

SHORT NOTES ON FIJIAN BIRDS

NOTES ON THE PINK-BILLED PARROT-FINCH OF FIJI

The Pink-billed Parrot-finch, *Erythrura kleinschmidti* (Finsch, 1878), is confined to true rainforest on the high, rugged island of Viti Levu, Fiji. Little is known about this rare bird, which has been recorded only a few times since its discovery in the 1870s.

It has been reported from the Nadrau Plateau of Central Viti Levu (Mercer 1965: 25) at about 3,000' (914 m) but other sightings have been made at much lower altitudes in rainforest near Suva, on the south coast. The Whitney Expedition collected specimens from the latter area in 1924 and 1925 (Mayr 1931: 10), while A. H. Martin saw it at about 300' (91 m) at Lami, on the north shore of Suva Harbour (Martin, manuscript note). He recorded the egg as being light red with dark red spots (Martin 1936: 6). The late W. J. Belcher's painting of the Pink-billed Parrot-finch seems to have been done at Lami, as Mount Korobaba is featured in its background. It was painted in early 1925 (Belcher Painting No. 22) and is probably of birds collected by the Whitney Expedition.

During 1971 further sightings of the Pink-billed Parrot-finch were made in dense rainforest near Joske's Thumb, a volcanic plug northwest of Suva. Here, at 9.00 a.m. on 7 March 1971, one of us (F.C.) positively identified a lone bird which sat for several seconds on a small branch some eight feet (2½ m) above the track and not twenty feet (6 m) from him (300' (91 m) altimeter reading).

Although F.C. was in the Joske's Thumb area regularly during the following months, no further sightings were made until 28 November 1971, when at 2 p.m. I.P. and F.C. saw at least two Pink-billed Parrot-finches only a hundred yards from where the previous sighting was made (270' (82 m) altimeter reading). One of the birds moved about some twenty feet (6 m) up in the understorey, perching every now and then on small branches, then darting off again. Some mature and immature Red-headed Parrot-finches (*Erythrura cyanovirens*) were also moving about nearby, and an adult one perched near the Pink-billed Parrot-finch for several seconds. The birds were of similar length, but the Pink-bill had a noticeably stouter body. Through 10 x 40 binoculars F.C. saw the Pink-billed Parrot-finch feed on a small white flower some thirty feet (9 m) up in the understorey. While I.P. was watching this bird at close range, F.C. saw a second Pink-billed Parrot-finch in a densely foliated tree some twenty yards (18 m) distant.

The large, flesh-pink bill, dark head, olive-green upperparts, lighter yellowish-green underparts, and bright red rump were all noted. The bill is the dominant field characteristic, being visible to the naked eye at quite long range, even in a poor light.

Nothing positive has been recorded about the food of this strange finch, although the suggestion that it "may feed on flower buds" (Mayr 1945: 148) seems to be confirmed by this most recent sighting. In the past the bird was usually described as inhabiting the mountain forest, but it would appear more accurate to say that it is found in rugged rainforest regions at both high and relatively low altitudes.

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SUNBATHING BY THE FIJI GOSHAWK

On the glary noon of 14 April 1971 I saw an immature Fiji Goshawk (*Accipiter rufitorques*) perched four feet off the ground in a tree in Government House grounds, Suva. When harassed by a Wattled Honeyeater (*Foulehaio carunculata procerior*), the goshawk flew some fifty yards to perch in a densely foliated tree. A few minutes later an adult goshawk flew from deeper in the grounds, and landed in the shade about thirty yards from where the young bird was sitting. It pecked about at the grass, apparently in search of insects. At this point the immature hawk flew down and, landing on the sun-lit lawn, lay on its belly and spread its wings to their full extent. The adult walked out into the sunshine and lay down in a similar position. Both birds remained like this for several minutes, after which the immature walked about a little, then stretched out again, while the adult flew into a nearby tree. The young hawk soon flew up to join the older one in the tree.