



WildWings

Papua New Guinea – The WildWings Tour NEW!

STOP PRESS!

9/9/11. Due to changes in the Tari area we are making some changes to the itinerary and will be lowering the price too! Please e-mail tours@wildwings.co.uk for the updated version when available, which will be by the end of September 2011.

There is simply nowhere like PNG, it's fantastic birds, scenery and amazing people, it is utterly unique. Most parts of it were not even seen by white man until the 1930s and still today, in this ever shrinking world, large tracts remain unexplored. It is not the easiest or cheapest place to visit, the birding can be difficult and frustrating at times but when you do score, the smiles remain with you forever. It's most famous avian stars, the Birds-of-Paradise however, are fairly predictable in many cases and with the superb local guides we will use in each area we will visit, an amazing experience is assured. BoPs merely top the list of myriad avian wonders. The current field guide has rather poor plates and this means many of the birds in reality are far more spectacular than you think they are going to be! Two of us have been out there in the last part of 2010 and this itinerary is the result of those visits, detailed planning and talking to other people who have visited before us. Travel within the country is almost entirely by air, due to the central mountain chain, in fact the capital Port Moresby is not linked to the interior by road even today. Whilst we have tried to keep the costs down we have not skimped on what we believe are false savings such as long and uncomfortable road journeys, which are also dangerous (in requiring armed guards) and a complete waste of valuable time. Our group size is deliberately small to maximize the participant's birding experience. Birds are still very much part of today's culture of the country, with the national

airline and beer both sporting BoPs as their logo. The famous sing-sings of the local peoples include of course bird feathers in their costumes and the dances themselves are based on male BoP displays. Whilst bird hunting continues to this day, the export of bird products and feathers is thankfully strictly forbidden and enforced. Every square inch of this land is privately owned, it is impossible to go and just do your own thing on your own*. Join us for one of the most memorable experiences of your life!

Itinerary

Planned Itinerary as of 23/6/11. Please note weather and local conditions can be unpredictable at any time and a sense of adventure and on occasions patience is required. You cannot 'clean up' on any trip to PNG but you should see many of our planned targets. Photography is not easy in many locations, off the shoulder opportunities will present themselves on occasion but days 10-13 do offer superb opportunities due to one of our lodge's forest 'bird table'. NB: 9/9/11 This itinerary is being updated and will be re-issued shortly!

Day 1: Port Moresby

Mid-afternoon flight from Brisbane, Australia arriving early evening. Transfer to our very comfortable air-conditioned hotel, welcome dinner and overnight.

Day 2: Varirata National Park

We will leave our hotel very early and take a packed breakfast and lunch with us. Varirata National Park is not much more than an hour's drive from Port Moresby, however, it is home to an excellent range of species including what should be our first "BoP" of the tour, the Raggiana Bird-of-Paradise. A short trail leads to a lek or display ground for this species and the males tend to gather in the early morning and late afternoon in the hope of attracting any females which are around. Magnificent Riflebird is also found here too. There are also several species of kingfisher to look for including Rufous-bellied Kookaburra, Yellow-billed Kingfisher and both Buff-bellied and Brown-headed Paradise-kingfishers. Other species we could see include Slender-billed Cuckoo-dove, Black-capped Lory, Red-cheeked Parrot, Channel-billed Cuckoo, Pheasant Coucal, Barred Owlet-nightjar, Red-bellied Pitta, Boyer's, Stout-billed and New Guinea Cuckoo-shrikes, Varied Triller, Willie-wagtail, Lemon-bellied Flycatcher, Hooded Pitohui, Chestnut-backed Jewel-babbler, Black Berrypecker, Streak-headed Honeyeater, Black-backed Butcherbird, Fawn-breasted Bowerbird, Metallic Starling, Yellow-faced Myna and Grey-headed Munia. Overnight Port Moresby again.

Day 3: Port Moresby - Kiunga

We will take a mid-morning flight from Port Moresby to the small town of Kiunga which is located in the lowlands of south-west Papua New Guinea where we will meet up with an expert local bird guide who will accompany us for the next few days. Kiunga is surrounded by forest and we plan to spend several days exploring a number of quiet roads and trails where there are a fantastic range of endemics to look for. Several species of Birds-of-Paradise can be found here including the extraordinary "King BoP" which is surely one of the most vividly coloured birds on the planet. Our guides also know where there is a lek of the Greater Bird-of-Paradise and we should be able to enjoy good views of birds displaying in the canopy above us. The bizarre-looking Trumpet Manucode (a less brilliantly coloured BoP) is also present here and we can expect to see this on several occasions during our stay.

Day 4: Full day excursion to birding locations in the Kiunga area

We will continue our exploration of the forests around Kiunga and will probably visit at least a couple of different locations during the day. As well as the Birds-of-Paradise, there are plenty of other birds to look for with the luminescent Flame Bowerbird amongst the special species which can be found here. Other possibilities include Pink-spotted, Ornate and Beautiful Fruit-doves, Island and Zoe Imperial-pigeons, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Yellow-streaked and (Western) Black-capped Lories, Yellow-capped Pygmy-parrot, Red-cheeked Parrot, Papuan Hanging-parrot, Papuan Needletail, Yellow-billed Kingfisher, Blyth's Hornbill, Boyer's and Golden Cuckoo-shrikes, Golden Monarch, Variable Pitohui, New Guinea Babbler, Blue Jewel-babbler, Red-capped Flowerpecker, Red-throated and Black Myzomelas, Puff-backed, Graceful and Streak-headed Honeyeaters, Brown Oriole, Hooded Butcherbird and Yellow-faced Myna. On at least one evening during our time in Kiunga we will also venture out after dark to look for nightbirds and other nocturnal wildlife. Possibilities include Papuan Hawk-Owl, Marbled Frogmouth and Large-tailed Nightjar as well as some interesting night mammals.

Day 5: Trip up the Fly and Elevala Rivers staying at forest camp overnight

Although Kiunga is several hundred miles from the sea, the river which runs by the town is navigable by good-sized oceanic going ships, however, we will use motorised canoes to take us up the Fly and Elevala Rivers to continue our exploration of Papua New Guinea's lowland forests. The area we will be visiting is very remote with a low population density and our intention is to concentrate on finding various species that are less frequently encountered closer to Kiunga. Although the boat ride takes several hours, we will be birding as we travel and can expect to see flocks of parrots, imperial-pigeons and other species flying overhead as we travel upstream. We plan to make various birding stops and our expert local birding guides know, for example, where the Twelve-wired Bird-of-Paradise displays and we will make a special effort to see this extraordinary species during our time upriver. Other species we could see include Pacific Baza, Grey-headed Goshawk, Great Cuckoo-dove, Stephan's Dove, Orange-bellied Fruit-dove, Purple-tailed Imperial-pigeon, Palm Cockatoo, Yellow-streaked and Black-capped Lories, Orange-breasted Fig-parrot, Eclectus Parrot, Channel-billed Cuckoo, Papuan Needletail, Rufous-bellied Kookaburra, Blyth's Hornbill, Boyer's Cuckoo-shrike, Frilled Monarch, Meyer's Friarbird, Lowland Peltops and Glossy-mantled Manucode. We will spend the night at the very basic Kwatu Lodge and whilst the accommodation here is very simple, being here overnight significantly increases our chances of finding some of the rarer species such as the turkey-sized Southern Crowned-Pigeon. Southern & Dwarf Cassowarys are also present here, however, we will be very lucky indeed to see this ostrich-sized denizen of the forest, as it is extremely wary as it is still hunted by the local people. There maybe a possibility to see another of PNG very special birds, New Guinea Flightless Rail, a monster in every sense of the word! After dark we will go out once again with our focus being two species of Owllet-nightjar, Starry and Wallace's. Other birds we could encounter include Marbled and Papuan Frogmouths and Southern Boobook.

Day 6: Birding around Fly and Elevala Rivers. Return to Kiunga in early evening.

We will make another early start and if we did not see Southern Crowned-pigeon the previous afternoon, we will make a special effort to locate this species as being out on the river for the first hour or two of daylight is usually the best way to locate it. Other

species we could see include Great-billed Heron, Palm Cockatoo, Pesquet's Parrot, Moustached Tree-swift, Common Paradise-kingfisher and Golden Myna. We will also spend at least part of the day on forest trails, where we could encounter Black-billed Brush-turkey, Hooded and Red-bellied Pittas, Painted Quail-thrush, White-bellied Thicket-fantail, Black-faced, Spot-winged, Hooded and Golden Monarchs plus a host of other species. In the mid-afternoon, we will reluctantly have to leave this amazing area and begin our river journey back to Kiunga where we plan to arrive in the early evening. As on the way upstream, we will bird our way back to civilisation and new species we could see include Superb and Dwarf Fruit-doves, Collared and Pinon Imperial-pigeons, Grey-headed Cuckoo-shrike, Helmeted Friarbird and Grey Crow.

Day 7: Birding in the Kiunga area

We will have another day in the Kiunga area and will concentrate on looking for any species we may have missed. New birds could include Papuan Mountain Pigeon, Dusky Lory, Long-billed Cuckoo, Dwarf, White-crowned and Common Koels, Grey-headed and New Guinea Cuckoo-shrikes, Emperor Fairy-wren, Mimic, Tawny-breasted and Plain Honeyeaters, Magnificent Riflebird and Crinkle-collared Manucode.

Day 8: Early morning birding in the Kiunga area. Drive to Tabubil. Late afternoon birding in Tabubil area.

We will leave Kiunga in the early morning birding our way to the town of Tabubil which is near to the giant Ok Medi mine. As the road slowly climbs, we will make a number of stops both to look for any species we may have missed around Kiunga but also to begin our search for birds that are only found at higher elevations.

During our drive to Tabubil one of our stops will be to look for the extremely isolated and non-migratory form of Little Ringed Plover which can be found at a couple of sites near the Ok Tedi river which runs passed Tabubil. Although it looks similar to the birds found in the UK, some ornithologists believe this form warrants specific status and if this proposal was adopted, these birds would become one of the most range restricted waders on the planet. Depending how long our journey to Tabubil takes, we should have time to begin our exploration of this bird-rich area where new birds could include Rufous-tailed Bush-hen, Zoe Imperial-Pigeon, Red-breasted Pygmy-parrot, Orange-breasted Fig-parrot, Moustached Treeswift, Stout-billed Cuckoo-shrike, Cicadabird, Torrent Flycatcher, Black-headed and Dwarf Whistlers, White-shouldered Fairywren, Obscure Honeyeater, Scrub, Yellow-gaped and Spotted Honeyeaters and Mountain Peltops.

Day 9: Full day birding in the Tabubil area.

The Tabubil area is home to a number of important specialities including Shovel-billed Kingfisher and Salvadori's Teal. Our guides generally know a couple of territories for the kingfisher and we will need to make an early start to look for this species, as it rarely responds to playback except for a few moments around dawn and even then can be extremely tough to locate. The Teal, however, can be found throughout the day and we should be able to enjoy good looks of this threatened, river specialist, not dissimilar to the Torrent Ducks of South America. Tabubil is also home to yet another species of Bird-of-Paradise, the Greater Melampitta, although unlike most "BoPs", this one is a really skulker. Whilst looking for it, however, other species we could see include Doria's Hawk, Blue-collared Parrot, White-eared Bronze-cuckoo, Lesser Black Coucal, Black-shouldered and Golden Cuckoo-shrikes, White-rumped Robin, Sclater's Whistler, Mountain Gerygone and Red-throated Myzomela.

Day 10: Birding very early morning and then transfer to airport for flight to Mount Hagen. Transfer to Kumul Lodge.

We should have the opportunity for some final birding prior to our flight to Mount Hagen. From there we will drive to Kumul Lodge which is located in the highlands of central Papua New Guinea. Kumul Lodge is rightly famous for its king-sized bird table which has to be restocked with fruit several times each day as an exciting range of frugivores and other species are almost constantly present. These include several birds which can be difficult to see well on the forest trails such as Brown Sicklebill and both Ribbon-tailed and Princess Stephanie's Astrapias. It is usually possible to get stunning views (and photographs of these three species of Bird-of-Paradise as they gorge themselves on soft fruits with the iridescent colours on the male Sicklebill and the ridiculous length tail of the Ribbon-tailed Astrapia being truly breathtaking. Other species which can often be found around the bird table include Chestnut Forest-rail, Brehm's Tiger-parrot, White-winged Robin, Smoky Honeyeater and Island Thrush, however, we will have to resist the temptation to spend too many hours each day watching this one spot, as there are plenty of other exciting birds in see in the area. One of the most colourful is undoubtedly the Crested Bird-of-Paradise (or Crested Satinbird) which is so bright it almost seems to glow; yet this amazing bird can sometimes be found less than 100 metres from the lodge's dining room!!

Days 11 and 12: Kumul Lodge

We will have two full days to explore the trail network at Kumul Lodge (as well as enjoying the spectacle of the bird table), however, we also plan to make several excursions to look for species which are not readily found in the immediate environs of the lodge.

During our stay, we will make a special effort to look for Birds-of-Paradise, as there are several species which can be found nearby. Our local guide generally knows where both Lesser and Magnificent Birds-of-Paradise are displaying and we plan to make early morning trips to look for both species. King-of-Saxony, Blue, Superb and Loria's Birds-of-Paradise, plus Lawes' Parotia, also occur here so there should be plenty of opportunities to boost our "BoP list". We will, however, also look for some of the other special birds which can be found around Kumul Lodge including Long-tailed Honey-buzzard, Dusky Woodcock, Black-billed Cuckoo-dove, Goldie's, Plum-faced and Yellow-billed Lorikeets, White-eared Bronze-cuckoo, Friendly and Black Fantails, Torrent Flycatcher, Garnet Robin, Rufous-naped, Lorentz's and Regent Whistlers, Wattled Ploughbill, White-shouldered Fairy-wren, Mountain Mouse-warbler, Buff-faced and Papuan Scrubwrens, Tit and Mid-mountain Berrypeckers, New Guinea White-eye, Long-billed, Mountain, Marbled, Rufous-backed and Black-backed Honeyeaters, Belford's and Ornate Melidectes and Torrent Lark.

Day 13: Transfer to Ambua

After some final birding around Kumul Lodge, we will reluctantly leave this delightful location and return to Mount Hagen. Here we will board our own charter plane for a flight across vast swathes of untouched forest to another birding wonderland, Ambua Lodge which is located in the Central Highlands, an area first visited by foreign explorers only eighty years ago. Landing at Ambua's private airstrip, it will take a matter of minutes to reach the lodge which is widely regarded as another world-class birding site. Being at a different elevation from Kumul Lodge, there are plenty of new birds to look

for including several Birds-of-Paradise with Black Sicklebill, Lesser Melampitta and Short-tailed Paradigalla being the mostly likely additions. King-of-Saxony, Blue, Superb and Crested Birds-of-Paradise as well as Lawes' Parotia and both Ribbon-tailed and Princess Stephanie's Astrapia are also present here, so we will have another opportunity to look for all these amazing birds too. During our stay, we will also look for some of the night birds that can be found around Ambua with Mountain and Feline Owlet-nightjars both possible. Sooty and Grass Owls are also present and our local guide generally knows of a day roost for the former.

Days 14 and 15: Ambua and The Tari region.

We will have two full days to explore the Ambua area and plan to target birds we have not seen so far. One of the species we will look for is the highly sought after Crested Berrypecker, an extremely colourful, yet unobtrusive, member of a family which is unique to the island of New Guinea. Another unique-looking bird is the Blue-capped Ifrita which tends to move quietly through the understory but there are plenty of other possibilities including Long-tailed Honey-buzzard, Papuan Harrier, Black-billed Cuckoo-dove, White-breasted Fruit-dove, Rufescent Imperial-pigeon, Papuan Mountain-pigeon, Dusky Lory, Papuan and Yellow-billed Lorikeets, Glossy and Mountain Swiftlets, Island Leaf-warbler, Friendly, Black and Dimorphic Fantails, Black-breasted Boatbill, Black-throated Robin, Brown-backed and Regent Whistlers, Northern Logrunner, Papuan Whipbird, Spotted Jewel-babbler, Large, Buff-faced and Papuan Scrubwrens, Fan-tailed Berrypecker, Red-collared Myzomela, Black-throated and Black-backed Honeyeaters, Belford's and Yellow-browed Melidectes, Great Woodswallow, Mountain Peltops, Mountain Firetail and Hooded Munia.

Day 16: Fly to Port Moresby and PAU

After some final early morning exploring around Ambua, we will drive to the nearby town of Tari from where we will fly to Port Moresby arriving about 1200. After lunch we will explore the campus of the nearby Pacific Adventist University. The open-plan design is wildlife friendly and incorporates a number of ponds and areas of trees where we should see an excellent range of species, many of which we are unlikely to see elsewhere on the tour. There is certainly an Australasian theme to many of the birds which can be found here and species we could see include Australasian Grebe, Little Black Cormorant, Rufous Night-heron, Pied Heron, Australian Ibis, Plumed, Spotted and Wandering Whistling-ducks, Comb-crested Jacana, Peaceful Dove, Cinnamon Ground-dove, Rainbow Lorikeet, Dollarbird, Pacific Swallow, Rufous-banded Honeyeater, Brown Oriole, Green Figbird, Black-backed and Hooded Butcherbirds, Fawn-breasted Bowerbird, Singing Starling and Grey-headed Munia. Overnight Port Moresby, farewell dinner.

Day 17: Depart Papua New Guinea

We will transfer to the international airport for our morning flight back to Brisbane, Australia, currently due to arrive just after midday.

Tour Information

Dates: 9th – 25th September 2012

Leaders: Chris Collins plus local guides.

Cost: £6999 per person sharing a twin room.

Single supplement: £689 (excludes day 5)
Deposit: £1000
Group size: 6-7

2013, Advance register for only £100 per person, TBA September – TBA October.

Notes

Accommodation is in rooms with private facilities throughout except the night in the forest camp which is very basic, with hole in the ground latrines etc but offers a real adventure for just one night. The other hotels and lodges vary from OK to almost luxurious. The area around the world-famous Ambua Lodge is sadly changing, and rapidly. A new gas pipeline is planned across the valley and helicopters are flying in and out of the lodge grounds itself currently. In addition the Tari Gap road (a major birding site) has been widened and is now taking more heavy traffic – a good reason to go sooner rather than later! This trip is not suitable for beginners and basic forest birding skills are an asset (i.e. the ability to get onto a bird quickly with directions). Walking may occasionally involve slippery and steep slopes and good mobility is therefore required, although no great distances are involved. PNG's climate is very variable from hot and dry, hot and humid to even quite cool in the mountains. Our trip is timed for the dry season but expect every kind of weather during the tour! The Fly and Elewa River areas can be very bad for mosquitoes and chiggers, hopefully not at this time of year though. If you react badly to such bites you may want to think again. Note due to some of smaller aircraft being used, hold baggage may be restricted to just 15kg plus hand baggage for the domestic flights. It will be possible to leave excess luggage in Port Moresby however.

Price includes: International (from Brisbane) and internal group economy class flights including pre-paid taxes, all ground & river transportation, all accommodation and meals, land use fees, services of WildWings leaders and local guides and a bird checklist.

Price excludes: Flights to and from Brisbane (Australia), visa fees for PNG (currently £25), travel insurance, vaccinations and medications, laundry bills, drinks (bottled water is included for some parts of the tour), other items of a personal nature and personal gratuities.

Chris's species list from the 2010 recce trip is available on our website or from us.

* We will also be offering 'PNG -Your Way' itineraries too, for birders and photographers, see our separate materials and trip report.