



**NEW CALEDONIA – KAGU CUSTOM TOUR  
TRIP REPORT DECEMBER 2017**

**By Andy Walker**



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Kagu was the main reason for this custom tour, and this one showed very well for us on our first day birding in the country. A spectacular New Caledonian endemic

This short custom tour to Grande Terre, New Caledonia, focused on finding the endemic and monotypic flightless **Kagu**, as well as many of the other New Caledonian endemics. New Caledonia is an ancient archipelago of Gondwanan (continental) origin. Most of the island of Grande Terre is covered in tropical evergreen forest in the higher elevations, while savanna and maquis dominate the lower elevations.

Most famous for being the home of the unique **Kagu**, Grande Terre hosts a total of 18 island endemics as well as about a dozen more Melanesian endemics. Seeing **Kagu** was the main point of the tour, and great views of several birds were had. Other endemics we found during this short tour included **Cloven-feathered Dove**, **Goliath Imperial Pigeon**, **Horned Parakeet**, **New Caledonian Parakeet**, **New Caledonian Myzomela**, **Barred Honeyeater**, **Crow Honeyeater**, **New Caledonian Friarbird**, **New Caledonian Whistler**, **New Caledonian Crow**, **New Caledonian Cuckooshrike**, **Yellow-bellied Flyrobin**, **Green-backed White-eye**, **Striated Starling**, and **Red-throated Parrotfinch**. Sixty-three species were recorded (61 seen). Species lists are provided at the end of this report for birds, reptiles and butterflies identified.

## **New Caledonia: Kagu Custom Tour**

### **Day 0, 9<sup>th</sup> December 2017. Pre-tour arrival in Nouméa**

John and Andy flew into Nouméa midmorning after finishing the Southwestern Australia tour that had just concluded a couple of days earlier. The afternoon was spent at leisure enjoying the amenities at our comfortable beachside hotel.

### **Day 1, 10<sup>th</sup> December 2017. Parc Provincial de la Rivière Bleue**

We had one target in mind for the day, so we headed across to the very hot and extremely dry Parc Provincial de la Rivière Bleue. We arrived at the park early in the morning, and once through the entrance procedures (where we found our first **New Caledonian Friarbird**) made our way into the forest. The first bird we saw was **Goliath Imperial Pigeon**, the largest arboreal pigeon in the world. Typically, the bird sat in a tree and allowed us great and prolonged views, enabling us to really appreciate this huge bird.

A short while later we were rewarded with the principle target of the day, and the trip, the rare, flightless, and endemic **Kagu**. We watched this bird for a while before it walked out of view. We persisted on the trail, hoping to get better and more prolonged views, which eventually we did. As we rounded a corner on the trail we were suddenly face-to-face with a foraging **Kagu**. We stayed with this bird for a long time as it foraged in the leaf litter. It was fascinating to be able to watch the bird at length.

After enjoying our time with this very unique bird we decided to focus our attention on some of the other endemics to be found in the forest. During the course of our time here we found a stunning male **New Caledonian Myzomela**, several vocal but rather shy **New Caledonian Whistlers**, numerous vocal and rather aggressive **New Caledonian Friarbirds**, and a few **Green-backed White-eyes** that were being seriously harassed by the aforementioned friarbirds. Other species recorded included **Coconut Lorikeet**, **Swamp Harrier**, **Shining Bronze Cuckoo**, **Grey-eared Honeyeater**, **Fan-tailed Gerygone**, **Streaked Fantail**, and **Southern Shrikebill**. The shrikebill gave fantastic, close-range views.

As we drove back to our hotel for the late afternoon we saw **Pied Cormorant**, **Nankeen Night Heron**, **White-faced Heron**, and, best of all, a dark-phase **Pacific Reef Heron**.





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The endemic and well-named Goliath Imperial Pigeon is commonly seen and heard.



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The magnificent Kagu peering out at us from behind a tree! Later we had some amazing views of one out in the open – as shown in the photo on the front cover of this report.

**Day 2, 11<sup>th</sup> December 2017. Mount Koghi**

After enjoying breakfast while looking out to sea on a beautiful morning (and admiring some **Coconut Lorikeets**) we gained some elevation and headed to Mount Koghi for the day. Here we walked in some very pretty forests complete with some huge and impressive tree ferns. As we stepped out of the car we found **Rufous Whistler** and then three New Caledonian endemics: **Striated Startling** (an adult feeding a recent fledgling), **Green-backed White-eye** (much better views than on the previous day), and **Barred Honeyeater**. A pair of foraging **Fan-tailed Gerygones** and **Grey Fantail** came quite close to us, and a lone **Metallic Pigeon** showed very well as it fed at eye-level. We had very brief views of two further endemics; first a stunning **Cloven-feathered Dove** appeared in the treetops, but only for a short while, and then a **New Caledonian Crow** flew through but didn't hang around, unfortunately. One other new endemic, however, gave some good views, and we were very pleased to see a pair of the uncommon (and at times difficult-to-see) **New Caledonian Parakeet**.



This endemic Green-backed White-eye was very inquisitive as to why we were in the forest.

We started hiking on a forest trail which was initially actually much quieter than the area we had been checking on the forest edge. However, undeterred we continued our walk, and it was well worth it as we found several **Melanesian Flycatchers**, **Green-backed White-eye**, **South Melanesian Cuckooshrike**, **Long-tailed Triller**, **New Caledonian Whistler** (much more cooperative than on the previous day), and another new endemic in the form of the rather 'cute' **Yellow-bellied Flyrobin** (as well as plenty of endemic **Goliath Imperial Pigeons**). There was ample frustration from a **Fan-tailed Cuckoo** that could be heard calling from the treetops, but despite our best efforts to see it we failed to do so. However, we got a much better reward than the cuckoo when we found a small flock of the rather bizarre-looking **Horned Parakeet** feeding in a fruiting tree. The **Horned Parakeet** is considered an uncommon endemic and is classified as globally Vulnerable by BirdLife International. This was another big target bird for the tour gladly secured!





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The endemic New Caledonian Whistler (male). They seem to spend a lot of time close to the ground on the dark forest floor, but are well worth the effort to see one as they are rather pretty.

Gradually it started to rain, so we decided to grab some lunch at a rather nice local café back down the mountain. On our return to the forest a bit later in the day it was much quieter than in the morning, although we did get much better looks at **New Caledonian Crow** as well as several new species for the day/trip, such as **Shining Bronze Cuckoo** (seen this time), **Chestnut-breasted Mannikin**, **Common Waxbill**, **Southern Shrikebill**, **Silvereye**, **New Caledonian Friarbird**, and several **Sacred Kingfishers** and **White-breasted Woodswallows**. But most satisfying of all was seeing **Fan-tailed Cuckoo** just as we were leaving the forest at the end of the day, especially after the runaround it had given us all morning!

### Day 3, 12<sup>th</sup> December 2017. Parc Provincial de la Rivière Bleue to Sarraméa

After breakfast in Nouméa we again traveled across to Parc Provincial de la Rivière Bleue. As we entered the park road one of the first birds we saw was a **Pacific Emerald Dove** that flew right across in front of the car. As we waited for our shuttle bus to take us through the national park we saw several **Whistling Kites** and the ubiquitous and vociferous **Grey-eared Honeyeater**. Once we hit the forest the first bird seen was a **Kagu** – a great start! We spent a couple of hours walking around the forest trails, where we found a few more **Kagus**. Numerous **New Caledonian Friarbirds** were present and were actually a bit of a pain, as they were very territorial over a flowering tree and were chasing anything and everything away from the vicinity, and this included a very brief **Crow Honeyeater**. Rather frustrating! We did, however, have good views of several **Goliath Imperial Pigeons**, **New Caledonian Whistler**, **Coconut Lorikeet**, **Streaked Fantail**, **Southern Shrikebill**, and our first endemic **New Caledonian Cuckooshrike**.



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We had some exceptional views of Kagu during the tour. It was exciting to see these rare and endemic flightless birds, but it was even more of a privilege to be able to spend some quality time with them, particularly to watch and listen to them foraging in the forest. These are very interesting birds indeed.

Once it became quiet, around noon, we decided to commence our journey north to the Sarraméa area. **Barred Honeyeater** and another **Pacific Emerald Dove** were noted as we drove out of the park, along with three more **Kagus** too! A few stops along the way north produced some new trip birds for us, such as **Pacific Black Duck**, **Grey Teal**, **Australasian Grebe**, **Wild Turkey** (an introduced species here), and **Australasian Swamphen**, along with our best views of **Chestnut-breasted Mannikin** and at least five **Buff-banded Rails**. **Zebra Dove** was also new, and we had a couple of very close flyovers from a couple of **Swamp Harriers** and a pair of **New Caledonian Parakeets**.

As we drove into our accommodation we found what was going to be one of the following day's main targets much more easily than expected, but there were no complaints with the close-up views we got of the simply stunning endemic **Red-throated Parrotfinch**. The only complaint was with the heavy rain, which made photography rather difficult. We'd have to hope for better weather the following day.

#### Day 4, 13<sup>th</sup> December 2017. Farino

After some very nice crêpes, croissants, and pain au chocolat for breakfast we headed out onto a riverside trail passing alongside some gardens and then through some very nice forest, seeing an immature **Nankeen Night Heron** and a few **White-faced Herons** along the way.

We had plenty of good birds along the walk to keep us occupied, getting great close-up views of most of them was appreciated. Highlights were several endemics such as **Red-throated Parrotfinch**, **Yellow-bellied Flyrobin**, **New Caledonian Whistler**, **New Caledonian Crow**, **Goliath Imperial Pigeon**, **New Caledonian Myzomela**, **Green-backed White-eye**, **Striated Starling**, and again lots of **New Caledonian Friarbirds**. Other species showing well included **Long-tailed Triller**, **Melanesian Flycatcher**, **Metallic Pigeon**, **Streaked** and **Grey Fantails**,

**Rufous Whistler, South Melanesian Cuckooshrike, Fan-tailed Gerygone, and Satin** (a recent split from Glossy) **Swiftlet**. A surprise in the forest was the sound of **Indian Peafowl** ringing out, yet another introduced species on this island.



Melanesian Flycatcher is always popular; they look pretty and make a range of strange calls. Often high in the trees, occasionally they will drop down low, as this female did for us.

As it looked like it was about to start raining, we jumped into the car and headed off the mountain down to our wonderful lunch spot (the best cakes in New Caledonia!). This turned out to be great timing, as it poured down with rain for a while at this point.

After lunch we checked out some wetlands nearby, another good move. Here we found a large flock of **Grey Teal**, along with a few **Hardheads** and many **Pacific Black Ducks**. A **Little Black Cormorant** was also present, as were several **Australasian Grebes**. **Buff-banded Rails** and **Australasian Swamphens** were numerous. A couple of **Swamp Harriers** were keeping an eye on things from the air and occasionally flushed the waterbirds. Several **Sacred Kingfishers** were present, and, best of all, we found several **Red-throated Parrotfinches** foraging with **Common Waxbills** and **Chestnut-breasted Mannikins**. **Pied Trillers** also passed through as they fed, showing very well.

During the late afternoon we spent some time around our accommodation, and here we had more great view of several **Red-throated Parrotfinches**. These are seriously stunning birds, and across the day we saw plenty, which was really appreciated. Tricky to photograph but amazing to see so well! We also had further views of a few **New Caledonian Crows**, our best views of the tour, in fact. One bird was even noted foraging with its tool! However, our best sighting involved finding a **Cloven-feathered Dove**, which gave prolonged views as it digested its food, sitting in a treetop. This ended a great penultimate day of our short tour.





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The Red-throated Parrotfinch is easily one of the most beautiful and spectacular endemic birds in New Caledonia. This small finch was seen fairly-frequently during the second half of the tour and gave some excellent views on most occasions.

#### **Day 5, 14<sup>th</sup> December 2017. Sarraméa to Nouméa, where the tour concluded**

We had a final morning birding around our hillside accommodation, where we found a fruiting tree that contained quite a few species, such as **South Melanesian Cuckooshrike**, **Rufous Whistler**, **Green-backed White-eye**, **Silvereye**, **Melanesian Flycatcher**, **Red-throated Parrotfinch**, **New Caledonian Myzomela**, and **Striated Starling**. We had really great views of several **New Caledonian Crows** and plenty of **New Caledonian Friarbirds** (again). **Goliath Imperial Pigeon**, **Metallic Pigeon**, and **Cloven-feathered Dove** were all heard, the latter unfortunately remaining inaccessible this time. **Sacred Kingfisher** and **White-breasted Woodswallow** were both found nesting, and we spent some time admiring the range of beautiful butterflies that were present here (e.g. monarch, meadow argus, small grass yellow, and great eggfly). While watching the many butterflies we had fantastic views (our best ones of the entire trip) of **Satin Swiftlet** flying around practically at our feet!

As lunchtime approached the skies again turned gray, so we headed to the wetland spot where we had been the last couple of days, where we saw many of the same birds seen there on the previous day, with the addition of a lone **Welcome Swallow**. We had further close looks at **Buff-banded Rail**, **Hardhead**, **Zebra Dove**, **Chestnut-breasted Mannikin**, **Common Waxbill**, **Rufous Whistler**, **Red-throated Parrotfinch**, **Long-tailed Triller**, and **Swamp Harrier**. After an hour or so the rain caught up with us, so we decamped to our lunch spot of choice and called time on a great few days' birding.

After yet another wonderful lunch we commenced our journey back to Nouméa through several torrential rain showers. We arrived at our beachside hotel in the city in the late afternoon, and the tour concluded.



**Day 6, 15<sup>th</sup> December 2017. Post-tour departure from Nouméa**

John departed Nouméa early in the morning for his flight home; Andy followed a couple of days later.



If you are going to introduce a mannikin to your country you might as well make sure it's a good-looking one, and Chestnut-breasted Mannikin must rate as one of the prettiest mannikins out there, even when soaking wet!

**Bird List<sup>1</sup> Following IOC 7.03**

Common Name	Scientific Name	Trip
	<b>ANSERIFORMES</b>	
<b><u>Ducks, Geese and Swans</u></b>	<b><u>Anatidae</u></b>	
Pacific Black Duck	<i>Anas superciliosa</i>	1
Grey Teal	<i>Anas gracilis</i>	1
Hardhead	<i>Aythya australis</i>	1
	<b>GALLIFORMES</b>	
<b><u>Pheasants and allies</u></b>	<b><u>Phasianidae</u></b>	
Wild Turkey (I)	<i>Meleagris gallopavo</i>	1
Indian Peafowl (I)	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>	1

<sup>1</sup> Species with **bold** names are New Caledonian endemics. The following notation after species names is used to show conservation status following BirdLife International: CR = Critically Endangered, EN = Endangered, VU = Vulnerable, NT = Near-threatened, and I = Introduced. Birds 'heard only' are marked with 'H' in the Trip column, all other species were seen.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Trip
	<b>PODICIPEDIFORMES</b>	
<b><u>Grebes</u></b>	<b><u>Podicipedidae</u></b>	
Australasian Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus novaehollandiae</i>	1
	<b>PELECANIFORMES</b>	
<b><u>Hérons, Bitterns</u></b>	<b><u>Ardeidae</u></b>	
Nankeen Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax caledonicus</i>	1
White-faced Heron	<i>Egretta novaehollandiae</i>	1
Pacific Reef Heron	<i>Egretta sacra</i>	1
	<b>SULIFORMES</b>	
<b><u>Cormorants, Shags</u></b>	<b><u>Phalacrocoracidae</u></b>	
Little Pied Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo melanoleucos</i>	1
Little Black Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax sulcirostris</i>	1
	<b>ACCIPITRIFORMES</b>	
<b><u>Kites, Hawks and Eagles</u></b>	<b><u>Accipitridae</u></b>	
Swamp Harrier	<i>Circus approximans</i>	1
Whistling Kite	<i>Haliastur sphenurus</i>	1
	<b>EURYPYGIFORMES</b>	
<b><u>Kagu</u></b>	<b><u>Rhynochetidae</u></b>	
<b>Kagu (EN)</b>	<i>Rhynochetos jubatus</i>	1
	<b>GRUIFORMES</b>	
<b><u>Rails, Crakes and Coots</u></b>	<b><u>Rallidae</u></b>	
Buff-banded Rail	<i>Gallirallus philippensis</i>	1
Spotless Crake	<i>Porzana tabuensis</i>	H
Australasian Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio melanotus</i>	1
	<b>CHARADRIIFORMES</b>	
<b><u>Sandpipers, Snipes</u></b>	<b><u>Scolopacidae</u></b>	
Wandering Tattler	<i>Tringa incana</i>	1
<b><u>Gulls, Terns and Skimmers</u></b>	<b><u>Laridae</u></b>	
Silver Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus novaehollandiae</i>	1
Greater Crested Tern	<i>Thalasseus bergii</i>	1
	<b>COLUMBIFORMES</b>	
<b><u>Pigeons, Doves</u></b>	<b><u>Columbidae</u></b>	
Rock Dove (I)	<i>Columba livia</i>	1
Metallic Pigeon	<i>Columba vitiensis</i>	1
Spotted (I)	<i>Spilopelia chinensis</i>	1
Pacific Emerald Dove	<i>Chalcophaps longirostris</i>	1
Zebra Dove (I)	<i>Geopelia striata</i>	1
<b>Cloven-feathered Dove (NT)</b>	<i>Drepanoptila holosericea</i>	1

Common Name	Scientific Name	Trip
<b>Goliath Imperial Pigeon (NT)</b>	<i>Ducula goliath</i>	1
	<b>CUCULIFORMES</b>	
<b><u>Cuckoos</u></b>	<b><u>Cuculidae</u></b>	
Shining Bronze Cuckoo	<i>Chrysococcyx lucidus</i>	1
Fan-tailed Cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis flabelliformis</i>	1
	<b>APODIFORMES</b>	
<b><u>Swifts</u></b>	<b><u>Apodidae</u></b>	
Satin Swiftlet	<i>Collocalia uropygialis</i>	1
White-rumped Swiftlet	<i>Aerodramus spodiopygius</i>	1
	<b>CORACIIFORMES</b>	
<b><u>Kingfishers</u></b>	<b><u>Alcedinidae</u></b>	
Sacred Kingfisher	<i>Todiramphus sanctus</i>	1
	<b>PSITTACIFORMES</b>	
<b><u>Old World Parrots</u></b>	<b><u>Psittaculidae</u></b>	
<b>Horned Parakeet (VU)</b>	<i>Eunymphicus cornutus</i>	1
<b>New Caledonian Parakeet</b>	<i>Cyanoramphus saisseti</i>	1
Coconut Lorikeet	<i>Trichoglossus haematodus</i>	1
	<b>PASSERIFORMES</b>	
<b><u>Honeyeaters</u></b>	<b><u>Meliphagidae</u></b>	
<b>New Caledonian Myzomela</b>	<i>Myzomela caledonica</i>	1
Grey-eared Honeyeater	<i>Lichmera incana</i>	1
<b>New Caledonian Friarbird</b>	<i>Philemon diemenensis</i>	1
<b>Crow Honeyeater (CR)</b>	<i>Gymnomyza aubryana</i>	H
<b>Barred Honeyeater</b>	<i>Glycifolia undulata</i>	1
<b><u>Australasian Warblers</u></b>	<b><u>Acanthizidae</u></b>	
Fan-tailed Gerygone	<i>Gerygone flavolateralis</i>	1
<b><u>Woodswallows, Butcherbirds</u></b>	<b><u>Artamidae</u></b>	
White-breasted Woodswallow	<i>Artamus leucorhynchus</i>	1
<b><u>Cuckooshrikes</u></b>	<b><u>Campephagidae</u></b>	
South Melanesian Cuckooshrike	<i>Coracina caledonica</i>	1
<b>New Caledonian Cuckooshrike (NT)</b>	<i>Coracina analis</i>	1
Long-tailed Triller	<i>Lalage leucopyga</i>	1
<b><u>Whistlers and allies</u></b>	<b><u>Pachycephalidae</u></b>	
<b>New Caledonian Whistler</b>	<i>Pachycephala caledonica</i>	1
Rufous Whistler	<i>Pachycephala rufiventris</i>	1
<b><u>Fantails</u></b>	<b><u>Rhipiduridae</u></b>	
Grey Fantail	<i>Rhipidura albiscapa</i>	1
Streaked Fantail	<i>Rhipidura verreauxi</i>	1

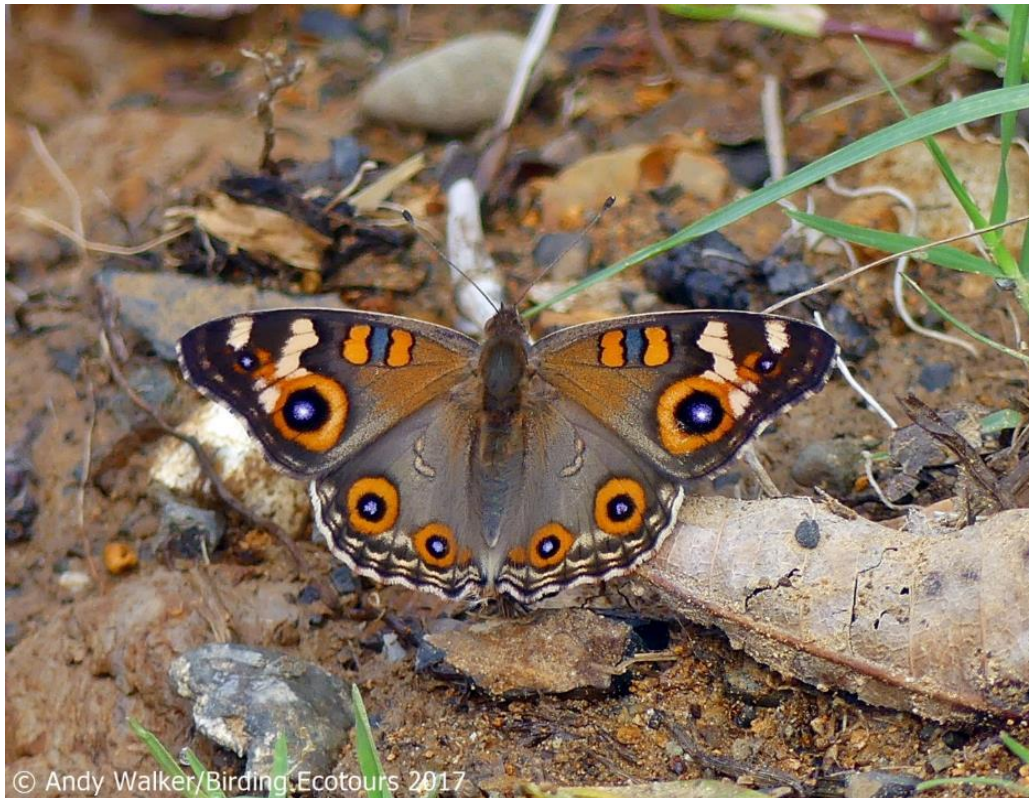


Common Name	Scientific Name	Trip
<b><u>Monarchs</u></b>	<b><u>Monarchidae</u></b>	
Southern Shrikebill	<i>Clytorhynchus pachycephaloides</i>	1
Melanesian Flycatcher	<i>Myiagra caledonica</i>	1
<b><u>Crows, Jays</u></b>	<b><u>Corvidae</u></b>	
New Caledonian Crow	<i>Corvus moneduloides</i>	1
<b><u>Australasian Robins</u></b>	<b><u>Petroicidae</u></b>	
Yellow-bellied Flyrobin	<i>Microeca flaviventris</i>	1
<b><u>Bulbuls</u></b>	<b><u>Pycnonotidae</u></b>	
Red-vented Bulbul (I)	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>	1
<b><u>Swallows, Martins</u></b>	<b><u>Hirundinidae</u></b>	
Welcome Swallow	<i>Hirundo neoxena</i>	1
<b><u>White-eyes</u></b>	<b><u>Zosteropidae</u></b>	
Green-backed White-eye	<i>Zosterops xanthochroa</i>	1
Silvereye	<i>Zosterops lateralis</i>	1
<b><u>Starlings, Rhabdornis</u></b>	<b><u>Sturnidae</u></b>	
Striated Starling	<i>Aplonis striata</i>	1
Common Myna (I)	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	1
<b><u>Old World Sparrows, Snowfinches</u></b>	<b><u>Passeridae</u></b>	
House Sparrow (I)	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	1
<b><u>Waxbills, Munias and allies</u></b>	<b><u>Estrildidae</u></b>	
Common Waxbill (I)	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>	1
<b><u>Red-throated Parrotfinch</u></b>	<b><u>Erythrura psittacea</u></b>	1
Chestnut-breasted Mannikin (I)	<i>Lonchura castaneothorax</i>	1
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>61</b>

### Reptile and Butterfly List

Common Name	Scientific Name	Trip
<b><u>REPTILES</u></b>		
	<b>SQUAMATA</b>	
	<b>Gekkonidae</b>	
Common house gecko	<i>Hemidactylus frenatus</i>	1
	<b>Scincidae</b>	
Green-bellied tree skink	<i>Lioscincus nigrofasciolatum</i>	1
Litter skink sp.	<i>Caledoniscincus sp.</i>	1
<b>TESTUDINES</b>		
	<b>Emydidae</b>	
Red-eared slider	<i>Trachemys scripta elegans</i>	1
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>4</b>

Common Name	Scientific Name	Trip
<b><u>BUTTERFLIES</u></b>		
	<b>LEPIDOPTERA</b>	
	<b>Nymphalidae</b>	
Meadow argus	<i>Junonia villida</i>	1
Monarch	<i>Danaus plexippus</i>	1
Plain tiger	<i>Danaus chrysippus</i>	1
Great eggfly	<i>Hypolimnas bolina</i>	1
	<b>Pieridae</b>	
No-brand grass yellow	<i>Eurema brigitta australis</i>	1
Cabbage white	<i>Pieris rapae</i>	1
Montrouzier's ulysses	<i>Papilio montrouzieri</i>	1
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>7</b>



This meadow argus was one of many stunning butterflies seen during the tour.