

NEW BIRD RECORDS FROM THE FIJI ARCHIPELAGO

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ABSTRACT

This is a complete list of species and subspecies recorded from the Fiji Archipelago subsequent to the work of Mayr (1945), Mercer (1966) and King (1967). Some of these new records have been published previously, but fifteen new specific and subspecific records of birds are listed here together with a new breeding record and confirmation of some earlier doubtful sightings.

INTRODUCTION

The standard work dealing with Fijian birds has been Ernst Mayr's (1945) *Birds of the Southwest Pacific*, which lists 16 species of "sea birds" (Procellariiformes 3; Pelecaniformes 6; Sternidae 7), six species of migratory waders, and 64 species of land and fresh-water birds. Some of the "sea birds" are listed within a wider distributional pattern without specifically mentioning Fiji. Mercer's (1966) field guide includes six additional land birds and one migratory wader not listed by Mayr (1945). King (1967) summarised knowledge of Fijian "sea birds," listing 19 breeding species (including two doubtful breeders) and seven non-breeding visitors.

A comprehensive list of all new records from Fiji was considered necessary as a recent work (du Pont 1976), claiming to be "a ready identification guide to all known South Pacific Birds" is, as far as Fiji is concerned, badly out of date and incomplete.

An increasing amount of fieldwork since about 1963 has resulted in several new records, and some doubtful sightings have been confirmed. These new records, whether published or not, are listed below. Records published here for the first time (14 new species and subspecies) are preceded by an asterisk (*). Most of these result either from voyages made by J. A. F. Jenkins through the Fiji islands on merchant vessels or from a continuing series of combined National Museum of New Zealand and Fiji Museum ornithological expeditions (1972, 1973, 1974, 1975).

Fijian waters are here defined as extending from 15° to 22°S and from 177°W to 175°E.

LIST OF SPECIES

ORDER PROCELLARIIFORMES

*Wandering Albatross (*Diomedea exulans*)

There have been several sightings of Wandering Albatrosses within Fijian waters, but apparently only immature birds of this species follow ships into these low latitudes. One bird was seen on 31 July 1967 at 19°40'S 176°55'E, another on 30 August 1970 north of Cape Washington at the western end of Kadavu Island. Two more were recorded 96km SSW of Kadavu on 16 September 1973. Hence it appears that Wandering Albatrosses may stray into southern Fijian waters quite frequently, but the nearest previously published record of this species to Fiji seems to be that of Morgan & Morgan (1965: 158), at 27°S.

Black-browed Mollymawk (*Diomedea melanophris*)

A century ago Baron von Hugel (Layard 1876: 393) saw a lone bird of this species while his ship was in sight of Kadavu Island. Wood (1926: 106) questioned this sighting, and King (1967: 103) listed it as needing verification.

On 4 August 1968 an immature New Zealand Black-browed Mollymawk (*D. melanophris impavida*), which had been banded as a chick on Campbell Island (some 3500km south of Fiji) on 19 March 1968, was found dying on the beach near Levuka, Ovalau Island. This record confirms the occasional occurrence of this species in Fijian waters. The bird was not retained but the band was returned to the N.Z. Bird Banding Scheme.

*Cape Pigeon (*Daption capensis*)

Cape Pigeons are often seen as far north as 21°S, and individuals have been recorded in the Kadavu Passage. One bird was seen some 10km west of Cape Washington, Kadavu, on 17 September 1973, and another about 56km south of Kadavu on 25 August 1974.

*Tahiti Petrel (*Pterodroma rostrata*)

On the night of 9 October 1972 while a party from the National Museum of New Zealand and Fiji Museum was based at the Marist Training Centre at Tutu, Taveuni Island, the first Tahiti Petrel to be recorded from Fiji flew into a light at the mission station, which is about 200m above sea level. The skin of this bird, an immature female, is held by the National Museum of New Zealand, Wellington (NMNZ 17801).

Two birds of this species were seen off Beqa Island, south of Viti Levu, on 3 October 1973, and another at 19°09'S 177° 52'E on 9 May 1976. At present there is no evidence that this species breeds in Fiji.

*Black-capped Petrel (*Pterodroma externa cervicalis*)

A Black-capped Petrel landed aboard ship just outside Suva Harbour on 18 May 1955. This specimen, the first record from Fiji, is now in the Auckland Institute and Museum (Av. 136. 14). Several other records were made on 9 May 1976 when lone birds were seen at 18°50'S 178°04'E; 19°38'S 177°46'E, and 20°29'S 177°43'E.

Morris (unpublished) reported a sighting of this species from 113km south of Kadavu on 8 June 1963.

*Juan Fernandez Petrel (*Pterodroma externa externa*)

We have a tentative record of a Juan Fernandez Petrel, observed at 21°58'S 177°24'E, well south of Cape Washington, Kadavu Island, on 5 December 1974. This bird lacked the white collar of *P. externa cervicalis*.

*Mottled Petrel (*Pterodroma inexpectat*)

A single Mottled Petrel was recorded west of Cape Washington, Kandavu, at 19°14'S 177°33'E on 27 March, 1978. According to King (1976: 16) this New Zealand breeding petrel migrates northward through the central Pacific in April and May, returning southward from sub-arctic waters in October and November. This record indicates that some birds at least move northward through Fiji waters.

*Black-winged Petrel (*Pterodroma hypoleuca nigripennis*)

Black-winged Petrels are frequently met with at sea south of Taveuni and near Kadavu Island (JAFI). Morris (unpublished) encountered an individual 130km south of Kadavu on 8 June 1963 and another 21km south east of Yalewa Kalou Island (NE of Yasawa, the northernmost of the larger islands of the western Yasawa Group) on 14 June 1963.

Buller's Shearwater (*Puffinus bulleri*)

Cheshire (1974: 183) was the first to have recorded this species from the Fiji area. He saw a lone bird at 18°30'S 178°13'W, about 24km east of the Lau Group on 22 May 1972. The next day he observed three birds at 18°39'S 173°16'W. Buller's Shearwaters were next recorded off Taveuni, at 16°54'S 179°42'W, on 7 February 1974.

*Sooty Shearwater (*Puffinus griseus*)

On 21 September 1963 Morris (unpublished) recorded small flocks of Sooty Shearwaters flying SSW from near Yalewa Kalou Island towards the west coast of Viti Levu, and flocks of 150-200 birds were seen frequently on 24 September 1963 heading in the same direction. The occurrence of this species in Fiji was confirmed on 28 September 1967 when the close approach of a ship put up about 35 birds 8km SW of Batiki Island in the Lomaiviti Group.

Short-tailed Shearwater (*Puffinus tenuirostris*)

Bahr (1912: 312) regarded this species as one of the commonest seabirds in Fiji, specifically mentioning sightings in the Koro Sea.

Morris (quoted in Serventy *et al.*, 1971: 130) saw this species "off Fiji in late September."

One of us (JAFJ) encountered large numbers of Short-tailed Shearwaters on their southward migration from late September until as late as November 1976.

On 23 September 1976 the following records were made of birds flying towards the SW:

1300 hrs	21°06'S 177°42'E	more than 200 birds
1500 hrs	20°42'S 177°41'E	more than 50 birds
1600 hrs	20°29'S 177°44'E	7 birds
1615 hrs		more than 200 birds

At 1740 hrs, at 20°04'S 177°48'E, Short-tailed Shearwaters were visible on each side of the ship as far as the eye could see, not bunched in flocks, but spread out all over the ocean. This continued until dark at 1825 hours, thousands of birds being involved. Next day the ship was at Suva, but on 25 September 1976 Short-tailed Shearwaters were again encountered, flying SW.

0800 hrs	17°25'S 179°55'E	more than 100 birds
1200 hrs	16°57'S 179°57'E	more than 30 birds
1225-1240 hrs	At least 2500 birds	seen, spread out all over the ocean
1300 hrs	16°50'S 179°25'W	37 birds
1330 hrs	16°47'S 179°20'W	several flocks of from 7 to more than 100 birds seen
1340 hrs		hundreds of birds spread over the ocean
1400 hrs	16°44'S 179°14'W	70 birds
1600 hrs	16°34'S 178°58'W	80 birds

On 26 September 1976 at 0800 hours 7 birds were seen at 15°42'S 175°36'W, but no more were recorded between there and Pago Pago, in American Samoa. On 2 October 1976 Short-tailed Shearwaters were encountered between 24°36'S 178°25'W and 25°25'S 178°46'W, the birds again flying SW.

Only small numbers were seen at any one time, but birds were passing the ship at a rate of about 500 an hour. During another voyage smaller numbers of Short-tailed Shearwaters were seen on 9 November 1976 flying SW in flocks of 8 to 18 individuals from 23°44'S 177°23'E to 22°52'S 177°27'E, no more being encountered northwards. On 12 November 1976, on voyage from Suva to Nukualofa, Tonga, Short-tailed Shearwaters were again recorded, the birds flying in a southwesterly direction:

1120 hrs	19°21'S 179°21'W	two flocks on 200 and 130 birds
1600hrs	19°40'S 178°22'W	30 birds

No more birds of this species were recorded between here and Nukualofa, although a few Short-tailed Shearwaters were seen off Apia, Western Samoa, on 15 and 16 November 1976.

ORDER PELECANIFORMES

Greater Frigate Bird (*Fregata ariel*)

Although it was generally assumed that Greater Frigate Birds occur in Fiji waters regularly, there seem to have been no previous reliable records of this species from Fiji. Mayr (1945: 20) recorded them as occurring "throughout the Indian and Pacific Oceans," and King (1967: 103) listed them as non-breeding visitors to Fiji. Wood's (1926: 107) statement that he had never seen a Lesser Frigate Bird in Fiji and that the Greater Frigate Bird is commoner in the area than *F. ariel*, is almost certainly due to mistaken identity, as the Lesser Frigate Bird is far more common than its larger relative in Fijian waters.

During May 1975 two of us (FC & FCK) found the Greater Frigate Bird in considerable numbers in the Astrolabe Lagoon (east of Kadavu Island). The identity of this species was confirmed by the collection of an immature female and a sexually mature male. The latter bird had not yet attained the pure black under-side of adult-plumaged males, and with its black throat and white breast closely resembled an adult female Lesser Frigate Bird in the field. Both Lesser and Greater Frigate Birds were present daily, especially about Yabu Island off the coast of Ono Island, where they gathered to harry and rob the hundreds of Red-footed Boobies (*Sula sula*) coming in to nest and roost. Smaller numbers of Brown Boobies (*Sula leucogaster*), not nesting at that time, but roosting on the island, were also occasionally chased by Frigate Birds. The largest number of frigate birds seen at one time was when a mixed flock of about 150 birds congregated above Ono Island following a storm. It was estimated that about one in five of the several hundred frigate birds in the Astrolabe Lagoon during May 1975 was a Greater Frigate Bird.

Because the size difference between the two species of frigate birds is not nearly as obvious in the field as is suggested in the literature, close attention must be paid to all frigate birds observed in Fiji.

ORDER CICONIIFORMES

*White-faced Heron (*Ardea novaehollandiae*)

One bird of this species was observed resting at high tide on a sandy beach just north of Taunovo village on Vatulele Island on 19 July 1973. It was associating with two dark phase Reef Herons (*Egretta sacra*) and, when approached, the three birds flew northward along the beach. The lighter overall colour of the White-faced Heron compared with the Reef Herons was even more apparent in flight, when the flashing white underwing coverts contrasted with the dark underwings of its companions. The bird was later collected when feeding on a tidally exposed reef, still in company with two dark phase Reef Herons. The skin of this specimen, the first ever collected in Fiji, is currently held by the National Museum of N.Z., pending its

return to the Fiji Museum. This bird was almost certainly a vagrant from Australia.

A general eastward movement of this species from Australia during 1973 was also evident on the Kermadec Islands where J. G. Ireland (pers. comm.) saw a lone bird from 9 March to 3 April 1973, found a corpse on 23 April 1973 and recorded a single bird on 7 May 1973. Two additional birds were recorded from the Kermadecs in mid-July 1973.

*Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*)

On 25 August 1973 a Glossy Ibis, another probable Australian vagrant, was found associating with a flock of 15 Reef Herons in a rice paddy at Lakena, near Nausori (eastern Viti Levu). The birds were fishing for Tilapia (*Tilapia mossambica*) trapped in large puddles in the partially drained field. Contrary to the visual hunting tactics of the herons, the ibis swept the muddy shallows by moving its partly open bill from side to side. It seized and swallowed any fish it chanced upon, but dropped any stone, picked up in error. The ibis was feeding almost constantly, whereas the herons rested at frequent intervals. Several herons and the Glossy Ibis flew off westwards at 1630 hours, presumably to their night roost. Next day the Glossy Ibis was found with Reef Herons in the same paddy field. It was collected and proved to be an immature female in fresh plumage.

The head and neck were dark brown with some pale streaking, the wing coverts dark green with purple and red glosses and the primaries were glossy green. The skin of this specimen, the first recorded from Fiji, is located in the Fiji Museum (FM-14).

The rice paddies at Lakena, which support a teeming population of small fish, can attract flocks of up to 100 Reef Herons. The paddies also have a strong attraction for Crested Terns (*Sterna bergii*), and Marsh Harriers (*Circus approximans*), which frequent the area regularly, though in smaller numbers than Reef Herons. Marsh Harriers regularly catch and eat fish throughout Fiji.

ORDER CHARADRIIFORMES

Smart (1971) recorded several new migratory waders for Fiji, which are included in this list. His paper should be consulted for greater detail.

Banded Dotterel (*Charadrius bicinctus*)

First recorded by Morgan & Morgan (1965: 162) from Suva Point. Smart (1971: 270) reported this species from Vatuwaqa and the Rewa Sandbank, and also reports a sighting from Ono-i-Lau Island.

Long-billed Curlew (*Numenius madagascariensis*)

Recorded by Morgan & Morgan (1965: 162) from Suva Point, and by Smart (1971: 272) from Suva Point and Rewa Sandbank.

American Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus*)

Recorded by Smart (1971: 272) from the Rewa Sandbank.

Siberian Tattler (*Tringa brevipes*)

Recorded by Smart (1971: 273) among flocks of Wandering Tattlers (*Tringa incana*) on Rewa Sandbank.

Terek Sandpiper (*Xenus cinereus*)

Smart (1971: 274) recorded a lone bird from Rewa Sandbank.

Knot (*Calidris canutus*)

This species was first recorded from Rewa Sandbank (Smart 1971: 279) but du Pont (1976), who otherwise lists the waders recorded by Smart, does not include it in his field guide. Two of us (FC & FCK) saw a flock at Sausau Island off the north coast of Vanua Levu on 26 June 1974, confirming its occasional presence in Fiji.

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (*Calidris acuminata*)

Recorded by Morris (in Smart 1971: 24) from Suva Point.

Red-necked Stint (*Calidris ruficollis*)

Recorded by Smart (1971: 274) from Rewa Sandbank.

Sanderling (*Calidris alba*)

Recorded by Smart (1971: 275) from Rewa Sandbank, Navua (southern Viti Levu) and Toberau Island. Du Pont (1976: 57) listed it from Ono and Ono-i-Lau, apparently in error, as Smart referred to "large numbers of shorebirds occurring on Ono and Ono-i-Lau Islands" in the paragraph following his Sanderling notes. We saw a lone Sanderling daily on Vorovoro Island off the north coast of Vanua Levu from 13 to 16 November 1973.

*Pomarine Skua (*Stercorarius pomarinus*)

A lone bird, the first for Fiji, was seen at sea, 11km north of Cape Washington (Kadavu Is.) on 27 February 1974. Several records have been made since. On 3 September 1976 one bird was seen at 21°40'S 177°27'E, another on 27 February 1978 at 18°49'S 177°20'E, and two at 18°39'S 177°18'E rafted with 10 Wedgetailed Shearwaters (*Puffinus pacificus*) and another two at 19°06'S 177°26'E in company with two Arctic Skuas, on the same day.

*Arctic Skua (*Stercorarius parasiticus*)

A single bird of this species was observed flying in a NNE direction at 20°23'S 177°44'E on 26 February 1975. One was recorded at 22°13'S 177°21'E on 23 September 1976, and two more harrying a Sooty Tern (*Sterna fuscata*) seen with two Pomarine Skuas at 19°06'S 177°26'E on 27 February 1978.

Both this and the above species migrate from their northern breeding grounds south to New Zealand, but neither have been recorded from Fijian waters previously.

Crested Tern (*Sterna bergii*)

This large tern has long been known to be common about Fijian coasts but as late as 1967 King (1967: 103) still listed it only as a possible breeder. In May 1975 the combined museums expedition confirmed it as a breeding species for Fiji by finding a young bird, not yet capable of flight, being fed by its parents on a small rocky island in the Astrolabe Lagoon.

*Eastern Little Tern (*Sterna albifrons sinensis*)

An immature female was collected from a flock of twenty Little Terns resting on broad sandflats near Yakano village on Lakeba, the largest island of the Lau Group, on 21 November 1974. The birds had been watched for two days previously resting on the sandflats at low tide near a flock of Crested Terns. At high tide they retired with the Crested Terns to a coastal sand bar where there was a large mixed flock of waders; mainly Pacific Golden Plover (*Pluvialis dominica fulva*), Wandering Tattler (*Tringa incana*), some very nervous Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*) and Eastern Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*). Several dozen Grey Ducks (*Anas superciliosa*) were resting on the same sandbank. Grey Ducks commonly feed on tidal flats and reefs in Fiji, even swimming and diving for food just within the line of breakers on the reef at low tide.

None of the Little Terns was in breeding plumage. The species is regarded as a regular migrant in the tropical western Pacific where it has been recorded from the Mariana, Bonin, Bismarck and Solomon Islands (King 1967: 78). This is the first record of the species for Fiji. The specimen collected is now in the Fiji Museum (FM 112).

ORDER COLUMBIFORMES

Feral Pigeon (*Columba livia*)

Although not listed by either Mayr (1945) or Mercer (1966), feral pigeons were mentioned by du Pont (1976: 66) as occurring in Fiji. They are present on Viti Levu, Vanua Levu, Taveuni, and Ovalau and probably elsewhere. They were only observed in or in the vicinity of towns and villages, and cliff nesting or roosting away from human habitation has apparently not yet occurred in Fiji. Pigeons were probably introduced to Fiji by Methodist missionaries in the early 1840s. Williams (unpublished) shows dove-cotes in his drawings of early mission stations in Fiji, and mentions a Fijian chief asking him to repair his dove-cote for him.

ORDER APODIFORMES

Spine-tailed Swift (*Chaetura caudacuta*)

Recorded by Brown & Child (1975: 19) from Vatulele Island on 8 September 1972, and subsequently listed by du Pont (1976: 107).

ORDER PASSERIFORMES

Long-legged Warbler (*Trichocichla rufa cluniei*)

This new Vanua Levu subspecies of the rare Long-legged Warbler was discovered in the western central part of the island during a combined National Museum of New Zealand and Fiji Museum expedition on 10 June 1974 and was described by Kinsky (1975). The species was previously known only from Viti Levu, where it is often (possibly wrongly) considered extinct. The type specimen is held at the National Museum of New Zealand, Wellington (NMNZ 18520).

*House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)

A male House Sparrow, the first recorded in Fiji, was seen early on 20 May 1973 in Sukuna Park, Suva, Viti Levu. It was feeding and moving in association with a small flock of Redheaded Parrot Finches (*Erythrura cyanovirens*). The sparrow roosted that night in a densely leafed sapling, and was seen at Sukuna Park, again with parrot finches, on 22 May 1973, but not thereafter. Sukuna Park is only a few hundred metres from the Suva wharves, and the House Sparrow might have been accidentally transported to Fiji aboard a cargo ship.

*White-backed Magpie (*Gymnorhina tibicen hypoleuca*)

The presence of the Black-backed Magpie (*G. t. tibicen*) on Taveuni Island has been known for a long time. Although that species is not listed by Mayr (1945), Mercer (1966: 14) and du Pont (1976: 182) both included it in their lists. However, a combined National Museum of New Zealand/Fiji Museum expedition to Taveuni in September and October 1972 found that the White-backed Magpie is also present on the island.

The exact details of the introduction of Australian Magpies to Taveuni Island have not been satisfactorily traced. In 1923 Rollo H. Beck (unpublished) of the Whitney South Sea Expedition was told that Magpies began nesting on Taveuni in 1894. This is in general agreement with claim of Ernie Douglas (B. D. Heather pers. comm.), a local planter, that his grandmother, Mrs James McConnell, imported magpies from Australia in about 1883, and that the Tart family brought in more magpies in about 1902. However, Adrian Tart, another local planter, told us that his grandfather introduced the first magpies from Australia in about 1915, and that a second lot, "to improve the original stock" was imported from Australia in the 1930s.

The main reason for introducing magpies to Taveuni was the hope that these "insectivorous" birds would, by feeding on stick insects, help to reduce the damage done by the insect to the extensive coconut plantations on the island. If Adrian Tart's information is correct, Black-backed Magpies, recorded by Beck in 1923 were introduced first and White-backed Magpies, recorded here for the first time,

were introduced later. Both subspecies are now well established on Taveuni, considerable hybridisation between the two subspecies occurs and hybrids can be observed throughout the low-lying areas of the island.

Although generally restricted to Taveuni, Magpies are occasionally reported from nearby Vanua Levu. It is, therefore, probably only a matter of time before Vanua Levu also is successfully colonised by these birds.

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