

PAPUA NEW GUINEA 2022

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Masked Ringtail Possum at Kumul Lodge

Working as a bird guide but try to see mammals as we go along! Unfortunately we only have limited amount of time to look for mammals on a birdwatching tour, but as more and more people interested in mammals we try to see as much as possible – combine night birding with mammals. Some locations visited for birds can be interesting for mammals too so a few notes and coordinates could help future mammal watchers when planning a tour. All coordinates were taken out from the **maps.me** app which I used during the tour. It has been a few years I was in PNG and since that visit my interest also turned towards mammals as well. This is a short recap what we managed to see on the **BIRDQUEST** classic PNG tour in 2022.

When planning a trip and looking at the very few mammal reports for PNG I have realized it will be not so easy to see mammals. Also our previous birding tours have not seen many mammal species, so it was a very pleasant surprises to find more than I expected. Eventually managed to see 22 species and a few slipped away without photos hence no identification.

Knowledge of mammals and especially their identification on the field is not so straightforward in PNG and if you spot any errors or misidentifications of species (those with photos) please kindly let me know (email). Bat ID is especially not easy and many thanks for Carlos Bocos and Jon Hall for any hints or suggestions with those.

All photos in the report were taken by me.

LOCATIONS VISITED

Varirata NP

A great national park close to Port Moresby (PM) with pretty easy access. However to get there in the dark is not so easy from PM and for those who want to look for mammals only (or mostly) I would recommend to use the campsite within the park or stay in the Kokoda Trail Motel (kokoda-trail-hotel.business.site) not too far from the park. In PNG security can be a problem hence most operators will be not so happy to drive from PM to the park before it gets light (or after dark). The only occasion we managed to visit the park pre-dawn gave us Grey Dorcopsis (Forest Wallaby) *Dorcopsis luctuosa* right around the campsite. The introduced Timor Deer is also fairly common. No other mammals were identified in the park though a small *Echymipera* like mammal was seen running away along one of the tracks (probably Common *Echymipera* *E. kalubu*). Other has regularly seen Common Spotted Cuscus *Spilocuscus maculatus* in the park.

Kwatu Lodge, Transfly area near Kiunga

A remote location which can be reached by boat from Kiunga. The lodge is very basic (more like camping) and the area is classic lowland site for birds. It would certainly be good to explore it for mammals. Several rodents were seen from the boat at night but no ID was possible. It has a great variety of night birds and it was great to find Feather-tailed Possum, Striped Possum and Southern Common Cuscus on our single night in the area. You could organize a visit with the help of Samuel Kepuknai of Kiunga Nature Tours (skebuknai@gmail.com or call +675 548 1451).

Tabubil area

It is not so easy to be out birding at night as security is very strict which is run by the mining company. The place to stay in Hotel Cloudlands. We did not see any mammals mainly because we were not out at night. There is a new road being built to Telefomin and it goes high in the Hindenburg's Wall which is going through superb primary forest (up to 2000 meter asl). If a dedicated visit is possible to arrange with sleeping up in that area (try with Samuel as he is also organizing visits to Tabubil area) it could be fantastic. Recently our local guide has been taking some researchers (collectors) around and local hunters did produce Telefomin Cuscus *Phalanger matanim* for him. Not a sighting of live mammal but as a specimen so it certainly does occur in the area!

Kumul Lodge

A great place to stay in fantastic mountain forest habitat. The lodge has a big garden and forest trails so night excursion possibilities are great. We had some flight problems so our stay was

cut short and we only had two nights but even in our limited time we managed to find Masked Ringtail Possum *Pseudochirulus larvatus*, Coppery Possum *Pseudochirops cupreus* and Papuan (Sugar) Glider *Petaurus (breviceps) papuanus*. The Coppery Possum was photographed through thick mist so misidentification cannot be excluded. Due to covid the usual fruit feeder was poor at night, nothing was seen on it. But in my opinion it was not in use for cc 2 years and it was just restarted not long before we arrived (but certainly not before late spring 2022). This was the only place I could actually find some mammal reports and many other species has been seen in the past regularly such as Calaby's Padamelon *Thylogale calabyi*, Speckled Dasyure *Neophascogale lorentzii*, Long-fingered Triok *Dactylonax palpator*, Black-tailed Antechinus *Murexia melanurus*, Raffray's Bandicoot *Peroryctes raffrayana*, Pygmy Ringtail *Pseudochirulus mayeri*, Long-footed Tree Mouse *Lorentzimys nouhuysi*, Black-tailed Giant Rat *Uromys anak* and Small Spiny Rat *Rattus steini* (Dion Hobcroft, 2022).

Ambua Lodge

This is a posh lodge near Tari on the way to the Tari Gap. It is operated by Trans Niugini Tours and can be pre-booked (<http://www.pngtours.com/lodge1.html>). It has a good garden for wildlife and also several fantastic locations along the road towards the Tari Gap. We mostly did night birding in the lodge garden. The only mammal we saw daytime way a fantastic Speckled (Spotted) Dasyure, probably the same individual on two consecutive days. Details see at species accounts. The lodge garden produced some great mammal watching and throughout 4 nights we managed to find Black-tailed Dasyure *Murexia melanurus*, Mountain Cuscus *Phalanger carmelitae*, Ground Cuscus *Phalanger gymnotis*, Feather-tailed Possum *Distoechurus pennatus*, Long-fingered Triok *Dactylonax palpator*, Large Tree-Mouse *Pogonomys loriae* and Brown Rat *Rattus norvegicus*.



Finally there is no PNG report without Bird-of-paradise. This is a male King-of-Saxony Bop.

TRIP LIST

- 1 **Black-tailed Dasyure** *Murexia melanurus*
1 Ambua Lodge 2022-07-17. Access track to the lodge at night.
- 2 **Speckled Dasyure** *Neophascogale lorentzii*
1 Tari Gap 2022-07-15, 1 Tari Gap 2022-07-16. It was seen twice along the main road towards the Tari Gap at daytime, feeding on trees. It could have been the same individual both days.
Coordinates: -5.962707, 143.126979; -5.962173, 143.130602



- 3 **Mountain Cuscus** *Phalanger carmelitae*
2 Ambua Lodge 2022-07-17. One was seen along the access track and one in the garden above the upper cabins on large trees both late at night.



4 **Ground Cuscus** *Phalanger gymnotis*

1 Ambua Lodge 2022-07-17. A single sighting in the back of the garden at pre-dawn. Coordinates: -5.962114, 143.066117.



5 **Southern Common Cuscus** *Phalanger mimicus*

1 Kwatu Lodge 2022-07-10. Seen along the river from boat near the lodge. Lodge coordinates: -6.07475, 141.52337

6 **Feather-tailed Possum** *Distoechurus pennatus*

1 Kwatu Lodge 2022-07-09 coordinates: -6.074118, 141.524158. 1 Ambua Lodge 2022-07-17 along the access track. It was a great surprise to see this fantastic mammal twice on the tour. I was also surprised to find it on the lowlands and also at around 2000 meters! The individual at Kwatu Lodge was tame while the one at Ambua was deep inside thick cover and difficult to see.



7 **Long-fingered Triok** *Dactylonax palpator*

1 Ambua Lodge 2022-07-17. One was seen several times along the access track but it was shy and fast. Not managed any images despite seeing it 5-6 times. Had a great look of the tail and tail pattern (really thick and short dark tail with a pale end). Not sure if the next species occurs in the highlands but probably it does too.

8 **Striped (Torresian) Possum** *Dactylopsila trivirgata*

1 Kwatu Lodge 2022-07-09. One was seen close to the Feather-tailed Possum area. It was active and covering big distances fast. Coordinates: -6.074118, 141.524158.

9 **Papuan (Sugar) Glider** *Petaurus (breviceps) papuanus*

1 Kumul Lodge 2022-07-13, 1 Kumul Lodge 2022-07-14. Probably two different individual seen in the lodge garden. One was seen around the last cabins and one was seen by the restaurant. Usually late at night. This is the *papuanus* subspecies which is different from the Australian race and could well be a different species in future.



10 **Masked Ringtail Possum** *Pseudochirulus larvatus*

1 Kumul Lodge 2022-07-13. One of the highlight mammal of the tour! This really handsome species was seen well around the cabins but only on one occasion.



Honorary mammal Montane Owlet-nightjar

11 **Coppery Possum** *Pseudochirops cupreus*

1 Kumul Lodge 2022-07-14. One was seen in the forest below the lodge once at pre-dawn. It was rather foggy and the image is pretty useless but it seemed to be this species.

12 **Grey Dorcopsis** *Dorcopsis luctuosa* VU

1 Varirata NP 2022-07-24. Just one was seen around the campsite.



13 **Timor Deer** *Rusa timorensis* VU

8 Varirata NP 2022-07-03. Several sightings of this introduced species.

14 **Indo-pacific Bottlenose Dolphin** *Tursiops aduncus* DD

12 Pelagic off Kimbe Bay 2022-07-21. New Britain.



15 **Andersen's Bare-backed Fruit Bat** *Dobsonia anderseni*

New Britain. 1 Walindi Plantation Resort, Kimbe 2022-07-19. One was seen in the garden of the resort. It looked larger, darker and no greenish fur around the neck like the next species (which was common).



Honorary mammal Golden Masked Owl

16 **Bismarck Bare-backed Fruit Bat** *Dobsonia praedatrix*

New Britain. 1 Walindi Plantation Resort, Kimbe 2022-07-19, 5 Walindi Plantation Resort, Kimbe 2022-07-20, 5 Walindi Plantation Resort, Kimbe 2022-07-21. It was common in the garden of the resort at night.



17 **Black-bellied Blossom Bat** *Melonycteris melanops*

New Britain. 1 Walindi Plantation Resort, Kimbe 2022-07-19, 1 Walindi Plantation Resort, Kimbe 2022-07-20. The same individual was seen at the same area two nights. They supposed to be territorial feeders. Coordinates: -5.437955, 150.086872.



18 **Large Tube-nosed Fruit Bat** *Nyctimene major*

New Britain. 1 Walindi Plantation Resort, Kimbe 2022-07-20, 1 Walindi Plantation Resort, Kimbe 2022-07-21. I am not sure of the ID of this species and *P. raptor* was also suggested but apparently it does not occur in New Britain. So I think it is this species. It is two different individuals on the images below. Any help welcome!



19 **Spectacled Flying Fox** *Pteropus conspicillatus*

7 Port Moresby, Pacific Adventist University 2022-07-03. Seen roosting on some large trees while looking for Papuan Frogmouth.



20 **Great Flying Fox** *Pteropus neohibernicus*

New Britain. 2 Walindi Plantation Resort, Kimbe 2022-07-20, 2 Kulu River 2022-07-20



21 **Brown Rat** *Rattus norvegicus*

1 Mount Hagen airport 2022-07-15, 1 Ambua Lodge 2022-07-17.



22 **Large Tree-Mouse** *Pogonomys loriae*

2 Ambua Lodge 2022-07-17. On the access track. Two secretive mammals were seen and took a lot of time to get some images. They were fast but I believe it was some kind of courtship or mating time as they were very busy with each other. They were identified as this species but again if you have experience or other idea comments and help is welcome!



REFERENCES

Dion Hobcroft (2022): The Mammals of Kumul Lodge, Enga Province, Papua New Guinea, with Notes on Calaby's Pademelon *Thylogale calabyi*. Technical Reports of the Australian Museum Online, Number 37, pp. 1–8, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.3853/j.1835-4211.37.2022.1790>