom stops in exactly eight minutes – is this a record? The traipse up the old logging road on Waigeo was something I never thought I'd be doing again after visiting the same site in 2014. Much has changed. An invasive exotic vine (Kudzu?) is swamping parts of the forest, shading out and ultimately killing it. Pioneer plants along the logging road have grown to the extent that it is harder to see inside the forest edge.

Mr Wilson failed to show at the hide. We paid Bram, who disappeared, and spent the rest of our time together walking up and down what is a very good road for birding. There are no other people or any traffic. Raja Ampat pitohui was common (yet not seen in 2014), along with sightings of brown-headed crow, glossy-mantled manucode and red bird-of-paradise amongst many others.

Dion stayed in the forest for the whole day and part of the night. I returned slowly to the homestay, arriving a little after midday. The sunny conditions saw me wash my clothes and get them to dry! I now owned three pairs of clean socks..... was it a dream or a premonition?



Swimming was next on the agenda, quickly followed by some snorkelling. Plenty of fish and good coral, although nothing too exciting. Meanwhile Dion was up in the forest (his natural habitat) in his full kit. The great thing about Indonesia is that nobody much cares what you do, or, maybe, whether they ever see you again.

My health issues had diminished to the point that my mood had flipped from fringe suicidal to mildly exuberant. A Bintang on the beach was just the ticket.



A visit to Saporkren village was enjoyed. Chatted with a family from Torajaland in Sulawesi. One of them proudly showed me his photos of holding desiccated dead folk. I performed a passable pantomime regarding my visit to his homeland sans the dead people holding bit – although this aspect might not have translated well. Then it was villager handshakes all round and the refreshing prospect of more Bintang on my return to Warimpurem.

Raja Ampat is simply gorgeous. Currently it sees 36,000 visitors per annum. The Indonesian Government wants to increase this three-fold in the short term.

Okay – this is the beer’o’clock scene: the islands of Friwen, Gam, Batanta, the one with the mosque, Kri, Mansour and a few others that I can’t identify. There is not a zephyr of breeze, a one inch shore break, a pod of bottlenose dolphins nearby and the sound of eclectic parrots and rufous-bellied kookaburras in the homestay’s trees. Does it ever get any better than this?

Fahmy, a young English-speaking chap from Yogyakarta, chatted with me about tourism in Raja Ampat. He is studying tourism and working in Waisai. We were interrupted by one of the homestay’s contractors who asked if we wanted to see some cuscuses. Oh yeah, maybe. There were three grey cuscus in the trees outside the homestay right above the road. Dion rocked up (having seen five birds that would have been lifers for me had I stayed with him) and managed a striped possum in the same trees. We soon had Papuan frogmouth, spectacled flying-fox, great bare-backed fruit-bat, common tube-nosed bat and rousette bat, all within 100m of our homestay.

Day 15 – 18th March 2017

Back up into the forest we went – hours before sunrise. We quickly had a pair of sugar gliders feeding in an *Omalanthus* tree almost at eye height. This small beast has not been



recorded as existing on Waigeo. We later heard two others calling.

Birding highlights were hook-billed kingfisher (finally!), purple-



tailed imperial-pigeon, Oriental hobby (another new record for the island) and a family of

brown-headed crows.

I left Dion at 0930 and trudged slowly back to the homestay. We'd earlier joked about being competitors on a television show called "Extreme Birding". I was beginning to feel as though I'd made it through to the semi-finals only to be voted off. So now I wasn't allowed to look at birds anymore. So be it.

Dion returned surprisingly early – just in time for a delicious lunch. We then chatted over a beer, watched several pods of bottlenose dolphins and wandered to Saporkren and beyond. Our return coincided with a thunderstorm and associated deluge. A lake formed within the homestay's grounds. Our spotlighting chances looked grim.

The rain stopped and although all the roadside vegetation was drenched we had killer views of a striped possum. I went back to the accommodation whilst Dion continued in pursuit of Waigeo spotted cuscus. His dedication to the task of seeing everything there is to see knows no bounds. His determination is admirable and possibly slightly alarming.

The holiday had seen few opportunities to wake up "whenever" and I was determined to make my last morning on Waigeo one of these. Not so Dion, he had arranged for a 4WD to take him deeper into the forest to try to get a better look at a male Wilson's bird-of-paradise.

Day 16 – 19th May 2017

Slept in to 0600, had coffee and would have had breakfast if the cats hadn't eaten it. I relocated my feline friends, who suddenly had the power of flight. Curiously they behaved as if they expected it and appeared none the worse for wear after their journey beach-side.



Dion and Enggelina

Snorkelling, swimming and poking about matched my wish list perfectly.

Dion returned happy that he saw his bird along with Papuan dwarf kingfisher and cinnamon ground-dove.

Lunch, to die for, then said goodbye to our hosts Hery and Enggelina. We used Dion's hired 4WD to take us to Waisai for our return ferry ride to Sorong. We arrived there quite early and watched as goods bound for the island were offloaded and Waigeo products, mostly fish, were loaded on board. Well, most of the fish anyway. There appeared to be a local "stevedores' tax" happening.

The ferry wasn't as crowded as the forward journey. We were entertained, alarmed, serenaded and finally a little irritated by the gayest guy I have ever

met. He wouldn't leave us alone.



gay Thai and Dion

Our mammal list was enhanced by a pod of thirty or so short-finned pilot whales which passed along both sides of the boat on calm seas. These were in company with a similar number of spinner dolphins. Many brown boobies, common terns and other seabirds / shorebirds were also seen.

The ferry docked alongside another ferry which in turn was tied to a local freighter. Walking-the-plank multiple times was the only sensible path to terra firma. A taxi driver had other ideas and leapt the gap between the various craft and soon had some of our luggage as he led us to his aged taxi. When we arrived at our digs, the JE Meridien Hotel, he wanted double the standard rate. Then 150%, then complaining about us to reception. I wasn't in the mood to argue – not just yet anyway – and found that ignoring him did the trick.

We were soon ensconced in our superior twin room. We quickly relocated to the bar. The beer and food went down a little too easily and we soon found ourselves \$A100 out of pocket. It was a funny night as Dion explained to an extraordinary Thai / Russian couple that he and I were identical twins (born eight years apart), and that I had twin lesbian daughters aged 52 years. The odd thing is that our company tried their best with the maths with a view to believing us! Dion further explained that unlikely as this sounded, it was possible. I couldn't speak; I was in stitches.

Day 17 – 20th May 2017

I was looking forward to returning to the forest at Taman Alam Wisata Sorong (or “Hutong Lindu”). We arrived at sunrise. Instead of the bird-filled nirvana of my memory it was almost deathly quiet.

Whilst we eventually compiled a healthy list of birds it really never got going as we had hoped. I picked up two lifers in greater black coucal and green-backed honeyeater. Red-breasted paradise-kingfishers and black lories eluded us.

After lunch at the hotel I went looking for West Papuan artefact shops. With the help of hotel reception I found a couple, and soon delighted in my purchases. That was until I got back to the hotel and Dion explained that no way would customs and quarantine allow anything with feathers or animal bits into Australia. So I took back my Asmat kundu drum and ceremonial dagger to the shop I'd just purchased them from. The proprietor didn't really want to repay me anything at all but we soon struck a deal that would see me spend some of the returned \$\$ on other stuff.

The late afternoon plan saw us on a visit to a patch of mangroves I'd located via Google Earth. After a scrum of hotel taxi drivers conferred on how to get to the site – even though it was only 15 minutes by car, none had ever been there – until we eventually found a driver adventurous (or reckless, stupid, financially distressed) enough to take us.

Dads with kids and slingshots and guys with guns joined us so we must have been at the right place for birds. Dion soon had the target – blue-black kingfisher, calling, and then

crossing the road. At one point a bird flew straight at us, missing our heads by inches. At least several pairs of these rarely seen birds were seen or heard.

Drinks, not as many, and dinner at the hotel.

Day 18 – 21st May 2017

Once more we tried Hutong Lindu and once again we were disappointed. Coroneted fruit-dove, red-flanked lorikeet and New Guinea babbler were among the best of the birds. Back to the hotel by late morning.



In the afternoon Dion returned to the same site. As there was persistent rain when we got there, I went back to the hotel. Dion was mumbling something about brush-turkeys.

Spent the afternoon writing, watching Donald Trump make a fool of himself on CNN, chatting to some chaps from Jayapura who had come to Sorong as participants in some sort of university challenge, and finally with a West Papuan guy who worked for WWF Indonesia. He told a tale of environmental disaster that seemed to have diminished him.

Dion returned with no gripping news to report.

Day 19 – 22nd May 2017

The local mosque's compulsory wake-up call started the day, well before it should have. As our last birding hurrah we revisited the "Sorong mangroves". Once more the hotel taxi drivers formed a scrum as our unbelievable request slowly filtered into their brains. Eventually one received a blinding flash of the obvious – the chance to earn some money –

and we were off, guiding the driver at every turn. Blue-black kingfishers were seen well and several other birds made it onto our holiday list – little kingfisher, whimbrel and white-bellied cuckoo-shrike were among these.

Now only the flight marathon remained.

We departed Sorong at 1445 for our first stopover at Makassar where we had a few hours to kill. It didn't matter how many times I did laps of the terminal, there was no Bintang to be found. Okay, let's have a coffee. A foolish decision was made on my part – I ordered a durian coffee on the basis that I just had to know. It was disgusting. I kept drinking it on the basis that it would somehow get better as I rapidly developed an acquired taste. It did not get better. This was a fact that I was reminded of every couple of minutes as noxious gases escaped my person. I feared entering Australia in such a state.

Denpasar was our next stop. Here I could change my rupiahs and enjoy a beer. Our flight to Sydney left on time at 1130 arriving in Sydney almost an hour early at 0640.

Day 20 – 23rd May 2017

Arriving early might have bestowed some sort of benefit if the baggage carousel was working. It was not. Dion and I thanked each other for a wonderful adventure and good company.

Now, all that remained was customs and quarantine, and what sort of view they would take of my cassowary feather Asmat head-dress and feather-covered billum bag + some wooden items. All good! Thank you. I asked about the kundu drum and that would have likely been okay too – bugger.

Post Script

Dion contacted Tim Flannery and others regarding our possum sightings in the Arfaks. One of these caused some excitement, and although I thought it may be new to science (!), it is most likely a significant range extension for masked ringtail.....

Steve Anyon-Smith

67 Wattle Road Jannali 2226

tel: 02 9528 8733

mob: 0426 842 466

email: steveas@tpg.com.au

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