

BirdLife Australia Rarities Committee

Unusual Record Report Form

This form is intended to aid observers in the preparation of a submission for a major rarity in Australia. (It is not a mandatory requirement) Please complete all sections ensuring that you attach all relevant information including any digital images (email to tonyp@bigpond.net.au or andrew.silcocks@birdlife.org.au). Submissions to BARC should be submitted electronically wherever possible.

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Address: P.O.Box 292 Carlton North 3054	
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Species Name: Red-flanked Lorikeet	Scientific Name: Charmosyna placentis
Date(s) and time(s) of observation:	24/03/2018
	Time: 1530
How long did you watch the bird(s)?	20 +/- seconds
First and last date of occurrence:	24/03/2018
	1531
Distance to bird:	20 +/- metres

Site Location Over the channel between Kaumag Island and Saibai Island, Torres Strait. 09° 22'30" S 142° 41' 02" E

Habitat (describe habitat in which the bird was seen): Both banks of the channel are bordered by mixed tall mangrove and hardwood forest. Some were in flower. The nearby New Guinea coast is also tall mangrove and hardwoods. Approx. 10 km north-west from where the birds were seen is an area of more open savanna woodland in the Trans-Fly region.
Sighting conditions (weather, visibility, light conditions etc.): The afternoon was clear and calm with the bright afternoon sun behind and to the west of the observers. The birds flew fast, just over tree top height, from north to south to the east of the observers and were well lit allowing good views of colour, shape, size etc. Beyond the shelter of the channel there were strong north to north-west winds blowing across the Trans-Fly coast and Torres Strait from the north-eastern edge of Category 2 Cyclone Nora in the Gulf of Carpentaria.

To your knowledge, is the species seen frequently at this site? This is the first reported record for the species from this location. If it is a vagrant to Saibai its arrival may have been aided by the prevailing winds and the species' reported behavior of flocking with other species of lorikeet (Juniper & Parr).

Were other observers present Do any of the other observers disagree with your identification, if so, who? (please give names, addresses and phone numbers)?

One other observer was Sue Taylor. She agreed with my identification.

How confident are you of your identification?, e.g. 70%, 100%. If not 100%, why not?

I am 100% confident of the ID. However, because this is a new bird for Saibai, the sighting was brief, no photos were taken and I did not study both birds I accept that the identification may not stand up to scrutiny.

Please confirm that you are willing for BARC to display your images (fully credited with your name) electronically
YES or NO No photos taken

Other details: e.g. Do you have historical and or anecdotal information/comments relating to the prior occurrence/status of the species within or near this location?

There has been very little or no birding done in the central Trans-Fly region of New Guinea immediately to the north of Saibai (see map below). The only villages are along the coast and are reached by boat from Torres Strait. There are no roads into the area within 40 km of the sighting, the nearest being at the inland village of Kibui where there is also a bush airport.

This species has been recorded on eBird from Bensbach Lodge, south-east of Weim, (see map below) some 160 km to the west of Saibai and approx. 30 km from the coast. It is also recorded on eBird some 500 km to the east in the lowlands to the west of Port Moresby. Habitat in the Trans-Fly is suitable for Red-flanked Lorikeet and the area is shown in field guides as within their reported range.

The trip had been arranged by Richard Baxter and other birders were on board or in one of the tenders cruising the channel to the west of the boat.

Physical Description of Bird - Please describe only what you saw: (1) No. of individuals present (living or dead); (2) age (adult, juvenile, immature) and sex; (3) size and shape; (4) plumage colour and pattern (including any details of moult); (5) colour of bill, eyes and legs/feet; (6) calls; (7) behaviour, movements, flight pattern, and anything else that might help to identify the bird e.g. feeding, interactions with other birds, describe where the bird was – on ground, in canopy, flying etc. Were comparisons made with other species?

At 1530 two small lorikeets flew from north to south and as they crossed the channel both were calling. As I had spent the last 2 days listening to Coconut Lorikeets flying over and calling, either in pairs or groups, I immediately knew the call was different from what I had been hearing. It did not have the strength or harshness of the Coconut Lorikeets and was, to me, more reminiscent of Little or Purple-crowned Lorikeets, but slightly different. Maybe a cross between the two. As Sue Taylor and I were the only two on deck I called loudly to her “what was that” to draw her attention to the birds. They were easy to locate as there were no other birds in the sky. In judging the call I should say I use a hearing aid tuned by my audiologist so one setting is specifically to pick up higher frequency bird calls. My interpretation of the call, therefore, may vary from other people’s but suffice to say the call was different to what I had heard coming from the Coconut Lorikeets.

I use 10X40 Zeiss binoculars and raised them immediately to see two birds. The lower bird was slightly ahead of the upper bird and as I looked my attention was drawn to it as it flashed a strong yellow ventral wing bar, reminiscent of a Coconut Lorikeet. I could see that it was not a Coconut Lorikeet though as the chest, breast, throat and head, the whole ventral side, was solid bright, almost electric, green. There was no red or purple visible at all. I also had the impression that the two birds were a lot smaller than Coconut Lorikeets. The shade of green could well have been enhanced by the bird being in bright sunlight.

This size and colour difference immediately ruled out Coconut Lorikeet and as soon as the birds disappeared I ran for a copy of the second edition of Beehler that has a plate, 49, of “flying Lories, Lorikeets and Fig Parrots” (see below). The only species that matched what I had seen through the binoculars was the female Red-flanked Lorikeet. The birds were too far off to see bill or leg colour. I did not see the second bird properly as in the time allowed, approx. 20 seconds, I was intent on getting a good view of the bird I was locked on to.

References:

Handbook of New Guinea Birds, Rand & Gilliard. The Trinity Press 1967
Birds of New Guinea, Second Edition. Pratt and Beehler. Princeton Uni. Press 2015
Parrots, A guide to the Parrots of the World. Juniper and Parr. Pica Press 1998
HBW Alive: <https://www.hbw.com/species/red-flanked-lorikeet-charmosyna-placentis>

Please indicate other species with which you think it might be confused and how these were eliminated?

The only real possible confusion species in the Saibai region of Torres Strait is the Yellow-streaked Lory. The range of the Yellow-streaked Lory takes in the Trans-Fly and the call is reported as being “shrill, buzzy and weaker than Rainbow Lorikeet” (Juniper & Parr). This would fit with what I heard but the ventral side of the Yellow-streaked Lory is shown in guides as being yellow-flecked dark green in both male and female. It also has a dark head and is close to the size of a Coconut Lorikeet, maybe a little larger. In flight the field guides show the underwing of the female as being similar to what I saw except that the yellow is not as apparent. HBW Alive says habitat is; “Lowland savanna and forest, disturbed lower montane forest, secondary growth, sago swamps and mangroves, and coconut plantations, up to 800 m.” A bird that may have been this species was reported during the 2009 Torres Strait trip. I believe size, wing colour and ventral colour rule this species out for the bird I saw.

The locally common Coconut Lorikeet, *Trichoglossus haematodus* is another possibility, mainly because it was so common and my view of the bird was brief. As we were sheltering in the channel from strong winds we had seen these birds flying over in groups and pairs throughout the day and we were used to their calls and colour. They differ strongly from the bird in question by having dark red and purple breasts, chest and head. They could appear similar in flight only because they have a strong yellow greater underwing covert bar in the ventral wing that shows well against the darker red of the lesser coverts when the wing is extended and the sun is on it. The call of the Coconut Lorikeet, to my ear, is harsher and stronger than the call I heard.

Red-chinned Lorikeet can be ruled out as its range is restricted to the islands of New Ireland and New Britain to the east of New Guinea.

Red-fronted Lorikeet can be ruled out as its range is restricted to the north coast of New Guinea.

Striated Lorikeet can be ruled out as it does not have a yellow wing-bar and its range is restricted to the southern slopes of the central ranges, north of the Trans-Fly region.

To the south are Rainbow Lorikeets, *Trichoglossus moluccanus* but they have never been recorded as far north as Saibai and again are larger with a dark ventral side, similar to the Coconut Lorikeet.

Strengthening the case for Red-flanked Lorikeet are the field notes from the various field guides. In Juniper & Parr (J&P) they state; “Probably the most commonly encountered small green lorikeet throughout the lowlands of New Guinea and many of its surrounding islands”.

Under voice J&P say “... a high-pitched trilling call”, which could describe what attracted my attention. Also, J&P state, “Chiefly a lowland species occurring in humid primary forest, forest edge, savannah, tall secondary growth, ... coastal forest and occasionally mangrove and coconut groves” ... “Mostly found in pairs but occasionally in parties of 25 or more foraging with other lorikeets ...”.

In HBW Alive it states; “Observations on Halmahera suggest birds apparently travelling long distances in search of flowers.” Also; “Generally common and sometimes abundant ...”. Habitat is said to be “Forest, especially mangroves; also savanna woodland, tall secondary growth, coastal *Casuarina* groves, coconut and sago plantations, riverside palm and eucalypts, and open cultivated areas. Generally reported from lowlands, below 250 m ...”.

Rand and Gilliard report “a pair nesting on the Fly River”, which forms the northern boundary of the Trans-Fly region and is in reasonable range of Saibai and Torres Strait. They also comment that the birds are “most often seen in pairs” and are a lowland bird.

Was the description written from memory?

The description was written from notes taken at the time and from memory. The call was checked immediately after the sightings from recordings I had downloaded from xeno-canto before leaving Melbourne. In anticipation of possibly seeing birds of the Trans-Fly region I had the calls of 29 species of New Guinea Trans-Fly birds on my iPod, one of which was the Red-flanked Lorikeet.

Were photographs taken? (please include where possible)

No

What experience have you had with the species in question? (Did you know it was a Rare bird when you first saw it?)

I knew it was a new bird as soon as I heard the call which was different to what we had been hearing from the Coconut Lorikeets during the past 2 days.

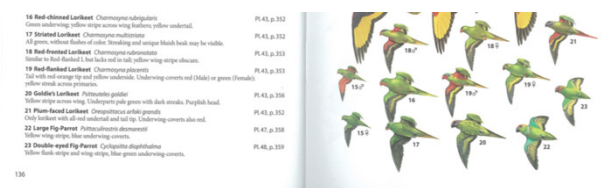
I have had no experience with Red-flanked Lorikeets but am very used to the larger Coconut Lorikeets of the Torres Strait having visited the area in 2009, 2016 and 2018. I also know the calls of the smaller Lorikeets from southern Australia.

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eBird map of reports made in the Trans-Fly region. Bensbach Lodge is in the eastern block of the three on the New Guinea border.