

## Chapter 17

### Birds of the Kaijende Highlands – the high elevation avifauna revisited

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#### SUMMARY

We compare records of birds surveyed from a high elevation camp in the Kaijende Highlands in 2008 with a similar dataset collected in 2005. In both surveys a preponderance of species was recorded in four days of effort, but apparently local patchiness of species distribution led to single-site surveys missing common species. A take-home lesson is that rather than investing more days in a single camp, it may be more productive to move camp after four days of effort. In order to fully survey the impoverished avifauna at 3,200 meters elevation, it would be best to work at no fewer than three separate camps, which would give access to the entire avifauna. Earlier field work underestimated the high-elevation fauna, which we now estimate to be 60 resident species at 3,200 m. This higher count may, in part, be a product of upslope retreat of montane species in the face of ongoing climate change. We document seven species on the Kaijende Plateau that are substantially above their known elevational limits elsewhere.

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#### INTRODUCTION

The massive Kaijende Plateau (see Richards 2007) is one of the most remarkable upland features of the central highlands of Papua New Guinea. Anything but planar, this vast upland surface includes a network of high-elevation grassland basins interdigitated with an array of rocky summit peaks that exceed 3,400 m in elevation. The Kaijende Highlands are stunningly beautiful and little-developed with but a single gravel road that, when completed, will provide direct access to this upland wilderness from Porgera (from the north) and Tari (from the south). There are considerable bushwalking and nature tourism opportunities here, once facilities are available to serve visitors.

Although this highlands region will be disturbed by the road access and ongoing pit mining for gold at Mount Kare, much of it will remain wilderness for the foreseeable future, because of difficulty of access. It is thus an important natural biotic reserve, especially under the current regime of global change.

The birdlife of the Kaijende Plateau has been studied on several occasions (see Beehler and Sine (2007) but remains incompletely known. This chapter reports on the birds of a single high-elevation camp, and compares the survey results of this 2008 field effort with that made in 2005 at a similar high camp a mere 5 kilometers distant. The comparison offers an interesting study on the accuracy and effectiveness of the RAP avian field survey methodology under the uncertainties of real-world field conditions.

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#### STUDY SITE AND METHODS

The Kai-ingri Camp was established c. 200 m west of the gravel road being constructed to link Porgera with Tari to the south. The Camp was placed in a small copse of closed subalpine forest