

Conservation of Endemic Birds in the Louisiade Archipelago, Papua New Guinea. Interim Report for the Rufford Foundation – October 2014.

During late 2013 and early 2014 observations and samples were collected on the islands of Misima, Sudest, Panatinani, Panawina and Sabara. These observations and additional consultation with locals identified the range of islands occupied by the endemic species historically attributed to Sudest Island only. Encouraging news from a conservation perspective is that at least the Tagula Butcherbird (Fig. 1; *Cracticus lousiadensis*) and Tagula Meliphaga (Fig. 2; *Meliphaga vicina*) have populations on more than one island. However, the endemic White-throated White Eye (*Zosterops meeki*) has been only sighted three times and only on Sudest. On one occasion we had the opportunity to watch four of these birds at close range for several minutes. This was incredibly exciting. This species was last collected in 1916 by the Eichorn brothers for Meek (who was unwell), who made the last additions to museum collections of this species (only 13 are known to be in collections globally). The exact locations of the collection of these specimens was coarse and they have not been reliably seen since then.

Local people have strong folklore and knowledge of many of the birds, including the endemic species. I have been fortunate to work with local people on the islands that have shared this knowledge. I have a group of local people that I employ to help collect data (e.g. Fig. 1 Pole Adrian) and we have established the local population densities of species of interest, started banded (ringed) populations for ongoing monitoring and captured birds and collected blood samples for parasite screening. In addition to this information, this season (currently) we are collecting data on the habitat associations of the endemic birds. Local people are trained and employed to make observations of the more easily encountered butcherbirds and honeyeaters using four field kits that each include binoculars, inclinometers, tape measures, gps and data sheets designed for easy collection of information by someone new to this type of documentation. This training will allow ongoing employment opportunities through my own research to gather data on these restricted range species. The kits also enable concurrent collection of data in different locations. It is hoped that this research can be continued to improve the training and opportunities for local people.

As would be expected from a tropical region with high vector abundances, blood parasite screening of the samples collected last year showed high levels of infection with different parasites. This varied across species and with endemism (Fig.3). These samples will be added to this year to attain a more robust dataset to both establish their threat to the endemics, and identify the relationships between parasites, host species and habitats.

The kind support of the Rufford Foundation has also allowed us to produce posters for some of the local schools. These posters focus on the scientific, English and local language names for birds and highlight those that are globally restricted to the islands, a fact which many locals are unaware. These species feature highly in local beliefs and values. Consequently, the posters encourage continuation of traditional knowledge of these birds. Photos of these posters will be supplied.



Figure 1. Local Pole (Ralph) Adrian with the endemic Butcherbird, the Tagula Butcherbird, on Sudest Island.



Figure 2. The endemic Tagula Butcherbird (*Meliphaga vicina*).

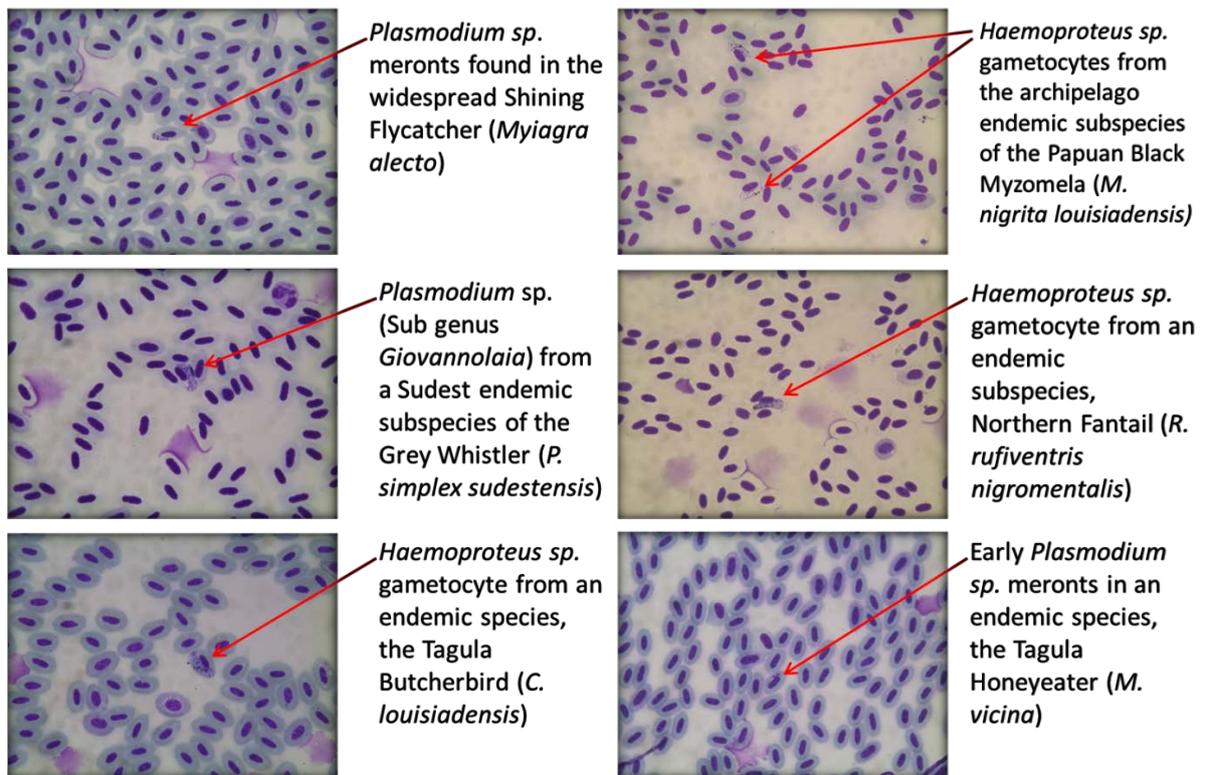


Figure 3. Haemosporidian parasites found in the avifauna of the islands.



Figure 4. A peaceful place. Small outrigger canoe in the sunset at Panatinani Island.