

EXTRACTS FROM LETTERS

In a letter from Port Moresby, New Guinea, dated 8 July 67, Roy Mackay wrote:

"Our banding activities and general observing have increased considerably. Possibly this is because we have concentrated to a great extent on two areas. In one of these we have recognised netting sites which we find regularly bring in the Meliphagas and numerous other species. Last week I netted three species new to me, the Hook-billed Kingfisher (*Melidora macrorhina*), Yellow-green Flycatcher (*Microeca flavovirescens*) and a Warbler (*Gerygone chloronota*).

Evan, Harry and I were observing at the sewerage treatment works about eight miles from Port Moresby just a fortnight ago. A pair of very strange grebe-like birds held our attention. They seemed a fraction bigger than Little Grebes and seemed to have longer necks. The head and upper part of the neck was strikingly striped in white and dark reddish grey, and the flanks appeared to show indications of plumes. We returned to Harry's house to go through his books. We could not determine the species and thought we should try and collect one. I went out to the area later in the week and found them again—being fed by the parents—Little Grebes! They certainly fooled us. They were most beautifully marked but possibly not so beautiful as the fully plumaged male there. He was a most outstanding bird."

Most members will be very interested in the following letter also from Port Moresby, written by Major Harry Bell on 20 July 67. Harry recently returned from a patrol to the Nomad River District. The Nomad River runs into the Strickland River from the east with its source to the north of Mount Bosavi. The Strickland River is in turn a tributary of the Fly River.

"Banded 100 birds while at Nomad River. A hundred is a LOT for New Guinea. Got what I presume were the first White-breasted Pigeon (*Gallicolumba jobiensis*), Stephan Pigeon (*Chalcophaps stephani*), Red-breasted Mouse-Babbler (*Crateroscelis murina*), Pied Robin (*Poecilodryas hypoleuca*), a Scrub-Wren (*Sericornis spilodera*), King Bird of Paradise (*Cicinnurus regius*), Pearl-breasted Fantail (*Rhipidura threnothorax*), Variable Wood-Shrike (*Pitohui kirhocephalus*) and the White-tailed Kingfisher (*Tanysiptera sylvia*). Evan and I have since caught the latter at Moresby. A sight record of the Fairy Martin is the first for New Guinea. Also collected the

bower (undescribed) of the Golden Bird (*Xanthomelus aureus*).

I banded at Nomad for 24 days with 90 feet of mist net. Nets were usually opened at 9 a.m. and closed at 6 p.m. Dawn opening produced very poor results whereas here at Brown River we reckon that after 9 a.m. its not worth netting. The best result was seven birds in a 30 foot net in one day. However, there were some days when no birds were caught. We are convinced that humidity has something to do with this and is connected to those inexplicable occasions when hardly a bird seems to move.

An interesting sequel was that my 20 foot net was stolen by a 'real live' cannibal! He took off with it and headed for home (home is a village that ate two fellows last January). However, a police patrol raided the village, recovered the net but lost the accused. Not wishing to be selfish he had cut the net in two and given one half to a friend for a crayfish net!

One must remember that these people were real untouched 'bushies'. Elsewhere in the Territory, or the rural portion of it, public honesty is excellent and one may put up a mist net without fear of it being stolen.

Of course I had the usual 'ones that got away'. A Black-headed Pitta bounced into the net and bounced out again. A New Guinea Quail-Thrush (the only one seen) walked under the net! The ones that I wished had got away were three Blossom Bats that champed their way to freedom via just about every pocket of what used to be a perfectly good 30 foot net!

Today in a 40 foot net in my backyard, I caught two Sacred Kingfishers, a White-breasted Wood-Swallow, a Yellow-tinted Honeyeater and a Peaceful Dove. That's some netting for New Guinea!"

(The scientific names are from the *Handbook of New Guinea Birds*, Rand and Gilliard, 1967)

Notice to Banders

In order to assist the flow of work through the banding office, banders are requested to forward all 1967 schedules as early as possible after 31 December.