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Birding around the summit of Mt. Hagen in Papua New Guinea

by Michiel van den Bergh

Introduction

From July 29 to 1 August 2008 I spent 4 days birding on and near the summit of Mt. Hagen (3861 metres), Enga Province, Papua New Guinea. My goal was to see some high altitude birds, with a remote change of discovering an unknown population of Mannikin species (*Lonchura*) or Greater Ground-Robin (*Amalocichla sclateriana*).

Unfortunately, I did not record any Mannikins or Ground-Robins. However, I did see some interesting localized high-altitude species, including Long-bearded Melidectes (*Melidectes princeps*) and Mountain Robin (*Petroica bivittata*), that were well worth the visit. Besides, the forest and scenery were stunning, and the birding was great, with many 'difficult' species seen with relatively ease and at close range. With this short note I provide some information on the birds and birding possibilities of this ornithological poorly known mountain.

Logistics and accommodation

My trip was arranged through the Kumul Lodge (<http://www.kumullodge.com.pg/>), who gave me permission to visit the privately (by a clan) owned mountain and supplied me with a guide. As there is no accommodation on the mountain you have to sleep on a grass-lined floor of a rock overhang; the so-called cave. Food, drinks, cooking gear, mattresses, sleeping bag etc. all have to be brought up the mountain by yourself and/or the guide.

The cave is situated at 3650 metres above sea level, right at the tree line and can be reached from the Kumul Lodge via a fairly rough trail. It takes about 6 hours or more to reach the cave. There was no trail up to the summit, and to reach the summit I had to make a (fairly) rough and sometimes steep hike for several hours.

Birding

I tried to do some line transects counts to obtain a rough estimate of the abundance of some bird species. These line transects included the following three;

- Line transect (1) Transect downhill from the cave (cave excess trail) through montane forest; elevation 3650 - 3450m; length 1.5km.
- Line transect (2) Transect on both sides of the cave along the tree line; elevation 3650m; length 150m.
- Line transect (3) Transect uphill from the cave through alpine grassland and a isolated forest patch; elevation 3650-3750m; length 500m.

All three line transect were surveyed three to four times, back and forth, including at least once in the early morning and once in the (late) afternoon. Besides birding these line transect, I spent one day birding the summit and surrounding valleys and peaks (4); an area existing of extensive alpine grasslands and isolated forest patches.

Highlights

Multiple sightings of both Long-bearded Melidectes (*Melidectes princeps*) and the uncommon Mountain Robin (*Petroica bivittata*) represented the highlights of the trip; being both very localized high altitude species and difficult to see anywhere in New Guinea (to which they are endemic). Other recorded New Guinea high altitude endemics which are often difficult to see elsewhere in the country or maybe even anywhere in New Guinea, included Painted Tiger Parrot (*Psittacella picta*), New Guinea Thornbill (*Acanthiza murina*), Alpine Pipit (*Anthus gutturalis*) and Sooty Melidectes (*Melidectes fuscus*); all of them were moderately easy to very easy to see. The fact that most birds were very approachable (due to the lack of hunting?) made the birding even more rewarding. See the bird list for an overview of all recorded birds.

Bird list

Bird species that were recorded along the line transects (1, 2 & 3) and/or on the summit and surrounding valleys (4) are listed below (only birds identified up to species level are listed). Furthermore, the number of days on which a species was recorded are given, after which, between brackets, the location is given where the species is recorded, concluding with the maximum of birds recorded on one day or other additional information.

1. **Papuan Mountain Pigeon** (*Gymnophaps albertisii*) seen on 2 days (1), up to 2 birds
2. **Papuan Lorikeet** (*Charmosyna papou*) seen on 3 days (1), up to 2 birds (2 dark morphs)
3. **Plum-faced Lorikeet** (*Oreopsittacus arfaki*) seen/heard on 4 days (1); up to 15 birds
4. **Painted Tiger Parrot** (*Psittacella picta*) seen on 3 days (1 & 2), up to 2 birds
5. **Fan-tailed Cuckoo** (*Cacomantis flabelliformis*) seen on 1 day (2), 1 bird
6. **Glossy Swiftlet** (*Collocalia esculenta*) seen on 4 days (1,2,3 & 4), up to 4 birds
7. **Mountain Swiftlet** (*Collocalia hirundinaceus*) seen on 1 day (4), common in area 4
8. **Island Thrush** (*Turdus poliocephalus*) seen on 1 day (4), 4 birds
9. **Papuan Grassbird** (*Megalurus macrurus*) seen on 2 days (3 & 4), common, up to 22 birds
10. **New Guinea Thornbill** (*Acanthiza murina*) seen on 4 days (1&2), many groups of 2-10 birds
11. **Mountain Mouse Warbler** (*Crateroscelis robusta*) seen/heard on 3 days (1&3), up to 3 birds

12. **Papuan Scrubwren** (*Sericornis perspicillatus*) seen on 2 days (1), up to 4 birds
13. **Large Scrubwren** (*Sericornis nouhuysi*) seen on 1 day (1), 3 birds
14. **Friendly Fantail** (*Rhipidura albolimbata*) seen on 4 days (1 & 2), up to 6 birds
15. **Dimorphic Fantail** (*Rhipidura brachyrhyncha*) seen on 3 days (1), up to 2 birds
16. **Mountain Robin** (*Petroica bivittata*) seen on 2 days (1), up to 2 birds
17. **White-winged Robin** (*Peneothello sigillatus*) seen on 4 days (1,2,3), 2 to 6 birds a day
18. **Canary Flycatcher** (*Microeca flavigaster*) seen on 1 day (1), 1 bird
19. **Garnet Robin** (*Eugeryone rubra*) seen on 1 day (1), 1 female bird
20. **Alpine Pipit** (*Anthus gutturalis*) seen on 2 days (3,4), 20+ birds in (4), incl. 6 males singing
21. **Regent Whistler** (*Pachycephala schlegelii*) seen on 2 days (1), up to 3 birds
22. **Brown-backed Whistler** (*Pachycephala monacha*) seen on 1 day (1), 1 bird
23. **Crested Berrypecker** (*Paramythia montium*) seen on 3 days (1), up to 8+ birds
24. **Grey-streaked Honeyeater** (*Ptiloprora perstriata*) seen on 3 days (1,2), up to 9 birds
25. **Black-throated Honeyeater** (*Lichenostomus subfrenatus*) seen on 1 day (1), 3 birds
26. **Belford's Melidectes** (*Melidectes belfordi*) seen on 4 days (1,2,4), up to 8 birds
27. **Long-bearded Melidectes** (*Melidectes princeps*) seen on 4 days (1,2,3), up to 3 birds

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| 28. Sooty Melidectes (<i>Melidectes fuscus</i>) seen on 3 days
(1,2,4), up to 1 bird |
| 29. Common Smokey Honeyeater (<i>Melidectes fumigatus</i>)
seen on 3 days (1), up to 2 birds |
| 30. Crested Bird of Paradise (<i>Cnemophilus loriae</i>) seen on 1
day (1), 5 birds |
| 31. Ribbon-tailed Astrapia (<i>Astrapia mayeri</i>) seen on 3 days
(1), up to 3 birds |
| 32. Brown Sicklebill (<i>Epimachus fastuosus</i>) heard on 1 day
from (1), 1 bird calling below (1) |

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Eurasian Tree Sparrows (*Passer montanus*) in PNG

by Phil Gregory

Eurasian Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*) is known from West Papua with records from Biak, and now seemingly newly but well-established in urban centres such as Sorong and Jayapura as well as some villages, but there have been no published Papua New Guinea records to date.

In April 2007 I was in Walindi on New Britain, and following a tip-off from a local about some sparrows in Kimbe town, I went to check the sparrows in the industrial area. I found some half dozen Eurasian Tree Sparrows flitting about by a paint warehouse, and carrying nest material. I returned in June 2007 and again saw the birds at this site, where they seem well-established.