

Undescribed taxa and new records from the Fakfak Mountains, Irian Jaya

by *David Gibbs*

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The Fakfak Mountains on the Onin Peninsula in southwest Irian Jaya are one of the ornithologically least known areas in New Guinea. Doherty and Schädler collected there in 1896 and 1897 but did not reach high elevations and collected just 10 montane species (Diamond 1985). Diamond spent several weeks in these mountains in 1981 reaching an altitude of 1290 m. Although he added greatly to our knowledge of the birds of this range he did not reach the highest altitudes, so many montane species remained undiscovered. The lack of exploration is largely due to the extremely inhospitable nature of these limestone mountains. There is almost no accessible water more than a couple of kilometres inland and the terrain is very steep and broken. Vertical cliffs, sheer-walled fissures and deep sink-holes are frequent features of the landscape. The human population of the Fakfak is very low and almost entirely confined to the coast; the mountains are uninhabited and trackless. The local inhabitants do not even venture more than 4–5 km into the hills to hunt.

However in 1991 oil exploration teams cut numerous trails right across the peninsula from coast to coast, building helipads at approximately every 2½ km. Most important, 44-gallon oil drums have been left at the helipads and allowed to fill with rain-water, facilitating travel in these mountains without mounting a large expedition. The cut-line heads straight across the mountains, but wherever sheer cliffs or very broken country is encountered, detour trails have been cut. The helipads provide wonderful camp sites with a superb view of the

surrounding forest. From 31 August to 7 September 1992, I birded in these mountains, using the new trails, and recorded 117 species, some of which represent quite distinct, undescribed taxa.

From the coastal town, Kota Fakfak, we travelled by dugout to Worsaret, a tiny village about 2 hours east of town. Close to Worsaret is the southern end of 'cut-line Hotel', which I intended to follow to the watershed. With two porters from Worsaret, I set off for my week-long trek. After half an hour's walking we left the cleared area around the village and soon after entered undisturbed forest at about 100 m. The first night we camped at Helipad 2 at about 600 m. The second day we walked for 10 hours to cover the 6 km to Helipad 4 at about 1200 m, where I stayed for two nights. On day 4 we walked for 7 hours to cover 3 very difficult and exhausting kilometres to Helipad 5 on the north side of the watershed at about 1500 m. The summit, about two hours before Helipad 5, is at approximately 1600 m. From here I returned to Worsaret spending another night each at Helipads 4 and 2. Unfortunately I did not have an altimeter with me, so the heights given above are very rough estimates.

My main reason for visiting the Fakfaks was to search for the Greater Melampitta *Melampitta gigantea* which had been discovered here by Diamond in 1981 (Diamond 1983). Unfortunately I failed completely to locate the species, not even hearing anything fitting Diamond's description of the call. The Worsaret villagers were not familiar with the Melampitta. This species was considered locally common near Wanggasten by Diamond, just 20 km east of 'cut-line Hotel'. Its absence here may be due to inadequate sink-holes and fissures at the right altitude, although some were present along much of the trail and the area between Helipads 4 and 5 seemed ideal. Alternatively, if the bird is silent at this time of year, it would be almost impossible to locate. It seems likely that this rare bird has very specialised requirements even within the limestone terrain to which it is certainly confined.

Generally the birding in this remote area was very rewarding. The most striking characteristic of the avifauna was its confiding behaviour. Throughout most of New Guinea, where birds have been heavily hunted for thousands of years, getting good views of birds (or even seeing them at all) can be exceedingly difficult. In the Fakfak most passerines and even pigeons and raptors were readily attracted by squeaking or by an imitation of their call, and would perch close by apparently quite unperturbed by human presence. Even the Southern Cassowary *Casuarius casuarius* only reluctantly walked away from me. Many species were also more abundant than I am accustomed to experiencing elsewhere in New Guinea. A number of the species listed below clearly belong to undescribed races and some may merit specific status. Several of these taxa were noted by Diamond in 1981 but a few are entirely new records. My brief visit indicates that these much neglected hills deserve the attention of a proper ornithological expedition.

Taxonomy and nomenclature of the following list follow Sibley & Monroe (1990).

Potentially new taxa

SCLATER'S WHISTLER *Pachycephala soror*

Frequent from Helipad 4 to the summit. These birds belong to an unnamed race (Diamond 1985) and are quite different from the nominate; head of male paler and greyer and breast-band very thin and not always obvious.

LEMON-BREASTED BERRYPECKER *Melanocharis longicauda*

A few seen associated with feeding flocks between Helipads 4 and 5. The birds here are quite distinct from those of the Arfak and Central Ranges. Underparts are satiny-white rather than grey, more or less washed with lemon-yellow on throat and breast and with lemon-yellow pectoral tufts.

HONEYEATER *Ptiloprora* sp.

A honeyeater of this genus was seen daily in small numbers, mostly above Helipad 4. The only members of the genus known from the Fakfak Mountains are *P. erythropleura* and perhaps *P. plumbea*. The latter is a small species, unstreaked below and thus readily eliminated as a possibility. The birds I saw differ from *P. erythropleura* of the Arfak in their larger size, distinct streaking on the underparts and complete lack of rufous plumage on the flanks or elsewhere. Pectoral tufts rather yellowish. Iris of at least some individuals appeared pale. Call typical of the genus, *pee-yooee*. Overall these birds were more reminiscent of the Grey-streaked Honeyeater *P. perstriata*. *Ptiloprora* honeyeaters observed by Diamond (1985) in the Fakfak and Kumawa Mountains were presumably the same as I have described above. As no specimens have been trapped or collected the identity of these birds must remain undetermined.

HONEYEATER *Melipotés* sp.

Another very distinct and, as yet, undescribed form. Diamond (1985) tentatively placed these birds with *M. fumigatus* on the basis of three sightings. To me the plumage of these birds appeared closer to *M. gymnops* being pale, off-white on belly and undertail coverts but lacking the dark streaking of that species. However the yellow/red eye skin differs from both these species being very similar in structure to that of *M. ater* of the Huon Mountains. Below and just behind the eye the bare skin is produced into a long 'ear' such that in profile the 'ear' on the opposite side of the head to the observer is easily visible. I have not observed such a striking elongation of the eye wattle in any race of either *M. fumigatus* or *M. gymnops*. In the field this undescribed bird appears to be as distinct from both *M. fumigatus* and *M. gymnops* as they are from each other. The possibility that it represents a fourth allospecies in the *Melipotés* complex is worth investigation.

(VOGELKOP) BOWERBIRD *Amblyornis* ? *inornatus*

Frequently heard and seen between Helipads 4 and 5. Several bowers seen. Currently this population is assigned to *A. inornatus*

(Beehler *et al.* 1986, Sibley & Monroe 1990). However, as described by Diamond (1984, 1985), the birds of the Kukmawa and Fakfak Mountains construct a quite different type of bower. The Arfak, Tamrau and Wandammen birds build large, elaborate hut-like bowers 1 m high and 1.6 m in diameter with a wide door along one side and a lawn of moss decorated with fruits, flowers, leaves and, often, any rubbish of the right colour (Fig. 1a). Orange, blue and black items are selected, each being placed in discrete piles. Fakfak and Kumawa birds build a bower of the maypole type with a central column of sticks built around a sapling to a height of about 2 m (Fig 1b). Sometimes a subsidiary column is built around an adjacent sapling, covering with the main one above. At the base of the main column a mat of black fibrous roots, about 1 m in diameter, covers the ground. This mat is built up around the base of the column but no raised perimeter ring is present. Bowers were ornamented outside the mat of roots with discrete piles of large gastropod shells all of the same species and of much the same size, black bamboo leaf sheaths and small white limestone rocks. The latter, so the Worsaret villagers informed me, are only to be found in wells. As water is very scarce in these limestone hills, such stones are rare items for which the birds must travel far.

The Fakfak birds look very like those of the Arfak, but are slightly darker above and more fulvous below. So similar are they that these two populations have not even been separated as races. However, it is impossible to believe that so elaborate and time consuming a structure as a bower is not a far more significant genetic isolator than any features of plumage or song in this genus. The behaviour of the male and, by inference, the preferences of the females, have surely diverged too far for these two populations to be considered conspecific.

(LONG-TAILED) PARADIGALLA *Paradigalla ? carunculata*

Two birds, presumably this species, were seen close to the highest altitude reached between Helipads 4 and 5. No representative of this genus has previously been found in either the Fakfak or the adjacent Kumawa Mountains. Both birds differed from *P. carunculata* in the very much paler yellow/white facial wattle; more swollen, paler blue malar wattle; lack of red malar wattle (this is often not visible in Arfak *P. carunculata*) and shorter, square-cut tail extending just 3–4 cm beyond the wing tip (Fig. 1, c–e). This approximates to half the length of the graduated tail of typical *P. carunculata*. No vocalisations were heard. These birds are clearly an undescribed taxon which seems to be intermediate between *P. carunculata* and *P. brevicauda* and I have only presumed them to be the former from their range. Whether this population is conspecific with one of the above species or constitutes a separate species will only be answered by further research. The existence of an intermediate form may suggest that the two known paradigallas are the extreme ends of a cline within a single species.

Other species recorded inland

SOUTHERN CASSOWARY *Casuarius casuarius*. One seen between Helipads 2 and 4. Still common here from the beginning of the forest above Worsaret almost to the altitude of Helipad 4.

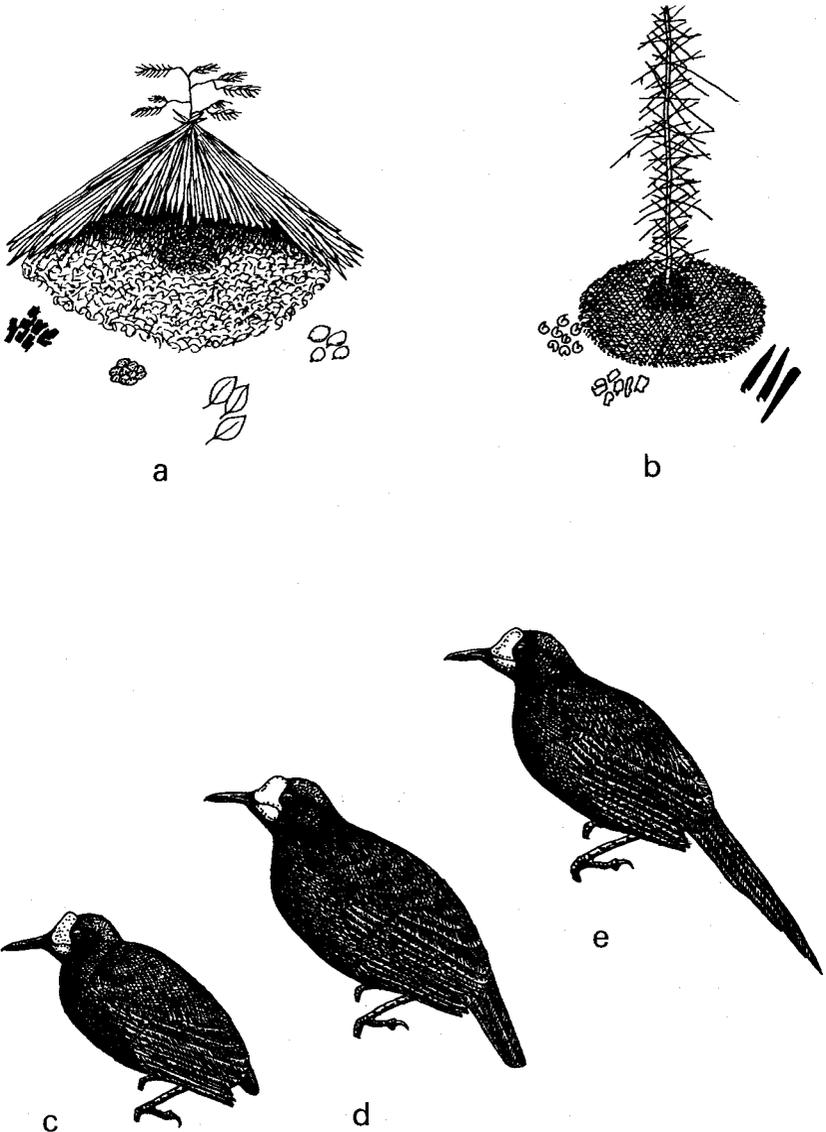


Figure 1. (a) Bower of Vogelkop Bowerbird *Amblyornis inornatus*; Arfak Mountains. (b) Bower of bowerbird *Amblyornis* sp.; Fakfak Mountains. (c) Short-tailed Paradigalla *Paradigalla brevicauda*; Central Ranges. (d) *Paradigalla* sp.; Fakfak Mountains. (e) Long-tailed Paradigalla *P. carunculata*; Arfak Mountains.

- LONG-TAILED HONEY-BUZZARD** *Hemicopernis longicauda*. One at Helipad 4.
- GREY GOSHAWK** *Accipiter novaehollandiae*. One white-phase bird seen at Helipad 5.
- GREY-HEADED GOSHAWK** *Accipiter poliocephalus*. One at Helipad 4.
- SLENDER-BILLED CUCKOO-DOVE** *Macropygia amboinensis*. A few seen and heard between Helipads 2 and 4.
- BLACK-BILLED CUCKOO-DOVE** *M. nigrirostris*. Frequent from Helipad 2 to the highest altitude reached.
- GREAT CUCKOO-DOVE** *Reinwardtoena reinwardtsi*. Singles seen from Helipad 2 to the highest altitude reached.
- STEPHAN'S DOVE** *Chalcophaps stephani*. Singles seen between Helipads 2 and 4.
- WESTERN CROWNED-PIGEON** *Goura cristata*. Two flushed up 2-3 km inland.
- WOMPOO FRUIT-DOVE** *Ptilinopus magnificus*. Heard in lowlands between Worsaret and Helipad 2.
- ORNATE FRUIT-DOVE** *P. ornatus*. Frequent from Helipad 2 to 4. These birds belong with one of the yellow-capped races (presumably *P. o. kaporensis*) and not with the purple-capped nominate of the northern part of the Vogelkop.
- SUPERB FRUIT-DOVE** *P. superbus*. Singles seen at Helipad 4.
- WHITE-BIBBED FRUIT-DOVE** *P. rivoli*. Common from above Helipad 2 to the summit.
- PURPLE-TAILED IMPERIAL-PIGEON** *Ducula rufigaster*. Heard between Worsaret and Helipad 2.
- PINON IMPERIAL-PIGEON** *D. pinon*. Heard at Helipad 2.
- BANDED IMPERIAL-PIGEON** *D. zoeae*. Below and at Helipad 2.
- PAPUAN MOUNTAIN-PIGEON** *Gymnophaps albertsii*. Frequent near Helipad 5.
- DUSKY LORY** *Pseudeos fuscata*. Flocks of 30 plus flying over at Helipads 4 and 5 and a few singles at Helipad 2.
- BLACK-CAPPED LORY** *Lorius lory*. Heard below Helipad 2.
- FAIRY LORIKEET** *Charmosyna pulchella*. Several seen around Helipads 4 and 5.
- PALM COCKATOO** *Probosciger aterrimus*. Frequent from coast to Helipad 2.
- SULPHUR-CRESTED COCKATOO** *Cacatua galerita*. Common below Helipad 2.
- ECLECTUS PARROT** *Eclectus roratus*. A few near the coast.
- MOLUCCAN KING-PARROT** *Alisterus amboinensis*. Heard below Helipad 2.
- BRUSH CUCKOO** *Cacomantis variolosus*. Heard below Helipad 2.
- CHESTNUT-BREADED CUCKOO** *C. castaneiventris*. Often heard and a few seen between Helipad 2 and the summit.
- WHITE-EARED BRONZE-CUCKOO** *Chrysococcyx meyeri*. Singles seen between Helipads 2 and 4.
- GREATER BLACK COUCAL** *Centropus menbeki*. Several calling after dusk at Helipad 4.
- LESSER SOOTY-OWL** *Tyto multipunctata*. Heard nightly at Helipads 4 and 5; readily came in to whistled imitation of call at the former camp.
- RUFOUS OWL** *Ninox rufa* (?). A *Ninox* heard at Helipad 4 was presumed to be this species.
- JUNGLE HAWK-OWL** *Ninox theomacha*. Singles heard at Helipads 2 and 4.
- MARbled FROGMOUTH** *Podargus ocellatus*. Many calling at Helipad 2 and one at Helipad 4.
- UNIFORM SWIFTLET** *Collocalia vanikorensis*. Frequent from the coast to Helipad 4.
- GLOSSY SWIFTLET** *C. esculenta*. Frequent at all altitudes.
- RED-BREADED PARADISE-KINGFISHER** *Tanysiptera nympha*. One of these beautiful kingfishers seen in the disturbed forest near the clearing surrounding Worsaret.
- HOOK-BILLED KINGFISHER** *Melidora macrorrhina*. Heard every evening from Worsaret to my highest camp at Helipad 5.
- RUFOUS-BELLIED KOOKABURRA** *Dacelo gaudichaud*. Recorded near Worsaret.
- YELLOW-BILLED KINGFISHER** *Syma torotoro*. Frequently heard and several seen from Worsaret to Helipad 4.
- RAINBOW BEE-EATER** *Merops ornatus*. Noted at Worsaret and Helipad 4.
- BLTYH'S HORNBILL** *Aceros plicatus*. Small numbers noted from the lowlands to the highest altitude reached.
- RED-BELLIED PITTA** *Pitta erythrogaster*. One heard between Worsaret and Helipad 2.
- STOUT-BILLED CUCKOO-SHRIKE** *Coracina caeruleogrisea*. A few seen from Helipad 4 to the summit.
- BLACK-SHOULDERED CICADABIRD** *C. incerta*. One seen in a mixed species flock between Helipads 2 and 4.

BLACK-BELLIED CUCKOO-SHRIKE *C. montana*. One of the commoner species from Helipad 2 to the highest altitudes.

ISLAND LEAF-WARBLER *Phylloscopus poliocephalus*. Occasionally found in mixed species flocks between Helipads 4 and 5.

RUSTY MOUSE-WARBLER *Crateroscelis murina*. Often heard and a few seen up to Helipad 4.

MOUNTAIN MOUSE-WARBLER *C. robusta*. Several seen at the highest altitudes between Helipads 4 and 5. Found by Diamond (1985) in the Kumawa Mountains but not previously in the Fakfak.

PALE-BILLED SCRUBWREN *Sericornis spilodera*. Occasionally met with between Worsaret and Helipad 4.

PERPLEXING SCRUBWREN *S. virgatus*. A pair seen between Helipads 2 and 4.

GREY-GREEN SCRUBWREN *S. arfakianus*. Seen daily between Helipad 2 and the highest altitude reached.

MOUNTAIN GERYGONE *Gerygone cinerea*. Singles seen between Helipads 4 and 5.

YELLOW-BELLIED GERYGONE *G. chrysogaster*. Heard between Worsaret and Helipad 2.

FAIRY GERYGONE *G. palpebrosa*. Singles noted between Worsaret and Helipad 4.

BROWN-BREASTED GERYGONE *G. ruficollis*. Frequent from Helipad 4 to the summit.

RUFOUS-BACKED FANTAIL *Rhipidura rufidorsa*. One seen in secondary scrub near Worsaret.

BLACK FANTAIL *R. atra*. A common and conspicuous bird from Helipad 2 to the summit.

FRIENDLY FANTAIL *R. albolimbata*. Frequent at the higher altitudes between Helipads 4 and 5.

NORTHERN FANTAIL *R. rufiventris*. Recorded between Worsaret and Helipad 2.

BLACK MONARCH *Monarcha axillaris*. Seen on two occasions between Helipads 2 and 5.

BLACK-WINGED MONARCH *M. frater*. A couple in a mixed species flock between Worsaret and Helipad 2.

SPOT-WINGED MONARCH *M. guttulus*. A few between Worsaret and Helipad 2, usually in mixed species flocks.

GOLDEN MONARCH *M. chrysomela*. A couple seen in mixed species flock between Worsaret and Helipad 2.

FRILLED MONARCH *Arses telescopthalmus*. Singles noted from near Worsaret to as high as Helipad 4.

BLACK-BREASTED BOATBILL *Machaerirhynchus nigripectus*. Seen on a couple of occasions between Helipads 4 and 5.

YELLOW-LEGGED FLYROBIN *Microeca griseiceps*. One seen between Helipads 2 and 4.

CANARY FLYROBIN *M. papuana*. A pair seen at the summit.

WHITE-FACED ROBIN *Tregellasia leucops*. Several seen in a rather narrow altitudinal band between Helipads 2 and 4.

BLACK-SIDED ROBIN *Poecilodryas hypoleuca*. Fairly frequent between Worsaret and Helipad 2.

OLIVE-YELLOW ROBIN *P. placens*. Three or four singing birds present within a narrow altitudinal band, just above the upper limit of the last species, half way between Worsaret and Helipad 2.

BLUE-GREY ROBIN *Peneothello cyanus*. Frequent between Helipad 4 and the summit. One heard between Helipads 2 and 4.

REGENT WHISTLER *Pachycephala schlegelii*. A few individuals seen near the summit.

GREY WHISTLER *P. griseiceps*. A few in feeding flocks between Worsaret and Helipad 2.

RUFOUS-NAPED WHISTLER *Aleadryas rufinucha*. One seen close to the summit between Helipads 4 and 5.

LITTLE SHRIKE-THRUSH *Colluricincla megarhyncha*. Found in bamboo stands between Helipads 2 and 4.

VARIABLE PITOUI *Pitohui kirhocephalus*. Frequent at lower altitudes below Helipad 2.

HOODED PITOUI *P. dichrous*. Common from Helipad 2 to Helipad 4.

RUSTY PITOUI *P. ferrugineus*. Several groups seen between Worsaret and Helipad 4, sometimes in mixed species flocks.

CRESTED PITOUI *P. cristatus*. The incredible song of this species occasionally heard between Worsaret and Helipad 4.

BLACK PITOUI *P. nigrescens*. Two females seen close to the summit between Helipads 4 and 5. A much darker earthy-brown above than other races, warmer brown below and quite ochreous on the under tail coverts.

BLACK BERRYPECKER *Melanocharis nigra*. Noted between Worsaret and Helipad 2.

OLIVE-CROWNED FLOWERPECKER *Dicaeum pectorale*. Occasionally seen between Helipads 2 and 4.

CAPPED WHITE-EYE *Zosterops fuscicapillus*. Frequent between Helipads 4 and 5.

OLIVE STRAIGHTBILL *Timeliopsis fulvigula*. A few in a feeding flock near Helipad 4.

LONG-BILLED HONEYEATER *Melilestes mearhynchus*. One bird seen between Helipads 4 and 5.

GREEN-CROWNED LONGBILL *Toxorhamphus novaeguineae*. Singles noted between Worsaret and Helipad 4.

PLUMED LONGBILL *T. iliophus*. Singles seen at Helipad 4 and below Helipad 2.

RED MYZOMELA *Myzomela cruentata*. Several seen around Helipads 4 and 5.

RED-COLLARED MYZOMELA *Myzomela rosenbergii*. Frequent from Helipad 4 to the highest altitude reached.

VOGELKOP MELIDECTES *Melidectes leucostephes*. Two sightings at and near Helipad 4. Diamond (1985) discovered this species in the Kumawa mountains but not in the Fakfaks.

PYGMY DRONGO *Chaetorhynchus papuensis*. One seen at Helipad 4.

GREAT WOOD-SWALLOW *Artamus maximus*. Several seen soaring over Helipad 4.

MOUNTAIN PELTOPS *Peltops montanus*. Singles below Helipad 2 and between Helipads 2 and 4.

SPOTTED CATBIRD *Ailuroedus melanotis*. Heard between Helipads 2 and 4.

CRINKLE-COLLARED MANUCODE *Manucodia chalybata*. Two birds seen in a fruiting tree at Helipad 5.

TRUMPET MANUCODE *M. keraudrenii*. Heard between Worsaret and Helipad 4.

MAGNIFICENT RIFLEBIRD *Ptiloris magnificus*. Males calling through the day from just above Worsaret to the highest altitudes reached. A few female plumaged birds seen in mixed species flocks.

BLACK-BILLED SICKLEBILL *Epimachus albertsi*. Frequently heard and several seen from Helipad 4 to 5. This is the first record from the Fakfak. The single female bird trapped by Diamond (1985) in the Kumawa Mountains he attributed to *E. a. albertsi*. However the voice of the Fakfak bird differs markedly from the nominate birds of the Arfak Mountains. Arfak birds give a Whimbrel-like call lasting 3–4 seconds, rising in volume and slightly accelerating. The call heard in the Fakfak was more of a series of down-slurred whistles slightly decelerating and much less rapidly delivered, rather reminiscent of a slowed-down yaffle of a Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*.

KING BIRD-OF-PARADISE *Cicinnurus regius*. Heard in the first few kilometers of forest above Worsaret.

MAGNIFICENT BIRD-OF-PARADISE *C. magnificus*. Males very commonly heard and female plumaged birds often seen from below Helipad 2 to the highest altitude reached.

LESSER BIRD-OF-PARADISE *Paradisaea minor*. Heard between Worsaret and Helipad 2.

GREY CROW *Corvus tristis*. Frequent from the coast to the highest altitude reached.

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Address: David Gibbs, 28 Blackamoor Lane, Maidenhead, Berks SL6 8RD, U.K.

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