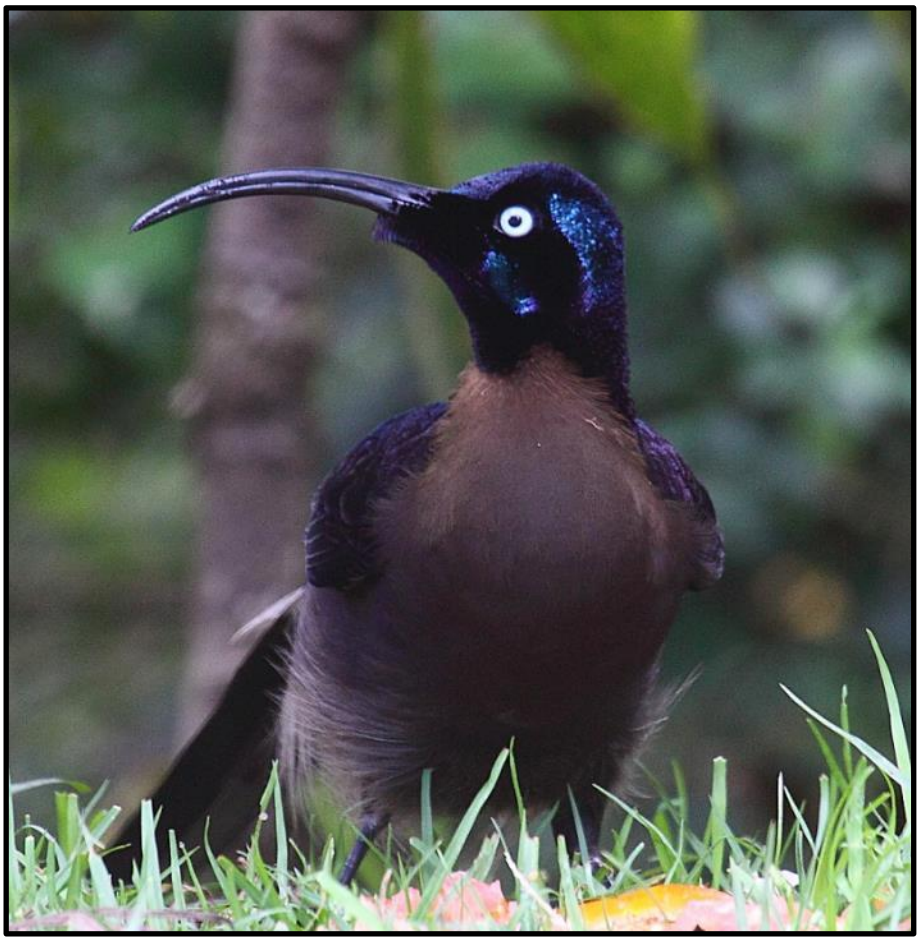
Papua New Guinea

Highlights II

29th August to 8th September 2023 (11 days)



Brown Sicklebill by David Hoddinott

Of all the world's birding destinations, Papua New Guinea must certainly rank amongst the most fascinating and exotic. The second largest island on Earth, New Guinea was the last inhabited island to be explored by Europeans, and even today many areas have little or no exposure to Western influence. The virtually untouched forests come alive with incredible fruit doves, fig parrots, fairywrens, jewel-babblers, pittas, honeyeaters and berrypeckers, while over twenty species of dazzling birds-of-paradise present sometimes unbelievably iridescent colours and wild tail plumes in one of the most astonishing exhibits of the natural world!

Travelling by air, road, and boat we will explore the diverse habitats of the country, from winding lowland rivers and sprawling grasslands, to the richly forested highlands. Local tribes still dress themselves to mimic the island's fabulous birds, adorned with elaborate head plumes made from the feathers of parrots and birds-of-paradise. Our tour covers the highlights of this enchanted and little-travelled country. We can expect a phenomenal variety of remarkable birds in and amongst vast regions of immaculate forests that have been experienced by few people on earth.

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival in Port Moresby**
Day 2	**Port Moresby to Rondon Ridge via Mount Hagen**
Day 3	**Rondon Ridge**
Day 4	**Rondon Ridge to Mount Hagen area**
Days 5 & 6	**Mount Hagen area**
Day 7	**Mount Hagen to Kiunga**
Day 8	**Kiunga area**
Day 9	**Kiunga to Port Moresby**
Day 10	**Varirata National Park**
Day 11	**Final departure**



Birding sites in detail

Pacific Adventist University. The Pacific Adventist University affords a pleasant introduction to some of the woodland and wetland birds of the island. The expansive grounds of the university contain gardens and patches of habitat suitable for a surprising variety of lowland species that can literally teem with birds.



Fawn-breasted Bowerbird by Dušan Brinkhuizen

We'll likely find the huge Blue-winged Kookaburra with its distinctive raucous call, flocks of migrant Black-faced Cuckooshrike that can often number more than 50 at a time, as well as the attractive Rufous-banded and Yellow-tinted Honeyeaters. The loud calls of New Guinea Friarbird are heard throughout the grounds, while conspicuous Black-backed Butcherbirds and the huge, skulking Pheasant Coucal patrol the scrubby edge. One of the key birds here is the subtly attractive Fawn-breasted Bowerbird and we will also look for Torresian Imperial Pigeon, Orange-fronted Fruit Dove, Torresian Crow, the locally uncommon Bar-shouldered Dove, endemic Gray-headed Mannikin and flocks of attractive Australasian Figbird and Yellow-faced Myna. The grounds support many ponds and we can expect to see Comb-crested Jacana, Australasian Swamphen, Dusky Moorhen and good numbers of Pacific Black Duck and Wandering and Plumed Whistling Ducks. Other species we may encounter include Green Pygmy Goose, Grey Teal, Radjah Shelduck and Nankeen Night Heron. Overhead we will keep an eye out for Whistling and Brahminy Kites, noisy Rainbow Bee-eaters, White-breasted Woodswallows and Pacific Swallow. Variable Goshawk hunt throughout the grounds, and in the late afternoon we will seek out a roost of the impressively large Papuan Frogmouth!

Varirata National Park. Varirata National Park is situated in the foothills above the city. En route to the park entrance, we will pass by the head of the notorious Kokoda Trail, where valiant efforts by Australian and local troops halted the Japanese march during the Second World War.



Radjah Shelduck & Wandering Whistling Duck by Glen Valentine

The dry eucalypt forests that flank the quiet access road to Varirata provide superb birding and noisy screeches will reveal pairs of stunning Black-capped Lory and flocks of busy Coconut Lorikeet and Red-cheeked Parrot. Here we will find a mix of New Guinea endemics and species shared with Australia. Likely birds may include the attractive White-shouldered Fairywren, Black Sunbird, White-throated Honeyeater, White-bellied Cuckooshrike, Varied Triller, Lemon-bellied Flyrobin, Leaden Flycatcher, Brown Oriole, Spangled Drongo and noisy Hooded Butcherbird, while we will also work hard to try and locate the scarce White-bellied Whistler.

Upon entering the park, we will spend the morning slowly walking the narrow trails that enter the moister evergreen hill forest. These well-marked trails wind through a variety of habitats with some excellent lookouts over Port Moresby and the coastline, providing a full day of new sights and sounds.



Raggiana Bird-of-paradise by Dušan Brinkhuizen

The forests here are particularly rich in kingfishers; in fact, New Guinea hosts the world's highest density of these desirable birds with 24 species known to occur! We will search for the PNG endemic Brown-headed Paradise Kingfisher, one of several paradise kingfisher species found on the island, and distinguished by their long trailing tails. Further kingfishers to be found today may include Yellow-billed, Azure, Forest, Papuan Dwarf and Sacred, while the most attractive of all the giant kingfishers, Rufous-bellied Kookaburra, is also a possibility.

Columbids are very well represented here too, particularly the stunning collection of Fruit Doves that include Wompoo, Pink-spotted, Superb, Beautiful and Orange-bellied. Zoe's Imperial Pigeon, Amboyna Cuckoo-Dove, Metallic Pigeon and the elusive Pheasant Pigeon are other species we will be on the lookout for. The latter is likely to be heard but we would be very fortunate to observe this secretive ground dweller. Other species we might find on the trails include White-faced Robin, Black Cicadabird, Barred Cuckooshrike, Sooty Thicket Fantail and inquisitive Chestnut-bellied Fantail, Frilled, Black-faced and Spot-winged Monarchs, Green-backed Honeyeater, Rusty Mouse-warbler with its continuous squeaky-gate call, Yellow-breasted Boatbill, Grey Whistler, Rusty Pitohui and the poisonous Hooded Pitohui, Pale-billed Scrubwren, Growling Riflebird with its loud, guttural calls, Fairy Gerygone, Black Berrypecker and Dwarf Longbill. The last two mentioned species belong to the Berrypecker family that is endemic to New Guinea. Two other taxonomic oddities that sometimes join the mixed feeding flocks at Varirata are Goldenface and Drongo Fantail, and while both are difficult to track down, we will certainly try our best as they are both of great interest. We will also attempt to locate Barred Owlet-nightjar, a localised endemic, by checking some potential roost sites.



Orange-fronted Fruit Dove by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Besides the Pheasant Pigeon, several other secretive terrestrial birds occur in Varirata, all of them a challenge to observe! These include Black-billed Brushturkey, Crested Pitohui, Cinnamon and White-breasted Ground Dove, Painted Quail-thrush, the stunning Chestnut-backed Jewel-babbler and Papuan Scrub Robin. Any of these require luck but it would take a huge dose of luck to bump into a Dwarf Cassowary or Forest Bittern, although we have done just that on past tours! However, the absolute highlight of the day will be witnessing the marvellous

performance by testosterone-ridden male Raggiana Bird-of-paradise. Adorned with elaborate red and orange flank plumes, they dance in anticipation of a potential mate. We will visit a display site where we may see good numbers of displaying males and receptive females. After this unforgettable experience, we will know for sure that we really are in birders' heaven!



Crested Berrypecker by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Rondon Ridge. Sitting on the outer edge of the Kubor Range, our lodge sits at an altitude of around 2,150 masl. Powered by its own eco-friendly hydro plant, this rather luxurious lodge enjoys stunning views over the Wahgi Valley and Mount Hagen itself. The lodge gardens are host to White-shouldered Fairywren (here of the black and white northern race), Mountain Myzomela, Bar-tailed Cuckoo-Dove, Mountain Meliphaga, Fan-tailed Cuckoo and Yellow-browed Melidectes.

A spectacular diversity of Bird-of-paradise occur here, including the elaborately plumed King of Saxony Bird-of-paradise, Superb Bird-of-paradise with its protruding iridescent breast-shields, outrageous Blue Bird-of-paradise, the rare Black and more widespread Brown Sicklebills and impressive Princess Stephanie's Astrapia! With the keen knowledge of local guides, we will attempt to see as many of these jewel-like species as possible, some of which may be performing their ritualistic displays.

Rondon Ridge is a good area to search for some of the more elusive of the 7 endemic bird families of New Guinea. The fabulous Wattled Ploughbill is common here although not easy to see as it moves around in the incredibly lush bamboo growth. The very skulky Mottled Berryhunter is also to be found here, but as always it is much easier to hear than actually see! Poisonous Blue-capped Ifrits are relatively common at the higher parts of the trail. Besides these specialties, we will search some of the forest trails in the area for some other highly sought-after species such as the elusive MacGregor's Bowerbird (generally easy to see here!), Goldie's Parakeet, Red-breasted Pygmy Parrot, Black Pitohui, Black-throated Honeyeater, Black-mantled Goshawk, Orange-crowned Fairywren, Sclater's Whistler, Lesser Melampitta, Streaked and Mid-mountain Berrypecker, and Blue-faced Parrotfinch. It is arguably the best site in the country to track down a couple of rare and rather obscure species, namely Yellowish-streaked Honeyeater and Papuan Parrotfinch.



Crested Satinbird by Dušan Brinkhuizen

A number of other species that are likely to be found as we search for the area's specialities include White-bibbed Fruit Dove, Papuan Mountain Pigeon, Ornate Melidectes, Little Shrikethrush, Black and Dimorphic Fantail, Papuan Sitella, Hooded Pitohui, and Black-throated Robin. At the end of each day, we will enjoy the spectacular views over the Wahgi Valley and across to the stunning alpine peaks of Mt

Hagen and Mt Giluwe. Nocturnal walks could produce a sighting of Papuan Boobook or even the rare Feline Owlet-nightjar.

Mount Hagen area. Our lodge is situated at 2,900m (9,600ft), inside a lush alpine forest patch. Here we will concentrate our efforts on the montane forest patches and secondary forest habitat in and around this fabulous area. We are likely to linger at the lodge feeders where the remarkable Ribbon-tailed Astrapias will compete with Brown Sicklebill, Common Smoky and Grey-streaked Honeyeaters, Belford's Melidectes, Brehm's Tiger Parrot, Island Thrush, White-winged Robin and Rufous-naped Bellbird for our attention! A constant flow of hungry birds throng to the feeders, providing incredible photographic opportunities. Many of us will no doubt spend hours birding from here, with a cup of coffee in hand and coal stoves nearby!



Wattled Ploughbill by Stephan Lorenz

The heavily mossed trails around our lodge produce some exciting birding and here we will seek out the secretive Rufous-throated Bronze Cuckoo, Friendly and Dimorphic Fantails, stunning Regent Whistler, Orange-crowned Fairywren, Wattled Ploughbill, Garnet Robin, Mountain Mouse-warbler and Large Scrub-wren. The Papuan Lorikeet is one of the world's most beautiful parrots and both the stunning black form and more gaudy red form occur around the lodge. Flocks of the attractive, monotypic Blue-capped Ifrit feed like nuthatches along branches and are now known to be even more poisonous than the Hooded Pitohui! Crested Berrypeckers sometimes forage around the lodge grounds, while other lodge specialities include Lesser Melampitta, Mountain Firetail, stunning Crested Satinbird, New Guinea Woodcock (a resident in the bogs around the lodge), and Mountain Owlet-nightjar that sometimes perches on tree-ferns outside the cabins at night. Even the rare Feline Owlet-nightjar occurs around the lodge and we will work hard to try and locate this very difficult species.

A number of other elusive species occasionally attend the feeder and it is hard to predict what will be around, but past visitors have included Archbold's Bowerbird and Crested Satinbird, Bronze Ground Dove, Mountain Mouse Warbler and both Forbes's and Chestnut Forest Rail, although seeing any of these species at the feeder would be a huge bonus. Mammals sometimes visit as well, most commonly a marsupial carnivore called Speckled Dasyure, or perhaps a Raffray's Bandicoot. By night Black-tailed Giant Rat and De Vis' Wooly Rat also sometimes visit.



Blue-capped Ifrit by Glen Valentine

Kiunga area. The port town of Kiunga is located in extreme western PNG along the border of West Papua, the Indonesian half of New Guinea. Situated on the north bank of the Fly River, Kiunga was built to service the giant Ok Tedi copper and gold mine. Although Kiunga is situated approximately 1,300 nautical kilometres from the Fly River mouth, the

berthing of huge ships bears testament to the size of this impressive river.

We will bird a nearby area of fabulous, untouched lowland rainforest where we have a chance of encountering several mouth-watering forest specialities. The forest interior is always hard work but with patience and perseverance, we hope to observe some of the shy and secretive forest dwellers. These could include Stephan's Emerald Dove, Thick-billed Ground Pigeon, White-breasted Ground Dove, White-crowned Cuckoo, Dwarf Koel, White-bellied Thicket Fantail, the brightly-coloured Golden Monarch, vociferous Papuan Babbler, the indescribably stunning Blue Jewel-babbler and tricky-to-see Hook-billed Kingfisher with its adapted ground-hunting bill.



Flame Bowerbird by Glen Valentine

One of our main targets here will be the gem-like King Bird-of-paradise. The smallest bird-of-paradise, we will position ourselves at a known tree where this beauty displays from the tangles, with strident calls and raised iridescent green shoulder fans. Its fabulous wired tail ends in a stunning green spiral and the red and white plumage leaps out of the dark green forest once it has been spotted.

As one of PNG's most famous birding sites, it is here that David Attenborough was hoisted into the treetops for the marvellous footage of displaying Greater Bird-of-paradise. This remarkable footage is one piece of the highly recommended video Attenborough in Paradise, which stars many of the bird-of-paradise species found in Papua New Guinea, performing their elaborate display rituals. Many bird-of-paradise species keep to traditional display trees that are used by generation after generation. Specific trees are generally well supported by a healthy population of the indescribably beautiful Greater Bird-of-paradise. We will have ample opportunity to observe these elegant beauties as they strut their stuff, competing for the attentions of the rather drab females. Rhythmic displays, wing mantling and posturing, loud, raucous and incessant calling and frequent mating are a constant affair. Many guests might consider this their top experience in PNG!



Greater Bird-of-paradise by Dušan Brinkhuizen

At another nearby site, our key target will be the incredibly beautiful Flame Bowerbird. We will spend time at a lookout near to a colony of these birds, hoping for fly-by or perched views. The radiant orange males really do appear aflame and this must rank as one of the world's most beautiful birds. Other species to be found in the area include the rare Grey-headed Goshawk, shy and elusive New Guinea Bronzewing, Long-tailed Honey Buzzard, Pacific Baza, Double-eyed Fig Parrot, petite Red-flanked Lorikeet, Yellowish-streaked Lory, thumb-sized Yellow-capped Pygmy Parrot, the starkly



Twelve-wired Bird-of-paradise by Dušan Brinkhuizen

contrasted Eclectus Parrot (named due to the remarkable difference between the red-and-blue females and green males), Orange-bellied, Beautiful, Dwarf, Pink-spotted and scarce Ornate Fruit Doves and Zoe's, Pinon's and Purple-tailed Imperial Pigeons. There is also the distinctive Long-billed Cuckoo – the male having a strikingly bright red eye-ring, noisy Brush Cuckoo, brilliant Emperor Fairywren, Red-capped Flowerpecker, Long-billed, Obscure, Plain and Streak-headed Honeyeaters, Ruby-throated Myzomela, diminutive Pygmy Longbill and Meyer's Friarbird. Further bird-of-paradise species include the glossy-black Trumpet and Glossy-mantled Manucodes, which often perch prominently atop dead trees to utter their loud retching calls. A nearby area of dry grassland may produce Red-backed Buttonquail and/or Australian Pratincole and, if we are very lucky, flocks of elusive and nomadic White-spotted and Black Mannikin or even a Crimson Finch.

Elevala & Fly Rivers. We will depart in the predawn mists swirling over the mighty Fly River on a boat journey into the rich swamp forests and lowlands. The Fly River's source is situated in the higher reaches of the central divide from where it then winds its way south-east, being joined later by the Strickland River. Our destination today is the Elevala River, one of the tributaries of the Fly.

As dawn breaks, we will be looking along the riverbanks waiting for one of the world's strangest birds to make an appearance – the Twelve-wired Bird-of-paradise! This yellow-and-black creature with a most unusual shape and a dozen bizarre, wire-like feathers bending upwards from its rear-end, performs its ritual maypole shuffle on a dead snag. After witnessing the unique dance of one of the world's most desirable birds, we will continue our journey up the river. Travelling slowly, we will be looking out for the giant Palm Cockatoo, a huge black parrot with a floppy crest, massive hooked bill and bright red cheek-patch that flies noisily overhead. Further species along the river might include the Large Fig Parrot, Shining Flycatcher, Large-billed Gerygone, Lowland Peltops and the scarce Yellow-eyed Starling hidden amongst huge numbers of Metallic Starling. We should also encounter large flocks of Collared Imperial Pigeon, Papuan Spine-tailed Swift, dozens of Oriental Dollarbids and the strange Grey Crow. Parties of noisy Blyth's Hornbill sound like steam trains passing overhead and are delightfully common while migrant flocks of giant Channel-billed Cuckoo from Australia occur in breath-taking numbers at times.



Sclater's Crowned Pigeon by Dušan Brinkhuizen

However, our key target once we enter the quiet Elevala River is the huge, fan-crested Sclater's Crowned Pigeon. The *Goura* genus that includes Victoria's, Scheepmaker's and Western Crowned Pigeon are the world's largest surviving columbids, all four of which are endemic to New Guinea.

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		This is a moderate tour. You should have a GOOD level of fitness and stamina, and be in good health. Not suitable for anyone with mobility or health challenges.
Birding Ease		Moderate. Bird density is low, many visuals are high in the canopy. A number of tricky target species.
Accommodation		Reasonable to good.
Walking / Trails		Some trails can be muddy and fairly steep. Long days on our feet.
Vehicles / Roads		Some bumpy drives, poor road conditions in general. A full day boat ride with no weather cover.
Photography		Reasonable, typical rain forest conditions of variable light and frequent rain.
Annoyances		Malaria and other biting insects. Environment varies from very hot & humid to cold, with some nights at high altitude.

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 11;
- Bottled drinking water, tea and coffee at meals;
- All lodgings;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- All reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services;
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

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

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

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 due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes made 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 DOES require a MODERATE to GOOD level of fitness and stamina. Participants should also be in good general health. Much of the forest birding will be done on foot and may require walking for several hours at a time.
- This Papua New Guinea tour is designed to be an *easier* birding experience than our longer, comprehensive tour. We purposefully avoid the more difficult trails and uncomfortable accommodation sites.
- We will be away from modern medical facilities for much of this tour.
- Trails around Rondon Ridge and Varirata National Park can be excessively muddy depending on weather conditions.
- In some areas, it can get very hot and humid, especially in the lowlands. We will thus make good use of the early mornings and will have a lot of early starts to avoid, as far as possible, birding in the heat of the day. Rainforest areas often have high humidity.
- We spend several nights in the highlands of New Guinea at an altitude of approximately 3 000m (9 000ft) above sea level, meaning that cooler evenings and early mornings should be expected.
- Due to the nature of Papua New Guinea's economy, the cost vs delivery in terms of quality of items and services is highly disproportionate.
- New Guinea is always a challenging place to visit, and it is not unusual for logistics to go awry - expect some hassles along the way. Delays, sometimes significant, should be expected when taking the several internal flights that are necessary to access remote locations. Weather or airline problems might cause delays that are out of our control.
- Birding in Papua New Guinea is very challenging. Many species are incredibly shy and difficult to observe along trails.
- To ensure your comfort and that of your companions, please limit yourself to one medium-sized suitcase / duffel bag and one carry-on bag as space in the vehicles is limited.
- Malaria is prevalent in New Guinea - consult your physician or local travel clinic for specific advice.
- Rubber boots may be useful along the many muddy trails and are highly recommended.
- We will spend many hours waiting for birds to appear at various locations where no seating is available. A small, folding stool may be beneficial.
- Due to the nature of some trails, a collapsible hiking pole may be beneficial.
- Accommodation varies greatly in Papua New Guinea, from good in the primary cities such as Port Moresby to very basic along the Elevala River. Some hotels and lodges will be below the standard of what you have come to expect from the developed world, and can suffer from issues related to basic maintenance. We will stay either in hotels or guesthouses with the exception of our accommodation along the Elevala River, where the small, elevated bunkhouse has only the most basic facilities (mattress, bedding and mosquito net, plus a forest clearing where washing facilities include cold water and an outhouse.)
- Domestic flights within Papua New Guinea have a baggage limit of 16kg per person for checked luggage and 5kg for hand luggage. (Airlines in PNG have however become more tolerant towards travellers carrying heavy / expensive camera and other optical equipment and often waive overweight hand luggage fees.)

Arrival and Departure Details

Day 1 of the tour is allocated as an arrival day, and you should have arrived in Port Moresby by midday, as the afternoon will be spent birding near to Port Moresby. The tour will conclude after breakfast on day 11 at Port Moresby International Airport.

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.

Due to the unreliable nature of the internal flights in Papua New Guinea, it is highly recommended to take an afternoon or evening departure flight on the final day of the tour, or a morning flight the day after.

Port Moresby International Airport (IATA: POM) is the main port of entry for international flights into Papua New Guinea, and is serviced most reliably by Air Niugini from Brisbane, Singapore or Cairns. We will book all domestic flights of this tour on your behalf.

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. The following website provides detailed information about visa eligibility and assistance with online applications options where viable: Visa HQ for Travel

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