

# Bismarck Archipelago

## A Greentours Itinerary

### Days 1 & 2

#### UK to West New Britain via Singapore and Port Moresby

An afternoon departure from the UK sees us heading east to Singapore where we'll connect with the onward Air Niugini flight to Port Moresby. As we cross the remote Transfly region close to the borders with Irian Jaya we'll start our descent into Port Moresby, crossing the wide expanse of the Gulf of Papua. Looking to our left we'll see the impressively mountainous New Guinean interior that rises to over 12,000 feet not far inland. In Port Moresby we'll connect with our local flight to Hoskins on the island of West New Britain, and to get there we have a spectacular flight up over the Owen-Stanley Range before descending across the tropical blue Solomon Sea.

### Days 3-10(am)

#### West New Britain – Walindi

New Britain is exceedingly exotic! The island has an impressive geography, the narrow ridge of land that separates the Solomon Sea from the Bismarck Sea tops 6,000 feet in a verdant and steep central mountain ridge. We'll make the short journey from the airport to Walindi, formerly a coconut plantation, though for more than twenty years famous as one of the world's finest dive resorts. During our stay we'll enjoy daily snorkelling trips in some of the world's most diverse reefs. We'll also enjoy the splendours of the lowland and hill forests inland of Walindi, and take a look at the fauna of islands in Kimbe Bay.

However it will have been a long journey and we'll want to enjoy the comforts and relaxation of Walindi so why not let the wildlife come to us. The grounds of the lodge offer great bird and butterfly watching not least because many of the commonest species are so colourful. Most noticeable are the noisy flocks of parrots. Brilliant Eclectus Parrots, the males green and red, the females blue and red – both of them just pure colour – are common, and we'll see the magnificent Eastern Black-capped Lory, a tremendous bird, black and shiny bright red! Flowering shrubs around the grounds bring in many butterflies with swallowtails such as the endemic *novobritannicus* race of *Atraphaneura polydorus*, a rose swallowtail that has around twenty often very different races spread through the Papuan and Moluccan regions! Rarer is the endemic *Graphium browni*, whilst we'll soon meet our first birdwing, the huge *Ornithoptera priamus*.

Forest-clad volcanoes make a perfect backdrop for some quite wonderful snorkelling. The majority of the world's coral species are found in these seas. The corals come in all shapes and sizes, and are exceptionally colourful. Amongst these perch anemones, starfish, and sea slugs including the marvellous Anne's Nudibranch, a delicate little thing with white, blue and orange colours. Christmas Tree Worms can be red, orange, blue, green or white on the same coral. Marine

scientists are still only just getting to grips with the fish diversity. There are so many different species of butterfly and angel fishes. Latticed, Black-lip, Threadfin and Eastern Triangular Butterflyfishes are all common, as well as boldly-marked Vagabond and delicate Chevroned Butterflyfishes. Pretty Longnose Butterflyfishes move in pairs, and lurking by steep coral walls are groups of strangely-shaped Pennant and Humphead Bannerfishes. Among the large Angelfish are Regal, Emperor and Six-banded. 'Herds' of Pinktail Triggerfish and Tomini Bristletooths mix with groups of Parrotfishes and Foxface Rabbitfishes, often many hundreds together, the parrotfishes including Saddled and Chameleon Parrotfishes amongst plentiful Bleeker's Parrotfishes. There's Polkadot Coral Trout and its cousin, the Chinese Footballer! By intricate coral heads are all sorts of brilliant small fish, especially Jewel Damsels and Blue-green Chromis, whilst anemones give shelter to Orange-finned Anemonefish. Scarlet Soldierfish lurk in the shade of convoluted corals. Scarlet-breasted Maori-Wrasse look more like parrotfish in size. Shoals of Keeled Needlefish drift past.

And that's all on your first snorkel! It will be a bewildering experience and we'll be trying desperately to remember the multitude of fish patterns! Each time we go snorkelling we'll take the boat out into the bay. One of the best snorkelling sites is the Hanging Gardens, just five minutes by boat from Walindi's jetty, others are scattered through the bay. Groups of flying fish erupt from the bow-wave and sail improbable distances off across the ocean. Pods of Spinner Dolphins are a common sight and we'll entice them in to play. Looking down on their powerful swimming shapes from just a couple of metres above is a wonderful experience as they bow-ride with us, and we'll see them leap out of the water and show off their spins! Black Marlin also leap clear of the water at times. Crested Terns and Black-naped Terns feed around the boat along with Black Noddies. Small groups of Melon-headed Whales lounge around on the surface, close enough for us to make out the distinctive white areas on their sides and their strangely swollen heads.

Out in Kimbe Bay we'll visit islands that harbour many unusual birds including the rarely seen Nicobar Pigeon, an elusive inhabitant of island forest understory. White-bellied Sea Eagles soar over the bay and we'll likely encounter both Lesser and Greater Frigatebirds and a number of terns, including Black-naped and Bridled. Mangrove Golden Whistlers and Sclater's Myzomelas bring colour to the shoreline shrubs and where these are flowering we will see some fantastic butterflies. New Britain has very many butterflies that are endemic to this island group, the glassy tigers here being *Parantica rotundata* and dusky-winged *Parantica fuscata*. Rainbow-hued *Delias salvini* is restricted to New Britain though it has many colourful relatives in PNG's high mountains. Mackinlay's Cuckoo-Doves speed away as we arrive at Big Malumalu island, the flashing colours of Chromis darting about the reef's surface visible even from on deck so clear is the water. Collared Kingfishers sit quietly close by the boat and groups of Metallic Starlings fly by. Island Imperial Pigeons and the Bismarck endemic Yellow-tinted Imperial Pigeon are flushed as we take a short walk through the luxuriant vegetation on Restorf where Birdwing Butterflies flash green and yellow as they flounce through shafts of sunlight. Orange-spotted *Dryadorchis* hang from the tree boughs.

Watching Beach Kingfishers catch their lunch we might consider it time for another snorkel. What will be the highlights this time? Perhaps shoals of Purple Anthias hovering over coral heads, the purple-pink a shocking and vibrant colour. Maybe the sight of the amazing Smashing Mantis Shrimp. This strikingly colourful creature, with yellow and green 'flags', packs quite a punch. Or a metre long Crocodilian Longtom hovering in the water next to us, its menacing presence probably due to a passing resemblance to a Barracuda! There's so much to see – shoals of Red-bellied Fusiliers, numbers of golden Threadfin Anthias and when the superb little blue damsels and a shoal of Tessellated Fusilier get mixed up with these the effect is kaleidoscopic. Our butterflyfish list continues to increase with Dotted, Yellow-dotted, Redfin and Spot-tailed Butterflyfishes. Groups of Orange-spine Triggerfish cruise past, and marauding parrotfishes include the impressive Steephead. Pairs of pretty One-spot Demoiselles have their territories right on top of the reef, centimetres from the surface. The light generally in these reefs is superb and every fish seems perfectly lit. We'll find IndoPacific Bluetangs, stunningly marked Blackpatch Triggerfishes, yellow Black-spotted Pufferfish, and lots of Neon Damselfish before exhausting our memory banks and heading back for lunch!

We'll also have daily visits to the fantastic forests and mountains on Walindi's hinterland. Trees on the hillside behind Walindi offer great perches for a succession of colourful birds. Eclectus Parrots, the males green and the females red, but with blue on the wing, are abundant. Pure colour! Suddenly our first Blue-eyed Cockatoos will fly in. What impressive birds! Tiny Red-flanked Lorikeets, Dollarbirds, Long-tailed Mynas and finely attired Superb Fruit Doves appear. Whiskered Tree Swifts arc through the sky, and the groups of Blyth's Hornbills flying past are simply superb. We'll find Collared Kingfisher, the superb White-necked (Pied) Coucal, and endemic New Britain Friarbirds before a local guide shows us a pair of lovely, and rather uncommon, New Britain Boobooks, owls that are found nowhere else in the World. As dusk approaches the numbers of Greater Flying-foxes, huge fruit bats, like squadrons of griffon vultures, increase, and as we walk to our rooms at night we'll hear them munching fruit in the trees above the restaurant!

New Britain is one of the most volcanically active areas in the world. It would hardly be a surprise should a dinosaur materialise through the steam that rises from the forest rivers of Garu whose waters are almost too hot to stand in! Megapodes (Melanesian Scrubfowls) favour this area as they can bury their eggs in already pre-heated soil and leave them to it in the sure knowledge that they will be well regulated temperature-wise. Birds are calling all the time; parrots, starlings and always the somnolent call of the Violaceous Coucal. Pacific Baza, Slaty-backed Sparrowhawk and Variable Goshawk perch in roadside trees in this protected area. New Britain Honey Buzzards soar overhead and the beautiful endemic White—mantled Kingfisher is found in the forest edge. We'll see colourful Eastern Red-capped Lory, Buff-faced Pygmy Parrot, and the more muted colours of Bismarck Friarbird, Bismarck Flowerpecker, and Pied Cuckoo-Dove. Red-knobbed Imperial Pigeons and the endemic Bismarck Imperial Pigeons will distract us from a marvellously rich insect life that features many different types of dragonfly (how do they cope with water temperature?!), the carpenter-type bees with blue bodies

and iridescent orange wings, and butterflies such as the swallowtail *Papilio albinus*, map butterfly *Cyrestis acilia* and Cruiser. A large day-flying moth, *Alcidis agathrysus*, mimics the Swallowtail *Papilio laglaizei* superbly, both strikingly patterned with blue, black and white. Black Bitterns and Variable Dwarf Kingfishers are commonly seen on the drive there and back.

Meanwhile back at Walindi the butterflies will have us oohing and aahing! Reckoned by many to be the most beautiful butterfly in the World, *Papilio ulysses* is an awesome insect. The intensity of the blue is unbelievable however so too is its flight speed! More approachable are the huge Birdwings, *Hypolimnas alimena*, the 'albatross' *Appias celestina*, the endemic swallowtail *Papilio phestus*, and *Jamides nemophilus*, a pretty 'danis' mimic.

### **Days 10(pm)-14(am)** **New Ireland – Lissenung Island**

The once a week domestic flight from Hoskins to New Ireland stops off at Rabaul, the capital of New Britain. Rabaul's very much still active volcano often shoots ash high into the sky so you can expect spectacular views as you fly past it en route to Kavieng. From Kavieng it is just a twenty minute boat ride to Lissenung.

Lissenung. It is small – it takes just fifteen minutes to walk round the whole island. It is stunningly beautiful. Fringed by white sandy beach, the tall palm trees reflected in the crystal clear turquoise waters of Kavieng Bay, a place of magnificent sunsets and surrounded by some of the most colourful reefs and the best fish life this planet has to offer... The Lissenung Island Resort was built by Dietmar and Ange Amon, who came to PNG in 1996. Dietmar has a fine eye for marine life and has discovered a new species of allied cowry at Lissenung on a sea fan. It is proudly named *Archivolva lissenungensis*. He also discovered an olive shell that has been named after him, *Janaoliva amoni*. Water temperature is between 28°C and 30°C year round at Lissenung.

The island's own fringing reef allows us to snorkel whenever it suits us, though we'll certainly visit other reefs in the area too. An Australian couple recently compiled a list of 175 species of fish encountered in just two dives/snorkels going directly from their room into the sea! Bliss! It would be perhaps unfair to describe the weird Cockatoo Waspfish as looking like a fishmonger's offcut, only you don't expect those to suddenly swim away from you! There are no less than six species of clownfish on the island's reef including Spine-cheek Anemonefish and Clown Anemonefish, and this is a great place to look for seahorses. Juvenile sharks, usually around 50cm in length are a frequent sight on the reef and in sandy patches we should look for the well-camouflaged crocodile fish. The very upright Teira Batfish float about in small groups as elegant Smooth Flutemouths drift silently past us. Celebes and Many-spotted Sweetlips form stacks so thick that you can see nothing through them, the fish moving mesmerically back and forth in front of you. Coral heads are home to some stunning nudibranchs as well as little Sixspot Goby and Damsels, among them Jewel, Lagoon and Lemon Damsels. Black-spotted Toadfish and Scribbled Leatherjackets drift above sands where the brilliantly-coloured

Yellow Shrimpgoby hovers about the entrance to its burrow. The fantastically frilly and richly-hued orange-red striped Ragged-finned Firefish is an amazing sight, almost equally red is the Strawberry Rockcod. Battering the corals are the reefs demolition mob, herds of Blue Parrotfish along with Double-headed, Green-finned and Red-speckled Parrotfishes.

Baudisson Bay, thirty minutes by boat, has lots of colourful nudibranchs, some superb Moray Eels, big Bumphead Parrotfish and Napoleon Wrasse. This is a great spot for Turtles, and Grey Reef and Whitetip Sharks are often seen. And if you've had enough of seeing the big species then it is time to look for the Pygmy Seahorse!

A shallow lagoon with beautiful turquoise water surrounds the small, uninhabited island of Ral. Green Turtles breed on the beaches and are often encountered on snorkelling sessions in this most productive of spots. The corals are fantastic, so colourful in these clear waters. The exquisite Mandarinfish, all exuberant blues and oranges, picked out with just touches of brilliant green and yellow, is quite simply one of the World's most flamboyant creatures. Here it is joined by Mimic Surgeonfish, Ocellated Spinefoot, the widespread Moorish Idol and the amazingly named Sleek Unicornfish. The immaculate patterns of Meyer's and Ornate Butterflyfish will continue to add to our butterflyfish haul – there's also Eight-banded Butterflyfish and Bennett's Butterflyfishes. The flame-topped Singular Bannerfish will draw much admiration as will the Blue-girdled Angelfish and electric Six-banded Wrasse. Groups of shimmering Blueback Damsels mix with Blue-green Chromis, elegant Three-spot Dascyllus and the extraordinary almost completely opaque Fragile Cardinalfish. Swarthy Parrotfish and Blue-lined Sabretooth Blenny are a pair that sound a little dubious, and the Coral Pigfish hardly sounds more attractive, though in truth is a little beauty. We'll see Long-finned Batfish, Titan Triggerfish, Yellow-dotted Maori Wrasse and both Spiny and Smooth Squirrelfishes, new species seem to be at every turn!

During our stay on Lissenung we'll be snorkelling daily and exploring some fantastic forests and coastal areas daily too. It is just a twenty minute boat ride back to Kavieng and there we'll drive the Boluminsky Highway taking us through some stunning coastal scenery. Ospreys and Brahminy Kites fish in the bays whilst Hunnstein's Mannikins and Buff-banded Rails frequent the scrubby fields. Eastern Reef Egrets and Yellow-tinted Imperial Pigeons are frequently seen along with Oriental Hobby, Little Kingfisher, Red-banded Flowerpecker and Red-tinted Honeyeater. In more natural forest we'll look for Song Parrot, White-bibbed Fruit-Dove, Bismarck Hanging Parrot and New Ireland Drongo. We'll make an optional journey (its 100km out to sea!) to Tench Island, a tiny atoll in the St Matthias Group, northeast of Kavieng. The island is a haven for seabirds with abundant Black Noddies and Red-footed Boobies. Delicate White Terns are common too and we'll see the lovely White-tailed Tropicbird. Spectacular Great Frigatebirds hold the air over the atoll. The rare Atoll Starling is found here and so too Nicobar Pigeons. These strange pigeons are much easier to photograph on Tench than most islands, for they are usually elusive and wary birds. The seas between Tench and Kavieng will offer us the chance of seeing Brown Noddy, Brown Booby, Bulwer's Petrel and

Wedge-tailed Shearwaters and we've a good chance of seeing cetaceans, particularly Indo-Pacific Humpback Dolphins.

An afternoon flight on Day 14 takes us back to the capital where we'll spend the night in the secure and comfortable Airport Hotel.

## **Day 15**

### **Morning Visit to the Pacific Adventist University and afternoon departure**

The extensive grounds of the Pacific Adventist University, a few miles inland of Port Moresby, offer superb birding and as the birds are completely used to people the photographic opportunities are amazing. Port Moresby's tropical savannah habitats are quite different to anything we'll have yet experienced on the island and will be full of new birds not least because of a series of small lakes and streams that are also very rich in dragonflies and damselflies. Black-backed Butcherbirds and Orange-fronted Fruit Doves are in the trees and under them are Fawn-breasted Bowerbirds, likely busy with their bowers. We'll certainly see these extraordinary structures and with a little patience should be able to photograph these interior decorators of the avian world in action. The little lakes host Australian Ibis and abundant Little Black and Little Pied Cormorants. Comb-crested Jacanas, their luminous red combs shining in the sun, will wander to within feet of us as will numerous Black-backed Swamphens and Dusky Moorhens. There are ducks too – many Pacific Black Ducks, as well as Spotted Whistling Ducks, Plumed Whistling Ducks, and Wandering Whistling Ducks. Marbled Frogmouths perform dead stump impersonations almost to perfection opening their big reddish eyes to peer at the lenses trained on them!

After a morning enjoying this productive site we'll return to the hotel for a superb buffet lunch before heading to the airport for our flights home.

## **Day 16**

### **Arrive UK/Europe**

## **Highlands of New Guinea Extension**

### **Days 15-18**

#### **Rondon Ridge above Mount Hagen**

Our flight takes us up over a landscape thickly covered in forest then suddenly it changes to the richly-cultivated highlands before we land at Mount Hagen's little airport. From town we'll drive uphill to the Rondon Ridge, a new lodge perched high above the valley with superb views over the highlands and surrounded by some wonderful highland habitats.

In the epiphyte-laden cloudforests above Rondon, among strange trees related to our ivy, and many-footed Pandanus with lots of stilt-like trunks, is a world far removed from our temperate woodlands. At night we'll seek marsupials such as the Striped Bandicoot and the rather adorable Mountain Couscous as well as owls

the simply gorgeous Feline Owlet-Nightjar. Early in the morning our local guide will take us to a place where we can watch three or possibly four birds of paradise all from one spot. The Superb Bird of Paradise wafes the iridescent blue-green feathers of its extendable chest georgette back and forth, often remaining in one spot for a goodly time, so easily viewed in detail through the 'scope. Soon after dawn we'll be regaled by the deafening machine-gun like calls of the Brown Sicklebill. The males are incredible, almost metre long birds with long pointy central tail feathers, All dark (almost) they might be, but they actually possess the most valuable (to the locals) of all bird of paradise feathers in those tail plumes. Which may seem rather strange when we meet the fabulous Stephanie's Astrapia. Another huge all dark looking bird of paradise but this time with 'inflated' central tail feathers, rather whydah-like, which curve elegantly as the bird moves about the fruiting trees. The head and chest are like a giant sunbird, a burst of metallic blues and greens offset by a narrow iridescent purple band. Breathtaking. The King of Saxony Bird of Paradise, its display song a cascading waterfall, is at the bizarre end of birds of paradise plumage. When displaying the King of Saxony thrusts out its shiny green breast and turns its head first one side, then the other, waving crazy long, curved and ratcheted plumes. These emanate from the sides of its head, are longer than the bird itself, and trail behind in flight! White-bibbed Fruit-Doves and fabulous Regent Whistlers, Black Pitohuis and Mountain Mouse Warblers, and Common Sooty Honeyeaters and Buff-faced Scrub-Wrens will have trouble attracting our attention away from these amazing birds.

Orchids are plentiful in Rondon's forests with some fine *Dendrobiums*, these including the congested pink blooms of *Dendrobium pseudoglomeratum*, the beautiful *Bulbophyllum pulchrum* and the amazing *Bulbophyllum streptosepalum* whose tepals has been pulled into very long tassels many times longer than the flower itself. The world's second largest butterfly, the Birdwing *Ornithoptera goliath*, visits the flower beds right outside our rooms and several different *Myzomelas* (a kind of Honeyeater) bring shining blacks and brilliant reds to the garden. Nearby streams cut steep-sided gorges into the mountain sides and perched amongst all the mosses and ferns on the huge boulders we'll see the distinctive Torrent-Lark whilst in nearby trees the flamboyant Blue Bird of Paradise holds territory. We'll explore the Kip Valley and Huli Gap where Papuan Harrier, Brown Falcon and Variable Goshawk are among a good selection of raptors. Local villagers will show us a tremendous sight for in the trees around their houses the truly incredible Raggiana's Birds of Paradise gather to flaunt their elegant yellow and red plumes, the males doing vigorous upside down press-ups to shake their flamboyant plumage! We fly back down to Port Morseby late morning on Day 19 to connect with our early afternoon flight to Singapore.

## **Day 19**

### **Arrive UK/Europe**

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