

DISCOVER THE SECRETS OF MELANESIA
on board HERITAGE ADVENTURER

23 October - 8 November 2023



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Day 1

Monday 23 October

Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea

There was a sense of excitement in the air as we gathered at the Airways Hotel in Port Moresby. It was a time to rest before the exciting adventure ahead and to get to know our fellow travellers and some of our expedition team. After a delicious dinner, we settled in for an early night with our Discover the Secrets of Melanesia adventure about to begin.

Day 2

Tuesday 24 October

Madang

After a delicious breakfast at the Airways Hotel in Port Moresby, we were transferred to the airport for the domestic charter flight to the city of Madang. The busyness of the airport and the colour of clothing, bags, and posters were a feast for the senses as we adopted 'Melanesian time' and waited.

After an hour-long flight punctuated with stunning scenery, we landed at Madang and

were whisked off by local guides in buses to explore the countryside and take in Madang's attractions. Highlight included a series of welcome dances, markets, the beautiful gardens of Bilbil Village and the wonderful Madang Museum.

At 1400 hours we boarded our new home the stylish *Heritage Adventurer* and enjoyed the first of many delicious lunches. After checking into our accommodations and settling into ship life we took part in a lifeboat drill and enjoyed introductions to our full expedition team capped off by Captain Tomasz's welcome cocktails. By 1800 we departed the port of Madang for our overnight voyage to the Sepik River on calm seas.



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Day 3

Wednesday 25 October

Kopar Village, Sepik River

Our Cruise Director, Kay, woke us from our slumber to rise early before heading out on a Zodiac cruise along the mighty Sepik River (See-pik) at first light. The meandering Sepik, over 700 miles (1,200km), is the longest river in Papua New Guinea and the fifth largest river in the world. Starting at the West Papuan border, the Sepik snakes its way towards the Bismarck Sea.

The birding group headed away early and enjoyed views of Imperial Pigeons, Fruit-doves and Blyth's Hornbills, the rest of us were excited to take our first Zodiac cruise along the dense sago-lined edge of this incredible river system before we visited Kopar Village which is situated at the mouth of this mighty river.

As we entered the river some of us spotted several impressive White-bellied Sea Eagles, along with a variety of parrots and egrets. Numerous rafts of floating debris, logs, water hyacinth and *Salvinia* were being swept towards the sea. Small tributaries feeding the Lower Sepik were lined with dense wetland jungle dominated by Sago Palms, with occasional mangroves and emergent rainforest trees. Sago, the staple diet of the Sepik people, is cultivated regularly to obtain flour which is used to make pancakes and a 'pudding' with steamed fish and greens. The fibre of the trunk is pounded and washed. Then the starch is gathered once it settles in the bottom of a collection canoe.

When we all met up ashore at Kopar Village we were greeted by a wonderful performance of traditional dance (including the region's famed Dragon Dance), song and drums, the performers adorned with an assortment of feathered headdresses, pendent necklaces and leg bracelets of shells that jingled as feet were stamped in time with the drum rhythms. School children sang the Papua New Guinea national anthem and after official speeches, gift-giving and thrilling performances, there was time to enjoy a tour of the village and admire the handicrafts on sale. A variety of impressive masks and ceremonial paddles were on display as were a variety of lightweight, yet incredibly strong, Bilum bags as we browsed the shopping opportunities around the 'village green'. Some of the artisans selling their crafts had travelled for several days downriver and were very happy to see us.

As we departed the mouth of the Sepik River Captain set a course to take us through the volcanic Schouten Islands with a great closeup view of the well-named Bam Island. As we crossed a very languid-looking Bismarck sea this afternoon the birders enjoyed a

constant stream of shearwaters and terns, the occasional booby and, incredibly, a very close Beck's Petrel, one of the least-known and mythical seabirds of this region. The afternoon included two great talks with Steve on travel photography and birding by Frank. Before dinner Captain Tomasz introduced us to his officers and crew and we toasted the voyage ahead.



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Day 4

Thursday 26 October

Manus Island

After a smooth overnight passage, we awoke anchored inside the northern barrier reef of Manus Island, the largest island in the Admiralty group. We were greeted by locals in well-crafted canoes and by 0730 we had eaten breakfast and were headed for the shoreline in the Zodiacs. The air was thick with humidity, carrying the fragrant scents of fresh herbs and flowers that filled the village. We were welcomed by the children of Derimbat Village with a rousing dance/march and colourful attire. We were ushered to the blissful shade of a large Banyan tree where the young dancers showcased their culture through lively performances with garamuts (drums) and the energetic 'hey hey' dance. After our official welcome, the friendly locals invited us to explore the well-groomed gardens and striking houses up on piles that dotted the village. We were also welcome to explore the lush forest behind the village, sharing the art of sago making which provided them with their staple food. A refreshing round of coconuts took the edge of our thirst before we were escorted back to the beach with much laughter and mirth.

By 1130 hours we were back on board for a quick change before heading over to the nearby uninhabited island of Hawei for some snorkelling of its crystal-clear waters. This gave the novice snorkellers among us the opportunity to familiarise ourselves with our gear, the abundance of sand made finning practice and adjusting our gear easier.

Our birders Zodiaced up the small section of the Lorengau River and saw many endemics. Like the Manus Monarch, Manus Cuckcooshrike and the diminutive Yellow-breasted Pygmy -parrot.

An unexpected tropical downpour saw everyone return to *Heritage Adventurer* for a late lunch, while Suzanne's fascinating lecture on the Crocodile Men of the Sepik and Bruce's introduction to World War II in the Pacific kept us entertained as we made course for New Hanover Island.



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Day 5

Friday 27 October

Tsoilik Island, New Hanover

This morning we woke to the remote beauty of Tsoilik Island, nestled within the New Ireland archipelago in the New Hanover District of Papua New Guinea, on anchor inside the northern reef of New Hanover Island. After an early morning rain squall we were greeted by the island locals who welcomed us with traditional drums and dance to create yet another unique musical experience in this land of diversity. We received a warm uniquely Melanesian welcome from the children and families of the village.

The birding group was away by 0630 and headed to mainland New Hanover Island across the lagoon. There were some mangrove and beach Zodiac birding, however, the birds proved elusive. A short dash back to Tsoilik island and Frank was able to lead a group to a protected megapode habitat with up to 40 birds fenced off from predators. After our village welcome, we explored the island and enjoyed learning about island life from the locals who had settled here to get away from the tribal intricacies of the mainland. Rod took a party across the small lagoon where we were exposed to the wonders of Ant Plants. While others had their first experience paddling a collection of local outrigger canoes.

Courtney set up a nice snorkelling spot to explore this vibrant underwater world, drift snorkelling along the outer reef edge viewing coral bommies, Pipefish, Nudibranchs, and Anemone Fish. Others wandered the village and swam off the local beach. By 1230 we were back aboard *Heritage Adventurer* and making our way along the northern coast of New Hanover. We had a great lecture from Rod on Papua New Guinea's Birds-of-paradise before we transited the spectacular Steffen Strait between New Hanover and New Ireland in the late afternoon.



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Day 6

Saturday 28 October

Rabaul, New Brittan

Incredible views of the towering Tavurvur and Volcan volcanoes greeted us this morning. These twin volcanoes showed their power on 19 September 1994 when they erupted and destroyed 80% of the buildings in Rabaul. We landed at Hot Spring Beach which was living up to its name with a black sand beach and sulphur-streaked boiling springs. The steam, black clouds over the Tavurvur stratovolcano and blue sea made for a moving backdrop.

Departing in a convoy of minivans we drove through the remains of the pyroclastic flow (ash and pumice) and entered the centre of what was once the heart of Rabaul. Our first stop was at the New Guinea Club, now Rabaul Museum of German colonisation and war history along with great images of the eruption and destruction of Rabaul buried by ash. A brief stop on a hill above Rabaul showed the extent of the three huge volcanic eruptions in 1880, 1937 and 1994 (one every 57 years!) - it also demonstrated why Rabaul boasts one of the best harbours in the South Pacific.

Our next stop was at former the bunker of Admiral Yamamoto, one of the architects of

Japan's war in the Pacific and an instrumental part of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour. As we continued around the coast we stopped at one of the 500 kilometres of Japanese tunnels that were built by POWs to house amphibious barges that were used to offload the submarine supply vessels during WWII. We were taken on a tour of the 200-metre-deep tunnel that still housed the remains of five barges, most now in poor condition.

Next, we stopped at the Kokopo War Museum which had a great collection of primarily Japanese equipment from WWII including significant parts of aircraft, tanks, artillery, naval guns, bombs and vehicles including tractors and armoured personnel carriers. There were other buildings on the grounds that housed colonial and native artefacts and an enclosure with a resident crocodile!

The Kokopo Market was our final stop and it was a riot of colour and smells from the vast array of stalls selling food and souvenirs. During another delicious lunch Heritage Adventurer sailed to nearby Pigeon Island where we transported the bar ashore for cocktails on the beach and a great off-the-beach snorkelling experience. We watched the sun go down behind the volcanic peaks of Rabaul and enjoyed yet another great day in paradise.





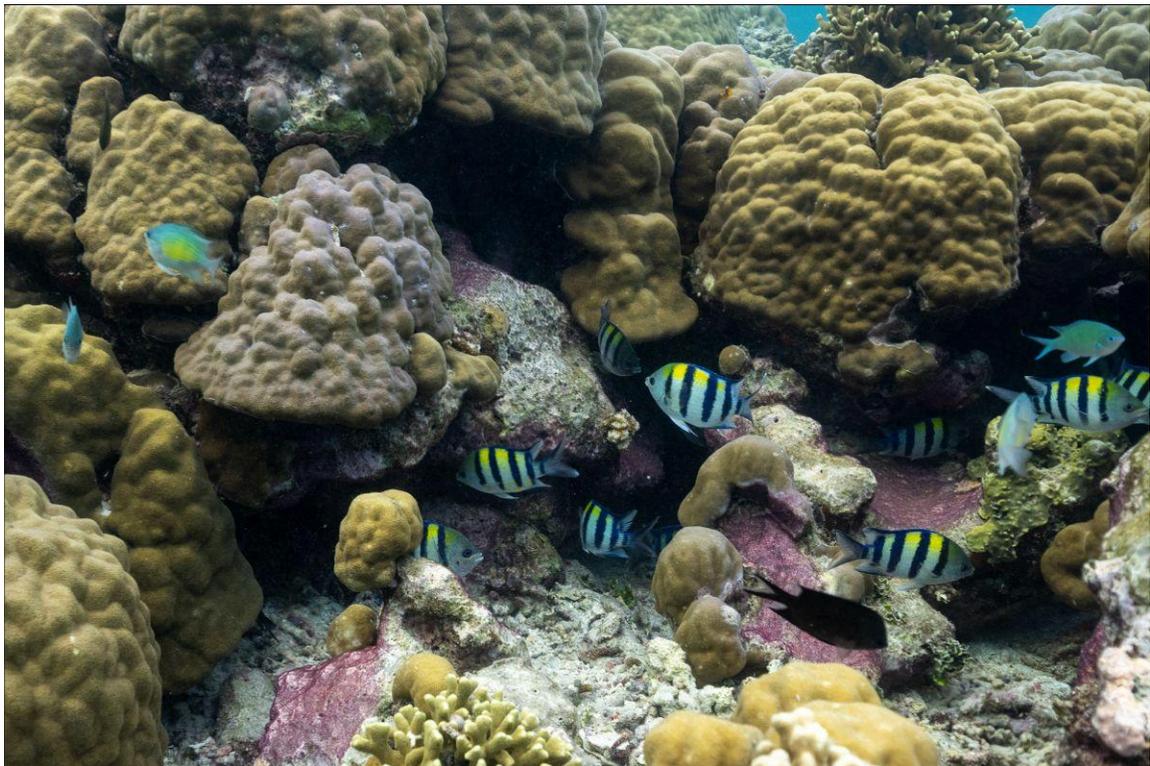
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Day 7

Sunday 29 October

Nissan Island, Papua New Guinea

We awoke this morning off the lush green Island of Nissan. Identifying with Bougainville but having strong links to New Ireland, Nissan is another beautiful mix in this land of diversity. There had been some serious preparations for our visit and despite being a Sunday we were in awe of their kindness and love of life. The welcome began with a traditional cleansing, followed by a walk past lines of smiling and engaging locals in what felt like the PNG equivalent of a red-carpet welcome.

After some formal speeches to begin the proceedings, we were treated to a programme of 'sing sings' and dances performed by contingents from various other villages around the island under the shade of a magnificent Barringtonia tree. These included fascinating butterfly, bird snake and waka dances. At the end of official festivities, we were taken in hand by groups of local guides, many of them school children, and escorted enthusiastically around the island and the villages to see the way the community lived. We were led around gardens with staple crops of kaukau (sweet potato), coconuts, some cacao and drying seaweed. Bruce led an intrepid group to find the remains of a WWII aircraft wreck which had been rendered down to a rusted engine by humidity and wind in the thick jungle! There were three distinct population groups on the island and our guides appeared to be a congenial mix of each of them.

After fond farewells, we re-joined the air-conditioned comfort of *Heritage Adventurer* for lunch and a short rest before heading over to the western reef of Nissan Island for a drift snorkel of the drop-off and reef. The reef life below the water did not disappoint, with many brightly coloured corals interspersed with anemones and another suite of Anemone Fish and other Damsels such as the prominent Bicolour Chromis. The clear water and bright sunshine made snorkelling a pleasure. By 1500 we were all back aboard and made our departure for Bougainville.



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Day 8

Monday 30 October

Bougainville, PNG

By dawn, we were anchored off the small port of Arawa and looking forward to seeing the notorious Panguna mine which sparked 10 years of bloodshed on this beautiful island. The conflict was brought on by tensions of self-determination, disputes over indigenous control of land and inequality of profit distribution from the copper, silver and gold mine which was established in 1963.

In 2005, Bougainville regained autonomy, and today we have the privilege to explore this historic place, engaging with locals and hearing their stories from challenging times. After our convoy completed a steep climb to the top of the mountain we were able to experience the refreshingly cool mountain air and spectacular views down towards Arawa and the east coast of the island.

Once over the hill, we descended into the mine site passing some small-scale local gold mining operations. We enjoyed an excellent tour of the mine site visiting the main pit, standing atop the massive tailings canal and the crusher plants. In its day the mine was the largest open-cut copper mine in the world and stretched more than 5 kilometres long

and deep, employed more than 7,000 people and provided facilities such as schools, cinemas, shops, residential rooms, sports centres, churches and markets. International companies and countries alike now bid for annual contracts to remove large amounts of the scrap metal, contributing to the cash on the island.

Bougainville people culturally associate themselves more with the people of the Solomon Islands than Papua New Guinea, giving rise to a recent referendum that decided to break away from PNG and form an autonomous region.

After a quick lunch aboard *Heritage Adventurer* we returned ashore to visit the bustling Arawa Markets. Here we wandered the crammed stalls and walkways, filled to the brim with local produce, tobacco, and root vegetables with the top shelf overflowing with dried fish, tapioca, donuts and local nuts. A small artefacts section included lavalava (sarongs), beaded necklaces and the famous Buka baskets and bags offering a chance for us to spend our last Papua New Guinea currency (Kina).

After a short journey, we arrived at the local Catholic mission and were privy to some of the finest singers in Bougainville as they regaled us with their songs on the beautiful beach of the mission. The sounds of Rhythm Yard and Auaumaring music filled the air, their melodies inspired by a recent musical festival in Vanuatu. Folk, country, and contemporary tunes resonated, accompanied by guitars, kundu drums, pipes, and traditional dancers adorned in grass skirts and colourful fans. They moved in unison, kicking up their heels and sand, akin to a joyful line dance. It was a fitting farewell to Papua New Guinea as we set our course for the enchanting Solomon Islands.



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Day 9

Tuesday 31 October

Kolombangara Island

The sight of one of the highest points in the Solomon Islands archipelago greeted us as we stepped out on the decks of *Heritage Adventurer* this morning to view the extinct cone volcano of Kolombonagara in the New Georgia group of islands. We had been invited by the Kolombangara Island Biodiversity Conservation Association (KIBCA) to visit the conservation area 400 metres above a sustainable forest plantation. On arrival we boarded the 'best available transport' - three 10-ton trucks complete with slabs of wood in the back for seats and free "air conditioning" to begin our scenic drive up to Imbu Rano Lodge within the conservation area. The gravel road left the coast and headed towards the two distant volcanoes, steadily rising in elevation. After 15 minutes, we left the forest plantation behind and entered the vivid green sub-montane forest. Arriving at the lodge we enjoyed the pleasant cool temperatures granted to us by the altitude.

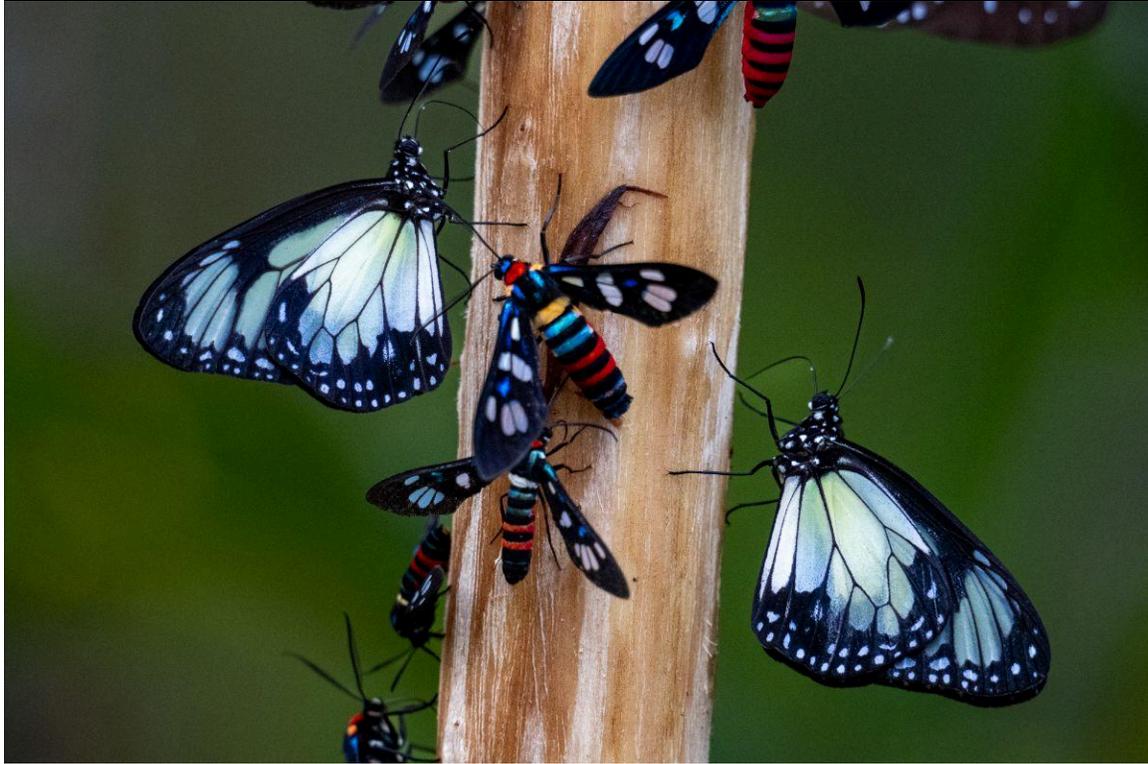
From there the more intrepid set out on a long walk into the thick rainforest, uncovering many unique insects and plants camouflaged to co-habitat in the lush undergrowth. A few of the more speedy walkers made it to the lookout. Our naturalist Rod led the short walk and introduced us to ant plants, a variety of orchids, insects and reptiles. Others enjoyed the peaceful calm of the lodge which had a wide variety of birds to be seen from the cool protection of the deck. Our birders wandered down the road hoping to spot the Roviana Rail.

Covering an area of over 20,000 hectares (200km²), the conservation equates to approximately 28% of the island, making it the largest conservation area in the Solomon Islands. On the island, both locals and the conservation groups are dedicated to maintaining wildlife corridors along with marine protection areas. On return to the landing site, we were tempted by exquisite contemporary pieces of polished wood from bowls to elaborate masks from Rinaggi and Boboe Village carvers and were serenaded by arguably the world's best bamboo band.

After a quick lunch back on board *Heritage Adventurer*, it was a short hop over to Lilly's Island where we enjoyed swimming and snorkelling off the beach and Zodiac cruises in the lagoon and up the nearby river complete with dolphin escorts. A small group headed around to the local village for an informal visit which was enjoyed by both locals and guests. By 1730 we were all back aboard and departing for Tetepare Island.



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Day 10

Wednesday 1 November

Tetepare Island

One of the last wild islands in the South Pacific awaited us early this morning. Tetepare, a long, rugged island, cloaked in primary lowland rainforest and fringed with diverse reefs, is noted as the largest uninhabited island in the world and showcases unique terrestrial and marine animals protected by a permanent Marine Protected Area. The island has been uninhabited for 200 years and while headhunting certainly played its part, no one is sure why it was abandoned. When the logging companies came in 2001 with their promise of easy money, the descendants of the original landowners chose instead to establish the Tetepare Descendants' Association (TDA) to protect the environment and culture of the island, focus on conservation and manage the island's resources sustainably.

Onshore we were welcomed by our guides for the morning, local rangers, who we did not at first recognise as rangers due to their traditional warrior attire, complete with bows, arrows and axes. Their ferocious charges were met with broad smiles from our group, and we were all thankful to be allowed entry and treated as friends and not foes! Marine turtles, such as the critically endangered Leatherback, nest on the volcanic black

sand beaches here. Green and Hawksbill Turtles feed in the island's sheltered lagoons, while Dugongs are often seen grazing in its seagrass beds. Sharks, Crocodiles and a myriad of fish species inhabit the reefs surrounding Tetepare, while several rare and endemic bird and bat species are found in its forests, making people one of the rarest creatures on the island.

After an initial warrior greeting and Coconut Crabs encounters, we split into groups for a wander around the forest tracks where we discovered the many medicinal plants found on the island. On one of the back beaches two females of the largest and rarest sea turtles were also ashore laying eggs. These giants were Leatherback Turtles and they were the size of a small Clinker Dinghy! Others stayed back at the lodge and wandered the manicured gardens and walkways surrounding the research centre and eco-lodge. The local carvers were present with some exquisite inlaid shell woodwork and we were happy to know all proceeds from their enterprise go to furthering conservation efforts on the island.

The birders had a very productive walk around the lodge grounds and into the forest. Bird hunting ceased a generation ago on this island and it was so refreshing to see plentiful birdlife with no fear of humans. On the way back to *Heritage Adventurer* we were able to stop for an excellent drift snorkel. The reef here was another delightful display of fringing reef with a brightly coloured patchwork of hard and soft corals below tranquil waters. A dramatic edge to provided vertical walls and some small caverns for adventurous duck divers, and there was a very healthy population of large fish such as Snapper, Parrotfish and Grouper. By 1200 we were all back aboard and saying our farewell to this remarkable island.



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Day 11

Thursday 2 November

Malaita Island

Dawn found *Heritage Adventurer* off the east coast of Malaita Island - the second largest and most populous island in the Solomon Islands. The birders headed off at first light into the mangroves of main Malaita Island where a truck awaited them ready to transport the party a few kilometres in land. Bird guide Frank worked hard to find a few key species, with the main target, Malaita White-eye showing itself well.

After dropping birders ashore, we repositioned *Heritage Adventurer* near uninhabited Leli Island. An enthusiastic group went ashore after Courtney found a suitable beach and snorkelling site where we enjoyed swimming and snorkelling in the slightly cooler water, while some enjoyed a short walk in the forest with Rod.

After returning to the ship and another delicious lunch we welcomed Chief Esau of the Kwaoi people and some of his dance troupe aboard in their traditional attire to show us their unique culture. They had taken a long journey to get here from their remote mountain village laden with customary costumes and crafts to generously share their traditional ways of living.

Initially, we were to meet them on uninhabited Leli Island where they could perform their very sacred dances away from the eyes of any coastal tribes, however, a tribal dispute over land ownership of the island meant we had to invite the group aboard the ship. After an introduction, and learning about their dedication to retaining traditional living we were privileged to see some of the traditional songs performed. As a finale, they invited us to participate in one of their sacred dances which can only be experienced by those who wear the traditional attire, so a small but dedicated group was given the privacy of the Aft Lounge deck to cast off their inhibitions and clothes and take part in an experience few will ever see.

By 1600 we had departed for a short visit to Ngongosila Island, where we were treated to some spectacular performances including a traditional bridal ceremony. The locals showed us their neatly arranged houses on this densely populated island and were equally intrigued to see us as we were them. With dusk falling we made our way back to *Heritage Adventurer* which was looking resplendent in the falling tropical night.



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Day 12

Friday 3 November

Star Harbour, Frigate Island. Solomon Islands

Dawn saw us safely anchored off the entrance to Star Harbour and near the beautiful Frigate Island. Our birding group headed out at 0715 and up toward the inlets and hills of Star Harbour. Walking along an easy trail from the village, the birders encountered several interesting Solomon Islands endemic species, such as the impressive, highly vocal Makira Honeyeater, super active Sooty Myzomela, and secretive Chestnut-bellied Monarch, not to mention two gorgeous parrots, the Duchess Lorikeet and Yellow-bibbed Lory, both of which gave stunning views as they fed in the canopy of flowering trees. After a leisurely breakfast, the rest of us went ashore at Frigate Island where we were greeted by the locals who treated us to a display of their dancing under the shade of a beech almond tree. Suzanne and Chief Alfred interpreted the meanings behind the dances which told of the everyday lives of the men. After speeches, we were free to roam the island or head out snorkelling. Many enjoyed chatting with the locals who had come out from the mainland to meet the new visitors. Nathan gave rides in the Zodiac to

a swarm of local children who shrieked with laughter at every wave.

We were also greeted with the spectacle of hundreds of Lesser Frigatebirds circling above our heads and perched in the taller trees of this diminutive island. Despite its tiny size and significant tree cover, there are still several thatched wooden buildings on the islet, and even a garden with scattered crops such as bananas, papaya, yams and herbs. Small numbers of Megapode birds also persist here despite being easily accessible from the mainland.

By 1145 we were all back aboard and making our departure for remote Nendö Island in the Santa Cruz group. The afternoon was spent enjoying great discussions with Betha and Bruce on Papua New Guinea and WWII, and with Rod, Lou and Beth on the future of conservation in Melanesia. The birders were out in force on the Bridge deck as we approached the steep underwater drop-off of the Solomon Island Trench with depths down to a staggering 6,000 metres.



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Day 13

Saturday 4 November

Nendö Island, Santa Cruz Islands, Solomon Islands

Sunrise saw us arriving in Graciosa Bay, Nendö Island. The largest of the Santa Cruz Islands, and our last stop before leaving the Solomon Islands Group.

After an early breakfast, the birders were away for a walk in the rich rainforest of the eastern coast of Glacier Bay. By 0800 the rest of us were shore at Nemboe Village for our traditional welcome and women's dance before walking a short distance to the village proper for another traditional dance and a chance to meet the locals. Torrential rain did not dampen our spirits and added to the ambience of the lush tropical rainforest.

After an excellent showcase of local dance that had us laughing and clapping we explored the displays and market booths which showed everything from carvings to the manufacture of Red Feather Money which is used in the Santa Cruz Islands as a form of currency in settling important obligations in bridal wealth, mortuary celebrations and compensation payments). This currency, known as 'Tevau', is formed as coils resembling long belts and can reach up to 10 metres long (approximately 5 centimetres wide). The manufacture of the feather coils is limited to just a few hereditary specialists, working on one island, who are thought to receive their skills from spirits. One man locates the small Scarlet Honeyeater birds (*Myzomela Cardinalis*) living in the rainforest, and traps them using sticky perches. He then plucks the feathers from their heads, breasts and backs. A double coil of currency may consist of around 50-60,000 red feathers! Another man assembles the platelets from which the coils are composed. Using sap from a shrub as an adhesive he glues together Grey Pigeon feathers using a wooden gauge to check that each platelet is the correct size. A narrow strip of red feather is then glued onto each platelet. The currency binder assembles the platelets using a fibre cord base. The platelets are overlapped so just the red feathers are visible. The finished piece may be decorated with strings of seeds, shells, and turtle-shell, and attached to a ring of bark. The value of a coil is dependent on its condition - newly-made vivid coloured examples are most valuable. The coils are wrapped in leaves and bark cloth for storage.

Biologically, these islands share more with Vanuatu than the Solomon Islands. However,

they still have their endemics including four bird species - three of which the birders were lucky enough to see on their trip ashore - one of their best days birding. With the arrival of the trade winds and the associated swell, snorkelling was replaced and instead a small group went ashore at 1300 to wander and visit the technical college where students learned vital skills in house building and construction. These students were involved in building a church which was still under construction due to lack of supplies. Further along the coast, the predominantly Anglican village was notable for its monastery which is a rarity in the Pacific. By 1530 we were back aboard *Heritage Adventurer* as we set sail for the last country on our voyage, Vanuatu.



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Day 14

Sunday, 5 November

Lo Island, Torres Islands, Vanuatu

Dawn found us skirting down the eastern flank of the Torres Island group with many of us enjoying a well-deserved sleep-in. By 0830 we had received the customs officials aboard and cleared into Vanuatu and were ready to head ashore to the local village of Rinuhe on Loh Island. A warm Vanuatuan welcome awaited us after a ritualised challenge to the Zodiacs as they landed on the secluded beach with the drums heralding yet another cultural change on the journey. *Heritage Adventurer* was the first expedition ship to visit since her visit last year so the locals were happy to see us and welcomed us through an archway on the beach adorning us with beautiful leis. We were greeted by the chief of the local village and wider community before beginning the dances which they quickly invited us to join.

Their dance routines involved different generations tramping out a circular beat in a show of unity was followed by an intriguing visit to the village where we were able to sample the local delicacies and crafts. The birders went their way in search of some

species they had yet to see while other members of our group went to inspect a cave the locals use to shelter from cyclones. Loh is also one of the main exporters of Coconut Crab to the other islands of Vanuatu and with the harvesting season just opened, there weren't many crabs to be seen.

After returning to *Heritage Adventurer* for lunch, the adventurous among us had the opportunity to snorkel an incredible underwater world of sprawling corals teeming with colourful fish. By 1530 we were all back aboard and making our departure for Espiritu Santo and enjoying lectures from Bruce on WWII history, Valerie on Chocolate and Rod on Island Dispersal.



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Day 15

Monday 6 November

Espiritu Santo, Vanuatu

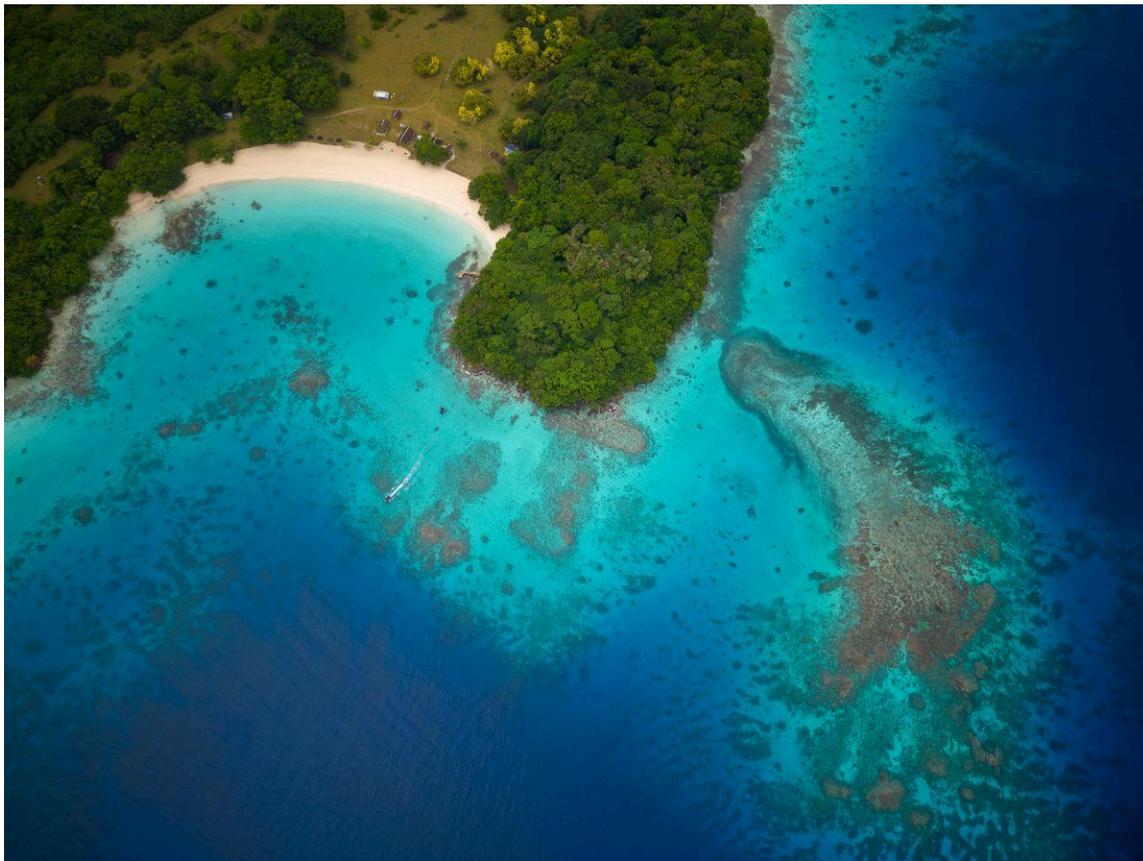
Espiritu Santo (Spanish for 'the Holy Spirit') is the largest of Vanuatu's islands (3,677 km²) and is home to some of the most beautiful white sandy beaches on the planet. Voted as one of The World's Top 10 Beaches, the white soft sand and clear blue waters of Champagne Beach took our breath away as we, appropriately, enjoyed a glass of champagne on Champagne Beach.

The ease of snorkelling out from the beach and the astounding marine life blow also proved great entertainment. An extra surprise awaited us onshore - the incredible water music of the Leweton Village water dancers from Gaua Island in the Banks Islands. Their water music has been practiced on Champagne Beach for hundreds of years and is passed on through the Ni Vanuatu women. In 2008 they became famous worldwide through a tour of Europe, Australia Asia, and the USA where hundreds of thousands experienced their unique music and performance. After a relaxed morning on the beach, we said our farewells to this special place.

By afternoon we had repositioned further down the coast and were ashore and exploring Santo and downtown Luganville, the provincial capital. During WWII, particularly after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, the island was used by Allied

Forces as a military supply and support base, naval harbour, and airfield. In a highly fictionalised form, it was the locale of James Michener's *Tales of the South Pacific* and the subsequent Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, *South Pacific*. After visiting Million Dollar Point, named for its worth after thousands of tons of US construction equipment was dumped into the sea after WWII, we headed to the memorial site of the SS Coolidge - an American luxury ocean liner that was converted into a troop carrier during WWII and sank as a result of hitting two US mines. All, but two on board were saved. The SS Coolidge along with Million Dollar Point have now become world-renowned dive sites on Espiritu Santo.

Stopping for a refuelling at the farmers' market, we end our day at one of Espiritu Santo's legendary Blue Holes - crystal-clear, deep iridescent blue pools unique to Vanuatu. These natural phenomena are formed when underground streams originating in the island's western ranges resurface as springs, cutting deep circular pools into the karst. Filtered by limestone, the water in these holes is pure and gin-clear, manifesting in luminous shades of blue. By 1630 our Zodiacs were ready to take us downriver through spectacular jungle before gaining the sea and an awaiting BBQ aboard *Heritage Adventurer*.



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Day 16

Tuesday 7 November

Ambrym Island, Vanuatu

Cloud draped the peaks of the two active volcanoes Marum and Benbow as we approached the northeast coast of Ambrym Island. The island was named by Captain Cook who anchored here in 1774 and translates to 'here are yams' ('ham rim' in the Ranon language). Ambrym is first and foremost a 'black' island due to its volcanic ash and because of its 'black magic' history. Ancient customs play a significant part in everyday village life including unique characteristics such as the sculpted tam-tams (slit gongs), sand-drawing, tree fern statues and local mystical dances.

Heritage Adventurer anchored off the northern tip of Ambrym and by 0830 we were heading ashore to the landing at Nobul Village. Before our arrival guests and staff had donated US\$2,000 to provide food and water for the Ambrym community, so badly hit by category 5 Cyclone Lola two weeks ago on 23 October. While we visited the island 140 kilograms of rice, 3,000 litres of water in 20-litre containers, soap, medical supplies and another 300 kilograms of food were shuttled ashore by Zodiac.

We set off by foot and 4WD to find the specially-prepared Rom Dance site which had been selected by its soil resonance to give full effect to the foot-stomping music created by the participants. As we ventured further east the damage caused by the cyclone became more apparent with large trees down and gardens ravaged by the winds. The locals had done an excellent job of clearing up and we arrived at the performance grounds full of anticipation.

After the initial speeches, we witnessed some storytelling and sand drawing before the Rom Dancers slowly appeared with their mesmerising beat. Intended as a sacred initiation celebration for young men taking the rites of passage into manhood, the ancient, sacred dance was a feast for the senses featuring mysterious Gods dressed in leaves and drum sounds of hollow wood, and the dancers' feet on the soil. The resonating beats and rhythmic chanting had us all captivated.

Back at the landing site, a local rhythm band played to raise funds for cyclone relief and there was an opportunity to purchase some of their fantastic wood carvings and bamboo flutes. Some guests enjoyed a final swim, then returned to *Heritage Adventurer* for an afternoon of lectures before Captain Tomasz's farewell cocktails and dinner.

A particular highlight was our photographer Stephen Bradley's slide show of our endless

adventures on Discover the Secrets of Melanesia revisiting the many memories of our last 16 days. What a fantastic voyage and, as many said, "trip of a lifetime!"



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Day 17

Wednesday 8 November

Havannah Harbour, Vanuatu

Waking in Havannah Harbour, having sailed more than 2,480 nautical miles over 16 days and 15 expedition stops, we certainly feel we have discovered the secrets of Melanesia, privileged to have travelled to places few will ever visited. Following a final breakfast together, we bid farewell to the *Heritage Adventurer*, her crew and our Heritage Expeditions team and embarked on new adventures with hearts full of incredible memories and magical moments exploring this very special part of the world.

DISCOVER THE SECRETS OF MELANESIA SPECIES LIST

Birds seen on Sepik River near Kopar Villag 25 Oct am

Australian White Ibis
(Eastern) Great Egret
Intermediate Egret
Pied Heron
Great-billed Heron

Common Sandpiper
Whiskered Tern
Whistling Kite
Ornate Fruit-Dove
Orange-fronted Fruit-Dove
[Orange-bellied Fruit-Dove - probable]
Torresian Imperial Pigeon
Zoe's Imperial Pigeon
Pinon's Imperial Pigeon
Collared Imperial Pigeon
Eclectus Parrot
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo
Black-capped Lory
Red-cheeked Parrot
Fig-parrot sp.?
Pacific Swallow
Lesser Black Coucal
Blyth's Hornbill
Uniform Swiftlet (most likely from our distant views)
Rufous-bellied Kookaburra
New Guinea Friarbird (heard)
Yellow-faced Myna
Black-browed Triller
White-bellied Cuckooshrike
Metallic Starling
Torresian Crow

At sea. Sepik towards Manus 25th October

Wedge-tailed Shearwater
Streaked Shearwater
Beck's Petrel
Little Tern
Common Tern
White-tailed Tropicbird
Brown Booby

Birds seen on Manus Island 26 October morning

Pacific Black Duck

Purple Swampphen
Nicobar Pigeon
Island Imperial Pigeon
Claret-breasted Fruit-Dove
Glossy Swiftlet
(Uniform Swiftlet?)
White-rumped Swiftlet
Papuan Brush-Cuckoo
Brahmany Kite
Pacific Baza
Manus Dwarf-kingfisher (heard)
Coconut Lorikeet
Eclectus Parrot
Yellow-breasted Pygmy-parrot
Blyth's Hornbill
White-naped Friarbird
Manus Cuckooshrike
Bismarck Whistler
Northern Fantail
Common Shining Flycatcher
Manus Monarch
Black-headed White-eye
Moustached Treeswift
Metallic Starling
Sahul Sunbird
Red-banded Flowerpecker?

New Hanover briefly near Tsoilik Island and on the island, 27 October am

Melanesian Scrubfowl
Stephan's Dove (heard)
Red-knobbed Imperial Pigeon
Island Imperial Pigeon
Yellow-banded Fruit-Dove
Uniform Swiftlet
Papuan Brush Cuckoo (heard)
Common Kingfisher
Melanesian Kingfisher
Red-flanked Lorikeet
Coconut Lorikeet

Green (Finsch's) Pygmy-parrot
Ebony Myzomela
White-bellied Cuckooshrike
Varied Triller
Bismarck Whistler
Tree Martin
Common Shining Flycatcher
Island Monarch
Bismarck Crow
Singing Starling
Pacific Golden Plover
Common Sandpiper
Whimbrel?
Common Tern
Striated Heron
Osprey

Rabaul species seen 28 October morning

Whimbrel
Red-knobbed Imperial Pigeon
Knob-billed Fruit-Dove
Coconut Lorikeet
Red-flanked Lorikeet
Song Parrot (heard)
Eclectus Parrot
Variable Goshawk
White-bellied Sea Eagle
Glossy Swiftlet
White-rumped Swiftlet
Uniform Swiftlet
Rainbow Bee-eater (heard)
New Britain Friarbird
Velvet (Dull) Flycatcher
Bismarck Monarch
Bismarck Crow
Pied Coucal
Metallic Starling
Black Sunbird
Ashy Myzomela

Red-banded Flowerpecker
Hooded Manakin
Spangled Drongo
Willie Wagtail

Pigeon Island 28 Oct pm

Island Imperial Pigeon
Golden Whistler
Sahul Sunbird
Sclater's Myzomela
Willie Wagtail
Common Sandpiper
Bismarck Crow

Birds seen on Green Islands - Nissan 29 October

Melanesian Megapode (Scrubfowl)
Rufous Night Heron
Pacific Reef Egret (presumed - distant)
Osprey
White-bellied Sea Eagle
Mackinlay's Cuckoo-Dove
Glossy Swiftlet
Island Imperial Pigeon
Yellow-banded Fruit-Dove (heard)
Melanesian Kingfisher (bennetti)
Beach Kingfisher
Coconut Lorikeet
Atoll Starling
Metallic Starling
Louisiade White-eye
Island Monarch

Bougainville Species seen on road to Panguna Mine

Mackinlay's Cuckoo-Dove
Island Imperial Pigeon
Glossy Swiftlet
Bougainville Rail

Brahmany Kite
Pied Goshawk
Blyth's Hornbill
Ultramarine Kingfisher
Solomons Cockatoo
Cardinal Lory
Solomons Cicadabird (Black-bellied Cuckooshrike) [heard]
Scarlet-naped Myzomela
Oriole Whistler
Rufous Fantail (crossed road)
Bougainville Monarch
Bougainville Bush Warbler [heard]
Bougainville Crow
Yellow-throated White-eye
Bougainville White-eye (previously Grey-throated White-eye)
*Brown-winged Starling?
Singing Starling
Midget Flowerpecker
Meek's Lorikeet
Long-tailed Myna

Birds seen or heard on Kolombangara, morning. Imbu Rano Lodge area 31st October

Solomons Sea Eagle
Pied Goshawk [heard]
Roviana Rail [heard]
Mackinlay's Cuckoo-Dove
Island Imperial Pigeon
Pale Mountain Pigeon
Solomons Cockatoo
Cardinal Lory
Coconut Lorikeet
Duchess Lorikeet [heard]
Buff-headed Coucal [heard]
Moustached Treeswift
Glossy Swiftlet
Melanesian Kingfisher
Crimson-rumped Myzomela
North Melanesian Cuckooshrike
Barred Cuckooshrike

Oriole Whistler [heard]
Kolombangara Monarch
White-capped Monarch
Steel-blue Flycatcher
Solomons White-eye

Birds seen on Tetepare 1st November morning

Great Frigatebird
Pacific Black Duck (flushed)
Purple Swamphen
Whimbrel
Pacific Reef Egret
Melanesian Scrubfowl
Claret-breasted Fruit-Dove
Island Imperial Pigeon
Solomons Cockatoo
Cardinal Lory
[Song Parrot seen & photos by Rod]
Solomons Nightjar
Moustached Treeswift
Glossy Swiftlet
Melanesian Kingfisher
Beach Kingfisher
Little Kingfisher
Willie Wagtail
Crimson-rumped Myzomela
Kolombangara Monarch (heard)
White-capped Monarch
Dark-eyed White-eye
Metallic Starling
Long-tailed Myna
Brown-winged Starling
'Olive-backed' Sunbird
Pacific Swallow

White-eyed Starling - the pale-eyed starling seen briefly by Frank and Richard (after Ron & Sue had gone back) with the Metallic Starlings seems to be a very good candidate for White-eyed Starling. It's a shame it flew off. Surprisingly, according to the book it has been seen on only 4 islands, Bougainville, Choiseul, Guadalcanal and

Rendova. Rendova is very close to Tetepare, separated by only 2km at the nearest point. The bird we saw had a creamy eye (not white) and was long tailed, but not as long tailed as illustrated. It seems probable that it was a female White-eyed Starling. I hope we can verify the ID on subsequent trips!

Malaita birds seen 2nd November. Road from Atori

Striated Heron
Crested Tern
Common Tern
Variable Goshawk
Woodford's Rail (prob an endemic)
Chestnut-bellied Imperial Pigeon
Yellow-bibbed Lory
Solomons Cockatoo
Steel-blue Flycatcher
Malaita White-eye
Moustached Treeswift
Uniform Swiftlet
Brown-winged Starling
Singing Starling
Metallic Starling
White-eyed Starling
Long-tailed Myna
'Sahul' Sunbird

Birds seen on Makira (Star Harbour) 3rd November

Black Bittern
Grey-tailed Tattler
Island Imperial Pigeon
Eclectus Parrot
Yellow-bibbed Fruit-Dove
Yellow-bibbed Lory
Duchess Lorikeet
Chestnut-bellied Monarch
Cardinal Myzomela
Sooty Myzomela
Rufous Fantail
Makira Honeyeater

Makira Starling
Metallic Starling
Singing Starling
White-rumped Swiftlet
Pacific Swallow
Melanesian kingfishers
Brahminy Kite

Frigate Island 3 November

Melanesian Megapode
Melanesian Kingfisher
Island Imperial Pigeon
Lesser Frigatebird 250-300

Frigate Island towards Nendo. At sea. 3 November pm

3 Tahiti Petrels
1 Mottled Petrel
2 unidentified Pterodroma
c.10 Wedge-tailed Shearwater
1 White-tailed Tropicbird
6+ Sooty Terns

Birds seen on Nendo 4 November 2023 morning

Mackinlay's Cuckoo-Dove
Pacific Emerald Dove
Red-bellied Fruit-Dove
Pacific Imperial Pigeon
Coconut Lorikeet
Pacific Kingfisher
Rufous Fantail
Cardinal Myzomela
Polynesian Triller
Rusty-winged Starling
Santa Cruz (White-throated) Whistler
Santa Cruz White-eye
Sanford's White-eye
Uniform Swiftlet

Pacific Swallow
Bridled Tern
Common Tern
Pacific Reef Egret

Seabirds NW of northernmost Torres Islands 6-8am 5 November

Sooty Tern
Wedge-tailed Shearwater
'Tropical' Shearwater

Birds seen Lo Island in Torres Islands, Vanuatu. 5 November morning

Vanuatu Megapode (in flight)
Red-bellied Fruit-Dove
Pacific Imperial Pigeon
Coconut Lorikeet
Satin Swiftlet (narrow white rump)
Pacific Kingfisher (torresianus) heard
Cardinal Myzomela
[Long-tailed Triller photos by Natalia!]
Silvereye (tropicus)

5th November pm. At sea

Red-footed Booby
White-tailed Tropicbird
Wedge-tailed Shearwater

Birds seen in Espirito Santo, Vanuatu. Loru Conservation area & behind Champagne Beach

Vanuatu Megapode
Buff-banded Rail
Pacific Emerald Dove
Mackinlay's Cuckoo-Dove
Red-bellied Fruit-Dove
Tanna Fruit-Dove Pacific Imperial Pigeon
Metallic Pigeon (leopoldi)
Coconut Lorikeet

Satin Swiftlet
Pacific Kingfisher (santoensis)
Vanuatu Kingfisher (glimpsed!)
Buff-bellied Monarch
Melanesian Flycatcher
*Melanesian Whistler (intacta)
Streaked Fantail
'Grey' Fantail
South Melanesian Cuckooshrike
Vanuatu White-eye
Silvereye (tropicus)
White-breasted Woodswallow
Pacific Swallow
Vanuatu Imperial Pigeon (Ron only)
Long-tailed Triller (Ron only)

Approach to Ambryn am 7 November

Streaked Shearwater (1-2)
Wedge-tailed Shearwater 150+
Melanesian Shearwater 1
Sooty Tern 20
Pacific Swift (assumed) c.10

7 November morning Ambryn Island

Vanuatu White-eye
Silvereye
Grey-cheeked Honeyeater (griseoviridis)
Cardinal Myzomela
Satin Swiftlet
Grey Fantail (I didn't see an obvious breast band - certainly not as depicted)
Red-bellied Fruit-Dove
Pacific Imperial Pigeon
Pacific Kingfisher

At sea pm 7th November

Wedge-tailed Shearwater
Crested Tern

Sooty Tern
Red-footed Booby