

PEREGRINE BIRD TOURS

BOIGU ISLAND

24th – 29th January 2013

TOUR REPORT

LEADER: Chris Doughty

We very much enjoyed our five days on Boigu Island. The weather pattern was much the same throughout our time on the island. The mornings would be bright and very hot and as the day progressed there would be a build up of clouds and one or two showers, sometimes very heavy, in the afternoon. Most days were hot and humid, the first two days reaching temperatures of 40 degrees Celsius. There was always a huge number of very hungry mosquitoes. We saw a total of 82 species of birds, there are no passage migrants, passing through Boigu Island during the month of January, so I think that 82 was a good number of birds to see in five days. Every morning from first light onwards flocks of Pacific Swifts would appear overhead, they varied in number each day. Each morning we found from 6-8 Uniform Swiftlets mixed in amongst them. On the 25th January there was a particularly large flock of Pacific Swifts number 200 plus and on this occasion, we also found a single House Swift amongst them. Highlights of the tour included a few Black Bitterns, 20 Spotted Whistling-Ducks, a couple of incredibly tame Red-backed Buttonquails, a Pectoral Sandpiper, a good number of Collared Imperial-Pigeons, small numbers of Uniform Swiftlets on a daily basis, a single House Swift, one Pacific Swallow, a full-breeding plumaged Eastern Yellow Wagtail, of the race *simillimo*, two Red-capped Flowerpeckers and there was a good number of Singing Starlings, seen every day.

We began our tour of Boigu Island at Cairns, the major town in far north Queensland. We boarded a plane which took us to Horn Island, one of the Torres Straight Islands. Here we took another short flight to Boigu Island, which is situated just 4 kilometres south of the Papua New Guinea south coast. We could clearly see Papua New Guinea while birding on the island. As the plane landed on the airstrip we were greeted by large numbers of Masked Lapwings, which lined either side of the airstrip. Once the plane was unloaded, we grabbed our baggage and carried them for less than 100 metres to our accommodation. There was no one there to meet us and the building was locked. We were now on Boigu Island time! So we birded around our motel-style accommodation block. There was literally White-breasted Woodswallows everywhere. There was also a great deal of surface water around town, the result of the tail end of cyclone Oswald, which had passed by the previous day. Fortunately, not doing any damage but it had dropped a great deal of rain.

This resulted in large puddles of water throughout the small township, which attracted good numbers of beautiful Pied Herons, Red-necked Stints, Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and a solitary Marsh Sandpiper. Whistling Kites flew overhead, a solitary Whimbrel flew past us and large numbers of Little Terns were flying over a small dam, the former water supply for the town. Bar-shouldered Doves walked around in the gardens, a Golden-headed Cisticola was calling loudly as he performed his display-flight and Willie Wagtails were dashing here and there. A solitary Torresian Imperial Pigeon flew overhead, as did a splendid Oriental Cuckoo. Our motel proprietor then arrived and we settled into our, thankfully, air-conditioned rooms. It was very hot and humid and there were large

numbers of very hungry mosquitoes.

We went for a walk around the small township, birding as we did so. A couple of Great Egrets were observed along the airstrip. A male Red-backed Buttonquail suddenly walked out into the middle of the track and started to have a dust-bath, enabling us to enjoy the best look that any of us had ever had, of this normally shy and secretive bird. A few Torresian Crows were flying around, we found several Varied Honeyeaters in the gardens of the homes, along with plenty of House Sparrows and best of all, we enjoyed a dozen or so sightings of one of the three main birds we were looking for, the Singing Starling. Then suddenly out of nowhere appeared two fast moving Uniform Swiftlets, which quickly disappeared to the south, over the township.

We then checked out the recently build desalination plant, where we found a large number of roosting waders and terns. New birds here included a single White-headed Stilt, good numbers of both Lesser and Greater Sandplovers and a solitary Pectoral Sandpiper, which we saw well in the scope. We also found four Caspian Terns, half a dozen or so White-winged Black Terns and a couple of Common Terns, which we were able to admire in the scope. A quick look along the airstrip produced a solitary Little Egret and a single Common Greenshank. We were then caught in a very heavy shower and soaked to the skin, we headed back to our accommodation block.

The following morning we concentrated our birding along the edge of the mangroves, which proved very rewarding. New birds included a Little Pied Cormorant, a female Lesser Frigatebird, a female Great Frigatebird, a Common Sandpiper, a Grey-tailed Tattler, a couple of singing Brush Cuckoos and one or two Little Bronze-Cuckoos. Frank and Karen also saw a flock of four Great Cormorants flying in the distance. There was an enormous flock of approximately 200 Pacific Swifts which stayed around for the whole morning and we spent much of our time checking the flock. This paid dividends as we found four more Uniform Swiftlets and a single House Swift. We also found a female Cicadabird, a male Varied Triller, a few female Shining Flycatchers, lots of Olive-backed Sunbirds, several Tawny-breasted Honeyeaters, a Brown-backed Honeyeater, several Rufous-banded Honeyeaters and several Spangled Drongos.

We then walked into the large swamp behind the settlement, where we got rather muddy. New birds here included a single Intermediate Egret, a few Striated Herons, a single Rufous Night-Heron, up to three Black Bitterns, a dozen Australian White Ibis, a single Royal Spoonbill, huge flocks of Radjah Shelducks, a single Osprey and a single Grey Plover.

In the afternoon we birded a patch of open water behind the airstrip and here we found a flock of 17 Spotted Whistling-Ducks and Jock saw a Bar-breasted Honeyeater, a bird that has not previously been observed on the island.

The following morning we concentrated on the area around the cemetery and once again we were rewarded with a good number of new birds. A Little Black Cormorant flew overhead and flew off into the large inland swamp. A Glossy Ibis flew overhead and then went back into the inland swamp. An adult White-bellied Sea-Eagle flew across the track in front of us and headed out to sea. We watched a pair of Australian Swamphens on the edge of the swamp, then a Black-tailed Godwit flew out of the swamp and out to sea. Wendy then spotted a Collared Imperial Pigeon, flying above the mangrove parallel with the coast, a great cheer went up, this was the one we wanted. Twenty minutes later it flew back again, heading out to sea, heading for nearby New Guinea. Forty minutes later it flew over our heads again heading inland. We then noticed a Channel-billed Cuckoo flying above the mangroves, parallel with the coast. Suddenly, a Pheasant Coucal flushed from cover along the edge the swamp and flew along at eye-level for a while. Two White-bellied Cuckoo-

shrikes were then seen flying along above the mangroves, before disappearing inside them. A Broad-billed Flycatcher flew into a nearby tree and we enjoyed prolonged scope views of a preening Large-billed Gerygone. All in all, a very good morning, which was followed by lunch and a short, but well-earned, siesta.

In the afternoon a walk along the edge of the swamp added Orange-footed Scrubfowl and Terek Sandpiper to our ever growing list.

The following morning we headed out to the edge of the large swamp, searching for any species that would be new for us. The only new bird for the tour were three Pacific Black Ducks, which flew by us. We then pressed on to a large stand of mangroves, which we thought was the most likely place to find the much sought after, Red-capped Flowerpecker. We had not been there very long when a flock of three Grey Teal flew past us. Then a small bird perched in the top of the mangroves, it was an immature Red-capped Flowerpecker, which most of us saw through the scope. One hour later in much shorter mangroves, some of us got a quick look at an adult male Red-capped Flowerpecker. A little later a perched Oriental Cuckoo, observed through the scope, was also much appreciated. While walking back to the township we saw a pair of Buff-banded Rails, along the side of the track. We also observed our only mammal of the tour today, we found a large day-time roost of hundreds of Black Flying-foxes, which we saw very well in the scope.

Two new birds on the afternoon walk included a solitary but beautiful Eastern Yellow Wagtail, in full breeding plumage, of the race *simillimo*. The other new bird was a Pacific Swallow, which we watched flying down the middle of the airstrip.

The following day we spent the whole of the morning deep in the mangrove forest, waiting for something new to pop up! Which in due course they did, we saw an immature and an adult female Red-headed Honeyeater and an immature Black-faced Monarch.

In the afternoon we checked out the airstrip and the mangroves at the settlement end of the airstrip and I saw a single Black Butcherbird flying above the mangroves. This was to be the last bird of the tour.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

CORMORANTS *PHALACROCORACIDAE*

Little Black Cormorant *Phalacrocorax sulcirostris* The highest total seen was three birds on the 26th January.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax arbo* A flock of four birds was observed by Frank and Karen flying above the inland swamp on the 25th January.

Little Pied Cormorant *Phalacrocorax melanoleucos* We saw the same bird every day, at the same time, at the same place, following exactly the same flight pattern!

FRIGATEBIRDS *FREGATIDAE*

Great Frigatebird *Fregata minor* Perhaps the unsettled weather, brought this species closer to land, as it normally does not frequent coastal areas, preferring to stay well out at sea. The highest count was of nine birds, on the 28th January, flying in a mixed flock with the following species.

Lesser Frigatebird *Fregata ariel* This species is far more often seen in coastal waters, than the preceding species. The maximum count was of three birds on the 28th January, flying in a mixed flock with the preceding species.

HERONS, EGRETS AND BITTERNES *ARDEODAE*

Great Egret *Ardea alba* Small numbers seen daily, with a maximum count of four birds on the 25th January.

Pied Heron *Egretta picata* Seen daily, mainly around the township and particularly along the edge of the airstrip. The maximum count was of 40 birds on the 28th January.

Intermediate Egret *Mesophoyx intermedia* A single bird was present on the island during our stay.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* Small numbers present on the island, with a maximum count of four birds on the 25th January.

Striated Heron *Butorides striata* There were also small numbers of this species present on the island, with a maximum count of two birds on a few occasions.

Rufous Night-Heron *Nycticorax caledonicus* Once again, small numbers of this species were present on the island, with a couple of birds observed on most days.

Black Bittern *Ixobrychus flavicollis* An uncommon bird on mainland Australia, it was good to see it well here on a number of occasions, where it is obviously quite common. We saw a maximum of three birds on the 25th January.

IBIS AND SPOONBILLS *THRESKIORNITHIDAE*

Australian White Ibis *Threskiornis molucca* A frequent visitor from New Guinea, we had a maximum count of 10 birds on the 25th January.

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* There was a single bird present on the 26th January.

Royal Spoonbill *Platalea regia* Once again, there was a single bird present on the 25th January.

DUCKS, GEESE AND SWANS *ANATIDAE*

Spotted Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna guttata* Observed on a daily basis, there was much movement between New Guinea and the island, with fairly large flocks flying to and fro on most days. The maximum count was of 30 birds on the 28th January.

Radjah Shelduck *Tadorna radjah* Another bird which was involved in large movements on a daily basis between New Guinea and the island. Flocks were constantly flying overhead. The maximum count was of 100 birds on the 25th January.

Grey Teal *Anas gracilis* We saw a flock of three birds on the 27th January, flying over the island, heading for New Guinea.

Pacific Black Duck *Anas superciliosa* Once again, we saw a flock of three birds on the 27th

January, flying over the island, heading for New Guinea.

OSPREY *PANDIONIDAE*

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* We enjoyed good looks at an immature on the 25th January and an adult on the 28th.

HAWKS, EAGLES AND KITES *ACCIPITRIDAE*

Whistling Kite *Haliastur sphenurus* Small numbers seen daily, with a maximum count of three birds on the 28th January.

White-bellied Sea-Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster* A single adult was seen very well on the 26th, 27th and 28th January.

MEGAPODES *MEGAPODIIDAE*

Orange-footed Scrubfowl *Megapodius reinwardt* A single bird was observed on the 26th January.

BUTTONQUAIL *TURNICIDAE*

Red-backed Buttonquail *Turnix maculosus* An adult male was observed dust-bathing on 24th January and we saw an adult male, perhaps the same bird, literally in the courtyard of our motel. Both individuals were very tame, allowing close approach and many good photos!

RAILS CALLINULES AND COOTS *RALLIDAE*

Buff-banded Rail *Gallirallus philippensis* Brief sightings on most days of the tour, with a maximum of three birds on the 27th January.

Australian Swamphen *Porphyrio melanotus* Seen well on the 26th and 27th January, with a maximum count of two birds, on the 26th.

STILTS AND AVOCETS *RECURVIROSTRIDAE*

White-headed Stilt *Himantopus leucocephalus* Small numbers observed daily, with a maximum count of three birds on the 28th January.

LAPWINGS AND PLOVERS *CHARADRIIDAE*

Masked Lapwing *Vanellus miles* One of the commonest birds on the island, observed daily, with a maximum count of 60 birds on the 27th January.

Pacific Golden-Plover *Pluvialis fulva* Small numbers were present daily on the airstrip, with a maximum count of 10 birds on a few days.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* A single bird was observed very well in the inland swamp, on the 25th January.

Lesser Sandplover *Charadrius mongolus* Good numbers wintering on the island, with a maximum count of 30 birds on the 25th January.

Greater Sandplover *Charadrius leschenaultii* Also good numbers of this species were wintering on the island, with a maximum count of 50 birds on the 24th January.

SANDPIPERS AND ALLIES *SCOLOPACIDAE*

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* A single bird seen well in flight, on the 26th January.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* Once again, we noticed large movements of this species to and from New Guinea. With a maximum count of 40 birds on the 26th January.

Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* A single bird was observed on the 26th and 27th January.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* Small numbers observed on a daily basis, with a

maximum count of four, on the 27th January.

Grey-tailed Tattler *Tringa brevipes* Small numbers observed on most days of the tour, with a maximum count of three birds on the 25th January.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* Small numbers wintering on a daily basis with a maximum count of six birds on the 25th January.

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis* Two birds were present throughout the five days we spent birding on Boigu.

Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis* Good numbers present throughout the tour, with a maximum count of 100 birds, at a high tide roost on the 24th January.

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *Calidris acuminata* Also observed on every day of the tour, with a maximum count of 50 birds, at the same high tide roost on the 24th January.

Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos* A single bird observed very well in the scope, at the same high tide roost on the 24th January.

TERNs STERNIDAE

Little Tern *Sternula albifrons* Approximately 50 birds present on the island, throughout our stay.

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia* Four birds present on the 24th and 25th January and three birds present on the 26th January.

White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* Small flocks feeding in the swamp on most days of the tour. On the 28th January there was a flock of 20 birds feeding just offshore.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* Four birds noted amongst the wader and tern high tide roost, on the 24th January.

PIGEONS AND DOVES COLUMBIDAE

Bar-shouldered Dove *Geopelia humeralis* Seen on a daily basis, they were particularly numerous around the tip, there were approximately 50 birds present throughout the tour.

Torresian Imperial-Pigeon *Ducula spilorrhoea* We noticed large movements of this species to and from New Guinea. With a maximum count of 30 birds on the 27th January.

Collared Imperial-Pigeon *Ducula mullerii* Observed in flight on the 26th, 27th and 28th January, with three birds together on the 28th.

CUCKOOS CUCULIDAE

Oriental Cuckoo *Cuculus optatus* Single birds observed in flight on the 24th and 26th January, then we saw two birds on the 27th, one of which we saw perched, enabling us to observe it very well in the scope.

Brush Cuckoo *Cacomantis variolosus* Small numbers observed daily, with a maximum count of six birds on the 28th January.

Little Bronze-Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx minutillus* There were also small numbers of this species observed on a daily basis, with a maximum count of four birds on the 26th January. On one occasion we observed a Large-billed Gerygone performing the duty of foster parent.

Channel-billed Cuckoo *Scythrops novaehollandiae* Single birds observed on the 26th and 27th January.

Pheasant Coucal *Centropus phasianinus* Once again, single birds were observed on the 26th and 27th January.

SWIFTS APODIDAE

Pacific Swift *Apus pacificus* A flock of varying numbers was present during the morning hours, on every day of the tour. Small numbers of Uniform Swiftlets, were also observed with

them, every day. On the 25th January there was an unusually large flock of 200 plus birds and on this day we found a single House Swift amongst the flock.

Uniform Swiftlet *Aerodramus vanikorensis* Observed every day amongst the flocks of Pacific Swifts. Numbers recorded were two, six, eight, seven and five, on consecutive days.

House Swift *Apus nipalensis* A single bird observed very well, directly overhead, amongst a flock of 200 plus Pacific Swifts on the 25th January.

SWALLOWS *HIRUNDINIDAE*

Pacific Swallow *Hirundo tahitica* A single bird flew along the airstrip on the 27th January and I was able to observe it well through the scope.

WAGTAILS AND PIPITS *MOTACILLIDAE*

Eastern Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla tschutschensis* A single bird in superb full-breeding plumage, of the race *simillimo*, was observed extremely well on the 27th and 28th January.

CUCKOOSHRIKES *CAMPEPHAGIDAE*

White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina papuensis* Three birds observed in the mangroves on the 26th January and a single bird on the 27th.

Cicadabird *Coracina tenuirostris* We observed a female in the mangroves on the 25th January and a male on the 26th.

Varied Triller *Lalage leucomela* Small numbers observed every day, with a maximum count of six, on the 27th January. They were all of the race *yorki*, which is confined to coastal Cape York Peninsula and Torres Straight Islands. The male birds are very different from male birds elsewhere in Australia, their underparts are pure glistening white, with no trace of barring and the vent is also pure glistening white, with no trace of rufous.

CISTICOLAS AND ALLIES *CISTICOLIDAE*

Golden-headed Cisticola *Cisticola exilis* Small numbers were breeding in long grass near the airstrip. We saw them on a daily basis, with a maximum count of 10 on the 25th January.

FANTAILS *RHIPIDURIDAE*

Willie-wagtail *Rhipidura leucophrys* A common and conspicuous bird which we observed on every day of the tour, with a maximum count of 20 on the 24th January.

MONARCH FLYCATCHERS *MONARCHIDAE*

Black-faced Monarch *Monarcha melanopsis* An immature bird was observed well in the scope, in the mangroves. This bird is normally only a passage migrant to Boigu, in spring and autumn.

Broad-billed Flycatcher *Myiagra ruficollis* A single bird was observed well in the scope on the 26th January.

Shining Flycatcher *Myiagra alecto* Observed in the mangroves on most days of the tour, with a maximum count of six birds, on the 28th January.

THORNBILLS AND ALLIES *ACANTHIZIDAE*

Large-billed Gerygone *Gerygone magnirostris* Observed in the mangroves on the 26th, 27th and 28th January, with a maximum count of six birds on the 27th.

SUNBIRDS AND SPIDERHUNTERS *NECTARINIIDAE*

Olive-backed Sunbird *Cinnyris jugularis* Observed frequently, on a daily basis, with a maximum count of 20 birds on the 25th January.

FLOWERPECKERS *DICAEIDAE*

Red-capped Flowerpecker *Dicaeum geelvinkianum* We observed an immature and then an adult male on the 27th January and a single adult on the 28th.

HONEYEATERS *MELIPHAGIDAE*

Red-headed Honeyeater *Myzomela erythrocephala* We observed an immature and then an adult female on the 28th January.

Varied Honeyeater *Lichenostomus versicolor* Observed well on every day of the tour, it was not only confined to the mangroves, it was also common in the gardens around the settlement.

Tawny-breasted Honeyeater *Xanthotis flaviventer* Observed in small numbers on a daily basis, usually away from the settlement, with a maximum count of 10 birds on the 28th January.

Brown-backed Honeyeater *Ramsayornis modestus* Small numbers observed on a daily basis, with a maximum count of four birds on the 26th January.

Bar-breasted Honeyeater *Ramsayornis fasciatus* One bird observed by Jock on the 25th January. This species has not previously been observed on the island.

Rufous-banded Honeyeater *Conopophila albogularis* Once again, observed on a daily basis, with a maximum count of 10 birds on the 25th January.

DRONGOS *DICRURIDAE*

Spangled Drongo *Dicrurus bracteatus* Small numbers present each day, with a maximum count of 10 birds on the 28th January.

WOODSWALLOWS *ARTAMIDAE*

White-breasted Woodswallow *Artamus leucorhynchus* One of the most common and conspicuous birds on the island, with a maximum count of 50 birds on the 24th January.

BELLMAGPIES AND ALLIES *CRACTICIDAE*

Black Butcherbird *Cracticus quoyi* A single bird seen by myself, as it was flying above mangroves, close to the airstrip, on the 28th January.

CROWS, JAYS AND MAGPIES *CORVIDAE*

Torresian Crow *Corvus orru* Small numbers present on a daily basis, with a maximum count of 10 birds, on the 24th January.

STARLINGS *STURNIDAE*

Singing Starling *Aplonis cantoroides* Seen very well on a daily basis, with a maximum count of 20 birds on the 27th January.

OLD WORLD SPARROWS *PASSERIDAE*

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* Commonly encountered on a daily basis, with a maximum count of 20 birds on the 24th January.

MAMMALS

Black Flying-fox *Pteropus alecto* A large day time camp of hundreds of animals, was located in the mangroves on the edge of the big swamp. Scope views identified them as this species. At dusk each evening hundreds of them flew overhead, on their way to forage, on mainland New Guinea.