

New Caledonia

2 – 8 September 2018

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Introduction

Since we were so close to New Caledonia in our year of travelling we had to visit New Caledonia to see a Kagu. Of course, when we made the trip we tried to see the rest of the endemics as well, and given it was an in-between stop we tried to see everything in a short timeframe. We started with a 2-trip to the small Loyalty islands Lifou and Ouvea for their endemic White-eyes and Parakeet, next we had 3,5 days on Grande Terre but after 2 days we had seen all the birds (including the Thicketbird).

Since we are still traveling this is a preliminary trip report with our main findings and a rough annotated species list (counts are incomplete and subspecies indication is missing). Please send us an email if you are missing information.

Itinerary

Day 0	Sunday 2 September	23.30 arrival in Noumea from Brisbane – night in hotel Le Paris
Day 1	Monday 3 September	06.50 arrival in Lifou – birding at Wé – 16.10 arrival Ouvea– night Hotel Beaupré
Day 2	Tuesday 4 September	Ouvea – 18.50 arrival in Noumea (domestic) and pick-up car at international airport
Day 3	Wednesday 5 September	Parc Riviere Bleue + drive to Farino – night at Refugio de Farino
Day 4	Thursday 6 September	Birding Farino + afternoon birding at Bourail grassland (Pepe's site) – night at La Foa
Day 5	Friday 7 September	Drive to Parc Riviere Bleue – night at camping Bois du Sud
Day 6	Saturday 8 September	Short visit to Mount Koghi and 14.15 departure to Brisbane

What would we do different in hindsight.

It would have been easier to collect a car at the domestic airport and drop it off at international or even to rent it for the entire period (parking is available at the domestic terminal which would save on time and would probably not cost much more – a taxi from domestic to international costing 10.000 CPF).

Other birders

We saw one other birder in Parc Riviere Bleue on our second visit.

Practicalities

Language

Speaking some French makes life a lot easier around here (especially on the smaller islands).

Guiding

We used no guides.

Literature

We made our own digitised version of Birds of Melanesia by Guy Dutton (don't buy the kindle version, something went horribly wrong there!). For sounds we downloaded a selection from Xeno-Canto.org. We relied on trip reports found on www.cloudbirders.com

Travelling, Eating & Sleeping.

We booked our flights some months in advance and since we arrived quite late in the evening at Grande Terre (both times) we booked hotels there as well (through booking.com), the rest was done on the fly. The flights to the islands have a low luggage allowance (12 kilo's) and are very strict on the weight for the carry-on (5 kg or even 3 kg on Air Loyauté). We left our large bags in storage in our hotel in Noumea and took binoculars/camera's/laptop out of our carry-ons and kept them on us (which was allowed) and checked-in our regular carry-ons.

We were surprised about how well everything was organised: excellent roads and cars were plentiful (hitchhiking was easy on Lifou and Ouvea). We had booked a rental car (Europcar) for our stay on Grande Terre (but overlooked the fact there's a domestic and an international airport which are 1 hour apart!) We hadn't bothered to hire a car for the small islands in advance.

Weather

During our stay a front moved through with our day on Ouvea being overcast, windy and about 20 degrees and the next day on Grande Terre very wet (rain all day). The other days were sunny with pleasant temperatures (20-25o).

Health and safety

No malaria in New Caledonia, tap water is safe to drink and we felt safe throughout.

Money & costs

ATM's were common throughout and cards accepted at most hotels. New Caledonia is not cheap (everything seems to be imported from France). In total we spent:

- €320 per person on the return ticket Brisbane – Noumea
- €235 per person on the flights Noumea – Lifou – Ouvea – Noumea
- €174 on car hire Grande Terre with Europcar
- €560 per person on accommodation, food, fuel, park entrance, bike rental etc. It can be done cheaper, campsites are everywhere, we only camped one night.

Visited Sites

Loyalty islands

A visit to the Loyalty Islands is a very nice extension when visiting Grande Terre. Next to the endemic white-eyes on Lifou and the parakeet on Ouvea, other species not found (easily) on Grande Terre: Melanesian Whistler, Red-bellied Fruit dove, Cardinal Myzomela and Silver-eye (a distinct black-headed ssp on Lifou) are common on both islands. We flew to the islands but the ferry to Lifou can be good for seabirds (e.g. Gould's Petrel).

Lifou

In preparation we doubted whether we would try birding the forest near the airport as many had done in the past but most people had difficulty with (or even dipped) the Large Lifou white-eye here. In the end we decided to go to the Antenna Road in Wé (-20.9165, 167.2654) based on some recent sightings on Ebird and since we had quite some time on the island anyway. This site is about 25 km south of the airport. We hadn't made any arrangements for a hire car and when we found out there was a public bus to Wé leaving at 7:30 we went for it. (hiring a car is probably possible on the spot, the lot seemed plenty full with cars). The bus brought us to the site for XPF 440 where we arrived at 8AM.

Within 45 minutes we had seen both white-eyes along the nice and quiet road that goes up for about 1km to the antennas. Throughout the morning we heard about 5-6 Large Lifou White-eyes but only saw two well. Small Lifou White-eye, Silver-eye, Cardinal Myzomela, Red-bellied Fruit dove were common. When we returned to the main road we were informed the next bus would be for a couple of hours so we hitchhiked back to the airport. There were quite a lot of cars on the road so that didn't take too long.

Ouvea

We had almost 24 hours on the island to find one species so we weren't in a hurry. When we arrived at the airport we walked to the main coastal road, but were offered a lift in the back of a pick-up without asking. The first accommodation we tried (Chez Dydyce) was full and we walked a bit further north finding hotel Beaupré with very luxurious bungalows, an excellent restaurant and chilled white wine. A bit more expensive but very pleasant.

The only available information about seeing the Parakeet pointed us northwards and because we had a whole day we decided to rent bikes. In the end it's about 25 km single trip and the bikes were a bit small with soft tires but we made it back by 11.00 so it wasn't too bad. After biking north for about 20 km we went around some smaller (asphalted!) roads through native vegetations and found the parrots at -20.4500, 166.6197 foraging next to the road on some low flowers. We rode a bit further and found more at -20.4451, 166.6238 foraging in the canopy (which is very low here).

We relaxed for the afternoon (swimming and snorkelling is pretty easy if you want). Late afternoon we walked back to the airport we saw a parakeet (95% certain) crossing the road at -20.6417, 166.5673 and noted there seems to be reasonably good native vegetations around the airport so maybe a trip to the north is no longer necessary.

Grande Terre

Almost all endemics can be seen at Parc Riviere Bleue in the South-east of the island. Only for the New Caledonia Thicketbird you need to visit the grasslands further north, best place used to be Farino but in recent years the grasslands above Bourail (Pepe's site) has become the best spot. Also the New Caledonian Crow and the White-bellied Goshawk seem to be easier there (we saw several White-bellied Goshawk at both Farino and at the grasslands but not at Riviere Bleue, the Crow was common at Farino and the grasslands but only heard at Riviere Blue the second day we were there). If you have limited time a day at Parc Riviere Bleue and a morning at the grasslands should be enough to see all species. All parcs have a good trail system and excellent facilities.

Parc Riviere Bleue

The park opens at 7am and closes at 5pm. Tickets can be bought at the entrance gate -22.1525, 166.7363 after which you can continue by car until the Pont Perignon -22.1309, 166.7025. You are not allowed to cross the wooden bridge by car so in order to reach the birding site there are two options; there are shuttlebuses (first one leaving at 7:30, second at 9am) or you can hire a bike (starting from 9am). The place to find all the birds is between the Cagou-trail (6km from the bridge) and the Pont Germaine (10km) where the trees are tallest. The first day we took the 7:30 shuttlebus to Grand Kaori (km8) and by 12 o'clock we had seen all the targets birding the main road; Kagu's were common and without any difficulty we found a Crow Honeyeater along the road at -22.0995, 166.6672. We visited a second time (but arrived quite late) and rented bikes. This time there weren't any Kagu's on the road (more tourists than on our first rainy visit), but the where found easily along the Grand Kaori-trail.

Bourail grassland (Pepe's site)

This site was found by Tommy Pedersen in 2015 and the Ticketbird is quite easy here. Acces is along a road from Bourail. Park the car at -21.4483, 165.5152 and walk the track on the other side of the road. Habitat is good from the GPS-point given by Pedersen -21.4461, 165.5174. When we arrived it was mid-afternoon, sunny and windy so we walked further untill a bit beyond -21.4379, 165.5211 (440 m asl the track continues further in to the hills) hearing three Ticketbirds shortly responding to tape. Walking back we saw at least 4 Ticketbirds along the track. Other endemics we saw along the track (and along the road at the base) are: New Caledonian Crow, White-breasted Goshawk, Red-throated Parrotfinch. Other species of note: Barred Honeyeater, Rufous Whistler and an Eastern Barn Owl.

Farino (Parc des Grandes Fougères)

Another nice National Park where most endemics can be seen. The entrance gate is around -21.6281, 165.7621, the park opens at 07.30 but we had to wait until 8.15 for someone to show up. We went there to check out the Grassbird track which is directly left after the entrance gate. Habitat for the Thicketbird was very reduced and we heard nothing so we decided pretty quickly to move on. New Caledonian Crow is quite common here. There are nice walking trails here which we did not explore.

Mount Koghi

We went here on our last morning for a short visit en route to the airport. Another nice organised place with good trails. The parking is at (-22.1781, 166.5059) and a bit further along the road you need to pay an entrance fee (500 CPF per person). The first bit of the forest we saw isn't logged (like Rivière Bleue) and looks very good.

ANNOTATED SPECIES LIST

We have tried to accurately indicate the proper subspecies for all our observations, usually based on geographic locations based on the IOC World Bird List version 8.2. We tried to keep detailed notes throughout the trip but especially commoner species might not have been written down daily. Triplist generated with iGoterra trips, see www.igoterra.com for details. In my view the best listing software/website!

- 1 **Pacific Black Duck** *Anas superciliosa*
Only observed en route with 1 5.9.
- 2 **White-faced Heron** *Egretta novaehollandiae*
Only observed en route with 1 7.9.
- 3 **Pacific Reef Heron** *Egretta sacra*
1 Ouvéa 4.9.
- 4 **Great Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo*
10 Parc provincial de la Rivière Bleue 5.9.
- 5 **Brown Goshawk** *Accipiter fasciatus*
2 Ouvéa 4.9 and 1 en route 6.9.
- 6 **White-bellied Goshawk** *Accipiter haplochrous* (NT) Endemic
1 Lifou Is.--We 3.9, 1+1 heard Farino 6.9 and 1 Grasslands above Bourail 6.9.
- 7 **Swamp Harrier** *Circus approximans*
1 Farino 6.9, 1 Parc provincial de la Rivière Bleue 7.9 and 2 en route 8.9.
- 8 **Whistling Kite** *Haliastur sphenurus*
2 Parc provincial de la Rivière Bleue 5.9, 1 en route 6.9 and 1 Parc provincial de la Rivière Bleue 7.9.
- 9 **Kagu** *Rhynochetos jubatus* (EN) Endemic
2 Parc provincial de la Rivière Bleue 5.9 and 4 Parc provincial de la Rivière Bleue 7.9.
- 10 **Australasian Swamphen** *Porphyrio melanotus*
1 Farino 6.9.

- 11 **Dusky Moorhen** *Gallinula tenebrosa*
Only observed en route with 2 6.9.
- 12 **Metallic Pigeon** *Columba vitiensis*
1 Lifou Is.--We 3.9, 1 Farino 6.9 and 1 Mount Koghi 8.9.
- 13 **Pacific Emerald Dove** *Chalcophaps longirostris*
1 OuvÃ©a 3.9, 1 there 4.9, 1 Farino 6.9 and 2 Parc provincial de la RiviÃ©re Bleue 7.9.
- 14 **Red-bellied Fruit Dove** *Ptilinopus greyi*
2 Lifou Is.--We 3.9 and 1 OuvÃ©a 4.9.
- 15 **Cloven-feathered Dove** *Drepanoptila holosericea* (NT) Endemic
1 Parc provincial de la RiviÃ©re Bleue 5.9, 1 Farino 5.9, heard there 6.9, 1 heard Parc provincial de la RiviÃ©re Bleue 7.9 and 1 heard Mount Koghi 8.9.
- 16 **Pacific Imperial Pigeon** *Ducula pacifica*
10 Parc provincial de la RiviÃ©re Bleue 5.9.
- 17 **Goliath Imperial Pigeon** *Ducula goliath* (NT) Endemic
2+1 heard Parc provincial de la RiviÃ©re Bleue 5.9 and 2 Mount Koghi 8.9.
- 18 **Shining Bronze Cuckoo** *Chrysococcyx lucidus*
1 Lifou Is.--We 3.9 and 1 heard OuvÃ©a 4.9.
- 19 **Eastern Barn Owl** *Tyto javanica*
1 en route 4.9 and 1 Grasslands above Bourail 6.9.
- 20 **Satin Swiftlet** *Collocalia uropygialis*
1 OuvÃ©a 4.9 and 2 Farino 6.9.
- 21 **White-rumped Swiftlet** *Aerodramus spodiopygius*
1 Lifou airport 3.9, 1 OuvÃ©a 4.9, 5 Parc provincial de la RiviÃ©re Bleue 7.9 and 1 en route 8.9.
- 22 **Sacred Kingfisher** *Todiramphus sanctus*
1 Lifou airport 3.9, 1 OuvÃ©a 4.9 and 1 Farino 6.9.
- 23 **Horned Parakeet** *Eunymphicus cornutus* (VU) Endemic
1 heard Parc provincial de la RiviÃ©re Bleue 5.9 and 2 Farino 6.9.
- 24 **Ouvea Parakeet** *Eunymphicus uvaensis* (EN) Endemic
2 OuvÃ©a 4.9.
- 25 **New Caledonian Parakeet** *Cyanoramphus saisseti* (VU) Endemic
2 Parc provincial de la RiviÃ©re Bleue 5.9, 2 Farino 6.9, 1 Parc provincial de la RiviÃ©re Bleue 7.9 and 2 Mount Koghi 8.9.
- 26 **Coconut Lorikeet** *Trichoglossus haematodus*
Only observed en route with 1 7.9.

- 27 **New Caledonian Myzomela** *Myzomela caledonica* Endemic
8 Parc provincial de la Rivière Bleue 5.9, 1 Farino 6.9, 4 Parc provincial de la Rivière Bleue 7.9 and 2 Mount Koghi 8.9.
- 28 **Cardinal Myzomela** *Myzomela cardinalis*
1 Lifou Is.--We 3.9 and 1 Ouvéa 4.9.
- 29 **Grey-eared Honeyeater** *Lichmera incana*
1 Lifou airport 3.9, 3 Lifou Is.--We 3.9, 1 Ouvéa 3.9, 1 there 4.9, 10 Parc provincial de la Rivière Bleue 5.9, 2 Farino 6.9 and 1 Grasslands above Bourail 6.9.
- 30 **New Caledonian Friarbird** *Philemon diemenensis* Endemic
1 Farino 6.9 and 1 Parc provincial de la Rivière Bleue 7.9.
- 31 **Crow Honeyeater** *Gymnomyza aubryana* (CR) Endemic
1 Parc provincial de la Rivière Bleue 5.9.
- 32 **Barred Honeyeater** *Glycifohia undulata* Endemic
1 Grasslands above Bourail 6.9 and 1 Mount Koghi 8.9.
- 33 **Fan-tailed Gerygone** *Gerygone flavolateralis*
1 Lifou Is.--We 3.9, 1 Ouvéa 4.9, 5 Parc provincial de la Rivière Bleue 5.9, 1 Farino 6.9, 1 Parc provincial de la Rivière Bleue 7.9 and 1 Mount Koghi 8.9.
- 34 **White-breasted Woodswallow** *Artamus leucorhynchus*
2 Lifou airport 3.9, 2 en route 5.9, 1 Farino 5.9 and 1 en route 8.9.
- 35 **South Melanesian Cuckooshrike** *Coracina caledonica*
1 Parc provincial de la Rivière Bleue 5.9, 1 Farino 6.9 and 4 Mount Koghi 8.9.
- 36 **New Caledonian Cuckooshrike** *Edolisoma anale* Endemic
1 Lifou Is.--We 3.9 and 1 Parc provincial de la Rivière Bleue 5.9 and 1 Parc provincial de la Rivière Bleue 7.9.
- 37 **Long-tailed Triller** *Lalage leucopyga*
1 Lifou Is.--We 3.9, 1 Ouvéa 3.9, 1 there 4.9 and 1 Parc provincial de la Rivière Bleue 5.9.
- 38 **Melanesian Whistler** *Pachycephala chlorura*
1 heard Lifou Is.--We 3.9 and 1 Ouvéa 4.9.
- 39 **New Caledonian Whistler** *Pachycephala caledonica* Endemic
2 Parc provincial de la Rivière Bleue 5.9, 1 Farino 5.9, 1 there 6.9, 2 Parc provincial de la Rivière Bleue 7.9 and 1 Mount Koghi 8.9.
- 40 **Rufous Whistler** *Pachycephala rufiventris*
1+2 Grasslands above Bourail 6.9.
- 41 **Grey Fantail** *Rhipidura albiscapa*
1 Parc provincial de la Rivière Bleue 5.9, 1 Farino 6.9 and 1 Mount Koghi 8.9.

- 42 **Streaked Fantail** *Rhipidura verreauxi*
1 Lifou Is.--We 3.9 and 1 Parc provincial de la Rivière Bleue 5.9 and 1 Parc provincial de la Rivière Bleue 7.9.
- 43 **Southern Shrikebill** *Clytorhynchus pachycephaloides*
1 Parc provincial de la Rivière Bleue 5.9 and 1 Mount Koghi 8.9.
- 44 **Melanesian Flycatcher** *Myiagra caledonica*
1 Lifou Is.--We 3.9 and 1 Parc provincial de la Rivière Bleue 5.9.
- 45 **New Caledonian Crow** *Corvus moneduloides* Endemic
2+1 heard Farino 6.9 and 1 heard Parc provincial de la Rivière Bleue 7.9.
- 46 **Yellow-bellied Flyrobin** *Microeca flaviventris* Endemic
1 Parc provincial de la Rivière Bleue 5.9 and 5 Parc provincial de la Rivière Bleue 7.9.
- 47 **Pacific Swallow** *Hirundo tahitica*
1 Ouvéa 4.9.
- 48 **Welcome Swallow** *Hirundo neoxena*
1 Lifou airport 3.9.
- 49 **New Caledonian Thicketbird** *Cincloramphus mariae* Endemic
2+1 heard Grasslands above Bourail 6.9.
- 50 **Small Lifou White-eye** *Zosterops minutus* Endemic
1 Lifou Is.--We 3.9.
- 51 **Green-backed White-eye** *Zosterops xanthochroa* Endemic
1 Parc provincial de la Rivière Bleue 5.9, 1 Farino 6.9, 10 Grasslands above Bourail 6.9 and 3 Mount Koghi 8.9.
- 52 **Silvereeye** *Zosterops lateralis*
1 Lifou Is.--We 3.9, 1 Ouvéa 4.9 and 3 Grasslands above Bourail 6.9.
- 53 **Large Lifou White-eye** *Zosterops inornatus* Endemic
1+1 heard Lifou Is.--We 3.9.
- 54 **Striated Starling** *Aplonis striata* Endemic
2 Lifou Is.--We 3.9, 2 Ouvéa 3.9, 1 there 4.9 and 2 Farino 5.9, 2 there 6.9.
- 55 **Red-throated Parrotfinch** *Erythrura psittacea* Endemic
1 Parc provincial de la Rivière Bleue 5.9 and 1 Parc provincial de la Rivière Bleue 7.9.
- 56 **Chestnut-breasted Mannikin** *Lonchura castaneothorax*
Only observed en route with 3 5.9.