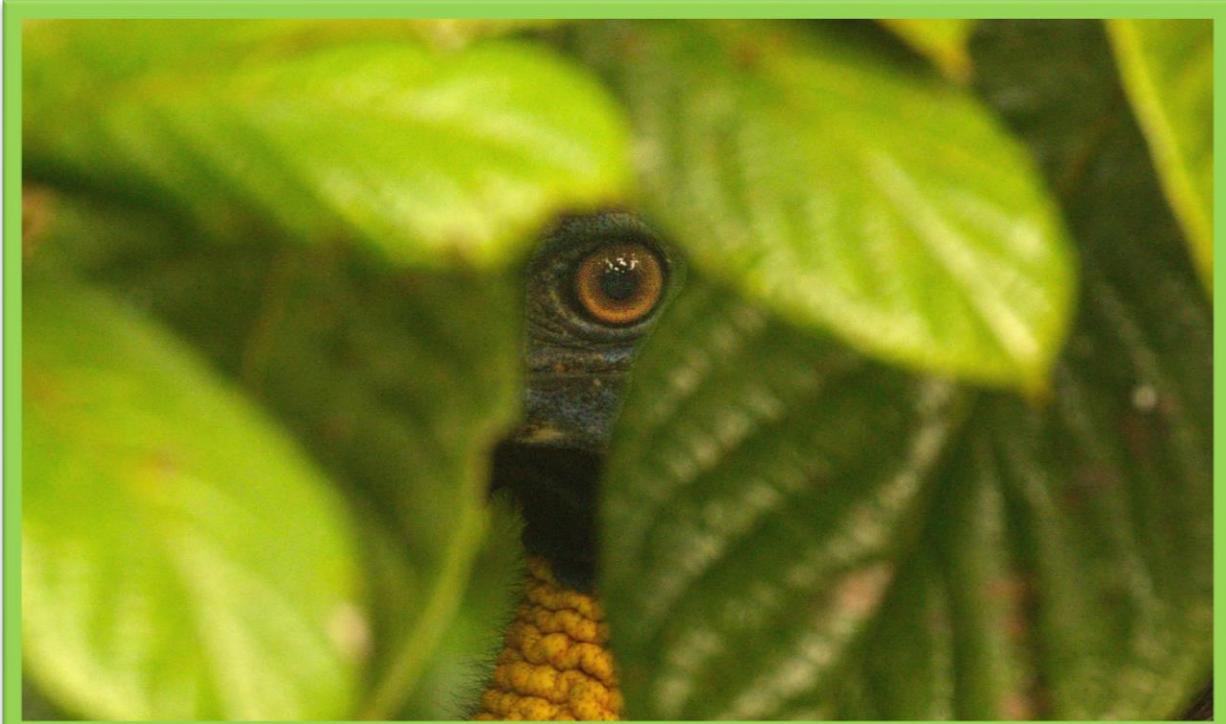


West Papua

November 13 – 24, 2019

Text and photos Bengt Legnell (legnell@hotmail.com)



The suspicious eye of a rare juvenile Northern Cassowary taking shelter under a bush during a rainstorm in Malagufuk

BACKGROUND

The visit to West Papua came through as an extension of a tour I organized to Sulawesi and Halmahera in October-November 2019. Stickan Holmstedt, Gunilla Olsson, Hans Lövgren and Kjell Sahlberg from the Sulawesi trip really wanted to see some Birds-of-Paradise...so, since we were in the vicinity I arranged a trip to Nimbokrang on the mainland and the island of Waigeo.

I also had a long standing invitation from Oka Dwipo from Birding Indonesia/Indonesian Parrot Foundation to travel with him to the newly opened forest around the village Malagufuk on the Vogelkopf peninsula, east of the city Sorong. Oka and I spent the last 4 days in Malagufuk.

TRAVELS, ITINERARY & TIPS

We caught a direct flight from Manado, Sulawesi to Jayapura on the Papuan mainland. Since we stayed at Jamil's place in Nimbokrang, Jamil took care of all transport, food, guiding and we also stayed at his homestay. Simple rooms with fans. Communal toilet/shower.

After the visit to Nimbokrang we caught a flight from Jayapura to Sorong and on to Waigeo by boat. Oka had arranged transport, local guide (needed when visiting the leks of Wilson's and Red BoP) and accommodation in advance. We stayed at a very simple but clean place right by the beach – no fan, communal bath/toilet and only electricity (generator) a couple of hours/day – long enough to charge batteries etc. (There are a number of dive-resorts & lodges – quite expensive, with aircon and private baths on the island as well)

After the visit to Waigeo, Stickan and friends returned to Sweden, while I and Oka continued to Malagufuk

The village-chief met us in Sorong, we bought all the food needed (supplies as well as beddings, toiletries etc has to be brought to Malagufuk from Sorong) and then on to Malagufuk by 4x4 car.

Regarding air-flights in the area. All three local flights we had booked in advance got cancelled and re-bookings had to be done. Fortunately we didn't miss time birding, but got some additional expenses for check-in luggage on the flights.

The main reason for this snag was that we flew in from Manado. I think if we had

taken a flight from Jakarta - more flights from there, and more passengers (probably our flights were cancelled because of lack of passengers) most these snags would not have happened.

Generally speaking, if possible, I try to keep flight-cancelations in mind when planning trips to Indonesia. Sometimes flights are cancelled because of weather-conditions as well – rainstorms, typhoons, etc and I try to have at least an overnight stay before the international flight back to Europe. If the flight back home is from Jakarta I often plan a visit, 2 full days, to Gunung Gede a few hours drive from Jakarta. The best birding site on Java with most of the Java-endemics present - and there are quite a few of those!

Regarding climate and weather. Papua is hot, afternoon temperatures can reach over 35 degrees – early mornings and late afternoons are often a little cooler. On top of that, few places on Earth are more humid than the lowland forests of Papua, even up on Arfak - that can be quite cold at night, the humidity is high.

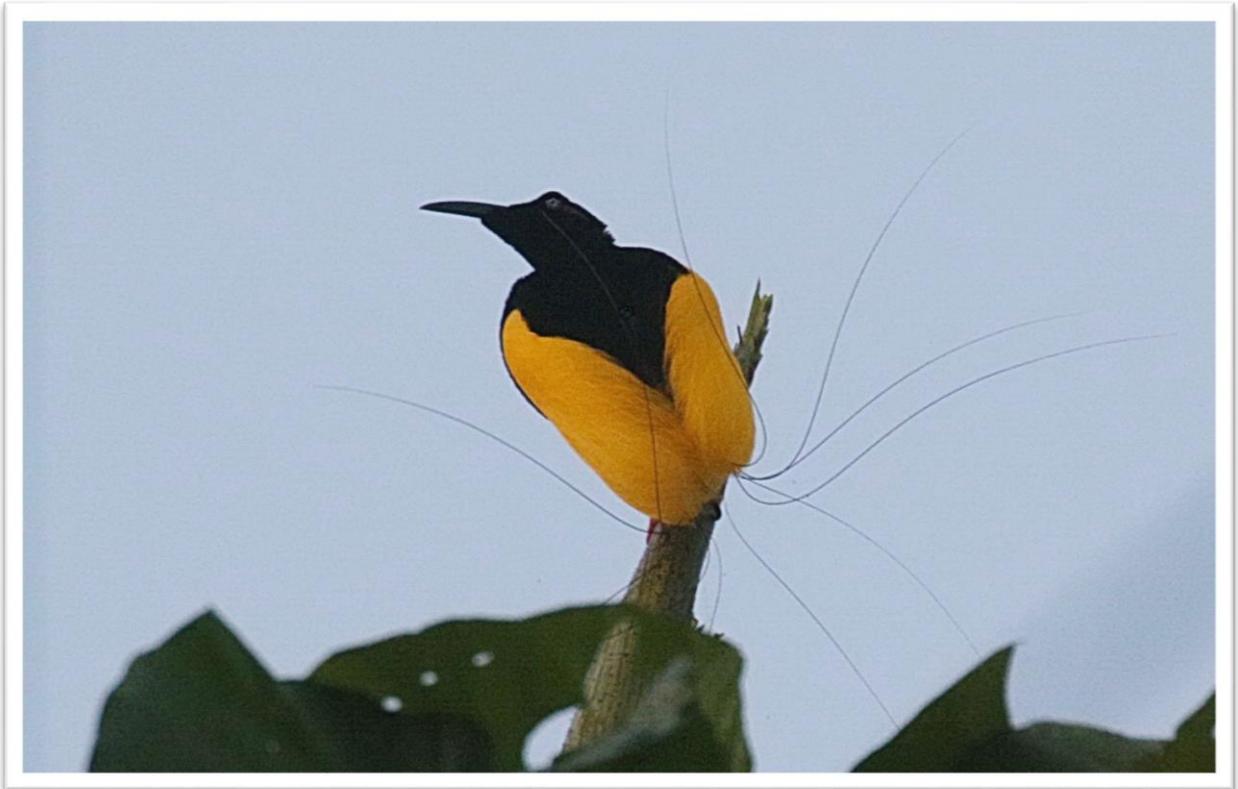
It can start rain anytime, but often the showers are short when visiting the area august-November. But heavy rain sometimes transform the trail to mud – but the seasoned visitor get used to all that if the motivation is to see all the avian beauties that this fantastic place can offer. An hour...or two... of cursing and swearing in the rain or heat is forgotten when the BoP's perform, Pittas call or some other feathered beauty appear. After all, you are not the first birder to endure all of this on Papua! Umbrella and rain-clothes are recommended. Maybe even rubber-boots, that often can be bought for a small sum locally – up to size 43-44, if the visitor don't have space for them in their luggage. Some places even have a pair or two to let – visitors often leave their boots. These new water-tight pack-bags come in handy – to protect electronic devises, money, passports etc, as well as for clothes – even clean clothes kept in a suitcase get damp by the huminty.

Health and diseases. I don't know much about diseases. Malaria seems to be quite common at times in Nimbokrang and Malagufuk, especially when it has been raining a lot. I have taken prophylaxis – Malastad, before visiting those areas. Apart from that, I have no info. (those who often spend extended time here rather risk catching malaria – that can be cured, than risk getting their kidney permanently damaged by using prophylaxis for weeks or months each time)

As far as insect-bites etc, there are quite a few sticking bamboo-mosquitoes, esp. in the forests around Nimbokrang. The forest around Malagufur has some leeches, mostly after rain, but nothing compared to some forests in SEA. I often get bitten by something – I am not sure what, sand-flies maybe, every time I visit these areas, very itchy on the legs and hard to protect against. This last journey to Malagufur was particularly bad. With some cream the itchiness disappear quite quickly, but the red spots on my legs stay on for quite some time.



Our bungalows during the stay in Waigeo – simple but nice. Fresh fish for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Snorkeling for Angelfish, Butterflyfish, Clownfish, Surgeons etc, right outside the door. Two sets of snorkels are available at the place.



Always on top of a dead tree-stump above the surrounding canopy, usually on top of a hill, so he can have unobscured view of the surroundings. A skilled “pole-dancer” as well, but with a twist, his 12 “wires” on the tail are used to tickle the female when she come within range – what female could resist that?! The Twelve-wiered Bird-of-Paradise from the forest of Nimbokrang.

Nimbokrang. This is a traditional place to watch Birds-of-Paradise; Lesser, Magnificent, 12-wiered and King BoP’s as well as Magnificent Riflebird, Pale-billed Sicklebill and Glossy-mantled Manucode occur here. In the past it was also possible to see Northern Cassowary, Victorian Crowned Pigeon as well as Hook-billed and Shovel-billed Kingfisher, but forest degradation and hunting has made it difficult to see these species any more. They have for the most part moved deeper into the forest. Even Jamil, who runs the local homestay as well as acts as the local guide, is getting a little frustrated and is looking for a new place where the forest still is intact – but it is not easy to set up operations with local landowners who does not always understand the difference between 100 or 1,000 dollars for a visit on their property.

The Victoria Crowned Pigeon is arguably the most beautiful of the four species of that make up this group of pigeons; Crowned Pigeons, all endemic to Papua and all are on the “red list”. Extensive hunting and forest destruction are most likely the reason to the decline. A little over a year ago Jamil got wind of that hunters had nine specimens in cages in their village. He bought them for a few hundred dollars, kept them in his house until he was sure they were ok and then released them. Eight of the birds immediately disappeared into the forest but the ninth stayed on around the outskirts of the village – the one on the photo. Every evening the bird sneaks back to Jamil’s place for an easy dinner and a safe tree to roost in.

Victorian Crowned Pigeon, Nimbokrang



But Nimbokrang still delivers. There are still BoP's here and in the grassland/farmland around the village endemic species like Black-billed Coucal, Rufous-bellied Kookaburra, Fawn-breasted Bowerbird, White-shouldered Fairywren, Hooded and Great-billed (Grand) Mannakin can easily be seen. In the village there almost always are a few Papuan Frogmoth on day-roost in a tree.

BIRDLIST FROM NIMBOKRANG – Nov. 13-16
 Birds written in **red** are endemic to Papua
 H = birds heard only

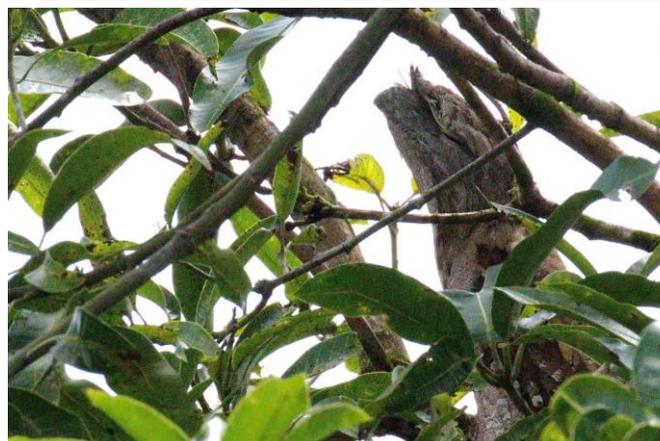
1. **Collared Brushturkey**.....H
2. Brown Quail.....1
3. Asian Blue Quail.....1
4. Marbled Frogmouth.....2+H
5. Papuan Frogmouth.....3+H
6. Moustached Treeswift.....5+
7. Glossy Swiftlet..... common
8. **Papuan Spinetail**.....a flock of 30 flew by
9. **Black-billed Coucal**.....1+1+H
10. Channel-billed Cuckoo.....1+1+H
11. Little Bronze Cuckoo.....1
13. Brush Cuckoo.....
14. Rock Dove.....common
15. Spotted Dove (introduced).....1+5+3
16. **Great Cuckoo-dove**. (Also on Halmahera)...1+H
17. Stephan's Dove.....1
18. **Victoria Crowned Pigeon**.....1
19. Wompoo Fruit Dove.....1+H
20. **Pinon's Imperial Pigeon**.....fairly common
21. **Zoe's Imperial Pigeon**.....1+H
22. Buff-banded Rail.....1+H
23. White-browed Crake.....H
24. Pacific Golden Plover.....13+20
25. Common Sandpiper.....1
26. Whiskered Tern.....2
27. Little Black Cormorant....a flock of 50 was seen
28. Eastern Cattle Egret.....common
29. Variable Goshawk.....1
30. Brahminy Kite.....4
31. **Blyth's Hornbill**. (Also on Halmahera).....5+H
32. Rufous-bellied Kookaburra (semi-endemic)2+H
33. **Blue-black Kingfisher**.....2
34. Yellow-billed Kingfisher.....1
35. Rainbow Bee-eater.....5
36. Sulphur-crested Cockatoo.....3+3+H
37. **Buff-faced Pygmy-parrot**.....1
38. **Papuan King Parrot**.....2
39. Eclectus Parrot. (semi-endemic).....2+H
40. **Blue-collared Parrot**.....1+H
41. **Black-capped Lory**.....H
42. Coconut Lorikeet. (semi-endemic).....4
43. **Papuan Pitta**often heard but not seen
44. Hooded Pitta.....H
45. Fawn-breasted Bowerbird.....7+
46. **Emperor Fairywren**.....2+3
47. **White-shouldered Fairywren**.....3
48. **Meyer's Friarbird**.....3+
49. **New Guinea Friarbird**.....fairly common
50. **Mimic Honeyeater**.....5
51. **Yellow-bellied Longbill**.....1
52. **Yellow-breasted Boatbill**.....H
53. **Lowland Peltops**.....1
54. **Golden Cuckoo-shrike**.....1



Twelve-wired BoP in courtship



Emperor Fairy-wren

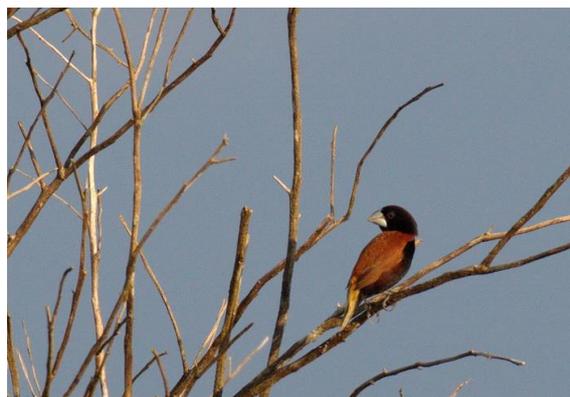


The Papuan Frogmoth is huge, it can be over ½ meter long. A common bird – the call is often heard at night. If the day-roost is found it is not difficult to approach, as they are not shy -

55. Black-browed Triller	2
56. Little Shrike-thrush (Arafura).....	1+H
57. Papuan Sprangled Drongo.....	common
58. Willie Wagtail.....	common
59. Northern Fantail.(semi-endemic).....	1+2
60. Sooty Thicket Fantail	161.
62. Spot-winged Monarch	2
63. Hooded Monarch	2
64. Common Shining Flycatcher.....	2
65. Grey Crow	H
66. Glossy-mantled Manucode	2
67. Magnificent Riflebird	2+H
68. Pale-billed Sicklebill	1+H
69. King Bird-of-Paradise	1+2+H
70. Twelve-wired Bird-of-Paradise	2+H
71. Lesser Bird-of-Paradise	5+5+H
72. Black-sided Robin	H
73. Sooty-headed Bulbul (introduced).....	5+
74. Pacific Swallow.....	common
75. Golden-headed Cisticola.....	common
76. Metallic Starling.....	5
77. Singing Starling.....	10+1
78. Pied Bushchat.....	2
79. Red-capped Flowerpecker	1
80. Olive-backed Sunbird (Sahul).....	2
81. Euro-asian Tree Sparrow.....	common
82. Crimson Finch.....	10+
83. Great-billed Mannikin (Grand)	12+10
84. Hooded Mannikin	20+2
85. Chestnut-breasted Mannikin.....	20+



Lesser Bird-of-Paradise is one of the stunning BoP's. We found a few leks in the forest around Nimbokrang, but for the most part the birds were so high up in the dense canopy that they were hard to see. Only after we returned to the same lek I had visited 2 years previously did we get a good glimpse of these fantastic birds. We went there early in the morning – before sunrise, and waited for the males to come to the tree – 5 in all as well as 2 females.



The Great-billed or Grand Mannikin could be seen in numbers around the grass and farmland outside Nimbokrang, the only place we visited with suitable habitat for open-country, grassland birds.



It is not easy to take photographs of BoP's that display high up in the tree-canopy – too many trees, branches and leaves obstructing the view. Here a King BoP from Nimbokrang.

The Dampier Strait between Sorong and Waigeo. When traveling by boat from Sorong to the island of Waigeo, a cruise of about 2½-3 hours, it can be very rewarding to look out for pelagic birds. We had a fantastic time onboard, especially on the trip back to Sorong. Here is a list of what we saw:

Wedge-tailed Shearwater.....	at least 3	Whiskered Tern.....	5
Streaked Shearwater...500-1000, could be more		Common Tern.....	20
Lesser Frigatebird.....	at least 500	Greater Crested Tern.....	at least 50
Brown Booby.....	at least 4	Little Tern.....	1
Red-necked Phalarope.....	at least 100	Gull-billed Tern.....	2
Brown Noddy.....	at least 10	Pomarine Jaeger (Skua).....	at least 5
Bridled Tern.....	at least 20	Bulwer's Petrel.....	1

There could easily have been other Shearwaters and Petrels in the flocks fishing and if all the Skuas we saw were Pomarine we don't know. Pilot Whales were also seen.



Lesser Frigatebird - juvenile



Bulwer's Petrel



It was amazing to see 100's of Red-necked Phalaropes flying and swimming in the middle of the strait.



There could have been over 1000 Streaked Shearwaters



There was a lot of garbage floating around in the ocean – plastic bottles, pieces of Styrofoam and other debris. Terns and Boobies often took advantage of this....



This Pomarine Skua made me feel like on a pelagic watch back in Sweden. There were quite a few around.

The Island of Waigeo. Birders come to this island off the coast of the north-western corner of West Papua (access by boat from Sorong, a city with an airport, on the mainland) for one reason; the two spectacular BoP's, endemic to Waigeo and a few small surrounding islands - Wilson's and Red PoP! Waigeo also offers good general birding along the roads on this forest-clad island. In fact, just like Halmahera only 350km away, birds here seem less shy compared to the birds on mainland Papua. Maybe the fishermen that traditionally inhabited these islands were less inclined to go out hunting in the forests compared to the indigenous people on the mainland? No need to, with all the jummy fish surrounding the islands here!

There are quite a few resorts on the island, from expensive aircon places to simple huts by the beach, since the area also attracts international divers and snorkelers. The waters on these islands are rich in coral-reefs and tropical fish. Some of the reefs are considered the best in the world, better than Great Barrier Reef, and a visitor should not leave the island w/o going for a swim!



One of the biggest high-lights of the trip to West Papua was to see the stunningly colorful Wilson’s BoP. We walked to the hide in the dark and waited for the first sunlight – then, as from no-where he just sat there on a twig in front of us! For about an hour, spell-bound, we could watch him cleaning his lek from leaves and other debris, occasionally jumping up on a twig calling out for a female.

Bird-list from Waigeo, Nov. 17-19, 2019.

1. Collared Brush Rurkey.....H
2. Raja Shelduck.....2
3. Moustached Treeswift.....5+1
4. Glossy Swiftlet.....X
5. Channel-billed Cuckoo.....1+2
6. Chestnut-breasted Cuckoo.....1+H
7. Great Cuckoo-Dove.....H
8. Wompoo Fruit Dove.....H
9. Pink-spotted Fruit Dove.....H
10. Coronated Fruit Dove.....1+2
11. Beautiful Fruit Dove.....2
12. Claret-breasted Fruit Dove.....5+10
13. Orange-bellied Fruit Dove.....2+2
14. Pinon’s Imperial Pigeon.....common
15. Pied Imperial Pigeon.....10+15
16. Whimbrel.....1
17. Common Sandpiper.....1
18. Whiskered Tern.....5+
19. Eastern Cattle Egrets.....a few
20. Little Egret.....1+4
21. Eastern Osprey.....1
22. Pacific Baza.....2



Red Bird-of-Paradise from Waigeo. A fairly common BoP on the island. We saw some birds flying around daily on our walks along the roads. The “Lek” had a built up hide and the birds seemed to ignore visits to the 15 meter long construction with seats and all.

- 23. Long-tailed Honey Buzzard.....1-2
- 24. Grey-headed Goshawk.....2
- 25. Brahminy Kite..... 5+
- 26. White-bellied Sea-Eagle.....1
- 27. Blyth's Hornbill.....(also Halmahera) 30+
- 28. Oriental Dollarbird.....3+4
- 29. Rufous-bellied Kookabura.....1+3+H
- 30. Beach Kingfisher (semi-endemic).....1+H
- 31. Yellow-billed Kingfisher.....H
- 32. Palm Cockatoo.....5+1
- 33. Sulphur-crested Cockatoo.....3+10+10
- 34. Buff-faced Pygmy Parrot.....1
- 35. Eclectus Parrot (semi-endemic).....40+
- 36. Red-cheeked Parrot (semi-endemic).10+
- 37. Great-billed Parrot (semi-endemic).....1
- 38. Black-capped Lory.....1
- 39. Coconut Lorikeet (semi-endemic).....30+
- 40. Orange-fronted Hanging Parrot.....1
- 41. New Guinea Friarbird.....20+
- 42. Yellow-bellied Longbill.....1+1
- 43. White-breasted Woodswallow.....5+
- 44. Lowland Peltops.....1+1+1
- 45. Hooded Butcherbird.....30+
- 46. Boyer's Cuckooshrike.....2
- 47. Raja Ampat Pithui.....5+3
- 48. Papuan Sprangeded Drongo.....common
- 49. Willie Wagtail.....common
- 50. Rufous-backed Fantail.....1
- 52. Grey Crow.....2
- 53. Topresian Crow.....2+5+
- 54. Glossy-mantled Manucode.....3+2
- 55. Wilson's BoP.....1+H
- 56. Red BoP.....7+9+1
- 57. Black-sided Robin.....1
- 58. Sothy-headed Bulbul (introduced).....1
- 59. Pacific Swallow.....common
- 60. Metallic Starling.....2+2
- 61. Yellow-faced Myna.....10+10
- 62. Grey-streaked Flycatcher.....2
- 63. Olive-crowned Flowerpecker.....2+2
- 64. Black Sunbird.....1+H
- 65. Olive-backed (Sahul) Sunbird.....1+1
- 66. Euroasian Treesparrow.....common



The Glossy-mantled Manucode belongs to the family of Paradisebirds
Not as flashy as the rest of the family



Hornbills occupy the southern part of Africa and Asia – all the way to The Philippines, Borneo and Java. 3 species dare to cross the magic Wallace-line, 2 can be found on Sulawesi and the third – Blyth's, occupy the islands of Halmahera and Papua. Blyth's Hornbill on photo

Malagufuk on the Vokelkopf peninsula (the north-western corner of Papua) After the visit to Waigeo the rest of the group returned to Sweden from Sorong (via Manado and Singapore). I had an invitation from Oka to visit a newly opened forest around a village – Malagufuk. Even if only a short distance from Sorong – a little over 35 km, it took over 1½ hour by 4x4 and then another 1½ by feet through thick forest to reach the village situated in the middle of the densely forested and road-less Vogelkopf.

This is their story as I have learned it; About five years ago 14 families who lived in a wood-cutting community decided to go out pioneering a new part of the virgin forest. One of the reasons they moved, is said to be concern that a huge multinational company planned to commercially cut the forest and set up a palm-oil plantation afterwards – right in the middle of their tribal land. So they moved, build 7 very simple huts to live in, cut a few trees, collected rattan and other products of the forest in order to get by. Maybe they did a little hunting as well. The forest was unexploited and rich in wildlife – Wallabies, wild pigs, Cassowaries, Brush Turkeys and Crowned Pigeons for example. A couple of years ago an official from the regional administration in Sorong came for a visit. The villagers showed him around and the official was amazed to see all the wildlife in the forest

around the village. It is said the village-hunters even managed to show him an Echidna, a strange egg-laying marsupial that looks a bit like a hedgehog. The impressed official then made a deal with the villagers. If they stopped cutting trees and worked on preserving the birdlife – there were plenty of Birds-of-Paradis of different species around the village as well, he would start to promote the village with the tour-companies in Sorong as an Eco-tourism and birdwatching destination. The villagers agreed and the last two years nature-lovers and birdwatchers start to find their way to the village. It is still very much small-scale - maybe about a hundred people/year visit. There only is a very small “guest-house” of two tiny rooms with a thin mattress on the floor in each. Food, beddings and all personal needs have to be brought along from Sorong.



Daniel, my local guide on the trail to the village.



The villagers have planted a lovely garden.

But the forest here is still mostly virgin. There are at least four species of BoP’s around the village alone, rare and shy species like Northern Cassowary, Western Crowned Pigeon, Green-naped Pheasant-pigeon, Hook-billed, Common and Red-breasted Paradise Kingfisher, Blue Jewel-babbler and a host of other dynamic birds can still easily be seen here.

The village just got a donation of timber to build two new guesthouses – each with two bedrooms, bath and toilet. Hopefully these guesthouses will be built in a few month.

Bird-list of Malagufuk, Nov. 19 – 24, 2019.

1. **Northern Cassowary**.....2
2. **Red-billed Brush-Turkey**.....H
3. Marbeled Frogmouth.....H
4. Papuan Frogmouth.....H
5. **Papuan Nightjar**.....1
6. Moustached Treeswift.....1
7. Glossy Swiftlet.....common
8. Channel-billed Cuckoo.....1
9. Chestnut-breasted Cuckoo.....1+H
10. Brush Cuckoo.....1
11. **Amboyna Cuckoo-dove**.....1
12. **Thick-billed Ground-pigeon**.....1
13. **Green-naped Pheasant-pigeon**.....2+H
14. **Western Crowned Pigeon**.....1+2
15. Wompoo Fruit Dove.....H
16. **Pinion’s Imperial Pigeon**.....common
17. **Zoe’s Imperial Pigeon**.....2
18. Whimbrel (on the way).....3
19. Wood Sandpiper (on the way).....1
20. Striated Heron (on the way).....1
21. Pacific Reef Heron (on the way).....2
22. Variable Goshawk.....1
23. Blyth’s Hornbill..... common
24. Oriental Dollarbird.....1
25. **Hook-billed Kingfisher**.....2+H
26. **Common Paradise Kingfisher**.....2



- 27. Red-breasted Paradise Kingfisher.....3+H
- 28. Rufous-bellied Kokaburra.....5
- 29. Yellow-billed Kingfisher.....2+H
- 30. Papuan Dwarf Kingfisher..... 4+H
- 31. Sulphur Crested Cockatoo.....common
- 32. Eclectus Parrot.....common
- 33. Red-cheeked Parrot.....common
- 34. Black-capped Lory.....4+H
- 35. Black Lory.....2+5
- 36. Coconut Lorikeet.....fairly common
- 37. Large Fig Parrot.....2+2
- 38. Papuan Pitta.....1+H
- 39. Hooded Pitta.....2+H
- 40. White-eared Catbird.....H
- 41. New Guinea Friarbird.....common
- 42. Rusty Mouse-warbler.....2
- 43. Pale-billed Scrub-wren.....2
- 44. Papuan Babbler.....3+H
- 45. Blue Jewel-babbler.....2+H
- 46. Boyer's Cuckoo-shrike.....1
- 47. Papuan Sprangled Drongo.....common
- 48. Northern Fantail.....1
- 49. Sooty Thicket Fantail.....1
- 50. Brown-headed Crow.....H
- 51. Magnificent Riflebird.....3+H
- 52. King BoP.....1+H
- 53. Twelve-wired BoP.....3+H
- 54. Lesser BoP.....6+H
- 55. Barn Swallow (on the way).....100
- 56. Pacific Swallow. (on the way).....50
- 57. Metallic Starling.....100+
- 58. Golden Myna.....5+
- 59. Olivebacked (Sahul) Sunbird.....1
- 60. Common Shining Flycatcher.....2



Papuan Dwarf Kingfisher



Western Crowned Pigeon



Lesser Bird-of-Paradise



Magnificent Riflebird



Shining Flycatcher