

New Caledonia

28/11 – 4/12 2006



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This trip was part of a longer trip to New Zealand that I did in November 2006. I saw a total of 64 species during my week stay. One whole week is plenty of time to see all important species. Because of the costs I decided to skip Lifou Island and therefore missed out on the White-eyes.

Acommodation

New Caledonia is quite expensive. The cheapest option to stay in Noumea is the youth hostel. I stayed there for four nights (1600XPF/night). It is an excellent youth hostel, close to the city centre (but the hostel is on a hill so lots of stairs to climb to get there!) At La Riviere Bleue I camped for free two nights and at Refuge de Farino I camped one night (600XPF)

Car hire

I rented a small diesel Citroen from Europcar/Mencar. The cost for 6 days including CDW was 29000 XPF. I made the reservation on internet (www.mencar.nc). I drove a total of almost 600 km on the island.

Itinerary

28/11: Flight from Auckland to Noumea in the morning. Afternoon in Noumea

29/11: Mount Koghis in the morning, to La Riviere Bleue after lunch

30/11: La Riviere Bleue

1/12: La Riviere Bleue in the morning, to Farino in the afternoon

2/12: Farino and Sarramea, to Noumea in the afternoon

3/12: Plum, Prony, Noumea

4/12: Amédée Island

5/12: Morning flight to Auckland

Daily log:

28/11

Arrived at Toutoma airport around 11 am and went to pick up my prebooked rental car from Europcar/Mencar. Because of some misunderstanding when making the reservation, the car was actually at the city office. The Mencar staff was very helpful and they arranged another car for me that just had been returned and instructed me to drive directly to the Noumea office and get a clean car there. The airport is approx. 45 km northwest from Noumea. Spent the afternoon in Noumea. Mostly at the youth hostel waiting for the reception to open.

29/11

Spent the morning at Mount Koghis. I had some trouble finding the place at first because the lack of a good map and poor road signs. Not so much activity in the forest but I found my first Green-backed White-eyes, New Caledonian Imperial Pigeons, Melanesian Cuckoo-shrike, New Caledonian Whistler, and New Caledonian Myzomela.

After lunch at McDonald's in Koutio, I drove to Riviere Bleue. Met Jean-Marc at the entrance and arranged with him a couple of hours guiding for Friday morning. Spent the afternoon around the entrance of the park but the only birds of note were two New Caledonian Parakeets. Camped for free.

30/11

Drove from the entrance to Pont Perignon at 7 am when the park opened. I saw the first Long-tailed Triller along the way. From there I took the shuttlebus to Pont Germain. I spent the morning along the road between Pont Germain and Grand Kaori and also walked the informative track at Grand Kaori. Struggled in the beginning since I was not familiar with the birds's calls. But I soon found Crow Honeyeater, New Caledonian Crow, Streaked Fantail and Yellow-bellied Robin. At lunchtime I was fortunate to meet Francois from Caledonia Tours at Pont Germain. He was guiding a group of Japanese tourists. I was invited to join them for lunch. It was a great lunch with sausages, meat, schrimp and vegetables. Much better than the water and bread I had planned to eat.

I had not seen a Kagu yet and Francois wanted to fix that so we drove to near Pont Pourina and he started to play the Kagu call on the CD-player. It did not take long before two Kagus were standing on the road beside us. Magnificent birds! I left the group and walked the track around Grand Kaori again and soon found another Kagu. This one was very curious and walked around my feet and then continued to look for food without bothering about me.

Later in the afternoon I walked parts of the tracks around Pont Germain and also along the road towards Refuge Scientifiques. In the dense forest I found the only Southern Shrikebill of the trip and in the more open areas I saw a New Caledonian Parakeet and a Barred Honeyeater. I camped at Pont Germain where there is picnic tables, toilet and running water.



Pont Germain, La Riviere Bleue

1/12

Woke up around 4.30 am when the Kagus started to call. Started birding in the more open areas past Pont Germain. I soon found a Horned Parakeet perched high up in a tree. Also got decent views of Fan-tailed Cuckoo. At 8 am Jean-Marc and Yves came, and I informed them which birds I still had not found. With the aid of CD-player I had soon ticked off New Caledonian Cuckoo-shrike, Melanesian Flycatcher and good views of Cloven-feathered Dove near the Grand Kaori. We also saw Crow Honeyeater, Horned Parakeet and more Kagus. We also tried to tape-in a Long-tailed Cuckoo that was calling close to the road. No luck, but suddenly two Kagus came running. Apparently one of them was in the wrong territory because the other one was really upset and they were fighting right in front of us. One took a bite across the neck of the other one and I thought it would end in death. The intruder fled for his life and was chased for about 500 meters along the road. We went after them trying to get photos, a real challenge!

I had only booked two hours with Jean-Marc and Yves so the rest of the time before lunch I birded by myself around Grand Kaori. I then took the shuttlebus back to my car at Pont Perignon and headed towards Noumea.

Back in Noumea I went to Mary D's office in Ansa Vata and booked the trip to Amédée Island for Monday.

After a late lunch I started the drive to Farino. It took about two hours. I saw several Whistling Kites and Swamp Harriers along the way and also a perched Brown Goshawk. Decided to camp at Refuge de Farino which is a really nice place with a big lawn by a stream. Later walked the track up towards the waterfall and heard lots of doves but could not get any into view. I was surprised to hear a Kagu call from the valley below.

2/12

In the morning I drove up to the grassbird site. I had double checked the directions with Jean-Marc and Yves since they were misleading in some reports I had. I started birding around the grassy area and the left fork but did not find the important birds I was searching for. I then walked about 2 km back towards Farino and eventually found both Emerald Dove and Metallic Pigeon. Melanesian Cuckoo-shrike, New Caledonian Crow and Striated Starling were quite common. Back at the grassy area I took the left fork once again and this time I had more luck. First a White-bellied Goshawk flew over my head and right after that I found a Red-throated Parrotfinch. I felt that the Grassbird would be really hard to find since I did not have a recording but suddenly a Grassbird flew across the road right in front of me. It was impossible to find it again but on the way back to the car I found two other Grassbirds and managed to get good views of both. Guess I was really lucky because most people seem to think this bird is the most skulking bird of them all.

On the way down the mountain I got excellent views of a perched White-bellied Goshawk (before a group of motorbikers scared it), more Parrotfinches, a Red-fronted Parakeet and brief views of a Cloven-feathered Dove.

Later drove to Sarramea. Started to walk the track that goes up to Plateau de Dogny but I was too tired and didn't see much, so I soon returned to the car and drove back to Noumea where I checked in at the youth hostel for three nights.



Farino Grassbird site

3/12

At first I had planned to go to Mount Koghi again but since I had already been there and I didn't think I would find something new, I decided to explore the southern tip of Grande Terre instead. I drove to Plum and relaxed at the beach for a while. I then went on to the little village of Prony. It took longer time to drive than I had expected, it was a very winding road. Around the village I walked some tracks where I saw New Caledonian Crows but not much else of note. I was back in Noumea early in the afternoon and had another lazy evening at the youth hostel.

4/12

At 9:30 I boarded the boat for Amédée Island with a lot of other tourists, mainly a big group of teenagers from Australia. Jean-Marc and Yves didn't think I should expect much birds but in the end I was quite successful. The boat trip takes about an hour. First birds encountered were Great-crested Terns but I also found a Bridled Tern and a Wedge-tailed Shearwater. Arriving on the island I immediately found some waders on the beach. I counted 11 Ruddy Turnstones, three Grey-tailed Tattlers and one Sanderling. There was also a Pacific Golden Plover a little further away on the beach. Around the small boats that were anchored near the reef there were several Black-naped Terns and Brown Noddys.

Apart from birds the reef is great. I took a small tour with the glassbottom boat and saw plenty of beautiful fishes. Before lunch we also went a little further out from the island to feed some sharks. After an excellent buffet lunch and some entertainment I relaxed at the beach and went swimming a little. I then sat and scanned the ocean when I suddenly saw a bird flying close over the water, struggling to get ashore and with a tern harassing it. I was surprised to see it was a brightly coloured green dove. It landed on the boat bridge for a few seconds before I lost it, a Red-bellied Fruit-dove!

I later searched for it around the island. You can easily walk around the whole island in 20 minutes. I found more Pacific Golden Plovers and Grey-tailed Tattlers and also three Fairy Terns an Osprey and a Pacific Reef-egret.

On the way back to Noumea the wind was stronger and I saw several more Wedge-tailed Shearwaters and a lot of terns, among them another Bridled Tern.



Amédée Island

5/12

Took the 7 am bus to the airport and left New Caledonia for Auckland at 10:15am

Site descriptions

La Riviere Bleue

Information on this site is well covered in several other reports. I had not seen Petri Hottolas report from July 2006 when I left Sweden. Some things have changed since then. The bridge at Pont Perignon is still broken and I was told that there are no plans to repair it. However, there is now a free shuttlebus going between Pont Perignon and Vieux refuge six times per day. The first leaves Pont Perignon at 7:30 and the last at 15:45. It stops at several places along the way; Grand Kaori, Pont Germain etc. An excellent option is then to camp in the park at one of several campsites. During daytime I only met a few tourist and in the evening when the last bus had left I was completely alone. I had planned to hire Jean-Marc for half a day but since I had the first day on my own we agreed that two hours would be enough the second day. With a little luck you can find all the specialities by yourself but I had missed out on Melanesian Flycatcher and New Caledonian Cuckoo-shrike the first day so guiding with Jean-Marc and Yves for a couple of hours the second day was excellent. With the aid of CD-player we soon found my wanted birds. Jean-Marc can be reached at parcrivierebleue@province-sud.nc.

Farino

Best directions to the grassbird site in Petris report. If you go straight ahead by the small chapel and drive for about two kilometers you reach Refuge de Farino. Excellent place to camp at and the birding along the stream towards the waterfall is quite good.

Prony

Small village on southern Grand Terre. I walked the tracks near the village and along the shore of Baie de Prony. For birding it's not worth the visit but there were some nice views along the very winding road to get there.

Amédée Island

Not many birders seem to visit this small coral islet. It is situated about 20 km south of Noumea. Full day trips are run daily from Noumea by the operator Mary D. They have an office in Ansa Vata. The cost is 12000XPF including an excellent buffé lunch. It's an excellent place to relax and also do some snorkelling on the beautiful reef. I didn't expect to see much birds but ended up seeing quite a lot of different terns and some shorebirds. Well worth a visit if you have the time.

Species List

(E) =Endemic

(I) = Introduced

Wedge-tailed Shearwater <i>Puffinus pacificus</i>	c10 Amédée Island boattrip
White-faced Heron <i>Egretta novaehollandiae</i>	A few Grand Terre
Pacific Reef-heron <i>Egretta sacra</i>	1 Amédée Island
Pacific Black Duck <i>Anas superciliosa</i>	2 Grand Terre
Osprey <i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	1 Plum, 1 Amédée Island
Whistling Kite <i>Haliastur sphenurus</i>	6 Grand Terre
Swamp Harrier <i>Circus approximans</i>	2 Grand Terre
Brown Goshawk <i>Accipiter fasciatus</i>	1 Noumea-Farino
(E) White-bellied Goshawk <i>Accipiter haplochrous</i>	2 Farino, also heard
Purple Swampphen <i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>	5 Noumea-Farino
(E) Kagu <i>Rhynochetos jubatus</i>	c6 La Riviere Bleue
Pacific Golden Plover <i>Pluvialis fulva</i>	3 Amédée Island
Gray-tailed Tattler <i>Heteroscelus brevipes</i>	5 Amédée Island
Ruddy Turnstone <i>Arenaria interpres</i>	11 Amédée Island
Sanderling <i>Calidris alba</i>	1 Amédée Island

Silver Gull <i>Larus novaehollandiae</i>	Common in Nouma harbour and around Amédée Island
Great Crested Tern <i>Sterna bergii</i>	Common around Amédée Island
Black-naped Tern <i>Sterna sumatrana</i>	Common around Amédée Island
Fairy Tern <i>Sterna nereis</i>	3 Amédée Island
Bridled Tern <i>Sterna anaethetus</i>	2 Amédée Island boattrip
Brown Noddy <i>Anous stolidus</i>	c10 Amédée Island
(I) Rock Pigeon <i>Columbia livia</i>	Common in Noumea
Metallic Pigeon <i>Columba vitiensis</i>	1 Farino
(I) Spotted Dove <i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>	Common in Noumea
Emerald Dove <i>Chalcophaps indica</i>	1 Farino
Red-bellied Fruit-dove <i>Ptilinopus greyii</i>	1 Amédée Island
(E) Cloven-feathered Dove <i>Drepanoptila holosericea</i>	1 seen at La Riviere Bleue, 1 seen at Farino. Lots more heard. Also heard at Mt Koghis
(E) New Caledonian Imperial-pigeon <i>Ducula goliath</i>	Mostly heard but a few seen at Mt Koghis and La Riviere Bleue
(E) New Caledonian Parakeet <i>Cyanoramphus saisseti</i>	4 La Riviere Bleue, 2 Farino
(E) Horned Parakeet <i>Eunymphicus cornutus</i>	2 La Riviere Bleue
Rainbow Lorikeet <i>Trichoglossus haematodus</i>	Common
Fan-tailed Cuckoo <i>Cacomantis flabelliformis</i>	2 La Riviere Bleue, 1 Farino
Shining Bronze-cuckoo <i>Chrysococcyx lucidus</i>	2 heard La Riviere Bleue, 2 seen at Farino
Long-tailed Koel <i>Eudynamys taitensis</i>	1 heard La Riviere Bleue
Glossy Swiftlet <i>Collocalia esculenta</i>	Common
Sacred Kingfisher <i>Todirhamphus sanctus</i>	7 Grand Terre
Melanesian Cuckooshrike <i>Coracina caledonica</i>	1 Mt Koghis, 8 Farino, 3 Prony
(E) New Caledonian Cuckooshrike <i>Coracina analis</i>	2 La Riviere Bleue
Long-tailed Triller <i>Lalage leucopyga</i>	1 La Riviere Bleue, 2 Farino, 1 Sarramea, 1 Prony
(I) Red-vented Bulbul <i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>	Fairly common in Noumea
(E) New Caledonian Grassbird <i>Megalurulus mariei</i>	3 Farino
Grey Fantail <i>Rhipidura fuliginosa</i>	2 La Riviere Bleue, fairly common Farino
Streaked Fantail <i>Rhipidura spilodera</i>	4 La Riviere Bleue, 4 Farino
Southern Shrikebill <i>Clytorhynchus pachycephaloides</i>	1 La Riviere Bleue
Melanesian Flycatcher <i>Myiagra caledonica</i>	2 La Riviere Bleue
(E) Yellow-bellied Robin <i>Eopsaltria flaviventris</i>	c10 La Riviere Bleue, heard at Farino

- (E) **New Caledonian Whistler** *Pachycephala caledonica* 1 Mt Koghis, 2 La Riviere Bleue
- Rufous Whistler** *Pachycephala rufiventris* 2 Mt Koghis, 3 La Riviere Bleue, common Farino, 2 Sarramea
- (E) **Fan-tailed Gerygone** *Gerygone flavolateralis* Common
- (E) **Green-backed White-eye** *Zosterops xanthochrous* Common
- Silvereye** *Zosterops lateralis* Fairly common
- (E) **Dark-brown Honeyeater** *Lichmera incana* Very common
- (E) **New Caledonian Myzomela** *Myzomela caledonica* 1 Mt Koghis, 1 La Riviere Bleue, 4 Farino, 3 Prony
- (E) **New Caledonian Friarbird** *Philemon diemenensis* Common La Riviere Bleue, several seen in Farino, Sarramea and Prony
- (E) **Crow Honeyeater** *Gymnomyza aubryana* 3 La Riviere Bleue
- (E) **Barred Honeyeater** *Phylidonyris undulata* 3 La Riviere Bleue, 6 Farino, 1 Prony
- White-breasted Woodswallow** *Artamus leucorhynchus* Fairly common
- (E) **New Caledonian Crow** *Corvus moneduloides* 1 La Riviere Bleue, c5 Farino, 1 Sarramea, 1 Prony
- (E) **Striated Starling** *Aplonis striata* 2 Mt Koghis, 2 La Riviere Bleue, several Farino
- (I) **Common Myna** *Acridotheres tristis* Common in Noumea
- (I) **House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus* Common in Noumea
- (I) **Common Waxbill** *Estrilda astrild* c10 Farino
- (E) **Red-throated Parrotfinch** *Erythrura psittacea* 4 Farino
- (I) **Chestnut-breasted Munia** *Lonchura castaneothorax* 5 Farino, c50 Sarramea