

THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

14 SEPTEMBER – 7 OCTOBER 2007

TOUR REPORT

LEADER: MARK VAN BEIRS

Rain, mud, sweat, steep mountains, shy, skulky birds, shaky logistics and an airline with a dubious reputation, that is what the Solomon Islands tour is all about, but these forgotten islands in the southwest Pacific also hold some very rarely observed birds that very few birders will ever have the privilege to add to their lifelist. Birdquest's fourth tour to the Solomons went without a hiccup. Solomon Airlines did a great job and never let us down, it rained regularly and we cursed quite a bit on the steep mountain trails, but the birds were out of this world. We birded the islands of Guadalcanal, Rennell, Gizo and Malaita by road, cruised into Ranongga and Vella Lavella by boat, and trekked up into the mountains of Kolombangara, Makira and Santa Isabel. The bird of the tour was the incredible and truly bizarre Solomon Islands Frogmouth that posed so very, very well for us. The fantastic series of endemics ranged from Solomon Sea Eagles, through the many pigeons and doves - including scope views of the very rare Yellow-legged Pigeon and the bizarre Crested Cuckoo-Dove - and parrots, from cockatoos to pygmy parrots, to a biogeographer's dream array of myzomelas, monarchs and white-eyes. A total of 146 species were seen (and another 5 heard) and included most of the available endemics, but we also enjoyed a close insight into the lifestyle and culture of this traditional Pacific country, and into the complex geography of the beautiful forests and islet-studded reefs.

After a lot of travelling – up to 72 hrs for some! – most of the group finally arrived at Henderson Airport, the international gateway to the little-known Solomon Islands. The airport is situated near the capital Honiara on the island of Guadalcanal, a name that sadly became famous because of the fierce naval and air battles that were fought here during the Second World War. We checked into our hotel in downtown Honiara, where Rainbow Lorikeets, Pacific Swallows and introduced Common Mynas occupied the gardens. An hour later we found ourselves on a track through partly logged forest in the foothills overlooking the capital. This excellent, but sweaty introduction gave us good views of beauties like Red-knobbed Imperial Pigeons, Ducorps's Cockatoo (our first real endemic), really nice Yellow-bibbed Lories, a huge Buff-headed Coucal, a pair of Ultramarine Kingfishers, scores of Brown-winged Starlings and several Long-tailed Mynas. As dusk was approaching we returned to our minibus that soon got stuck on the steep, slippery track. Pushing did not help, so we walked back until a lorry came past that took us to the hotel. An excellent dinner followed a thorough briefing on what a birding tour in the Solomon Islands really was going to entail.

Next morning, just before our Solomon Airlines Twin Otter flight to the island of Santa Isabel, we managed to pick up Bob, who had just arrived from Fiji – albeit 48 hrs late, courtesy of an airline we will not mention. A lucky man!! The flight took us to the offshore islet of Fera and upon arrival we transferred in a small dingy to the village of Jejevo. The porters were ready; we paid a visit to the local bottle shop and then hiked up in the heat of the day to the village of Tirotonga, our base for the next two days. It was hot and humid and hard work and there were almost no birds about, and eventually we reached our destination. In the afternoon we explored the surroundings of the village where goodies like Variable Goshawk, Ducorps's Cockatoo, Eclectus Parrot, Claret-breasted Fruit-Dove, Ultramarine Kingfisher, White-bellied Cuckoo-Shrike, Yellow-throated White-eye and Guadalcanal Crow got our heartbeat going. After a delicious dinner of taro, rice, corned beef and pineapple we again donned our muddy boots and walked into the surrounding forest. Eventually, after a lot of sliding on the treacherously muddy and slippery trail, we reached a favourite spot of the little known Solomon Islands Frogmouth and after some appropriate and respectful waiting, we obtained eye-ball to eye-ball views of this really weird-looking nocturnal species. We were able to admire and photograph this magical bird for as long as we wanted at extremely close range. What a fantastic experience!! It has now been shown that it is so different from the other frogmouth species that it has been placed in a genus by itself. It was already obvious what the bird of the tour was going to be!!

Next morning, we birded along narrow trails through densely forested limestone habitat. The birds kept a rather low profile, and we only managed to observe Rufous Night Heron, several colourful Cardinal Lories, Yellow-eyed Cuckoo-Shrike, Guadalcanal Crow, Yellow-throated White-eyes and some Brown-winged Starlings at their nest. We heard a single Black-faced Pitta, our main remaining target here, but it totally ignored us and we obtained our first good looks at a Midget Flowerpecker. In the afternoon we tried again for the pitta and although one called persistently, it chose to stay in very dense cover and totally refused to move or show itself. It in fact moved slowly away from us... frustrating!! We also heard Woodford's Rail squeal and noted a couple of Cicadabirds. Nightbirding was again successful as a couple of exquisite Solomon Hawk Owls performed splendidly, just before it started to rain. On our last morning at Tirotonga, we obviously concentrated on trying to get the pitta on our lifelists, and although we heard it again, it remained unseen. An endemic Black-and-white Monarch provided some consolation. After an early lunch, we took a group photo together with our porters and walked down to the village on the seashore. Our afternoon boat trip along a river through dense mangrove forest and patches of gallery woodland yielded Pacific Reef Heron, Striated Heron, Whimbrel, Grey-tailed Tattler, lots of Cardinal Lories, Moustached Treeswift and Blyth's Hornbills. We heard a Woodford's Rail call from dense cover, but it kept in hiding. Upon returning, we witnessed some impressive roost flights of Eclectus Parrots, totalling more than 200 birds. Quite a sight!!

Adorable Claret-breasted Fruit-Doves and Singing Starlings enlivened a relaxed early morning around our guesthouse near the beach. In midmorning we transferred to the nearby island on which the airstrip is located and it did not take too long to find an Island Monarch. A party of these "supertramp" birds showed really well, as did a Melanesian Scrubfowl. The coral flats held a good selection of waders including Pacific Golden Plovers, Mongolian Plover, Bar-tailed and Black-tailed Godwits, Whimbrel, Grey-tailed Tattler and Ruddy Turnstones. Black-naped and *longipennis* Common Terns were roosting on emergent rocks. We then flew to Honiara, and in the afternoon we paid another short visit to Mount Austen, where an immature Buff-headed Coucal and a Mackinlay's Cuckoo-Dove were noted.

Next morning, a Pied Goshawk was observed while we were waiting for our flight to Rennell at the increasingly familiar domestic terminal at Honiara Airport. The flight took us south to this raised coral island and we landed on a small airstrip amongst expanses of forest. We dropped our bags at our guesthouse and soon explored the surroundings. It was marvellously birdy and we soon connected with all Rennell's endemics: Silver-capped Fruit-Dove, Rennell Fantail, the attractive Rennell

Shrikebill, Rennell White-eye, the unusual-looking Bare-eyed White-eye and Rennell Starling. Australian Ibises were everywhere, we located a nest of a Brown Goshawk, Mackinlay's Cuckoo-Dove showed very well, Pacific Imperial Pigeons flew overhead, and four male Singing Parrots sat together in a fruiting tree and Melanesian Flycatchers, Fan-tailed Gerygones and Cardinal Myzomelas flitted about. Really good fun!! Next morning, a lovely walk through disturbed habitat and a stretch of excellent forest gave us great views again of the endemics. The Rennell Shrikebill really showed off and flocks of bizarre Bare-eyed White-eyes kept appearing. We also obtained magical views of several tiny, feeding and displaying Finsch's Pygmy Parrots. Suddenly, the local police officer on his motorbike appeared to warn us that our charter flight would be half an hour earlier than arranged. Quite a service!! Not much later a Norman Britton Islander manned by an Indian pilot took us over the virtually inaccessible, pristine forests of Guadalcanal, the habitat of the fabled Moustached Kingfisher and Guadalcanal Honeyeater.

At dawn, we were walking along the now familiar track at Mount Austen near Honiara. It took a while for the birds to become active, but then we were almost overpowered by the best flock we encountered on the whole tour, as Solomon Islands Cuckoo-Shrike, Cicadabirds, Finsch's Pygmy Parrots, Steel-blue Flycatchers and Golden Whistlers vied for attention. We also had good looks at Pacific Baza, Yellow-bibbed Lory and Dollarbird and finally connected with a Black-headed Myzomela, an often hard-to-find Guadalcanal endemic.

We then returned to the airport, where over a hundred Pacific Golden Plovers were foraging in the short grass. Our flight to the western island of Gizo gave us great views over the World Heritage-nominated Marovo Lagoon with its green forested islets, turquoise coral reefs and deep azure-blue seas. After a delicious lunch, a fast boat took us to the volcanic island of Kolombangara, looming in the distance, as Black Noddy, Bridled and Roseate Terns enlivened the sea journey. We checked our guesthouse on the beach and later walked through coastal forest holding Yellow-vented Myzomela, White-capped Monarch and Melanesian Cuckoo-Shrike. While waiting at the edge of some cassava fields several Ospreys and White-rumped Swiflets showed and in late afternoon we were scoping a couple of only recently described Roviana Rails with chicks. Magnificent stuff!!!

Early next morning, in the coastal village of Iriri, we were getting organized for the tough hike to the upper reaches of Kolombangara volcano. It turned out that our porters were mainly young women – a nice surprise!! The walk first took us through gardens and patches of secondary growth and then, for several hours, along a disused logging road, where a dense mat of vine-like creepers impeded swift progress. Island Imperial and Pale Mountain Pigeons were scoped, a single Duchess Lorikeet shot past and White-winged Fantails and Solomon Islands White-eyes were added to the tally. In late morning, we hit the steep slopes covered in beautiful primary forest and started climbing in earnest. Several hours later, we arrived, rather exhausted, at our camp, just when it started to rain in earnest. We then discovered that our main tarpaulin had been left behind. Disaster loomed, but luckily our gracious porters saved the situation and four of us ended up sharing a small tarpaulin with our ten Kolombangara ladies, while our two Birdquest ladies had a tent to themselves. It was not an unpleasant situation and some of us really enjoyed it. Our local cooks also had a hard time getting the fire going, but eventually a mixture of insect repellent and taxonomic notes from the Birdquest checklist (?!!?) did the trick and soon we enjoyed a hot meal at our most basic and most memorable camp of the tour. It definitely was a night to remember with all the singing, joking and talking while it kept on raining. Before dawn, we were already hiking up fairly quickly, as we wanted to reach the altitude of 1500m as soon as possible. Fast-moving flocks of Kolombangara White-eyes accompanied us and upon arriving at the right altitude we found some gorgeous Scarlet Robins and more modestly clad Island Leaf Warblers. In this lovely mossy forest we first heard and then saw our main target: the rarely observed Kolombangara Leaf Warbler. We all got great views!! Very few people have ever seen this very localized species and Brian even managed to photograph it!! In the same area we also noted several Meek's Lorikeets and a secretive Red-breasted Pygmy Parrot. We then walked down for most of the day and in early afternoon it started raining really heavily. We all got totally soaked and

the path became a torrent. Just after dusk our wet party arrived on the coast, having walked 17 km today. We said goodbye to our very hospitable and helpful gang of porters and returned by boat and in the dark to the much-appreciated luxury of the hotel on Gizo.

Next day was island-hopping day. After a hearty breakfast, we sailed along the northern shore of Gizo island towards Vella Lavella. A spectacular Beach Kingfisher posed for us and a sandy islet held an impressive variety of seabirds including Brown Boobies, beautiful Roseate Terns together with Little and Great Crested Terns and both Black and Brown Noddies, while overhead we found a single Great Frigatebird amongst many Lessers. From a nearby islet a man and a boy were waving frantically to get our attention and we soon learned that their boat holding six people had capsized the previous evening and that they thought they were the only survivors. We called the police on our radio and luckily later found out that a couple with a young girl and a baby had been rescued later that day. Upon arrival at Vella Lavella we were welcomed by a playful pod of Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphins. We went for a walk on the island and in a nice patch of forest soon found the endemic (to Vella Lavella) Banded White-eye. Other interesting species here included Solomon Sea Eagle, Pied Goshawk, Island Imperial Pigeon, Steel-blue Flycatcher and White-winged Fantail. After this successful visit we sailed to nearby Ranongga, where in the gardens soon found several smart Ranongga White-eyes and another White-winged Fantail. In late afternoon we returned to our base in Gizo, where early next morning we birded a patch of forest at the edge of Gizo town. Here, we soon located the endangered Splendid White-eye, the only bird restricted to this small island. Together with this attractive little fellow we also found a couple of enormous Buff-headed Coucals and many Island Imperial Pigeons. After a scrumptious brunch, we took a leisurely boat trip touring around the neighbouring islets and also ventured a bit further a field. We found an islet that held several Ospreys and teeming colonies of Roseate, Black-naped, Little and Great Crested Terns together with both species of Noddy. A Beach Kingfisher showed particularly well on Kennedy island and we were told it was exactly here that, in the Second World War, JFK performed his heroic feat after his torpedo boat TP109 had been rammed by a Japanese destroyer. Later, we observed a large flock of feeding noddies in the distance and upon approaching we discovered several small dark shearwaters feeding under the very active noddies and Bridled Terns: Heinroth's Shearwaters. We really hit the jackpot and we managed to get good views of about eight of these little known and only rarely seen seabirds. A Wedge-tailed Shearwater also showed and upon returning home we bumped into a really playful pod of Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphins. Some of the animals gave us real show, jumped very high into the air and splashed so close to our boat that we got soaked. A free shower and a splendid spectacle!! On our last morning in the Western Province we returned to Kolombangara. The sunrise behind the impressive volcano was out of this world and the walk through the gardens and lowland forest very enjoyable. The highlight was a perched adult Solomon Sea Eagle near its eyrie in a forest giant. We studied it for a while through the scope and then realized that a recently fledged youngster was sitting nearby. Here, we also added Peregrine Falcon to our list and obtained even better views of Solomon Islands Cuckoo-Shrike, White-winged Fantail and Solomon Island White-eye. In the afternoon we caught the flight to the hub of Honiara.

An impressive group of 30 Ducorps's Cockatoos enlivened our wait for the flight to the island of Makira next day, but we were then told that heavy rain had flooded the airstrip there and that the flight had to be postponed till the next morning. We returned to our hotel in Honiara, where a Tree Sparrow was seen and in late afternoon we visited an area of wet grassland bordering a river on the outskirts of town. Several Little Pied Cormorants and a Great Egret were noted, but best of all were the eight or so Red-backed Buttonquails that we flushed. We managed to find one on the deck and studied it for 15 min while she was walking in the open, no further than 5m from us. Pure magic, as all the details of her finery could be discerned. Splendid stuff. Next morning we finally flew to the village of Kirakira on Makira (or San Cristobal). The airstrip was fairly dry and the female pilot made a very soft landing. A small truck took us to the village where a few things had to be organized, while the whole community was celebrating the inauguration of the new bishop. We drove to the beginning of the trail and although it was hot and sticky, we were all very happy that no rivers had to

be crossed this year, as water levels were extremely high, so it would not have been a lot of fun. We hiked up into the Hauta Conservation Area, taking our time to get acquainted with this new area. On the way we observed a soaring Solomon Sea Eagle and had four sightings of Pied Goshawk, including some pretty spectacular display. We heard the raucous duetting of Rufous-tailed Bush-hens and added three remarkable members of the pigeon guild to our list: Yellow-legged Pigeon, Crested Cuckoo-Dove and White-headed Fruit-Dove. In mid afternoon we arrived at our village where we were given a large house. We quickly settled in and spent the last hours of the day at a nearby clearing, where we enjoyed two more sightings of Yellow-legged Pigeons together with a nice variety of Makira endemics like Sooty Myzomela, San Cristobal Melidectes and San Cristobal Starling. Yellow-bibbed Fruit-Dove, Long-tailed Triller and Chestnut-bellied Monarch added to the fun. In the evening we were formally introduced to the village headman and the village people. Next dawn found us again at the clearing, observing two more Yellow-legged Pigeons and a male Ochre-headed Flycatcher. After a filling breakfast – no fiddleheads this time!! - we walked up into the hills in search of two ‘higher occurring’ endemics. Our first Shade Warbler (genus *Cettia*) played hide and seek and proved really hard to get on to, so eluded some of us. Luckily, another bird performed splendidly and showed in detail at close range. The other target for the day, the San Cristobal Leaf Warbler was eventually heard singing high in the canopy and allowed good but brief looks. A secretive and endemic Dusky Fantail showed nicely in a patch of forest undergrowth and a more widespread Grey Fantail obliged in the canopy. On the return walk, we spent some time scanning at some nice viewpoints and caught up with several rare Chestnut-bellied Imperial Pigeons. Another full day in the highlands of the Hauta Conservation Area produced a stylish Metallic Pigeon, another Yellow-legged Pigeon (the seventh one of the tour!!), more Crested Cuckoo-Doves, Yellow-bibbed Fruit-Doves and Chestnut-bellied Imperial Pigeons and a few more obliging Dusky Fantails. Variable Kingfishers were regularly heard and only briefly seen, but sadly we did not have a single sniff of the San Cristobal Thrush.

Early next morning, we hiked down from the Hauta Conservation Area to the lowlands. It rained, it was muddy, it was slippery, it was steep, but everyone did very well and we were grateful for the river crossings we managed to evade. We heard a San Cristobal Thrush, but it obviously did not want to play in the rain. We finally made it to the road, where our man on the spot was waiting for us with some very much-appreciated cold beer. While waiting for our porters to catch up, a Buff-banded Rail showed. We said goodbye to our genial hosts and a short flight took us back to our base on Guadalcanal. Some of us revisited the wetlands in late afternoon and obtained great looks again at a female Red-backed Buttonquail walking about in the open. A nice patch of marsh held an Eastern Cattle Egret (probably a first for the islands!), flushed what must have been a Swinhoe’s Snipe (another first!!) and had great looks at Little Pied Cormorant, Pacific Black Duck, White-browed Crake and Australian Reed Warbler. A Chinese restaurant produced the best dinner of the tour and early next morning we flew to the island of Malaita. Logging is a major problem on this densely populated island. In a fairly easily accessible patch of forest we soon found the endemic Malaita White-eye, but otherwise things were very quiet. We returned the next morning to find the forest-lined road quite birdy, with regular observations of Malaita White-eyes and an obliging Black-and-white Monarch, but all the other species were by now well known to us. The Red-bellied Myzomela remained invisible and when it became too hot, we headed home for a tasty lunch, packed up and returned to Guadalcanal.

Our last morning in the Solomon Islands found us again on Mount Austen, where we enjoyed great views of Ultramarine Kingfisher, a male Singing Parrot and a couple of Black-headed Myzomelas amongst a bunch of more widespread and regularly seen species. Later that day we left the Solomons for the long haul home.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

Species that were heard but not seen are indicated by the symbol (H).

Species that were not personally recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (NL).

PROCELLARIIDAE

Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus pacificus*: We noted a single dark morph bird on one of our boat trips off Gizo.

Heinroth's Shearwater *Puffinus heinrothi*: Excellent views of about eight birds on one of our boat trips off Gizo (Western Province). They were feeding together with Black and Brown Noddies and allowed us to discern their dark plumage and pale underwings. This rarely recorded species is only known from the Solomon Islands and the seas surrounding New Britain (Bismarck Archipelago) and Bougainville (Papua New Guinea). No nest has ever been found, but it is presumed to breed in the mountains of these islands. The total population is probably only a few hundred birds!! BirdLife International treats it as '**Vulnerable**' in its splendid book "Threatened Birds of the World". The species is named after Oskar Heinroth (1871–1945), German zoologist, collector in the Pacific and author. Ron's favourite.

SULIDAE

Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster*: A total of 27 were seen at sea off Gizo, many resting on a sandy islet.

PHALACROCORACIDAE

Little Pied Cormorant *Phalacrocorax melanoleucos*: This widespread species was regularly recorded at Betikama near Honiara (Guadalcanal).

FREGATIDAE

Great Frigatebird *Fregata minor*: One was seen flying overhead with Lessers near Gizo. Many other flocks of Lesser Frigatebirds were likely to have included this species.

Lesser Frigatebird *Fregata ariel*: Up to 25 frigatebirds at sea around Gizo, Ranongga and Vella Lavella were predominately this species but many were seen too distantly for identification. Frigatebirds have the lowest wing-loading (low weight in contrast to large wing area) of all birds, enabling them to be amongst the most nimble of fliers.

ARDEIDAE

Great Egret *Ardea alba*: Three were noted at Betikama, near Honiara (Guadalcanal).

Pacific Reef-Heron (P Reef-Egret) *Egretta sacra*: Regular observations of both morphs on the coasts and reefs all over the archipelago.

Striated Heron *Butorides striatus*: Seven sightings of this well-known species. This small dark subspecies is endemic to the Solomons (*B. s. solomonensis*).

Eastern Cattle Egret *Bubulcus coromandus*: A single bird was noted attending cattle at Betikama near Honiara (Guadalcanal). I am not aware of any previous records in the Solomon Islands.

Rufous Night Heron (Nankeen Night Heron) *Nycticorax caledonicus*: Two were noted on Santa Isabel and a single bird showed beautifully at Betikama near Honiara (Guadalcanal).

THRESKIORNITHIDAE

Australian Ibis *Threskiornis molucca*: The endemic subspecies *T. m. pygmaeus* was common on Rennell with up to 60 seen per day.

ANATIDAE

Pacific Black Duck *Anas superciliosa*: Regular observations of this widespread species. This is the only duck in the Solomons.

PANDIONIDAE

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*: No fewer than 15 sightings of this well-known and widespread piscivore. The form involved is sometimes split off as a separate species: Wallacean Osprey *Pandion melvillensis*.

ACCIPITRIDAE

Pacific Baza (Crested Hawk) *Aviceda subcristata*: No fewer than 16 observations of this attractive bird of prey. We witnessed some spectacular display on a couple of occasions.

Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus*: The most regularly recorded bird of prey in the archipelago, with almost daily observations.

Solomon Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus sanfordi*: Five observations of this spectacular eagle. Best views were of an adult perched close to its eyrie on Kolombangara. Although similar in plumage to juvenile White-bellied Sea Eagle (and originally classified as this species), this bird of prey ranges far inland over forested mountains. Classified as '**Vulnerable**' by BirdLife/IUCN on the basis of its low population density, ongoing forest and coastal degradation, and occasional hunting. Endemic to the Solomons Islands and the island of Bougainville (Papua New Guinea).

Variable Goshawk *Accipiter hiogaster*: We only saw this species on Santa Isabel and on Malaita, and obtained excellent scope views. The various small dark Solomons subspecies are generally split off from the Australian Grey Goshawk *Accipiter novaehollandiae* along with other New Guinea subspecies, but may be better split again as a species endemic to the Bismarck islands of PNG and the Solomons (see 'Raptors of the World' by James Ferguson-Lees & David Christie).

Brown Goshawk *Accipiter fasciatus*: Excellent views of perched and flying birds at and near a nest on Rennell. One bird was seen to break off leafy branches for the eyrie. Rennell is the only island in the Solomons on which it occurs: an example of how Rennell appears to have been colonized more from Australia and Vanuatu than from the other Solomon islands.

Pied Goshawk *Accipiter albogularis*: Nine observations of this fairly common, but rather elusive species. Most birds were of the regular pied morph, but we saw one totally black individual on Guadalcanal. We witnessed some pretty spectacular display over the Makira lowlands. It is endemic to the Solomon Islands.

FALCONIDAE

Oriental Hobby *Falco severus*: One offered brief views near the airstrip on Rennell.

Peregrine Falcon (Peregrine) *Falco peregrinus*: Good views of single birds on Kolombangara and on Malaita. The dark subspecies involved is *brevirostris*.

MEGAPODIIDAE

Melanesian Scrubfowl *Megapodius eremita*: Regularly heard and very well seen on the islet of Fera near Santa Isabel. Generally considered as an endemic to the Bismarcks and the Solomons, it nests in warm ground in volcanically heated areas or around rotting substrates.

TURNICIDAE

Red-backed Buttonquail *Turnix maculosa*: One of the surprises of the tour was finding up to eight of these tiny critters in a patch of grassland near Honiara (Guadalcanal). On two different occasions we managed to obtain magnificent, point blank views of sitting birds, allowing us to admire their white eyes and subtle plumage characteristics. The subspecies involved is the endemic salamonis. In the Solomon islands it is restricted to the northern lowlands of the island of Guadalcanal. The number three in the Bird of the trip contest.

RALLIDAE

Woodford's Rail *Nesoclopeus woodfordi* (H): We heard this little known species in impenetrable habitat in the hills and in a patch of grassland in the lowlands of Santa Isabel, but the birds would not budge. It is endemic to the Solomon Islands and to Bougainville (Papua New Guinea). The bird is named after Charles Woodford (1852-1927), the resident Commissioner in the Solomons Protectorate from 1896 to 1914.

Buff-banded Rail *Gallirallus philippensis*: We obtained excellent views of this well-known species on Makira and at Betikama on Guadalcanal.

Roviana Rail *Gallirallus rovianae*: We managed to obtain great scope views of a pair with two chicks along the edge of a dense cassava field on Kolombangara and we saw several other birds in the same area. This is an extremely poorly-known, flightless species which was only described in 1991. It is endemic to Kolombangara, New Georgia and adjacent islets in the Western Province and is named after the small island of Roviana.

Rufous-tailed Bush-hen *Amaurornis moluccanus* (H): Pairs were heard duetting in the lowlands of Makira and on Guadalcanal. Typically, this extremely skulking species remained hidden from view.

White-browed Crake *Porzana cinerea*: One at Betikama (Guadalcanal) offered nice scope views while walking along a reed edge.

Australasian Swamp-hen *Porphyrio melanotus*: Regular observations of this huge-billed rail.

CHARADRIIDAE

Pacific Golden-Plover *Pluvialis fulva*: Flocks of up to 100 were noted on the airport grasslands at Honiara (Guadalcanal) and smaller numbers on other airstrips.

Mongolian Plover (Lesser Sandplover) *Charadrius mongolus*: A single bird was scoped on the coast of the Fera airstrip near Santa Isabel.

SCOLOPACIDAE

[Swinhoe's Snipe *Gallinago megala*: A snipe was flushed by the Eastern Cattle Egret at Betikama (Guadalcanal) and could not really be identified, but is noted here tentatively as Swinhoe's Snipe, the most likely possibility. There are no known records of any *Gallinago* snipe from the Solomon Islands!!]

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*: A single showed well together with the following species on Fera island off Santa Isabel.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*: A single bird was scoped on Fera island off Santa Isabel.

Eurasian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*: 21 observations of this well-known species. All were of the far eastern subspecies *N. p. variegatus*.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*: A single bird in winter plumage was found on a sandy islet off Gizo.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*: Scattered singles were noted along many coasts and rivers.

Grey-tailed Tattler *Heterosceles brevipes*: Regular observations on mudflats throughout the islands. Remember the distinctive call.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*: Several sightings of this worldwide wanderer.

LARIDAE

Great Crested Tern (Greater C T, Swift T) *Sterna bergii*: Good views of many on the sandy islets off Gizo and smaller numbers elsewhere throughout the islands.

Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii*: Great views of up to 80 smart birds on breeding islets in the Gizo area. This is a distinctive subspecies *S. d. bangsi* with dark wings and all-red bills.

Black-naped Tern *Sterna sumatrana*: Small numbers were seen close inshore around Gizo and on a sandy islet nearby.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*: Six were seen at Fera island off Santa Isabel and c10 were found perched on a sandy islet off Gizo. All were early-returning adults of the Siberian subspecies *S. h. longipennis*.

- Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*: About 20 off Gizo included some perched on sandy islets. This species is a rare breeder in the Solomons, with proved nesting only on Santa Isabel.
- Bridled Tern *Sterna anaethetus*: A few were seen on each of the boat journeys around Gizo and Kolombangara, often perched on floating coconuts. Typically occurs further offshore than Great Crested and Black-naped Terns, but still within sight of land (whereas Sooty Terns keep far offshore).
- Black Noddy *Anous minutus*: At least 100 were seen on each of the boat trips around Gizo and Kolombangara, usually in dense flocks.
- Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus*: A few were noted on each of the boat trips around Gizo and Kolombangara, where they appeared much larger and paler than the much more common Black Noddies.

COLUMBIDAE

- Metallic Pigeon *Columba vitiensis*: This species is largely montane in the Solomons. We saw a couple in the Makira highlands.
- Yellow-legged Pigeon *Columba pallidiceps*: No fewer than seven encounters with this rarely observed species in the Makira highlands. We saw them well in flight on several occasions and twice obtained excellent scope views of perched birds. Although it is not too rare on Makira, it is very rare elsewhere and hunted everywhere, and it is classified by BirdLife/IUCN as '**Endangered**'. It is endemic to Melanesia.
- Mackinlay's Cuckoo-Dove *Macropygia mackinlayi*: This Melanesian endemic was widespread in small numbers, with many excellent close up studies.
- Crested Cuckoo-Dove *Reinwardtoena crassirostris*: Fantastic scope views of several in the Makira highlands. This uncommon Solomons endemic must be one of the weirdest pigeons in the world.
- Stephan's Dove *Chalcophaps stephani*: Rather elusive, with singles seen by one or more people on several occasions. The bird is named after Etienne Stephan Jacquinet, father of French explorer Vice Admiral Jacquinet, so watch your pronunciation!!
- Superb Fruit-Dove *Ptilinopus superbus*: Just a few sightings of this more widespread species.
- Silver-capped Fruit-Dove *Ptilinopus richardsii*: This beautiful fruit-dove was common on Rennell, where five were seen on the first day and eight on the second day. Endemic to Rennell and small islands off Makira, all low coral (makatea) islands.
- Yellow-bibbed Fruit-Dove *Ptilinopus solomonensis*: We only saw this cracker of a bird in the Makira highlands. It is endemic to the Solomons and a scatter of small islands off New Guinea as far west as Biak.
- Claret-breasted Fruit-Dove *Ptilinopus viridis*: Another glorious fruit-dove which is most common in the Solomons, but ranges as far as east Indonesia. Many fantastic scope views.
- White-headed Fruit-Dove *Ptilinopus eugeniae*: This Makira endemic must be the most beautiful pigeon in the country. Good views of up to five perched in treetops most days in the Makira highlands.
- Pacific Imperial Pigeon *Ducula pacifica*: Up to seven seen each day on Rennell. This is a classic 'tramp' species occurring on islands mostly without other imperial pigeons, and ranging from islands off New Guinea to Samoa.
- Red-knobbed Imperial Pigeon *Ducula rubricera*: This spectacular and attractive Bismarcks-Solomons endemic was widespread in small numbers and allowed many excellent scope studies. We soon got to know its very distinctive growling voice very well.
- Island Imperial Pigeon *Ducula pistrinaria*: Good views of small numbers on all the visited islands of the Western Province. Another Melanesian endemic, replacing Red-knobs in coastal and mangrove forest.

Chestnut-bellied Imperial Pigeon *Ducula brenchleyi*: No fewer than ten scope observations of singles perched up in treetops on Makira. This attractive species is endemic to Guadalcanal, Malaita and Makira and has been heavily hunted. It is classified by BirdLife/IUCN as 'Vulnerable'. The scientific epithet refers to Julius Lucius Brenchley (1816-1873), English traveller in the Solomon Islands and author.

Pale Mountain-Pigeon *Gymnophaps solomonensis*: Perfect scope views of four perched birds on Kolombangara. Most roost high on the mountain and whoosh down through the cloud (and rain) to feed in the foothills. It is endemic to the highest islands in the Solomons.

CACATUIDAE

Ducorps's Cockatoo *Cacatua ducorpsii*: These small corellas showed very well, perching and performing on many occasions. The highest numbers were noted near Honiara (Guadalcanal), where up to 30 were counted a couple of times. It is endemic to the Solomons, but does not occur on Makira or Rennell. Adjutant L. J. Ducorps was a 19th century French naval administrator and explorer.

LORIIDAE

Cardinal Lory *Chalcopsitta cardinalis*: Although common as high-flying flocks, the beauty of this gorgeous bird was most evident in the pairs perched at close range on Ranongga and Kolombangara. Also seen on Gizo, Guadalcanal and Santa Isabel. It is endemic to the Solomons and small islands off New Ireland.

Rainbow Lorikeet *Trichoglossus haematodus*: Somewhat less common than the preceding species, with which it shares the lowland forests and especially coconut plantations.

Yellow-bibbed Lory *Lorius chlorocercus*: Common but surprisingly elusive, with the best views on Mount Austen on Guadalcanal. It is endemic to Guadalcanal, Malaita and Makira where it remains common despite large numbers being trapped for the cagebird trade.

Meek's Lorikeet *Charmosyna meeki*: These tiny lorikeets were seen a couple of times above the camp on Kolombangara. It is endemic to the mountainous islands of the Solomons (including Bougainville).

Duchess Lorikeet *Charmosyna margarethae*: Another localized Solomons montane endemic, of which we only glimpsed one in flight in the lowlands of Kolombangara. An attractive but elusive species.

PSITTACIDAE

Red-breasted Pygmy Parrot *Micropsitta bruijnii*: Fair views of three above the Kolombangara camp. This scarce montane species is easier to see on New Guinea.

Finsch's Pygmy Parrot *Micropsitta finschii*: The tiny size of these pocket parrots was fully appreciated on Rennell, where about 10 were seen and several were scoped at close range. It is endemic to the Solomons and New Ireland.

Singing Parrot (Song Parrot) *Geoffroyus heteroclitus*: Often heard, but only seen perched on Rennell and at Mount Austen (Guadalcanal). It is endemic to the Bismarcks and the Solomons.

Eclectus Parrot *Eclectus roratus*: Small numbers of these gaudy parrots were seen on most islands except on Rennell. We witnessed an amazing evening roost flight of c200 along the Santa Isabel coast. Quite a sight!!

CUCULIDAE

Brush Cuckoo *Cacomantis variolosus*: We saw this vocal species well on Kolombangara and on Makira and heard it on a couple more islands.

Australian Koel *Eudynamys cyanocephala* (H): As usual, heard only.

CENTROPODIDAE

Buff-headed Coucal *Centropus milo*: This huge cuckoo showed very well on several occasions and we also scoped an immature on Mount Austen (Guadalcanal). Its loud swearing calls lend credence to the story that invading head-hunters from Malaita were just too scared to land on Vella Lavella, home to such intimidating beasts, and paddled back home! Endemic to the Kolombangara group (Western Province) and Guadalcanal. The scientific epithet refers to Milo, a 5th century BC giant Greek athlete.

STRIGIDAE

Solomon Hawk-Owl (S Boobook) *Ninox jacquiniti*: Magnificent night time views of an obliging pair in the surroundings of Tirotonga (Santa Isabel). A real cracker of a bird.

PODARGIDAE

Solomon Islands Frogmouth *Rigidipenna inexpectata*: Exquisite and prolonged eye-ball to eye-ball studies of a single bird near Tirotonga village on Santa Isabel. This Solomons taxon is extremely poorly-known and is endemic to the islands of Bougainville, Choiseul and Santa Isabel. It used to be considered as a subspecies of Marbled Frogmouth *Podargus ocellatus*, but recent studies found it different enough to warrant a separate genus. If you want to know more, read the following, recently published article: Nigel Cleere, Andrew W. Kratter, David W. Steadman, Michael J. Braun, Christopher J. Huddleston, Christopher E. Filardi, Guy Dutson (2007): "A new genus of frogmouth (Podargidae) from the Solomon Islands - results from a taxonomic review of *Podargus ocellatus inexpectatus* Hartert 1901" (Ibis 149 (2), 271–286). The number one in the Bird of the Trip contest and the favourite species for Riitta, Gudrun and Brian. Brian and Mark managed to get some pretty good photos of this marvellous species.

APODIDAE

Glossy Swiftlet *Collocalia esculenta*: A common swiftlet, with up to 15 seen daily on most islands, usually low in forest clearings.

White-rumped Swiftlet *Aerodramus spodiopygius*: Several showed well on Kolombangara.

Uniform Swiftlet *Collocalia vanikorensis*: More localised but occurring in much larger flocks than the Glossy Swiftlet, often high over the forest.

HEMIPROCNIDAE

Moustached Treeswift *Hemiprocne mystacea*: We had fantastic views of this superbly elegant species on a number of different islands.

ALCEDINIDAE

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*: One was seen on Santa Isabel and we heard it on Kolombangara. The deep blue colour and tiny ear-covert patch of this subspecies *A. a. salomonensis* are quite different in comparison to European birds.

Variable Kingfisher *Ceyx lepidus*: This forest understorey inhabitant is always a difficult bird to see. We heard it on Kolombangara and heard five or six on most days on Makira, where we eventually also saw it briefly.

Ultramarine Kingfisher *Todirhamphus leucopygius*: Magnificent scope views on several occasions on Mount Austen (Guadalcanal) and on Santa Isabel. A smart and little-known bird endemic to the islands of Bougainville, Choiseul, Santa Isabel and Guadalcanal.

Collared Kingfisher *Todirhamphus chloris*: Singles and pairs of this kingfisher were most commonly seen in forest clearings on Mount Austen, Rennell, Gizo, Kolombangara, Malaita and Santa Isabel. Competes with Golden Whistler for the title of the bird with most subspecies, and these sightings comprise four of those.

Beach Kingfisher *Todirhamphus saurophaga*: Several excellent encounters with this large and spectacular species in the Gizo area. This kingfisher is common along rocky coasts across the Solomons.

Sacred Kingfisher *Todirhamphus sanctus*: Singles of this Australian migrant were seen in open habitats on Santa Isabel and on Kolombangara. It is confusingly similar to the local subspecies of Collared Kingfisher.

CORACIIDAE

Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis*: A nice series of sightings on different islands. Another species which reaches its easternmost limits in the Solomons, with the rather bright endemic subspecies *E. o. solomonensis*.

BUCEROTIDAE

Blyth's Hornbill *Aceros plicatus*: A spectacular species that was seen very well on a number of islands. This is the only hornbill east of Sulawesi.

PITTIDAE

Black-faced Pitta *Pitta anerythra* (H): We heard up to three a day near the village of Tirotonga on Santa Isabel and we tried hard to see this endemic, but no joy. Rather frustrating!! Since 1938, it has only been recorded at Tirotonga, where Dave Gibbs rediscovered it in 1994 and only a handful of people have ever seen it. It is widely considered as one of the shyest of the 31 species of the wonderful Pitta family. It is classified as '**Vulnerable**' by BirdLife/IUCN because of its rarity, and it is endemic to the islands of Bougainville, Choiseul and Santa Isabel.

HIRUNDINIDAE

Pacific Swallow *Hirundo tahitica*: This dark swallow was widespread along coasts and in towns.

CAMPEPHAGIDAE

Melanesian Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina caledonica*: One was seen in the forest near Kukundu on Kolombangara. This big cuckoo-shrike is rare in the Solomons but more common in Vanuatu and New Caledonia.

Yellow-eyed Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina lineata*: This is a common species, often mixed with other cuckoo-shrikes, with up to five seen on many days throughout the tour. These comprise five subspecies, including the sexually monomorphic subspecies on Rennell.

White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina papuensis*: Another widespread species that is fairly common in open habitats and degraded forest.

Cicadabird (Common C) *Coracina tenuirostris*: Less common than the preceding two species. The many subspecies of Cicadabirds are widespread in the region and show significant variation. The Makira subspecies *C. t. salamonis* stands out as having distinct calls and ecology, as well as plumage differences in both sexes. This subspecies probably deserves specific status, and a total of five were seen on Makira.

Solomon Islands Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina holopolia*: By far the scarcest of the small cuckoo-shrikes. One showed well on Mount Austen (Guadalcanal) and another showed all too briefly on Kolombangara. It is endemic to the Solomons.

Long-tailed Triller *Lalage leucopyga*: Up to five were seen daily on Makira, where it is most common along forest edges and in clearings. It is endemic to Melanesia, from Makira to New Caledonia.

TURDIDAE

San Cristobal Thrush *Zoothera margaretae* (H): We only heard it sing on the rainy day we were leaving the Conservation Area in the highlands of Makira (San Cristobal). We gave it a try, but it would not budge. It is endemic to Makira, and is an extremely difficult bird to see. The species is named after Margarete Mayr, wife of the famous German-American ornithologist Ernst Mayr.

Island Thrush *Turdus poliocephalus*: One was briefly seen in dense forest on Rennell. This subspecies is unusual in occurring at sea-level, presumably because there are few other competing species on Rennell. No fewer than 50 races of this widespread bird have been described!!

SYLVIIDAE

Shade Warbler *Cettia parens*: Our first one played really hard to get, but the second bird gave magnificent and extended views at really close range, high on the ridge above our house on Makira. It is endemic to this island, and is closely related to the Fiji Bush-Warbler. Bob's favourite.

Australian Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus australis*: Several showed very well in marsh habitat at Betikama (Guadalcanal).

Island Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus poliocephalus*: Five birds showed very well in the mountain forest above our camp high on Kolombangara.

San Cristobal Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus makirensis*: Two were seen high up on Makira, where they briefly responded and showed quite well. It is endemic to Makira, but it is one of the least convincing current Solomon Islands splits.

Kulambangra Leaf Warbler (Kolombangara L W) *Phylloscopus amoenus*: Excellent close up views of this Kolombangara endemic in the mossy forest close to the crater of this extinct volcano. Our well-earned reward after the toughest hike and the most primitive overnight conditions of the tour. Not many birders have this species on their lifelist!! Well done, bunch!! Brian even managed to get decent photographs of this little-known bird.

MONARCHIDAE

Willie-wagtail *Rhipidura leucophrys*: This over-familiar species, full of character, was common in urban environments and also on airstrips and along beaches.

White-winged Fantail *Rhipidura cockerelli*: Five excellent observations of this attractive, but rather retiring forest inhabitant on several islands in the Western Province. This was a good total for this widespread but uncommon Solomon islands endemic.

Dusky Fantail *Rhipidura tenebrosa*: Several pairs on Makira behaved very well, allowing excellent close views in the forest understorey. An unobtrusive and uncommon fantail, which is endemic to the island of Makira (Solomon Islands).

Rennell Fantail *Rhipidura rennelliana*: A total of three were seen on Rennell, where it was one of the less inspiring endemics. It is one of the five species endemic to Rennell and is probably derived from the next species.

Grey Fantail *Rhipidura fuliginosa*: A single bird was observed high on the mountain on Makira. This Australian and New Zealand species occurs in the Solomon Islands only in montane Makira.

Rufous Fantail *Rhipidura rufifrons*: This charming and confiding species was common on Makira, where up to six were seen daily. Elsewhere, we only saw one on Kolombangara. It is remarkable for approaching so close to houses in the forests of Makira. This well-known bird is widespread throughout Indonesia, Australia and the southwest Pacific with many subspecies described.

Rennell Shrikebill *Clytorhynchus hamlini*: A total of nine of these smart birds showed well on Rennell. This is the brightest of the four described shrikebills, which are restricted to the southwest Pacific. It is endemic to the island off Rennell.

- Island Monarch *Monarcha cinerascens*: Three of this 'supertramp' species performed well on Fera islet, off Santa Isabel. This is an unusual location as it also has Chestnut-bellied Monarchs. Island Monarchs occur on hundreds of tiny inaccessible islands from Wallacea to the Solomons but perhaps this is the only site with an airstrip!
- Chestnut-bellied Monarch *Monarcha castaneiventris*: This large monarch was fairly common on Makira with up to ten seen daily. We also recorded it on Mount Austen (Guadalcanal) and on Malaita. It is endemic to the Solomons.
- White-capped Monarch *Monarcha richardsii*: A total of about 25 were seen on Gizo, Kolombangara, Vella Lavella and Ranongga. An unusual species with a distinct juvenile plumage, which looks very similar to the preceding species, and it also has a number of intermediate plumages. It is endemic to the Kolombangara and New Georgia group.
- Kulambangra Monarch (Kolombangara M) *Monarcha browni*: This pied monarch is distinctly uncommon and we only saw it briefly on our descent from the highlands on Kolombangara. Endemic to the Kolombangara and New Georgia group.
- White-collared Monarch *Monarcha viduus*: No fewer than 17 of these smart birds were seen in the Makira highlands. It is endemic to the island of Makira.
- Black-and-white Monarch *Monarcha barbatus*: The last of the Solomons pied monarchs is also uncommon but we had fair views of two on Santa Isabel. It is endemic to the Solomon Islands, and ranges from Bougainville to Guadalcanal and Malaita.
- Steel-blue Flycatcher *Myiagra ferrocyanea*: Scattered sightings, seen best from the roads on Gizo and Malaita, but also a few on Mount Austen and Kolombangara. These represent three subspecies, with a fourth on Bougainville, all with differing females. It is endemic to the Solomons.
- Ochre-headed Flycatcher *Myiagra cervinicauda*: Another genus which has speciated on Makira, where we saw a male in the clearing near our house. Note that the scientific name means ochre-coloured tail, and this English name is obviously erroneous. This smart species is endemic to Makira.
- Melanesian Flycatcher (New Caledonian F) *Myiagra caledonica*: Four were seen on Rennell. The males of the genus *Myiagra* are all very similar, but the female of this species has a distinctive bright orange breast. It is endemic to Rennell, Vanuatu and New Caledonia. Yet another species which has obviously colonized Rennell from the south.

PETROICIDAE

- Pacific Robin *Petroica multicolor*: Three birds, including two stunning males perched up for us all high on Kolombangara. The Melanesian and west Polynesian subspecies have recently – see Handbook of the Birds of the World vol 12 – been treated as specifically distinct from the Australian Scarlet Robin which has been split off as a separate species *P. boodang*.

PACHYCEPHALIDAE

- Golden Whistler *Pachycephala pectoralis*: Regular observations of this widespread species, which has 11 subspecies in the Solomon Islands alone. No fewer than 64 subspecies have been described.

ACANTHIZIDAE

- Fan-tailed Gerygone *Gerygone flavolateralis*: Probably the commonest bird on Rennell, with up to 12 seen each day. It is endemic to Rennell, Vanuatu and New Caledonia.

NECTARINIIDAE

- Olive-backed Sunbird *Cinnyris jugularis*: Locally common in coastal and open habitats.

DICAEIDAE

- Midget Flowerpecker *Dicaeum aeneum*: Many excellent encounters with this tiny Solomons endemic.

Mottled Flowerpecker *Dicaeum tristrami*: Up to 15 seen each day on Makira. This is the furthest east for this genus, and has produced quite an unusual flowerpecker. It is endemic to Makira.

ZOSTEROPIDAE

Rennell White-eye *Zosterops rennellianus*: Several pairs and small groups totalling about 10 were seen on Rennell. An atypical white-eye, lacking any eye-ring except a very narrow ring of blue skin, and often behaving more like a creeper. It is endemic to Rennell.

Banded White-eye *Zosterops vellalavella*: Good views of six in an overgrown coconut plantation. Endemic to Vella Lavella, where extremely few people have been to see it.

Ranongga White-eye (Ganongga W-e) *Zosterops splendidus*: A splendid white-eye with a large yellow bill. No fewer than 15 were seen during our short visit. It is endemic to Ranongga, only 8 km away from Vella Lavella, and it is classified as **Vulnerable** by BirdLife/IUCN on the basis of a small declining population. The number two in the Bird of the trip contest!

Splendid White-eye *Zosterops luteirostris*: Another splendid white-eye and quite distinct from its close neighbours. Eight were seen along the road in Gizo, even allowing scope views. It is endemic to Gizo where so little forest remains that it is classified as **Endangered** by BirdLife/IUCN, with an estimated population of a few thousand.

Yellow-throated White-eye *Zosterops metcalfeii*: A more typical white-eye, with up to 15 seen daily on Santa Isabel. Another species endemic to Bougainville, Choiseul and Santa Isabel, which were connected by a Pleistocene land-bridge a long time ago.

Solomon Islands White-eye *Zosterops rendovae*: Eight were noted on our walks on Kolombangara. This confusingly named bird is endemic to the lowlands and hills of the Kolombangara and New Georgia group. (Sometimes called *Z. kulambangrae* or confused taxonomically with *Z. ugiensis*).

Kulambangra White-eye (Kolombangara W-e) *Zosterops murphyi*: Common around and above the camp on Kolombangara, where it moves about in fast-moving flocks and it is thus often quite difficult to see well in the cloud and rain. This species looks quite plain with a very wide white eye-ring. It is endemic to Kolombangara above 400 m.

Grey-throated White-eye *Zosterops ugiensis*: A few pairs and small groups totalling ten birds were seen in the hills on Makira. An unusual warbler-like white-eye, which is endemic to the mountains of Makira, Guadalcanal and Bougainville. It is often confused taxonomically with *Z. rendovae*.

Malaita White-eye *Zosterops stresemanni*: Another unusual white-eye, plain and chunky like a stout warbler. About 25 seen, making it one of the commonest birds in the Malaita hills. It is endemic to Malaita.

Bare-eyed White-eye *Woodfordia superciliosa*: A most unusual 'white-eye', with its long decurved bill, striking head pattern and fat shape – a good candidate for some investigative DNA work. The only other member of this genus is on Santa Cruz, to the southeast. It is endemic to the island of Rennell where about 25 were seen very well each day.

MELIPHAGIDAE

Cardinal Myzomela *Myzomela cardinalis*: This brilliant red honeyeater was fairly common on Rennell and on Makira. It is restricted to the coast on Makira, usually in coconuts, where the Sooty Myzomela replaces it in forest. Endemic to south Melanesia and Samoa (and possibly Micronesia and Fiji depending on taxonomy).

Yellow-vented Myzomela *Myzomela eichhorni*: Regular encounters on Kolombangara, Gizo and Ranongga. Endemic to the Kolombangara and New Georgia group.

Black-headed Myzomela *Myzomela melanocephala*: Four excellent observations on Mount Austen (Guadalcanal), where it is probably nomadic in search of suitable flowering trees. It is endemic to Guadalcanal and the Florida islands.

Sooty Myzomela *Myzomela tristrami*: Up to ten seen daily on Makira. This Makira endemic is believed to be a melanistic derivative of the endemic forest myzomelas which range across the other Solomon islands.

San Cristobal Melidectes *Melidectes sclateri*: About ten of these big and vociferous honeyeaters were seen in the hills on Makira. A taxonomic oddity, sometimes placed in its own genus *Meliarchus*. Similar enigmatic large honeyeaters are endemic to the mountains of Bougainville and Guadalcanal. It is endemic to Makira.

DICRURIDAE

Spangled Drongo *Dicrurus bracteatus*: A single bird was seen on Makira where it is behaviourally distinct, being a quiet, unobtrusive and shy bird. Its habits, calls, shape and especially long bill suggest that it might be a good species but a subspecies on Guadalcanal is somewhat intermediate with the more typical drongos on New Britain, and those in turn with the very typical drongos on New Guinea.

CORVIDAE

Guadalcanal Crow (White-billed C) *Corvus woodfordi*: Regular good views of this small crow on Santa Isabel. It is endemic to Choiseul, Santa Isabel and Guadalcanal (with a very similar species on Bougainville). Sieghard's favourite.

STURNIDAE

Metallic Starling *Aplonis metallica*: Locally common in degraded lowland forest, usually seen from roadsides on Mount Austen, Gizo, Makira and Malaita, and also common on Santa Isabel.

Singing Starling *Aplonis cantoroides*: A scatter of records of this town and coastal species, which is endemic to New Guinea and the Solomons.

Rennell Starling *Aplonis insularis*: Five of this scarce species were observed on Rennell, usually distant or flying over, but at least one pair was seen well and showed its yellow iris. It is endemic to Rennell and was previously lumped with the yellow-eyed Atoll Starling of ridiculously small islets off north PNG and the Solomons.

Brown-winged Starling *Aplonis grandis*: This distinctive endemic was common on Mount Austen (Guadalcanal), on Santa Isabel, on Gizo and on Kolombangara. It was also regularly encountered on Malaita, where this subspecies is probably a separate species, differing by its white eye, black secondaries and calls. It is endemic to the Solomon Islands.

San Cristobal Starling *Aplonis dichroa*: This smaller Brown-winged Starling type was an uncommon bird of forest edge, with no fewer than 17 seen in the hills. It is endemic to Makira.

Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*: The only introduced species established in the Solomons. It is common throughout Honiara, where up to 30 were seen whenever we looked. Introduced from India to control pests in coconut plantations.

Long-tailed Myna *Mino kreffti*: Regular observations on Mt Austen, Gizo, Kolombangara, Malaita and Isabel. Often in fruiting trees with Brown-winged Starlings and fruit-doves. A Bismarck and Solomons endemic, split from Yellow-faced Myna *M. dumontii*.

PLOCEIDAE

Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*: A single bird was seen in Honiara. The first sightings for the Solomons date from 2004 only.

MAMMALS

Solomon Islands Flying-fox *Pteropus rayneri*: The huge flying-foxes roosting close to Kukundu on Kolombangara were this species but the Solomons has nine species of *Pteropus* flying-foxes, making flight-identification of smaller species difficult.

Pacific Flying-fox *Pteropus tonganus*: The big flying-foxes on Rennell were this species which mainly occurs to the south and east of the Solomons.

Indo-Pacific Bottle-nosed Dolphin *Tursiops aduncus*: Schools of 20 and 30 off Gizo gave incredibly close views and showed off like nothing else. It was exhilarating to be splashed wet by the truly magnificent acrobatic jumps of these amazing creatures. Real "joy de vivre".