

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

SIGHTING OF AN UNIDENTIFIED PIGEON IN IRIAN JAYA

by Sjarifin Gardiner and James Mangan

On 19 July 1937 we were returning from a walk in secondary forest at about 1850 m above Jiwika in the Grand Valley of the Balim, in the Snow Mountains of Irian Jaya. The sighting took place at about 15.30 hours. Visibility was excellent, with a cloudless sky. The sun was approximately at right angles to our line of vision. The location was just below the brine well, a well known spot where the local people obtain salt. SG was carrying 10x40 and JM 10x21 binoculars.

A pigeon or dove was first sighted by SG and then observed by both of us, perched on a branch about 10 to 15 m above ground level and about 30 to 40 m down slope of us. We observed it for about 30 seconds as it sat on the branch. Although it was not in full sunshine, lighting was good because the canopy was thin, and there was side lighting from the gap in the canopy over the pathway. It then flew off to the left over the path across our line of vision in bright unobscured sunlight, with the sun to our backs.

It was a large dove or pigeon, 30 to 40 cm from head to tail. The entire head was an even light grey. The rest of the breast, belly and undertail coverts were bright yellow, similar to the yellow on the Common Golden Whistler *Pachycephala pectoralis* which we had seen several times during the afternoon. The head of the bird was small, and the breast quite full. The undertail was dark grey, the tail being very long in proportion to the body. The bill and feet colour were not bright. The back and wings, seen only after the bird took flight, were a dark slate with a slightly bluish tinge. As the bird flew past, a white flash appeared on the region of the upper breast—perhaps white on the flanks which were covered when the bird sat perched with wings folded.

We described the bird to each other as we were observing it on the branch, and SG talked a description into a hand-held dictating machine immediately afterwards.

We referred to *The Birds of New Guinea* (Beehler *et. al.* 1986) which we had with us, and immediately discovered that there was nothing remotely like what we had just seen. JM drew and then coloured a sketch based on our joint observations two days later in Jayapura.

The observation was first described by JH in a letter to Dr. Beehler dated 24 July, 1987.

Me offer this observation in the hope of alerting future fieldworkers of an unidentified form in the Balim Valley.

Reference ;

Beehler, B.M., T.K. Pratt and D.A. Simmerman. 1987. *Birds of New Guinea*. Princeton University press. Pnnceton, N.J.

