

**PAPUA NEW GUINEA CRUISE  
HIGHLANDS EXTENSION  
OCTOBER 5–11, 2019**



*Ribbon-tailed Astrapia* © David Wolf

**LEADERS: DAVID & MIMI WOLF**  
**With Local Leaders Wilson and Joseph**  
**LIST COMPILED BY: DAVID E. WOLF**

**VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS, INC.**  
**2525 WALLINGWOOD DRIVE, SUITE 1003**  
**AUSTIN, TEXAS 78746**  
**[WWW.VENTBIRD.COM](http://WWW.VENTBIRD.COM)**

No group of birds says “New Guinea” more than the fabulous Birds-of-Paradise, noted for their brilliant plumage and elaborate ornamentation, and they were the focus of this Extension. Very few are found in the lowlands, so to see a variety of them we headed for the Central Highlands. We couldn’t have been more successful in our quest!

After a difficult check-in at the Rabaul Airport, with no electricity and everything done by hand, we finally took off for Port Moresby, only to arrive and find that our flight to Mt. Hagen had been canceled. We became “the disrupted,” but got a very good meal out of it that evening! Early the next morning we flew to Mt. Hagen in beautiful weather, coming in right over the incredibly rugged and heavily forested spine of the mountains. By lunchtime we had arrived at rustic Kumul Lodge in the upper montane forest, where an amazing sight greeted us as we stepped onto the back balcony overlooking their bird-feeding tables. There were birds simply everywhere, the gorgeous Ribbon-tailed *Astrapias* the standout. Never did we imagine that we would see our first spectacular birds-of-paradise right in front of us at close range! Male, female, juvenile—all were there as we pulled out cameras and fired away. Eventually we calmed down enough to look at some of the other birds too, including three species of honeyeaters and a cute little White-winged Robin. Then the level of excitement rose again when a Brehm’s Tiger-Parrot silently appeared, just as two elegant and unique Crested Berrypeckers landed in a nearby shrub to pick at the fruiting spikes. We finally tore ourselves away as the staff waited patiently to serve lunch, but just after sitting down, a big bird with a long tail and remarkably decurved beak landed on a feeder, throwing lunch into chaos. Female Brown Sicklebills! We were able to study every aspect of this strange bird-of-paradise as it tried to bully an *astrapia* that refused to budge. Welcome to the highlands!



**Crested Berrypecker © David Wolf**



**Brown Sicklebill © David Wolf**

That afternoon our local guide, Wilson, led us down a narrow path to an overlook above a small clearing in the wet and drizzly mountain forest. With patient scanning of the tall trees, he spotted a male *astrapia* for us, its white tail so long we realized that the birds at feeders had only half-length tails. Then he magically picked out a small bird perched inconspicuously in the canopy of a tall tree. Scope views revealed a black bird with a yellowish breast and two long pale blue “ribbons” trailing out of its crown, a male King-of-Saxony Bird-of-Paradise. He wasn’t close, but we were certainly happy to see this specialty of the high mountain forest. All the while at this spot we periodically heard loud machine-gun rattles resounding through the forest, the call of the male Brown Sicklebill, and before leaving we watched a shy adult with a





**Crested Satinbird © Warren Regelmann**

full-length tail visit a fruiting tree. Satisfied, we returned to the lodge, but the day wasn't over yet, and right behind our rooms we found a brilliant orange and black Crested Satinbird quietly feeding in a fruiting shrub. This dazzling inhabitant of the upper montane forest is not often seen!

It was up and out early the next morning, as we headed downslope through the mountains to lower elevations. The terrain was mostly cleared and settled, and when we arrived at our destination amidst the native gardens it didn't seem like there was much habitat for anything. Then, of course, we heard a Lesser Bird-of-Paradise call close at hand. Somehow it slipped away unseen, but as we patiently waited for it to return we watched Ornate

Honeyeaters, White-shouldered Fairywrens, and a Yellow-breasted Bowerbird, among others. Eventually it became clear that the quest bird had disappeared, so we moved back to the road and strolled downslope to a thicker patch of second-growth. Soon we had what seemed like half of the big village following us and searching for the bird, and it wasn't long before someone spotted a stunning male Lesser emerge from the understory, grab something to eat, and return to a perch where we could scope it. The bird did this several times, always staying down low in the understory.

As we wound our way back upslope, we stopped for a close Torrent Flycatcher along the roadside and found ourselves under a huge remnant fig tree with fruit. It was attracting numerous honeyeaters, and while sorting them out a small stocky bird with dark underparts and golden-brown upperparts flew into the tree. With help from Wilson we realized that it was an adult male Magnificent Bird-of-Paradise, and it returned several times, eventually yielding looks at the two funny curlicue central tail feathers and "lumpy" head. Though its colors remained muted by the shade, this was a real bonus bird for us and a very lucky find, not rare but one whose habitat is hard to access. The final big stop of the morning found us hiking steadily up a rocky native trail when suddenly a loud series of bugling "karr" calls rang out from the forest on the steep slope above us. Blue Bird-of-Paradise! It took time and a change of position to spot this fabulous creature, but eventually we did, scoping a fully adult-plumaged male at length from several different angles. Found only locally in mid-mountain forests in the eastern half of New Guinea, this is perhaps the most threatened of the entire family, not to mention one of the most beautiful and unusual in color. During the next days we would also get to see several females at close range as they fed at spikes of fruit at the forest edge.



**female Blue Bird-of-Paradise © Warren Regelmann**



**Rufescent Imperial-Pigeon © David Wolf**

That afternoon we traveled back down to the broad Wahgi Valley, picked our way through Mt. Hagen town, and climbed onto the mountain above, to luxurious and spacious Rondon Ridge Lodge. The next day a long hike took us up into the cloud forest high on the slope above the lodge, where Stephanie's Astrapias chased through the midstory and we watched a flowering tree that was attracting four species of lorikeets, including the unusual-looking black morph of the Papuan Lorikeet. A male King-of-Saxony perched almost overhead, while perhaps the best bird of the day was a very cooperative Rufescent Imperial-Pigeon.

Our last morning in the highlands found us searching the lower trails at Rondon Ridge for a MacGregor's Bowerbird. We had seen the remarkable maypole-type bower the day before and now we wanted the bird itself. Though our keen-eared guide Joseph kept hearing one, it took us awhile to spot this plain brown bird in the understory. We were happy to see it, but the bower was definitely more impressive than the bird itself! Now we had one more great bird to try to track down, the Greater Lophorina (a.k.a. Superb Bird-of-Paradise). We had already seen females and immatures quite well, but we had not seen an adult male, when suddenly a series of harsh calls sounded off in the nearby midstory. The bird was hard to spot, and initially all that we saw was a medium-sized black bird, but as we waited and the bird calmed down, it flicked its wings and threw out the blue chest shield several times before flying to another perch and repeating this territorial performance again and again, as we watched with great satisfaction.



**Raggiana Bird-of-Paradise ©David Wolf**

The last day of the trip found us afield in Varirata National Park, on the Sogeri Plateau not far from Port Moresby. Here eucalyptus savanna borders lush foothill forest, the home of the Raggiana Bird-of-Paradise. This is a classic "lek" species, where multiple males gather in a specific area to display noisily for the females, who then nest and raise the chicks on their own. We stationed ourselves in a grove of ridgetop trees at a known lek, and it didn't take long for two spectacular males to appear. There were other highlights here too, like the stunning Brown-headed Paradise-Kingfisher perched unobtrusively in the understory and the amusing Barred Owlet-Nightjars peering at us from their roost holes. Throughout the morning we heard the loud and distinctive two-part slurs of the Growling Riflebird, but they were always distant or well-concealed in the tall trees, typical of this wary and elusive bird. Now we silently and slowly tiptoed down a path towards one, waiting and watching. The bird kept calling and then, with some incredible spotting, Warren picked it out much farther away than we expected, high up on an exposed branch near the top of a tall spindly tree. It was far enough away that we weren't disturbing the bird, but the views in the scope were great, and we took turns

watching it for over 15 minutes, an adult male of our 12<sup>th</sup> bird-of-paradise! All too soon the trip was over, and we returned home with a wealth of memories.



Growling Riflebird © Warren Regelman

### **ITINERARY:**

**October 5, 2019:** Disembark the *Caledonian Sky* in Rabaul, New Britain and then brief stops at the Volcano Observatory and Japanese tunnel en route to the Airport. Delayed check-in and departure for Port Moresby, where, upon arrival, we found out that our flight to Mt. Hagen had been canceled. Night: Lamana Hotel in Port Moresby.

**October 6, 2019:** Early morning flight to Mt. Hagen and then transfer to Kumul Lodge, on Mt. Hagen just over the Enga Province line, in time for feeder-watching before lunch. Afternoon birding at the lodge and at the clearing in nearby upper montane forest.

**October 7, 2019:** Morning birding the foothills of Enga Province before returning to Kumul Lodge for lunch. Afternoon transfer to Rondon Ridge Lodge above Mt. Hagen town, with late afternoon birding in the second-growth just above the lodge.

**October 8, 2019:** Most of the day was spent on the hike upslope into the cloud forest on Rondon Ridge, with picnic breakfast and lunch delivered to us. Late afternoon near the lodge.

**October 9, 2019:** Morning on the lower trails at Rondon Ridge Lodge and early afternoon birding around the lodge garden before departure for the Mt. Hagen Airport and return flight to Port Moresby. Night: Airways Hotel in Port Moresby.

**October 10, 2019:** Varirata National Park until mid-afternoon. Night: Airways Hotel

**October 11, 2019:** Departure for home from Port Moresby.

### **KEY:**

NB = New Britain (October 5)

MH = Mount Hagen (Airport, town and settled areas en route to Kumul on October 6)

KL = Kumul Lodge and nearby (Oct 6-7)

EP = Enga Province (Oct 7)

RR = Rondon Ridge Lodge and nearby (Oct 7-9)

V = Varirata National Park (Oct 10)

hd = heard

**BIRDS:** Taxonomy follows the eBird/Clements “*Checklist of Birds of the World: v2018*”.

Ducks, Geese & Waterfowl: Anatidae

Pacific Black Duck (*Anas superciliosa*) – PM

Pigeons & Doves: Columbidae



Amboyna Cuckoo-Dove (*Macropygia amboinensis*) – EP, RR  
Black-billed Cuckoo-Dove (*Macropygia nigrirostris*) - RR  
**Bronze Ground-Dove** (*Alopecoenas beccarii*) – KL (walking rapidly around the clearing below us in the cloud forest overlook).

Peaceful Dove (*Geopelia placida*) - V  
hd Pheasant Pigeon (*Otidiphaps nobilis*) – heard only; V  
Wompoo Fruit-Dove (*Ptilinopus magnificus*) - V  
Pink-spotted Fruit-Dove (*Ptilinopus perlatus*) - V  
Superb Fruit-Dove (*Ptilinopus superbus*) - V  
White-breasted (-bibbed) Fruit-Dove (*Ptilinopus rivoli*) - RR  
Dwarf Fruit-Dove (*Ptilinopus nanus*) - V  
Purple-tailed Imperial-Pigeon (*Ducula rufigaster*) - V  
**Rufescent Imperial-Pigeon** (*Ducula chalconota*) – RR (great long looks at one in the upper cloud forest on Rondon Ridge; not a bird that is often seen, especially this well).  
Zoe's Imperial-Pigeon (*Ducula zoeae*) - V  
Papuan Mountain-Pigeon (*Gymnophaps albertisii*) – RR

Cuckoos: Cuculidae

Pheasant Coucal (*Centropus phasianinus*) - V  
Rufous-throated Bronze-Cuckoo (*Chrysococcyx ruficollis*) - RR  
Shining Bronze-Cuckoo (*Chrysococcyx lucidus*) – EP (not Little Bronze, which I thought it was at the time).  
hd Fan-tailed Cuckoo (*Cacomantis flabelliformis*) – heard only; RR  
Brush Cuckoo (*Cacomantis variolosus*) – EP (seen), RR (hd)

Owlet-Nightjars: Aegotheidae

**Barred Owlet-Nightjar** (*Aegotheles bennettii*) – V (peering out of their daytime roost holes).

Swifts: Apodidae

Glossy Swiftlet (*Collocalia esculenta*) – NB, KL, RR, V  
Mountain Swiftlet (*Aerodramus hirundinaceus*) – MH, RR  
White-rumped Swiftlet (*Aerodromus spodiopygius*) - NB  
Uniform Swiftlet (*Aerodramus vanikorensis*) – NB

Plovers & Lapwings: Charadriidae

Pacific Golden-Plover (*Pluvialis fulva*) - NB  
Masked Lapwing (*Vanellus miles*) – NB

Hérons, Egrets & Bitterns: Ardeidae

Great Egret (*Ardea alba*) - PM  
Intermediate Egret (*Ardea intermedia*) - PM  
Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) – PM

Hawks, Eagles & Kites: Accipitridae

**Pygmy Eagle** (*Hieraaetus weiskei*) – EP (circling above the giant fig tree by the river).  
Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*) – MH, EP, RR  
Brahminy Kite (*Haliastur indus*) – MH, V

Hornbills: Bucerotidae

Blyth's Hornbill (*Rhyticeros plicatus*) – V

Kingfishers: Alcedinidae

Rufous-bellied Kookaburra (*Dacelo gaudichaud*) - V

**Yellow-billed Kingfisher** (*Syma torotoro*) – V (cute!).

hd Mountain Kingfisher (*Syma megarhyncha*) – heard only; RR

**Brown-headed Paradise-Kingfisher** (*Tanysepta danae*) – V (long scope study of this beautiful endemic of the southeastern region).

Rollers: Coraciidae

Dollarbird (*Eurystomus orientalis*) – V

Cockatoos: Cacatuidae

Sulphur-crested Cockatoo (*Cacatua galerita*) – V

Old World Parrots: Psittaculidae

Eclectus Parrot (*Eclectus roratus*) - PM

Red-cheeked Parrot (*Geoffroyus geoffroyi*) - V

**Brehm's Tiger-Parrot** (*Psittacella brehmii*) – KL (male and female quietly visiting the Kumul Lodge feeders!).

hd Modest Tiger-Parrot (*Psittacella modesta*) – heard only; RR

Yellow-billed Lorikeet (*Neopsittacus musschenbroekii*) - RR

Orange-billed Lorikeet (*Neopsittacus pullicauda*) - RR

**Plum-faced Lorikeet** (*Oreopsittacus arfaki*) – KL, RR (gorgeous when seen up close as they fed on *Schefflera* fruiting stalks).

**Papuan Lorikeet** (*Chamosyna papou*) – RR (at the flowering tree in the cloud forest, including the very different-looking black morph).

Black-capped Lory (*Lorius lory*) – V

Bowerbirds: Ptilonorhynchidae

**MacGregor's Bowerbird** (*Amblyornis macgregoriae*) – RR (we saw the amazing maypole-type bower on the hike down from the cloud forest, but it took a while to track down the bird the next morning. We finally saw a female foraging through the lower midstory of the forest interior).

Yellow-breasted Bowerbird (*Chlamydera lauterbachii*) – EP, RR

Fairywrens: Maluridae

White-shouldered Fairywren (*Malurus alboscapulatus*) – EP, RR

Honeyeaters: Meliphagidae

Plain Honeyeater (*Pycnopygius ixoides*) – EP, V

Marbled Honeyeater (*Pycnopygius cinereus*) - EP

Mountain Meliphaga (*Meliphaga orientalis*) - EP

Mimic Honeyeater (*Meliphaga analoga*) - V

Elegant Honeyeater (*Meliphaga cinerifrons*) - V

Black-throated Honeyeater (*Caligavis subfrenata*) - RR

**Ornate Melidectes** (*Melidectes torquatus*) – EP (an especially attractive member of its family).

Belford's Melidectes (*Melidectes belfordi*) - KL

Yellow-browed Melidectes (*Melidectes rufocrissalis*) – EP, RR

Smoky Honeyeater (*Melipotes fumigatus*) – KL, RR

Papuan Black Myzomela (*Myzomela nigrata*) - V

**Elfin Myzomela** (*Myzomela adolphinae*) – RR (this tiny beauty was the last new bird seen in the highlands, right in the flowering ornamentals at the lodge).

Red-collared Myzomela (*Myzomela rosenbergi*) – KL, RR  
Rufous-backed Honeyeater (*Ptiloprora guisei*) – KL, RR  
Gray-streaked Honeyeater (*Ptiloprora perstriata*) - KL  
Tawny-breasted Honeyeater (*Xanthotis flaviventer*) - V  
Helmeted Friarbird (*Philemon buceroides*) – V

Thornbills & Allies: Acanthizidae

hd Rusty Mouse-Warbler (*Crateroscelis murina*) – heard only; V  
hd Mountain Mouse-Warbler (*Crateroscelis robusta*) – heard only; KL  
hd Large Scrubwren (*Sericornis nouhuysi*) – heard only; RR  
Buff-faced Scrubwren (*Sericornis perspicillatus*) - RR  
Papuan Scrubwren (*Sericornis papuensis*) - KL  
Gray Thornbill (*Acanthiza cinerea*) - RR  
hd Brown-breasted Gerygone (*Gerygone ruficollis*) – heard only; RR

Satinbirds: Cnemophilidae

**Crested Satinbird** (*Cnemophilus macgregorii*) – KL (a male of this dazzling and uncommon species of the upper montane forest was seen twice right behind our rooms at Kumul Lodge).

Berrypeckers & Longbills: Melanocharitidae

Black Berrypecker (*Melanocharis nigra*) - V  
Mid-Mountain Berrypecker (*Melanocharis longicauda*) - RR  
Fan-tailed Berrypecker (*Melanocharis versteri*) – KL

Tit & Crested Berrypeckers: Paramythiidae

**Crested Berrypecker** (*Paramythia montium*) – KL (elegant specialty of the high montane forest, feeding at length on fruiting spikes at Kumul Lodge).

Quail-Thrushes & Jewel-Babblers: Cinclosomatidae

hd Spotted Jewel-Babbler (*Ptilorrhoa leucosticte*) – heard only; RR

Woodswallows: Artamidae

Great Woodswallow (*Artamus maximus*) – KL, RR  
White-breasted Woodswallow (*Artamus leucorhynchus*) – V

Bellmagpies & Allies: Cracticidae

Hooded Butcherbird (*Cracticus cassicus*) – V (at the nest)

Cuckooshrikes: Campephagidae

Barred (Yellow-eyed) Cuckooshrike (*Coracina lineata*) - V  
Boyer's Cuckooshrike (*Coracina boyeri*) - V  
Black-bellied Cicadabird (*Edolisoma montanum*) – KL, RR (hd)

Sitellas: Neosittidae

**Black Sittella** (*Daphoenositta miranda*) – KL (at least 4 with a mixed-flock of small birds behind the rooms at Kumul Lodge; this uncommon bird of the high moss forest was one of our best finds).  
Papuan Sittella (*Daphoenositta papuensis*) – RR

Ploughbill: Eulacestomatidae

Wattled Ploughbill (*Eulacestoma nigropectus*) – RR (seen in the bamboo by a lucky few).



Whistlers & Allies: Pachycephalidae

- Gray Shrikethrush (*Colluricincla harmonica*) - EP  
Little Shrikethrush (*Colluricincla megarhyncha*) – RR, V  
hd Black Pitohui (*Melanorectes nigrescens*) – heard only; RR  
Regent Whistler (*Pachycephala schlegelii*) - KL  
**Sclater's Whistler** (*Pachycephala soror*) – RR (colorful and vocal member of the mixed-flock).  
Brown-backed Whistler (*Pachycephala modesta*) – KL, RR  
Black-headed Whistler (*Pachycephala monacha*) – EP

Mottled Berryhunter: Rhagologidae

- Rufous-naped Bellbird** (*Aleadryas rufinucha*) – KL, RR (hd) (this often secretive bird was seen on the ground right in front of us).

Shrikes: Laniidae

- Long-tailed (Black-headed) Shrike (*Lanius schach*) – MH, EP, RR

Old World Orioles: Oriolidae

- Hooded Pitohui** (*Pitohui dichrous*) – V (very reminiscent of some New World orioles).  
Brown Oriole (*Oriolus szalayi*) – V

Drongos: Dicruridae

- Spangled Drongo (*Dicrurus bracteatus*) – V (including crouched on a nest in a small isolated tree in the picnic area clearing).

Fantails: Rhipiduridae

- Black Fantail (*Rhipidura atra*) - RR  
Willie Wagtail (*Rhipidura leucophrys*) – NB, MH, EP, RR, V  
Dimorphic Fantail (*Rhipidura brachyrhyncha*) - RR  
Friendly Fantail (*Rhipidura albolimbata*) – KL, RR

Ifrita: Ifritidae

- Blue-capped Ifrita** (*Ifrita kowaldi*) – KL, RR (this unique New Guinea specialty was seen several times, creeping around on the mossy trunks, their blue crowns gleaming).

Monarch Flycatchers: Monarchidae

- Friilled Monarch (*Arses telescopthalmus*) – V

Crows, Jays & Magpies: Corvidae

- Torresian Crow (*Corvus orru*) – PM, V

**Birds-of-Paradise: Paradisaeidae – we saw adult males of all of these and they were all fabulous!**

- King of Saxony Bird-of-Paradise (*Pteridophora alberti*) – KL, RR (including the two strange head plumes that can be moved independently of each other).

- Greater Lophorina (*Lophorina superba*) – RR (male displaying in the midstory tangles; we also had several close sightings of female-plumaged birds feeding in the second-growth)..

- Growling Riflebird (*Ptiloris intercedens*) – V (amazing spotting Warren! Thank you).

- Brown Sickbill (*Epimachus meyeri*) – KL, RR (hd) (a female at the Kumul feeders and a full adult male at a fruiting tree in the wild).

- Stephanie's Astrapia (*Astrapia stephaniae*) – RR (chasing around in the cloud forest).

- Ribbon-tailed Astrapia (*Astrapia mayeri*) – KL (what an incredibly beautiful bird!).

Magnificent Bird-of-Paradise (*Cicinnurus magnificus*) – EP (a male that visited the big fruiting fig at the stop by the river was an unexpected find).

Blue Bird-of-Paradise (*Paradisea rudolphi*) – EP, RR (we had to hike a bit for the male of this elegant one, but it was certainly worth it. We also saw female-plumaged birds quite well).

Lesser Bird-of-Paradise (*Paradisea minor*) – EP (adult male finally seen).

Raggiana Bird-of-Paradise (*Paradisea raggiana*) – V (beautiful males visiting the lek area).

Australasian Robins: Petroicidae

hd Lesser Ground-Robin (*Amalocichla incerta*) – heard only; RR

**Torrent Flycatcher** (*Monachella muelleriana*) – EP (great look at one right by the roadside).

hd White-faced Robin (*Tregellasia leucops*) – heard only; V

White-winged Robin (*Peneothello sigillata*) - KL

Ashy Robin (*Heteromyias albispecularis*) – KL

Swallows: Hirundinidae

Pacific Swallow (*Hirundo tahitica*) – NB, MH, RR

Leaf Warblers: Phylloscopidae

Island Leaf-Warbler (*Phylloscopus maforensis*) – RR

Grassbirds & Allies: Locustellidae

hd Papuan Grassbird (*Cincloramphus macrurus*) – heard only; RR

White-eyes, Yuhinas & Allies: Zosteropidae

Black-fronted White-eye (*Zosterops minor*) – EP (briefly visited the fruiting fig by the river; this was the “Green-fronted” race without the black forehead; not identified as this species at the time).

New Guinea White-eye (*Zosterops novaeguineae*) – RR (conspicuous around the lodge).

Old World Flycatchers: Muscicapidae

Pied Bushchat (*Saxicola caprata*) – MH, EP, RR

Thrushes & Allies: Turdidae

Island Thrush (*Turdus poliocephalus*) – KL

Starlings: Sturnidae

Singing Starling (*Aplonis cantoroides*) - MH

Yellow-faced Myna (*Mino dumontii*) – V

Flowerpeckers: Dicaeidae

Red-capped Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum geelvinkianum*) – EP, RR, V

Old World Sparrows: Passeridae

Eurasian Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*) – MH

Waxbills & Allies: Estrildidae

Hooded Muna (*Lonchura spectabilis*) – EP, RR

**Gray-headed Munia** (*Lonchura caniceps*) – V (endemic to the southeast; we saw a large flock by the roadside on our way down from the park).