Banda Sea Cruise

5th – 23rd October 2014

Leaders: James Eaton and Mike Nelson


The 4,000 km wide Indonesian archipelago, stretching east to west across three time zones, is host to more than 300 endemic birds. With more than 18,000 islands, it is almost impossible to see all of those endemics, and a considerable number are amongst the most difficult species to see on earth because they inhabit remote islands where there are no airports and where boat travel is both slow and very uncomfortable. Nowhere is this truer than amongst the mainly volcanic islands that form the eastern arc of the Lesser Sunda islands. Indeed, whilst the larger, species-rich Lesser Sunda islands of Flores, Sumba and Timor are easy to get to and are visited by birders annually, the remote islands of Wetar, Alor, Pantar and a series of even smaller islands in the Banda Sea including Damar, Pantar and Babar have been visited by almost no birders, and their fauna and flora is only known through a limited amount of collecting that took place more than 100 years ago. Visiting these islands by means of public transport would be a seriously difficult undertaking, requiring many months of rough and uncomfortable travel. In 2011 however, Birdtour Asia organized the inaugural tour to the most ornithologically interesting of these islands, and this year’s Banda Sea Cruise was the third such tour. The Banda Sea Cruise provides a unique opportunity to look for the endemic birds of this region whilst living aboard our extremely comfortable private ship designed specifically for touring the remotest islands of Indonesia and catering exclusively for special-interest groups such as ours and, for example, divers seeking undisturbed coral reefs. Using the ships speedboats we were able to reach even remote unspoiltd beaches where virtually no foreigner has ever set foot.
Given that many distinctive taxa in Wallacea are undoubtedly going to be split into newly recognized species in the near future, this tour has been designed to not only include all the known endemics but also to seek out likely 'armchair ticks' in coming years. Hence the itinerary evolved to include Tanahjampea, Pantar, Alor, Wetar, Leti, Damar and Babar, and finishes on the rather more developed and better-known island of Yamdena, in the Tanimbar Islands, at the far eastern end of the Lesser Sunda chain.

Our intrepid group of travellers converged from across the globe on the popular holiday island of Bali where some took advantage with successful pre-tour excursions for Bali Myna, Javan Owlet and Javan Banded Pitta, and also to Flores. Our first outing on the tour proper included a visit south of our hotel before our mid-morning flight where we were successful in our quest to see both the critically endangered Black-winged Myna and Javan Kingfisher. Yellow-throated Hanging Parrot, Olive-backed Tailorbird, Javan Myna and Scarlet-headed Flowerpecker were also new for a couple of us.

From Bali airport, complete with a flock of Oriental Plover on the airfield, a punctual flight across to the sleepy port town of Labuanbajo, in eastern Flores was a good omen though the rather hard landing (to put it mildly!) was a reminder to keep our feet firmly on the ground with Indonesian airlines!

We were soon aboard our fully equipped chartered ship which was to be our home for the next 15 nights as we traversed the eastern part of the archipelago. After a full introduction to the ship and our ever smiling and helpful crew, all the sun-loungers were occupied as we left scenic Labuanbajo en route to our first destination of Tanahjampea. As we entered the open seas our first pelagic species began to appear with good numbers of Bulwer’s Petrels, our first Red-footed and Brown Boobies, and smaller numbers of Pomarine Skua and Red-necked Phalarope.

![Tanahjampea Blue Flycatcher and Tanahjampea Monarch](image)

After a full night of sailing in remarkably calm waters we arrived at the southern end of Tanahjampea just after dawn. This island, not far south of Sulawesi, was the only island visited on the tour that is not part of the Lesser Sundas, but being so interesting ornithologically and not too far off our route, it was included to give us an opportunity to see some very poorly-known species. Indeed, apart from our 2011 and 2013 Banda Sea Cruise participants, only one other birder has visited this island during the last 80 years. After the anticipated wait for clearance by local officials, we were soon on our way to the forest edge, some 3km away along a wide, flat trail.

More open areas near the village already provided interest with Arafura Fantail, Lemon-bellied White-eye, White-shouldered Triller, Island and Broad-billed Monarchs and the vocally-distinct black-bellied teysmannii subspecies of Olive-backed Sunbird. As we left the village we passed through small habitat patches and before long we had already found our first endemic. It turned out that our main target, the striking Tanahjampea (formerly White-tipped) Monarch, does not actually need good forest to survive, and we found a pair, feeding low in a mango tree along our route to the forest proper, along with our only everetti Golden Whistler sighting. Our other main targets, however, are more associated with forest. As we continued towards the forest edge we picked up several other birds of interest, including the endemic subspecies of Sulawesi Myzomela, Red-chested Flowerpecker, Short-tailed Starling and several more Tanahjampea Monarch. It was not until we reached the forest edge that we found a second major target, the longa subspecies of Bar-necked Cuckoo Dove – a taxon that will soon be elevated to species-level as ‘Flores Sea Cuckoo Dove’ - this being very distinct from elsewhere in the region, including two other forms that we were to see later during our tour.

Our third, and final target of the island took just a few minutes to find, as we entered a small dry streambed the highly distinctive Tanahjampea Blue Flycatcher popped up to sing wistfully away at close range. This is a species that has been recognized as a split (by IOC) from the confused ‘Mangrove Blue Flycatcher’ group. On
Tanahjampea, sexes of these *Cyornis* flycatchers show only minor plumage differences – males showing a whiter throat – whereas elsewhere in the region male and female blue flycatchers mostly look very different. Another pair of Tanahjampea Monarch also appeared, as did Sulawesi Myzomela. A clearing in the forest provided a good view point, and from here we saw good numbers of Black-naped Fruit Dove, Elegant and Pink-headed Imperial Pigeon before it was time for our picnic lunch.

Very happy with our success in seeing all our targets during the morning, we returned to the boat, enjoying another pair of flycatchers, sometimes even in the same view as the monarch and most of the other birds we had previously seen during our morning. Refreshed after some fresh coconut milk the kids waved us good-bye, having helped us push our zodiacs which had become stuck on the sand during low-tide! After some wonderful snorkeling and/or beer-toasting we set sail on our journey southeast towards Pantar – the longest leg of this tour, with 32 hours at sea.

Spending all day at sea, from the comfort of our top-deck sun-loungers we logged upwards of 1000 Red-footed Booby, small numbers of 3 species of skua, the odd Bridled and Sooty Tern, but otherwise the seawatching held few surprises. A distant all-dark shearwater stayed frustratingly unidentified though two Matsudiara's Storm Petrels were more confidently identified as they flushed from the sea by the boat. Cetaceans were also thin on the ground with just Bottle-nosed and Spinner Dolphins encountered.

**Alor Boobook, Pantar and Timor Bush Warbler, Alor**

The following morning we had breakfast just offshore of the island of Pantar whilst waiting for permission to go ashore – a long drawn out procedure to show respect to the village head in order to obtain a welcome passing on to their land and island. By 7am we had landed in some coastal mangroves and were birding in the hot, dry forest of the island. Here we found some widespread Lesser Sundas species such as Brown Quail, a Barred Buttonquail failing to find cover, Flame-breasted Sunbird, Araflura Fantail, Golden Whistler (split as Rusty-breasted by the IOC though this is might be rather premature as it excluded several far more distinct taxa), Black-fronted Flowerpecker, Indonesian Honeyeater and Helmeted Friarbird. Another widespread endemic, Elegant Pitta showed wonderfully well, on several perches for us. Rufous-backed Kingfisher also whizzed by on a couple of occasions, and perched once.

After lunch back on the boat, we went ashore again in the mid-afternoon to search for our remaining diurnal target, the *alfrediana* race of Wallacean Cuckooshrike that will be split in a forthcoming publication as 'Alor Cuckooshrike' and restricted to just Pantar and Alor. After watching our first Sunda Woodpeckers and Black-naped Monarch we heard the distinctive calls of the cuckooshrike and for the next 20 minutes or so we enjoyed the company of a pair. The characteristic plumage feature of these birds is the lack of sexual dimorphism, with the male lacking the black throat shown on all other races of the Wallacean complex, and a distinctive downsurred, not upslurred call. Yet more Brown Quail were found feeding by the roadside burnt grass and after finally finding several perched Olive-headed Lorikeet – a common bird from now till Babar – we picked our spot for night-birding. Even before dusk the *plesseni* race of Southern Boobook, found only on Pantar and Alor was calling and it wasn't long before the bird was found, later accompanied by his mate for repeated views in the spotlight. While waiting for our boats we found an additional boobook posing even better. Southern Boobook currently contains no less than 11 subspecies and is regarded to be a hugely over-lumped complex which undoubtedly includes several taxa that should be recognized as full species. The group is currently undergoing a review which will eventually see the ‘Alor’ Boobook elevated to full species status. Apart from members of the previous Banda Sea Cruises, this taxon has only been seen by a handful of pioneering birders!

From Pantar it was a relatively short journey to the neighbouring island of Alor where we anchored in the very early hours of the morning before taking an early breakfast – Edam, freshly-made unsweetened bread, a variety of jams and peanut butter, cornflakes, choice of eggs and freshly-squeezed juice – quite a change to the usual Indonesian birding breakfast!
Unusually for Indonesia, the pre-dawn waiting for vehicles and lack of fuel fiasco was more-or-less avoided and we were soon on our way into the hills. A newly paved road meant that, after just a couple of stops for over-heated engines we were right where we wanted to be not long after sunrise, in the montane eucalyptus forest. Olive-headed Lorikeets were positively abundant, throughout the day. Our first target, a myzomela, was found, a presumed 1st year male, followed later by an adult male. After plenty of Mountain White-eyes and surprisingly little else we finally heard the grating monotonous song of a Timor Bush Warbler down a narrow trail. After some patience, perseverance and careful tactics we gently enticed the skulking *Locustella* into view for most of us as he eventually clambered up above the dense thicket into clear view for several crucial seconds. Those of us still waiting for a view didn’t have to wait long as over the next half hour we were treated to repeated views of the pair, often in clear view either on top of ferns or even bare branches – we felt even luckier by the end of the day as we didn’t hear any more during the day.

A little further down the hill a familiar raptor cry down the valley soon had us peering at a pair of Flores Hawk Eagle, that circled beneath us occasionally perching up in the telescope. This critically endangered species was only recently found on the island.

After lunch, siesta and a football field loving Oriental Plover for one vehicle, as the rest of us thought they were taking photos of the local village (!), we birded lower down the slopes in pursuit of a different set of birds. Olive-headed Lorikeets were omnipresent, a pair of Wallacean Drongo appeared to be building a nest by the roadside, a flock of 4 ‘Alor Cuckooshrikes’, two Ruddy Cuckoo Dove, but frustratingly after flushing and hearing Flores Green Pigeons we finally had a pair fly into the very tree we had been hoping they would, and to the very top too, only for a motorbike to come past at precisely the wrong moment and flush them into oblivion! Despite some great birds already, the biggest surprise was in the late afternoon when whilst watching several beautifully marked Black-backed Fruit Doves, we discovered a flock of 17 Yellow-crested Cockatoo – away from Komodo and Timor Leste this is possibly the largest remaining population of this critically endangered species.

Our next island was further east, Wetar. On the open sea, Bulwer’s Petrel was a common feature, with upwards of 30 being logged and big numbers of Red-footed Booby, Brown Noddy, logging Risso’s Dolphins and Short-finned Pilot Whales, Spinner Dolphins racing towards us, leaping out and spinning just in front of us, and best of all a distant but unmistakable Blue Whale blowing several times before finally fluking.

We finished the day with some spectacular snorkelling off Reong island, with Black-tipped Reef Shark even being encountered by Alan before we dropped anchor just off Wetar in preparation for the next days excitement.

With all arrangements in place the previous evening, we set out well before dawn the next morning and as the light broke we entered our intended river valley surrounded by bird sound. We were well prepared for the walk much of which was wading along the shallow river as it navigated a forest-lined gorge, and far from being a problem this added to the sense of solitude and adventure in this spectacular setting. Early morning activity was instant and incredibly rewarding and exciting; as we entered the valley several Wallacean Drongo (soon to be Timor Drongo!), Pink-headed Imperial Pigeons, Wallacean Cuckooshrikes, a Timor Black Pigeon was called in which proved to be the first of many during the day, criss-crossing over the river in unison with a ‘Timor’ Cuckoo Dove – another soon-to-be-split taxon from the Bar-necked complex. Fruiting trees attracted stunning Black-backed Fruit Doves while many birds were perched out to soak up the early morning sun including Timor Blue Flycatcher, ‘Wetar Oriole’, endemic Crimson-hooded Myzomela and Black-necklaced Honeyeater. On previous trips Wetar Figbird had been thin on the ground so we were anxious to get on the first pair that appeared, which showed well, though after seeing another 50 or so during the course of the day (and a similar number the next day!!) we didn’t feel quite so privileged! Lorikeets were zooming by, many of which appeared...
to be Marigold though none were ever close. As we walked further up the gorge, usually ankle (or knee depending on your height!) deep in the crystal-clear stream – where else in the world provides rivers clean enough to drink at sea-level – we continually had Pink-headed Imperials in view, and usually either a Pacific Emerald Dove, Black Pigeon or Cuckoo Dove to boot. 6 Olive.shouldered Parrots were feeding in a ridge-side tree then shortly after that we located a fruiting fig close to the ground, just what we were after. Around the tree we found the major reason for us being here – Wetar Ground Dove, 5 of which, including 3 males, were found perched, often in clear view allowing for prolonged, wonderful telescope views. This species was lost for much of the 20th century and even now has been seen by very, very few birders, a real thrill. After the excitement we carried on, flushing another pair of ground doves before hearing the distinctive tremolo advertising call of Timor Imperial Pigeon. It took some time but we finally found a pair hiding under the canopy from the already searing heat (it was only mid-morning!). As with everything else in this gorge, they allowed us to get as close as we could to them, right underneath them as they just sat and preened, only occasionally peering down at us wondering what all the fuss was about. The rest of the day continued in the same form, and on the return a flock or two of Iris Lorikeet even flew by, though a little too fast for most of us. Our days total of pigeons ended up with 9 species with totals of 120+ Pink-headed Imperial Pigeon, 40 Black-backed Fruit Dove, 19 Timor Black Pigeon, 17 Timor Cuckoo Dove, 7 Wetar Ground Dove, 3 Timor Imperial Pigeon – quite a haul!

We moved further along the coast for predawn night-birding, with only partial success as a Wetar Scops Owl only showed fleetingly perched. Following that we decided to try a road we found on google earth in seemingly mixed forest habitat, being welcomed by a huge crocodile as we entered the bay. This proved an inspired decision as it was a disused mining road running though degraded and primary dry tropical forest teeming with birdlife. Olive.shouldered Parrot numbered well over 50 during the day, Olive-headed Lorikeet proved common as did most of the previous days birds, especially figbirds and pigeons once again, with the exception of the ground dove. Orange-banded Thrush was also plentiful, and a certain bird of the day until one actually flushed up a Sunda Thrush – which proceeded to feed right in the middle of the road in the late morning for an hour before we had to move on. After being ‘invited’ to see the operations manager of the copper mine we found out that the road will be reopened so our timing was just right. At dusk a pair of Wetar Scops Owl were easily found, posing several times in the spotlight and a little further down the road the distinctive chonking of ‘Timor Nightjar’ was heard – currently classified as a Large-tailed Nightjar the birds from Wetar and Timor are a vocally distinct, undescribed species. We must have chosen a spot right in the heart of its territory to lure the bird in as it glided straight in, found a suitable perch and sang its heart out just a few metres from us, giving walkaway views and possibly even the first field photographs of this rarely-encountered enigma.

The small island of Leti, close enough to be viewable from Timor, holds an interesting avifauna, partially shared with other small Banda Sea islands. After lunch we ventured on land here, picking up several of our prime target - Kisar Friarbird, just out of town. The species is endemic to the small islands of Leti, Moa and Kisar, the south-western Banda Sea islands, and while perhaps not the best looking bird of the trip but surely one of the most range-restricted and rarely-seen! Vocally it is more similar to Helmeted but plumage and size more like Little from Australia. We also saw ‘Banda Bronze Cuckoo’ perched singing overhead and all agreed the checklists are correct in currently not recognising it as a separate species. The same can’t be said for the compar race of Golden Whistler found on here and Moa (with similar birds found on nearby Romang) which is unique in that both sexes have female-type plumages, we even found a pair on the nest in a mango tree – which unfortunately were not quite ripe for eating! Arafura Fantail here changed to elegantula, very different in
appearance from other races with its bright rufous upperparts and pale forecrown, though of more interest is the Northern Fantail, an endemic race of the smaller Banda Sea islands, complete with distinct plumage, and more importantly wildly different song from elsewhere in the region.

We also encountered our first of many ‘silver-crowned’ Rose-crowned Fruit Doves, just a shame they sound the same as everywhere else! A nice look-out point till sunset was a hive of activity, as numerous friarbirds were continually on show, raucously harassing each other, more whistlers and fantails and a group of Black-backed Fruit Dove were perched distantly. As dusk descended on us several Savanna Nightjar came out to play, though the endemic race of Southern Boobook failed to offer even a hoot, not to worry, as it won’t be split!

Babar Boobook, Babar and Damar Flycatcher, Damar

Another long sailing towards Damar after dinner and through the following morning took us via a small uninhabited island, Terbang Selatan for some sensational snorkelling along a pristine coral reef that still contained 6-foot long Napoleon fish, Barracuda and Tuna among a never-ending list of fish of all colours, shapes and sizes. Chuck, Jacqui and James even went for a dive to inspect the drop-off from the reef, which was quite something. By mid-afternoon we anchored off Damar, and a short walk in the early morning brought us our first Wallacean Whistler, along with hordes of White-tufted Honeyeater and the endemic race of Rufus-sided Gerygone.

Damar was one of the most eagerly anticipated stops on the tour after the sensational rediscovery here of the Damar Flycatcher in 2001 by the first birder, Colin Trainor, to visit the island in more than a century! Other than him, only our intrepid groups have laid eyes on this diminutive beauty.

Within a short walk of the town the next day we were already finding more gerygone, the endemic dammariana Cinnamon-banded Kingfisher, Wallacean Whistlers and ‘Banda’ Bronze Cuckoos once more. A little further up the trail two Orange-banded Thrushes were battling it out with each other when we heard the faint twinkle of song we were in deep anticipation to hear – Damar Flycatcher lay ahead. A typically furtive little flycatcher, which allowed us all prolonged views as the male sang from the edge of the forest. Venturing inside we were treated to multiple, and continuous views of several further males, and a female within touching distance at times. In the shadow the bird appears rather black and non-descript but once a glint of sunlight hits the midnight-blue sheen the birds underparts can be seen to be littered in tiny white arrows. Anything else on top of this gem was a bonus really, our fourth race of Black-backed Fruit Dove of the tour perched out close-by, yet another race of Golden Whistler impressed us as the females here are surprisingly bright, twice Black-bibbed Monarch put in an appearance but otherwise it was typical small island birding – few species but in big numbers.

Back on the boat we toasted our success in seeing one of the most inaccessible birds on earth, and certainly high on all our most-wanted lists.

The seas were quiet the next morning, as they generally are around in the Banda Sea. Finally we saw our first, but unidentified tropicbird flying distantly over our only Sperm Whale of the trip. We arrived into Tepa harbour, on Babar in the heat of the day so we took our time getting off-board and back on terra-firma. Several species are noticeably more obliging on Babar than any other island – Tricoloured Parrotfinch, Cinnamon-banded Kingfisher and Orange-banded Thrush being the most notable and we saw plenty of parrotfinches behaving like munias, in small flocks by the track on a regular basis. Cinnamon-tailed Fantail were also found, in pairs, making short sallies from their open perches – the birds on Babar being vocally distinct from nearby Tanimbar make for an interesting comparison. We also found our first Banda Myzomela, and another pair of Black-bibbed Monarch (the first time we have encountered it on Babar). As dusk fell we waited for the distinct calls of the endemic taxon, cinnamomina, of the Southern Boobook, though after plenty of waiting there was scant response so we went for a walk, some distance away to a promising looking area we had found on google
earth, and would you believe, within 40 metres of that very spot we finally heard a distance response and a short while later we had the appropriately-named owl queued up in the spotlight, eventually until he was just a few metres overhead, peering down at us. All was well until we headed down to the shore to see the swell crashing against the rocky shoreline and our zodiac gushing with water containing our soaked crew! A 4km walk back to the harbour meant we arrived back on our boat just shy of 1am for our belated dinner – we all agreed it was worthwhile however!

Another walk around town the following morning yielded plenty more parrotfinches that were littering the town, in many people’s yards. Orange-banded Thrushes were quite conspicuous also, and we finally found our first flock of Five-coloured Munia, and a surprise Wallace’s Fruit Dove, a bird we were not expecting until Tanimbar. Around the harbour an abundance of insects must have led to a feeding frenzy of hirundines as Tree Martin were numerous and even a vagrant Fairy Martin was briefly among them and the Barn Swallows. Much more exciting though was a call familiar to many of us from home, as a Pied Wagtail flew over and landed on the wharf – a first for Wallacea no less! It was obviously of the race lugens, a bird that has already been recorded in Australia and the Philippines on a few occasions so it was only a matter of time before it as found in the region. Setting sail from Babar was the end of our island-hopping through the Flores and Banda Sea as next would be a tick-fest on Tanimbar. Finally we got an identifiable tropicbird – a Red-tailed, and a close Streaked Shearwater before the sun set over the sea one last time for us – shame it was a little too bumpy for some of us to attempt dinner that night!

**Fawn-breasted Thrush and Wallace’s Fruit Dove, Tanimbar**

Just shy of Yamdena, the main island of Tanimbar we stopped at a tiny islet of scrub and Casuarina trees. As we arrived we were welcomed by the resident Beach Thick-knees and pair of Pied Oystercatcher (the latter a bit of an Asian mega!), and overhead both Greater and Lesser Frigatebirds. After devising a cunning plan to search for Tanimbar’s most difficult endemic, Tanimbar Scrubfowl, a bird we had found previously on the island, we got to work, not feeling terribly hopeful but you never know… Surprisingly, within ten minutes James had caught sight of a scrubfowl legging it away from him, and straight to the eagerly assembled gaggle of birders, which the scrubfowl didn’t catch sight of until it was too late. It ran out into the open grass, head turned behind it looking straight at us before finally heading back into a tiny area of foliage at the tip of the island – too good an opportunity to turn down so once again, with some careful stalking the bird jumped up into the crown of a Casuarina for us all to admire! Tickled pink with our success we had another snorkel and/or beer session – the final one – before heading into Saumlaki wharf and after 15 nights at sea, thanked and waved off our wonderful crew and captain to set foot inside a hotel for the next four nights.

With 3 full days on Tanimbar we had plenty of time to see most of the endemics, but one bird is renowned for their difficulty – Fawn-breasted Thrush, so obviously it was a massive surprise to find this as our second endemic, following on from the scrubfowl, as it fed quietly in a dry streambed in the deep leaf-litter, allowing for prolonged scope views. Flushed with success at our good fortune with this notoriously difficult Zoothera we then picked up the island’s other endemic thrush, the more arboreal, striking Slaty-backed, which proceeded to sing from several prominent perches viewable from the roadside. Keen for further views of the Fawn-breasted Thrush we eagerly returned the next morning, finding one feeding underneath a roadside shack, and then finding a couple more feeding by the edge of the asphalt – quite bizarre. Little did we realise at this point we would end up finding a minimum of 18 individuals, with about 27 sightings during the next couple of days – this is a bird that others, including us, have dipped on previous occasions – perhaps the cloudy conditions and some recent rains had brought them out to feed along the verges?
It turned out to be a bit of a tick-fest – Tanimbar Friarbird and Oriole both showed, and we had several opportunities to compare their plumage and jizz similarities – who mimics who one wonders. Tanimbar Triller, a fairly common bird fed in the roadside scrub and trees. Wallace’s Fruit Dove were perched prominently, obviously a sign of the low hunting pressures on pigeons here as we would see several on every outing sat out in similar fashion. Elegant was more numerous than Pink-headed Imperial Pigeon on the island, both of which regularly flew overhead and the characteristic woof-whistle often betrayed the presence of the local Bar-necked Cuckoo Doves here – huge, cold-brown universally barred birds in stark contrast to the two other forms we had seen earlier in the trip. Also overhead were regular pairs of Blue-streaked Lory, which were flying over every ten minutes or so but it would take us three days until we got them perched, giving us the views we had craved. A pair of ‘Tanimbar Drongo’ flew across the road and landed in a bare tree long enough for us all to admire their unique silhouette – highly arched culmen and shallow forked tail – and unsurprisingly it was our only sighting as this apparently rare, forest-dwelling bird. Mistletoebird was common and conspicuous, given the song and appearance would be best split as Tanimbar Flowerpecker given how distinct they are from the true Mistletoebirds of Australia (along with the Kai birds also appearing equally distinct).

Into the bush, a forested trail brought us both Loetoe and Black-bibbed Monarchs, often in close proximity to each other. Tanimbar Flycatcher, a bird once considered a race of Rufous-chested, was encountered on several occasions during the morning, often popping up quietly in the under-storey while we were waiting for other birds to reveal themselves, one of which was the charming Long-tailed Fantail, a species that often captivates as it sallies around, flashing his tail at 90 degrees from side-to-side, though our first Tanimbar Bush Warbler proved rather more furtive, being glimpsed by some of us, likewise a Pied Bronze Cuckoo.

Moluccan Masked Owl, Tanimbar © James Eaton /Birdbour Asia

In the afternoon we visited an old logging road slicing through a considerable area of degraded forest. Pigeons and parrots were numerous – our only Eclectus Parrot, a male, flew-by on a single, brief occasion but Tanimbar Cockatoos proved much more numerous, and after a few singles we found a flock of 15+ feeding low down around us, and another Great-billed Parrot flew by once again. One particular spot was fantastic birding – Tanimbar Starling were on constant view, as were more Wallace’s Fruit Dove and we were able to watch one bird visit a bare tree above us every 3-4 minutes to collect little twigs for nest construction just across from us. Our first Tanimbar Flyrobin shared the same tree with both the dove and Arafura and Cinnamon-tailed Fantails. A kid had a Rufous-tailed Bush-hen on a piece of string for dinner later, and funnily enough, one with no strings attached, dashed across the road for those looking the right way at the same moment. We carefully picked our spot for post-dusk birding, with yet another Fawn-breasted Thrush feeding on the road ahead of us. Tanimbar Boobook took little time nor persuasion to sit on an open perch to call across to its mate before we would start our first of several planned strolls over the coming evenings in search of the rarely-seen Moluccan Masked Owl, endemic to here, Buru and Seram. Expecting to take either days or just to simply dip, our spines tingled when we heard a response after just an hour right in front of us, with the unmistakable silhouette of a Tyto heading straight for the closest bare tree to us, where it gazed down at us for five mesmerising minutes wondering who, or what the hell we are! It eventually flew back, and was to be joined by its mate, allowing us to walk up to about 15 metres away from them as they gazed across (one bird was now nearly eye-level with us!) once more. We left the birds in peace in silent celebration.
With all the endemics reeled in by the end of our first full day we spent the following couple of days looking to improve on our views of everything, which we did handsomely. Pied Bronze Cuckoos chasing each other aggressively around us, an initially furtive Tanimbar Bush Warbler eventually relented and sat above eye-level in clear view to sing for the next five minutes or so, the bill and head pattern being so much more reminiscent of a stubtail than bush warbler. Though the only blemish (of the tour!) was that Kai Cicadabird eluded us during our stay – every time we tried a new area for them, as the landscape continually changes with the increased slash-and-burn shifting agriculture along the roadside all we would find was yet more Fawn-breasted Thrushes! From our accommodation we managed to pull in a few newbies, including Australian Pelican, while a tiny pool held a pair of Green Pygmy Goose, Australasian Grebe and several White-browed Crake. Along the roadside we found yet more Oriental Plover and even a couple of Little Curlew – a bird we would see more of, along with Australian Pratincole at the airport.

Our time on Tanimbar brought this amazing adventure to a close and as we left the barely constructed new airport (I hope the control tower is built for our next visit!) we flew firstly to Ambon and continued onwards to the sprawling metropolis of Jakarta for our onward travels home, filled with fantastic memories of our travels to some of the remotest places on the globe.

**Bird-of-the-tour**

1: Moluccan Masked Owl  
2: Damar Flycatcher  
3: ‘Timor Nightjar’  
4: Wetar Ground Dove  
5: Wallace’s Fruit Dove

**More tour photos...**

*Flores Sea Cuckoo Dove, Tanahjampea and Alor Cuckoooshrike, Pantar*
Wetar Figbird and Black-necklaced Honeyeater
Olive-shouldered Parrot and Black-backed Fruit Dove, Wetar
Timor Imperial Pigeon and Sunda Thrush, Wetar
'Banda’ Bronze Cuckoo, Leti and Timor Stubtail, Wetar Golden Whistler (compar) and Northern Fantail, Leti Damar Flycatcher, Damar and Orange-banded Thrush, Babar
Pied Bushchat and Pied Wagtail, Babar
Cinnamon-tailed Fantail and Tricoloured Parrotfinch, Babar
Tanimbar Scrubfowl and Beach Thick-knee, off Tanimbar
Tanimbar Triller and Tanimbar Flyrobin, Tanimbar
Tanimbar Bush Warbler and Long-tailed Fantail, Tanimbar
Tanimbar Cuckoo Dove and Tanimbar Cockatoo, Tanimbar
Oriental Plover and Little Curlew, Tanimbar
Loetoe Monarch and Tanimbar Boobook, Tanimbar
Arafura Fantail and Tanimbar Flowerpecker, Tanimbar
Systematic List

ANSERIFORMES: Anatidae
- Sunda Teal: Anas gibberifrons
- Green Pygmy Goose: Nettapus pulchellus

GALLIFORMES: Megapodiidae
- Tanimbar Scrubfowl: Megapodius tenimberensis
- Orange-footed Scrubfowl: Megapodius reinwardt reinwardt

GALLIFORMES: Phasianidae
- Brown Quail: Coturnix ypsilophora raaltenii

PODICIPEDIFORMES: Podicipedidae
- Australasian Grebe: Tachybaptus n. novaehollandiae

PROCELLARIIFORMES: Procellariidae
- Bulwer’s Petrel: Bulweria bulwerii
- Streaked Shearwater: Calonectris leucomelas

PROCELLARIIFORMES: Hydrobatidae
- Matsudaira’s Storm-Petrel: Oceanodroma matsudaira

PHAETHONTIFORMES: Phaethontidae
- Red-tailed Tropicbird: Phaethon rubricauda

SULIFORMES: Fregatidae
- Great Frigatebird: Fregata minor
- Lesser Frigatebird: Fregata ariel

SULIFORMES: Sulidae
- Brown Booby: Sula leucogaster plotus
- Red-footed Booby: Sula sula rubripes

SULIFORMES: Phalacrocoracidae
- Little Black Cormorant: Phalacrocorax sulcirostris
- Little Pied Cormorant: Phalacrocorax melanoleucos

PELECANIFORMES: Pelecanidae
- Australian Pelican: Pelecanus conspicillatus

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Blue-streaked Lory and Fawn-breasted Thrush, Tanimbar
**PELECANIFORMES: Ardeidae**
- Great-billed Heron: *Ardea sumatranana*
- Eastern Great Egret: *Casmerodius alba modesta*
- Pacific Reef-Heron: *Egretta sacra sacra*
- Eastern Cattle Egret: *Bubulcus ibis coromandus*
- Javan Pond-Heron: *Ardeola speciosa*
- Striated Heron: *Butorides striata javanicus*
- Rufous Night-Heron: *Nycticorax caledonicus hilli*

**ACCIPITRIFORMES: Pandionidae**
- Osprey: *Pandion haliaetus cristatus*

**ACCIPITRIFORMES: Accipitridae**
- Pacific Baza: *Aviceda subcristata timorlaoensis*
- Brahminy Kite: *Haliastur indus intermedius*
- White-bellied Sea Eagle: *Haliaeetus leucogaster*
- Short-toed Eagle: *Circaetus gallicus gallicus*
- Variable Goshawk: *Tachyspiza hiogaster polionotus*
- Brown Goshawk: *Tachyspiza fasciatus wallaci*
- Flores Hawk Eagle: *Niaseatus floris*
- Bonelli's Eagle: *Aquila fasciata renschi*

**FALCONIFORMES: Falconidae**
- Spotted Kestrel: *Falco moluccensis microbalia*
- Australian Hobby: *Falco longipennis hanieli*
- Peregrine Falcon: *Falco peregrinus calidus*

**GRUIFORMES: Rallidae**
- Rufous-tailed Bush-hen: *Amaurornis moluccanus*
- White-breasted Waterhen: *Amaurornis phoenicurus leucomelanus*
- White-browed Crake: *Porzana cinerea cinerea*

**CHARADRIIFORMES: Burhinidae**
- Beach Thick-knee: *Esacus magnirostris*

**CHARADRIIFORMES: Charadriidae**
- Pacific Golden-Plover: *Pluvialis fulva*
- Oriental Plover: *Charadrius veredus*

**CHARADRIIFORMES: Scolopacidae**
- Terek Sandpiper: *Xenus cinereus*
- Common Sandpiper: *Actitis hypoleucos*
- Wood Sandpiper: *Tringa glareola*
- Common Redshank: *Tringa totanus*
- Little Curlew: *Numenius minutus*
- Whimbrel: *Numenius phaeopus*
- Ruddy Turnstone: *Arenaria interpres*
- Sanderling: *Ereunetes alba*
- Sharp-tailed Sandpiper: *Ereunetes acuminata*
- Red-necked Phalarope: *Phalaropus lobatus*

**CHARADRIIFORMES: Turnicidae**
- Barred Buttonquail: *Turnix suscitator powelli*

**CHARADRIIFORMES: Glareolidae**
- Australian Pratincole: *Stiltia isabella*

**CHARADRIIFORMES: Haematopodidae**
- Pied Oystercatcher: *Haematopus longirostris*

**CHARADRIIFORMES: Laridae**
- Brown Noddy: *Anous stolidus*
- Sooty Tern: *Onychoprion fuscatus*
- Bridled Tern: *Onychoprion anaethetus anaethetus*
- Little Tern: *Sternula albifrons sinensis*
- Gull-billed Tern: *Gelochelidon nilotica macrotarsa*
- White-winged Black Tern: *Chlidonias leucopterus*
- Whiskered Tern: *Chlidonias hybrida*
- Black-naped Tern: *Sterna sumatranana*
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<tr>
<th>Common Tern</th>
<th>Sterna hirundo longipennis</th>
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<tr>
<td>Great Crested Tern</td>
<td>Thalasseus bergii</td>
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<td><strong>CHARADRIIFORMES:</strong> Stercorariidae</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pomarine Jaeger</td>
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<td><strong>COLUMBIFORMES:</strong> Columbidae</td>
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<td>Spotted Dove</td>
<td>Streptopelia chinensis tigrina</td>
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<td>Macropygia emiliana emiliana</td>
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<td>'Timor' Cuckoo Dove</td>
<td>Macropygia magna magna</td>
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<td><strong>PSITTACIFORMES:</strong> Cacatuidae</td>
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<td>Red-cheeked Parrot</td>
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<td>'Banda' Bronze Cuckoo</td>
<td>Chrysococcyx minutillus rufomerus</td>
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<td>Australian Koel</td>
<td>Eudyynamys cyanocephalus</td>
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<td>Asian Koel</td>
<td>Eudyynamys scolopaceus</td>
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<td>Centropus bengalis javanicus heard only</td>
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<td>Lesser Coucal</td>
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<td><strong>STRIGIFORMES:</strong> Tytonidae</td>
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<td>Moluccan Masked Owl</td>
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<td>Wetar Scops Owl</td>
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<td>Ninox [squamipila] forbesi</td>
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<td>Alor Boobook</td>
<td>Ninox [novaeseelandiae] plesseni</td>
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CAPRIMULGIFORMES: Caprimulgidae

Large-tailed Nightjar  
Timor' Nightjar  
Savanna Nightjar

Apolodiformes: Apodidae

Glossy Swiftlet  
Cave Swiftlet  
Uniform Swiftlet  
Edible-nest Swiftlet  
Pacific Swift  
House Swift

CORACIIFORMES: Alcedinidae

Common Kingfisher  
Rufous-backed Kingfisher  
Javan Kingfisher  
Collared Kingfisher  
Cinnamon-banded Kingfisher  
Sacred Kingfisher

CORACIIFORMES: Meropidae

Rainbow Bee-eater

CORACIIFORMES: Coraciidae

Dollarbird

PICIFORMES: Picidae

Sunda Woodpecker

PASSERIFORMES: Pittidae

Elegant Pitta

PASSERIFORMES: Meliphagidae

Crimson-hooded Myzomela  
Sulawesi Myzomela  
Banda Myzomela  
Indonesian Honeyeater  
White-tufted Honeyeater  
Black-neckaced Honeyeater  
Kisar Friarbird  
Tanimbar Friarbird  
Helmeted Friarbird

PASSERIFORMES: Acanthizidae

Golden-bellied Gerygone  
Plain Gerygone  
Rufous-sided Gerygone

PASSERIFORMES: Artamidae

White-breasted Woodswallow

PASSERIFORMES: Campephagidae

Wallacean Cuckooshrike  
‘Alor’ Cuckooshrike  
White-shouldered Triller  
Tanimbar Triller

PASSERIFORMES: Pachycephalidae

Fawn-breasted Whistler  
Golden Whistler

CAPRIMULGIFORMES: Caprimulgidae

Large-tailed Nightjar  
'Timor' Nightjar  
Savanna Nightjar

Apolodiformes: Apodidae

Glossy Swiftlet  
Cave Swiftlet  
Uniform Swiftlet  
Edible-nest Swiftlet  
Pacific Swift  
House Swift

CORACIIFORMES: Alcedinidae

Common Kingfisher  
Rufous-backed Kingfisher  
Javan Kingfisher  
Collared Kingfisher  
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CORACIIFORMES: Meropidae

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PASSERIFORMES: Acanthizidae

Golden-bellied Gerygone  
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PASSERIFORMES: Artamidae

White-breasted Woodswallow

PASSERIFORMES: Campephagidae

Wallacean Cuckooshrike  
‘Alor’ Cuckooshrike  
White-shouldered Triller  
Tanimbar Triller

PASSERIFORMES: Pachycephalidae

Fawn-breasted Whistler  
Golden Whistler
Pachycephala pectoralis fulvotincta
Pachycephala pectoralis callopo
Pachycephala pectoralis compar
Pachycephala pectoralis dammeriana
Pachycephala pectoralis fuscoflava

Wallacean Whistler
Pachycephala arctitorquis arctitorquis
Pachycephala arctitorquis kebirensis

PASSERIFORMES: Oriolidae
Wetar Oriole
Oriolus [melanotis] finschi
Tanimbar Oriole
Oriolus [bouroensis] decipiens
Black-naped Oriole
Oriolus chinensis boneratensis
Oriolus chinensis broderipii
Wetar Figbird
Sphecotheres hypoleucus

PASSERIFORMES: Dicruridae
Wallacean Drongo
Dicrurus densus bimaensis
'Timor' Drongo
Dicrurus densus densus
'Tanimbar' Drongo
Dicrurus densus kuehni
Black Drongo
Dicrurus macrocercus

PASSERIFORMES: Rhipiduridae
Northern Fantail
Rhipidura rufiventris pallidiceps
Rhipidura rufiventris buettikoferi
Cinnamon-tailed Fantail
Rhipidura fuscorufa
Long-tailed Fantail
Rhipidura opistherythra
Arafura Fantail
Rhipidura dryas semicollaris
Rhipidura dryas elegantula
Rhipidura dryas hamadryas
Rhipidura dryas celebensis

PASSERIFORMES: Monarchidae
Island Monarch
Monarcha cinerascens cinerascens
Loetoe Monarch
Monarcha castus
Black-bibbed Monarch
Monarcha everetti
Tanahjampea Monarch
Monarcha boneratensis
Spectacled Monarch
Symposiachrus trirugatus trirugatus
Black-naped Monarch
Hypothymis azurea
Broad-billed Monarch
Miagra ruficollis ruficollis
Miagra ruficollis fulviventris
Shining Monarch
Miagra alecto longirostris

PASSERIFORMES: Corvidae
Southern Jungle Crow
Corvus macrorhynchos

PASSERIFORMES: Petroicidae
Tanimbar Flyrobin
Microeca hemixantha

PASSERIFORMES: Hirundinidae
Barn Swallow
Hirundo rustica gutturalis
Pacific Swallow
Hirundo tahitica javanica
Striated Swallow
Cecropis striolata striolata
Fairy Martin
Petrochelidon ariel
Tree Martin
Petrochelidon nigriceps timoriensis

PASSERIFORMES: Paridae
Cinerous Tit
Parus cinereus

PASSERIFORMES: Cettiidae
Timor Stubbtail
Urosphena subulata subulata
Tanimbar Bush Warbler
Horornis carolinae
Aberrant Bush Warbler
Horornis flavolivacea kolichisi
Timor Bush Warbler
Locustella (seebohmi) timorensis

PASSERIFORMES: Pycnonotidae
Sooty-headed Bulbul
Pycnonotus aurigaster
Yellow-vented Bulbul
Pycnonotus goiavier

PASSERIFORMES: Acrocephalidae
Tawny Grassbird
Megalurus timoriensis [ssp. Yamdena]
PASSERIFORMES: Cisticolidae
Golden-headed Cisticola  Cisticola exilis lineocapilla
Zitting Cisticola  Cisticola juniceps constans
Olive-backed Tailorbird  Orthotomus sepium

PASSERIFORMES: Muscicapidae
Tanimbar Flycatcher  Ficedula [dumetoria] riedeli
Damar Flycatcher  Ficedula henrici
Snowy-browed Flycatcher  Ficedula hyperythra audacis
Little Pied Flycatcher  Ficedula westermanni
Timor Blue Flycatcher  Cyornis hyacinthinus kuehni
Tanahjampea Blue Flycatcher  Cyornis [rufa] djampeana
Pied Bushchat  Saxicola caprata fruticola
Saxicola caprata pyrrhonota
Saxicola caprata cognata

PASSERIFORMES: Turdidae
Slaty-backed Thrush  Geokichla schistacea
Orange-banded Thrush  Geokichla peronii audacis
Sunda Thrush  Zoothera andromada
Fawn-breasted Thrush  Zoothera machiki

PASSERIFORMES: Zosteropidae
Lemon-bellied White-eye  Zosterops chloris intermedius
Ashy-bellied White-eye  Zosterops citrinellus albiventer
Mountain White-eye  Zosterops montanus
Yellow-spectacled White-eye  Zosterops wallacei

PASSERIFORMES: Sturnidae
Metallic Starling  Aplonis metallica circumscripta
Tanimbar Starling  Aplonis crassa
Short-tailed Starling  Aplonis minor
Javan Myna  Acridothes javanicus
Black-winged Myna  Acridothes melanopterus tertius

PASSERIFORMES: Dicaeidae
Black-fronted Flowerpecker  Dicaeum igniferum
Red-chested Flowerpecker  Dicaeum maugel maugel
Dicaeum maugel salvadorii
Dicaeum maugel splendidum
Tanahjampea Flowerpecker  Dicaeum [hirundinaceum] fulgidum
Scarlet-headed Flowerpecker  Dicaeum trochileum
Ashy Flowerpecker  Dicaeum volnaratum
Thick-billed Flowerpecker  Dicaeum agile

PASSERIFORMES: Nectariniidae
Brown-throated Sunbird  Anthreptes malacensis convergens
'Clement's' Sunbird  Cinnyris [jugularis] clementiae teysmanni
Flame-breasted Sunbird  Cinnyris solaris solaris
Cinnyris solaris exquisita
Black Sunbird  Leptocoma sericea aspasioides

PASSERIFORMES: Motacillidae
Eastern Yellow Wagtail  Motacilla tschutschensis taivana
Grey Wagtail  Motacilla cinerea cinerea
Pied Wagtail  Motacilla alba lugens
Paddyfield Pipit  Anthus rufulus medius

PASSERIFORMES: Passeridae
Eurasian Tree Sparrow  Passer montanus

PASSERIFORMES: Estrildidae
Tricolored Parrotfinch  Erythrura tricolor
Black-faced Munia  Lonchura molucca
Scaly-breasted Munia  Lonchura punctulata nisoria
Lonchura punctulata blasii
Five-colored Munia  Lonchura quinquecincta
White-headed Munia  Lonchura maja
Black-headed Munia  Lonchura malacca jagori
**MAMMALS**

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<tr>
<th>Common Palm Civet</th>
<th>Paradoxurus hermaphroditus</th>
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<tr>
<td>Black-bearded Flying Fox</td>
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<td>Large Flying Fox</td>
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<td>Blue Whale</td>
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<td>Short-finned Pilot Whale</td>
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<td>Long-snouted Spinner Dolphin</td>
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<td>Bottlenose Dolphin</td>
<td>Tursiops truncatus</td>
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Following the outstanding success of our Banda Sea Cruise, we hope to be able to keep running the tour, please click [here](#) for further information. Alternatively please contact us via [e-mail](mailto:) if you would like to organise a custom tour to these superb areas.