Solomon Islands

Endemics of the Archipelago



Rennell Shrikebill by Adam Riley

Few destinations capture the excitement of island birding quite like the Solomon Islands. Scattered across the tropical waters of the southwest Pacific, this remarkable archipelago comprises rugged volcanic islands, forested mountains, remote coral atolls and idyllic lagoons. Millions of years of geographical isolation have produced an extraordinary diversity of birds, including numerous highly localised endemics, some restricted to just a single island. For the visiting birder, each journey between islands brings the prospect of encountering an entirely new collection of specialities, making the Solomons one of the most rewarding and fascinating birding destinations in the Pacific.

Our exploration begins on Guadalcanal, where tropical forests harbour such sought-after species as Ultramarine Kingfisher, Chestnut-bellied Monarch and Finsch's Pygmy Parrot. We then venture into the spectacular Western Province, using Gizo as our base to explore the forested islands of Kolombangara, Vella Lavella and Ranongga. Here, an impressive selection of exceptionally range-restricted birds awaits, including Gizo, Kolombangara, Vella Lavella and Ranongga White-eyes, Kolombangara Monarch and the elusive New Georgia Dwarf Kingfisher.

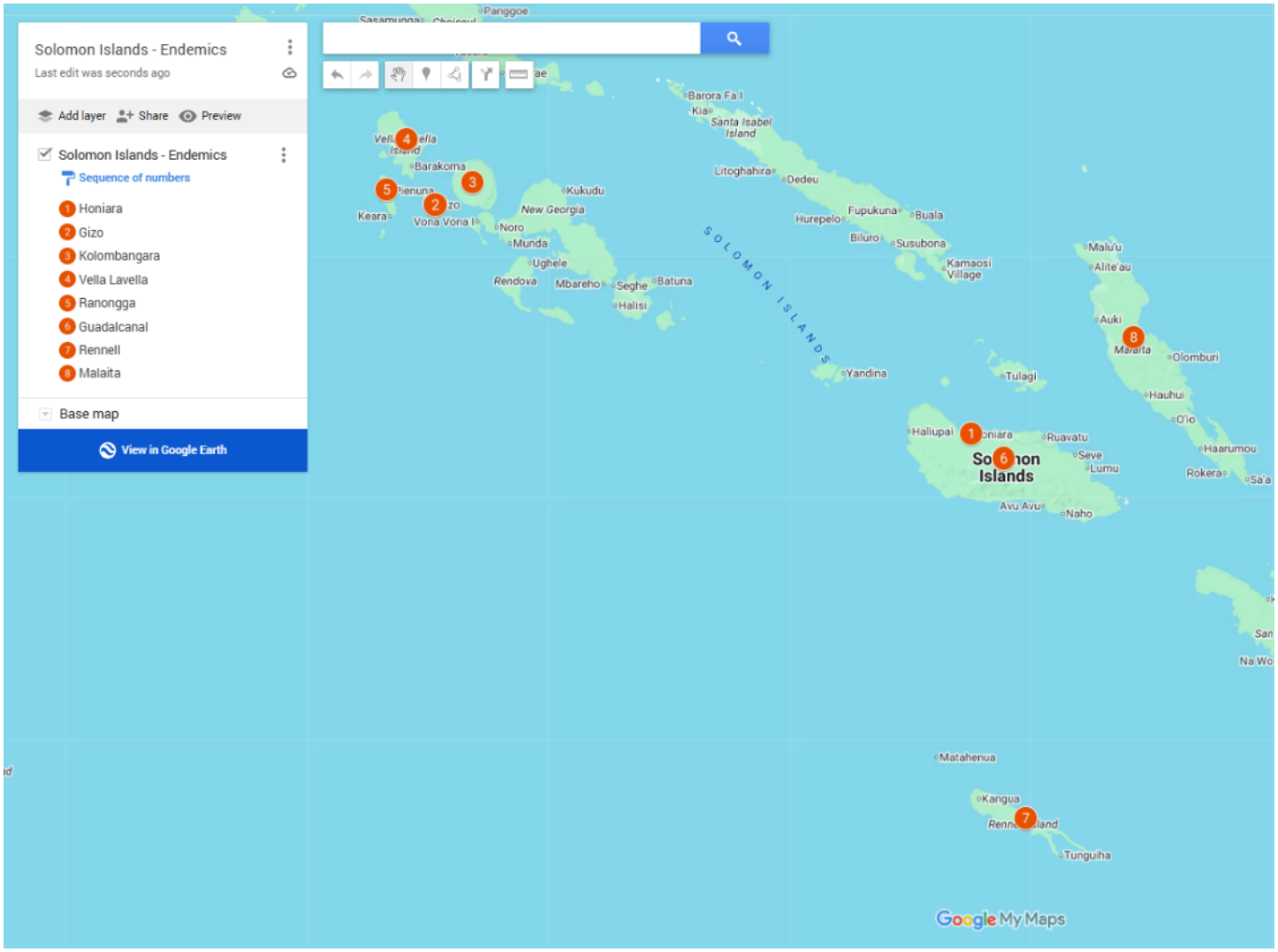
Further south, the extraordinary raised coral atoll of Rennell supports its own distinctive collection of endemics, including Rennell Starling, Rennell Shrikebill, Rennell Fantail and the difficult Rennell Whistler. Our exploration continues to Malaita, where targets include Malaita Owl, Malaita White-eye, White-gorgeted Fantail, Sanford's

Sea Eagle and the secretive Woodford's Rail. Throughout our travels, colourful fruit doves, imperial pigeons, parrots, kingfishers and an assortment of other tropical forest species add considerably to the experience.

Beyond its exceptional birdlife, the Solomon Islands offer magnificent tropical scenery, rich cultural traditions and a fascinating history. Our inter-island boat journeys provide opportunities for seabirds, dolphins and spectacular coastal scenery, while time on Guadalcanal allows us to explore sites associated with one of the pivotal campaigns of the Second World War. Combining outstanding endemic birding with remote island exploration, remarkable natural beauty and a genuine sense of adventure, this tour offers an unforgettable introduction to one of the Pacific's least-explored birding destinations.

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival in Honiara, Guadalcanal Island**
Day 2	**Mount Austen**
Day 3	**Honiara; flight to Gizo, Western Province**
Day 4	**Day trip to Kolombangara Island**
Day 5	**Day trip to Vella Lavella Island & Ranongga Island**
Day 6	**Gizo; flight to Honiara. Historic tour of Guadalcanal**
Day 7	**Honiara; flight to Rennell Island**
Day 8	**Rennell; flight to Honiara, ferry to Malaita Island**
Days 9 & 10	**Malaita Island**
Day 11	**Malaita; ferry to Honiara**
Day 12	**Central Guadalcanal**
Day 13	**Final departure**


Solomon Islands - Endemics
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Solomon Islands - Endemics
Sequence of numbers
1 Honiara
2 Gizo
3 Kolombangara
4 Vella Lavella
5 Ranongga
6 Guadalcanal
7 Rennell
8 Malaita
Base map
View in Google Earth
Barakoma
Kukudu
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Santa Isabel Island
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SOLOMON ISLANDS
Yandina
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Birding sites in detail

Honiara & Guadalcanal – World War II History. Honiara, the capital of the Solomon Islands, is situated on the northern coast of Guadalcanal, the country's largest island. Although now a bustling administrative and commercial centre, Guadalcanal occupies an important place in the history of the Pacific, having been the scene of some of the most significant battles of the Second World War.



Guadalcanal War Memorial by Ryan Chenery

The Guadalcanal Campaign, fought between August 1942 and February 1943, marked a major turning point in the Pacific War. American forces landed on the island in August 1942, beginning a prolonged struggle against Japanese forces for control of the strategically important airfield at Lunga Point. Renamed Henderson Field by the Americans, the airfield survives today as Honiara International Airport. The surrounding hills, dense jungles and offshore waters witnessed months of fierce fighting, while the waters between Guadalcanal and the nearby islands became known as Ironbottom Sound because of the numerous warships sunk during the campaign.

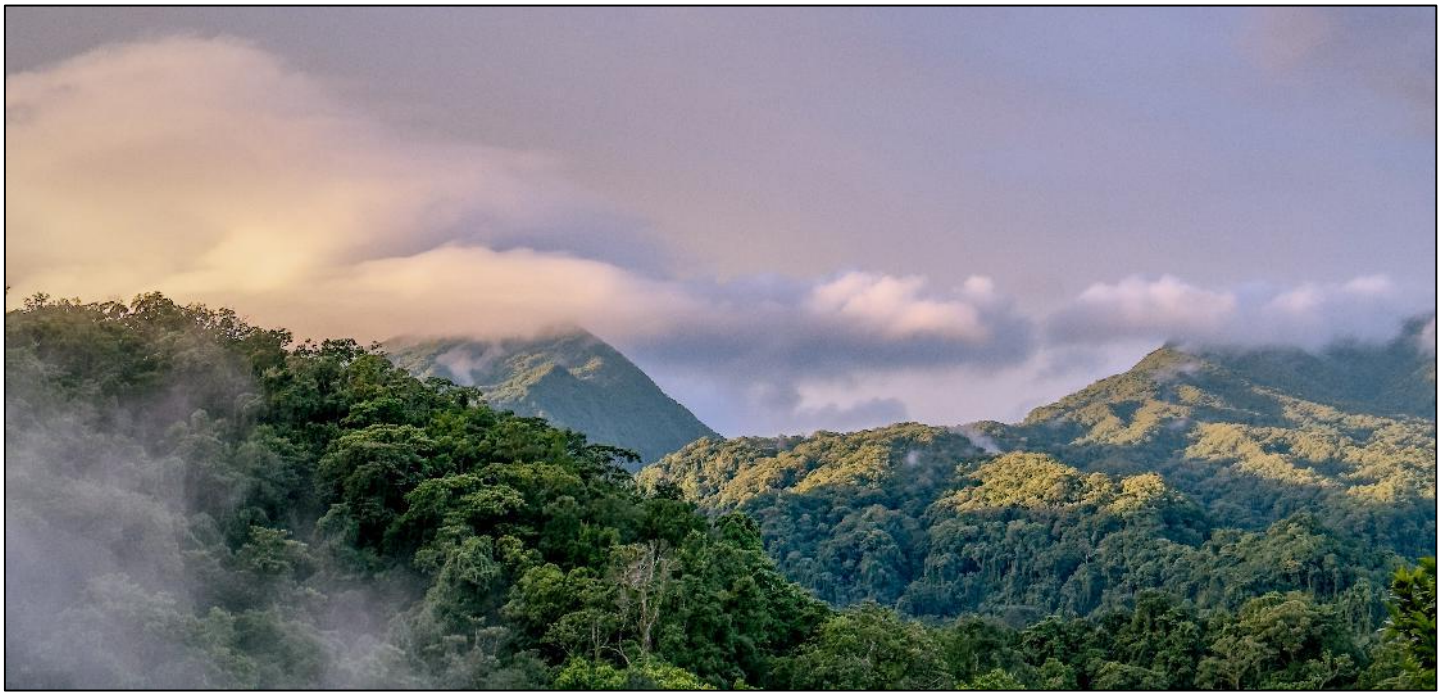
Following the war, Honiara replaced the badly damaged town of Tulagi as the capital of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate, taking advantage of the infrastructure established by American forces. Subject to regional flight schedules, we plan to enjoy a guided historical excursion around Honiara and its surroundings, visiting locations associated with the Guadalcanal Campaign and gaining an appreciation of the island's important wartime history.



Solomons Corella by Ryan Chenery

Mount Austen. Rising above Honiara, the forested slopes of Mount Austen provide an excellent introduction to the birds of the Solomon Islands. The area supports a mixture of tropical forest, secondary growth and wooded slopes, with several interesting species occurring relatively close to the capital.

Our birding here will concentrate on a selection of regional specialities, including the attractive Ultramarine Kingfisher, Spot-breasted Cuckoo-Dove, Brown-winged Starling and Chestnut-bellied Monarch. The



Forests of Kolombangara by Ryan Chenery

surrounding forests also support a variety of pigeons, cuckoos, honeyeaters and other characteristic Solomon Island species. We will explore suitable forest trails and lower-elevation habitats, taking advantage of opportunities to locate both widespread regional birds and more localised specialities.

Mount Austen also has considerable historical significance, having been the scene of fierce ground fighting during the latter stages of the Guadalcanal Campaign. Japanese forces occupied the commanding heights overlooking Henderson Field, and American troops subsequently fought a series of difficult engagements through the surrounding jungle and ridges during December 1942 and January 1943.

Gizo. The Western Province of the Solomon Islands presents a spectacular landscape of forested volcanic islands, sheltered lagoons, coral reefs and turquoise waters. Gizo, one of the principal centres of the Western Solomons, will serve as our base for exploring several islands, each supporting its own distinctive collection of endemic birds.



White-winged Fantail by Ryan Chenery

Gizo itself is particularly important for the range-restricted Gizo White-eye, a species confined to this small island. We will search suitable woodland and forest-edge habitats for this attractive endemic, while other possibilities include the diminutive Steel-blue Flycatcher and a selection of more widespread island species.

The surrounding coastal environment is equally appealing, with shallow reefs, tropical marine life and excellent scenery. Our accommodation is situated

close to the coast, providing opportunities to enjoy the relaxed atmosphere of the Western Solomons between birding excursions. Depending on available time and conditions, there may also be opportunities for swimming or snorkelling in the surrounding waters.



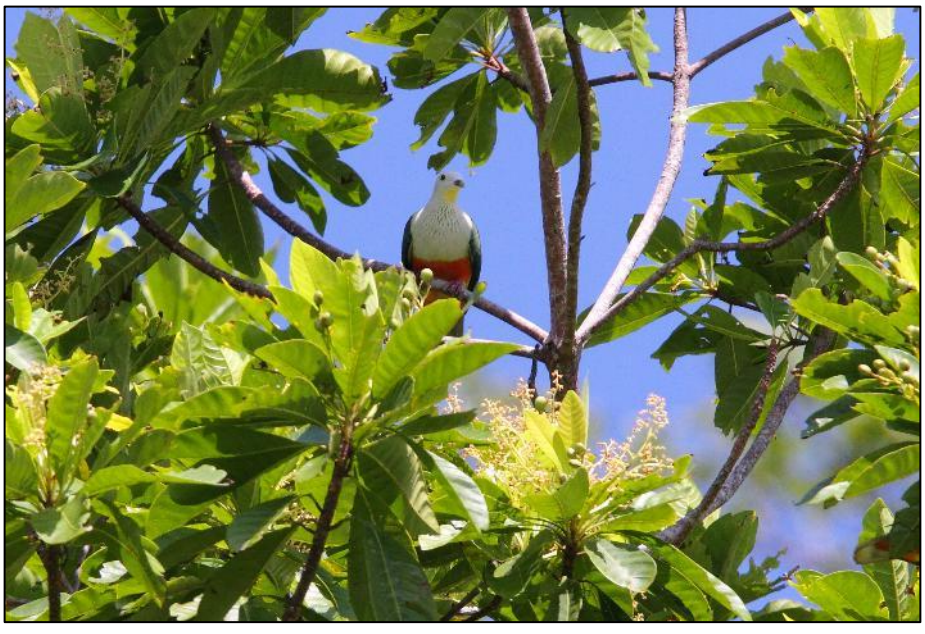
Malaita Airstrip by Ryan Chenery

Kolombangara Island. Kolombangara is one of the most striking islands in the Western Solomons, dominated by a steep, heavily forested volcanic mountain that rises dramatically from the surrounding sea. Its upper slopes are frequently shrouded in cloud, while the extensive tropical forests support a remarkable diversity of birds, including several species restricted to the island or the wider New Georgia group.

Reaching Kolombangara involves a speedboat crossing from Gizo, followed by a four-wheel-drive transfer into the forested interior. Our birding will concentrate on the lower and middle-elevation forests, where we will explore trails in search of an impressive selection of regional specialities. Principal targets include the highly localised Kolombangara White-eye and Kolombangara Monarch, together with the distinctive White-capped Monarch and Solomons White-eye.

Other possibilities include Solomons Cicadabird, Barred Cuckooshrike, Long-tailed Myna, Blyth's Hornbill, Solomons Corella (Ducorp's Cockatoo), White-winged Fantail and Yellow-vented Myzomela. We will also search for Long-tailed Koel, Metallic and Pale Mountain Pigeons, and Meek's Lorikeet.

The birding area around Imbu Rano offers superb views across the surrounding forested valleys, with opportunities to scan for soaring raptors and other canopy species. This island also played an important role during the 1943 New Georgia Campaign, when Japanese and Allied naval forces fought several major engagements in the surrounding waters, including the Battle of Kolombangara in July 1943.

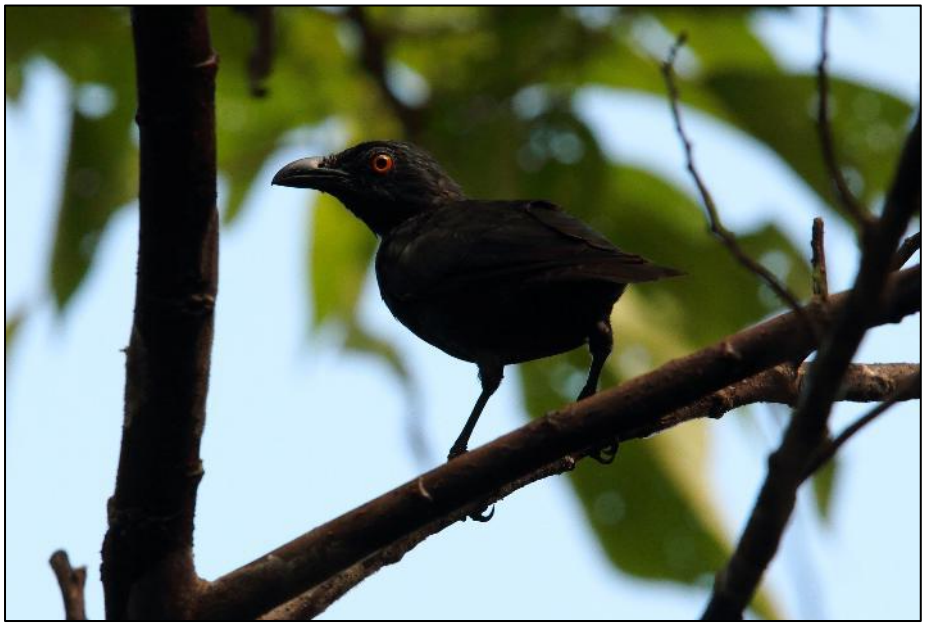


Silver-capped Fruit Dove by Adam Riley

Vella Lavella Island. Situated northwest of Kolombangara, Vella Lavella is another densely forested island of considerable ornithological interest. Its relatively isolated position has encouraged the development of distinctive bird populations.

Our principal target is the Vella Lavella White-eye, a species restricted to the island and one of the key birds of our Western Province exploration. We will search appropriate forest and

woodland habitats, while also keeping a close watch for the tiny and extremely elusive New Georgia Dwarf Kingfisher. This remarkable little kingfisher is notoriously difficult to locate, and Vella Lavella provides our main opportunity to encounter it during the tour.



Rennell Starling by Adam Riley

Ranongga Island. Ranongga is a comparatively small, forested island situated close to Vella Lavella. Despite its modest size, it supports an interesting bird community, including another highly localised endemic, the Ranongga White-eye.

Western Solomons – Inter-island Waters. The numerous boat journeys between Gizo, Kolombangara, Vella Lavella and Ranongga provide more than simply transport between birding sites. The surrounding waters offer opportunities for observing seabirds, marine mammals and some of the exceptional marine biodiversity for which the region is renowned. The Solomon Islands form the eastern part of the Coral Triangle, one of the richest marine biodiversity regions on Earth, supporting extensive coral reefs and an extraordinary variety of tropical marine life.

During our crossings we will keep watch for Red-footed Booby, Black and Brown Noddies, Greater Crested, Common and Roseate Terns, and a variety of other pelagic species. With considerable luck, more unusual possibilities include Bulwer's Petrel, Wedge-tailed Shearwater, Wilson's Storm Petrel, Long-tailed Jaeger and the extremely scarce Heinroth's Shearwater, one of the most sought-after seabirds of the southwest Pacific.

Dolphins and other cetaceans are additional possibilities, although sightings will depend on prevailing sea conditions and the routes followed during our island excursions.



Rennell White-eye by Adam Riley

Rennell Island. Situated well south of Guadalcanal, Rennell is one of the most extraordinary islands in the Solomon archipelago. Recognised as the largest raised coral atoll in the world, the island represents an immense ancient coral formation that has been uplifted above sea level. Much of its surface is covered in tropical forest growing over limestone, creating an unusual environment that has supported the evolution of several distinctive bird species.

The southern portion of the island, known as East Rennell, is recognised

as a UNESCO World Heritage Site for its exceptional natural history and importance to the study of island biogeography. Rennell is also culturally distinctive, with a predominantly Polynesian heritage that contrasts with the Melanesian traditions prevalent across much of the Solomon Islands.



Rennell Fantail by Adam Riley

Rennell Starling and Rennell White-eye generally the most approachable of the islands endemics, while the skulking Rennell Shrikebill, Silver-capped Fruit Dove and the small, active Rennell Gerygone require rather more careful searching. Rennell Fantail and Rennell Whistler complete this impressive endemic collection, with the latter often proving particularly challenging to locate. We will concentrate our efforts on suitable forest habitats, searching carefully through the understorey, middle levels and canopy for these distinctive birds.

Malaita Island. Malaita is one of the larger and more densely populated islands of the Solomon archipelago, although extensive areas of tropical forest remain across its rugged interior. The island supports a diverse avifauna, including several highly desirable species and distinctive island forms.

Our birding will concentrate initially on the forested highlands for the endemic White-gorgeted Fantail, Blyth's Hornbill, Red-vested Myzomela, Claret-breasted Fruit Dove and the beautiful Superb Fruit Dove, while Chestnut-bellied Imperial Pigeon is another key possibility. We will also search for the elusive Malaita Owl, together with the distinctive local form of Oriole Whistler.

Further birding through the island's forest habitats offers opportunities for Yellow-bibbed and Cardinal Lories, Coconut Lorikeet, Papuan Eclectus, Pacific Baza, White-bellied and Barred Cuckooshrikes, Midget Flowerpecker, Solomons Monarch and the endemic Malaita White-eye. Long-tailed Myna, Malaita Cicadabird, Metallic Starling and Singing Starling are additional possibilities.



Malaita Owl by Jonathan Slifkin

The coastal lowlands around Auki, Malaita's principal town, provide an interesting contrast to the forested highlands, with a mixture of woodland, coastal vegetation, sheltered bays and conservation areas supporting several additional target species. One of our most important

species in this region is the impressive, endemic Sanford's Sea Eagle. Equally desirable is Woodford's Rail, an elusive and localised inhabitant of dense lowland vegetation. We will devote time to searching suitable habitats for this difficult species, which can require considerable patience and persistence.

The surrounding coastal areas also provide opportunities for a selection of waders and shorebirds. Depending on seasonal movements and local conditions, possibilities include Terek, Sharp-tailed and Common Sandpipers, Beach Thick-knee, Striated Heron and Pacific Reef Heron.



Finsch's Pygmy Parrot by Adam Riley

Central Guadalcanal. The mountainous interior of Guadalcanal supports extensive areas of tropical rainforest, providing a very different birding experience from the coastal lowlands around Honiara. Here we will explore forest trails in the vicinity of our mountain lodge for Moustached Treeswift, Solomons Corella, Red-knobbed and Island Imperial Pigeons, Brahminy Kite and a variety of other characteristic forest birds.

Among the smaller target species are Steel-blue Flycatcher, Brown-winged Starling and the extraordinary Finsch's Pygmy Parrot. One of the smallest parrots in the world, this diminutive species can be especially difficult to locate as it moves quietly through the forest canopy and larger tree trunks.

Our exploration of central Guadalcanal will also include a visit to a locally operated cacao farm, where flowering gardens and surrounding secondary forest provide opportunities for additional birding. Olive-backed Sunbird and Midget Flowerpecker are possible around the flowering vegetation, while Buff-headed Coucal and Long-tailed Myna may be encountered in the nearby forest.



Malaita home stay accommodation by Ryan Chenery

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		Moderate to brisk pace, with several early starts and long travel days. Good general health, reasonable fitness and mobility required. Multiple island transfers and remote locations.
Birding Ease		Moderate. Several elusive forest endemics requiring patience and persistence. Birding can be challenging in dense tropical vegetation.
Accommodation		Basic to comfortable. Standards vary considerably between islands, with some shared bathroom facilities & differences between rooms.
Walking / Trails		Mostly easy to moderate, occasionally more demanding. Uneven, muddy or steep forest trails in hot, humid conditions.
Vehicles / Roads		Minibuses, cars and 4x4 vehicles. Variable road conditions, including rough & unsealed sections. Multiple domestic flights, ferries & chartered boats.
Photography		Worthwhile to good, particularly around coastal habitats. Forest photography is difficult due to poor light & dense vegetation.
Annoyances		Hot, humid conditions, tropical rain, insects, variable accommodation standards and possible flight or boat delays. Some potentially rough sea crossings.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 13;
- All lodgings;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- Scheduled & chartered regional boats between each island as noted in the itinerary;
- All local community and reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services;
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: Single accommodation is only possible during our nights in Honiara. Accommodation on islands is extremely limited, and shared rooms or sleeping arrangements may be unavoidable, regardless of whether a single supplement has been paid. The single supplement is applicable where individual accommodation can be provided. We will make reasonable efforts to accommodate individual rooming preferences, but privacy and single occupancy cannot be guaranteed in the highlands.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short notice due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- This tour involves considerable travel between islands, using a combination of domestic flights, scheduled ferries, chartered speedboats and road transport. While we have carefully planned the itinerary, transport schedules in the Solomon Islands are subject to change, sometimes at short notice. Flexibility is essential, and changes to the routing, order of visits or time spent on individual islands may be necessary.
- Several of the islands visited are relatively remote, with limited tourism infrastructure and facilities. Accommodation standards vary considerably, ranging from basic local guesthouses to comfortable hotels. Rooms within the same property may differ in quality, amenities and views, while some accommodation offers shared bathroom and shower facilities only.
- Birding will take place in a variety of habitats, including coastal woodland, secondary growth and tropical rainforest. Walking is generally easy to moderate, although some forest trails may be uneven, steep or slippery, particularly following rain. A reasonable level of fitness, good balance and mobility are recommended.
- Our excursions to Kolombangara, Vella Lavella and Ranongga involve travel by small boat. Sea conditions can be variable, and crossings may occasionally be rough or uncomfortable. Guests should be comfortable boarding and disembarking small boats, sometimes at basic or wet landing facilities.
- The Solomon Islands experience a tropical climate, with generally hot and humid conditions throughout the year. Rainfall is possible at any time, including occasional heavy downpours. Conditions in forested areas can be particularly humid, while exposed coastal areas and boat journeys may be considerably hotter.
- Several of our target birds are highly localised, scarce or particularly elusive. Although we will make every reasonable effort to locate the key species, sightings cannot be guaranteed. Our daily activities may be adjusted according to local conditions, recent sightings and the accessibility of particular birding sites.
- Medical facilities are limited on many of the islands we visit, and some birding locations are a considerable distance from reliable medical assistance. Guests should be in good general health and carry sufficient supplies of any necessary personal medication. Comprehensive travel insurance, including emergency medical evacuation cover, is strongly recommended.
- The historical excursion around Guadalcanal is subject to available time and prevailing domestic flight schedules. Similarly, opportunities for swimming or snorkelling in the Western Province will depend on weather conditions, available time and local arrangements.

IMPORTANT: Due to the nature of travel within the Solomon Islands, changes to the itinerary may be unavoidable. Guests should approach this tour with a flexible attitude and an appreciation for the challenges and rewards of exploring a relatively remote Pacific archipelago.

Arrival and Departure Details

The tour will begin with a welcome dinner at our hotel in Honiara in the evening of day 1. The tour will conclude here on day 13 after breakfast.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Honiara International Airport (IATA: HIR) is the main port of entry and departure for this tour.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.