

GONDWANA CONNECTION

WILDLIFE TOURS

BIRDING MILNE BAYS ENDEMIC 2015

10th–25th OCTOBER 2015



Milne Bay Province in eastern Papua New Guinea is rarely added to birding itineraries for this amazing country. Even rarer still, is there an attempt to secure all of the endemic bird species. This is largely due to the fact that they are spread out amongst the large number of islands that go to make up this province and require some real effort.

We at GONDWANA CONNECTION Wildlife Tours do believe that we have the knowledge, expertise and guides to make this rather optimistic adventure a reality. After all, we focus our PNG tours on this very beautiful region.

Tour departs Cairns in North Queensland on the **10th October 2015** and returns on the **25st October**.

Milne Bay does not offer the big expensive Birding Lodges of the Central Highlands, but the village stay network and wonderful people more than compensate for this.

To participate in our little adventure, you will be required to camp out a couple of nights, share accommodation in a number of village guest-houses, travel between islands in an open banana boat and do a bit of walking.



Your reward for this effort! What about a tick-sheet containing a number of species that will make your mates sit-up and wonder what they missed out on. To achieve this, we will be birding the Sagarai Valley, D'Entrecasteaux Islands and Louisiade Archipelago.

Staying in the villages also has the advantage of immersing you in what you have travelled to see, birds and this great country. The Spectacled Longbill *Oedistoma iliolophus fergussonis* depicted here, had built its nest in such a spot that you could observe it while visiting the loo at Sibinai Village on Normanby Island.

Do you feel that this might be something that will interest you? Do not wait too long, as numbers are strictly limited.

Send us an email at des@gondconnect.com.au and I will forward further information and costings.

Being a small family business, we are able to pass on all group discounts and are able to offer the best possible price, without compromising on the experience.

Price of this package will be **A\$4790** p/p twin share, based on four participants. This is fully inclusive and covers all costs as per the itinerary, including accommodation in Cairns at the beginning of the tour and all airfares ex Cairns. All you will have to pay for is alcohol, personal effects and souvenirs.

Outlined below is the proposed itinerary of this tour.

BIRDING MILNE BAYS ENDEMIC 2015

DAY 1

All participants will be required to be in Cairns on the day prior to departure (9th Oct) and accommodation will be booked at the **Cairns Queens Court** or similar. The evening meal will be here, allowing for all to meet and for any last minute details to be passed on. These costs are included in the package.

DAY 2

An early start will be required this morning and breakfast will be on our Air Niugini flight over the Coral Sea.

We will fly to Jackson Airport in Port Moresby (1.5-2hrs) and on arrival move down to the domestic terminal to check in for our next leg to Gurney Airport in Alotau, Milne Bay. Due to the relatively short stopover in Port Moresby, we will stay at the airport until our flight departs.



The flight to Alotau will take about one hour. On arrival we will be picked up and taken to Napatana Lodge. After dropping our gear off in our rooms, lunch will be available at the lodge's restaurant.

Our host Gretta and her wonderful staff will take care of all our needs. The house pets in this part of the world can be a little different, such as **Pesquet's Parrots**.

After lunch, those who wish to go into town can do any shopping required and will also have the opportunity to visit the local markets. These are worth the effort.

Remember to keep the binoculars close by as there is always the chance of a nice surprise, even in town. Look for **Grand Mannikin, White-shouldered Fairy Wrens** and **Pink Spotted Fruit-doves**.

Should you choose to stay at the lodge, it will not be a complete loss, birding wise as Napatana has a number of visitors worthy of mention. These include **Red-cheeked Parrots, Yellow-faced Myna, Fawn-breasted Bowerbirds** and a bunch of others.



Our evening meal will be at Napatana Lodge.

DAY3

After breakfast we will be joined by our guide Enoch Bulunamur and head off by road to our first temporary home, Hilltop Guesthouse near Saisaida Village in the Sagarai Valley. There will be the opportunity to stop at several points along the way to allow us to further increase our tick lists.

Hilltop is owned and run by the local mission and proceeds go towards running the mission's "School of Destiny". Pastor Douglas Pitoni and his band of volunteer teachers offer the opportunity to give the areas young children a strong start to their education. In addition to this, they also provide a very enjoyable place for us to spend a couple of days.



Lunch will be followed by a walk through the nearby areas of Alluvial Rainforest and we should pick up some nice birds including, hopefully the **Southern Crowned Pigeon**. For the kingfisher enthusiasts, both **Common** and **Brown-headed Paradise Kingfishers** are relatively common here. The **Hook-billed Kingfisher** can be heard calling most nights and with a little effort can be picked up during the day. This area is also a great spot for the **Palm Cockatoos**, which are very common and can even be spotted from our accommodation.

DAY 4

Today will involve hiking back to a hilltop located to the south east of the village and this allows for us to pick up our first Bird of Paradise at their leks, such as the **King's**, **Raggiana** and **Magnificent BOP**. **Growling Riflebirds** are also common up here and with our fingers crossed, we may also get species like the **Dwarf Cassowary**. Our local guides will do their best to locate as many notable ticks as possible for us.

This walk will be timed to suit the fitness level of the individuals on the tour. We don't want to see anyone being carried out. Our guides normally walk the distance in about one hour, but we will be allowing three. If any participant struggle a little with ascending and descending slopes, walking sticks should be part of your kit.

A bush camp complete with tents and self-inflating mattresses will be our home tonight. A night walk will be a must, as this site has a wealth of wildlife and you would not want to miss the opportunity to experience it.

DAY 5

Our priority this morning will be to catch the **Magnificent Bird of Paradise** at their display lek. With this achieved the rest of the morning has been allocated to continue birding this piece of high ground.

Around midday we will begin our journey back down to Saisaida. There will be plenty of time to chase up new species, as this descent normally only takes about two hours.

The evening meal and our beds will be in Hilltop Guesthouse once again. To sit around the fire and chat to some of the local boys is a great way to finish the day.

DAY 6

With farewells done, we will take a casual drive back to Alotau. After dropping off our hire vehicle, we return to Gurney Airport to catch our flight to Misima Island in the Louisiade Archipelago.

This flight will take a little under one hour and on arrival we will be taken to Bwagaoia Guesthouse and have lunch.

The afternoon will allow time for some local birding and to prepare for the next boating leg of our little adventure.

DAY 7

An early departure by boat will facilitate the maximum opportunity to explore various small islands and atolls on route to Sudest Island. The **White-chinned Myzomela** should always be in our thoughts when scanning through the birds on any of these small islands and the highly desirable **Nicobar Pigeon** is also widely distributed out here. Our destination for today is the village of Tagula and this presenting our very first potential encounter with our three main target endemic species for this location. These are, the **Tagula Butcherbird**, **Tagula Honeyeater** and **Tagula White-eye**. We will also be pursuing the **Louisiade White-eye** and **Louisiade Flowerpecker**.

Due to limited facilities, tonight and the next two will require us sleeping in tents with self-inflating mattresses. Basic, but should not be too uncomfortable.

DAY 8

Today will kick-off with some early morning birding around Tagula and then we will work our way around to the eastern end of the island by boat, with Donuwa Village being our destination.

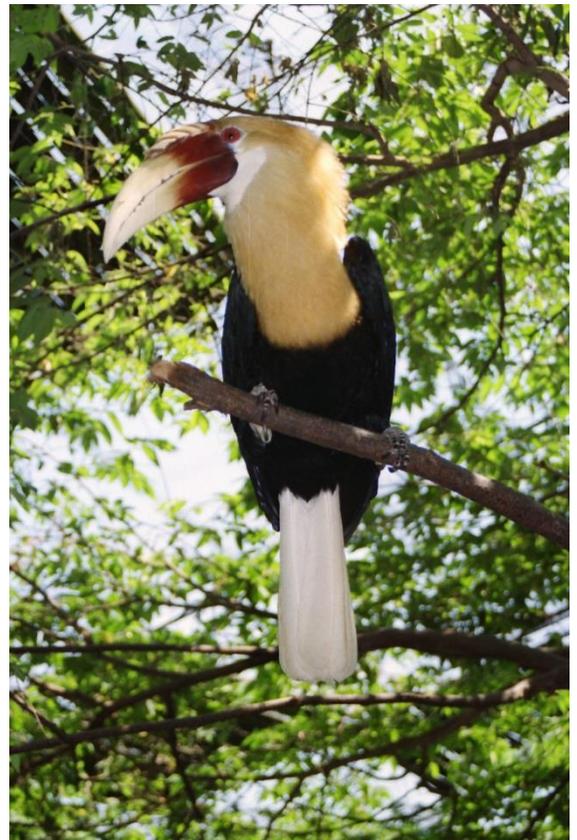
DAY 9

If we have secured our three main targets on Sudest and conditions are favourable, we will pop over to Rossel Island. The species of interest here would consist of several endemic sub-species, including the nominate race of **White-chinned Myzomela** *M. a. albigula* and White-bellied Whistler *P l. meeki*. The recently split **Rossel Paradise Kingfisher** would also be a high priority.

Time would be restricted here, as we do need to be back in Tagula Village by nightfall.

DAY 10

A last bit of birding will be possible early on this day and then we would have to head off to Bwagaoia on Misima Island. Again, this trip will allow a few stops on small islands and atolls. Plenty of oceanic species should be on offer.



Accommodation, hot shower, cold drinks and our evening meal will be at the Bwagaioa Guesthouse.

DAY 11

As our flight today will not be leaving until lunch time, there will be an opportunity to have a bit of a look about the town if so desired.

Following the afternoon flight back to Alotau/Napatana, there will be the chance to catch up on some hot showers, washing (If so inclined) or just put your feet up and enjoy a cold drink.

A different menu and comfortable bed should finish the day off nicely.

DAY 12

An early morning breakfast, possibly with one of Greta's hand raised free flying **Papuan Hornbills** looking over our shoulders for a titbit.

After breakfast we will finish packing our gear for the next of the village stay parts of this tour. Four nights on the islands will allow for an experience of a different kind.

At the end of our drive to East Cape, our guide and host, Waiyaki Nemani will escort us by banana boat out to Sibonai Village on Normanby Island in the D'Entrecasteaux Islands.

On the way across, time and conditions permitting, we will have a quick stop off at Boiaboawaga Island. This will allow us to have a shot at a bit more of island birdlife. This small uninhabited island is a roosting site for **Lesser Frigate Birds** and also the home of species such as the **Mangrove Golden Whistler**.

Sibonai is located at the eastern end of Sewa Bay at the base of rainforest clad mountains. Despite it's remoteness, mobile phone coverage only requires a fifty meter off shore paddle into the beautiful Sewa Bay in a dugout canoe. The village itself loses coverage due to the wonderful tall rainforest surrounds.

After meeting our hosts and dropping our gear off, lunch will be served.

The afternoon walk will take us along the river and through Sago Palm swamps. These areas will offer very different species to the higher ground to be covered tomorrow. The **Yellow-billed Kingfisher** is commonly in the garden near our accommodation and this being the larger Milne Bay endemic sub-species *S. t. ochracea*. The **Purple-bellied Lory** is a regular sighting out here, when it is the **Black-capped Lory** most frequently seen on the mainland.



This evening meal will be prepared by Waiyaki's wife Jenna and some of their village neighbours. On offer, will be further examples of traditional village food. ENJOY!

After tea, we will head out for a bit of night spotting. This area offers **Barred Owlet-nightjars**, **Papuan Frogmouth**, **Marbled Frogmouth** and the **Papuan Boobook** *Ninox theomacha goldii*.

DAY 13

An early breakfast in Sibonai includes a procession of birds that will get you itching to get out there. Amongst these are the beautiful **Black Sunbirds**, **Golden** and **Hooded Monarch**.



This morning's activity will involve birding along the bays edge and immediate area around the village. Just conserving our energy for what is to follow.

The walk this afternoon will take us up the river into the higher country. This offers the first chance to pick up target species such as the **Goldie's Bird of Paradise** at their lek and we have seen the **New Guinea Harpy-Eagle** up here. To allow us to see the **Goldie's BOP** displaying, we will have to be there in the late afternoon. This in itself is a bit problematic, as it takes over two hours to get up there and requires several

crossings of the river and we really want to get back to the village shortly after dark. This takes some effort, but to have this remarkable bird displaying eight to ten meters over your head, it is worth the effort. The chap depicted in the photo above was 70 years old and not only got to see the Goldie's at this lek but returned alive and well.

You will sleep well tonight.

DAY 14

After breakfast and wishing a farewell to our hosts, we will head off by boat to our next stop on Fergusson Island.

This boat trip will take about one and a half hours, but the bird spotting will continue. Hundreds of **Black Noddy** can be seen over the open water, but keep an eye open for the odd **Brown Noddy** that can be mixed in. Sightings of **Brown Booby**, **White-breasted Sea Eagles**, **Lesser Frigate Birds** and other Tern species will keep you interested. The Flying Fish in themselves offer much amusement as they skip and glide over the water.

On arrival at Gomwa Eco Guesthouse, our next stay, we will be greeted by a wonderful man, Siyosi Solon and his family. This village accommodation is right on the water's edge and looks straight into the Mangrove canopy. A birders idea of heaven!

DAY 15

An early breakfast will be followed by a short boat ride to Sebutuia Bay and put us in a spot that will allow easy access to a display area for the **Goldie's Bird of Paradise**. If we have not already seen them, then this will fix that.

After lunch we will walk inland to the Hot Springs and this will allow for some good birding opportunities. This trail is over flat ground and consequently a very easy walk, taking in a number of habitats. Three species of Manucodes have been seen here, including the Milne Bay endemic **Curl-crested Manucode**.

DAY 16

After breakfast and farewells, we will boat back to East Cape. A morning tea stop at Duchess Island will allow us the opportunity to tick **Nicobar Pigeons**, **Yellow-billed Kingfisher** and hopefully the **Louisiades White-eye**. A population of this latter species has been recorded on this small island.

On returning to town it will be time to start putting our gear together for our departure tomorrow.

Farewell drinks and dinner at Napatana will allow for us to say thankyou and farewell to all that have helped during our stay.



DAY 17

As our flight does not depart until early afternoon, there is an opportunity for all to have a wander into town and maybe pick up some souvenirs.

Our Air Nuigini flight lands in Port Moresby at 15.05 and the arrival time in Cairns is 18.40.

END OF TOUR.

For those flying out today, farewell and have a safe trip.

Should you wish to stay on for a few extra days and do some birding in New Ireland, then this can be arranged as an additional option.

NOTE: The species listed are only a small sample of what is on offer in this truly beautiful part of the world. A species list for Milne Bay Province is available on request.