

**NOTES ON THE AVIFAUNA OF BACAN, KASIRUTA AND OBI,
NORTH MOLUCCAS**

by

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(Revised manuscript received. 1 October 1993)

In 1991 and 1992, field work was conducted in the north Moluccas under the auspices of IUCN (the World Conservation Union) to ascertain the status of three species of parrot: White Cockatoo *Cacatua alba*, Chattering Lory *Lorius garrulus* and two subspecies of Violet-backed Lory *Eos squamata riciniata* and *E. s. obiensis* (Lambert 1993; in press). During these survey, about one month was spent on Bacan (0°30'S, 127°0'E - October/November 1991), four days on the adjacent island of Kasiruta (0°25'S, 127°10'E - 20-24 November) and a further month on Obi (1°30'S, 127°45'E - February 1992). Most of the parrot surveys were conducted in the lowlands and hills, although observations were made up to 1,300 m on the steep forested western slopes of Mt Sibela, Bacan, and at altitudes of up to ca. 730 m in the upper catchment of the Widi Besar River, Obi. Even at these higher altitudes, however, the forest was tall, with trees estimated to be 30-35 m tall, and best described as submontane rather than montane even at 1,300 m. Unfortunately, it was not possible to reach the true montane forests of Mt Sibela (maximum elevation 2111 m).

There are many gaps in our knowledge about the birds of the north Maluku, where most ornithological work has concentrated on Ternate, Halmahera and Bacan. Obi, despite its size, has been poorly surveyed for birds, whilst the small island of Kasiruta, separated from Bacan by a narrow channel, is even less well known. White & Bruce (1986) list no birds from the latter, although it is not inconceivable that bird specimens collected on "Bacan" may include some from Kasiruta. A list of all species observed during the brief visit to Kasiruta in 1991 is therefore included in this paper (Table 1). The following species account presents distributional, altitudinal, and biological data additional or contradictory to that in White & Bruce (1986) and publications. Nomenclature and sequence follow Andrew (1992).

Great-billed Heron *Ardea sumatrana*. Though principally a coastal species in Wallacea, two birds were observed at 80-90 m elevation along a small river about 12 km from the coast, inland from Yaba, Bacan.

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*. Recorded for the first time on Obi near Laiwai in 1989 (Linsley, in prep.). Subsequently a snail flock was observed near Kelo in 1992.

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*. Observed along the north coast and over forest near Lake Manis, Obi. Linsley (in prep.) also reported the species at the same locality in 1989. These are the first records for Obi.

Moluccan Goshawk *Accipiter henicogrammus*. The call of this species on Bacan, from a perched bird, was noted to be 12-16 ascending whistles, the last 6-8 notes wavering and more shrieking.

Goshawk sp. *Accipiter* sp, cf. *Meyerianus*. On 14 February, a large immature *Accipiter* was observed perched in primary forest canopy at 445 m in the upper catchment of the Widi Besar River, Obi. Field notes taken were as follows: cere greyish, eye dark, bin black, legs not observed clearly; short but prominent buffy supercilium behind eye and prominent dark eye stripe; underparts pale orange-buff with bold but not broad dark brown streaking on breast and sides of neck and less distinct streaking or spotting on the lower flanks. Undertail coverts paler orange and unstreaked, held fluffed out in a manner reminiscent of European Goshawk *A. gentilis*; tail, observed from broiw, with broad blackish terminal bar and 4-5 narrower dark bars.

The author has been unable to confirm the identity of this bird. Of the two *Accipiter* spp. that have been recorded on Obi (*vide* White & Bruce 1986), only Grey Goshawk *A. novaehollandiae obiensis* is a large species, and neither this nor Rufous-necked Sparrow-hawk *A. e. erythrauchen*, depicted by Weick (1980), conform with the description of the bird observed in 1992. The most similar illustration to the bird observed is that of immature Meyer's Goshawk *A. meyerianus*. This species is known in the Moluccas from Halmahera, Boana, Seram and Seram Laut (White & Bruce 1986). The size and pattern of the head, with prominent dark eyestripe and buff superciliary behind the eye, underparts with bold but not broad streaks, unmarked undertail coverts, and tail with broad dark terminal band and 4-5 narrower bars, all strongly suggest that the individual observed was an immature Meyer's Goshawk.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*. A Peregrine was observed chasing Barn Swallows *Hirundo rustica* over the sea between small islands near Labuha on 2 February. This is the first record for Bacan. Elsewhere in the Moluccas, *F. p. calidus* has been recorded from Ternate and Seram. Although the subspecies of the individual seen on Bacan was not ascertained, the bird appeared to be too pale to be *F. p. ernesti*, the only other form known from Wallacea (White & Bruce, 1986; I Bishop 1992).

White-headed Shelduck *Tadorna radjah*. Two groups of six and seven birds (possibly the same group) were observed along a shallow stony river about 12 km inland from Yaba, Bacan, in mid November. This is usually regarded as a coastal species in Wallacea.

Dusky Scrubfowl *Megapodius freycinet* Still locally common on Bacan and Kasiruta, being S regularly encountered up to 250 m, and less commonly up to at least 1,000 m; encountered much less frequently on Obi.

Moluccan Scrubfowl *Megapodius wallacea*. Apparently rare on Bacan; only a single adult was observed, in primary forest at 410 m on Mt Sibela.

Common Bush-hen *Amauornis olivaceus* One heard and briefly observed in scrub near Kelo on 24 February; first record for Obi.

Moluccan Woodcock *Scolopax rochusseni*. Although not observed, a guide from Kelo, Obi, was familiar with what is probably this species. He recognized pictures of Snipe, saying that there was one species on the coast and another in the forests inland from Kelo. The latter differed in being larger and having yellowish throats. During dry periods, the guide occasionally flushed this bird from ridgetops above *ca.* 500 m. He noted that they were rather tame, flushing from very close and generally flying only a short distance.

Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii*. Small numbers were observed between Bacan and Kasiruta. The distribution of this species in Wallacea is poorly known. In the Moluccas, it has been previously recorded only from Obi.

Carunculated Fruit-dove *Ptilinopus granulifrons*. This poorly known Obi endemic was found to be widely distributed but apparently scarce. Pairs were generally observed in the canopy. They were recorded from *ca.* 40 m up to 550 m altitude, in primary forest near Lake Manis and the upper catchment of the Wide Besar River, and near Kelo in a mosaic of scrub and lightly wooded cultivation.

Pink-headed Imperial Pigeon *Ducula rosacea*. Six observed in the canopy of a tall forest tree at 120 m altitude in recently logged forest near Gorogoro, Bacan. They were smaller than accompanying White-eyed Imperial Pigeon *D. perspicillata*, pale greyish above, perhaps tinged with green, with a whitish head and underparts, tinged pink. In the north Moluccas, this species is previously known only from north-west Halmahera.

Nicobar Pigeon *Caloenas nicobarica*. On Bacan, two sightings, perhaps involving the same bird, were made of this species in tall primary forest at the base of Mt. Sibela at 180 m. Although not observed on Obi, this species was described as being a regular visitor to degraded forest patches at the edge of agricultural "gardens" near Kelo. Flocks of up to ten are apparently often observed locally.

White Cockatoo *Cacatua alba*. Obi is often cited as a locality for this species, presumably based on a specimen that was sent to Hartert (Hartert 1903). On the small island of Bisa, close to the north coast of Obi, it was said to be somewhat scarce in 1883 (Guillemard 1885). In addition, several specimens labelled "Bisa" are deposited in the zoological museum in Bogor. However, this conspicuous and noisy species was not observed on Obi during the 1992 visit. Parrot trappers and traders on Bacan and Obi were unanimous in their opinion that the species does not occur on Obi, and never had done. It therefore seems doubtful that White Cockatoo has ever occurred wild on Obi or Bisa. White Cockatoos caught on Bacan were seen in captivity on Obi in 1992, and many of the birds trapped on the former island are sent to Ambon via Obi (Lambert 1993). Hence specimens from Bisa and Obi seem most likely to have derived from either captive birds or a feral population on Bisa that is now extinct, or they have been mislabelled. The alternative explanation, that there was a population on Obi and Bisa that became extinct, seems a less likely explanation. Despite intensive trapping for the wild bird trade on Bacan, White Cockatoo is still a relatively common species there, with a population on Bacan (together with its neighbouring island of Kasiruta and Mandiole) estimated at 7,220-29,300 individuals (Lambert 1993; in press).

Eclectus Parrot *Eclectus roratus*. Although still fairly common on Bacan, apparently exceedingly rare or localised in distribution on Obi, where it was heard only once.

Red-cheeked Parrot *Geoffroyus geoffroyi*. Common on both Bacan and Obi. However, the calls of the two respective subspecies are very different. The endemic Obi subspecies *G. g. obiensis* has a much more piercing, high-pitched nasal call (reminiscent of racket-tails *Prioniturus* spp) than birds on Bacan *G. g. cyanicollis*. The call is given as a stow series when perched, but more rapidly when in flight.

Drongo Cuckoo *Surniculus lugubns*. This species, previously unrecorded from Obi, was heard in logged forest at 360 m inland from Kelo. The call was usually of six notes, but varied from five to eight. On Bacan, they were heard in logged forest at 100 m and in primary forest at 200 m.

Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopacea*. Whilst taxonomic relationships and status of Koels *Eudynamys* spp in the Moluccas are uncertain, the distinctive calls of a Koel, believed to be 6 species rather than Australian Keel *E. cyanocephala* were heard near Kelo, Obi, in an area of coconuts, gardens and scrub in late February. Neither Asian nor Australian Koel has been records previously from Obi, though White & Bruce (1986) note the occurrence of the former on other north Moluccan islands including Bacan. Bowler & Taylor (1989) found both species on Seram though whether these were migrant or resident individuals was not established.

Giant Coucal *Centropus goliath* Present in primary and logged forest up to 250 m on Bacan, but presumably very rare or local on Obi where none were observed.

Moluccan Owlet-nightjar *Aegotheles crinifrons*. This little-known Moluccan endemic was heard in primary forest at 295 m on Mt Sibela, Bacan, and at 350 m in lightly-logged forest on Kasiruta.

Swiftlets *Collocalia* spp. White & Bruce (1986) list only Glossy Swiftlet *Collocalia esculenta* for Bacan and Obi. This species is fairly common on both islands, but both islands also support other species. Owing to the difficulty in identifying swiftlets and the many uncertainties about their taxonomy, those observed on Bacan and Obi are here identified tentatively.

On Bacan, a group of swiftlets was observed over recently cleared forest near the coast adjacent to Mt Sibela. These birds appeared to be brown and had distinctive whitish rump patches. The underparts were slightly paler than the upperparts. They were provisionally identified as Uniform Swiftlet *Aerodramus vanikorensis*, a species which also occurs on Halmahera and Morotai.

On Obi, three species, including Glossy Swiftlet, were watched in excellent light for 30 minutes from a vantage point provided by a tower in the interior of the island. The birds were congregating, prior to a rainstorm, in the vicinity of a road through degraded forest at ca 400 m. Two birds stood out from the rest because they were black with a bold, pure white rectangular rump band and white breast to undertail coverts. At times, these white areas appeared to be joined. These birds were larger than the distinctive, blue-backed Glossy Swiftlets. The tail was slightly forked. They were tentatively identified as the white-rumped sub-species of Moluccan Swiftlet *A infuscatus ceramensis*.

The third species observed, which was the commonest, was also larger than the Glossy Swiftlet. It was brown above and all pale below, particularly on the undertail coverts. The tail fork was shallow.

One or two birds had marginally paler brown rumps, contrasting slightly with the rest of the upperparts. The flight was distinctive, with a few wing flaps followed by gliding on down held wings. These birds were probably Uniform Swiftlet *A. vanikorensis*.

Fork-tailed Swift *Apus pacificus*. Two observed on Kasiruta on 21 Nov. The only previous record from the Moluccas was of specimens from Halmahera in April 1931 (White & Bruce 1986; Bishop 1992).

Blue-and-White Kingfisher *Halcyon diops*. Although usually observed in cultivated areas and degraded forest in the lowlands and hills (White & Bruce 1986; Fry *et al.* 1992), an individual was observed at the edge of a logging road through primary forest at 700 m on Obi.

Azure Roller *Eurystomus azureus*. On Bacan, uncommon but widely distributed in selectively logged forest and at primary forest edge, where observed between 40 and 150 m. On Kasiruta, observed at 465 m.

Papuan Hornbill *Rhyticeros plicatus*. Widely distributed and very common on Bacan, from sea level to at least 1,200 m, whereas on Obi it was uncommon.

Blue-breasted Pitta *Pitta erythrogaster*. Common in selectively logged forest and secondary growth in the lowlands of Bacan. A juvenile was observed on 26 Oct. On Obi, common and widely distributed in primary forest, logged forest, secondary growth and scrub, from sea level to 550 m.

Ivory-breasted Pitta *Pitta maxima*. Although a relatively common species on Halmahera, where it occurs in primary forest on a variety of soil types, and in secondary forests (Lambert & Yong 1989; pers. obs. 1992), this conspicuous pitta was not observed on Bacan. Neither was the far-carrying, distinctive call heard. However, during the brief visit made to Kasiruta, this species was frequently heard and observed daily between 200 and 500 m, in logged and primary forests. On Bacan, it appears to be rare or very localized.

Distant calls similar to those of Ivory-breasted Pitta on Halmahera and Kasiruta were heard on two mornings in primary forest bordering the Akelamo River in central-east Obi. Since no other species are known to the author to have a call similar to this, the Ivory-breasted Pitta is probably a rare and local species on Obi, although this requires confirmation. White & Bruce (1986) inexplicably attribute a recent specimens from Obi to an escaped captive bird. Although parrots are regularly kept in captivity and traded in the Moluccas, the author found no evidence that birds of other species are kept as pets.

Petchora Pipit *Anthus gustavi*. One observed in logged forest on Obi on 14 February was the ft! record for Obi Hie species (which the author has observed many times in the Philippines and Sabah) was easily identified by the combination of its heavily streaked appearance and the two bold, long White lines along its back.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*. Four birds were observed near Kelo, Obi, on 23 February. IUCN listed for Obi by White & Bruce (1986), though seen by Linsley (in prep.) in 1989.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*. White & Bruce (1986) did not list this species for Obi, but this may have been an oversight since the Grey Wagtail is a commonly encountered bird in suitable habitat, as also noted by Linsley (in prep.).

Rufous-bellied Triller *Lalage aurea*. White and Bruce (1986) give the habitat of this species a scrub on Halmahera. However, it is also frequently found in the canopy of both logged and primary forest, although perhaps favouring the former. On Obi, it was found from sea level to 301 m, and on Bacan up to 215 m.

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*. A female observed at the edge of a logging road near Gorogoro, 50 m, is the first record of this Palearctic migrant for Bacan.

Gray's Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella fasciolata*. This common winter visitor to Wallacea was observed on all three islands up to 610 m. The great majority of birds were in secondary growth adjacent to forest, particularly along logging roads. One bird was observed on the floor of closed-canopy, tall primary forest on Bacan, some 700 m from the forest edge. This individual was feeding amongst large boulders in a dry gully.

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Island Verditer Flycatcher *Eumyias panayensis*. White & Bruce (1986) could trace only two specimens of the endemic sub-species *E.p. obiensis*, obtained on Obi at 650 m. Observations 41 1992 suggest that this is an uncommon bird. One was observed singing at ca. 250 m in primary forest near Lake Moms, and several were observed in lightly-logged and primary forest at 300 - 700 m inland of Kelo.

Drab Whistler *Paschycephala griseonata*. Only observed once on Bacan, in logged forest at ca. 280 m. On Obi, the endemic sub-species *P.g.johni* was common, occurring in well forested habitats at 220 - 700 m. It was observed in small groups, and sometimes in mixed bird parties from the understorey to the middle layers of the forest canopy.

Creamy-throated White-eye *Zosterops atriceps*

On Obi, this north Moluccan endemic was found to be an uncommon inhabitant of forest between 220 and 700 m. This species has surprisingly not previously been recorded from Obi, perhaps suggesting fairly recent colonisation. The birds most closely resemble the nominate race of Bacan, with greyish heads contrasting with the bright green upperparts. On Bacan, this species was observed in forest between 115 and 700 m.

Dusky Friarbird *Philemon fuscicapillus*. Although listed for Bacan by White & Bruce (1986), this species was not observed, and no typical friarbird calls (which are usually loud and distinctive) were heard. This also appears to be an extremely rare bird on Halmahera, where none were observed in 1992 during three weeks spent on the island. Although Bishop (1992) speculates that the distinctive calls of a

friarbird heard on Morotai by D. Bishop, F. Lambert and B. Coates in 1989 were those of the Helmeted Friarbird *Philemon buceroides*, it is this author's opinion that these calls were more likely given by *P. fuscicapillus*.

Paradise Crow *Lycocorax pyrrhopterus*. On Halmahera, Bacan and Kasiruta, the nominate subspecies is a fairly secretive, quiet species. On Obi, in contrast, the endemic *L.p. obiensis* was found to be one of the most demonstrative birds in the avifauna, their loud calls resounding through the forest. As far as is known, these calls are not given by Paradise Crow on Halmahera. The call on Obi is a very loud "who-up", often answered by a loud "hwhoo". The birds on Obi are also notably different in appearance, being rather more Manucode-like, with prominent longitudinal tufts running along the sides of the head, and a whitish streak above and behind the eye.

On Obi, this is a very common species, occurring in all habitats, including fairly open agricultural land with scattered scrub and trees, from sea level to at least 730 m. On Halmahera, Bacan and Kasiruta, the nominate race was only observed in logged forest, forest edge, scrubby gardens within the forest, and in scrub at the boundary of forest and agriculture, and not in more open agricultural areas dominated by scrub.

On Obi, a nest was found in primary forest at ca. 500 m. It was sited about 15 m above the ground at the edge of the lower canopy. A large structure of dead leaves and moss, it appeared to be attached by pieces of vine or twine in such a way that it hung below the branches (which were ca. 5 cm in diameter). When sitting on the nest, the adult was very obvious, suggesting that although the nest looked deep, it was in fact a rather shallow cup. However, the nest was afforded excellent camouflage, by an abundance of moss on the trunk of the tree and nearby branches. Two nests and an egg of this species, found in Halmahera in December 1929, are documented by Parker (1963).

Wallace's Standardwing *Semioptera wallacei*. Wallace's Standardwing is moderately common on Bacan, where it was observed in primary and logged forests. It was relatively common in the proposed protected area of Gunung Sibela. The altitudinal range of this species was found to be 70 - 1150 m on Bacan, perhaps higher. According to Bishop (1992a), there have been no records from Bacan since 1954. Bishop (1992a) reported that this species was absent from flat lowland forests on Halmahera, and that it favoured limestone areas, but on Bacan it was present, though apparently rather scarce, in flat areas of logged forest close to the River Ra, and found on a variety of soil types.

Wallace's Standardwing was also observed on Kasiruta.

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Acknowledgements

My visits to Bacan and Obi were made under the auspices of IUCN - the World Conservation Union, on behalf of the Trade Specialist Group of the Species Survival Commission, and were greatly enhanced by assistance from PHPA and LIPI, without which my research would have not been possible. Special thanks are extended to Dr. Soetikno Wiryoatmodjo, Widodo Ramono and Corry Hehakaja. I am particularly indebted to Marcel and Tini Silvius for their invaluable advice and hospitality during my visit, and to Paul Jepson of BirdLife Indonesia and Pat Homing of CIDA.

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Table 1. Altitudinal range of record for birds on Bacan and Obi (metres)

	Bacan	Obi
<i>Ptilinopus bernsteini</i>		180-600
<i>Ptilinopus superbus</i>	60-840	210-700
<i>Ptilinopus monacha</i>	100	
<i>Ptilinopus hyogaster</i>	60-1000	
<i>Ducula perspicillata</i>	0-600	40-700
<i>Ducula basilica</i>	0-900	50-730
<i>Gymnophaps albertisii</i>	900	
<i>Reinwardtoena reinwardtii</i>	115-265	
<i>Tanyseptera galatea</i>	100-200	50-600
<i>Phylloscopus poliocephala</i>	?	>550
<i>Ficedula westermanii</i>	900	
<i>Dicaeum erythrothorax</i>	0-950	180-400
<i>Zosterops montanus</i>	>870	
<i>Myzomela obscura</i>	50-100	0-700
<i>Melitograis gilolensis</i>	80-600	
<i>Semioptera wallacei</i>	70-1150	
<i>Corvus validus</i>	70-1150	

Table 2. List of species observed on Kasiruta, 20-24 November 1992

<i>Haliastur indus</i>	<i>Cacatua alba</i>	<i>Hypsipetes affinis</i>
<i>Accipiter sp.</i>	<i>Loriculus amabilis</i>	<i>Locustella fasciolata</i>
<i>Aquila gurneyi</i>	<i>Centropus goliath</i>	<i>Phylloscopus borealis</i>
<i>Falco moluccensis</i>	<i>Otus magicus</i>	<i>Muscicapa griseisticta</i>
<i>Megapodius freycinet</i>	<i>Ninox sp.</i>	<i>Piezorhynchus alecto</i>
<i>Ptilinopus superbus</i>	<i>Aegotheles crinifrons</i>	<i>Dicaeum erythrothorax</i>
<i>Ptilinopus monacha</i>	<i>Collocalia esculenta</i>	<i>Nectarinia aspasia</i>
<i>Ptilinopus hyogaster</i>	<i>Apus paciflcus</i>	<i>Nectarinia jugularis</i>
<i>Ducula perspicillata</i>	<i>Eurystomus azureus</i>	<i>Myzomela obscura</i>
<i>Ducula basilica</i>	<i>Rhyticeros plicatus</i>	<i>Melitograis gilolensis</i>
<i>Ducula bicolor "melanura"</i>	<i>Pitta erythrogaster</i>	<i>Aplonis mysolensis</i>
<i>Macropygia amboinensis</i>	<i>Pitta maxima</i>	<i>Dicrurus bracteatus</i>
<i>Reinwardtoena reinwardtii</i>	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	<i>Lycocorax pyrrhopterus</i>
<i>Eos squamata</i>	<i>Coracina atriceps</i>	<i>Semioptera wallacei</i>
<i>Lorius garrulus</i>	<i>Coracina papuensis</i>	<i>Corvus validus</i>
<i>Chamosyna placentis</i>	<i>Lalage aurea</i>	