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First photographs of the endemic Tagula White-eye *Zosterops meeki*, on Sudest Island (Louisiade Archipelago), Papua New Guinea

by David K. Mitchell

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Tagula White-eye *Zosterops meeki* Hartert, 1898, is an apparently uncommon bird, seldom seen in the canopy of the hill rainforests on Sudest Island (Pratt & Beehler 2015, Beehler & Pratt 2016). It is the only white-eye species known from Sudest and is, as far as is known, confined to this island. The species has a distinctive white throat and breast, compared to Louisiade White-eye *Z. griseotinctus* Hartert, 1899 (LeCroy 2011), an olive-green bird with a yellowish-green breast that occurs on nearby islands in the Calvados chain and Louisiade archipelago (Pratt & Beehler 2015). Mayr & Diamond (2001) placed *Z. meeki* within the *Z. [atriceps] atrifrons* complex, as *Z. a. meeki*, whereas Pratt & Beehler (2015) maintained it as a species apart.

Hartert (1898) described *Z. meeki* from adult male and female specimens (Rothschild & Hartert 1903) collected on 18 April 1898 by Albert S. Meek on Sudest (Tagula) Island, in the eastern Louisiade archipelago, Papua New Guinea. These, the lectotype and paralectotype respectively, once part of the Rothschild Collection at Tring, UK, are now held in the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH), New York (LeCroy 2011) (Fig. 1).

At the time they were collected, Meek observed that Sudest Island was well wooded and inhabited, with several villages situated inland of the coast (Hartert 1898). These villages have since been relocated along the coastal fringe of grassy ridges and rainforest valleys that extend to the forest-covered mountainous interior. Forests are heavily impacted by cyclones and landslides (pers. obs.).

There have been few recorded sightings of *Z. meeki* since it was collected by Meek 120 years ago and by Albert & George Eichhorn more than a century ago, in early 1916,



Figure 1. Male lectotype (above) and female paralectotype of Tagula White-eye *Zosterops meeki* (© American Museum of Natural History, New York)



Figure 2 (left). Tagula White-eye *Zosterops meeki*, Araeda, Sudest Island, Papua New Guinea, 16 December 2016 (David K. Mitchell)

Figure 3 (right). Tagula White-eye *Zosterops meeki*, coastal vegetation below Araeda, Sudest Island, Papua New Guinea, 16 December 2016 (David K. Mitchell)

despite several subsequent visits and expeditions to Sudest by ornithologists. The most recent known records are those of T. K. Pratt and D. Mitchell (*in Pratt et al.* 2005) who heard white-eyes on Sudest in 2004, and observations by Australian ornithologist W. Goulding in 2012 and 2013–2014 (BirdLife International 2016; W. Goulding pers. comm. 2016). A solitary *Zosterops* was observed by British entomologist John Tennent (pers. comm. 2016), at Rambuso on the north coast of Sudest in December 2014.

New observations and photographs

During entomological fieldwork on Sudest between 1 and 16 December 2016 by myself and J. Tennent, a transect was made from the coastal village of Vuwo to the summit of Mount Riu (Rattlesnake), at 799 m the highest point on the island, and back to the coastal village of Araeda 2.5 km south-east along the coast from the start point. During the ascent from 150 m to Mbejelele at 645 m, individuals and small groups of 2–4 white-eyes were heard by the author as they moved through the canopy, but were not visually identified.

However, *Z. meeki* was also seen on the morning of 16 December 2016, when again small groups of 2–4 birds moved through the trees at the edge of the easternmost coastal hamlet of Araeda, at 11°45.41'N, 153°58.11'E, and the adjoining coastal fringe, three hours after sunrise and just before a period of heavy rain.

Photographs taken by the author (Figs. 2–3) represent confirmation of the continued presence of *Z. meeki* on Sudest, and are almost certainly the first-ever photographs in life of the species.

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