

Chapter 3

Birds of the Kaijende Highlands, Enga Province, Papua New Guinea

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SUMMARY

Nineteen days of surveys at four sites between 2,117 m and 3,200 m elevation in the Kaijende Highlands of western Papua New Guinea detected 102 species of birds. The Long-bearded Melidectes (*Melidectes princeps*) was recorded for the first time west of the Mount Hagen massif. It presumably ranges westward at high elevations to the Strickland Gap. The Ribbon-tailed Astrapia (*Astrapia mayeri*) was common from 2,117 m at Lake Tawa to 3,200 m at Omyaka Camp. We did not encounter Stephanie's Astrapia (*Astrapia stephaniae*). Its westernmost range extension must lie east of Porgera valley in the north, although it extends west to the Doma Peaks/Tari Gap area in the south.

The Crested Bird of Paradise (*Cnemophilus macgregorii*) was not encountered on this survey, but one local informant at Omyaka Camp stated that it was present and it was collected during a 1989 survey (Kula 1989). It appears that this species is rare or absent between the Hagen/Giluwe area and the Star Mountains of Papua (Indonesia). This provides an intermediate-stage example of Diamond's "drop-out" phenomenon (Diamond 1972). The Kaijende Highlands support a rich upland bird fauna that might best be conserved through the creation of a large contiguous community-managed reserve that encompasses uninhabited traditional hunting lands. This could serve as a useful biodiversity offset for the Porgera mine operation.

INTRODUCTION

Study of the geographic distribution of birds in Papua New Guinea has reached the phase where most field surveys provide fine-tuning of the elevational and geographic distribution of a few interesting species endemic to Papua New Guinea, while also confirming the excellent state of our knowledge of many of the more common and widespread species (Coates 2001). This rapid assessment of the bird fauna of the Kaijende Highlands produced some interesting distributional records that help to further clarify the pattern and process of differentiation of the montane forest birds of New Guinea.

Few surveys of the western highlands regions of Papua New Guinea have been undertaken, but most of these were individually comprehensive (see Frith and Beehler 1998, Appendix 2). To the southeast of our area of focus, the Mount Hagen massif was surveyed repeatedly for birds between 1938 and 1956 by Shaw Mayer, Blood, Gilliard, and Bulmer, and Mount Giluwe was worked between 1961 and 1973 by the Schoddes, Clissold, Sedlacek, and Mirza (in Frith and Beehler 1998, Appendix 2).

To the south and west of our area of focus, surveys were conducted as follows: The Tari Gap/Doma Peaks were surveyed between 1983 and 1991 by Mackay, the Friths, a PNG Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) team, and Laska (in Frith and Beehler 1998, Appendix 2). The Victor Emanuel and Hindenburg Ranges were surveyed between 1954 and 1997 by Gilliard, Bell, Mirza, Wanga, Murray, and Gregory (in Frith and Beehler 1998, Appendix 2).