

Eastern Indonesia: Sulawesi, Halmahera, west Irian Jaya, Ambon and Tanimbars August - September 2004

by Jon Hornbuckle and Ian Merrill.

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Indonesia is in the top league of countries for world birding, with many endemics and threatened birds, but a lot of time and effort is required to do justice to it. A huge archipelago, 5000 km in length, the logistics of travel are often difficult and there are relatively few English-speakers. This was my fourth visit, a classic birding trip in many ways, and will certainly not be my last as the rewards, as ever, fully justified the aggravation.

We visited Eastern Indonesia as two parties, combining for part of the trip: MK and IM did Sulawesi first then met SC, JH and BW (who visited Sulawesi in 2001) for Halmahera and West Irian Jaya, leaving S, J and B to do Ambon and the Tanimbars last. The bulk of this report is an evocative account by Ian Merrill of his trip, after which is a map of eastern Indonesia. This is followed by my log of the last 10 days on Ambon and Yamdena in the Tanimbars, at almost the southeastern extremity of the Indonesian Archipelago, only 150 km from the coast of Australia. This region is rarely visited, but gave relatively easy, rewarding and trouble-free birding, once we had overcome the difficulties of reaching Ambon and booking flights.

As the following accounts contain much detail about the trip, I am just giving recommendations for birding in the region, rather than a conventional report. Note that the main problem is the unreliability of flights, so it is best to have a couple of days to spare for delays and cancellations. The cheapest deals are obtained by visiting the airline office a few days beforehand as the staff seem to have the flexibility to offer good rates then for flights on competitive routes.

Sulawesi and Halmahera

Fly to Manado: Garuda/ Malaysian AS (who code share) are likely to be the cheapest - Rowland at Steamond 0207 7308646 gave good service - with Singapore Airlines the best. Use an agent in Manado to book internal flights and vehicles; we found Safari Tours and Travel (URL: www.manadosafaris.com E-mail: info@manadosafaris.com) to be very good but there are others, eg see http://www.surfbirds.com/trip_report.php?id=598.

Ask the agent to book one of the best guides at Tangkoko, ie Freddy or Untu. If you want a good bird-guide for anywhere else on Sulawesi, the best bet is to take one of them with you as the guides elsewhere are not so knowledgeable about the birds.

For Lore Lindu it is worth using one of the local guides based in Palu, Royke Mantana lorelindu@yahoo.com or Darwin Sumang danau_lindu@yahoo.com probably being the best. They will arrange transport, food and accommodation, as well as showing you where the best sites are.

If you have the time, Sangihe and Talaud, islands north of Sulawesi, are worth visiting - there are some flights and ferries there from Manado but you will need at least a week to do them both.

The only flights to Halmahera are Manado - Kao by Merpati, but they are unreliable, being the first flights to be cancelled if there is a shortage of aircraft. There are daily flights to and from Ternate and it's an easy boat-journey from there to Sidangoli. This is a good base for seeing most of the birds,

around KBP, but it's a long journey from there to the better forest across the bay on the east side. The two options for bird-guides here are Iskandar Abdullah and Anu. Iskander is often busy with surveys; Anu knows the birds but we were disappointed with him - to be fair he probably was seriously ill, having had a motor-bike crash which put him in hospital for some days not long previously, we later heard. He and his wife farm at Labi Labi where there is pristine forest containing a big accessible Standardwing lek. To get there, it will probably be necessary to hire a boat in Tobelo, a 4 hr car ride from Sidangoli, as few public boats cross the bay. Unless you are in a large party or have lots of cash, the boat will be flimsy so the 3-4 hr journey should be made in the morning when the sea is likely to be at its calmest. Foli is a village further south on the east side of the bay and the logged forest here holds Purple Roller which has not been seen at KBP or Labi Labi in recent times. It can be reached by boat from Labi labi or from north of Kao (which is halfway between Sidangoli and Tobelo).

West Irian Jaya

As there is a daily flight from Manado to Sorong and an excellent trip organiser in Kris Tindige papuabirdclub@hotmail.com, it is easy to add the islands of Batanta and Sulawati to the itinerary. We did have to negotiate with Kris to agree an acceptable price for our tour. He will also arrange visits to other sites on Irian, ie the Arfaks and Nimbokrang, but not to Lake Habbema at present as the Indonesian army are refusing access to the "new" road to Habbema. You could walk there on the old trail but it's a hell of a trek. It is possible to fly directly to Makassar from Sorong, which may save time when flying home.

Two or three days on Batanta should be enough to see the incredible Wilson's Bird-of-Paradise but the awesome Western Crowned-Pigeon is now difficult to find on Sulawati, probably due to hunting and logging.

Ambon and Tanimbars

To see birds further east in the Moluccas, you have to fly to Ambon, via Makassar. This has been a dangerous business till recently but all is calm now and it may be that direct Manado-Ambon flights will be reinstated. The Tanimbars are easy to visit and bird, although you may have to wait a day or two for a flight unless your agent can get through to Merpati on Ambon on the phone and get your name on the hand-written list for the chosen day. The Kai islands hold 4 endemics and are relatively near the Tanimbars but the only regular way of travelling between the two island groups is by the weekly ferry which takes 36 hours. You can fly back to Ambon from Tual on the Kais.

The other two main destinations are Seram and Buru; there are flights and ferries to both from Ambon but most of the endemics are montane birds requiring some serious trekking and camping to see.

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ITINERARY**MK & IM**

- Aug 22** Arrive in Manado
Aug 23 Travel to Lore Lindu NP with stop at Bantimurung Forest, Makassar
Aug 24-26 Lore Lindu NP
Aug 27 Lore Lindu NP, drive to Palu
Aug 28 Fly to Manado, drive to Tangkoko Batuanus NP
Aug 29-30 Tangkoko Batuanus NP
Aug 31 Tangkoko Batuanus NP, drive to Dumoga Bone NP
Sept 1 Dumoga Bone NP
Sept 2 Dumoga Bone NP, drive to Manado - meet up with SC, JH and BW

ALL

- Sept 3** Travel to Sidangoli, Halmahera
Sept 4 Kali Batu Putih, drive to Tobelo, abort boat trip to Labi Labi, drive back to Sidangoli
Sept 5-6 Kali Batu Putih
Sept 7 Kali Batu Putih, boat to Ternate
Sept 8 Fly to Sorong via Manado, met by Kris Tindige, visit Makbon Road
Sept 9 Boat to Wai Lebeb, Batanta
Sept 10 Batanta
Sept 11 Batanta, visit Sulawati
Sept 12 Sulawati, boat to Sorong

MK & IM

- Sept 13** Intimpura Logging Trail and Makbon Road
Sept 14 Fly to Manado
Sept 15 Fly to Jakarta, visit Muara Angke Nature Reserve, fly home

SC, JH and BW

- Sept 13** Fly to Makassar
Sept 14 Visit Bantimurung Forest, fly to Ambon
Sept 15 Fly to Saumlaki, Tanimbars, drive to Lorulun Farm
Sept 16-18 Lorulun Farm
Sept 19 Lorulun Farm, drive to Saumlaki
Sept 20 Fly to Ambon, visit Hila
Sept 21 Hila, fly to Manado via Makassar
Sept 22 SC & BW visit Tangkoko Batuanus NP, JH flies to Singapore
Sept 23 JH flies to Manila, SC & BW fly home

The Sulawesi Chainsaw Massacre - Ian Merrill**Sulawesi, Halmahera and western Irian Jaya, 21st August to 16th September****Saturday 21st / Sunday 22nd August**

Heathrow to Kuala Lumpur and then Kuala Lumpur to Jakarta with Malaysian Airways; so far so good. With three hours to kill at Jakarta, Martin Kennewell and I vacate the bustling airport in favour of a couple of hours birding.

Having never before set foot on Java we are in hope of a few surprises. It soon becomes obvious, however, that beyond the busy car parks and imposing bronze statues lies little more than expanses of

ornamental parkland with manicured lawns and very little vegetation. It's 11.30 and we wander through the intense tropical heat in a very lethargic and jetlagged manner.

Javan Munia and Scarlet-headed Flowerpecker are the surprise highlights of a small bagful of species that are found sheltering from the scorching sun, beside lanes packed with horn-honking traffic. Satisfied with our afternoon's work we board our connecting Garuda flight to Manado, Sulawesi, at 16.30. It's an hour late and very much a taste of things to come in the course of the fourteen connecting flights to be employed over the next three-and-a-half weeks.

Two hours later and we are descending towards the bright lights of Manado. The large city is built beside the Celebes Sea, close to the tip of the north-eastern 'finger' of Sulawesi. A short taxi-ride delivers us at the rather plush waterfront-located Formosa Hotel, where Jeremy Barnes warmly greets us in an American accent and with a firm handshake. We have been corresponding with Jeremy, the American ex-pat diver who runs Safari Tours and Travel (URL: www.manadosafaris.com E-mail: info@manadosafaris.com), for some weeks in order to smooth the logistic nightmare of Indonesian internal travel.

Over a cold Bintang we run through the umpteenth version of our proposed itinerary and take receipt of a wad of air tickets. Jeremy and his associates prove to be extremely knowledgeable and an invaluable help during the trials of the next few weeks; a calm English-speaking voice, always a phone-call away, is essential in this land of rescheduling and cancellations.

The original plan was to travel around Sulawesi and Halmahera for the entire duration of our three-and-a-half week trip. Unfortunately Jon Hornbuckle has made us a proposition we cannot refuse in Western Irian Jaya and as a consequence we are about to attempt to squeeze a two-and-a-half week itinerary into just eleven days in Sulawesi, before the rest of our group fly out to meet us; the next week-and-a-half is going to be very interesting!

Monday 23rd August

By daylight the Formosa Hotel reveals itself to be located on a palm-fringed waterfront, with views over a flat-calm Celebes Sea. Our taxi ride to the airport is interrupted by a forced stop in honour of the daily rising of the red-and-white bicoloured Indonesian flag at the army headquarters. Manado is a colourful leafy city, whose single-storey houses bear an obvious Chinese influence. In the suburbs, trees and gardens break up the concrete and tarmac, while the whole scene is set against a dramatic background of dark volcanic peaks. Glossy Swiflets accompany us on our journey, with hundreds of their tiny bat-like forms feeding low over the streets.

Our arrival at the Mandala Airlines check-in desk is greeted by rather distressing news; although I have a seat on the flight to Makassar MK is, for some reason, on standby and without a reserved seat. An anxious half-hour follows, before we get the thumbs-up and are allowed to check in our bags. Manado Airport is a fine modern structure, with a departure lounge dominated by a huge stained glass window depicting local culture and landmarks, including sharks and a Knobbed Hornbill. Ironically a man next to us in the queue is clutching a traditional feathered head-dress that incorporates the macabre dried remains of a Knobbed Hornbill's head; let's hope that the next Hornbill we encounter is a live one! We are very taken by the smiling, helpful and friendly nature of everyone we meet in the airport, a theme to be carried pretty much throughout the duration of our travels and a fine reflection of the friendliness of the Indonesian people as a whole.

At 07.00 we board a dilapidated Boeing 737 and head southwest. Our final destination is the city of Palu but flight schedules dictate that we must travel via Makassar, the main city of southern Sulawesi and transport hub of the island.

The daylight flight gives a great lesson in the topography of Sulawesi. The coastal lowlands are all cleared of native forest and planted in gridded rows of plantation coconut palms. Close to sea level the land is developed for rice cultivation, and from the air the paddies form colourful blocks of crops at various stages of production; shining water of recently flooded land, light greens of growing crops or yellow-brown of rice ready for harvest. Highland areas appear to maintain the dark green hue of forest cover, though it is doubtful whether any areas have escaped at least selective logging.

Skirting the intricate coastline of deep bays and pointed promontories we can pick out the white ribbons of coral sand which, in the sheltered bays, clearly demarcate the dark green forest from deep-blue ocean. Finally, our descent to Makassar provides spectacular views of the forested limestone pinnacles that jut up steeply from the mosaic of low coastal rice paddies.

We have calculated that our three-hour slot, before the connecting flight to Palu departs, will just give us enough time to pull in a visit to the nearby Bantimurung Forest. With just a brief bout of taxi-haggling we vacate the airport to weave a route through the bustling hordes of market stalls, rickshaws and horse-drawn carts.

After passing the minarets and rounded concrete domes of numerous mosques we find ourselves in a landscape of flat rice-growing plains. These lowlands are bisected by straight roads that run parallel to irrigation canals and are dotted with Javan Pond Herons which prove to be the ubiquitous birds of this habitat. The local population, who tend the crops, don the woven pointed hats synonymous with work in the paddies. Houses here are constructed atop timber stilts and drying or bagged rice lines every road.

Soon we reach the landmark of the rather grotesque concrete ape, a huge whitewashed statue that bridges the entrance to Bantimurung. Beyond this point we pass close to the limestone pinnacles that rise above the flat plain and enter an area of remnant forest and cultivation between a string of villages. Picking a suitable patch of relatively intact forest we commence our first serious Sulawesi birding.

Although it's late in the morning we rapidly come across a good selection of birds including Chestnut and Black-faced Munias, a colourful set of Yellow-sided and Grey-sided Flowerpeckers, Pale-blue Monarch and Sulawesi Drongo. We have to wait for the last birds of the morning to find our target, however, a pair of neatly-spectacled endemic Black-ringed White-eyes that are restricted to southern-most Sulawesi.

Our return to the airport is greeted with the latest delay saga and it's 16.00, two-and-a-half hours behind schedule, when we finally depart for Palu on the Bouraq flight. Our in-flight meal is delivered at record-breaking speed, with cardboard boxes literally flung down the length of the plane. Catering consists of a strange assortment of confectionary, including a 'Victoria sponge' whose filling is spicy gristle instead of cream!

As we near Palu the rather flat terrain below gives way to a series of high forested hills, below a fantastic display of billowing cumulo-nimbus cloud. Our descent takes us past contrasting dry deforested lower slopes and the now-familiar patchwork of bright green paddy fields, before touching down at the small airport where our guide Royke Mantana *should* greet us.

Royke, or 'Roy', has been booked in advance over the Internet to arrange our logistics over the next five days in northwestern Sulawesi and hopefully show us some birds. He turns up forty-five minutes late, just as we are considering a taxi. This late arrival means that we have virtually no birding time before dark, although a quick stop at a riverbed on the far side of Palu produces a consolation Yellow-bellied White-Eye and Savannah Nightjar.

The next three hours are spent on the winding road south to Lore Lindu National Park. We slowly climb uphill, crossing various watercourses which all seem to have had their bridges recently washed away! Little can be discerned of our surroundings in the darkness and it a great relief to arrive at our destination, the village of Wuasa, at 21.30.

We arrive at our base for the next four nights, the Rhmah Makan Sendi Loseman and find Swedish birders Max Jensen and Michel Bauer awaiting our arrival. After a quick debrief with our new friends, already familiar from e-mailed correspondence, we dine on a fine array of luke-warm vegetables washed down with a decidedly warm Bintang!

Our recently built room seems to be constructed from recycled orange boxes, with timber walls as thin as paper. We share our lodgings with a number of spiders whose leg-span is far in excess of a human hand, but by now we are ready for any mattress that will support us!

Tuesday 24th August

An 04.00 alarm, hasty breakfast and 04.30 departure begin our day. Half an hour of winding tarmac roads deliver us at the base of the famous Anaso Trail, the only means of access to the fantastic high-altitude forest that is 'protected' by the 2500 km² Lore Lindu National Park.

Six of us plus kit are crammed into the short-wheelbase Toyota Landcruiser, and as we commence the ascent on the precariously steep and uneven trail it seems like reaching the summit is a highly unlikely scenario. The large engine and raised suspension do us proud however, and we bump relentlessly upwards, past huge gulleys where large portions of the Anaso Trail have simply been washed away.

Our arrival at the summit coincides perfectly with the dawning of the day. The sky is clear deep blue and the scenery fantastic, with steep hillsides covered in beautiful dwarf moss-forest. Wisps of lichen are draped over gnarled braches and a soft carpet of moss gives every step a bounce.

Birds are all around and virtually every one is a tick! Sulawesi Leaf-Warbler, Greater Streaked Honeyeater, Streak-headed Dark-Eye, Island Flycatcher and a flypast pair of Golden-mantled Racquet-Tails all appear in a head-spinning flurry of dawn activity. Both Yellow-flanked and Yellow-vented Whistlers, dazzling Citrine Flycatcher and sleek Cerulean Cuckoo-Shrikes come next. Brush Cuckoo, a wonderful Red-eared Fruit-Dove, Mountain Serins, Yellow-and-green Lorikeet and a handsome Blue-fronted Flycatcher all precede breakfast. This really is phenomenal birding!

Close to the summit of the Anaso Trail we dine on banana sandwiches, washed down with coffee as thick as engine oil. We have been travelling for three full days to reach our first birding site! It sounds implausible, but accessing the far-flung corners of Indonesia really is that laborious; it's a good job there are plenty of birds here!

Upon commencing our decent, on foot, we flush a pair of nightjars from their roost site adjacent to the track. One alights again close by and we are ecstatic to see that it is a Satanic Nightjar. This enigmatic bird, which was lost to the World for nearly a hundred years and presumed extinct, is currently only known from Lore Lindu National Park.

It is not only incredibly rare, but also outstandingly beautiful. Upon close inspection the dark sooty plumage is intricately marked with rich rufous and grey, and cut by a large sandy collar. And a very close inspection we have too! The fearless bird sits tight until we are gathered just 30 cm from its chosen roost site. When we approach too closely our bird opens his huge pink gape in threat and occasionally stretches out his long black wings; a truly Satanic and totally amazing sight!

While we spend time photographing the nightjar from every angle British birders Rob Hutchinson and James Eaton appear on the scene. We are amazed to find that they hail from the English East Midlands and just a stones-throw from our own stomping grounds; the World can be a very small place!

The descent of the upper section of the Trail produces Sulawesi Hawk-Eagle, Mountain White-eye, Grey-headed Imperial Pigeon and a stunning pair of Purple-bearded Bee-Eaters. These beauties are nesting in a sandy bank right beside the trail and feed from low perches to display a subtle combination of purple-blue head and 'beard', green back and chestnut tail with long central extension.

Rusty-bellied Fantail comes next and we finish the day with a fantastic finale of Fiery-browed Myna. A small flock of this stunning species are watched feeding amongst the moss and epiphytes of a trackside tree as banks of mist drift in and out. This large endemic starling is an absolute dazzler; charcoal grey with a dull green back, it shows a contrasting lemon-yellow rear-end and dazzling orange eyebrows.

After a bumpy descent of the lower reaches of the Trail we return to Wuasa to dine and log the successes of the day.

Wednesday 25th August

Today daybreak is witnessed at Kalimpa'a Lake. Close to the base of the Anaso Trail, this site consists of an area of fairly intact mid-altitude forest centred on a small, picturesque pool.

The variation in altitude produces a very different resident avifauna and a welcome flurry of new birds. Skulking Chestnut-backed Bush-Warblers, Yellow-billed Malkoha and Dark-eared Honeyeater precede the impressive pied Piping Crow, which moves through the treetops on short, rapid wing-beats.

A handsome White-bellied Imperial Pigeon puffs his chest as he lets out a deep resounding call and nearby a pair of wonderful White-backed Woodswallows hawk insects from the vantage point of a tall dead limb. Sulawesi Serpent-Eagle and Blue-backed Parrot fly past, before expletives announce the discovery of a fantastic turquoise-crowned Purple-winged Roller.

Black-crowned White-eye, an overhead party of Purple Needletails and a feeding party of *Malia* maintain non-stop action as we explore the forest lining the main road above the Lake. The last species resembles an olive-yellow version of a New World foliage-gleaner, as the group forage through epiphytes and tangles of dead leaves.

Our morning is concluded with an exciting bird-flock which adds Sulawesi Myzomela, a very smart pair of Pygmy Cuckoo-Shrikes, Sulawesi Woodpecker and the monstrous Ashy Woodpecker to our list. What a morning! While Royke prepares lunch we check the skies above the lake for raptors and are rewarded with a pair of displaying Barred Honey-Buzzards. As we consume a large plate of rice and eggs Royke spots some movement nearby and directs us onto a Small Sparrowhawk that has alighted on a mossy bough. This crackling little endemic *accipiter* proceeds to devour its reptilian meal in front of our eyes while we take a break from our vegetarian cuisine!

P.m. birding sees us back along the main road and later beside the lake. Spot-tailed Goshawk, Gould's Bronze Cuckoo, Short-tailed Starling and Ornate Lorikeet are all new birds; it's been quite a day in terms of increasing our list of Sulawesi endemics.

Back at Wuasa the usual fare of fish and vegetables topped off with a warm Bintang precedes a decidedly unproductive hour of stumbling around playing a Sulawesi Scops Owl tape. Never mind; plenty more nights in Sulawesi.

Thursday 26th August

Wuasa Forest is an area of lowland habitat within Lore Lindu National Park, located just fifteen minutes from our accommodation. At dawn there is a heavy mist hanging over the area, giving an eerie appearance to the skeletal remains of huge trees that flank the access trail. It is apparent that Lore Lindu is a National Park in name alone and that this status has done nothing to stop the encroachment of loggers and subsistence farmers into the superb forest which it is intended to protect.

It really is a depressing sight, as we walk through the shattered remains of giant trees in an attempt to find some intact forest. Fortunately some good birds are still present in the severely degraded habitat and we find exquisite Black-naped Fruit-Doves, Sulawesi Blue-Flycatcher, Grey-cheeked Green Pigeon and Sulawesi Cicadabird. Moluccan Swiftlets patrol the recently-made clearing and Sulawesi Triller plus fluorescent-green Large Sulawesi Hanging-Parrots feed in the few remaining trees.

After laboriously picking our way between recently felled trunks and boughs we finally reach something more like a forest, though even in this section piles of newly-sawn timber indicate that selective logging has taken place. Black Sunbird and a group of Sulawesi Babblers take shelter here, but after just a few hundred metres we find ourselves in another clear-felled block. The devastation here is so recent that we are walking on freshly felled leaves and epiphytes. Fires are still smouldering and chainsaws buzz in the background, drowning out the birdsong.

With sad irony we use a recently-felled trunk as a vantage point from which to view our first pair of Knobbed Hornbills that feed in a nearby fruiting tree. They are awesome birds, with the male showing off a bright blue wattle of bare skin at his throat and a fantastic red knob on top of a huge yellow bill. A small flock of Sulawesi Crested Mynas fly through the veil of wood-smoke that fills the clearing and briefly alight to show their frilled headdresses.

Wuasa portrays a dismal scene and although we have amassed a fair bagful of species we return to the road, now below a hot mid-morning sun, in a rather sombre manner. There really does seem little hope for this section of the 'National Park'. Spotted Kestrel, an open-country species, hunts beside the jeep in an area where forest had stood not many months before.

After a quick lunch it's time for a return visit to the Anaso Trail, to attempt to track down a few remaining target species. In the course of the bumpy ascent we learn that Rob and James, still camping on the mountain, have seen *Geomalia* a number of times at a certain spot on the trail. As the biggest outstanding omission from our lists we commence a seated vigil at the allotted spot.

Four-and-a-half hours later and it's starting to get dark. We have sore bottoms, a liberal covering of chigger bites and no *Geomalia*. Such are the joys of chasing other people's birds. A certain highlight is a male Greater Shortwing that has briefly fed on the trail, but our descent is conducted in a very subdued manner.

At the base of the trail we bid farewell to the Swedish contingent, who are flying out of Palu in the morning, while MK and I return to Wuasa for our final night.

Friday 27th August

Surely a *Geomalia* would feed on the track at first light? Inevitably first light sees us back at the allotted spot on the Anaso Trail. As does mid-morning. As does lunch-time. After much debate we decide to cut our losses and depart. Our time wasted on the limited section of the trail has cost us the opportunity to look for a number of other birds and highlights how chasing other people's birds can often be totally counter-productive. The jeep is very quiet during the descent.

Our route back to Palu takes us past a settlement within Lore Lindu National Park called Dongi Dongi. The area features in many historic birding trip reports and these include long lists of the species once present. Things are now very different in the area. The linear settlement consists of huts, constructed on timber stilts, which line the road. Thatched roofs top walls made of newly-sawn wooden planks. Roy tells us that it is unwise to stop in this area, as the locals can be hostile; there certainly seems to be a strange and uneasy atmosphere to the settlement, with an absence of the normally ubiquitous Indonesian smile.

Although we are still within the bounds of the National Park the forest has been totally ravaged across the whole valley floor in the vicinity of the settlement. On the distant valley-sides huge tree trunks are strewn in a haphazard manner. Fires are smouldering all around, with large expanses of newly charred earth much in evidence. The whole area bears a resemblance to a battlefield.

Large areas are planted with bananas and other subsistence crops, with dead or dying isolated trees the sole evidence of the former forest cover. Surprisingly, a few species of birds are clinging on in the hostile environment and we find both White-necked and Finch-billed Mynas perched in these sorry-looking remnants of the forest.

Deforestation means that the Dongi Dongi River now experiences huge fluctuations in water level during times of storm and a string of recently demolished bridges are testament to this. We are amazed to see that one huge steel structure has been washed 200 metres downstream by the force of the water. It has been replaced by a makeshift crossing of battered planks and we have to pay a shifty-looking group of card-playing minders for the privilege of using the same!

Leaving the uplands behind, we return to the land of rice fields that cover the wet lowlands. In one small settlement a huge funeral entourage that is sweeping down the main thoroughfare halts our progress. It is headed by a formation of mopeds, the riders of which are gripping colourful floral wreaths. Next comes a group of twenty-five young men who are supporting the timber coffin on long bamboo poles, with an open-backed van of black-clad mourners bringing up the rear.

A final bout of birding produces Barred Buttonquail, flocks of Pale-headed Munias, and Uniform Swiftlets overhead. Our return to Palu takes us past clumps of tall palms which are dotted amongst a deep green sea of rice paddies and set against a backdrop of dark angular peaks, all framed by a salmon-pink sunset.

After checking into the pleasant Rima Garden Hotel we bid our farewells to Royke. His knowledge of the area and its more common bird species has been very useful, though not entirely indispensable at times. (Royke Mantana E-mail: lorelindu@yahoo.com)

It's nice to sit down to hot food and an ice-cold Bintang, with which we plan our tactics for the next leg of the trip.

Saturday 28th August

Our 07.15 flight from Palu to Makassar departs a mere thirty-five minutes late. The Makassar to Manado leg actually leaves the tarmac on schedule; Lion Air wins the prize of being the most reliable internal carrier to date! When the occupant of the seat next to MK begins to read a book on 'The Mammals of Papua New Guinea' we raise our eyebrows. When the book's owner turns out to be Kris Tindige, with whom we have arranged our travel in Irian Jaya, we cannot believe the coincidence!

Naturally we spend the next hour grilling Mr Tindige in order to secure every possible morsel of information that may assist in our forthcoming travels. Kris is more than happy to oblige and we part company at Manado firm friends, eagerly awaiting our reunion in Sorong in a couple of week's time.

Our taxi, pre-arranged through Safari Tours and Travel, awaits our arrival and it takes just an hour-and-a-half to whisk us east to the coast and Tangkoko National Park that protects a remnant area of coastal and montane forest. We receive a friendly welcome at Mama Roo's Homestay, with Mama Roo herself showing us to the basic but clean room which will be our home for the next three nights.

We have arranged to reunite with Michel Bauer at Tangkoko, and not wanting to waste a moment we all set out under the scorching sun into the scrubby secondary forest that lies on the perimeter of the National Park. We have a ranger by the name of Freddy as our guide, renowned as the site's premier bird-finder, plus his son Ogi who is apparently learning his father's skills. The softly spoken Freddy turns out to be a skilled and reliable bird guide in the course of his employ.

Birding is predictably hard work as we sweat our way through the dry scrub and into mature forest. Here the terrain is slightly undulating, still dry and relatively open, with the large-butressed trees being quite widely spaced. First new bird is Pied Cuckoo-Shrike, rapidly followed by an excellent Lilac Kingfisher which perches in a low bush beside the track. It sports a long red bill and fierce red eye, though finding something which one could describe as 'lilac' in its plumage requires a little imagination! A pair of Yellow-breasted Racquet-tails performs a fly-past before Freddy pulls another ace out of the hat when he locates a fantastically camouflaged Sulawesi Scops Owl roosting in a low bush.

Late in the evening we return to the secondary scrub on the Park's perimeter in order to try for nightbirds. In the last light of the day we have a fantastic view of Gunung Tangkoko, a pyramidal peak that reaches high above the surrounding lowland forest and is topped by a wispy vale of cloud that tumbles down the leeward side of the mountain. Silhouettes of Pterodactyl-like Knobbed Hornbills can be seen flying to roost, black outlines against a pale orange sky.

A full silver Moon is high above the bare trees that bound our chosen clearing when the first nightjars appear. They are not the desired Sulawesi Nightjar, but it's still great to get some close views of their Great-eared cousins. As we sweep the area with MK's huge spotlight, not dissimilar to those employed over London during the WWII Blitz, another larger and paler shape materializes. It's a Sulawesi Masked Owl, one of the Island's endemic *Tytos*, and a great finale to the afternoon.

Back at the Homestay we dine on huge helpings of Mama Roo's superb cuisine, some of the finest of our trip. Later, over a Bintang, we are able to interrogate Dutch birder Rinke Krol who kindly divulges useful details of his travels already completed in Indonesia.

Sunday 29th August

Setting out early to optimise our time in the cooler early-morning air, we commence our birding in the scrubby secondary forest on the Park's boundary. White-rumped Cuckoo-Shrike is our first new bird, followed rapidly by Small Sulawesi Hanging-Parrot. Old favourites in the form of Finch-billed Mynas, which move through the treetops in large flocks and Purple-winged Roller are good to see but it's soon hot and sweaty and birding becomes hard work.

Highlight of our morning is a toss-up between Green-backed Kingfisher and a troop of seventy Black Macaques. The former shows a brilliant combination of royal-blue head, grass-green back, rufous belly and bright red bill, perching close to the track to display its attributes at their best. The latter are a mobile and animated group of handsome black primates, with flat elongated faces and a wild Mohican haircut.

Final new bird is Black-billed Koel, before we return to Mama Roo's where we are invited to dine with the family who are celebrating the birthday of 'Mr Roo' with a fantastic spread of fine local food. Over lunch we meet Dr Marion Kotrba, curator of diptera at Munich Natural History Museum, and a

fascinating lady with a passion for stalk-eyed flies. We learn that Marion is in Sulawesi to study the reproductive behaviour of this amazing group of insects, which literally do have eyes on stalks!

After a brief siesta it's time for our assault on Gunung Tangkoko, where we intend to spend the night in order to get an early-morning crack at some of the species that only occur at higher altitude. Along with Freddy, Ogi and a hired porter we set off, with the mountain looking very high and very distant in the mid-afternoon heat! The walk is a tough one, initially incredibly hot and sweaty, and latterly very steep and exhausting. Birding is pretty-much forgotten as we struggle upwards, with the trees slowly decreasing in height as we climb and the wind increasing in strength, at times blowing through the canopy in noisy gusts.

Our 'campsite' is beside the track on what is just about the only area of relatively flat ground that we have come across on the steep-sided mountain. While Freddy and company erect the tent we venture uphill and are rewarded with a family party of Sulawesi Dwarf Hornbills, marvellous little black beasts with sulphur-yellow cheeks and delicately marked bills. In the fading light we consume our take-away dinner of rice neatly packaged in banana leaves, along with tasty chicken and vegetables, all courtesy of Mama Roo.

Nightbirds soon begin to call and taped playback soon entices a Sulawesi Scops Owl into a convenient perch, though sadly we fail to persuade a calling Ochre-bellied Hawk-Owl to do the same. As we possess sleeping bags it seems only fair that our guides have the luxury of the tent; we sleep in the open on a 'gorilla nest' of branches and leaves. This initially seems very cosy but we soon discover that there always seems to be a thicker branch in the most delicate of places! Never mind, though, it is fantastic to sleep under a huge full moon; it seems unnaturally bright and its illumination outlines every gnarled branch and epiphyte in the open canopy above our heads. What a view to end the day!

Monday 30th August

We set off uphill from the campsite at first light, scrambling around the steep slopes through the moss-draped dwarf forest. The trails are ill-defined and many have to be re-established by Freddy's sharp machete. Eventually we reach a ridge close to the summit where we are buffeted by a strong offshore breeze that whips at the long beards of pale grey lichen. The view is quite stunning, with the mossy boughs framing a turquoise seascape over the bay and offshore islands far below.

The dwarf forest is an incredible place. In sheltered valleys we walk over a deep mossy carpet past ancient trunks laden with ferns and epiphytes. Occasional clumps of beautiful white orchids have flowers shaped in a human form resembling those of our European Man Orchid, while the deep booming call of White-bellied Green-Pigeons echoes through the trees. Sadly our enjoyment of the site is slightly tempered by our inability to find a Scaly Kingfisher and we can't help being disappointed when we commence our mid-morning descent without a sniff of this scarce endemic.

By the time we reach Mama Roo's all that we have recorded of note is a pair of Yellow-breasted Racquet-tails; it's turning out to be one of those days. Thankfully Marion is on hand to entertain us after lunch, now with caged specimens of her amazing stalk-eyed flies.

Late in the afternoon we make a return trip to the forest, heading directly to the huge fig tree that is the focus of ecotourism with Tangkoko National Park. Before long, from deep inside the hollow trunk, the most amazing little creature appears. The endemic Spectral Tarsier is a tiny, long-tailed primate with a body little larger than a clenched fist. This is a traditional daytime roosting site and at dusk the tarsiers appear, to jump between low horizontal stems that they grip with minute bony fingers. Huge brown eyes indicate the endearing creature's nocturnal habits and we marvel as one independently adjusts the pitch and level of its radar-like ears. It's easily the 'bird' of the day!

When a jostling hoard of Italian tarsier-watchers appears we make a sharp exit. Tangkoko is the recognised site for Sulawesi Nightjar so after the scares and identification hang-ups experienced two nights previously we return to the secondary scrub for another try at this species. This time there are no false alarms and a fine male Sulawesi Nightjar proceeds to call to us as he displays diagnostic large white spots on wings and tail.

Another of Mama Roo's superb dinners is followed by more fly-talk and plenty of cold Bintangs with our new friend Dr Kotrba. MK even gets some video footage, no doubt the only record in existence, of the *Diopsis subnotata* stalk-eyed fly.

Tuesday 31st August

At 04.45 we take off our shoes and walk across coarse dark-brown volcanic sand to board a small canoe that rocks gently on the salty waters of the Lembeh Strait. The beach is just ten minutes walk from Mama Roo's and Freddy has arranged our transport the previous evening. The craft has a narrow wooden hull with flimsy timber outriggers, much as those on Hawaii Five-O!

A huge silver moon is high above the tall palms which fringe the beach as the engine of the canoe crackles into life. It is still pitch black and the shallow inshore waters are dotted with the reassuring glow of lights mounted on curious fishing platforms. These strange scaffold-like bamboo structures attract fish with lanterns before they are netted from below.

As we head south the sky begins to lighten and we can pick out the distinctive silhouettes of frigatebirds against the bright orange sunrise that is now sweeping over the vast eastern horizon. For half an hour we skirt the black volcanic rocks that make up the shoreline, flanked by dense forest that stretches all the way to the peak of the distant Gunung Tangkoko, above which the Moon now sits.

Further south the geology changes to limestone and steep pale cliffs rise from the sea on both the mainland and nearby Lembeh Island. Below the boat the crystal-clear water permits uninterrupted viewing of fantastic coral formations and brightly coloured fish; one can see why the area has a reputation for some of the best diving in the World.

Birding interest takes the form of Lesser Frigatebird, Great-billed Heron and a surprise Channel-billed Cuckoo, but the star of the morning is the large, endemic Black-billed Kingfisher which is found hunting from low branches which overhang the clear water. After finding our quarry we turn about, returning to our mooring where the light of day reveals a vivid scene of brightly painted canoes dragged onto the steep, black volcanic beach with a background of waving coconut palms.

After a round of good-byes to our friends at Mama Roo's and warm thanks to Freddy for all his help, we depart in a hired mini-bus for Manado, from where we will head west to Dumogo Bone. When our driver proudly displays the revolver in his glove-box we do not share his enthusiasm that this will make travel much safer!

Dog-lovers would not appreciate the freshly butchered canine joints that adorn the market stalls in one village through which we pass, but we are soon out of the conurbation and onto the Sulawesi Highway. This is the main arterial route that links Manado to Palu and ultimately Makassar. West of Manado the road winds along the line of the low coast, being well surfaced and fairly lightly trafficked.

In this area there is no natural vegetation remaining and hectare after hectare of coconut palms stretch inland to sprawl over the low hills. The tall trees are laden with fruit and we note how notches have been sliced into the tall pale grey trunks to ease climbing access at harvest. Regular coconut de-husking 'plants' are situated at the roadside, where groups of labourers gather to work their way

through mountains of harvested fruit. Nearby strips of coconut flesh are set to dry in the sun on purpose-built concrete pads.

Many of the small towns in the area have imposing catholic churches at their centre, testament to the predominant Christian faith in this region. Beyond the towns are isolated cemeteries that consist of odd assemblages of grotto-like memorials. Here concrete blocks are decorated with brightly-coloured bathroom tiles and sheltered by pitched tiled roofs as lasting legacies to the deceased.

As we skirt the large city of Kotamobagu we marvel at the local mutation of the motorcycle rickshaw. They are all fitted with ridiculously oversized hi-fi systems, massive speakers bidding to out-perform the opposing riders in a war of wattage; we fear that the schoolchildren they convey may be deposited at home with permanently damaged hearing!

Nearing our destination of Dumoga Bone National Park we pull over at a roadside pool that we find to be alive with birds. White-browed Crake, Dusky Moorhen and a pair a Sunda Teal are among the highlights, but a stunning adult Spotted Harrier which sets all other species diving for cover is the star of the stop.

Our next stop, at a recently flooded paddy next to the village of Toraut, produces no less than fifteen Buff-banded Rails and two Barred Rails on the same small area of mud. We whiteys are clearly a novelty here and virtually the entire village turns out onto the street for a better look. At one point we have a group of forty children queuing to check out the view through our telescope!

While we entertain the locals our driver, Ance, has his detective head on and when we return to the mini-bus he advises us that it is no longer safe to stay at Domoga Bone. Apparently we are in a gold mining area and the consequence of the sudden cash injection has been an increase in violence. Even the park rangers pull out of the area overnight and return to the safety of Kotamobagu. It's always difficult to know just how serious things really are, but Ance is adamant that we cannot safely sleep at the headquarters as planned, so we reluctantly make the long trek back to Kotamobagu.

After a search we find a semi-decent hotel and while-away the evening in the grotty room eating home-made tuna sandwiches and drinking warm Bintang. This is the life!

Wednesday 1st September

Not long after dawn we are back at Toraut. Here we have arranged to rendezvous with a local lad who claims to be able to guide us within Dumoga Bone and he eventually appears from a hut, rubbing sleep from his eyes. The National Park Headquarters is still deserted, but Blue-breasted Quail and Barred Rails certainly find the access road to their liking.

The Park itself begins on the far bank of a ten metre wide fast-flowing river. The rocks that form its bed are either slippery as glass or sharp as razors; in bare feet it's a real pleasure! Greatly relieved to have reached the opposite bank in one piece we set off into the forest, or at least we try to. It soon becomes apparent that the term 'National Park' is applied very loosely in this part of the world. Large blocks have been clear-felled and planted with subsistence crops. More sections have been felled in the last few weeks and await clearance.

We have to walk for more than a kilometre into the 'Park' before we reach anything resembling forest and even here selective logging has been rife. The fact that our guide, Babi, doesn't speak a word of English doesn't help matters and by mid-morning we have not seen a single new bird. Extremely downhearted, we head back to the river.

The far bank is now alight and the tortuous scramble through the rapids is followed by a dash through the burning grassland. Having run this gauntlet we are immediately cornered by a very hostile group of Park Rangers. They tell us that we should have permits and we tell them that if anyone had been present at the HQ we would have bought them. The attitude of the staff, who have clearly been of no use whatsoever in the protection of the forest, becomes quite aggressive. Luckily Ance, who has been back to Kotamobagu for the morning, reappears at this point. He tries to mediate but cannot bring sense to the guards and we decide that the situation is one of futility.

Michel decides to chance his luck and remain at the HQ where he has planned to meet up with Max and Royke late in the day. His cool Swedish demeanour seems to have been better received than MK's English sarcasm. We return to Kotamobagu, where we head to the National Park Administration Headquarters to secure a permit for the next leg of our travels; we don't want the same performance in the morning!

It's a predictably protracted process, but the numerous uniformed staff are very helpful and seem to run around the huge offices at our beck-and-call. Eventually a permit is produced, for the princely sum of what amounts to 30 pence, and then we have to get *seven* photocopies of the document from a local shop before returning these to the admin staff!

A roadside pair of Isabelline Bush-hen is easily the ornithological highlight of the day, but our impromptu visit to a roadside gold refinery is just as interesting. Here gold-bearing quartz is crushed to dust by a huge diesel-powered press before mercury is used to extract the precious mineral. All very environmentally friendly, I'm sure!

We spend the evening back at our favourite hotel in Kotamobagu, with the small mercy of procuring a few Bintangs that are actually cold.

Thursday 2nd September

On the road at 04.30 so that we can be at the Tambum Maleo Project site for dawn, we make our way down a series of narrow lanes that our driver believes lead to the site. We soon realise that he hasn't a clue about where to go, but he does gamely ask local advice after each wrong turn! Eventually, well after first light, we find what appears to be some form of administration building belonging to the project. There is, however, no sign of life.

Returning to Tambun village, we manage to track down the home of a fellow by the name of Max who co-ordinates the Maleo Project; his wife tells us that he is away on business! Refusing to give up, we persuade Max's son to return to the breeding area to arrange for our access. The young lad manages to find the Project's ageing second-in-command, Ramoy, and we are finally granted access to the Maleo breeding area at 07.15. What a performance!

The Maleos favour an area of scrubby, low growth with patches of open, stoney ground at the base of a forested hillside. Volcanic activity warms the ground here and we pass pools of steaming clear-blue water in which wonderful algae of bright green and blue colouration thrive. Ramoy leads us to a rickety timber tower hide that gives elevated views across the clearing and we settle into position in wait of our quarry.

Almost instantly a pair of Maleo appear in a clearing around 100 m away; what a result! The Maleo is Sulawesi's endemic megapode, a family restricted to Asia and Australasia, specialised in laying eggs that are buried and incubated by the heat of the earth. The Maleo is arguably the star of the family, large and grey-backed, with wonderful creamy-pink underparts. On top of its head is a weird dome of bare skin, said to help in the measurement of the optimum temperature at the nest site.

Ramoy leaves us for a couple of hours in the gently-swaying tower where we shelter from the rain and soak up views of Sulawesi Crested Myna, Blue-rumped Parrot and Bay Coucal amongst other goodies. When Ramoy, who doesn't speak a word of English, returns he gesticulates that we should follow him. Intrigued we set off in line towards the large wire cages that have been built at the edge of the clearing.

This is obviously the 'hatchery', into which Maleo eggs are relocated to protect them from the unwanted attention of hungry monitor lizards and *Homo sapiens*. They really are heavyweight structures, built of steel, concrete and wire mesh with a massive lock and chain on the door. We can't believe our luck when we see that a Maleo chick is running around inside a cage. It is already the size of a small partridge and can fly well above the head of Ramoy, who struggles to catch it. After a quick photographic session of this amazing creature, already showing a dull version of adult colouration, it is released. Upon leaving Ramoy's grip it flies a good seventy yards, crashing into a bush just short of the road. Later we learn that it will have hatched just hours before; these amazing birds are apparently able to fly strongly within fifteen minutes of leaving the egg!

Our incredible tour continues with an inspection of the breeding area. Every few metres shallow pits have been excavated by the Maleos in the grey stony ground, where the earth is obviously at an ideal temperature for incubation. Ramoy seems to know instinctively which pit, of the dozens present, has been disturbed since his last inspection. One pit has obviously (to Ramoy!) been used and he rapidly digs down a good thirty centimetres to reveal a large elongated oval egg, the same colour as that produced by a domestic chicken. Another egg is found in the same manner and then we go in search of an adult.

A large bird crashes into flight through the dense undergrowth but comes to rest close by, on the low branches of a sparse-leaved tree. The Maleo looks down on us as he paces backwards and forwards along the branch, displaying subtly pink-flushed breast and 'helmeted' crown to their very best.

Returning to the hatchery, each egg is set in a carefully marked spot at precisely the right depth and with longest axis to the vertical. Ramoy's initials plus the date 'planted' are written on the shell in pencil and then they are gently covered, before the huge padlock is secured. It has been an immense privilege to witness the Maleo project in action and we are deeply indebted to Ramoy for his kindness in showing us how it all works. Ance translates our thanks before we set off on the long drive back to Manado.

The journey is uneventful, but for the fact that Jeremy telephones us en route to inform us that our morning flight to Kao, on Halmahera, has been cancelled. This is obviously a huge blow to our travel arrangements but fortunately an hour later he calls back to say that we are all booked onto a flight to Ternate, an island just off Halmahera and with easy access to the mainland; yet another example of Indonesia's hopeless internal air network and the value of employing a good ground agent.

The sun is sinking over the bay when we are dropped off at the Formosa Hotel. We instantly spot the familiar faces of Jon Hornbuckle, Simon Colenutt and Barry Wright at a seafront bar and join them for a reunion Bintang. It's great to have some entertaining English company and we spend a lively evening recounting stories and planning the next leg of our journey, on which the well-travelled threesome will accompany us.

Friday 3rd September

After the first lie-in of the trip and a leisurely breakfast we all make our way to the airport where we meet up with Jeremy Barnes and his wife Ninoy. Ninoy, who has agreed to accompany us to Halmahera to act as translator, is well-travelled in Indonesia but has never ventured to Halmahera and is most excited at the prospect; she even has her own pair of bins so as not to miss the endems!

It comes as no surprise when we find out that the Merpati flight to Ternate has been delayed; the hour-long flight finally departs around eighty minutes late and at 14.30 we touch down on the airstrip that occupies a narrow ribbon of coastline adjacent to the large volcanic cone of Ternate. This is a real no-frills destination, with baggage merely dumped off a truck and into a scrum of people adjacent to the ramshackle terminal building.

"Where you from?" demands a shifty-looking local character on the periphery of the suitcase-wrestling pack.

"England"

"Ah, Liverpool Football Club"

It certainly makes a pleasant change from finding another bloody Man U fan!

Before leaving the UK we had been corresponding with Iskandar Abdullah who has guided others on Halmahera, but eventually said he was too busy at this time. Surprisingly, Iskandar appears at the airport and we discuss logistics and the use of his friend, the infamous Anu, as a guide. We agree to meet Anu on Halmahera, with a dose of trepidation.

Our taxi drops us off in the busy main street of Ternate town. Taking a narrow covered alleyway we make our way past the local market where our senses are bombarded with a fantastic array of colour and smells; spicy fried food, fresh fruit and vegetables, fish of all descriptions and festering sewage greet our nostrils within a matter of metres!

The dark passageway eventually opens onto the wobbling planks of a boardwalk with a filthy mess of rotting rubbish lying below. The boardwalk extends into a jetty, to which a number of large speedboats are moored. These are the ferries to mainland Halmahera and their owners are keen to vie for our custom. The boats have seats for thirty people but our haggling gets the cost down to the equivalent of £3 per head to hire the entire boat, which seems a reasonable deal.

The crossing takes just half an hour with three large engines roaring at the stern to provide a rapid but bumpy ride in the low swell. Brown Boobies and Lesser Frigatebirds are the only seabird interest, before we head along a mangrove-lined estuary leading to the Halmaheran fishing village of Sidangoli.

The excited group of villagers who gather to greet us seems to suggest that not too many Western faces appear at the landing stage and the huddle of rickshaw drivers are understandably grateful of the sudden influx of trade. Rucksacks and binders are slotted into place, on the ancient bicycle rickshaws, before we are whisked off through the shabby-looking village and deposited at the Sidangoli Indah that would appear to be the first and last hotel in the brochures!

checking in we settle down with a cold one to listen to the proposals of Iskandar and Anu for the next few days. Sadly Anu comes with quite a reputation for his less than trustworthy means of dealing with birders in the past. From very first impressions he comes across as a rather aloof character with little interest in his clients other than securing as much remuneration for his services as possible. The problem is that he has the monopoly on bird-guiding on the island so we, like most others who have visited Halmahera, are forced to sign up to his \$50/day guiding fee.

Not wanting to waste a minute of birding time we arrange to spend the evening looking for nightbirds at Kali Batu Putih (KBP), a well known birding site around fifteen minutes drive from the hotel. We pop out of the cramped taxi in the darkness at the point where a wide stone track leads off the tarmac road and into the secondary forest. Taking this track we soon hear Moluccan Scops Owl and Moluccan Owlet-Nightjar, but seeing them is another matter. After around half-an-hour of persuasion from JH's minidisk, however, an Owlet-Nightjar alights in a small tree very close to the track. Bathed in the light of our spotlight we soak up every detail of this stunning little bird, intricately spotted and

vermiculated in warm rufous shades. At this range we can count the long whiskers that protrude from around its wide gape, as the Speedlites flash and video rolls.

It takes another hour of determined work with the Senheiser and spotlight to secure a decent view of Moluccan Scops-Owl, however, but with two nightbirds safely in the bag after just a few hours on the island we return to Sidangoli very pleased with ourselves.

Saturday 4th September

Our rather bizarre early-morning call comes in the form of a rendition of "The Green, Green Grass of Home" belting out from the hi-fi in the dining room at 05.00! We consume breakfast of a very tasty local 'porridge', to the musical accompaniment, before setting off back to KBP in our battered taxi.

It is interesting to note that a large Catholic church that we pass en route is partially demolished and peppered with what appear to be shell-holes. Just two years previously it had been impossible to visit Halmahera due to the intense religious violence which had engulfed the island; the damaged church would seem to be a throwback to these times, when the local Muslim population did their best to drive out any resident Christians.

At KPB we take another trail, opposite the logging road used on the previous evening, which leads across an open area and into some relatively intact forest. The area seems to be full of birds and we rapidly notch up a huge Goliath Coucal, a group of attractive Golden Bulbuls and the first of very many fantastic Blyth's Hornbills. A beautiful Blue-capped Fruit Dove, both White-naped and Spectacled Monarchs, Metallic Starling and Moluccan Hanging-Parrot are all new birds in the first half-hour on the trail. White-streaked Friarbird, Grey-headed Fruit-Dove and the dazzling Eclectus Parrot all put in appearances, before Anu hears the call of the biggest target-bird of the island and we race onwards, pulses quickening.

Playback of the harsh, rasping call draws the bird closer and then it appears, above us in the lower canopy. Wallace's Standardwing has the most westerly distribution of any bird-of-paradise, and its isolation on Halmahera has certainly led it to evolve in a manner totally unlike any of its congeners. The male is a large fawny-brown bird, with a long pale bill and thick orange legs. From the bend in each wing trail peculiar long white streamers, which we admire as we piece the bird together while it moves through the vegetation. Eventually it settles down to eat from a clump of berries and it is at this point that it turns head-on to reveal a fantastic iridescent green delta-shaped breast shield. Awesome!

The male Standardwing spends some time around this favoured area, apparently an historic display site, and a female briefly joins him. It's hard to move away but another monster-bird is calling further down the trail so we home-in on the whistled call and JH whirls the minidisk once more. This must be our lucky morning; within a few minutes the World's largest pitta is calling to us from a perch around 5 m high in a nearby tree. Ivory-breasted Pitta is an amazing creature, with jet-black head and back, pure white belly, red vent and turquoise wing patches. When it flies through the trees it appears unfeasibly large for a pitta, with an undulating flight reminiscent of a sizeable woodpecker! Interestingly this species proves to be very widespread on the Island and its loud call is audible in most areas visited, even the poorest secondary forest.

Delighted with our success we return to Sidangoli, where we have our first minor dispute with Anu who is already claiming increases in our agreed fees. Naturally he gets short shrift. Our plan is to drive to Tobelo in the north of the island, from where we will cross by sea to Labi Labi, a site located on the tip of a peninsular to the east. Our huge pile of bags is lashed to the roof of the taxi, under a large tarpaulin, and eight of us squeeze inside; we have had more comfortable transport in our time!

The road is generally in good condition, but the vehicle struggles under the load. At whichever point we ask Anu "How far now?" his stock reply is "Another hour"! The 170 km journey, via Kao, takes nearly four hours to complete, with an occasional stop for a bird in the heavily degraded secondary forest, not the two hours Anu had originally told us. Our first Red-cheeked Parrot, Blue-and-white Kingfisher and White Cockatoo are all notched up en route.

Tobelo is a bustling market town with a small port attached and is the largest conurbation we have seen on Halmahera. Small canoes with outriggers are constantly coming and going to deposit cargoes of goods and passengers. A large rusting freighter, with Jakarta registration, is being loaded with bulging hessian sacks full of copra from equally rusting lorries on the quayside. Adjacent to the quay, a run-down suburb of the town sprawls to the waters edge. Here makeshift timber and corrugated iron houses sit on stilts above a disgusting mixture of salt water and foul-smelling rubbish.

The next two hours are spent in this area, with Ninoy trying to find a boat to ferry us to Labi Labi with enough room to accommodate eight people and a small mountain of baggage. Anu had assured us that this would be a straightforward process! We have all-but given up hope when a vessel which just about fits the bill is located on an offshore island, and its skipper is tied down to a reasonable fare. With our means of transport secured we need to make a quick tour of the market in order to purchase our food for the next three days; they don't have shops at Labi Labi.

It's around 18.00 when we finally start to ferry bags full of rice, vegetables and water up the narrow gangplank and into the boat. The vessel is a wide canoe, around six metres long, and with a small covered section at the bow. The covered area is rapidly filled with our supply of food and rucksacks, causing the boat to settle at a somewhat unstable angle, low in the water. We line up along the remaining open section of the canoe, along with Anu, his wife, sister and two boatmen. The single outboard engine splutters into life and we head out to sea, with some very ominous grey storm-clouds ahead. It's already 18.30 and starting to get dark.

The first twenty minutes of our journey goes well, as we are in shallow water and in the lee of a series of small mangrove-covered islands. It is now pitch black and the boatmen have neglected to bring a torch. The lad on the bows asks to borrow one but all we have at hand is a rather dim headlight; this hardly seems up to the job of spotting floating logs and averting a disastrous collision!

Lightning has now started to flash all around and the waves instantly double in height as we make the open sea. Within minutes we are being lashed with salt water and are soaked to the skin; considering that this is the Tropics we are suddenly getting very cold. Anu's wife is frantically bailing out the bilges with an inadequately small bucket and our kit soaking up the foul mixture of oily water. All conversation has dried and everyone aboard seems to be mentally weighting up the chances of completing the journey in one piece, while at the same time being afraid to speak first of either trepidation or fear!

After a silent eternity of five more minutes a huge wave breaks over the boat and brings us to our senses. It is at least a three-and-a-half hour crossing to Labi Labi and we are damned sure that this boat won't stay afloat for another three hours in these conditions. We tell the boatman that he must return to port and he swings about. This manoeuvre is very tricky in itself as we sit sideways to the waves for a short time and the boat pitches violently. It's a case of white knuckles all round as a man overboard wouldn't bear thinking about on a rough sea in pitch-darkness.

The air of relief on board is palpable when we make the sheltered shallow waters; half an hour later the feeling of solid sand underfoot is heaven. Setting out in a boat barely large enough to carry us and at a time immediately before dark was, in hindsight, plain stupidity. Later in the trip we hear of a group of Australians who did something very similar and their inadequate boat capsized. One lost his

life and the survivors spent fourteen hours clinging to the hull of the upturned craft; there are no lifeboats out here. Anu and the boatmen should obviously have refused to set out when they did, but money doesn't come easy in this part of the world and a good fare from a group of stupid whiteys is unlikely to be refused.

We unload a pile of soggy rucksacks and food onto the quayside and weigh up our choices. Looking back we probably should have stayed in Tobelo overnight and attempted the crossing again the next day. However, in our cold and wet state and with a very close shave fresh in our minds, we decide to get back to Sidangoli and concentrate on KPB for the rest of our limited time on Halmahera.

The only taxi we can find smells of unsavoury substances and is falling to bits. It is also ridiculously cramped and driven at brake-neck speed; well, it is once we have made ten stops to find a shop selling bottled petrol! The brakes are clearly in need of attention and the driver applies the handbrake as we descend steep hills.

Sunday 5th September

Our 03.00 arrival back at the Sidongoli Indah comes as a great relief!

07.30 sees us back on the KPB logging trail, with our distinct lack of sleep countered by a fine breakfast of Spanish omelette. In the daylight we see that the trail runs through much degraded secondary forest but there are still birds around and we soon notch up White-eyed Imperial Pigeon, Rufous-bellied Triller and Flame-breasted Flowerpecker. Paradise Crow is about as exciting as its name suggests, while both Chattering Lory and Red-flanked Lorikeet perform only brief fly-pasts. A less-than cooperative Sombre Kingfisher plus a feeding flock containing Cream-throated White-eye and Moluccan Flycatcher round off the morning and we head back to Sidongoli for a short siesta.

Mid-afternoon we squeeze back into the taxi and head out on the Jailolo Road. The half-hour ride takes us to a hillside with commanding views of some of the best stands of forest we have encountered on Halmahera. Parrots are much in evidence, with many Eclectus and White Cockatoos flying over the treetops below us. A flock of twenty-four bright-scarlet Violet-necked Lorys contrast with the rich greens of the canopy in which they feed, though a group of distinctive Long-billed Crows show less aesthetic appeal.

Final new bird of the day is Moluccan Cuckoo-Shrike, though we note that our 'guide' has been of little use this-afternoon. Anu has an annoying habit of wandering off for a cigarette and not returning. Although his knowledge of the Island's birdcalls is undeniable, he often fails to tell us what he's heard until well after the event! We find him sitting back at the car and when quizzed about his lack of enthusiasm he blames his performance upon a recent motorcycle accident. Maybe he should have told us about this before accepting the fee to guide us? We try not to be too cynical.

On the way back to Sidongoli we stop for a bout of owl-taping. The chorus of tree frogs is tremendous, and display of lightning spectacular, but there is a distinct lack of owl activity. Back in the village we establish that there is a total absence of a refrigerator, so improvise a Bintang ice bucket to end the day. That's better!

Monday 6th September

Our pre-dawn owling session is thwarted by the late arrival of our taxi; between 04.00 and 05.00, when the car finally appears, we sit at the hotel drinking strong coffee and cursing Anu, who was to arrange the pick-up.

We land at the KPB logging trail in time to catch the last few calls of a Moluccan Hawk-Owl, but that's as close as we get in the gathering light of day. A pair of attractive Cinnamon-bellied Imperial Pigeons

provides a good consolation prize, however, followed by our first pair of Shining Flycatchers, a species which exhibits sexual dimorphism in the extreme. Drab Whistler turns out to be appropriately named, but a bird calling from the depths of a dense trackside bush is much more appealing. After some patient playback we are rewarded with a very welcome pair of Gray's Grasshopper Warblers. This hefty *Locustella* is a Palearctic migrant and is observed crawling mouse-like amongst dense vegetation, much like its more familiar western cousins.

Right on cue Ninoy reappears with a pile of freshly made Spanish omelettes, certainly one of the highlights of the day! We continue along the logging trail but the birding seems to tail off abruptly from this point and we return to Sidongoli to sleep out the heat of the early afternoon.

Final birding session of the day is along the main road, north of the logging trail. We walk for miles along the hot tarmac, scanning the multitude of bare tree snags for Purple Roller, without success but rewards coming in the form of soaring Variable Goshawk and a pair of Black Eagles, a party of Halmahera Cuckoo-Shrikes and an obliging pair of colourful Chattering Lories. It would seem that the latter is sadly becoming a very rare bird on the island due to trapping for the cage-bird trade.

We end the day close to a high pass that gives a fantastic view over the lower slopes of Halmahera, where ridges are topped by the skeletal remains of the forest. In the background the black conical peak of Ternate is sliced in two by a lens of pale cloud, all illuminated by a rich orange sunset that reflects on the calm waters of the Moluccan Sea; it really is a stunning corner of the World.

Tuesday 7th September

Predictably we return to KBP before dawn for the few remaining Halmahera specialities, the list of which is now getting very short. Common Paradise-Kingfisher, which responds to playback, is an absolute cracker with deep-blue and white plumage, blood-red bill and elongated tail-streamers. Sombre Kingfisher is far less obliging, however, and our only contact with this species is further distant and irregular calls.

The forest trail is otherwise very quiet, though our favourite Ivory-breasted Pitta puts in another brief appearance. We withdraw from the trees and spend a couple of hours along the main road, but this area too is decidedly unproductive. Last shot is the logging trail, where we pull out a pair of Gurney's Eagles and the amazing sight of a flock of thirty Blyth's Hornbills soaring high above a forested ridge.

When the temperature climbs we return for the final time to Sidongoli, to pack our bags and grab some lunch. A torrential thunderstorm ensues and grounds us for a couple of hours, though thankfully this is the only significant daytime rainfall we have experienced in Indonesia to date. Our final job is to agree the payment due to Anu, which is done with the help of Ninoy's translation. Throughout our stay Anu's attitude has been extremely poor. He has a rather detached, almost arrogant, air about him and is not at all communicative. His knowledge of the Island's birds is second to none, yet he will only demonstrate this when constantly pushed and hounded; if left to his own devices he invariably ends up sitting down with a cigarette.

He has certainly not earned the \$50 per day that he requested and, through Ninoy, we explain why we are not prepared to tender this sum. Eventually, after much debate, he accepts our offer and slopes away in a very disgruntled fashion. The fact that our taxi driver, who is actually Anu's brother, receives a handsome tip for his reliable service and helpful manner will hopefully draw Anu to some constructive conclusion. It also proves that we do normally pay our dues!

There is quite an emotional gathering as we leave the Sidangoli Indah, where we have been made incredibly welcome and treated with the utmost kindness. Down at Sidongoli waterfront we charter

another boat for the Ternate crossing, but this time take a tour of the mangroves before venturing into open water. After an hour of looping between the various low, densely vegetated, islands and negotiating passage around a number of shallow reefs, we give up on our search for Beach Kingfisher and head out into the main channel. Not far off shore we spot a mass of seabirds wheeling above an obvious shoal of fish and we speed across the choppy waters to investigate. The birds materialise into a large flock of terns, mainly *longipennis* Common Terns, but with a number of magnificent Bridled Terns amongst their number.

The squalor of the docks again greets us on Ternate, with a lovely view of the rear of the local abattoir abutting the quay. Here a grotesque mountain of animal remains slopes down to the rancid saltwater, above which a very sorry-looking cow is tethered in an adjoining shed. Retracing our steps past the covered market and on into the main square we are pleasantly surprised to find a thriving, friendly and semi-civilized little town beyond the stench and filth of the waterfront.

Squeezing into a tiny taxi and out of the persistent rain we make our way to the best hotel in town. It is an imposing white colonial-style structure, entered by a flight of marble stairs, and with a fantastic view down to the bay below. We find the room rates rather exorbitant for this part of the world, but strike a deal for the use of one large room with air-conditioning which will protect us from the profusion of mosquitoes.

Part of our group travel into town to buy food as the kitchen would appear to have been abandoned. They return with tales of black market beer purchase in a dark alleyway; this is supposed to be a 'dry' island. Ninoy rustles up a fine meal of noodle soup with pilchards, washed down with our illicit Bintang!

Wednesday 8th September

For breakfast we are treated to bread and cheese cooked in the only sandwich toaster on Ternate!

At 07.00 we miraculously depart on time, from the tiny airport terminal, on board a turbo-prop Lion Air Dash 8-300. Gaining height we are treated to a fantastic view of Ternate's amazing geology. A grey tarmac road circumnavigates the perimeter of the circular island, and is lined with the rusting tin roofs of tiny houses far below. Inland of the road is a green blanket of coconut palms, cut by an occasional river of lava that has burnt a route down the hillside to the ocean, before cooling to a dark-brown petrified mass. At the heart of the island is an incredible black conical peak, from which wisps of white smoke continue to emerge in a rather ominous manner. What a place to live!

Our schedule gives us a couple of hours on the ground back in Manado, where we spend our time sorting out finances and air tickets. Our 11.00 flight to Sorong is a mere forty-five minutes late in its departure, and again utilises a small turbo-prop Dash aircraft.

The flying time to Irian Jaya is one hour forty minutes and at 14.45 we get our first glimpse of the Western Papuan Islands as our descent commences. After aerial views of the devastation of the natural environment on both Sulawesi and Halmahera, it is fantastic to savour the pristine forest that covers the islands over which we now fly. The contrast is nothing short of amazing and even at 5,000 metres altitude we can already tell that we are in for an ornithological treat!

We pass over island after island on which no form of human activity is visible. Continuous dark green forest canopies stretch from one golden beach to the next, with each archipelago surrounded by a turquoise blue ocean coloured by shallow reefs; Papua and Indonesia are clearly worlds apart from an environmental perspective.

When our aircraft touches down at Sorong airport we are amazed to see children playing football and dogs running within metres of the runway! After reclaiming our baggage in the lean-to hut which

doubles as a terminal building we are immediately greeted by a grinning Kris Tindige (pronounced tin-dee-gay). Kris is the founder of the Papua Bird Club, whose logo is proudly emblazoned on his t-shirt. He has been guiding tourists, birders and film-makers around the islands for many years and specialises in the birds-of-paradise for which Papua is famed. In the coming days we find Kris to be extremely well organised, very knowledgeable and deeply passionate about Papua, its birds and the preservation of some of the finest forest habitat on the planet; we would recommend his service to anyone (E-mail: papuabirdclub@hotmail.com, URL: <http://www.papuabirdclub.com/index.htm>)

A waiting taxi takes us into Sorong Town, which is surprisingly large and clean in appearance. Our bags are rapidly dumped at the well-appointed, waterfront Hotel Waigo and we head for the forest. In less than half an hour's drive to the east of Sorong, we have reached some good, relatively intact forest beside the Makbon Road. Our route takes us past the town's dump, an unsightly sprawling mass of smouldering refuse set amongst the trees, which fills the minibus with a sour stink.

Apparently the area has been selectively logged, but it is alive with birds and for the 'Papua Virgins' of the group it is an absolute tickfest! Orange-bellied Fruit-Doves and Western Black-capped Lories dazzle, while Palm Cockatoo simply takes the breath away. This immense dark-grey parrot, with bright-red cheek-patch, massive bill and unlikely bushy crest is one of the most impressive creatures of the entire trip.

Large Fig-Parrot, Black-sided Robin, Grey-headed Cuckoo-Shrike and Zoe Imperial Pigeon are all new birds. Moving on a few kilometres we check another area that holds the bizarre pale-plumaged and bare-faced Grey Crow, Black-lored Triller and beautiful Moustached Treeswift that perches beside the road. The Helmeted Friarbird which inhabits the Island is listed by many as a full species in the form of 'New Guinea Friarbird'; it's always best to see as many obscure local subspecies as possible with a bagful of new splits never far away.

The light is fading fast at our final stop-off, but this is where MK pulls off his coup de gras and picks out a Bare-eyed Rail perched on a low log in the forest gloom. Fortunately we have a spotlight on hand and illuminate this elusive forest skulker before it has time to slip away; another brilliant finale.

Our evening meal is consumed in the superb Lido Kuring seafood restaurant. Over a memorable spread of crab and asparagus soup, red snappers and the most magnificent king prawns ever, we discuss plans for the next few days. The instantly likeable KT, who displays an excellent command of English and a fine sense of humour, assures us that our next boating experience will be infinitely more pleasurable than our last!

Thursday 9th September

Our arrival at the quayside allays all boating fears. The ten metre long craft on which we will be travelling is made of fibreglass, has four outboard engines and looks imminently seaworthy; this is more like it! Our large pile of baggage is loaded on board, as well as supplies of food and water plus a cook whose duty will be to turn the staple ingredients into fine meals for the next four days.

At 07.15 we set sail from the harbour, heading west into the open sea. Thankfully the many islands which dot the shallow waters provide a calming influence on the Pacific Ocean and we enjoy a fairly smooth passage. A series of strange and colourful fishing boats line our route, with brightly painted hulls and a huge pair of outriggers supported by a web of ropes tied to tall twin-masts. Nets are strung below the beams that run to the outriggers and apparently these are used to ensnare fish that are attracted to night-time illumination employed on the boats.

Our journey takes us close to densely forested islands, fringed with beaches of clean, white coral-sand and on into the Sagawin Strait, the two-kilometre-wide channel that separates the islands of

Batanta to the north from Salawati to the south. Soon after entering the channel we are treated to a brief display of aerial antics from a group of Long-snouted Spinner Dolphins, which leap high from the water's surface.

The calm seas make for a speedy crossing and by 09.30 we are cruising over fantastic coral formations, viewed through crystal-clear water, towards the small timber jetty that serves the village of Wai Lebeb. The settlement lies in an incredible location, above a wide sandy beach and at the foot of steep forested hills; all manner of weird and wonderful bird-calls echo from the surrounding trees.

A straight gravel track stretches away from the jetty, along which are spaced two orderly rows of well-constructed concrete huts with shining corrugated steel roofs and slatted glass windows. A final few concrete huts remain under construction. We later learn that the new structures, which replace simple timber and straw predecessors, are being provided as part of a deal with a logging company. In return for a concession to selectively fell Ironwood trees on the land owned by the village, part payment will be made in the form of the construction of these buildings. Although any form of logging is clearly bad news, one cannot blame the villagers for accepting a chance for an improved quality of life. Kris also seems confident that the people are aware of the value of their land in terms of future ecotourism-revenue potential and will continue to protect its fantastically diverse wildlife; by staying in the village we actually feel that we are doing our bit towards saving this particular forest.

Our first port of call is the hut belonging to the head of the village; without his approval our trip will not be possible. We are invited into his hut and asked to sit down on the assortment of very tatty brown leather sofas placed around the room. These are clearly the prime seats as the elders of the village, who enter after us, are relegated to straw mats on the floor! KT has brought gifts in the form of a bag full of Beetel nuts, a great local favourite as the assembled group eagerly devours the narcotic vegetable. We are offered a sample ourselves but politely decline.

The headman is easy to pick out amongst the room full of wide red-stained grins, being the only fellow whose shirt and trousers are not filthy and ripped to shreds! We also note that alongside the 'three piece suite' there is a video recorder and small television set, truly the height of opulence in this frugal environment.

The discussions must go well, as we learn that we have been allocated a hut and a number of guides for the duration of our stay. We are desperate to get out and do some birding so leave KT to finalise domestic arrangements while we head off into the forest with our three very willing bare-footed guides. Following a trail from the rear of the village we pass through plantations of subsistence crops before entering some excellent wet lowland forest. Although it's 10.30 and beginning to get very warm there is much bird activity. Pinon Imperial Pigeon is first on the list, followed by the wonderful Frilled Monarch, a small black-and-white flycatcher with large blue eye-rings and a unique bushy neck-frill. Large-billed Gerygone is low on the list of highlights but in contrast Rufous-bellied Kookaburra, a large forest kingfisher with rich-rufous underparts and bright turquoise wing patches, is an absolute stunner.

A ball of bright orangey-red feathers moving through the dark branches can only be our main goal in this area, Red Bird-of-Paradise. Restricted to just two islands of Western Irian Jaya, it takes some time to secure a good look at this mass of red, yellow and brown plumes which moves rapidly through the treetops. Rusty Pitahui and Tawny-breasted Honeyeater are next to hit the notebooks, followed by the amazing little Yellow-capped Pygmy-Parrot. This minute bird clings to bare tree trunks and branches and moves along the bark in a mouse-like manner as it feeds.

Last new bird is Yellow-gaped Meliphaga, a decidedly boring honeyeater, before the heavens open and we retreat towards the village. Our guides have been extremely amenable, pointing out every bird they

spot, and we can only marvel at the way they wander about the forest in bare feet without fear of a bite or thorn; we westerners really don't know that we're born!

Back in Wai Lebeb we discover that we have been allocated three large rooms in an excellent concrete-floored hut. The family in residence have very kindly moved their belongings to a single room, but do not appear to resent our intrusion in the slightest; they actually seem to relish the novelty of our presence and spend much time enjoying our strange English rituals! Tents are erected inside the hut on bamboo mats, as a mosquito deterrent, before our proud chef dishes up a fine meal of rice, vegetables and tinned tuna.

A short boat ride takes us to the site of our sweaty post-lunch walk, which is along a trail that commences on the shoreline about 500 metres east of the village. Brown Oriole, Spot-winged Monarch and Mimic Meliphaga are all new birds, but the highlight is certainly a Red Bird-of-Paradise lek-tree where males gather to fan their red plumes whilst gyrating about the bare canopy branches.

Returning to our digs as darkness falls, we make ourselves at home in some very out-of-place plastic patio chairs. We have to be content with coffee as we write-up our notes; not bringing any beer was a big mistake! Electricity comes from a generator that is fired-up in the evening and light comes from the single bulb that dangles from the roof. Outside a series of long poles support more light bulbs that illuminate the 'high street' and a chorus of frogs provides an evening serenade. It's hard to imagine living out your whole life in such an environment but that is precisely what our hosts and their fellow villagers will no doubt do.

Friday 10th September

An 03.30 alarm ends our sweaty night in the tents. We stagger around in torchlight pulling on damp clothes before rapidly consuming fried egg sandwiches and coffee, as sustenance for the ordeal ahead.

A short boat ride delivers us at yesterday evening's trail and we set off through the dripping-wet forest; it has poured with rain all night, but thankfully the sky is now clear. At first the trail is relatively flat but soon it develops into a precariously steep and muddy scramble up the slippery hillside, all done in pitch-blackness with just a headlamp for guidance. Vines and saplings steady our ascent, but it is still intensely physically-demanding work and we are soon soaked in our own sweat.

It takes one hour and ten minutes to clamber up to the 345 m height of the Wilson's Bird-of-Paradise lek site, with the latter stages of the climb made in a mist of low cloud that moves through the trees. In the gathering light the lek becomes visible and can be seen to consist of a series of bare creepers above a small area of dark brown earth, cleared of leaves by the occupying bird.

The first calling bird is heard at 06.10, but frustratingly it remains hidden in various patches of dense vegetation without visiting its display ground. When he finally does appear the visits are frustratingly brief, and he only perches for a second or two. In spite of the brevity of our observations the immature male is clearly an amazing bird, with electric-blue patches of bare skin covering the crown as if a throbbing blue brain were poking through its skull!

The significance of this amazing bird is heightened by the fact that it is species number 8,000 for JH. Only two people in history have previously achieved this monumental birding landmark and one of these is now dead, making Jon number two living world-lister. He earns a small pat on the back but we don't want him to get too conceited!

Little Shrike-Thrush is the only other new bird seen at this site, before we make a slow, slippery and sweaty descent back to sea level. It's too treacherous underfoot to consider birding en route and by the time we reach the foot of the hill heavy rain is again falling.

Behind our hut is a wonderfully refreshing outdoor 'shower', consisting of a few strategically placed timber planks and a large bucket of cold water. There is no roof and one gets brilliant views of the surrounding forest while dousing the sweat away. Lunch is consumed with relish and then we sit and listen to the persistent rain drum on the tin roof for a couple of hours.

By 14.00 the rain has abated and we make a short boat trip to another trail just west of the village. Our offshore vantage point provides a great panorama of the steep forested hills that rise from sea level to disappear into a bank of low cloud, above which a pair of Gurney's Eagles soars. We jump ashore onto a beach strewn with exotic shells, before setting off into the lowland forest. The trail is tricky to follow, however, and the birding very slow, with no hoped-for Blue-black Fingfisher, so we plump for a boat cruise back east in the hope of a few different species.

It turns out to be a particularly tranquil means of whiling away the last few hours of the day and we add Glossy-mantled Manucode plus Spice Imperial Pigeon to our list from the comfort of the boat's roof. Spending a little time around the village of Wai Lebeb, before nightfall, we are taken by the very relaxed and happy atmosphere that prevails. Children constantly laugh and adults seem to smile at every opportunity.

The contents of a large canoe are deposited onto the shore, consisting of two wheelbarrows full of coconuts and a line strung with bright orange fish. Waves are gently lapping onto a narrow beach of coarse dark-grey sand, littered with large white fingers of dead coral. The sunset gives a delicate pink glow to the thin bank of cloud covering the dark green hillside of Salawati on the far side of the Sagawin Straight. This really has been one of the most idyllic settings I've ever visited in my life.

After a candlelit dinner MK pulls off a masterstroke with the production of a chilled bottle of Moët and Chandon to celebrate JH's milestone birding achievement! To everyone's amazement he has managed to secretly transport the bottle all the way from the UK and even arrange for it's chilling in the course of the day. Glasses are held up to Wilson's Bird-of-Paradise and Mr Hornbuckle's monumental 8000th bird. After draining the champers JH remembers that he has stashed a bottle of Philippine rum in his rucksack so this is cracked open too.

Much frivolity ensues, with the local populous entering into our celebrations. At one unforgettable stage in the proceedings a line of local children queue through the door to shake JH's hand. "This is Jon Hornbuckle, he's seen 8000 birds" proudly announces MK. Naturally they haven't got a bloody clue what he's talking about!

Saturday 11th September

Another 03.30 alarm and some slightly furry mouths. Eggs and coffee again, then we're off on another test of endurance and stamina that leads us up an even steeper pitch-black hillside. Conditions on this trail, reached from behind the village, are even more demanding than yesterday and the slope is close to vertical in places. An hour-and-a-half later sees us in a panting, sweaty mess beside another Wilson's Bird-of-Paradise lekking ground.

Again the lek is situated in an area of dense palms and rattan, but this time on a steeply sloping hillside and partially obscured by a fallen log. The birds are much more active and vocal here and over the first two hours of daylight we observe two females, an immature and a sub-adult male, all of whom visit the

area of cleared earth plus surrounding perches. This time we are able to savour prolonged views of the unique glowing blue 'brain' and bright plumage detail of this incredible bird.

A Rusty Mouse-Warbler moves through, hugging the forest floor, before we commence another arduous descent, this time with the aid of walking sticks cut-to-size by our guides. Again few birds are noted as we struggle to maintain our balance, and see beyond eyes full of sweat, but a fine male Red Bird-of-Paradise does his best to keep up spirits.

Lunch and a short siesta are followed by a twenty minute boat trip across the Sagawin Strait and our first encounter with the island of Salawati. The lowland forest here seems particularly humid and mosquito-ridden, as well as being very quiet in terms of bird activity. What we lack in quantity, however, we make up in quality. First new bird is King Bird-of-Paradise, located by KT high in the canopy of a favoured lekking tree. It is another stunning creature, bright red with a white belly and a short rounded crest above a bright yellow bill. From its seemingly tail-less rear end protrude two tail-wires, each tipped with a strange disk reminiscent of a coiled spring. Papua is certainly never short of a few surprises!

Moving uphill we see little else until a Red-bellied Pitta hops into view on the open forest floor. Typical of the genus it is a little dazzler amongst the dull-brown leaves, with glowing-crimson belly and crown plus bright-blue breast band. After a formation fly-past of a dozen Blyth's Hornbills, we board our boat and travel west for a short distance to the village of Kalam, slightly disheartened that a certain much-desired pigeon has failed to materialise.

Taking an open trail through low secondary growth behind the village we bag a good selection of new birds in the form of Grey-headed Goshawk, a number of fly-over Black Lories, Collared Sparrowhawk plus colourful Claret-breasted Fruit-Doves and Yellow-faced Mynas. We take a final boat ride to a shallow coastal lagoon where we find Rajah Shelduck and Spotted Whistling-Duck in the fast-fading light; we also note the outside toilet of the house adjacent to the lagoon, which is situated at the end of a short pier above the open sea!

As we make the crossing back to Batanta the fiery sun dips into the Pacific and the bright orange sky picks out the dark shape of Sagawin Island to the west. It's been another unforgettable day in this truly magical part of the World.

Back at our holiday-home we discover that the resident puppy has managed to eat half of my field guide; small price to pay for such salubrious accommodation I suppose! Tonight's 'shower' is particularly welcome, made all the more pleasurable with an accompanying view of the magnificent sky-full of stars above. Later we ration out the remainder of the rum whilst writing up notes, all much to the amusement of the local population who have now taken to gathering around the hut to be entertained by our unfamiliar antics.

Sunday 12th September

Our early-morning crossing to Salawati is interrupted by three Matsudaira's Petrels flying low along the channel into the prevailing breeze; a fine start to the day! We pick up our guide, a local hunter, at Kalam and then head west past Sagawin Island before turning south to follow the coastline of Salawati.

Much logging is evident in this area, and we pass a couple of huge rusting steel barges piled high with timber logs of incredible girth. KT informs us that the logging companies often negotiate deals with the landowners which pay as little as £7.00 for each of the huge Ironwood trunks plundered from the forest. It is clearly a desperate situation that needs to be addressed urgently by the Indonesian

Government if Irian Jaya is not to follow the sad route of Sulawesi and Halmahera into an ecological abyss.

We ultimately enter a large mangrove-fringed bay where we disembark close to an active logging camp. Making our way past huge bulldozers and 360-degree excavators, adapted to rip the heart from the forest with consummate ease, we arrive at a timber shelter inhabited by a particularly motley assortment of contract workers. Our reception is decidedly frosty and we later hear that the main concern of the resident supervisor is that we will report the company for cutting trees that are not in accordance with their concession!

While KT tries to negotiate our access we shelter from the rain and savour the fantastic selection of waders that feed on the muddy shore before us. Terek Sandpipers, Red-necked Stints, Grey-tailed Tattlers, Greater Sandplovers and a pair of superb summer-plumaged Great Knot scurry about the grey mud, while an Azure Kingfisher perches in the mangroves beyond.

The bargaining finally does the trick and we are allowed to enter the forest via the muddy trail, through the mangroves, used to extract the felled timber. Beyond the mangroves is fantastically tall lowland rainforest, tragically bisected by trails strewn with huge puddles and ankle-deep mud. Dryer tracks follow the routes taken by the excavators to individual trees, their lines littered with shattered timber and crushed coral. It is fascinating to note that the entire forest is founded on a bed of coral, indicating that in the not-too-distant past the seabed has risen sufficiently to allow trees to become established where fish once sheltered. Between the trees the lime-based formations have now developed a thin covering of bright green moss through which an occasional finger of white coral still protrudes. It is an incredible habitat, and one that is being destroyed on a huge mechanised scale as we watch.

In spite of the disturbance birding is productive, with gorgeous Beautiful and Wompoo Fruit-Doves, Papuan King Parrot and Yellow-bellied Longbill all putting in appearances; the last species represents the only 'family tick' of the entire trip. Golden Myna and Papuan Needletail are also welcome but our main goal, the monster-pigeon, continues to elude us. We later discover that Papuan Needletail is virtually unknown in Western Irian Jaya so is either a vagrant or represents a significant range expansion. We also discover that JH has kept his forest sighting of Brown Dorcopsis, a small forest wallaby, well up his sleeve!

We return to the boat and debate our next move. The possibility of an early return to Sorong is muted, but this option is quashed in favour of a last-ditch try at one more pigeon site. We head back east for some distance, finally coming ashore at an incredibly beautiful stretch of beach where the pure white sand is whipped by crashing blue breakers in front of a wall of dense primary forest which arches down over the beach.

It's quite a laborious trek through mangroves and across tidal creeks before we find the desired trail amongst the trees. We have only been walking for around a hundred metres in the wet, open forest when our guide flushes a group of birds from the forest floor. They beat their wings with a loud echoing clap as they depart and we know exactly what they are, although we only catch the outline of shapes through the dense foliage.

It takes another fifteen minutes before the guide excitedly beckons us through the trees with a hushed voice. He points upwards to an exposed branch in the lower canopy on which sits the ultimate *columbiform*. Western Crowned Pigeon is a massive bird, being over two feet in length. Grey underparts contrast with a maroon mantle and broad white wing-bar. An extensive black mask surrounds a fearsome red eye with which it stares down on our vantage point below. Most amazingly of all it sports an immense and totally bizarre fan-shaped crest of pale grey feathers with frizzy diffuse filaments,

the like of which is incomparable in any other family of birds. It is absolutely bloody awesome and bounds straight onto the list of top-ten birds ever!

After a good half-hour of sketching, filming and uttering various expletives we watch our pigeon fly off then return to the boat as the happiest birders on Salawati. Sadly, Western Crowned Pigeon is becoming a very rare bird due to hunting and disturbance, and KT informs us that this is his first sighting of the species for two-and-a-half years; we realise just how lucky we have been.

Four more Matsudaira's Petrels are logged on the journey back to Wai Lebeb, where we set about dismantling tents and packing bags. Although we have cleaned up on our main target birds, this is one of those places where one just wishes to stay longer and it's a real shame to have to leave this incredibly beautiful and fantastically peaceful haven. We distribute as many spare clothes as possible to the grateful villagers before saying farewells at the jetty where the entire village turns out to see us off. Our time on the islands has been a truly amazing experience which we will never forget.

We make a brief stop at the brackish lagoons on Salawati where we had stopped the previous evening and obtain much better views of both Rajah Shelduck and Spotted Whistling-Duck. The lagoons are separated from the sea by a narrow palm grove in front of which sits a photogenic beach house constructed of weather-bleached planks and a palm-thatch roof.

Our route back to Sorong takes in a visit to Senapang Island, where we spend the final hour of daylight. Half of the tiny island is surrounded by a beach of fine white sand, from where we watch Black-naped Terns skip over the deep blue waves and groups of Pied Imperial Pigeons flock to their roosts. Highlights of our brief walk include an excellent little Orange-fronted Fruit-Dove and an initially uncooperative Varied Honeyeater, plus some fine beachcombing for exotic and colourful shells.

Returning to the boat we take a cruise around the remainder of the island, the opposite end of which is dominated by steep grey cliffs. The birding is still not over and here we find a pair of Beach Kingfishers perching on low branches and a number of Great-billed Parrots that fly noisily about the treetops.

Our departure from Senapang coincides with a fantastic panoramic sunset over the West Papuan Islands, a perfect note on which to depart from one of my favourite destinations ever. It is dark by the time we dock in Sorong, where we waste no time in procuring a celebratory Bintang and another fine seafood meal at our favourite restaurant. It's also time for a few farewells, as tomorrow JH, SC and BW fly back to Manado, then on to the Tanimbars, while MK and I have a day's birding around Sorong. We part company vowing to travel to this part of the world together very soon.

Monday 13th September

Dawn breaks on the Intimpura Logging Trail, an historic birding site just over thirty minutes drive southeast of Sorong. A dirt track cuts through what is now much degraded forest, though a good selection of birds seems to be clinging on. Papuan Flowerpecker, Streak-headed Honeyeater and a White-bellied Thicket-Fantail that is coaxed to the tape are all new birds.

As we continue along the trail we find more stands of tall trees and a series of very picturesque swampy lakes at low points in the undulating topography. Here we are treated to a prolonged view of the normally elusive Rufous-tailed Bush-Hen and a large flock of surprisingly attractive Streak-headed Munias, with their bright-yellow rumps.

Late in the morning our birding is interrupted by a text message from JH, who is at the airport, informing us that Lion Air are having plane problems and may have cancelled our flight. We spend an

hour in the Lion Air office where they repeatedly assure us that we will be able to fly the next day, before lunch at the obligatory Lido Kuring.

After a brief siesta we return to the forest that lines the route of the Makbon Road, the site that we had visited on our first evening in Irian Jaya. It is 15.00 but the low cloud has prevented the temperature from rising too high and we are surprised at the amount of bird activity in the tall trees that line the road. By a stroke of luck we find that we have parked next to a fruiting tree and spend the next half-hour savouring the pick-and-mix fruit-dove selection that come and go to the tiny green berries.

Amongst the regular Orange-bellieds we spy the red crown and grey breast of Beautiful Fruit-Dove but the real star is the exquisitely-tiny Dwarf Fruit-Dove, bright green with sulphur-yellow under-tail and subtly matching yellow edges to its coverts. Both Black and Boyer's Cuckoo-Shrikes perch on prominent treetops and are briefly joined by the fantastic Pink-spotted Fruit Dove, amazingly our twelfth member of this family seen on the trip!

A male Golden Monarch shines in the canopy and a group of Brown Lorries skim over the treetops. It really is turning into a phenomenal afternoon and the pace shows no sign of slowing; every time we move to a different location new birds continue to materialise! Next come Lesser Black Coucal and a splendid Great Cuckoo-Dove, though a flyover Lesser Bird-of-Paradise is all too brief. A Long-billed Honeyeater probes the epiphytes and a noisy group of Papuan Hanging-Parrots fly over to roost. Sadly the final bird of the day chooses to call from dense cover just metres away, but refuses to respond to the tape. This is a damned shame, when it's a bird of the quality of Hook-billed Kingfisher!

It has been a truly fantastic afternoon's birding and a very fitting way to end our time in this amazing part of the world. Naturally, we conclude the day with a feast of grilled fish and tiger prawns at our second home and over a cold Bintang or two cover some diverse topics of conversation with Kris. It is fascinating to get an insight into Papuan politics, a subject that is purposefully buried by the less-than democratic Indonesian ruling powers.

We also learn of Kris' passion for conservation and the great efforts he has made to preserve Irian Jaya's forests. He certainly speaks from the heart and we cannot help but admire his efforts in the face of immense challenges from a both largely uncooperative government and the overwhelming force of huge commercial organisations. We vow to encourage others to follow in our footsteps as increased birding-based ecotourism will certainly benefit Kris' struggle to preserve the natural environment and I sincerely hope that readers of this report will be encouraged to do just that.

Tuesday 14th September

It's never good to spend a day on a birding trip without getting a new bird and today's is secured soon after breakfast, in a tree just outside the hotel. Singing Starling; tick!

KT accompanies us to the airport 'terminal'. It consists of two small administration rooms plus a corrugated tin roof with a few wooden benches beneath, which could be loosely termed as the 'departure lounge'. Baggage X-ray machines are yet to reach Sorong.

While waiting for our flight we enjoy the unique experience of going for a walk along the runway to do a little birding! A constant stream of pedestrians and mopeds cross the tarmac, as do a couple of Varied Honeyeaters and a White-necked Stilt.

As our 09.30 departure time approaches we return to the 'departure lounge' to see our turbo-prop aircraft in pieces on the runway. This is a little disconcerting but we are assured that a replacement is on the way from Manado. It is nearly two hours later that a whining siren announces the imminent

arrival of our aircraft. The siren is a warning for pedestrians to clear the runway and it would also seem to be the cue for everyone to walk outside and watch the plane come in to land. We follow suit and find a man standing on the runway, blowing a whistle, and gesticulating wildly to some latecomers who have yet to vacate the tarmac ahead of the rapidly descending aircraft!

It is time to say a very fond farewell to Kris and we part company vowing to make a return trip when McGregor's Bird-of-Paradise is again accessible at Lake Habbema. For another half hour we sit sweating in our seats at the front of the aeroplane while a stream of technicians enter the cockpit and point at various dials whilst revving the port engine. This is not tremendously reassuring but eventually we make it into the air and on to Manado in one piece.

Arriving in Manado is like coming home! We get a taxi to the Galaxy Hotel and are then picked up by Ninoy to be taken the short distance out of town to the Nusantara Dive Centre. The idea is to thrash about in the mangroves that border the Centre but the mangroves have all but disappeared and we are more than content to write a wad of postcards and sink a Bintang in the very pleasant coastal setting.

En route back to the hotel we make a stop at Ninoy's hairdresser where a fantastic half-hour head-massage and haircut costs £1.30! Looking suitably dapper with our freshly shaven heads we then hit the town with Ninoy and Rini, pulling in a fine fish restaurant and then the very impressive subterranean GP's nightclub. A fine final night is had by all!

Wednesday 15th September

Slight hangers make for a subdued start, but our plane departs on schedule and some excellent company on the flight to Jakarta soon brightens up the day. We have around eight hours to kill in Jakarta and in spite of the Australian Embassy bomb that exploded a few days before, we are determined to make the most of every last minute; bloody Al Qaeda are certainly not going to spoil our birding!

After some deliberation at the taxi office we think that we have established the whereabouts of Muara Angke Nature Reserve and set off into the frantic traffic with our willing taxi driver. The Reserve is relatively close to the airport but it takes a good hour of u-turns and accosting passers-by before we find the obscure entrance to the tiny pocket of habitat set amongst urban sprawl.

Beyond a large earth bund nestles a fantastic little gem of wetland habitat, maybe just 1 km by 1km in size, surrounded on all sides by industrial sites and new development. Sadly the sound of construction work is constantly audible and a number of tower cranes dominate the horizon. A timber boardwalk cuts through mangrove and marshland and although it's 11.00 a.m. and very warm, the site is positively heaving with birdlife; it seems as if the whole region's birds are crammed into the only remaining habitat for miles around!

Brown-headed Pygmy Woodpecker and Sunda Coucal start the list, followed by a succession of trip-ticks including Pied Fantail and Triller, Racquet-tailed Treepie and Oriental Reed Warbler. A distant roost-tree holds a very impressive count of nearly fifty Oriental Darters and as we watch these birds we are amazed to see a pair of Black-winged Starlings fly through. This highly distinctive black-and-white bird is incredibly scarce and really shouldn't be here. In all the excitement we forget that MK's tripod has the annoying habit of collapsing itself and as a result both it and my attached telescope collapse into the polluted grey mess below the boardwalk. Great.

Close to another section of the boardwalk a family of Ruddy-breasted Crakes seems oblivious to our presence and in the mangroves we find Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker, Ashy Tailorbird and Yellow-vented Bulbul. Finishing on a flurry we add Bar-winged Prinia, Chestnut Munia and a number of smart

Javan Mynas to the list, before returning to the reserve entrance where a particularly aggressive Long-tailed Macaque chases us along the boardwalk with snarls and bared yellow incisors!

And there the birding ceases. Only a short hop to Kuala Lumpur and the long drag to Heathrow remain. It has been a logistically testing, physically demanding and patience-trying month. We have certainly had our share of bad luck and low moments, but we have also seen some of the most amazing birds anywhere on the Planet, in some of the most fantastic settings imaginable, and in the presence of the finest company.

Sulawesi and Halmahera appear to be sliding down a steep slope to environmental oblivion and without serious and swift intervention it would seem that many of the best birding sites will no longer exist in the not-too-distant future. Irian Jaya is a world apart from these shattered remnants of former ecological splendour and at present a visit to this forest and coral paradise is a pleasure in a league of its own. With good fortune people, possessing the vision and determination of Kris Tindige will prevent this region from following the route of the Sulawesi and Halmahera, and the fierce red eye of Western Crowned Pigeon will stare down on fortunate birders for many generations to come.



The Spice Islands: Ambon and Yamdena, 13th - 21st September

Jon Hornbuckle

SC, JH and BW attempt to reach the Tanimbar Islands in the far east of Indonesia, via Ambon, the main "spice island", that was likened to Beirut at its worst not so long ago. The objective is to fly to Saumlaki on Yamdena, the main island of the Tanimbars, where all the 22 special birds can be seen.

Monday 13th September

We hope to reach Ambon from Sorong today using three connecting Lion Air flights, via Manado and Makassar. We leave at 0800 in the hotel bus only to find the daily flight to Manado is full! The previous two days' flights were cancelled due to a grounded plane, so their passengers have priority. After a lot of uncertainty and telephone assistance from Ninoy, Lion Air switch us to the 1500 Pelita Air flight to Makassar and book us on tomorrow's flight to Ambon, meaning we will have to overnight at the former. We could have gone birding with Ian and Martin this morning! We have to buy new tickets, with the assurance that we can get a full refund with Lion Air in Manado - if we ever get back there. Two further consequences are that we have to go to Sorong's other airport, some distance away on an island, and will be unable to collect items we left in Manado such as our spare clean clothes.

We learn that the Australian embassy in Jakarta was blown up by a bomb 3 days ago, killing 9 and injuring 150, but are reassured by the English manager of a dive resort that Indonesia is very safe - one of her local staff went to London recently and had her passport and money stolen the first day!

After checking in at the new airport, we explore the small island, finding Australian Pratincole, Beach Kingfisher and Singing Starling. The two hour flight is comfortable and on time. At Makassar we "book" a flight from Ambon to Saumlaki on Yamdena island in the Tanimbars on 15th, returning on 19th. We take a minibus into the city, the Muslim stronghold on Sulawesi, past a multitude of rice paddies, some holding herons, terns and waders. We stay at the Hotel Lestari, visit an internet café, and have a good seafood dinner.

Tuesday 14th September

The one advantage of the change in schedule is that we have the morning to catch up on Black-ringed White-eye, a bird we had missed three years ago. The minibus collects us as arranged at 0600 and takes us to 7 km beyond Bantimurung. Here we take the short track on the left, just after a bridge, and eventually have good views of the White-eye, after learning the sound of its trill. The few other birds include Yellow-billed Malkoha and a rather plain flycatcher, probably the undescribed *Muscicapa* species.

Driving up the nearby hill to the pass, the road enters some logged forest, so we stop and walk back down the road to Km 49 (from Makassar). White-eyes are common but there is little else of note. We arrive back at the airport at 1020, try unsuccessfully to get our Manado tickets refunded, and are told by Merpati that their Ambon - Saumlaki flights go via Tual on Kai, but don't run tomorrow. This is worrying news as it may unduly limit our time on the Tanimbars.

We leave at noon on time and arrive on Ambon at 1425 (with an hour's time difference). Here we are helped by Taka Gani from Seram (0813 43047126) and are able to buy a ticket for tomorrow's "non-existent" Saumlaki flight from a gorgeous Merpati girl, but not for the return leg. The flight is direct, 5 times a week; there is a daily flight from Ambon to Tual but as it does not go on to the Tanimbar islands, we have to forget the idea of going to the Kais.

The terminal is brand new, the old one having been destroyed in the recent religious warfare. Surprisingly, it does not have an ATM or currency exchange facility, so someone must go into town,

some 40 km away to get cash as we don't know if there will be any such facility in Saumlaki. Simon volunteers, after a jolly taxi-driver takes us to his hotel, the nearby Transit Hotel. B and J search for Ambon White-eye in the scrub and trees near the far end of the runway, with eventual success. Simon returns, in "Mr Jolly"'s taxi, with tales of burnt-out buildings and an invisible line crossing the city, to separate Christians and Muslims, for this was the centre of the terrible violence that paralysed the Moluccas in recent years. The day ends with a fine meal of fish, rice and Bintang.

Wednesday 15th September

We report to the Merpati office at 0600 as requested, to collect our tickets, but it is shut till 0620 - Indonesian time again. We board the ancient 22-seater at 0725; the flight is full so we were lucky to get seats with our unavoidably late booking. The two hour flight across the Banda Sea ranks as one of the most boring and uncomfortable I've ever made, with not an island in sight until we reach the Tanimbars where the turquoise sea abounds with sandy islets surrounded by coral reefs. At Saumlaki we transfer to the Harapan Indah Hotel (0918 21019), the only one in town. We ask about return flights: full on 18th and don't run on 19th, so we book the 20th. This means we have to delay Ambon - Makassar - Manado - Singapore flights too, eventually done by phone calls to Manado. Unlike most of the country, the population here is predominantly Christian, with not a mosque in sight.

The Chinese proprietors of the hotel own Lorulun Farm, 21 km north of Saumlaki. They agree that we can stay at there, as recommended by David Milton, the last birder known to have been here (in 2002) who found the forest around the farm to be the most intact seen during his visit. Departure is delayed as their vehicle has gone to the airport to meet the only other flight of the day, from Larat, the other town on the Tanimbars. It comes back, then disappears again - we later learn, from the receptionist, the only English-speaker around, that after taking off for Ambon, the pilot felt ill so returned to Saumlaki and the car went to investigate what was happening. We watch the rain beat down (the first since April they say!) and birds fishing nearby: Lesser Frigatebird, Australian Pelican, Brown Booby and White-winged and Greater Crested Terns.

Ready to leave at 1400 at last, with a crate of beer, Sprite and food, but as the asking price was excessive at 200K rp, we negotiate a deal with a bemo-driver to take us for 100K. After a bumpy ride, we reach the farm on the edge of a nice-looking patch of forest. The rain stops and we soon bag our first regional endemics: Wallacean Whistler, Black-faced Friarbird, Buru Oriole, Wallacean Drongo and Tanimbar Starling, as well as Wallace's and Rose-crowned Fruit-doves and Broad-billed Flycatcher. We walk north along the road, lined with scrub, overgrown grassland and small patches of forest, adding Long-tailed and Cinnamon-tailed Fantails while White-tufted Honeyeaters are by far the most numerous bird. Lagging behind, I record a Pied Bronze-cuckoo singing but cannot see it - little am I to know that this is to be our only record of this elusive species. A big fish for dinner, with 2 large Bintangs.

Thursday 16th - Saturday 18th September

Woken before dawn every morning by the cocks crowing, these three rainless days are spent birding trails in the logged remnant primary forest, with breaks for lunch at the farm. The main trail is north of the farm on the right by the second small bridge. There is more extensive forest 2 km south of the farm but more disturbed as it is still being selectively logged. New fairly common species of note in the forest are Elegant Imperial-Pigeon, Tanimbar Cockatoo, Wallacean Cuckoo-shrike, White-browed Triller, Rufous-chested Flycatcher, Rufous Fantail, Black-bibbed and Loetoe Monarchs, Golden-bellied Flycatcher, Rufous-sided Gerygone, Mistletoebird, Ashy-bellied White-eye and Banda Myzomela. We have a few sightings of Dusky Cuckoo-dove, Pink-headed Imperial-Pigeon, Blue-streaked Lory, Great-billed Parrot, Channel-billed Cuckoo and Cinnamon-banded Kingfisher, but Tanimbar Scrubfowl and Elegant Pitta are only heard (though we don't try hard to see the latter as we saw it in 2001). Tricoloured Parrotfinch and

Five-coloured Munia are seen in the more open areas, and at dusk Moluccan Hawk-Owl shows well at the forest edge.

Most time is devoted to the *Zoothera* thrushes and Tanimbar Bush-warbler. The stunning Slaty-backed Thrush is not so difficult to see, especially when encouraged by judicious use of play-back of its rich song, but Fawn-breasted Thrush, a distinctive member of the *dauma* group is a different story - an arch-skulker, flushed more often than seen. Its song is unknown (Coates and Bishop, 1997) and all we can hear are high frequency calls, given by both species and difficult to separate. The Bush-warbler is seen well by B and S, firstly one foraging amongst fallen branches, on and very close to the ground, always less than 30cm - it occasionally hops along the ground rather mouse-like. Then S sees two moving rapidly between stems of saplings, flying short distances, hopping from branch to branch, or hopping on the ground - again the birds appear rather mouse-like but not timid. They react to pishing and to imitations of the call - a very soft, short chacking, like a soft human tut. The birds are associating with a monarch/flycatcher/white-eye flock, but only very loosely, they seem to be around 20m behind. I hear such calls on one or two other occasions but am unable to see the bird clearly. I suffer another set-back when the focus of my Leica bins seizes up, rendering them useless at more than 10 metres.

From our observations, it appears that the Scrubfowl, Cockatoo and Lory have become much scarcer in this area in the last 10 years, probably due to trapping, but other birds, with the possible exception of the Pied Bronze-cuckoo, are still surviving fairly well, despite the continual destruction of the forest. The only bird attracted to the cuckoo song is, consistently, Wallacean Whistler, implying this species is probably the main host for the cuckoo's eggs - according to Coates and Bishop, Rufous-sided *Gerygone* is presumed to be its host; they also say the cuckoo is common on Yamdena.

Sunday 19th September

A final morning is spent along the trails. After lunch we visit the old village of Turgham, starting at the mayor's house, where a meeting of the village elders is in progress. After mutual greetings, we sign the visitors book, noting that all previous entries of the last 2-3 years look to be by either Indonesians or Australians, the latter associated with the annual Darwin to Saumlaki boat race. At a wood-carver's house we buy a number of carvings from the selection on offer by several local artists - good quality and value. We are invited to drink a glass of *Soli*, local spirit distilled from palm wine, but feel obliged to decline seconds as it is so strongly alcoholic.

A final 90 mins is spent on the logging trail in a vain quest for the Scubfowl at dusk, then we drive back to Saumlaki, through two villages where the ubiquitous Indonesian "Hello mister" is much in evidence, even here. We enjoy a good fish and scampi meal at the Harapan Indah, and the air-conditioning in our room, until it stops owing to a power cut.

Monday 20th September

Bit of a lie-in but still woken early by the cocks. Good breakfast of banana fritters and omelette, then hearing that the flight to Ambon is delayed by 90 mins, I go to the jetty to photo Frigatebirds and an imm. White-bellied Fish-Eagle. After settling the bill - equivalent to £60 each all-in for the five days - we go to the deserted airport. A walk on the runway reveals the amazing sight of some 100 Little Whimbel, Oriental Plover and Australian Pratincole. We have plenty of time to study them feeding, before the plane arrives from Ambon. After a lengthy refueling, we take off at 11.30 with only 12 passengers aboard, for another uncomfortable journey. The baggage allowance is only 10 kg each this time, so we have to pay for 6 kg excess.

At Ambon we collect the bags left at the Transit Hotel and buy tickets for tomorrow's Lion Air flights to Manado - 1,400,000 rp, only about £30 each. Mr Jolly drives us to the north side of the island on roads lined with nutmegs and cloves drying in the sun - this is the Spice Islands after all.

Our destination is Hila where we hope to overnight in the Manuala Beach Hotel, as recommended in *Birding Indonesia*. Unfortunately, the hotel is well and truly defunct, although locals say it is to be renovated for reopening next year; stranger things have happened.

We find the trail up the mountain, described in *Birding Indonesia* as the best birding destination on Ambon, and walk steeply up through clove and nutmeg plantations, with some remnant primary forest trees, to a viewpoint at c.300m asl. On the way we see Claret-breasted Fruit-Dove, White-eyed Imperial-Pigeon, Red-cheeked Parrot, Ashy Flowerpecker, Ambon White-eye, and best of all, a distant perched Lazuli Kingfisher. At the viewpoint we frustratingly hear fast-flying Red Lories and a single Salmon-crested Cockatoo calling from the valley below. We can see the forested hillsides, logged no doubt, along the spine of the island, and looking the other way, the large island of Seram, with its 12 endemics, looks temptingly close; another time... We walk quickly down to Mr Jolly for 6 pm and drive back to the Transit hotel, for a good but late dinner.

Tuesday 21st September

We were hoping for an early return to Hila but have to settle for 0545 departure as Mr Jolly has to make a drop at the airport before this. We reach the trail at 0640, intending to walk quickly up to the viewpoint and on to a better viewpoint another hour away. We delay on the way for a lengthy look at a bird, with Chestnut-breasted Cuckoo, Golden Bulbuls, Island Monarch and Slaty Flycatcher, then decide not to go beyond the first viewpoint. Red Lory is eventually seen well but there is not a sniff of the Cockatoo. We do see a party of 4 pipits flying over, later identified by call as Olive-backed - the most interesting record of the trip as this species is unrecorded in Wallacea, let alone Ambon, although being a long distance migrant, its presence on passage is not unexpected.

On the way down we stop for a large monitor lizard, a giant spider, the best butterflies of the trip and a few small birds, one of which is clearly a Seram Myzomela, also known, with some justification, as Drab Myzomela. This "poorly known, inconspicuous and easily over-looked" species (Coates and Bishop) is an unexpected bonus. We drive back to the hotel, with several stops to photo village life and buildings destroyed during the troubles, of which there are plenty. The 1515 flight to Makassar is nearly on time so that on arrival we have to wait for 4 hours before boarding our last internal flight, to Manado. Arriving at 10 pm, we have a long wait for bags, then are taken by Donald, a bird-guide (remember him to Julia) sent by Ninoy, to the Minahassa Hotel. Bed at midnight.

Wednesday 22nd September

B and S leave at 0430 for a day trip to Tangkoko, with Ninoy. This is successful in giving good views of Green-backed and Lilac Kingfishers, White-rumped Cuckoo-shrike, a Sulawesi Masked Owl roosting on a cliff-face, and the tiny Spectral Tarsier at dusk. They note that there has been a lot of deforestation along the access road, now paved, since we were there three years ago.

I sleep on till 0800, go to the Lion Air office and eventually get a full refund on the unused tickets - a bucketful (4,400,000 rps) of notes. After re-packing, I leave on the afternoon Silk Air flight to Singapore. B and S return to Manado and fly home the following morning.

So ends a successful and enjoyable visit to the Spice Islands - birding as I like it, with time to get to know what's there.



LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED IN INDONESIA 2-13 SEPTEMBER 2004.

- Matsudaira's Storm-Petrel** *Oceanodroma matsudairae*
Parties of three and four between Batanta and Salawati on 12th.
- Brown Booby** *Sula leucogaster*
Four during ferry crossing from Ternate to Sidangoli, Halmahera, on 3rd.
- Little Black Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax sulcirostris*
Singles noted on Batanta on 8th and 9th.
- Little Pied Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax melanoleucos*
One, Sidangoli, Halmahera, 7th. Four around the small lake on Salawati, 11th.
- Lesser Frigatebird** *Fregata ariel*
Small numbers seen at most coastal sites: at least 20 during the crossing from Ternate to Sidangoli, Halmahera, 3rd and during the return on 7th; six, Tobelo, Halmahera, 4th ; at least 20, *en route* to Batanta, 9th, also seen on the return trip to Sorong, on 12th, when ten were near Senapang Island.
- Great-billed Heron** *Ardea sumatrana*
Single along the shore of Batanta during the ferry crossing, 9th.
- Great Egret** *Ardea alba*
Single on the shore of Batanta, 9th and 2 at Sorong airport on 13th.
- Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta*
One on Salawati, 12th and 20 at Sorong on 13th.
- Pacific Reef-Heron** *Egretta sacra*
Two on the shore of Batanta and one at Salawati on 9th and 12th, respectively.
- Javan Pond-Heron** *Ardeola speciosa*
- Striated Heron** *Butorides striata*
Two in the mangroves at Sidangoli, Halmahera, 7th. One at Sorong airport on 13th.
- Spotted Whistling-Duck** *Dendrocygna guttata*
On a pool behind the beach on Salawati there were 14 on 11th and 17 on 12th.
- Radjah Shelduck** *Tadorna radjah*
Ten on 11th and 15 on 12th on the pool behind the beach on Salawati.
- Grey Teal** *Anas gracilis*
Three on 11th on the pool behind the beach on Salawati (not listed by Beehler *et al*).
- Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus*
Only seen on 10-12th around Batanta and Salawati, with five noted on 10th and a nesting pair on 12th on Salawati.
- Pacific Baza** *Aviceda subcristata stenzonoma*
Two over Batanta, 11th.
- Brahminy Kite** *Haliastur indus*
The most frequently encountered raptor: up to six daily at Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera during 4th to 7th ; on Batanta and Salawati, upto four daily during 9th to 12th ; one on Senapang Island, 12th and two at the airport, Sorong, 13th.
- White-bellied Sea-Eagle** *Haliaeetus leucogaster*
One near Kao, Halmahera, 4th . Up to three seen daily around Batanta during 9th to 12th.
- Variable Goshawk** *Accipiter hiogaster*
One heard along Jailolo road from Sidangoli, Halmahera on 5th. One at km10, Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera, 6th. One, Batanta, 9th.

- Grey-headed Goshawk** *Accipiter poliocephalus*
One, Salawati, 11th.
- Collared Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter cirrocephalus*
One, Salawati, 11th.
- Black Eagle** *Ictinaetus malayensis*
Two, Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera, 6th.
- Gurney's Eagle** *Aquila gurneyi*
Two about five kilometres along the logging road, Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera, 7th. One over Batanta, 10th.
- Spotted Kestrel** *Falco moluccensis*
Seen daily at Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera during 4th to 7th, with five noted on 5th.
- Red-billed Brush Turkey** *Tallegalla cuvieri*
Heard only, on Salawati, 11th.
- Dusky Scrubfowl** *Megapodius freycinet*
One seen at Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera, 4th . Thereafter only heard, several daily at Kali Batu Putih during 5th to 7th and one along the Jailolo road from Sidangoli, Halmahera on 5th.
- [Red-necked Crake** *Rallina tricolour]*
A rail heard calling from long grass when we were watching the King BoP on Sulawati is likely to have been this species.
- Bare-eyed Rail** *Gymnocrex plumbeiventris*
One seen in the early evening (and then spotlight) besides the Makbon road, Sorong on 8th .
- Australian Pratincole** *Stiltia isabella*
One at Sorong airport on 13th.
- Pacific Golden-Plover** *Pluvialis fulva*
Up to 20 on sand bars in the mangroves at Sidangoli, Halmahera on 7th . Three on the shore of the bay opposite the Waigo Hotel, Sorong, 9th and 10 at Sorong airport on 13th.
- Little Ringed Plover** *Charadrius dubius*
A few at Sorong airport on 13th
- Malaysian Plover** *Charadrius makbon*
Four on the sand bar off the logging camp, Salawati, 12th.
- Greater Sandplover** *Charadrius leschenaultii*
Six on the sand bar off the logging camp, Salawati, 12th and 5 at Sorong airport on 13th.
- Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus*
About 50 on sandbars in the mangroves at Sidangoli, Halmahera on 7th. Four, Salawati, 12th.
- Eurasian Curlew** *Numenius arquata*
One on the sand bar off the logging camp, Salawati, 12th .
- Common Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia*
One on the sand bar off the logging camp, Salawati, 12th.
- Terek Sandpiper** *Xenus cinereus*
Six on the sand bar off the logging camp, Salawati, 12th .
- Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos*
One, Sidangoli, Halmahera, 7th . Up to four seen most days around the shores of Batanta and Salawati during 10th to 12th . One on Senapang Island, Sorong., 12th and two at Sorong airport on 13th.
- Grey-tailed Tattler** *Heterosceles brevipes*
About six on sandbars in the mangroves at Sidangoli, Halmahera on 7th . Six on the sand bar off the logging camp, Salawati, 12th and two at Sorong airport on 13th.

Ruddy Turnstone***Arenaria interpres***

One at the airport, Sorong, 13th.

Great Knot***Calidris tenuirostris***

Two on the sand bar off the logging camp, Salawati, 12th .

Red-necked Stint***Calidris ruficollis***

Three on the sand bar off the logging camp, Salawati, 12th .

Curlew Sandpiper***Calidris ferruginea***

One, Tobelo, Halmahera, 4th .

Red-necked Phalarope***Phalaropus lobatus***

During the ferry crossing from Sidangoli, Halmahera to Ternate on 7th three sightings of this species: a single; a group of three; and a flock of about 50.

Great Crested Tern***Sterna bergii***

At least six during the ferry crossing from Ternate to Sidangoli, Halmahera, 3rd . Two, Tobelo, Halmahera, 4th . Two off Sorong, 9th and one there, 14th . Sixty on the sand bar off the logging camp, Salawati, 12th .

Black-naped Tern***Sterna sumatrana***

About 13 were close inshore at Senapang Island, 12th .

Common Tern***Sterna hirundo longipennis***

Two during the ferry crossing from Ternate to Sidangoli, Halmahera, 3rd . At least 250 made up the bulk of the large feeding flock of terns off Sidangoli, Halmahera, 7th . At least ten off Sorong, during early part of boat ride to Batanta, 9th . About ten between Batanta and Salawati, 12th .

Little Tern***Sterna albifrons***

One amongst the large feeding flock of terns off Sidangoli, Halmahera, 7th . Four off Sorong, 8th . Two among the Crested Terns on the sand bar of the logging camp, Salawati and a flock of about 30 along the coast of Salawati, 12th .

Bridled Tern***Sterna anaethetus***

At least three amongst the large feeding flock of terns off Sidangoli, Halmahera, 7th . Six between Batanta and Salawati, 12th .

White-winged Tern***Chlidonias leucopterus***

At least two amongst the large feeding flock of terns off Sidangoli, Halmahera, 7th . One at the airport, Sorong, on 13th .

Spotted Dove***Streptopelia chinensis*****Slender-billed Cuckoo-Dove*****Macropygia amboinensis***

One or two at Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera on 4th, 5th and 7th . Two, Makbon road, Sorong, 8th .

Pheasant Pigeon***Otidiphaps nobilis***

Only heard calling: at around 300 metres on Batanta, 10th .

Western Crowned-Pigeon***Goura cristata minor***

An undoubted highlight was watching one of these beasts perched precariously about 30 metres up a tree in the mangroves of Salawati on 12th . It had been located after about six had been flushed from the ground whilst searching for the very same.

Ornate Fruit-Dove***Ptilinopus ornatus*****Scarlet-breasted Fruit-Dove*****Ptilinopus bernsteinii***

Heard only: proved a very frustrating species, heard daily during 4th to 6th at Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera.

Wompoo Fruit-Dove***Ptilinopus magnificus alaris***

Two, Batanta, 9th . A male, Salawati, 12th .

Orange-fronted Fruit-Dove***Ptilinopus aurantiifrons***

A male on Senapang Island, 12th .

Beautiful Fruit-Dove***Ptilinopus pulchellus pulchellus***

One, Salawati, 12th.

Blue-capped Fruit-Dove***Ptilinopus monacha***

At Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera, one seen on 4th and one heard on 7th .

Claret-breasted Fruit-Dove***Ptilinopus viridis***

A pair on Salawati, 11th . Two males on the same island, 12th .

Orange-bellied Fruit-Dove***Ptilinopus iozonus***

Along the Makbon road, Sorong two were seen 8th and at least 12 on 13th . Four were noted on Salawati, 12th .

Gray-headed Fruit-Dove***Ptilinopus hyogaster***

Seen daily during 4th to 7th at Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera with at least ten noted on the last day. Seen along the logging road and along the main road at km 9 and km14.

White-eyed Imperial-Pigeon***Ducula perspicillata***

Noted daily at Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera during 3rd to 7th . Most was about ten on 5th.

Spice Imperial-Pigeon***Ducula myristicivora***

About ten along the shore of Batanta, 10th and a similar number around Senapang Island, 12th .

Cinnamon-bellied Imperial-Pigeon***Ducula basilica***

Two singles seen at Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera on 6th and others heard there on 4th and 7th.

Pinon Imperial-Pigeon***Ducula pinon pinon***

Five, Batanta, 9th . Two, Salawati, 11th . On 13th , two at both the Intimpura Logging Road, Sorong and Makbon road, Sorong, .

Zoe Imperial-Pigeon***Ducula zoeae***

Three along the Makbon road, Sorong, 8th . One, Salawati, 12th .

Pied Imperial-Pigeon***Ducula bicolor***

About 20 along the Jailolo road at Sidangoli, Halmahera, 5th . At least two in the mangroves of Sidangoli, Halmahera, 7th . Three and a flock of 26, Senapang Island, , 12th .

Palm Cockatoo***Probosciger aterrimus***

One along the Makbon road, Sorong, 8th . Up to four on Batanta, 9th and 10th . Up to three on Salawati, 11th and 12th . Six around Senapang Island, 12th .

Sulphur-crested Cockatoo***Cacatua galerita***

One along the Makbon road, Sorong, 8th . Around ten noted daily around Batanta and Salawati, 9th to 12th .

White Cockatoo***Cacatua alba***

Small numbers (ones and twos) seen daily on Halmahera during 4th to 7th . The first near Kao, otherwise in the Kali Batu Putih area.

Black Lory***Chalcopsitta atra***

On Salawati, a total of seven in small groups on 11th .

Violet-necked Lory***Eos squamata***

A very colourful group of 24 on the Jailolo road at Sidangoli, Halmahera, 5th . Two along the logging track at Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera, 7th .

Rainbow Lorikeet***Trichoglossus haematodus***

Seen daily on Batanta during 9th to 11th , including at least 20 on 10th.

Chattering Lory***Lorius garrulus***

Two at km14, Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera, 6th .
Several captive individuals were noted in Ternate on 7th .

Black-capped Lory***Lorius lory***

Six, Makbon road, Sorong, 8th and four there on 13th. Three, Batanta, 11th . Two, Salawati, 12th . Four, Intimpura Logging Road, Sorong, 13th .

Red-flanked Lorikeet***Charmosyna placentis***

Two along the logging track, Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera, 5th . Four at about km8, Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera on 7th.

Yellow-capped Pygmy-Parrot***Micropsitta keiensis***

Two were noted on Batanta on 9th . One remained and proved very confiding as it crept, legs splayed, up and down the limbs of a tree in the manner of a Eurasian Treecreeper—remarkable.

Double-eyed Fig-Parrot***Cyclopsitta diophthalma***

One, Salawati, 12th .

Large Fig-Parrot***Psittaculirostris desmarestii***

Six, Makbon road, Sorong, 8th . A pair, Salawati, 12th .

Red-cheeked Parrot***Geoffroyus geoffroyi***

During 4th to 7th in the Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera area: one by the roadside at km10 on 4th; two on the Jailolo road from Sidangoli on 5th, six on the logging track on 6th; and one at km12 on 7th. On the Makbon road, Sorong, four were seen on 8th.

Great-billed Parrot***Tanygnathus megalorhynchus***

Six, Senapang Island, 12th .

Eclectus Parrot***Eclectus roratus***

Up to ten seen daily in ones and twos over the canopy of the forests and perched prominently in the Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera area during 4th to 7th . Seen daily (most was 14 on 11th) on Batanta and Salawati during 9th to 12th , again ones and twos, often in flight but also stunning perched views. At least four on Senapang Island, 12th . Along the Makbon road, Sorong, two noted on 8th .

Moluccan King-Parrot***Alisterus amboinensis***

One, Salawati, 12th .

Moluccan Hanging-Parrot***Loriculus amabilis***

At Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera, four at km9 on 4th and two at km14 on 6th .

Oriental Cuckoo***Cuculus saturatus***

Singles noted on 5th, 6th and 7th , Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera. One, Salawati, 12th .

Brush Cuckoo***Cacomantis variolosus***

One, Batanta, 11th .

Chestnut-breasted Cuckoo***Cacomantis castaneiventris***

One, Batanta, 11th . Two along Makbon road, Sorong, 13th .

Shining Bronze-Cuckoo***Chrysococcyx lucidus*****Asian Drongo-Cuckoo*****Surniculus lugubris***

One heard at Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera, 6th .

Australian Koel***Eudynamys cyanocephala*****Yellow-billed Malkoha*****Phaenicophaeus calyorrhynchus*****Goliath Coucal*****Centropus goliath***

On Halmahera: one at km9, Kali Batu Putih, 4th ; two on the Jailolo road from Sidangoli, 5th ; and a group of six along the logging track, Kali Batu Putih, 6th .

Lesser Black Coucal***Centropus bernsteini***

One, Salawati, 11th .

Lesser Coucal***Centropus bengalensis***

One heard at km8, Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera, 7th .

Moluccan Scops-Owl***Otus magicus leucospilus***

One seen well during the evening on of 3rd along the logging track at Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera and at least five others calling. Also there one or two heard during the evening of 6th and morning of 7th. On 5th, one heard calling on the Jailolo road from Sidangoli, Halmahera.

Moluccan Hawk-Owl *Ninox squamipila hypogramma*
On 6th, heard at Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera before dawn and again at dusk

Moluccan Owlet-Nightjar *Aegotheles crinifrons*
Stunning spotlighted views of one along the logging track at Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera on 3rd, with two others calling there also. One heard in the same area at dusk on 6th.

Barred Owlet-Nightjar *Aegotheles bennettii*

Large-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus macrurus*
One at first light at km9, Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera, 4th (also heard here on 6th). Also heard along the Jailolo road out of Sorong, 5th.

Glossy Swiftlet *Collocalia esculenta*
Small numbers seen daily around Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera during 4th to 7th. Two, Batanta, 11th. About 20 on the Makbon road, Sorong, on 8th and 13th.

Moluccan Swiftlet *Aerodramus infuscatus*
Small numbers seen daily at Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera during 4th to 7th.

Uniform Swiftlet *Aerodramus vanikorensis*
Noted in small numbers over Makbon road and at the airport, Sorong, Batanta and Makassar.

Papuan Needletail *Mearnsia novaeguineae*
One, Salawati, 12th [and 4 Intimpura Logging Road, Sorong, 13th].
These records are out of range for this species according to both Chantler and Driessens (1995) and del Hoyo *et al.* (1999), however both mention a record of ten at Sorong, in August 1992. Have there been records from the area in the subsequent years?

House Swift *Apus nipalensis*

Moustached Treeswift *Hemiprocne mystacea*
Singles on Halmahera as follows: logging track, Kali Batu Putih on 5th, 6th and 7th; Jailolo road from Sidangoli on 5th; km12 at Kali Batu Putih on 7th. One, Makbon road, Sorong, 8th. During 9th to 12th up to nine frequented a dead tree at Wei Lebed, Batanta.

Azure Kingfisher *Alcedo azurea*
One, Salawati, 12th.

Rufous-bellied Kookaburra *Dacelo gaudichaud*
Heard on the Makbon road, Sorong, on 8th and 13th. On Batanta, two seen on 9th and heard also on 10th and 11th.

Blue-and-white Kingfisher *Todirhamphus diops*
A male near Kao, Halmahera, 4th. A male, on Jailolo road from Sidangoli, Halmahera, 5th. A group of three, two males and a female, along the logging track Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera, in 51.

Collared Kingfisher *Todirhamphus chloris chloris*
One in the mangroves at Sidangoli, Halmahera on 7th. One at the airport at Sorong, 13th.

Sombre Kingfisher *Todirhamphus funebris*
Heard only: at dawn on 4th, 6th and 7th at Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera.

Beach Kingfisher *Todirhamphus saurophaga saurophaga*
Two, Senapang Island off Sorong, 12th.

Sacred Kingfisher *Todirhamphus sanctus sanctus*
One, Tobelo, Halmahera, 4th. Four in the mangroves at Sidangoli, Halmahera, 7th. On 12th singles were seen on Salawati and Senapang Island, Sorong, and one at Sorong airport, 13th.

Hook-billed Kingfisher***Melidora macrorrhina***

Heard only: at dawn on Batanta on 10th and 11th and at dusk along Makbon road, Sorong.

Yellow-billed Kingfisher***Syma torotoro torotoro***

Heard only: one along Makbon road, Sorong, 8th.

Common Paradise-Kingfisher***Tanysiptera galateai***

One heard at Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera on 4th and one seen and two more heard there on 7th .
One seen and two heard on Batanta, 9th .

Rainbow Bee-eater***Merops ornatus***

August 2004. Up to eight daily in the Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera area, 5th to 7th . Six, Senapang Island, Sorong, 12th.

Dollarbird***Eurystomus orientalis***

One by the road-side at about km8, Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera on 7th .Two, Makbon road, Sorong, 8th September. Singles on Batanta on 9th and 10th.

Blyth's Hornbill***Aceros plicatus reficollis***

Remarkably common in the Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera area, seen daily during 4th to 7th with as many as 50 a day recorded. On 7th a soaring flock above the canopy along the logging track numbered more than 30. Four along the Makbon road, Sorong, 8th (at least six there on 13th). Also common on Batanta and Salawati, several recorded daily during 9th to 12th , including groups of 12 and 17 on Salawati on 11th

Hooded Pitta***Pitta sordida***

One heard on Salawati, 12th .

Ivory-breasted Pitta***Pitta maxima***

Only one seen: at km9 Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera on 4th , where at least three others were calling. Heard commonly in the Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera area and along the Jailolo road from Sidangoli, Halmahera during 4th to 7th : as many as ten a day.

Red-bellied Pitta***Pitta erythrogaster***

After hearing birds along Makbon road, Sorong, on 9th and Batanta on 9th and 10th , one was seen on Salawati on 11th . subsequently two others heard on Salawati on 12th .

Barn Swallow***Hirundo rustica***

Seen at Tobelo, Halmahera on 4th .

Pacific Swallow***Hirundo tahitica***

Seen at Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera during 4th to 7th and the Makbon road, Sorong, on 8th.

Moluccan Cuckoo-shrike***Coracina atriceps***

A male, Jailolo road from Sidangoli, Halmahera, 5th . Three along the logging track, Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera, Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera.

White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike***Coracina papuensis***

A pair along the Jailolo road from Sidangoli, Halmahera, 5th . Seven, Batanta, 10th . Four, Salawati, 12th .

Halmahera Cuckoo-shrike***Coracina parvula***

Three at km10, Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera, 6th .

Cicadabird***Coracina tenuirostris grayi***

A pair, Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera, 5th .

Gray-headed Cuckoo-shrike***Coracina schisticeps***

Two males and a female along the Makbon road, Sorong, 8th .

Rufous-bellied Triller***Lalage aurea***

At least 12 along the logging track at Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera on 8th , with four seen there the following day. Two along the Jailolo road from Sidangoli, Halmahera on 6th and two at km12, Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera, 7th .

Black-browed Triller***Lalage atrovirens***

Along the Makbon road, Sorong, three were seen on 8th and a male and female on 13th .

Sooty-headed Bulbul***Pycnonotus aurigaster***

Fairly common in the Makassar and Bantimurung, Sulawesi area on 23rd August 2004: introduced.

Golden Bulbul***Alophoixus affinis chloris***

Seen in small groups around Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera daily during 4th to 7th , with at least ten on 7th.

Gray's Warbler***Locustella fasciolata***

Two were seen along the logging track at Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera, 6th .

Northern Fantail***Rhipidura rufiventris***

Two on Batanta, 9th .

Willie-wagtail***Rhipidura leucophrys***

Up to four seen daily at Sidangoli, Halmahera during 4th to 7th . Two daily at Wei Lebed on Batanta, 10th to 12th . Two on Senapang Island, 12th and six at Sorong airport, 13th.

White-bellied Thicket-Fantail***Rhipidura leucothorax***

Two, Intimpura Logging Road, Sorong, 13th .

White-naped Monarch***Monarcha pileatus***

One or two seen daily at Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera during 4th to 7th .

Spot-winged Monarch***Monarcha guttulus***

Three, Batanta, 9th .

Spectacled Monarch***Monarcha trivirgatus***

Up to six seen daily at Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera during 4th to 7th .

Frilled Monarch***Arses telescopthalmus***

One calling along the Makbon road, Sorong, 13th .

Frilled Monarch***Arses telescopthalmus***

Five on Batanta, 9th with four there the following day.

Moluccan Flycatcher***Myiagra galeata***

One along the logging track at Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera, 5th (and one heard there on 7th). One along the Jailolo road from Sidangoli, Halmahera, 5th .

Shining Flycatcher***Myiagra alecto***

Up to three seen (and others heard) at Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera during 5th to 7th .

Shining Flycatcher***Myiagra alecto***

Heard on Batanta, 10th . A male on Salawati, 11th . A male and a pair on Makbon road, Sorong, 13th .

Citrine Canary-flycatcher***Culicicapa helianthea*****Black-sided Robin*****Poecilodryas hypoleuca***

One along the Makbon road, Sorong, 8th .

Golden Whistler***Pachycephala pectoralis***

Singles on the logging track at Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera on 5th and 7th , and another at km12 on 7th.

Drab Whistler***Pachycephala griseonota***

One heard at km9, Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera, 4th . One seen along the logging track at Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera, 6th

Rufous Shrike-Thrush***Colluricincla megarhyncha***

One, Batanta, 10th .

Rusty Pitohui***Pitohui ferrugineus***

At least four on Batanta, 9th .

Rusty Mouse-Warbler***Crateroscelis murina***

Heard daily on Batanta, 9th to 11th : one appeared on a Wilson's Bird of Paradise dance ground on 11th.

- Green-backed Gerygone** *Gerygone chloronotus*
Recorded on Batanta on 9th, 10th and 11th and on Salawati on 12th.
- Large-billed Gerygone** *Gerygone magnirostris*
Two, 9th, Batanta.
- Plain-throated Sunbird** *Anthreptes malacensis*
A few at Bantimurung, Sulawesi, 23rd August 2004.
- Black Sunbird** *Leptocoma sericea*
Up to ten daily at Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera during 4th to 7th. One or two males seen at the Makbon road, Sorong, on 8th and 13th.
- Olive-backed Sunbird** *Cinnyris jugularis frenatus*
Up to six daily at Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera during 4th to 7th. One on Jailolo road from Sidangoli, Halmahera on 5th. One Batanta, 11th. Four along the Intimpura Logging Road, Sorong, 13th.
- Yellow-bellied Longbill** *Toxorhamphus novaeguineae*
One heard on Batanta, 9th and one seen on Salawati on 11th.
- Yellow-sided Flowerpecker** *Dicaeum aureolimbatum*
At least ten noted at Bantimurung, Sulawesi
- Flame-breasted Flowerpecker** *Dicaeum erythrothorax*
On 5th a female was seen on the logging track at Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera and a male on the Jailolo road from Sidangoli, Halmahera.
- Olive-crowned Flowerpecker** *Dicaeum pectorale*
Heard and seen in flight on both Batanta (11th and 12th) and Salawati (12th).
- Black-ringed White-eye** *Zosterops*
Two at Bantimurung, Sulawesi on.
- Cream-throated White-eye** *Zosterops atriceps fuscifrons*
Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera, six seen on 5th and two the next day.
- Dusky Myzomela** *Myzomela obscura*
One, Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera, 5th.
- Mimic Honeyeater** *Meliphaga analoga*
Noted on Batanta on 9th and 11th
- Yellow-gaped Honeyeater** *Meliphaga flavirictus*
One, Batanta, 9th.
- Varied Honeyeater** *Lichenostomus versicolor*
One, Senapang Island, Sorong, 12th and heard at the airport, 13th.
- Tawny-breasted Honeyeater** *Xanthotis flaviventer*
About six on Batanta, 9th and four on 11th.
- White-streaked Friarbird** *Melitograis gilolensis*
Up to four seen at Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera on 4th, 5th and 7th.
- Helmeted Friarbird** *Philemon buceroides*
One or two seen along Makbon road, Sorong, on 8th, on Batanta on 9th and 10th and Salawati on 11th and 12th.
- Halmahera Oriole** *Oriolus phaeochromus*
One seen at Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera on 4th and heard there the next day.
- Brown Oriole** *Oriolus szalay*
An immature on Batanta, 9th (where one had been heard earlier in the day). Two on Salawati, 12th.
- Sulawesi Drongo** *Dicrurus montanus*

Two, Bantimurung, Sulawesi, .

Spangled Drongo

Dicrurus bracteatus atrocaeruleus

Seen daily at Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera during 4th to 7th , with at least ten noted on 5th. Also seen along the Jailolo road from Sidangoli, Halmahera on 5th . Seen daily on Batanta and Salawati during 9th to 12th , with six on Batanta on 9th the most. Six were also seen on the Makbon road, Sorong, 13th .

White-breasted Woodswallow

Artamus leucorhynchus

Two, Bantimurung, Sulawesi, 23rd August 2004. On Halmahera on 6th : three were along the logging track at Kali Batu Putih and another was seen along the road around km12. Six on Senapang Island, Sorong, 12th and two at the airport, 13th.

Hooded Butcherbird

Cracticus cassicus

About ten daily on Batanta, 9th to 11th . Six, Salawati, 12th .

Black Butcherbird

Cracticus quoyi

Two, Salawati, 12th .

Paradise-crow

Lycocorax pyrrhopterus

Only on Halmahera. Recorded daily during 4th to 7th around Kali Batu Putih with eight seen on 7th

Glossy-mantled Manucode

Manucodia atra

On Batanta, one on 9th and two on both 10th and 11th . On 13th , two along the Intimpura Logging Road and about ten on the Makbon road, Sorong, .

Magnificent Riflebird ***Ptiloris magnificus***

Wilson's Bird-of-paradise

Cicinnurus respublica

On Batanta on 10th and 11th at least seven individuals (three immature males and four females) we seen around two leks during the first three hours of light.

King Bird-of-paradise

Cicinnurus regius

On 11th a male performed an extended display high in the canopy of Salawati. Otherwise only heard, two the following day, also on Salawati.

Wallace's Standardwing

Semioptera wallacii

A male and female at Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera, 4th .

Red Bird-of-paradise

Paradisaea rubra

Recorded on Batanta daily from 9th to 11th . On 9th at least nine were seen, including at least six in a display tree.

Long-billed Crow

Corvus validus

On Halmahera: three along the Jailolo road from Sidangoli on 5th ; five at km14 post, Kali Batu Putih on 6th: and two along the logging track, Kali Batu Putih on 7th.

Grey Crow

Corvus tristis

Six, Makbon road, Sorong, 8th (and four there on 13th). On Batanta, three on 9th and ten on 11th . On Salawati, six on 11th and 2 on 12th . Two, Intimpura Logging Road, Sorong, 13th .

Torresian Crow

Corvus orru

During 9th to 12th up to five seen daily around Batanta and Salawati.

Metallic Starling

Aplonis metallica

Common at Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera during 3rd to 7th , with more than 100 seen on some days.

Singing Starling

Aplonis cantoroides

Two at Sorong airport, 13th.

Yellow-faced Myna

Mino dumontii

One Salawati, three, 11th and two, 12th . On 13th , six, Intimpura Logging Road, Sorong, and two, Makbon road, Sorong, .

Golden Myna

Mino anais

Two, Salawati, 12th .

Eurasian Tree Sparrow***Passer montanus malaccensis***

Very common, small numbers seen on Java, Sulawesi, Ternate, Halmahera, Batanta, Salawati, and .

Black-faced Munia***Lonchura molucca***

Small numbers seen at several sites, as follows: two, Bantimurung, Sulawesi, 23rd August 2004; one, near the town of Palolo, lower Palu Valley, Sulawesi, 27th August 2004; at least ten, near Doludua, Sulawesi, 31st August 2004; and about four daily at Kali Batu Putih, Halmahera during 5th to 7th .

Chestnut Munia***Lonchura atricapilla***

Two, Bantimurung, Sulawesi, 23rd August 2004.

Additional species recorded by IM and MK on 13 Sept on Makbon Road and Intimpura Logging Road, Sorong

Rufous-tailed Bush-hen	<i>Amaurornis moluccanus</i>
Great Cuckoo-Dove	<i>Reinwardtoena reinwardtii</i>
Pink-spotted Fruit-Dove	<i>Ptilinopus perlatus</i>
Dwarf Fruit-Dove	<i>Ptilinopus nanus</i>
Dusky Lory	<i>Pseudeos fuscata</i>
Papuan Hanging-Parrot	<i>Loriculus aurantiifrons</i>
Channel-billed Cuckoo	<i>Scythrops novaehollandiae</i>
Boyer's Cuckoo-shrike	<i>Coracina boyeri</i>
Black Cuckoo-shrike	<i>Campephaga flava</i>
White-bellied Thicket-Fantail	<i>Rhipidura leucothorax</i>
Golden Monarch	<i>Monarcha chrysomela</i>
Long-billed Honeyeater	<i>Melilestes megarhynchus</i>
Streak-headed Honeyeater	<i>Pycnopygius stictocephalus</i>
Lesser Bird-of-paradise	<i>Paradisaea minor minor</i>
White-eared Catbird	<i>Ailuroedus buccoides</i> One heard only
Streak-headed Munia	<i>Lonchura tristissima</i>