

Tanimbar , Kai and Seram - July – Aug 2009

Mike Catsis

16 days were spent birding these islands between 20 July and 4 August with Nick Preston and Jon Hornbuckle. What follows is a short annotated account of the endemic and some of the near endemic species encountered and some others of interest. Although not intended as a travelogue or trip report it is hoped that this will encourage other independent birders to visit these much neglected but fascinating and endemic rich islands.

We had a very smooth trip considering the reputation of travel problems in this area , and the number of flights we took , with no flight cancellations and few delays. This was due in no small measure to the assiduous care and expertise of Poli (poli@ecoventures.com) based in Jakarta and his network of assistants throughout the region. Poli can be highly recommended to organise logistics throughout Indonesia for independent birders. Despite UK Foreign office advice which still warns against travel to Maluku we encountered no problems just lots of friendly people eager to help and flexible enough to satisfy the particular needs of hardcore birders.

We spent one day birding in Ambon , 4 full days on Yamdena , 2 on Kai Kecil , half a day on Kai Besar and 6 days on Seram. We encountered most of the possible endemics and near endemics. Only on Seram , where we chose not to embark on the arduous trek to Gunung Binaya , did we not have a chance for some key species. Here we birded the main road from Masohi to Sawai/Wahai , whose highest point is at 1260m , and some of the offshore islands from Sawai and Besi villages. Although it has been reported at this altitude Blue –eared Lory (*Eos semilarvata*) is very unlikely to be encountered along the road and we did not find it. Purple-naped Lory (*Lorius domicella*) is extremely scarce along the road although our helper Vino , from the Masi Hulan Parrot Rehabilitation project , did report hearing one from the road at 1100m. Seram thrush (*Zoothera joiceyi*) is found in ridge-top forest , although it's ecology is far too poorly known to conclude that it is restricted to such habitat , and it was not found ; although a thrush sized bird was flushed from the ground inside the forest at 1100m and it certainly should be looked for there. The only expected species that was not found , despite extensive searching between 600-900m (its preferred range) , was Rufescent dark Eye (*Tephrozosterops stalker*).

Few migrant species were found although some Australian Pratincoles were encountered on Saumlaki airport runway.

Species Notes.

Rufous-necked Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter erythrauchen ceramensis*)

One adult bird seen perched by the side of the Masohi-Sawai/Wahai road at c.900m on the Sawai side of the pass on 2nd August.

Forsten's Scrubfowl (*Megepodius forsteni*)

A pair found near dusk on Sawai island , a 20 minute boat ride from sawai village , on 3 August. 2 nest mounds were found during our search at the eastern end of the island. This species has a disputed taxonomic status some , for example Coates and Bishop (1997) and Stattersfield et al (1998) classifying it as a race of Orange – footed Scrubfowl (*M. reinwardt*) , although it is treated as a full species by Clements (2007). It was not heard or seen during our short searches near Air Besar and in Manusela National park east of Wahai.

(Tanimbar Scrubfowl (*Megapodius tenimberensis*)).

This species was not heard or seen on Yamdena at Lorulun farm , our main birding site , some 21 km north of Saumlaki. Interestingly local people there did not recognise pictures of this species and it is assumed that it must be suffering intense hunting pressure near human settlement. Searches for this species should look further afield as there is extensive forest left on the island as evidenced from the air.

Wallace's Fruit-dove (*Ptilinopus wallacii*)

This species was quite common on Yamdena even in quite disturbed forest where there is fruit. It was observed mainly singly or in pairs but it was not as common as Rose-crowned Fruit-dove (*Ptilinopus regina xanthogaster*) and never in large groups as reported by others.

Long-tailed Mountain Pigeon (*Gymnophaps mada stalkerii*)

2 were seen together at around 900m on the Masohi-Wahai road between Masohi and the pass.

Blue-streaked Lory (*Eos reticulata*)

3-4 seen flying over disturbed hill forest near the road to Lermatang on 22 July. 2 flying over forest next to Lorulun farm on 23rd July and 10+ feeding in trees in forest behind the Lorulun farm compound.

Moluccan Red Lory (*Eos bornea bornea*)

10+ on Ambon on the road from Tulehu port to Tulehu village on 20 July. Common on Seram from the lowlands up to 1260m on the Masohi –Sawai/Wahai road.

(Blue-eared Lory (*Eos semilarvata*))

This species was looked for at the highest altitudes , up to 1260m , along the Masohi – Sawai/Wahai road. Many Moluccan Red Lorries were scrutinised in the process but no Blue – streaked Lorries were found. Although it has been reported at this altitude it must be very uncommon indeed there , being much more common higher up.

Purple-naped Lory (*Lorius domicella*)

This very rare species is under severe threat from trapping for the bird trade and indeed for house pets in Maluku ; two captive birds were seen in a garden in Air Besar village. One bird was heard at 1100m from the Masohi-Sawai/Wahai road. The identification was made by a worker at the Masi Hulan Parrot Rehabilitation centre near Sawai where captive birds were tape-recorded. It is , however , hardly ever actually seen along the road although should certainly be looked for there.

Seram Cockatoo (*Cacatua moluccensis*)

First heard on the evening of 31st July and seen at a great distance from a lookout point at 900m on the Sawai side of the pass on the Masohi-Sawai/Wahai road. 4 seen very close at the junction of the

Sawai road and Masohi-Wahai road on the 1st August and at least 2 on the 2nd August at around 900m.

Tanimbar Corella (*Cacatua goffini*)

Uncommon on Yamdena with one over the forest at Lorulun farm on 21st July, another there on 23rd July and a maximum of 10 flying over the road north of Lorulun at dusk on 24th July.

Pied Bronze – cuckoo (*Chrysococcyx (minutillus) crassirostris*)

Seen on two occasions. Once near Lorulun farm on 24th July involving a male and a female on 26th July by the roadside on the Lermatang road.

The taxonomy of this bird is disputed with Payne (2005) keeping it as a race of Little Bronze-cuckoo (followed by Clements (2007)) while others (for example Birdlife International 2004) split it as *C. crassirostris*. In the field this bird appears strikingly different from all other races of *C. minutillus*, apart from perhaps *C. (minutillus) rufomerus* of Damar and nearby islands. Vocally they are all reported to be similar and there are reported cases of intergradation between races so the situation is not at all clear.

Kai Coucal (*Centropus spilopterus*)

Fairly common on Kai Kecil with 2 on 26th July near Defur village in heavily disturbed roadside forest. Several seen and heard on 27th July in limestone hill forest near Ohoililur beach resort. This species is thought to be a race of Pheasant Coucal (*Centropus phasianinus*) by some.

Lazuli Kingfisher (*Halcyon lazuli*)

One heard at the Masi Hulan Parrot Rehabilitation centre near Sawai on Seram on 1st August. This species seems much less common near Sawai than at Wahai where 3 were seen in forest 8km east of Wahai by the side of the road and 3-4 again in the same area on 3rd August. This patchy distribution is well documented by Poulsen (2004).

Kai Cicadabird (*Coracina dispar*)

Uncommon on Kai Kecil. One female was found in roadside secondary forest near Taman Anggrek on 27th July and a male in similar habitat on the road towards Taman Anggrek on 28th July, both late afternoon.

Pale Cicadabird (*Coracina ceramensis*)

Uncommon and inconspicuous. One on 29th July in degraded forest on the outskirts of Masohi. 2 near the turn off to Sawai on 1st August.

Tanimbar Triller (*Lalage moesta*)

Quite common and recorded on all days on Yamdena between 21st to 26th July.

Seram Oriole (*Oriolus forsteni*)

Quite common with 2 in degraded forest on the outskirts of Masohi on 29th July and then regularly heard and seen, usually singly and often in exposed treetops, along the Masohi-Sawai/Wahai road between 30th July to 3rd July.

Black-eared Oriole (*Oriolus bouroensis decipiens*)

Quite common and very conspicuous found on all days on Yamdena between 21st to 26th July. This species tended to call from exposed treetop perches rather unlike Black-eared Friarbird which was commonly encountered in small groups which often duetted while calling and was more difficult to see well.

Slender-billed Crow (*Corvus enca violaceus*)

3 seen on 29th July in degraded forest on the outskirts of Masohi. One near the turn off to Sawai on 1st August and two in roadside forest 8km east of Wahai. This race is very small and has distinctive vocalisations and probably merits specific status.

Slaty-backed Thrush (*Zoothera schistaceus*)

Quite common and conspicuous, at least by voice. First encountered on 23rd July in forest near Lorulun farm on Yamdena and heard again near there in a different forest patch on 24th July.

(Seram Thrush (*Zoothera joiceyi*))

This species is extremely poorly known and very rarely encountered on Seram and we did not find it. Most records have come from ridge-top forest and searches for it have centred on this type of habitat. However on 30th July a dark thrush sized bird was flushed off the forest floor while investigating the forest interior at around 1100m on the Masohi-Sawai/Wahai road on the Sawai side of the pass. The bird flew away very close to the ground and could not be relocated. It is recommended that searches in such habitat should not be neglected by visiting birders assuming that the species' habitat requirements are well known.

Fawn-breasted Thrush (*Zoothera machiki*)

Recorded on two occasions in the same patch of forest near Lorulun farm on Yamdena once on 23rd July and again on 24th July when a bird perched out in the open on a fallen log giving unexpectedly stunning views.

Rufous-sided Gerygone (*Gerygone dorsalis*)

Common and fairly conspicuous inside forest and at the edge, especially in viney tangles; recorded on all days between 21st to 26th July on Yamdena near Lorulun Farm and in forest patches on the road to Lermatang.

Tanimbar Bush-warbler (*Cettia carolinae*)

First found in a degraded forest patch in bamboo near the road to Lermatang on 22nd July. Found again in forest near Lorulun Farm on several occasions between 23rd to 26th July , mostly by voice.

Island Leaf-warbler (*Phylloscopus poliocephalus ceramensis*)

This species was common , particularly at the highest altitudes on the Masohi-Sawai/Wahai road especially in mixed flocks where it was encountered each day between 29th July to 2nd August. The taxonomy of this species group may warrant revision as there are many vocal and plumage differences between the various island populations in this region.

Tanimbar Flycatcher (*Ficedula riedeli*)

Split by Outlaw and Voelker (2006) from Rufous-chested Flycatcher (*F. dumetoria*) this species was found twice inside forest , once by a stream , in forest near Lorulun Farm on Yamdena on 23rd July.

Cinnamon –chested Flycatcher

(*Ficedula buruensis siebersii*) One was found near the forest floor near Ohoililur beach resort on Kai Kecil on 27th July.

(*Ficedula buruensis ceramensis*)

An adult with an attendant juvenile bird was found in roadside forest understory at around 900m on the Sawai side of the pass on the Masohi-Sawai/Wahai road on 1st August. The *ceramensis* race was observed to be noticeably darker slaty-grey than *siebersii*.

Loetoe Monarch (*Monarchus castus*)

Quite common on Yamdena inside forest and at forest edge , often in small mixed flocks. 2 on 22nd July in degraded forest near the road to Lermatang and another on 26th in a forest patch by the roadside there , and one in forest edge near Lorulun Farm on 24th July.

Black-bibbed Monarch (*Monarchus mundus*)

Quite common both inside forest and at the edge on Yamdena found on all dates between 23rd and 26th July at both sites visited (see above).

White-tailed Monarch (*Monarchus leucurus*)

Common on Kai Kecil in both relatively untouched and heavily disturbed forest with two in secondary roadside vegetation at Defur on 26th July , 10+ near Ohoililur beach resort in relatively undisturbed forest and two in roadside secondary forest near Taman Anggrek on 27th July.

Cinnamon-tailed Fantail (*Rhipidura fusciorufa*)

Common on Yamdena in all wooded habitats investigated ; even in very degraded habitat near forest patches. Usually found singly and very conspicuous , but also found in small mixed species flocks. Observed on all dates between 22nd to 26th July.

Streak-breasted Fantail (*Rhipidura dedemi*)

Common along the Masohi-Sawai/Wahai road in Seram from around 600m up to the highest points along the road , up to 1260m. Found both in pairs and as members of mixed species flocks , in fact all such flocks encountered contained this species.

Long-tailed Fantail (*Rhipidura opistherythra*)

Uncommon inside forest on Yamdena. Much less common than *R. fusciorufa* and unlike the latter seemingly confined to the forest interior. One on 23rd July and another on 24th July in two different forest patches near Lorulun Farm.

Golden-bellied Flycatcher (*Microeca hemixantha*)

Fairly common at the forest edge ; one on 24th July near Lorulun Farm and another on 26th July on the road to Lermatang. On 24th July several were seen at dusk well away by the roadside well away from the forest edge on a road some 15km north west of Saumlaki.

Island Whistler (*Pachycephala phaionotus*)

Only one bird seen in limestone forest near Ohoililur beach resort on 27th July.

Wallacean Whistler (*Pachycephala arctitorquis*)

Common and conspicuous especially at forest edge on Yamdena. Regularly encountered in forest edge at Lorulun Farm.

Tanimbar Starling (*Aplonis crassa*)

Quite common with several seen at the edge of degraded forest on 22nd July near the road to Lermatang. Seen on several occasions in forest near Lorulun farm and observed nesting inside the Lorulun Farm compound in a palm tree.

Long-crested Myna (*Basilornis corythaix*)

Uncommon but conspicuous and generally seen in small groups of up to 3 birds perching up on exposed snags at forest edge. Up to five on 29th July in degraded forest on the outskirts of Masohi ; 3 on 1st August near the Sawai turn off.

Seram Friarbird (*Philemon subcorniculatus*)

Common and conspicuous from the lowlands up to 1100m+ ; often in small groups up to 4 individuals.

Black-faced Friarbird (*Philemon moluccensis plumigenis*)

Common and fairly conspicuous on Yamdena with birds recorded on all dates between 21st to 26th July. Often in small groups (see Black-eared Oriole above).

Olive Honeyeater (*Lichmera argentauris*)

Found on Lusaolate island , 30 minutes by boat from Besi village east of Sawai. Perhaps 20 pairs observed on 3rd August ; very noisy and conspicuous. Some birds observed flying out to sea of which a few returned to the island but at least one seemed to continue out towards the mainland where it should be looked for near the shoreline. This species was not found on two islands closer to Sawai called Radjah and Sawai islands where much of the original vegetation has been converted by human activity.

Scaly-breasted Honeyeater (*Lichmera squamata*)

Very common on Yamdena where found on all dates between 22nd to 26th July. Particularly common and vocal at forest edge but also found in the forest interior.

Seram Honeyeater (*Lichmera monticola*)

Fairly common but at low density at the highest points , 1100 – 1260m on the Masohi – Sawai/Wahai road with 2 on 30th July and up to 5 on 2nd August.

Drab Honeyeater (*Myzomela blasii*)

Uncommon but difficult to identify with certainty unless a close view can be obtained and so probably overlooked at times. One identified at 1100m on 30th July and another on 1st August near the Sawai turn off.

Wakolo Myzomela (*Myzomela wakoloensis*)

Quite common in roadside forest at the highest levels of the Masohi –Sawai/Wahai road between 110-1260m. Most often seen in mixed flocks with up to 10 birds on 30th July.

Banda Myzomela (*Myzomela boiei*)

Seen as singles mostly in bare treetops at Lorulun farm on 21st and 23rd July.

Ashy Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum vulneratum*)

Common on both Ambon and Seram. Mostly in treetops singly and in pairs ; regularly in mixed flocks from the lowlands up to 1260m on Seram.

Great Kai White-eye (*Zosterops grayi*)

Readily found in forest patches from the main road running from the port of Elat inland on Kai Besar. Several found in pairs at various sites on 28th July in the middle of the day.

Little Kai White-eye (*Zosterops uropygialis*)

Common in both relatively undisturbed and heavily disturbed secondary forest patched on Kai Kecil. Usually found in pairs and recorded at Defur , Ohoililur and near Taman Anggrek on 26th and 27th July.

Seram White-eye (*Zosterops stalker*)

Uncommon. Found generally in pairs in mixed flocks dominated by Mountain White-eyes (*Z. montanus*) between 600-900m on 1st and 2nd August.

Ambon White-eye (*Zosterops kuehnii*)

On 20th July a pair was found in roadside forest patches on the road to Tulehu village inland from Tulehu port.

(Rufescent Dark-eye (*Tephrozosterops stalker*))

This species was conspicuously absent despite extensive searching on both sides of the pass on the Masohi-Sawai/Wahai road , particularly between 600-900m its preferred altitudinal range (Coates and Bishop 1997). This species seems particularly low density throughout its range and was found to be very uncommon also by other birdwatchers (Rheindt in litt).

Grey –hooded White-eye (*Lophozosterops pinaiae*)

One bird only was found in a large mixed flock at 1100m+ on the Masohi-Sawai/Wahai road. The bird was silent and inconspicuous and was seen to probe branches in a nuthatch –like manner.

Please contact me for any comments , queries or advice about travelling in these areas

Mike Catsis

mikecatsis@hotmail.com

References

BirdLife International 2004. [Chrysococcyx crassirostris](#). [2006 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species](#).

Clements, J , F. The Clements checklist of birds of the world, 6th ed (2007) Cornell U.Press.

Coates , B and Bishop, K D (1997): *A Guide to the Birds of Wallacea, Sulawesi, the Moluccas and Lesser Sunda Islands, Indonesia*. Dove Publications, Alderley, Queensland, Australia

Outlaw , D.C., Voelker, G. 2006. Systematics of *Ficedula* flycatchers (Muscicapidae): A molecular reassessment of a taxonomic enigma. *Molecular Phylogenetics and Evolution* Vol. 41:1, pp 118-126

Payne RB. 2005. *The Cuckoos*. Oxford University Press

Poulsen. M.K. 2004. The distribution and status of Lazuli Kingfisher *Halcyon lazuli*. *Forktail* 20: 21-24.

Stattersfield, A.J., M.J. Crosby, A.J. Long, and D.C. Wege. 1998. Endemic Bird Areas of the World: Priorities for Biodiversity Conservation. *Birdlife Conservation Series* No. 7: