

SOME NOTES ON BIRDS OF THE FIJI ISLANDS

By BARRY and JOANNA MORGAN

The Fiji Islands are centred on the 180° Meridian, 18° south, of volcanic origin and surrounded by barrier reefs. The larger islands are heavily forested on the mountainous southeast slopes where the rainfall exceeds 120 inches a year. The northwest is dry and flat to undulating hills where canefields cover much of the landscape.

During our 13 months' stay on the island of Viti Levu, we were able to record more than 60 species and make notes on permanent and migratory birds. Also a four-day visit to the island of Koro was made in April.

Detailed information was difficult as our time was usually limited to week-ends, and the density of the rain forest on the southeast part of the island made it difficult to observe, move freely, and find nesting birds. Lack of local observers in Suva added to the problem. The Fijians were not too helpful and we found that they had several names for one bird.

Of much help to us was Robin Mercer who has spent most of his life in the Islands and has observed and collected birds for the museum in Suva. He is a taxidermist and has done an excellent job in getting mounted specimens organized in display cases in the museum.

Of particular interest were the Giant Petrel (*Macronectes giganteus*) record and the ten weeks' stay of two Banded Dotterels (*Charadrius bicinctus*).

Regular counts of migratory waders were made at one particular spot — Suva Point — for a complete year. This area was a tidal flat clear of mangroves with a mixture of sand, mud and broken coral. The count was always made as the incoming tide forced the birds to feed in tight groups close to shore. Golden Plover counts were made on a large school lawn in the same vicinity where they regularly rest during high tide. Blank spaces in chart indicate no count was made.

SPECIES LIST

WANDERING ALBATROSS (*Diomedea exulans*)

Nearest sighting to Fiji was at 27° latitude S. on 22/9/62 while on ship to New Zealand.

GIANT PETREL (*Macronectes giganteus*)

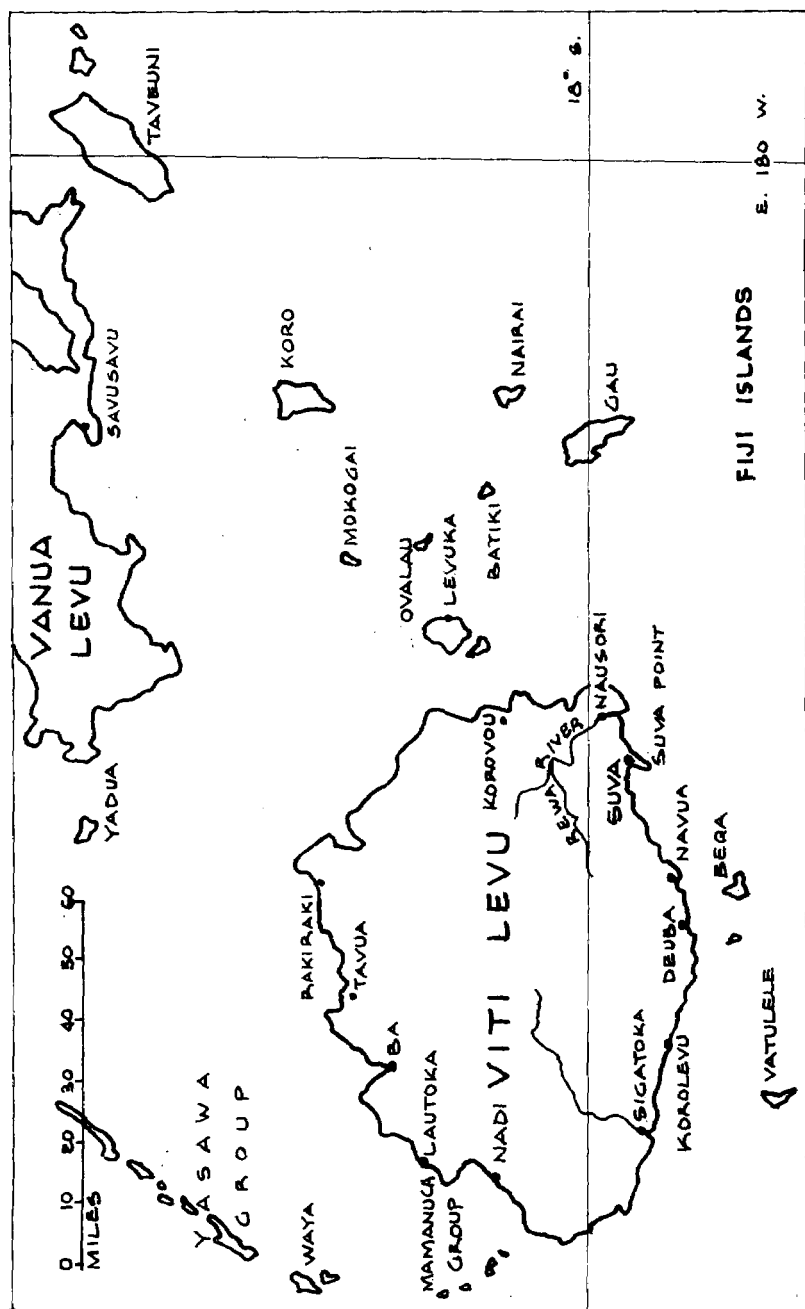
A dark grey immature bird was picked up off Suva Point on 22/8/61 by a fisherman. Band on left foot had following words: "Wildlife" C.S.I.R.O. Canberra Australia 1302513. It died a few days later. We found later that it had been banded as a nestling on Macquarie Island in January, 1961.

RED-TAILED TROPIC BIRD (*Phaethon rubricauda*)

An injured adult was picked up in Suva Harbour by a Fijian fisherman on 8/8/62. We nursed in for three weeks until its wing was strong enough for it to fly away. Other sightings were distant ones beyond the reef.

BROWN BOOBY (*Sula leucogaster*)

Only two sightings of this bird, one on 23/12/61 at Ba and the other was seen on 29/7/62 at Suva Point.



RED-FOOTED BOOBY (*Sula sula*)

Several small flocks seen only outside the reef near the island of Koro on 20/4/62. These were often in groups of four in adult and immature plumage. Two or more of these birds were usually noted in every flock of White-capped Noddies.

BLUE-FACED BOOBY (*Sula dactylatra*)

Seen 6/8/61 on ship between New Zealand and Fiji at 21° latitude s., one immature and one in near adult plumage.

LESSER FRIGATE BIRD (*Fregata ariel*)

Usually seen singly but occasionally several of both sexes noted soaring high overhead. More common on the dry northwestern side of Viti Levu. During our stay only 12 were seen.

BLACK-NAPED TERN (*Sterna sumatrana*)

On 26/3/62 R. Mercer saw five of these terns near Suva. Also on 9/9/62, 24 were seen on a sand bar about a mile off shore from Deuba. On the Island of Koro 15 were resting on rocks just off shore.

CRESTED TERN (*Sterna bergii*)

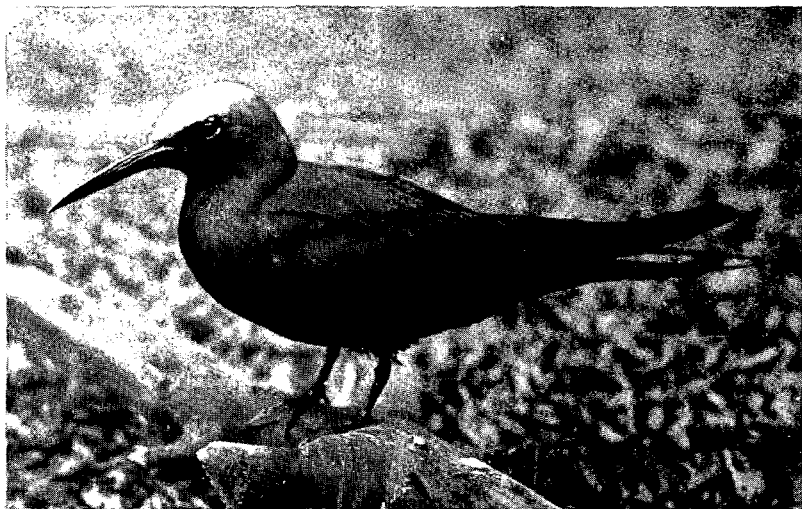
The most common and widespread tern along the coastal waters and reefs of Viti Levu and other islands of the Fiji group. Possibly nesting on small adjacent islands. This tern, because of its large size, is often thought to be a gull by local inhabitants.

SOOTY TERN (*Sterna fuscata*)

On 23/4/62 between Koro and Viti Levu, three seen at different times, all flying south-east towards a small island named Nairai.

WHITE-CAPPED NODDY (*Anous minutus*)

Generally seen just outside the reef in large flocks feeding on schools of small fish. At one time we counted up to 300 feeding in this manner (v. Pl. XVIII).



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MIGRANT WADERS SEEN AT SUVA POINT
FROM SEPT 9, 1961 TO SEPT 1, 1962.

SPECIES	DATE	SEP 9	SEP 19	SEP 23	OCT 1	OCT 3	NOV 11	NOV 20	NOV 24	DEC 3	JAN 14	FEB 16	MAR 18	APR 1	APR 7	MAY 5	MAY 20
WANDERING TATTLER			172			176				231	150	125	75+	170	125	125	
GOLDEN PLOVER	26	33	42		47	30	37	66	40	15+	40	20+	60	101	17	29	
BAR-TAILED GODWIT	3	2	1	7					15	12	20	6+	12	1			
WHIMBREL	SEE UNDER SPECIES LIST																
ASIATIC CURLEW	-	-	-	-	-					-	-	1	-	-	-	-	
TURNSTONE	26	21	3	9	30					16	2	40	20	2	1	1	5
MONGOLIAN DOTTRELL	-	-	-	-	-					1	-	-	-	-	-	-	
BANDED DOTTRELL	SEE BELOW																
DASH INDICATES SPECIES NOT SEEN																	
SPECIES	DATE CONT.	MAY 30	JUN 9	JUN 14	JUN 24	JUN 30	JUL 4	JUL 8	JUL 15	JUL 18	JUL 27	JUL 29	AUG 9	AUG 16	AUG 25	AUG 29	SEP 1
WANDERING TATTLER	72	45	81	80	63	55	75	53	30	36	52	57					175
GOLDEN PLOVER	23	22	23	23	31	31	23	26	27	30			26	29	23	29	26
BAR-TAILED GODWIT	2	-	1	2	5	5	5	1	2	2	4	8					-
WHIMBREL	SEE UNDER SPECIES LIST																
ASIATIC CURLEW	SEE FEB. 16 ABOVE																
TURNSTONE	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-				1
MONGOLIAN DOTTRELL	SEE MAY 5 AND UNDER SPECIES LIST																
BANDED DOTTRELL	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1

GOLDEN PLOVER (*Pluvialis dominica*)

Present in Fiji throughout the year. The largest numbers seen were at the Rewa River estuary where we counted 200+ on a large tidal flat in February 1962.

MONGOLIAN DOTTEREL (*Charadrius mongolus*)

Not noted regularly. Ten were seen on 18/2/62 at the Rewa River estuary and five at Suva Point on 20/5/62.

BANDED DOTTEREL (*Charadrius bicinctus*)

Two of these dotterels were first noticed with Golden Plovers on grass near Suva Point on 26/5/62 in non-breeding plumage. It was not until 1/7/62 that one began to change into breeding plumage. Full plumage was complete on 15/7/62. On 25/7/62 the other began to come into breeding plumage. They were last seen on 9/8/62.

WHIMBREL (*Numenius phaeopus*)

First sighting was one bird on 17/9/61 along the east coast in flight. At the Rewa River estuary, three were seen on 14/10/61 and 50 on 10/2/62.

ASIATIC CURLEW (*Numenius madagascariensis*)

Only noted once, a single bird at Suva Point on 16/2/62.

BAR-TAILED GODWIT (*Limosa lapponica*)

Seen throughout the year in small numbers of up to 20. No Black-tailed Godwits were sighted.

WANDERING TATTLER (*Heteroscelus incanus*)

The most common wader in Fiji with sightings throughout the year. During the months June, July and August the numbers were from 30 to 80 (probably non-breeders). The remaining months gave us counts of 125 to 230 with the peak about December, although a large number of about 400-500 were seen on 14/10/61 at the Rewa River estuary. During high tide the tattlers were often seen resting on mangrove roots about water. A careful watch for the Grey-tailed Tattler (*H. brevipes*) proved unsuccessful.

TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*)

Present throughout the year; up to 40 seen during January and February.

REEF HERON (*Egretta sacra*)

Common on Viti Levu and other islands feeding along shores at low tide. White phase was more common in some areas while in others the grey was predominant. Only a few of the mottled phase were seen (v. Pl. XIX & XX).

LITTLE MANGROVE BITTERN (*Butorides striatus*)

Seen only in the Suva area near mangroves occasionally moving onto open flats where it is difficult to see. It is very shy and hard to approach.

AUSTRALIAN GREY DUCK (*Anas superciliosa*)

Not seen by us along coastal regions but reported to be a short distance up the rivers.

FIJI GOSHAWK (*Accipiter rufitorques*)

Ten sightings throughout the year. Often in settled areas, but mostly in the bush and open forest.

SWAMP HARRIER (*Circus approximans*)

Not common, but noted throughout the year in several types of habitat such as mangroves, estuaries, bush and grasslands.

WHITE-BROWED RAIL (*Poliolimnas cinereus*)

Rails were thought to be extinct on Viti Levu because of the introduced mongoose. This rail was first seen on 20/5/62 in a very large swampy area of about 100 acres, approximately ten miles from Suva on the King's Road. A week later we saw another White-browed Rail on the opposite side of the road. It was lacking the white superciliary but in similar plumage to the first rail. No other rails were seen on Viti Levu although R. Mercer has seen Banded Rails (*Rallus philippensis*) on small offshore islands.

MANY-COLORED FRUIT DOVE (*Phelinopus perousii*)

Recorded several times but difficult to see. This bird is very partial to fruiting fig trees.

GOLDEN DOVE (*Ptilinopus luteovirens*)

Fairly common in thick forest but not seen as much as heard. The call is similar to the barking of a dog.



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XX — Reef Heron (*E. sacra*), grey phase, Fiji.

PACIFIC PIGEON (*Ducula pacifica*)

This pigeon, which is noted as being widespread in the Fiji Islands, was not seen at all. However, R. Mercer states that it is present on some of the islands of the Lau group.

PEALE'S PIGEON (*Ducula latrans*)

A shy pigeon of the forest that has been seen regularly throughout the year. Its large size could only be confused with the White-throated Pigeon.

WHITE-THROATED PIGEON (*Columba vitiensis*)

Only two sightings on the dry side of Viti Levu near Ba. Six of these pigeons were seen on the island of Koro which is mostly rain forest.

FRIENDLY GROUND DOVE (*Gallicolumba stairii*)

Seen only once in hilly forest country near Korolevu where we flushed it from the ground. It flew a short distance and then ran along the ground out of sight. The red feet were most noticeable.

CHINESE DOVE (*Streptopelia chinensis*)

A common introduced dove on Viti Levu and other islands in populated areas.

COLLARED LORY (*Phigys solitarius*)

Commonly seen feeding on coconut blossoms in numbers of two and three but sometimes more. Invades gardens in larger numbers when the *Erythrina* (Coral) trees are in blossom.

RED-BREASTED MUSK PARROT (*Prosopeia tabuensis*)

Supposedly introduced on Viti Levu but only one or two were seen in the Suva area and these were assumed to be cage escapes. It was noted on the island of Koro where it is endemic.

YELLOW-BREASTED MUSK PARROT (*Prosopeia personata*)

The common large parrot on Viti Levu which is usually seen in heavy forest country. It has a loud raucous call which can be heard for quite a distance.

FAN-TAILED CUCKOO (*Cacomantis pyrrhophanus*)

Noted mostly on the dry side of the island where it appears to prefer more open country.

BARN OWL (*Tyto alba*)

One seen at dusk flying along shoreline near Suva. In open grassland near Rakiraki we watched a pair hunting until two hours after sunrise. The following evening while still light, we saw another pair working the fields near Ba.

WHITE-RUMPED SWIFTLET (*Collocalia spodiopygia*)

Common and widespread throughout all the islands. A cave near Suva was visited several times where hundreds of these swiftlets nest.

WHITE-COLLARED KINGFISHER (*Halcyon chloris*)

The only kingfisher found in Fiji. Occasionally seen along shores and rivers but more often seen inland perched on power lines or trees. Fairly common.

PACIFIC SWALLOW (*Hirundo tahitica*)

Only two sightings on wet side of island but noticed commonly on dry side where it nests under shop porches, bridges and wharves.

POLYNESIAN TRILLER (*Lalage maculosa*)

Common in Suva gardens, coastal villages and forest edges. Found nesting in August, October and December.

RED-VENTED BULBUL (*Pycnonotus cafer*)

An introduced Indian bird common everywhere on Viti Levu and other islands except forest country.

ISLAND THRUSH (*Turdus poliocephalus*)

Not common. Usually inhabits dark undergrowth in forest country. Dark grey above, chestnut below, with striking orange bill. A pair observed near Deuba were continually singing a flute-like song which faded away on an ascending scale.

FIJI WARBLER (*Vitia ruficapilla*)

Not common. We only saw this bird a few times in hill forest country after being in Fiji nine months. It feeds in low bushes and on the ground. Often seen with Spotted Fantail.

SPOTTED FANTAIL (*Rhipidura spilodera*)

Can be seen from gardens to hill-forest.

SLATY FLYCATCHER (*Mayrornis lessoni*)

Can usually be seen in rain forest and often in more open forest.

FIJI SHRIKEBILL (*Clytorhynchus vitiensis*)

Always seen in dark forest. Noted from several places on wet side as well as on the island of Koro.

BLACK-FACED SHRIKEBILL (*Clytorhynchus nigrogularis*)

Not common and usually in dark forest. Only seen in two areas — Korolevu and 17 miles out King's Road. It searches for food amongst dead leaves attached to trees and vines. Voice of male is whistled high-pitched staccatto *whee-e-e-e-e* and same notes at lower pitch.

VANIKORO BROADBILL (*Myiagra vanikorensis*)

Seems to prefer gardens and forest edges to rain forest. Common throughout Viti Levu. Call is a sparrow-like chirp.

BLUE-CRESTED BROADBILL (*Myiagra azureocapilla*)

Although not common, this beautiful bird was seen in several areas of high forest country. Occasionally the male would raise its sky-blue crest which is most striking.

SCARLET ROBIN (*Petroica multicolor*)

Not common but seen frequently near forest edge and in cleared areas.

GOLDEN WHISTLER (*Pachycephala pectoralis*)

Males were seen in four different areas usually in rain forest. It lacks the black throat-bar of the Australian species.

WHITE-BREASTED WOOD SWALLOW (*Artamus leucorhynchus*)

Very common throughout Fiji and can often be seen perched on wires or dead limbs. It differs from the Australian species in having an all white breast.

POLYNESIAN STARLING (*Aplonis tabuensis*)

This bird is supposed to be common and widespread — in the forest as well as along the shore and near human habitation. Yet no one here knew of it and we did not see one until our last month in Fiji. Four were seen in a high tree feeding on fruit and later two singing from an exposed branch. Near this area we saw one fly into a hole in a dead Pandanus tree and we were able to watch it more carefully as it was nesting. This area, Wailoku Road, is forest country and about ten miles from Suva.

INDIAN MYNA (*Acridotheres tristis*)

Introduced. Very common in gardens and inhabited areas.

DUSKY CRESTED MYNA (*Acridotheres fuscus*)

Now almost as common as the Indian Myna. These two birds, plus the bulbul, have now become pests because of their great numbers and their liking of fruit. [The identity of this myna has long been uncertain. It is now generally agreed that it is not *cristatellus*. Ed.] (v. Pl. XXII.)



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XXI — Wattle Honeyeater (*Foulehaio carunculata*) feeding on pedilanthus blossoms, Fiji.



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XXII — Dusky Crested Myna, Fiji.

ORANGE-BREASTED HONEYEATER (*Myzomela jugularis*)

A very common bird around Hibiscus and other flowering plants in gardens. Also amongst flowering mangroves and coconut palms in country areas. Bill is black, not red as is stated in "Birds of the Southwest Pacific."

WATTLED HONEYEATER (*Foulehaio carunculata*)

As widespread as *M. jugularis* but not quite as numerous. It has a loud clear song often heard first thing in the morning and sometimes after dark. (v. Pl. XXI).

GIANT FOREST HONEYEATER (*Gymnomyza viridis*)

Found in forest country where it is more often heard than seen. It is not uncommon as the call can be heard ringing out over the valley on most visits to the forest. It sometimes begins calling two hours before dawn.

LAYARD'S SILVEREYE (*Zosterops explorer*)

Fairly common. Seems to prefer forest areas.

GREY-BACKED SILVEREYE (*Zosterops lateralis*)

Commonly found in gardens, forest and open country throughout Fiji.

RED-HEADED PARROT FINCH (*Erythrura cyanovirens*)

Common on Viti Levu and usually seen feeding under trees on roadside. Probably was a bird of the true forest as Mayr states, but now appears to be common in open country bordering forest and built-up areas. A pair nested in the Botanical Gardens in Suva on 5/5/62. Also 50 were seen feeding in a rice field near Deuba and several could always be seen on large school lawns near the sea at Suva Point.

STRAWBERRY FINCH (*Estrilda amandava*)

Introduced from Asia and very common. Large flocks can be seen in any grassland area around Suva and other settled areas. Flocks numbering over 100 birds can frequently be seen in cultivated fields.

JAVA SPARROW (*Padda oryzivora*)

Introduced and probably a recent cage escape as these birds were only seen in the Suva area. A count of 110 was made on the lawn at Suva Point.

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