



Field Guides Tour Report

New Caledonia, Fiji & Vanuatu 2012

Sep 3, 2012 to Sep 21, 2012

Phil Gregory

***NOTE:** This tour's triplist is in two parts in the list of species seen below, beginning with those recorded during our visit to New Caledonia, then followed by those recorded during our visit to Vanuatu and Fiji.*

Another fine trip to New Caledonia, with good weather throughout and Air Calédonie behaving itself for once and actually leaving early on a couple of flights! The park at Rivière Bleue was having problems with a washed out embankment, so we had to use the shuttle bus to get to the forest, but it all worked out. Next day the shuttle driver was off sick, so the bicycle guy gave us a ride in his truck and we had a very pleasant 5 km walk back through the heath, which was well worth doing.

Kagu happily was great, showing really well, with 7 birds the first day and a lovely couple of sightings on the second day. The gray ghost of the forest was, as ever, a hands-down winner for bird of the trip. However, not to be scorned were Cloven-feathered Dove, which was seen really well at Rivière Bleue, as well as at Farino, and which really is one of the world's great doves, and the huge New Caledonian (or Goliath) Imperial-Pigeon, which is also seriously impressive. New Caledonian Crow showed very well, as did both the main island parakeets (New Caledonian and Horned), and the Ouvea (Horned) Parakeet was outstanding, sitting out in full sun for some great shots. White-bellied (New Caledonia) Goshawk was seen in Nouméa itself for the first time ever on my trips, and there was a great perched one at Farino. Basically we reeled in all the endemics except the wretched grassbird, the same story as usual in fact, and it was a fun trip with a fascinating and unique combination of bustling metro-France and laidback Kanak culture.

Vanuatu is a relatively new destination for us, this being just the second Field Guides tour here, but we had a very good time and really enjoyed the relaxed lifestyle. The flight schedules left us with a 6 hour layover in Port Vila, so I hired a 10-seater van by flagging it down, and we had an exploration of the town- we saw one of the P & O cruise ships in port and had a look at the market, ate lunch at a very nice little local cafe, and did some birding up in the hills beyond the waterfall where we found Tanna Fruit Dove and the Vanuatu White-eye as our first endemics.

A night time arrival is always fraught and d'accord our rooming arrangements on Santo were messed up, but we sorted it out and then had a fine couple of outings to Loru Conservation Area nearby, with very nice local guides in Skip and Roy. The Vanuatu (Chestnut-bellied) Kingfisher was seen well, as was the striking Buff-bellied Monarch, but Vanuatu Scrubfowl was hard. We finally nailed it next day in denser thickets, a tape I made of one responding to the call of a chicken worked well in bringing it in, and we saw two more adults later, very satisfying to get this quite tricky species so well.

Fiji next, this year doing Viti Levu first which was actually very good- we had the Giant Forest Honeyeater at Raintree Lodge with the Fiji Parrotfinch and Masked Shining-Parrot nearby, and picked up most of the lowland forest birds in Colo-i-Suva. The Golden Dove proved troublesome, with close flybys only, but that afternoon we got a fine male out along the Namosi Road and it became one of the birds of the trip. Suva waterfront delivered the expected Wandering Tattlers, and when it came time to go to Taveuni we had a very small and select list on which to concentrate.

Garden Island Resort was very nice, and folks enjoyed the luxurious rooms even if the new American manager is trying to get rid of the very long-established colony of flying-foxes, which could actually be seen as an attraction and not a problem! A visit to the nearby 180 degree meridian was fun, with Maroon (Red) Shining-Parrot for good measure. Naturally our morning up Des Voeux Peak coincided with the first wet weather of the trip, but a two-hour vigil in the right habitat eventually got Silktail quite nicely for everyone. The afternoon at Nabogiono Farm produced the marvellous Orange Dove and Many-coloured Fruit-Dove, also Collared Lory. The boat trip back in the later afternoon was quite rough this year and seabird activity was notably less, but we did get nice looks at some 5+ Tahiti Petrels, a neat bonus.

Kadavu is a neat addition to this tour and the small Matana Beach Resort was very laid back, both Polynesian and pleasant. We enjoyed the cultural side especially with our own kava ceremony that evening -- my advice is indulge and sleep well! We had the often elusive Whistling (Velvet) Dove as our first Kadavu endemic with 2 coming to fruit by the lodge. Kadavu Honeyeater was obliging here, whilst Red Shining-Parrot and Kadavu Fantail plus the endemic White-throated Whistler showed nicely on our walk- we had all 5 endemics within 2 hours basically on a very pleasant beachside forest and scrub walk.

This was a fun trip with a quite fit, friendly and helpful group, run at a relaxed pace and with some great birds, a terrific intro to South Pacific birding and the much slower pace of life here. My thanks to Karen at Field Guides for grappling with frequent flight variations, to Kenneth, Skip and Roy on Santo, Matalita on Viti Levu, Boro, Vido and Wani on Taveuni, and Ben and Mere on Kadavu for their help with birding and access to sites. It was quite a revelation to find one member of our group had never heard of Bob Marley, a local deity in these parts, and a valuable cultural education for him.



Bird of the trip! On New Caledonia, to which it is endemic, the Kagu is known to the locals as 'ghost of the forest' because of its pale gray plumage. Its closest living relative is not a ghost, though, but the Sunbittern, which is almost as hard to believe given their dissimilarity. The resemblance is more pronounced when the Kagu spreads its wings and shows off its striking, somewhat Sunbittern-like, wing pattern. You can see just a hint of that pattern in the left wing of the bird shown here. (Photo by guide Phil Gregory)

Thanks also to the good spotters in the crew, and to David for insightful discussions on taxonomy, checklists, and systematics in general, hopefully we can get some better English names for local birds here as a consequence too. Tim lost his hearing aids as we left Nouméa, but seemed to manage quite well, and he may just get a Buff-banded Rail in Oz, I hope!

This is a laid back and not-strenuous but quite fascinating itinerary, with assorted cultural interactions (kanak, French, Melanesian and Polynesian) and generally easy birding, and you'll meet up with some lovely people and see some magic restricted range endemics. Why not join us in 2013 and get to see the legendary South Pacific for yourselves?

Vinaka,

--Phil

KEYS FOR THIS LIST

One of the following keys may be shown in brackets for individual species as appropriate: * = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic, N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant

BIRDS ON THE NEW CALEDONIA SECTION OF THE TOUR

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

PACIFIC BLACK DUCK (*Anas superciliosa*) – Four at Riviere Sallee were the only sighting.

GRAY TEAL (*Anas gracilis*) – Twelve on the sewage ponds by Riviere Sallee were the only sighting.

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

WILD TURKEY (*Meleagris gallopavo*) – A couple of small flocks in fields north of Tontouta. [I]

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

AUSTRALASIAN GREBE (*Tachybaptus novaehollandiae*) – One of this new arrival in NC was at the ponds at La Foa, where we have found them in the past two years.

Fregatidae (Frigatebirds)

GREAT FRIGATEBIRD (*Fregata minor*) – Distant frigatebirds off Ouvea were either this or Lesser, but way too far to identify to species.

Sulidae (Boobies and Gannets)

BROWN BOOBY (*Sula leucogaster*) – A couple were seen off Ouvea.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

LITTLE BLACK CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax sulcirostris*) – Six at the Cultural Centre where we first recorded them last year, it's a scarce irruptive from Australia. David saw one at Riviere Bleue also.

LITTLE PIED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax melanoleucos*) – Singles at Riviere Bleue and near Tontouta.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

WHITE-FACED HERON (*Egretta novaehollandiae*) – Just one near Mont Dore this trip.

PACIFIC REEF-HERON (*Egretta sacra albolineata*) – Uncommon, we saw singles at two sites on Ouvea and one at Riviere Sallee, all dark phase and of this endemic race.

RUFIOUS NIGHT-HERON (*Nycticorax caledonicus caledonicus*) – Seen near dusk in Noumea, some saw it at Riviere Sallee, and one nice adult came to drink from the hotel pool at Le Pacifique on the last morning!

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (AUSTRALASIAN) (*Pandion haliaetus cristatus*) – One near Mont Dore, and one fishing at Riviere Sallee, split by most these days as Eastern Osprey.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

WHISTLING KITE (*Haliastur spheurnus*) – A few at Riviere Bleue and near Farino.

SWAMP HARRIER (*Circus approximans*) – A great view of two at Riviere Bleue and two singles near Farino.

BROWN GOSHAWK (*Accipiter fasciatus vigilax*) – A displaying bird on Lifou was nice, rising up and then down with closed wings in big shallow swoops, and some saw it at Farino.

NEW CALEDONIA GOSHAWK (*Accipiter haplochrous*) – Heard at Mont Koghis, then most unexpectedly an adult flew over the pond at Riviere Sallee. Then came a fine perched adult at the Parc Des Grandes Fougères, and finally a couple of folks saw one go over Magenta Airport as we disembarked from Lifou! More usually known as White-bellied Goshawk or Blue Goshawk. [E]

Rhynchotidae (Kagu)

KAGU (*Rhynchotus jubatus*) – As ever, the star of the show and once more some great experiences with this most charismatic of birds in the forest at Riviere Bleue. The orange toenails are very noticeable, and several birds this year had amazingly abraded tails. We saw 7 on the first visit, with a pair coming right in and hissing just beside us, and had farewell views of two singles on the last visit, really good to see the numbers recovering so well after a very low ebb in the 1960's. I am still amazed that this species still exists, it seems somehow so vulnerable. [E]

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

BUFF-BANDED RAIL (*Gallirallus philippensis swindellsii*) – The group saw one at Riviere Bleue, the only sighting of the trip.

PURPLE SWAMPHEN (AUSTRALASIAN) (*Porphyrio porphyrio samoensis*) – Very sparse, we saw a couple at Riviere Sallee and a handful north of Tontouta.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

PACIFIC GOLDEN-PLOVER (*Pluvialis fulva*) – A small flock on Ouvea and 4 on Lifou.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

WHIMBREL (*Numenius phaeopus*) – Just one on Ouvea, this is the taxon *variegatus* and now split from Hudsonian Whimbrel.

BAR-TAILED GODWIT (*Limosa lapponica*) – Two asleep on a sandbar on Ouvea.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

SILVER GULL (*Chroicocephalus novaehollandiae forsteri*) – Small numbers around Noumea.

BRIDLED TERN (*Onychoprion anaethetus*) – About 60 fishing way offshore on Ouvea.

GREAT CRESTED TERN (*Thalasseus bergii cristatus*) – Just a handful around Noumea and off Ouvea, very scarce this trip.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

METALLIC PIGEON (*Columba vitiensis hypoenochroa*) – Great views of two fine adults at Mont Koghis, and an immature flew over on Lifou.

SPOTTED DOVE (*Streptopelia chinensis*) – Common in Noumea and at La Foa. [I]

EMERALD DOVE (PACIFIC) (*Chalcophaps indica sandwichensis*) – Seen nicely on Ouvea, and a couple of singles over at Lifou and at Farino. This is the Pacific Emerald Dove, split from grey-headed Asian birds by the IOC.

RED-BELLIED FRUIT-DOVE (*Ptilinopus greyii*) – Great looks on Ouvea, and one feeding in a fig right at Drehu Village, with another in the forest next day, and heard calling a lot on both islands.

CLOVEN-FEATHERED DOVE (*Drepanoptila holosericea*) – One of the birds of the trip, we got a superb adult calling at Riv. Bleue, with another at Farino we also heard them at Mt Koghis. The fluffy white anklets are just amazing, this really is a unique and tremendous bird. [E]

NEW CALEDONIAN IMPERIAL-PIGEON (*Ducula goliath*) – A great look at Riviere Bleue, and also seen briefly at Farino, and calling at Mont Koghis. One of the largest of the genus and a spectacular bird, aptly named Goliath Imperial Pigeon by the IOC. [E]

Psittacidae (Parrots)

RAINBOW LORIKEET (COCONUT) (*Trichoglossus haematodus deplanckii*) – Part of the Coconut Lorikeet group if you split them, we had some nice looks but only in very small numbers.

HORNED PARAKEET (HORNED) (*Eunymphicus cornutus cornutus*) – One calling at Riviere Bleue eventually flew right overhead then showed quite well. Two up at Mont Koghis were unexpected and again showed nicely, much yellower about the neck than the Ouvea birds. [E]

HORNED PARAKEET (OUVEA) (*Eunymphicus cornutus uvaensis*) – Back to my old site this year chez Benoit, and a great show it was two, with two active nests in tree holes, and a couple of birds feeding on the pawpaws, one of which sat out in good light for ages. Now split by all except laggardly Clements, this is an Ouvea endemic with a population estimated at 2000-3000 birds, which seems optimistic given the small range only in the north of the island. [E]

NEW CALEDONIAN PARAKEET (*Cyanoramphus saissetti*) – Heard calling on the first visit at Riviere Bleue, then finally one sat atop a kauri near the entrance late on the second day, which gave good scope views. Also heard at both Mont Koghis and Farino, the latter a new site for me for this species. Split from Red-fronted Parakeet of NZ by all the major lists. [E]

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

FAN-TAILED CUCKOO (*Cacomantis flabelliformis pyrrhophanus*) – Calling well as usual on Ouvea, and we tracked one down for good views. The tail only has white spots near the outer tips above, and it is both darker above and vocally very distinct. Also heard at Mont Koghis. I strongly suspect both this and the Fiji birds will be split, the vocalizations are very distinct to Fan-tailed Cuckoo of Australia.

SHINING BRONZE-CUCKOO (NEW CALEDONIAN) (*Chrysococcyx lucidus layardi*) – Seen very well at Riviere Sallee with two very responsive birds, and also seen on Lifou. Calling at most sites.

Tytonidae (Barn-Owls)

BARN OWL (AUSTRALIAN) (*Tyto alba delicatula*) – Manfred spotted one sat on a small limb of a sapling right by the road down a track on Lifou, and we had tremendous daylight views. Now split from the Barn Owl complex by most authorities.

Apodidae (Swifts)

GLOSSY SWIFTLET (*Collocalia esculenta albidior*) – Common, nicely glossy blue above in good light, with a white rump and whitish belly.

WHITE-RUMPED SWIFTLET (*Aerodramus spodiopygius leucopygius*) – Amazingly scarce, we saw a couple on Lifou but none on the mainland this trip.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

SACRED KINGFISHER (NEW CALEDONIAN) (*Todiramphus sanctus canacorum*) – A few on the mainland.

SACRED KINGFISHER (LOYALTY IS.) (*Todiramphus sanctus macmillani*) – This is the paler race on the Loyalty Is where it is also very common, especially on Ouvea where we must have seen 50 birds..

Meliphagidae (Honeyeaters)

NEW CALEDONIAN MYZOMELA (*Myzomela caledonica*) – Lovely looks at this smart little red and white species on the big island. [E]

CARDINAL MYZOMELA (*Myzomela cardinalis lifuensis*) – Quite common on the Loyalties, we had some very good looks on Lifou especially. The first was a female on Ouvea, with two buffy wing bars and a reddish forehead. Young males have red heads but olive backs, and traces of a wing bar.

DARK-BROWN HONEYEATER (*Lichmera incana incana*) – Abundant on New Caledonia and common on the Loyalties, now called Grey-eared Honeyeater in the new Dutson Field Guide and the IOC checklist, which is perhaps a slightly better name.

BARRED HONEYEATER (*Phylidonyris undulatus*) – This striking bird was seen well at Riv. Bleue and Mt. Koghis but only in very small numbers this time [E]

CROW HONEYEATER (*Gymnomyza aubryana*) – Well, one began calling as we got out of the vehicle at Riviere Bleue, but sadly Jean-Marc started blasting it immediately with his stadium level playback. Some saw it perched, some saw it fly over the road (me!), then it was hours of non-responsive playback before Manfred found one perched and a couple of folks got that one. There was no sign at all next day either, it is one of the rarest and most tricky of the endemics these days. [E]

NEW CALEDONIAN FRIARBIRD (*Philemon diemenensis*) – Nice look on the main island, and also on Lifou, one of the most striking of the genus. [E]

Acanthizidae (Thornbills and Allies)

FAN-TAILED GERYGONE (*Gerygone flavolateralis flavolateralis*) – Nice looks at most sites including on the Loyalties, an attractive little gerygone.

Artamidae (Woodswallows)

WHITE-BREASTED WOODSWALLOW (*Artamus leucorhynchus*) – Just a few on the main island and a handful on Lifou.

Campephagidae (Cuckoo-shrikes)

MELANESIAN CUCKOO-SHRIKE (SOUTH) (*Coracina caledonica caledonica*) – Nice looks at this large species on 3 days, this yellow-eyed form is now split from the Solomons one by the IOC and HBW but not Clements (d'accord...). Several were seen on Lifou too.

NEW CALEDONIAN CUCKOO-SHRIKE (*Coracina analis*) – This is fairly straightforward in Riv. Bleue but it's the only place we see it. The piercing call note is a good pointer to its presence, and the cinnamon- reddish undertail and bend of wing are distinctive. [E]

LONG-TAILED TRILLER (*Lalage leucopyga montrosieri*) – The first came on Lifou, then we had a couple at Farino, it seemed scarce this trip.

Pachycephalidae (Whistlers and Allies)

GOLDEN WHISTLER (*Pachycephala pectoralis littayei*) – This showed well on Ouvéa, it's a part of the Melanesian Whistler complex but oddly the IOC places it with the next species (New Caledonian Whistler) in this group, which can't be right! Males are bright yellow with white throats, big black pec bands and a large bill, whilst females are bright yellow below with a white throat and faint diffuse dusky pec band. Be good to know what this taxon really is!

NEW CALEDONIAN WHISTLER (*Pachycephala caledonica*) – Nice looks at Riv. Bleue, it's a forest bird and really very different to the main Golden Whistler complex. We also saw it at Farino. [E]

RUFIOUS WHISTLER (*Pachycephala rufiventris xanthetreae*) – Small numbers in the dry forest on the main island.

Rhipiduridae (Fantails)

GRAY FANTAIL (*Rhipidura albiscapa bulgeri*) – Fairly common in the forests.

STREAKED FANTAIL (*Rhipidura spilodera verreauxi*) – Widespread in small numbers in the forests.

Monarchidae (Monarch Flycatchers)

SOUTHERN SHRIKEBILL (*Clytorhynchus pachycephaloides pachycephaloides*) – One on the first visit, then very nice looks at two foraging on branches and among dead leaf clusters on the second day at Rivière Bleue.

MELANESIAN FLYCATCHER (*Myiagra caledonica caledonica*) – Nice looks in the forests on the big island.

MELANESIAN FLYCATCHER (*Myiagra caledonica viridinitens*) – Birds on Lifou are this taxon which has a much more obvious eye-ring.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

NEW CALEDONIAN CROW (*Corvus moneduloides*) – This odd small tool-using forest crow with the stubby bill and yapping call was seen very well at Riv. Bleue, then at Mt Koghis and Farino. [E]

Petroicidae (Australasian Robins)

YELLOW-BELLIED ROBIN (*Eopsaltria flaviventris*) – Now removed from the genus *Petroica* robins and placed in *Microeca* flycatchers, this gave lovely views in Riv. Bleue where they are very tame, and at Mont Koghis. [E]

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

WELCOME SWALLOW (*Hirundo neoxena*) – The new Dutson FG lists this for Lifou and Grande Terre, where I have always thought they were Pacific Swallows. which is seemingly only on Ouvéa. Anyway, two birds at La Foa were definitely Welcome, one had the elongated tail streamers and both had large white tail spots and whitish underparts, much paler than the subfusca Pacific Swallows. Oddly enough a New Cal tick for me, but now I need to reconfirm Pacific Swallow!

Pycnonotidae (Bulbuls)

RED-VENTED BULBUL (*Pycnonotus cafer*) – Common around Noumea. [I]

Zosteropidae (Yuhinas, White-eyes, and Allies)

LARGE LIFOU WHITE-EYE (*Zosterops inornatus*) – A good trip for this elusive species, we had 2 quite well at a new site called La Ferm de L'Ile, where they were calling and eventually showed well for all- the orangey-pink legs are a good field character. [E]

GREEN-BACKED WHITE-EYE (*Zosterops xanthochroa*) – Abundant on New Caledonia this year, they were at every site, whereas the Silvereye seems to have got scarce. [E]

SMALL LIFOU WHITE-EYE (*Zosterops minutus*) – Quite common on Lifou, small and very yellow looking above. [E]

SILVER-EYE (*Zosterops lateralis griseonota*) – Very sparse on Grande Terre, David and Tim saw it in some wood in Noumea but elsewhere they were virtually all Green-backed White-eyes..

SILVER-EYE (*Zosterops lateralis nigrescens*) – A nice view of this taxon with the blackish forehead on Ouvéa.

SILVER-EYE (*Zosterops lateralis melanops*) – Quite common on Lifou, with a very dark head but still the pinkish bill.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

STRIATED STARLING (*Aplonis striata*) – Nice looks on the Loyalties, and also seen at Mont Koghis. [E]

COMMON MYNA (*Acridotheres tristis*) – Sadly very common on the main island. [I]

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) – Fairly common on the main island. [I]

Estrildidae (Waxbills and Allies)

COMMON WAXBILL (*Estrilda astrild*) – Common on the main island. [I]

RED-THROATED PARROTFINCH (*Erythrura psittacea*) – Great looks on the last morning up at Farino, where we had some 3 birds in total, a very striking species. [E]

CHESTNUT-BREASTED MUNIA (*Lonchura castaneothorax*) – Seen at Rivière Salée, and then a small flock by the Farino turnoff, not nearly as common as the waxbill. [I]

BIRDS ON THE VANUATU & FIJI SECTION OF THE TOUR

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

PACIFIC BLACK DUCK (*Anas superciliosa*) – Three flew over at Vunisea airport, Kadavu just before our flight out.

Megapodiidae (Megapodes)

VANUATU SCRUBFOWL (*Megapodius layardi*) – Only heard on the first day, but the second day at Loru saw one responding every time a chicken crowed, and I was able to record that vocalization and then tape it in for quick but close views. Happily we also came upon a couple right at the end of the walk through the thickets near the small cliff- the legs are orangey-red and the bill red, unlike the illustration in Dutson's FG. This was a lifer for Phil too, getting promoted out of heard only at last! [E]

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

RED JUNGLEFOWL (*Gallus gallus*) – Nice looks at a few in Loru Conservation area on Vanuatu, where it is an ancient introduction. Every time one called a Vanuatu Scrubfowl would immediately answer it, and then David saw a chick of this species associating with a Vanuatu Scrubfowl, so there seems to be some close relationship going on here. [I]

Procellariidae (Shearwaters and Petrels)

TAHITI PETREL (*Pterodroma rostrata*) – One of the great bonus birds of the trip, we had very nice looks in choppy conditions from our late afternoon boat trip from Nabogiono back to Garden Is. There were at least 5 birds, it is believed to nest in the forested hills of Taveuni but we don't always get to see them, though we have now done so on the last 3 trips.

Fregatidae (Frigatebirds)

GREAT FRIGATEBIRD (*Fregata minor*) – A probable off Garden Is Resort in the late afternoon.

LESSER FRIGATEBIRD (*Fregata ariel*) – A couple at Suva waterfront, and at least 5 of the 13 frigatebirds off Garden Is Resort late pm were this species.

Sulidae (Boobies and Gannets)

BROWN BOOBY (*Sula leucogaster*) – A few in Somosomo Strait off Taveuni.

RED-FOOTED BOOBY (*Sula sula*) – A handful in Somosomo Strait, much less than last year with none on the boat trip, which was unusual.

Ardeidae (Heron, Egrets, and Bitterns)

WHITE-FACED HERON (*Egretta novaehollandiae*) – A few sightings on Viti Levu, it's a recent colonist from Australia.

PACIFIC REEF-HERON (*Egretta sacra*) – A couple of dark phase birds on Vanuatu, and three day records on Taveuni and Viti Levu, all dark phase bar one white at Garden Is Resort.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

SWAMP HARRIER (*Circus approximans*) – Just one on Vanuatu and one from Taveuni for Tim and I. This is a possible split as Pacific Harrier, it occupies a far wider niche here than it does in Australia.

FIJI GOSHAWK (*Accipiter rufitorques*) – Glimpsed and heard on Viti Levu, and seen well on Taveuni as usual. [E]

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

BUFF-BANDED RAIL (*Gallirallus philippensis sethsmithi*) – A couple across the track on the way up Des Voeux Peak, included one black juv. Tim managed to miss each sighting and it became a trip theme somehow.....

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

MASKED LAPWING (*Vanellus miles novaehollandiae*) – Two at Vunisea airport at Kadavu, maybe the same birds as last year I suspect.

PACIFIC GOLDEN-PLOVER (*Pluvialis fulva*) – A few on Suva waterfront and 4 at Nadi airport.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

WANDERING TATTLER (*Tringa incana*) – About 40 on the mudflats at Suva, many in summer dress still, this is clearly an important staging post for them.

WHIMBREL (SIBERIAN) (*Numenius phaeopus variegatus*) – Now split from Hudsonian Whimbrel, we had 3 at Suva. This race has a small white rump.

BAR-TAILED GODWIT (SIBERIAN) (*Limosa lapponica baueri*) – Thirty at Suva waterfront.

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*) – Four were at Suva waterfront, amazing to see them in mid-Pacific.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

BLACK-NAPED TERN (*Sterna sumatrana*) – A fine adult was on a post at Garden Island.

GREAT CRESTED TERN (*Thalasseus bergii*) – Just a few around Suva this trip, and singles at Garden Is. and Vunisea.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) – Quite common in Suva. [I]

METALLIC PIGEON (*Columba vitiensis vitiensis*) – A couple at Loru, and one on Taveuni for Tim and I on our morning foray.

SPOTTED DOVE (*Streptopelia chinensis*) – A few at Nausori. [I]

MACKINLAY'S CUCKOO-DOVE (*Macropygia mackinlayi mackinlayi*) – Good perched views at Loru on Vanuatu, and often heard there, giving the disyllabic "cuk-wu" call.

EMERALD DOVE (PACIFIC) (*Chalcophaps indica sandwichensis*) – Quite common in Loru.

TANNA FRUIT-DOVE (*Ptilinopus tannensis*) – Our exploration around Port Vila gave us a fine view of one of this elusive species on Kilm's Hill above the town. It was also also heard at Loru. [E]

MANY-COLORED FRUIT-DOVE (*Ptilinopus perousii mariae*) – Nice looks at Nabogiono Farm, where a couple of males and a female showed very well, the latter seeming very interested in a calling and very active male Orange Dove! Then some great looks around Matana Beach Resort, with males and females seen in nice light. The call is a fast descending series.

RED-BELLIED FRUIT-DOVE (*Ptilinopus greyii*) – This was vocal at Loru and seen by a few.

ORANGE DOVE (*Ptilinopus victor*) – Once again Nabogiono was the spot, and we had tremendous looks at two males, an immature male and a female there, saving much trouble trying to find it out in the forests. Surely one of the most striking of all the doves. [E]

GOLDEN DOVE (*Ptilinopus luteovirens*) – This led us a dance at Colo-i-Suva and we spent ages before we got flight views at close range of a

responsive but wary bird. Luckily that afternoon another along the Namosi Road sat nicely after an initial fly-by, another tremendous Fijian dove for sure, a unique odd glistening yellowy-gold colour with dark streaks. [E]

VELVET DOVE (*Ptilinopus layardi*) – Matana Beach Resort proved to be the place and this sometimes tricky species was the first Kadavu endemic we saw this time. Three or four birds were coming to a fruiting fig, and then we had a fine calling male in the forest patch along the beach. Velvet Dove is an awful and inappropriate name, I don't understand why it was changed from Whistling Dove as one of the characteristics of the bird is the disyllabic and very undovelike whistle. [E]

PACIFIC IMPERIAL-PIGEON (*Ducula pacifica pacifica*) – These were quite vocal and we saw at least 8 at Loru.

PEALE'S IMPERIAL-PIGEON (*Ducula latrans*) – The Barking Pigeon is aptly named and quite common on all the 3 Fijian islands we visited, the call is the best feature really though the rusty tail is quite striking at rest. [E]

Psittacidae (Parrots)

RAINBOW LORIKEET (COCONUT) (*Trichoglossus haematodus massena*) – A few seen on Vanuatu were of this taxon, if split it is a part of the Coconut Lorikeet group and it does look quite yellowy-green above, distinct to Rainbow Lorikeet.

COLLARED LORY (*Phigys solitarius*) – Small numbers of this striking bird on Fiji, mostly as fly-bys, the vivid apple green nape is remarkable. Manfred found an amazing iridescent green and blue feather of this bird at Matana, it really is an incredible vivid green shade. [E]

RED SHINING-PARROT (*Prosopeia tabuensis tabuensis*) – Nice looks around Matana Beach, these really are red and not maroon like the Taveuni species. [E]

RED SHINING-PARROT (*Prosopeia tabuensis taviuensis*) – The Taveuni bird is actually maroon not red, so the IOC name it far more appropriately Maroon Shining Parrot, and of course split it. We had some great looks on Taveuni. [E]

MASKED SHINING-PARROT (*Prosopeia personata*) – Some nice looks on Viti Levu at this huge parrot, they come by Raintree Lodge, but I am still in need of a decent photo. [E]

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

FAN-TAILED CUCKOO (*Cacomantis flabelliformis simus*) – One of the most interesting sightings on Fiji was a calling individual of this taxon at Colo-i-Suva, which was eventually saw, with another that afternoon at Namosi Road. The piercing trisyllabic "too-wee-tee" call is quite unlike the other taxa of the complex, and I am sure this is a distinct species. One began calling at Raintree at 0210 and continued with something like 15 calls per minute for the next 40 minutes before the rain began, an extraordinary expenditure of energy and one wonders why? The pressure had dropped and it got humid and still, which seemed to trigger this "rainbird" response.

SHINING BRONZE-CUCKOO (NEW CALEDONIAN) (*Chrysococcyx lucidus layardi*) – One was calling and was seen well at Loru.

Tytonidae (Barn-Owls)

BARN OWL (AUSTRALIAN) (*Tyto alba delicatula*) – Two on the night drive from the airport to Turtle Bay, and one the next night, all sat on fence posts by the road.

Apodidae (Swifts)

GLOSSY SWIFTLET (*Collocalia esculenta uropygialis*) – Common on Vanuatu, again with a white rump.

WHITE-RUMPED SWIFTLET (*Aerodramus spodiopygius assimilis*) – Quite common on Fiji, the rump is buffy white and quite small here. They were swooping about over the pond at Raintree and seemed to be drinking by scooping up water.

UNIFORM SWIFTLET (*Aerodramus vanikorensis vanikorensis*) – Quite common this time on Vanuatu.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

CHESTNUT-BELLIED KINGFISHER (*Todiramphus farquhari*) – This uncommon and elusive Vanuatu endemic was calling well at Loru, and we had a great scope view of this rather beautiful bird with cinnamon-orange underparts. Vanuatu Kingfisher is a better name as per the IOC. [E]

COLLARED KINGFISHER (VANUATU) (*Todiramphus chloris santoensis*) – This one is blue above, and white or pale buff below with a cinnamon eyebrow, and lives in forest. Call is also slightly different to other taxa, this whole complex of 49 races badly needs unpicking as it surely contains various species.

SACRED KINGFISHER (FIJI) (*Todiramphus sanctus vitiensis*) – Bluish above, white or buffy below, more open country, often placed with Sacred Kingfisher but who knows? It can equally be placed with Collared or split as an allospecies. I called it the Fiji Sacred Collared Kingfisher, see previous comments about splits.

SACRED KINGFISHER (FIJI) (*Todiramphus sanctus eximius*) – This was the Kadavu bird, which has a rusty eyebrow and lives in forest and forest edges, all previous comments apply!

Meliphagidae (Honeyeaters)

CARDINAL MYZOMELA (*Myzomela cardinalis*) – A couple seen on Efate and also Espiritu Santo.

ORANGE-BREASTED MYZOMELA (*Myzomela jugularis*) – Common on Taveuni this trip with some great looks, also a few on Viti Levu and Kadavu. [E]

DARK-BROWN HONEYEATER (*Lichmera incana*) – Widespread around Port Vila but again not seen on Santo.

WATTLED HONEYEATER (*Foulehaio carunculatus*) – Some nice looks on Taveuni and Viti Levu, very vocal at Raintree pre-dawn. The race taviunensis has a larger wattle than the Viti Levu birds.

GIANT HONEYEATER (*Gymnomyza viridis viridis*) – This is the Taveuni bird with orange legs and bill, with the very distinct call, pretty obviously not the same species as the Viti Levu bird. We had some excellent looks on Des Voeux Peak, it can be hard to see well.

GIANT HONEYEATER (*Gymnomyza viridis brunneiostriis*) – Dark bill and legs and a call like a car alarm, given every 20 minutes so and quite vocal at Raintree. We had some good views there and along Namosi Road. This must be a split from the Taveuni taxon, though regrettably the IOC calls both Yodeling Honeyeater which is an awful name, especially as it sounds more like a car alarm than something from The Sound of Music!

KANDAVU HONEYEATER (*Xanthotis provocator*) – Great looks at this striking endemic at Matana, and they sing when at roost in the hibiscus bushes with rather friarbird-like calls. [E]

Artamidae (Woodswallows)

FIJI WOODSWALLOW (*Artamus mentalis*) – We only saw this around Nausori and Colo-i-Suva this trip, but had some great views, it's much darker above than White-breasted Woodswallow with a white half collar. [E]

WHITE-BREASTED WOODSWALLOW (*Artamus leucorhynchus tenuis*) – These were quite common on Efate in the Port Vila hinterland.

Cracticidae (Bellmagpies and Allies)

AUSTRALASIAN MAGPIE (*Gymnorhina tibicen*) – A few on Taveuni where it is an old and now declining introduction. [I]

Campephagidae (Cuckoo-shrikes)

MELANESIAN CUCKOO-SHRIKE (SOUTH) (*Coracina caledonica thilenii*) – Now split from the Solomons bird, this one has the yellow eye, we saw 2 on Santo.

POLYNESIAN TRILLER (*Lalage maculosa*) – Common and very vocal in Fiji, they have an odd nasal flight call.

LONG-TAILED TRILLER (*Lalage leucopyga*) – Manfred saw one of these on Efate but it flew and all we got was a speck overhead. They seem scarce as we saw none on Santo.

Pachycephalidae (Whistlers and Allies)

GOLDEN WHISTLER (*Pachycephala pectoralis intacta*) – Great looks on Santo, this whole complex of 61 races is way overdue for splitting up, based on distinct calls and plumage morphology, with the females as well as the males being often very different. This one has a black breast band and white throat, with a dull brown female with buffish underparts and a pale throat. A start to reclassifying was made as long ago as 1956 by Cain & Galbraith but largely ignored, but now the unpicking has begun and this is placed with Melanesian Whistler by the IOC, which is by no means the end of that particular story! This one responded amazingly well to tape of the Golden Whistler race youngi, after playback of it's own calls had failed! Go figure....

GOLDEN WHISTLER (*Pachycephala pectoralis kandavensis*) – We found this in scrub along the beach near Matana, seeing a male for Petra, and a dull rather brown looking female for the rest of us. It has a white throat and black pectoral band, and is split by the IOC as White-throated Whistler.

GOLDEN WHISTLER (*Pachycephala pectoralis torquata*) – Again distinctive, with a yellow throat and black breast band in the males, now placed as an endemic called Fiji Whistler as some seeming intergrades with the next taxon are known. We saw them well on Taveuni. The females are very distinct having a greyish head, pale throat and rather rusty underparts with an olive-brown back.

GOLDEN WHISTLER (*Pachycephala pectoralis graeffii*) – This very distinctive male bird lacks the breast band, having just small dark smudges at the sides, and a yellow forehead. We had some good looks at Coloisuva, this taxon is a part of the yellow-throated Fiji Whistler assemblage. Females are nondescript brown above with buffish underparts and a pale throat.

Rhipiduridae (Fantails)

GRAY FANTAIL (*Rhipidura albiscapa brenchleyi*) – Common on Vanuatu.

STREAKED FANTAIL (*Rhipidura spilodera spilodera*) – This was the Vanuatu bird, which I don't think is the same species as the much more streaky Fiji ones.

STREAKED FANTAIL (*Rhipidura spilodera layardi*) – We saw a couple on Viti Levu, markedly heavily streaked dark beneath and calling differently to the New Caledonia and Vanuatu birds.

STREAKED FANTAIL (*Rhipidura spilodera rufilateralis*) – This was the one from Taveuni, I anticipate these Fiji birds being split in due course.

KADAVU FANTAIL (*Rhipidura personata*) – A nice view of one in the hibiscus scrub near Ben's home near Matana, our final of the big-5 Kadavu endemics for the afternoon! [E]

Monarchidae (Monarch Flycatchers)

SLATY MONARCH (*Mayrornis lessoni*) – Nice looks at this odd little gnatcatcher-like species on Viti Levu and Taveuni, and common on Kadavu. [E]

BUFF-BELLIED MONARCH (*Neolalage banksiana*) – This is a terrific and very striking bird, we saw it well at Loru on both days, one of the best Vanuatu endemics and pretty scarce. [E]

SOUTHERN SHRIKEBILL (*Clytorhynchus pachycephaloides griseus*) – This was a nice find in the thicket at Loru, it came in well and seems to be pretty scarce as I'd only heard it on previous trips. It is darker than the New Cal birds and has a broad pale buffy tip to the tail, not just the outer edgings.

FIJI SHRIKEBILL (*Clytorhynchus vitiensis*) – Seen very nicely at Colo-i-Suva, and again on Taveuni. A shrikebill calling quietly out on the Namosi Road again made me suspect its rare sibling, the Black-throated Shrikebill, but it regrettably stayed out of sight

MELANESIAN FLYCATCHER (*Myiagra caledonica marinae*) – Seen a couple of times at Loru and Turtle Bay, this race also has a distinct pale eye-ring.

VANIKORO FLYCATCHER (*Myiagra vanikorensis*) – This is a very nice looking bird, we saw it well at Raintree, Colo-i-Suva and Taveuni.

VANIKORO FLYCATCHER (*Myiagra vanikorensis kandavensis*) – Common at Matana, paler above than the other taxa, with no prominent eye-ring.

BLUE-CRESTED FLYCATCHER (*Myiagra azureocapilla*) – This is perhaps the most striking of the whole *Myiagra* genus, we saw it very well at Colo-i-Suva, and just one on Taveuni in the rain. [E]

SILKTAIL (*Lamprolia victoriae*) – Always a challenge and eminently missable, we eventually saw one nicely foraging about in the canopy in the rain, after a two hour wait during which Phil glimpsed it and it then vanished! Affinities remain uncertain, currently grouped with monarchs but conceivably actually its own family, a very singular and strange little bird. [E]

Petroicidae (Australasian Robins)

PACIFIC ROBIN (*Petroica multicolor kleinschmidti*) – Just one female plumaged bird at Colo-i-Suva, both Fiji taxa are now split from Scarlet Robin of Australia.

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

PACIFIC SWALLOW (*Hirundo tahitica*) – Just a couple at Santo Airport on Vanuatu, but quite widespread on Fiji, and much darker below than Welcome Swallow.

Pycnonotidae (Bulbuls)

RED-VENTED BULBUL (*Pycnonotus cafer*) – Common on Viti Levu. [I]

Cettiidae (Bush-Warblers and Allies)

FIJI BUSH-WARBLER (*Cettia ruficapilla badiceps*) – One was close by and showed briefly at Colo-i-Suva, where they call from the undergrowth but are tricky to see.

FIJI BUSH-WARBLER (*Cettia ruficapilla funebris*) – Brief looks as usual on Taveuni, where they are common by voice in the rainforest on the peak.

Zosteropidae (Yuhinas, White-eyes, and Allies)

LAYARD'S WHITE-EYE (*Zosterops explorator*) – Common in Fiji. [E]

SILVER-EYE (*Zosterops lateralis vatusensis*) – A few on Santo.

SILVER-EYE (*Zosterops lateralis flaviceps*) – A few of this race on Taveuni, which Phil eventually caught up with! It has a metallic call which is a bit different to other taxa, as well as the usual Silvereye type notes.

YELLOW-FRONTED WHITE-EYE (*Zosterops flavifrons efatensis*) – Common on Espiritu Santo and also seen on Efate. [E]

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

ISLAND THRUSH (*Turdus poliocephalus layardi*) – Seen briefly on Viti Levu, where it has a typical melodious thrush-like song

ISLAND THRUSH (*Turdus poliocephalus tempesti*) – Several seen quite well in flight on Taveuni in the rain, the song is a strange scratchy rather unmusical warbling, quite unlike the thrush-like song of the Viti Levu birds. This whole complex of 49 races could do with a re-evaluation.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

POLYNESIAN STARLING (*Aplonis tabuensis*) – Four on Des Voeux Peak, then a few at Matana on Kadavu, it's an uncommon and rather odd bird.

JUNGLE MYNA (*Acridotheres fuscus*) – Common on Fiji on Viti Levu and Taveuni. [I]

COMMON MYNA (*Acridotheres tristis*) – Common on Viti Levu and Taveuni. [I]

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) – A few around in Port Vila. [I]

Estrildidae (Waxbills and Allies)

RED AVADAVAT (*Amandava amandava*) – Tim and I saw these near the airport at Nadi on the last day, en route to the Novotel. [I]

FIJI PARROTFINCH (*Erythrura pealii*) – Some nice looks around Raintree and at Namosi Road, two birds seemed to be doing an up and down dipping display type flight, which I also saw at Nausori airport. Then there were a flock of them at the Novotel in Nadi giving great views, and including some green-headed young birds. [E]

CHESTNUT MUNIA (*Lonchura atricapilla*) – Quite common on Santo, this is split from Chestnut Munia L. malacca by most. [I]

MAMMALS

PACIFIC FLYING-FOX (*Pteropus tonganus*) – Small numbers on Taveuni and at Colo-i-Suva. Sadly the new manager at Garden Is Resort is trying to get rid of the long-established colony there.....

SAMOAN FLYING-FOX (*Pteropus samoensis*) – A nice noisy camp of 40 or so animals at Loru, much paler on the mantle than the more orangey Pacific Flying-fox.

SMALL INDIAN MONGOOSE (*Herpestes auropunctatus*) – A couple of this noxious pest on Viti Levu. [I]

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Birds of the trip were as always the amazing and wondrous Kagu, then the Golden Dove for which we worked so hard, the astonishing but easy Orange Dove, and the Vanuatu Scrubfowl which took quite an effort to track down and was a lifer for Phil too. Cloven-feathered Dove and Red-throated Parrotfinch were also major crowd pleasers, as were the 3 species of endemic parakeet and the delightful Blue Goshawk.

The local chief at Matana took great pride in showing us a fine female of the Kadavu Banded Iguana, *Brachylophus bulabula*, split from Banded Iguana in 2008 after genetic work revealed 3 cryptic species in the islands, all now Critically Endangered. We saw one of these being eaten by a Fiji Goshawk last trip so it was great to finally see a live one! There has been a pair around the Beach Resort for some 10 years it seems and herp twitchers come here to see them.

Totals for the NEW CALEDONIA section of the tour: 77 bird taxa and 0 mammal taxa

Totals for the VANUATU & FIJI section of the tour: 98 bird taxa and 3 mammal taxa