

# THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

2 – 26 SEPTEMBER 2009

## TOUR REPORT

**LEADER:** MARK VAN BEIRS

Our 2009 Solomon Islands tour will be remembered by its participants by the copious and unseasonal amounts of rain and mud, the sometimes brutally steep, slippery trails, the painful 'trenchfoot', the dark, gloomy straw house on Makira, the tough hike and wet overnight high on Kolombangara volcano, the splendidly performing 'out of this world' Solomon Islands Frogmouth, the stealthy, beautiful and very rarely seen Black-faced Pitta and the great looks at extraordinary Solomon Sea Eagles. The trip involved several serious hikes into the hardly ever visited highlands of remote and little known islands and our rewards included a great selection and a large percentage of its endemic birds. The Solomon Islands comprise Endemic Bird Areas 198 and 199 and the total area of this archipelago is barely larger than Belgium. It has more restricted range species (confined to an area less than 50,000 km<sup>2</sup>) than any other Endemic Bird Area in the World! We birded the islands of Malaita, Gizo, Rennell and Guadalcanal by road, cruised into Ranongga and Vella Lavella by boat, and trekked up into the mountains of Makira, Santa Isabel and Kolombangara,. The bird of the tour was the incredible and truly bizarre Solomon Islands Frogmouth that posed so well for us. A total of 148 species were seen (and another 4 heard) and included most of the available endemics, but we also enjoyed a close insight into the lifestyle and culture of this traditional Pacific country, and into the complex geography of the beautiful forests and islet-studded reefs.

After some really serious travelling, everyone finally arrived together at Honiara, the capital of the little known Solomon Islands. This sprawling town is situated on the north shore of the island of Guadalcanal, known to everyone because of its frightening WWII fame. A bit of exploring near our hotel produced the endemic Pied Goshawk and Yellow-bibbed Lory and a few more widespread species like Rainbow Lorikeet, Metallic Starling and Olive-backed Sunbird. A thorough briefing about things to come and what to expect was followed by an excellent dinner.

Next morning after a smooth check-in for our Sol Air (Solomon Airlines) flight to Kirakira on the island of Makira (or San Cristobal), we scanned the grassy expanses and forested surroundings of Henderson Airport and found several Ducorps's Cockatoos, Brahminy Kite, Pacific Baza, Little Pied Cormorant, Pacific Golden Plover and many Common Mynas. After an uneventful flight we were welcomed by our man on the spot, drove a short distance along the bumpy coastal track and started our first hike of the tour. A Pied Goshawk and our first Solomon Sea Eagle provided some excellent entertainment, but then we just concentrated on getting to our destination in the Hauta Conservation

area. The climb was quite brutal and left us all sweating and panting (and cursing), but soon we got into the swing of it and reached our foothill base in late afternoon. We were given one of the well-built original houses (large huts really) and got ourselves organized. The real birding could begin.

Heavy precipitation ruined our first dawn in the Makira highlands, but luckily the rain soon abated and we positioned ourselves strategically overlooking a clearing. Growling Red-knobbed Imperial Pigeons, a cooperative San Cristobal Melidectes, many Sooty Myzomelas, a party of smart Chestnut-bellied Monarchs, a pair of Ochre-headed Flycatchers, vociferous Golden Whistlers and several minute Mottled Flowerpeckers appeared on the list. By midmorning the forest had stopped dripping and we started our walk up through patches of nice forest. We made several stops at suitable viewpoints from where we observed Metallic Pigeon, the gaudy Crested Cuckoo-Dove, Yellow-bibbed and gorgeous White-headed Fruit-Doves, several Finsch's Pygmy-Parrots climbing a tree trunk, Common Cicadabird, Long-tailed Triller, a small flock of Grey-throated White-eyes, the shy, local race of Spangled Drongo and San Cristobal Starling. A rare Chestnut-bellied Imperial Pigeon was scoped and in the forest we found some smart White-collared Monarchs. A rare Yellow-legged Pigeon was briefly seen in flight and a few Mackinlay's Cuckoo-Doves were located in a fruiting tree.

On our second full day in the Hauta Conservation area, we again experienced unreasonable amounts of rain. It was extremely frustrating, but the show had to go on. We walked up to almost 800m altitude along a slippery, root-covered trail and in a lovely stretch of submontane forest we finally managed to obtain good views of the endemic, secretive Shade Warbler. For a member of the genus *Cettia* it behaved very well and we sure appreciated its distinctive voice. We scoped a cute Variable Kingfisher in the forest understorey and obtained good views again of the regular pigeons and doves. The Makira endemic White-headed Fruit-Dove was especially marvellous. A couple of Singing Parrots flew over and Spangled Drongo and San Cristobal Starling behaved very well. In the afternoon we walked about the camp area, where a couple of Crested Cuckoo-Doves performed splendidly. We heard the quiet notes of Duchess Lorikeets but sadly couldn't find them perched. At dusk the crowing notes of a Melanesian Scrubfowl emanated from the nearby forest. It rained cats and dogs all night long and this continued till mid morning. We then wandered around our camp area, spent time peering into fruiting trees and sat overlooking a new clearing for the rest of the morning. A couple of brief sightings of Yellow-legged Pigeons offered some consolation and good scope views were had of Mackinlay's Cuckoo-Doves and of a couple of attractive perched Duchess Lorikeets. A well-performing Brush Cuckoo, a perched Singing Parrot and a couple of endemic Dusky Fantails in a mixed species flock rounded off the morning. After an early lunch, we started our downhill walk. Few birds were noted, but in the lowlands we scoped a trio of recently fledged Oriental Hobbies. Then the skies opened again, totally drenching us and we fled to our small guesthouse in Kirakira, where a hot shower and cold drinks were much appreciated.

In spite of the heavy rainfall, the grassy airstrip of Kirakira had remained dry enough so the faithful Twin Otter could still land and take off, in contrast to our experiences here two years ago! In the early morning we flew to Honiara, where we reorganized our luggage, enjoyed a hearty lunch, and by mid afternoon we returned to the airport for our flight to Auki, the capital of well-populated Malaita. Upon arrival we transferred to our hotel in town. Roger went for a run in the neighbourhood and came upon a Woodford's Rail.

Dawn found us in a forested section in the northern foothills of Malaita and the start of the day was indeed excellent and gratifyingly birdy. Malaita White-eyes were everywhere and other new birds included Cardinal Lory, Stephan's Dove, Superb and Claret-breasted Fruit-Doves, elegant Moustached Treeswifts, Blyth's Hornbill, the uncommon Solomon Cuckoo-Shrike, Steel-blue Flycatcher, Midget Flowerpecker and good numbers of Long-tailed Mynas. We paid particular attention to the distinctive local forms of Black-and-white Monarch and of Brown-winged Starling (with its startling white eyes!). Other goodies included yet another Solomon Sea Eagle and a pair of posing Variable Goshawks. A pity the endemic Red-bellied Myzomela never showed, although we

sure looked hard for it. In early afternoon we returned to Auki for a late lunch and then boarded our return flight to Guadalcanal.

Early next morning, we took a flight to the little island of Fera, lying off the coast of Santa Isabel. The landing on the very muddy airstrip was quite an experience! Upon arrival we left our luggage at a nearby village and our boat took us to a meandering river surrounded by marshy grassland. Soon after arriving we heard the distinctive grunt-like calls of Woodford's Rail and, amazingly enough, we soon obtained superb views of two birds standing unconcernedly in the open under some bushes. We could even discern their red eyes! Great stuff! Lots of Cardinal Lories were flying about and there were also quite a few Ducorps's Cockatoos. We returned to the village, where our porters were waiting for us. After organizing our drinks, we started the hike up into the foothills. It was quite hot and very humid so we sweated a fair bit, but two hours later we were already organized in the best house of the village. A couple of Ultramarine Kingfishers had showed very well on the walk up. In the afternoon we explored some nearby gardens which produced Yellow-throated White-eyes, a heard only Guadalcanal Crow and a couple of Black-and-white Monarchs. A night walk along a steep and slippery trail eventually yielded a splendid Solomon Islands Frogmouth perched quite close, allowing for magnificent views. This really bizarre creature made it to Bird of the Trip again! The day ended with a heard only Solomon Hawk-Owl.

At dawn we were again experiencing a heavy downpour, but luckily after 1,5hr the rain stopped and we were able to walk about along the slick, root covered trails leading out of the village. The Guadalcanal Crows, which had given us such a hard time yesterday, sat out in the open in small groups squabbling away whilst allopreening. The scope revealed all their intricate details. A pair of Pacific Bazas was drying out in a treetop and we taped an Ultramarine Kingfisher in for in depth study. Suddenly we heard the distinctive voice of a Black-faced Pitta emanate from a dense patch of secondary growth. We crept closer and after some excruciatingly long and very diligent scanning and peering, we managed to observe this shy and very rarely seen jewel through the binoculars. Truly magnificent stuff. The chestnut crown and the azure-blue shoulder patch will remain burned into our retinas for a long time. Another bird called not too far away and later we, amazingly, managed to observe another bird on top of a large, vine-covered limestone outcrop. The latter half of the morning we monitored the comings and goings at a clearing with a great view over some nearby hill slopes. Guadalcanal Crows showed and bickered all the time, Brown-winged Starlings sat about, Ducorps's Cockatoos, Cardinal Lories and Eclectus Parrots perched nicely in the open or screeched past and Common Cicadabirds and Solomon Cuckoo-Shrikes adorned the treetops. After a midday pause we returned to the same area enjoying more good looks at already known species. An evening walk produced very satisfying looks at an engaging Solomon Hawk-Owl.

With most of the forest birds securely in the bag, we spent part of the following morning at a great overlook from where we observed an excellent selection of raptors. Best of all was that impressive Solomon Sea Eagle slowly hunting through the treetops allowing us to admire its amazing prowess of flight. A heart warming experience! A perched Pied Goshawk was scoped, and Oriental Hobby and Pacific Baza flew past. We also found our first Dollarbird of the tour. We then returned to some patches of secondary forest where most of the passerines showed well again. We heard the Black-faced Pitta once more, but this time there was no response at all as it disappeared without a sound in its usual way. Jean-Marc stayed the whole day at the viewpoint and was, after ten long hours, rewarded with a great sighting of an Imitator Sparrowhawk clutching a Yellow-throated White-eye in its talons.

Our final morning in the hills of Santa Isabel yielded good views of a pair of preening Pacific Bazas, a trio of smart Ultramarine Kingfishers and finally also the hoped for Scarlet-naped Myzomela. We then walked down after the obligatory group photo at the village edge with the beautiful azure waters of the surrounding reef in the background. After a lovely lunch we sailed to the islet of Fera, where we birded along the airstrip and at the edge of the mangroves. Great Frigatebird, Striated Heron, Grey-

tailed Tattler, lots of Whimbrels and Ruddy Turnstones and a Mongolian Plover were all noted, but best of all was a Swinhoe's Snipe that we flushed uttering its distinctive call, but before we could relocate it for more views the Sol Air Twin Otter came in to land an hour before schedule – yes, miracles do happen - and flushed it. This left us sadly with no time left to look for Island Monarch. We then flew to the much appreciated luxuries of Honiara.

A mid morning flight took us to the small island of Gizo, situated in the Western Province. Sadly clouds covered the world famous Marovo lagoon and upon arrival we noted a sea covered in white horses. We enjoyed a leisurely lunch at the famous TP 109 restaurant, which is named after John F Kennedy's WWII ill fated torpedo boat. We arranged things for our Kolombangara camping trip, observed a bunch of Lesser Frigatebirds and Island Imperial Pigeons and later sailed across to the volcanic island of Kolombangara. The sea was quite rough and we all got soaked, but half an hour later we were already at our cosy guesthouse overlooking a river mouth on the shore of Kolombangara. In the afternoon we walked around the area and observed a pair of nicely showing virtually flightless Roviana Rails. We also noted a couple of Australasian Swamphens, a Solomon Sea Eagle and a large colony of Solomon Islands Flying Foxes. At a forest edge handsome White-capped Monarchs, Yellow-vented Myzomelas and several Solomon Island White-eyes really showed well. It was a great introduction to birding in the Western Province. After a tasty dinner some of us went looking for the amazing Coconut Crab, but we only saw a couple of rather small individuals.

From the breakfast table at dawn, we admired an Osprey at its eyrie. We then got ready for the tough hike up the extinct volcano, distributing our luggage, tents and food amongst the waiting porters. We experienced intermittent heavy rain throughout the day (got drenched again), picked up a pair of well-behaved White-winged Fantails in the lowland forest, crossed a single, but rather deep river and followed an old logging track covered in horrible vines for several kilometres. We passed through beautiful submontane forests and glimpsed a flitting Kolombangara Monarch and some Pale Mountain Pigeons before we reached the small clearing of our camp in mid afternoon. The boys were already erecting the tents and got a fire going, so things sure looked a lot better than on our previous visit here... In the final hour of the day a swirling flock of Kolombangara White-eyes passed through and several speedy Meek's Lorikeets zoomed past our camp. After an early dinner, we retreated to our sleeping bags, keeping our fingers crossed for a dry morning.

Shortly after dawn, after a night without rain, we were hiking up through splendid montane forest covered in mosses and epiphytes to the volcano rim habitat of the famous Kolombangara Leaf Warbler. After a couple of hours of scrambling to get to the appropriate altitude we heard the distinctive song, but it still took another two hours before the little critter deigned to show itself. Meanwhile a glorious male Pacific Robin, several Island Thrushes and Island Leaf Warblers and a handful of fast moving flocks of Kolombangara White-eyes allowed great studies. From our final altitude, we could just about see the sheer crater walls of the extinct volcano. After this successful outing, we returned to camp, packed up, had a bit of a bite and started our descent. All our clothes and footwear were still wet from the previous day, but luckily it stayed dry during the afternoon. Unfortunately, poor Keith had an unlucky fall and cracked a rib and we all suffered a fair bit of the dreaded trenchfoot. It took us well into the evening to reach the coast where our boat to the hot showers of Gizo was waiting. It had, by far, been the hardest day of the tour. Everyone did a great job!

After a late and relaxed breakfast, we were ready for some island hopping. Our dive boat first stopped at several islets adding an imposing Beach Kingfisher, Brown Booby, Brown and Black Noddies, Little, Roseate (form with red bill), Common, Black-naped and Crested Terns and a single Sanderling to the tally. Further out a lone, rare and much wanted Heinroth's Shearwater showed all too briefly. Upon arrival at Ranongga we were told the amazing story of the 2007 five meter uplift. We walked around the gardens and along the forest edge and had repeated encounters with attractive Ranongga White-eyes. Our hosts had prepared a appetizing lunch and soon we sailed to the nearby island of

Vella Lavella. A leisurely walk along a mangrove-lined inlet gave us Striated Heron and Heidi found a Little Kingfisher. In the bush we had to wait a while to get to grips with the endemic Banded White-eye, while three Buff-headed Coucals and a White-winged Fantail obliged at length. On our return boat trip to Gizo the skies opened up yet again and the pouring rain left us once more totally soaked. It was ever so!

At first light we were already walking in the not too savoury outskirts of Gizo town. It was sad to see that the famous arboretum had totally been destroyed, but we luckily still found quite a bit of secondary woodland left. We soon located several of the endemic Splendid White-eyes. These lovely, beautiful little critters performed very well. We also observed many Island Imperial Pigeons flying about, lots of Cardinal Lories, a Pied Goshawk, good numbers of White-capped Monarchs and several Steel-blue Flycatchers. We returned for a hearty breakfast and a late morning boat trip in the nearby waters only offered us good numbers of Bridled Terns. We packed up, sailed to the offshore airstrip and just before leaving for Honiara we found two well-behaved Beach Thick-knees. A great end of our stay in the Western Province.

For the first time Sol Air let us down as our flight to distant Rennell was delayed for almost three hours. Eventually we took off, flew over the hard to access, beautifully forested mountains of Guadalcanal, home to the enigmatic Moustached Kingfisher and not too long after we landed at a little airstrip in the middle of well-forested Rennell. This makatea island is mainly inhabited by Polynesian people, giving it a very different feel. We walked to our guesthouse and settled in. In the afternoon we explored the surroundings and soon saw all the five endemics plus several other localized species. The gorgeous Silver-capped Fruit-Dove also occurs on some smaller islands and we scoped this beauty on several occasions. A pair of Rennell Starlings obliged in a treetop, small parties of Rennell White-eyes were foraging in the understorey, the dainty Rennell Fantail flitted about in the midstorey, the attractive Rennell Shrikebill showed no fear at all, but best of all were the cute Bare-eyed White-eyes that performed so very well at close range and looked so unlike any white-eye. Other goodies here included Australian Ibis, Brown Goshawk, Pacific Imperial Pigeon, lots of Singing Parrots, a very obliging Shining Bronze Cuckoo, lots of petite Fan-tailed Gerygones and scores of Cardinal Myzomelas.

On our second full day we further explored the nearby forest and again easily saw all the endemics. Rennell Fantails were especially cooperative and sometimes almost inspected us. Heidi found a fruiting tree that held several skittish, but well-behaved Island Thrushes. A male and a female Melanesian Flycatcher gave a good show, but strangely enough we didn't record any Golden Whistlers in these untouched forests. Amongst the Pacific Golden Plovers on the airstrip Jean-Marc located a lone Marsh Sandpiper, a new bird for the Solomon Islands.

As we had a spare day and all the important birds had been seen on Rennell, we took a touristy day trip to famous Lake Tengano, the largest lake in this part of the Pacific Ocean. The long drive led us through splendid tracts of primary forest, while Island Thrushes regularly flitted of the rather rough and bumpy track. Eventually we reached scenic Kagana Bay and not much later arrived at the 155 km<sup>2</sup> large azure lake. A bit of scanning gave us Great Cormorant, many Little Pied Cormorants, a couple of Red-footed Boobies of the dark morph and quite a few Australasian Grebes. A boat trip was soon organized and the relaxed cruise amongst the many islets covered in pandanus (screw palms) and cocos palms was very satisfying, but did not yield anything new. We were unable to reach the seabird colonies at the far eastern end of the lake, as it was quite rough.

Next morning, as we were walking towards the check in shack, we finally all caught up with the Solomon Islands first Marsh Sandpiper feeding at a puddle. A slightly delayed flight took us back to Honiara and in the afternoon, we explored an area of grassy wetland near the airport. We twice flushed a Red-backed Buttonquail which gave quite good views. A vigil at the edge of the marsh

produced several new birds like White-browed Crake, Great Egret and several Australian Reed Warblers.

The next day started with a spectacular sunrise visible from Mount Austen, the main hill overlooking the capital Honiara. This had been a site of heavy fighting in WWII, but is now a peaceful track through nice, partly disturbed forest, although we heard logging going on in the distance. By now we had seen most of Guadalcanal's lowland species, but it was great to wait at clearings and viewpoints getting nice views again of goodies like Yellow-bibbed Lory, Buff-headed Coucal, Pied Goshawk, Ultramarine Kingfisher, Guadalcanal Crow and Blyth's Hornbill. Our main target was the Guadalcanal endemic Black-headed Myzomela and we saw this unobtrusive species several times flitting through treetops. In the heat of the day we retreated to the hotel and in the afternoon we returned to the nearby wetland, where a splendid adult Solomon Sea Eagle stole the show. It sat perched in the open on a large bough of an enormous dead tree overlooking the marsh. We admired this magical species extensively, meanwhile also observing a Rufous Night Heron, lots of White-browed Crakes and several Buff-banded Rails. On our last morning in the Solomons we returned to the forested surroundings of Mount Austen and again obtained great looks at already known species, before we boarded our flight to Brisbane. It had been quite a tough tour, with lots of rain and mud, but with some amazing avian rewards!

## SYSTEMATIC LIST

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

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

Subspecies names are given where known and/or appropriate, either in a comment or in parentheses.

### PODICIPEDIDAE

Australasian Grebe *Tachybaptus novaehollandiae*: We saw several of these at huge Lake Tengano on the island of Rennell. The race involved is the endemic *renellianus*.

### PROCELLARIIDAE

Heinroth's Shearwater *Puffinus heinrothi*: Fair, but all too brief views of a single bird on one of our boat trips off Gizo (Western Province). There was quite a swell and the bird disappeared rather quickly. This rarely recorded species is only known from the Solomon Islands and the seas surrounding New Britain (Bismarck Archipelago) and Bougainville (Papua New Guinea). No nest has ever been found, but it is presumed to breed in the mountains of these islands. The total population is probably only a few hundred birds!! BirdLife International treats it as '**Vulnerable**' in its splendid book "Threatened Birds of the World". The species is named after Oskar Heinroth (1871–1945), German zoologist, collector in the Pacific and author.

### SULIDAE

Red-footed Booby *Sula sula*: We saw a couple of dark morph birds at Lake Tengano on Rennell.

Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster*: c15 adults and immatures were resting on a sandy islet off Gizo in the Western Province.

### PHALACROCORACIDAE

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*: We saw ten or so of these familiar birds at huge Lake Tengano on the island of Rennell.

Little Pied Cormorant *Phalacrocorax melanoleucos*: This widespread species was regularly recorded at the international airport and at Betikama near Honiara on Guadalcanal and also at Lake Tengano on Rennell. The race involved is the endemic *brevicauda*.

### FREGATIDAE

Great Frigatebird *Fregata minor*: Several were seen flying overhead with Lesser Frigatebirds at Fera (off Santa Isabel) and at sea off Gizo. Many other flocks of Lesser Frigatebirds were likely to have included this species.

Lesser Frigatebird *Fregata ariel*: Up to 40 frigatebirds at sea around Santa Isabel, Gizo, Ranongga and Vella Lavella were predominately this species, but many were seen too distantly for identification. Frigatebirds have the lowest wing-loading (low weight in contrast to large wing area) of all birds, enabling them to be amongst the most nimble of fliers.

### ARDEIDAE

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

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

Striated Heron *Butorides striatus*: Four sightings of this well-known species. This small and dark subspecies is endemic to the Solomon Islands (*solomonensis*).

Rufous Night Heron (Nankeen Night Heron) *Nycticorax caledonicus*: A single bird showed beautifully at Betikama near Honiara on Guadalcanal. The race involved is *mandibularis*, which is restricted to the Bismarck Archipelago and the Solomon Islands.

## THRESKIORNITHIDAE

Australian Ibis *Threskiornis molucca*: The endemic subspecies *pygmaeus* was regularly recorded on Rennell with up to 50 seen per day. In the Solomon Islands it is restricted to the islands of Rennell and Bellona.

## ANATIDAE

Pacific Black Duck *Anas superciliosa*: Just a few observations of this widespread species (*pelewensis*). This is the only regularly recorded duck in the Solomon Islands. Quite strange to see it perched high up in trees.

## PANDIONIDAE

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*: No fewer than 17 sightings of this well-known and widespread piscivore. The form involved is sometimes split off as a separate species: Wallacean Osprey *Pandion melvillensis*.

## ACCIPITRIDAE

Pacific Baza (Crested Hawk) *Aviceda subcristata*: About ten observations of this attractive bird of prey. We witnessed some spectacular display on a couple of occasions and had excellent scope views of perched and preening birds. The race involved is the endemic *gurneyi*.

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

Solomon Sea Eagle (Sanford's Sea Eagle/Sanford's Fish Eagle) *Haliaeetus sanfordi*: Ten observations of this spectacular eagle. Best views were of a bird hunting quite dramatically over a nearby hillside at on Santa Isabel. We also obtained great scope views in beautiful evening light of a perched and preening bird at Betikama on Guadalcanal. Although similar in plumage to a juvenile White-bellied Sea Eagle (and originally classified as this species), this bird of prey ranges far inland over forested mountains. It is classified as **'Vulnerable'** by BirdLife/IUCN on the basis of its low population density, ongoing forest and coastal degradation, and occasional hunting. It is endemic to the Solomons Islands and the island of Bougainville (Papua New Guinea). The scientific epithet refers to Leland Cutler Sanford (1868-1950), a US zoologist. Jean-Marc's favourite.

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

Brown Goshawk *Accipiter fasciatus*: Excellent views of a lazily flying bird on Rennell. Rennell is the only island in the Solomons on which it occurs: an example of how Rennell appears to have been colonized more from Australia and Vanuatu than from the other Solomon islands.

Pied Goshawk *Accipiter albogularis*: c15 observations of this fairly common and attractive species. We obtained great scope views of a perched bird on Santa Isabel. It is endemic to the Solomon Islands.

Imitator Sparrowhawk *Accipiter imitator* (NL): Jean-Marc had a close up encounter with this small and very little known forest Accipiter during his ten hour vigil at a clearing on Santa Isabel. BirdLife International treats it as **'Vulnerable'** in its splendid book "Threatened Birds of the World".

## FALCONIDAE

Oriental Hobby *Falco severus*: Several excellent encounters with this speedy and dashing bird of prey. On Makira we witnessed how three recently fledged youngsters were being fed. The Doughty, Day and Plant 'Field Guide' indicates erroneously that it is only a winter visitor to the Solomon Islands We also recorded this lovely bird of prey on Santa Isabel, on

Kulambangra and on Guadalcanal. In 'Raptors of the World' by James Ferguson-Lees & David Christie we read that it is a very rare species in the archipelago (?).

Peregrine Falcon (Peregrine) *Falco peregrinus* (NL): One was seen on Santa Isabel. The dark subspecies involved is *brevirostris*.

#### MEGAPODIIDAE

Melanesian Scrubfowl *Megapodius eremita*: Regularly heard on a variety of islands and only glimpsed once. It is generally considered as an endemic to the Bismarck Islands and the Solomon Islands, and nests in warm soil in volcanically heated areas or around rotting substrates.

#### TURNICIDAE

Red-backed Buttonquail *Turnix maculosa*: Fair views of two in flight in a patch of grassland near Honiara (Guadalcanal). The subspecies involved is the endemic *salamonis*. In the Solomon islands it is restricted to the northern lowlands of the island of Guadalcanal.

#### RALLIDAE

Woodford's Rail *Nesoclopeus woodfordi*: Fantastic close up views of at least two birds in a patch of grassland in the lowlands of Santa Isabel. We were able to discern the red eye colour and all the feather details. Roger also saw this species on his late afternoon training run in the outskirts of Auki on Malaita. This rarely observed species is endemic to the Solomon Islands and to Bougainville (Papua New Guinea). The bird is named after Charles Woodford (1852-1927), the resident Commissioner in the Solomons Protectorate from 1896 to 1914. BirdLife International treats it as '**Vulnerable**' in "Threatened Birds of the World".

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

Roviana Rail *Gallirallus rovianae*: We managed great looks at a pair along the edge of a dense cassava field on Kolombangara. This is an extremely poorly-known, flightless species which was only described in 1991. It is endemic to Kolombangara, New Georgia and adjacent islets in the Western Province and is named after the small island of Roviana. BirdLife International treats it as '**Near-Threatened**' in "Threatened Birds of the World".

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

White-browed Crake *Porzana cinerea*: At least five offered very nice scope views while walking on water lily leaves at Betikama (Guadalcanal). We also heard the distinctive calls.

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

#### BURHINIDAE

Beach Thick-knee *Burhinus magnirostris*: Two of these large and impressive waders showed very well at Gizo airport just before we were boarding our faithful Twin Otter. It is often placed in the genus *Esacus*. BirdLife International treats it as '**Near-Threatened**' in "Threatened Birds of the World".

#### CHARADRIIDAE

Pacific Golden-Plover *Pluvialis fulva*: Flocks of up to 40 were noted on the airport grasslands at Honiara (Guadalcanal) and smaller numbers were seen on other airstrips.

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

#### SCOLOPACIDAE

Swinhoe's Snipe *Gallinago megala*: A snipe was flushed at the Fera airstrip near Santa Isabel, but before we managed to locate it again, it was disturbed by the landing Twin Otter. Few

details were noted, but we heard the distinctive call. Further research has now shown that it was Swinhoe's Snipe. Guy Dutson, who is preparing a new Field Guide to the region told me that there have been a few records for the Solomon Islands!

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

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

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*: Jean-Marc found a single bird on the airstrip on Rennell and we were all able to admire it. This is the first record of this species for the Solomon Islands! There are one or two observations for the nearby island of Bougainville (PNG). Roger took several photos to substantiate our sighting.

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

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

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*: Several sightings of this worldwide wanderer. We noted birds in breeding plumage and in their drabber winter attire.

#### LARIDAE

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

Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii*: Great views of five smart birds on breeding islets in the Gizo area. They belonged to the distinctive subspecies *bangsi* with dark wings and all-red bills.

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

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*: Three birds were found on a sandy islet off Gizo. All were early-returning adults of the Siberian subspecies *longipennis*.

Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*: About ten were found on a sandy islet off Gizo. This species is a rare breeder in the Solomons, with proved nesting only on Santa Isabel.

Bridled Tern *Sterna anaethetus*: Small numbers were seen on each of the boat journeys around Gizo and Kolombangara, often perched on floating coconuts. Typically occurs further offshore than Great Crested and Black-naped Terns, but still within sight of land (whereas Sooty Terns keep far offshore).

Black Noddy *Anous minutus*: At least 500 were seen on boat trips around Gizo and Kolombangara, usually in dense flocks.

Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus*: A few were noted on each of the boat trips around Gizo and Kolombangara, where they appeared much larger and paler than the much more common Black Noddies.

#### COLUMBIDAE

Metallic Pigeon *Columba vitiensis*: This species is largely montane in the Solomons (*halmaheira*). We saw at least five in the Makira highlands and managed great scope views.

Yellow-legged Pigeon *Columba pallidiceps*: We had three encounters with this rarely observed species in the Makira highlands, but only saw it in flight. Although it is not too rare on Makira, it is very rare elsewhere and hunted everywhere, and it is classified by BirdLife/IUCN as '**Endangered**'. It is endemic to Melanesia.

Mackinlay's Cuckoo-Dove *Macropygia mackinlayi*: This Melanesian endemic was widespread in small numbers, with many excellent close up studies. The bird is named after Archibald Mackinlay (1850-1924), a Scottish explorer and naturalist.

Crested Cuckoo-Dove *Reinwardtoena crassirostris*: Fantastic scope views of several in the Makira highlands. We also heard it on Malaita. This uncommon Solomons endemic must be one of the weirdest pigeons in the world. BirdLife International treats it as '**Near-Threatened**' in its splendid book "Threatened Birds of the World".

- Stephan's Dove *Chalcophaps stephani*: Rather elusive, with singles seen by one or more people on several occasions. The bird is named after Etienne Stephan Jacquinot, father of French explorer Vice Admiral Jacquinot, so watch your pronunciation!!
- Bronze Ground-Dove *Gallicolumba beccarii*: Three brief encounters by one or more people with this tiny critter in the Makira highlands.
- Superb Fruit-Dove *Ptilinopus superbus*: Several exquisite sightings of this more widespread species on Malaita.
- Silver-capped Fruit-Dove *Ptilinopus richardsii*: This beautiful fruit-dove was common on Rennell, with up to 20 seen per day. It is endemic to Rennell and several small islands off Makira, all low coral (makatea) islands.
- Yellow-bibbed Fruit-Dove *Ptilinopus solomonensis*: We saw this cracker of a bird in the Makira highlands and high up on Kolombangara. It is endemic to the Solomons and a scatter of small islands off New Guinea as far west as Biak.
- Claret-breasted Fruit-Dove *Ptilinopus viridis*: Another glorious fruit-dove which is most common in the Solomons, but ranges as far as east Indonesia. Many fantastic scope views.
- White-headed Fruit-Dove *Ptilinopus eugeniae*: This Makira endemic must be the most beautiful pigeon in the country. Good views were obtained of up to eight perched in treetops in the Makira highlands. BirdLife International treats it as '**Near-Threatened**' in "Threatened Birds of the World".
- Pacific Imperial Pigeon *Ducula pacifica*: Up to 12 were seen each day on Rennell. This is a classic 'tramp' species occurring on islands mostly without other imperial pigeons, and ranging from islands off New Guinea to Samoa.
- Red-knobbed Imperial Pigeon *Ducula rubricera*: This spectacular and attractive Bismarcks-Solomons endemic was widespread in small numbers and allowed many excellent scope studies. We soon got to know the very distinctive growling voice of *Rednose* very well.
- Island Imperial Pigeon *Ducula pistrinaria*: Good views of fair numbers on several of the visited islands of the Western Province. Another Melanesian endemic, replacing Red-knobs in coastal and mangrove forest.
- Chestnut-bellied Imperial Pigeon *Ducula brenchleyi*: Several scope observations of singles perched up in treetops in the highlands of Makira. This attractive species is endemic to Guadalcanal, Malaita and Makira and has been heavily hunted. It is classified by BirdLife/IUCN as '**Vulnerable**'. The scientific epithet refers to Julius Lucius Brenchley (1816-1873), English traveller in the Solomon Islands and author.
- Pale Mountain-Pigeon *Gymnophaps solomonensis*: All too brief views of several on Kolombangara. Most roost high on the mountain and whoosh down through the cloud (and rain) to feed in the foothills. It is endemic to the highest islands in the Solomons.

#### CACATUIDAE

- Ducorps's Cockatoo *Cacatua ducorpsii*: These small corellas showed very well, perching and performing at close range on many occasions. The highest numbers were noted near Honiara (Guadalcanal), where up to 15 were counted a couple of times. It is endemic to the Solomon Islands and Bougainville (PNG), but does not occur on Makira or Rennell. Adjutant L. J. Ducorps was a 19<sup>th</sup> century French naval administrator and explorer.

#### LORIIDAE

- Cardinal Lory *Chalcopsitta cardinalis*: Although common as high-flying flocks, the beauty of this gorgeous bird was most evident in the pairs perched at close range on Santa Isabel. We also saw it on Kolombangara, Ranongga, Gizo, and Guadalcanal. It is endemic to the Solomons (including Bougainville) and small islands off New Ireland.
- Rainbow Lorikeet *Trichoglossus haematodus*: Somewhat less common than the preceding species, with which it shares the lowland forests and especially coconut plantations (*massena*).
- Yellow-bibbed Lory *Lorius chlorocercus*: Common but surprisingly difficult to observe perched, with the best views on Makira and especially on Malaita. It is endemic to Makira, Malaita and

Guadalcanal, where it remains common despite large numbers being trapped for the cagebird trade.

Meek's Lorikeet *Charmosyna meeki*: These tiny lorikeets were seen several times above the camp on Kolombangara. This unobtrusive species is endemic to the mountainous islands of the Solomons (including Bougainville). BirdLife International treats it as '**Near-Threatened**' in "Threatened Birds of the World". Albert Meek (1871-1943) was an English explorer and collector in New Guinea, the Solomons and Australia. His book "A Naturalist in Cannibal Land" provides some interesting reading.

Duchess Lorikeet *Charmosyna margarethae*: Another localized Solomons montane endemic, of which we obtained good scope views of perched birds in the highlands of Makira. An attractive but rather elusive species. The bird is named after Princess Louise Margaret Alexandra Victoria Agnes (1860-1917), Duchess of Connaught. BirdLife International treats it as '**Near-Threatened**' in "Threatened Birds of the World".

#### PSITTACIDAE

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

Singing Parrot (Song Parrot) *Geoffroyus heteroclitus*: Often heard, and usually seen in its rolling flight, but also regularly found perched. It is endemic to the Bismarcks and the Solomons (including Bougainville). Note that the form on Rennell is described as a separate race (*hyacinthinus*).

Eclectus Parrot *Eclectus roratus*: Small numbers of these gaudy parrots were seen on most islands except on Rennell (*solomonensis*). The name refers to the Greek word *eklektos*: chosen, select.

#### CUCULIDAE

Brush Cuckoo *Cacomantis variolosus*: We saw this vocal species well on Makira and on Guadalcanal and heard it on Kolombangara.

Shining Bronze Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx lucidus*: Several first-rate encounters with the endemic race *harterti* on Rennell. In the Solomons, it is restricted as a breeding species to the islands of Rennell and Bellona, most probably because these are the only islands where its host, the Fan-tailed Gerygone lives. They were very vocal this year.

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

#### CENTROPODIDAE

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

#### STRIGIDAE

Solomon Hawk-Owl (S Boobook) *Ninox jacquinoti*: Magnificent close up night time views of an obliging bird in the surroundings of Tirotonga (Santa Isabel). A real cracker of a bird. It is endemic to the Solomon Islands (including Bougainville). Vice Admiral Charles Hector Jacquinot (1796-1879) was a French explorer in the Pacific and was the father of Etienne Stephan Jacquinot, after who Stephan's Dove has been named.

## PODARGIDAE

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

## APODIDAE

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

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

## HEMIPROCNIDAE

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

## ALCEDINIDAE

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*: Four observations of this well-known species. The deep blue colour and tiny ear-covert patch of this subspecies (*salomonensis*) are quite different in comparison to European birds. The Solomon Islands are at the extreme eastern end of the range.

Little Kingfisher *Alcedo pusilla* (NL): Heidi found one perched along a mangrove edge on Vella Lavella.

Variable Kingfisher (Variable Dwarf Kingfisher) *Ceyx lepidus*: This forest understorey inhabitant is always a difficult bird to see. We obtained great scope views of the race *gentianus* on Makira, we heard it on Malaita (*malaitae*) and saw it also in the Western Province (*collectoris*) and on Guadalcanal (*nigromaxilla*). This is indeed a very variable species: have a look at plate 17 of Volume 6 of the "Handbook of the Birds of the World".

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

Collared Kingfisher *Todirhamphus chloris*: Singles and pairs of this kingfisher were recorded on most of the visited islands. No fewer than 49 subspecies have been described, and these sightings comprise four of those (*alberti*, *mala*, *solomonis* and *amoena*).

Beach Kingfisher *Todirhamphus saurophaga*: A couple of encounters with this large and spectacular species. This kingfisher is fairly common along rocky coasts across the Solomons.

Sacred Kingfisher *Todirhamphus sanctus*: Small numbers of this predominantly Australian migrant were seen in open habitats on Santa Isabel, on Kolombangara and on Gizo. It is confusingly similar to the local subspecies of Collared Kingfisher. It also breeds in small numbers in the Solomon Islands.

## CORACIIDAE

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

## BUCEROTIDAE

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

## PITTIDAE

Black-faced Pitta *Pitta anerythra*: We heard up to four a day near the village of Tirotonga on Santa Isabel and eventually, after some serious scanning and scrambling managed to get good views of this very little known species. Since 1938, it has only been recorded at Tirotonga, where Dave Gibbs rediscovered it in 1994 and only a handful of people have ever seen it. It is widely considered as one of the shyest and hardest to see of the 31 species of the wonderful Pitta family. It is classified as '**Vulnerable**' by BirdLife/IUCN because of its rarity, and it is endemic to the islands of Bougainville, Choiseul and Santa Isabel. Definitely one of the highlights of the tour!! Heidi's favourite.

## HIRUNDINIDAE

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

## CAMPEPHAGIDAE

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

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

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

Solomon Islands Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina holopolia*: This is by far the scarcest of the small cuckoo-shrikes. It showed particularly well on Malaita and granted good looks on Santa Isabel. It is endemic to the Solomons (including Bougainville). BirdLife International treats it as '**Near-Threatened**' in "Threatened Birds of the World".

Long-tailed Triller *Lalage leucopyga*: Up to eight were seen daily on Makira, where it is most common along forest edges and in clearings (*affinis*). In the Solomon Islands it only occurs on Makira and nearby Ugi. It is endemic to Melanesia, from the Solomons to New Caledonia.

## TURDIDAE

Island Thrush *Turdus poliocephalus*: Regular observations in forest on Rennell (*rennellianus*). This subspecies is fairly unusual in occurring at sea-level, presumably because there are few other competing species on Rennell. We also had several brief encounters on Kolombangara (*kulambangrae*). These two forms look very much like our European Blackbird. No fewer than 50 races of this widespread bird have been described!!

## SYLVIIDAE

Shade Warbler *Cettia parens*: It took a while, but eventually we had magnificent and extended views at fairly close range, high on the ridge above our house on Makira. It is endemic to this island, and is closely related to the Fiji Bush-Warbler.

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

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

San Cristobal Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus makirensis* (H): We heard the distinctive vocalizations a couple of times high up on Makira, but there was no response. It is endemic to Makira, but it is one of the least convincing current Solomon Islands splits.

Kulambangra Leaf Warbler (Kolombangara L W/Sombre L W) *Phylloscopus amoenus*: Excellent views of this Kolombangara endemic in the mossy forest close to the crater of this extinct volcano. Our well-earned reward after the toughest hike of the tour. Not many birders have this species on their lifelist!! Well done, bunch!! BirdLife International treats it as '**Vulnerable**' in "Threatened Birds of the World".

#### RHIPIDURIDAE

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

White-winged Fantail (Cockerell's F) *Rhipidura cockerelli*: A dozen excellent observations of this attractive, but rather retiring forest inhabitant on several islands in the Western Province. This was a good total for this widespread but uncommon Solomon islands endemic. BirdLife International treats it as '**Near-Threatened**' in "Threatened Birds of the World". The scientific epithet refers to J. Cockerell, an early 20<sup>th</sup> century Australian collector in Samoa and the Bismarck Archipelago.

Dusky Fantail *Rhipidura tenebrosa*: A pair in the highlands of Makira behaved very well, allowing excellent close views in the forest understorey. This is an unobtrusive and uncommon fantail, which is endemic to the island of Makira. BirdLife International treats it as '**Near-Threatened**' in "Threatened Birds of the World".

Rennell Fantail *Rhipidura rennelliana*: A total of 13 were seen on Rennell, where it was often very tame. It is one of the five species endemic to Rennell and is probably derived from the next species.

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

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

#### MONARCHIDAE

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

Chestnut-bellied Monarch *Monarcha castaneiventris*: This large monarch was fairly common on Makira with up to ten seen daily. We also recorded it on Malaita, on Santa Isabel and on Mount Austen (Guadalcanal). It is endemic to the Solomons.

White-capped Monarch *Monarcha richardsii*: A total of about 17 were seen on Gizo, Kolombangara, Vella Lavella and Ranongga. An unusual species with a distinct juvenile plumage, which looks very similar to the closely related Island Monarch. It also has a number of intermediate plumages. It is endemic to the Kolombangara and New Georgia group (Western Province).

Kulambangra Monarch (Kolombangara M) *Monarcha browni*: This pied monarch is distinctly uncommon and we only saw it briefly on our hike up into the highlands on Kolombangara. It is endemic to the Kolombangara and New Georgia group (Western Province). BirdLife International treats it as '**Near-Threatened**' in "Threatened Birds of the World".

White-collared Monarch *Monarcha viduus*: No fewer than a dozen of these smart birds were seen in the Makira highlands. It is endemic to the island of Makira.

Black-and-white Monarch *Monarcha barbatus*: The last of the Solomon Islands pied monarchs is also uncommon, but we had repeated excellent views on Malaita and also saw it well on Santa Isabel. It is endemic to the Solomon Islands, and ranges from Bougainville to Guadalcanal and Malaita. BirdLife International treats it as '**Near-Threatened**' in "Threatened Birds of the World".

Steel-blue Flycatcher *Myiagra ferrocyanea*: Scattered sightings, seen best from the roads on Malaita and Gizo, but also a few on Santa Isabel, Kolombangara and Mount Austen (Guadalcanal). These represent three subspecies, with a fourth on Bougainville, all with different looking females. It is endemic to the Solomons.

Ochre-headed Flycatcher (Ochre-tailed Flycatcher) *Myiagra cervinicauda*: Another genus which has speciated on Makira, where we saw both male and female in the clearing near our house. Note that the scientific name means ochre-coloured tail, and the English name is obviously erroneous. This smart species is endemic to Makira. BirdLife International treats it as '**Near-Threatened**' in "Threatened Birds of the World".

Melanesian Flycatcher (New Caledonian F) *Myiagra caledonica*: Three were seen on Rennell (*occidentalis*). The males of the genus *Myiagra* in the Solomons are all very similar, but the female of this species has a distinctive bright orange breast. It is endemic to Rennell, Vanuatu and New Caledonia. Yet another species which has obviously colonized Rennell from the south.

#### PETROICIDAE

Pacific Robin *Petroica multicolor*: A stunning male perched beautifully at close range high on Kolombangara. The Australian form has now been split off as a separate species: Scarlet Robin *P. boodang*.

#### PACHYCEPHALIDAE

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

#### ACANTHIZIDAE

Fan-tailed Gerygone *Gerygone flavolateralis*: This is probably the commonest bird on Rennell, with up to 15 seen each day (*citrina*). It is endemic to Rennell, Vanuatu and New Caledonia.

#### NECTARINIIDAE

Olive-backed Sunbird *Cinnyris jugularis*: This well-known bird is locally common in coastal and open habitats (*flavigaster*).

#### DICAEIDAE

Midget Flowerpecker *Dicaeum aeneum*: Many excellent close up encounters with this tiny Solomon Islands endemic (including Bougainville).

Mottled Flowerpecker *Dicaeum tristrami*: Up to 10 were seen each day on Makira. This is the furthest east for this genus and for the whole family, and has produced quite an unusual flowerpecker. It is endemic to Makira.

#### ZOSTEROPIDAE

Rennell White-eye *Zosterops rennellianus*: Several pairs and small groups totalling about 12 were seen on Rennell. An atypical white-eye, lacking any eye-ring except a very narrow ring of blue skin, and often behaving more like a creeper. It is endemic to Rennell.

Banded White-eye *Zosterops vellalavella*: Good views of five in an overgrown coconut plantation. It is endemic to Vella Lavella, where extremely few people have been to see it. BirdLife International treats it as '**Near-Threatened**' in "Threatened Birds of the World".

- Ranongga White-eye (Ganongga W-e) *Zosterops splendidus*: A splendid white-eye with a large yellow bill. About 15 were seen during our short visit. It is endemic to Ranongga, only 8 km away from Vella Lavella, and it is classified as **Vulnerable** by BirdLife/IUCN on the basis of a small declining population.
- Splendid White-eye *Zosterops luteirostris*: Another splendid white-eye and quite distinct from its close neighbours. Ten were seen along the road on Gizo, and we managed to obtain great scope views. It is endemic to Gizo where so little forest remains that it is classified as **Endangered** by BirdLife/IUCN, with an estimated population of a few thousand.
- Yellow-throated White-eye *Zosterops metcalfei*: A more typical white-eye, with up to 25 seen daily on Santa Isabel. Another species that is endemic to Bougainville, Choiseul and Santa Isabel, which were connected by a Pleistocene land-bridge a long time ago.
- Solomon Islands White-eye *Zosterops rendovae*: About 20 were noted on our walks on Kolombangara. This confusingly named bird is endemic to the lowlands and hills of the Kolombangara and New Georgia group. (It is sometimes called *Z. kulambangrae* or confused taxonomically with *Z. ugiensis*).
- Kulambangra White-eye (Kolombangara W-e) *Zosterops murphyi*: Common around and above the camp on Kolombangara, where it moves about in fast-moving flocks and it is thus often quite difficult to see well in the cloud and rain. This species looks quite plain with a very wide white eye-ring. It is endemic to Kolombangara above 400 m.
- Grey-throated White-eye *Zosterops ugiensis*: A few pairs and small groups totalling 14 birds were seen in the hills on Makira. An unusual warbler-like white-eye, which is endemic to the mountains of Makira, Guadalcanal and Bougainville. It is often confused taxonomically with *Z. rendovae*.
- Malaita White-eye *Zosterops stresemanni*: Another unusual white-eye, plain and chunky like a stout warbler. About 25 were seen, making it one of the commonest birds in the Malaita hills. It is obviously endemic to Malaita.
- Bare-eyed White-eye *Woodfordia superciliosa*: A most unusual 'white-eye', with its long decurved bill, striking head pattern and fat shape – a good candidate for some investigative DNA work. The only other member of this genus is on the Santa Cruz Islands, to the southeast. The genus *Woodfordia* is endemic to the Solomon Islands. This species is endemic to the island of Rennell, where about 25 were seen very well each day.

#### MELIPHAGIDAE

- Cardinal Myzomela *Myzomela cardinalis*: This brilliant red honeyeater was fairly common on Rennell and more localized on Makira. It is restricted to the coast on Makira, usually in coconuts, where the Sooty Myzomela replaces it in forest. It is endemic to south Melanesia and Samoa (and possibly Micronesia and Fiji depending on taxonomy).
- Scarlet-naped Myzomela *Myzomela lafargei*: A couple of observations in the Santa Isabel hills. This species is endemic to Bougainville, Choiseul, Santa Isabel and surrounding islets.
- Yellow-vented Myzomela *Myzomela eichhorni*: Regular encounters on Kolombangara, Ranongga, Vella Lavella and Gizo. It is endemic to the Kolombangara and New Georgia group.
- Black-headed Myzomela *Myzomela melanocephala*: Several fairly brief observations on Mount Austen (Guadalcanal), where it is probably nomadic in search of suitable flowering trees. It is endemic to Guadalcanal and the Florida islands.
- Sooty Myzomela *Myzomela tristrami*: Up to ten were seen daily on Makira. This Makira endemic is believed to be a melanistic derivative of the endemic forest myzomelas which range across the other Solomon islands.
- San Cristobal Melidectes *Melidectes sclateri*: About eight of these big and vociferous honeyeaters were seen well in the hills on Makira. A taxonomic oddity, sometimes placed in its own genus *Meliarchus*. Similar enigmatic large honeyeaters are endemic to the mountains of Bougainville and Guadalcanal. It is endemic to Makira.

## DICRURIDAE

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

## CORVIDAE

Guadalcanal Crow (White-billed C) *Corvus woodfordi*: Regular good views of this small crow on Santa Isabel. We also saw it at Mount Austen on Guadalcanal. It is endemic to Choiseul, Santa Isabel and Guadalcanal (with a very similar species on Bougainville).

## STURNIDAE

Metallic Starling *Aplonis metallica*: Locally common in degraded lowland forest, usually seen from roadsides on most islands.

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

Rennell Starling *Aplonis insularis*: About 20 were observed on Rennell, usually distant or flying over, but several performed well and showed their orange iris. It is endemic to Rennell and was previously lumped with the yellow-eyed Atoll Starling of ridiculously small islets off north PNG and the Solomons.

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

San Cristobal Starling *Aplonis dichroa*: This smaller Brown-winged Starling type was an uncommon bird of forest edge, with no fewer than 14 seen in the hills. It is endemic to Makira.

Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*: This is the only introduced species established in the Solomons. It is common throughout Honiara, where up to 80 were seen whenever we looked. It was introduced from India to control pests in coconut plantations.

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

## MAMMALS

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

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

## REPTILES

Monitor Lizard *Varanus indicus*: We saw several of these on Rennell.