The Moluccas include some of the least visited islands in the Indonesian archipelago though harbour a large number of rare and range-restricted endemics that will only increase as taxonomy advances within the region. The purpose of this custom tour was to seek out as many as possible, in as short a period as possible, having visited Seram and other, surroundings islands on previous trips. We did remarkably well, so well in fact, that we finished 3 days earlier than planned! We notched up all the endemic, and potential splits in the Kai islands, along with the super-tramp Island Whistler. One of our 4 visits to the hub of Ambon delivered its single endemic – Ambon White-eye. A short (but time-consuming!) hop across to the island of Boano gave us great views of the critically endangered Boano (Black-chinned) Monarch, followed by a barely longer visit to Buru (just one night in fact!), which was enough for all but two endemic – quite a feat!

Indonesian tours, especially those to remoter areas, always carry an element of unpredictability, however, on this occasion it worked to our advantage, and we managed to save a full day due to a revision of the flight and boat schedules! First up was Kai, which coincided with a visit of the governor of Maluku on the same flight, and we were thus greeted off the plane by 50 neatly-dressed, batik-wearing officials and a performance
of local dancing and music by a group of talented girl, though we thought the sight of hundreds of soldiers lining every street on the island was perhaps a little over the top for a regional governor!

Kai Kecil’s new airport is some way from town, so a quick stop down a roadside track through a patchwork of forest and garden in the late morning brought us our first endemics – Kai Kecil White-eye, Kai (or the less appealing name; White-tipped) Monarch and our first taxonomic conundrum with a pair of ‘Kai Drongo’ chasing one another overhead – this huge, impressively tailed endemic race is currently subsumed within the Wallacean group, the most awkward grouping of all Asian drongos.

We planned for a difference to the norm here by taking the boat across to the larger, hillier, but considerably less developed (it remains hotel-less!) Kai Besar. The hills were the reason for our visit, as the one currently accepted endemic, Kai Besar White-eye is easily found here, and a short walk up also produced ‘Kai Leaf Warbler’, currently part of the Island Leaf Warbler complex. Slightly more exciting here was the deep booming of a pair of duetting Kai Coucal and within a few minutes we found them close-by giving remarkably close views before rather ungainly jumping up into the canopy to continue their duet from the safety of the leaf-less canopy.

One taxonomic uncertainty remains on Kai. A single specimen of a juvenile *Ninox*, from Kai Besar was followed up by Frank Lambert sound recording a pair many moons ago, without a trace since (though the vocalisations suggest a possible Barking Owl influence…). Unfortunately this uncertainty continued as our hour post-dusk revealed nothing but a surprise Sugar Glider in action.

Next morning we spent a couple more hours in the area once more, though the wind, low cloud and eventually rain stopped us from seeing too much other than more white-eyes, *keyensis* Brown Cuckoo Dove and Kai Monarch, though a Grey-headed Whistler was noteworthy for the Asian list (as were the Varied Trillers and Green Figbirds!)

Returning to Kai Kecil for lunch we headed out to beach forest, which sadly continues to be cleared to make way for several resorts that look set to blacken the scenery. At least the burning of the understorey made finding Island Whistler easy! Our first feeding flock of Island Monarch and Northern Fantails containing at least a pair, perhaps more of this quiet, sluggish feeder – the vocalisation of which seems never to have been recorded.

Our final target on Kai, Kai Cicadabird was also swiftly found as 4 birds appeared within minutes of the whistler disappearing. More coucals and white-eyes appeared before we settled for an early beer and rest.

A morning flight back to Ambon gave us sufficient time to stop-by for Ambon White-eye, the islands single endemic, which took less than 2 minutes to find before it was sat peering down, just over our heads. Ashy Flowerpecker, Moluccan Monarch, Seram Swiftlets and black-bellied Olive-backed Sunbirds were also noted before we took the ferry across to Seram and to our rather plush-looking hotel just across the straits from Boano.

Boano is a small island, one of three, found off the north-west coast of Seram. In 1918 the Boano (alternatively named, Black-chinned) Monarch was collected, and remained unseen until 76 years later, then another 17 years before it was refound by Birdtour Asia in 2011. We were whisked across the straits to a remote village on the backside of the island to be greeted within a few minutes by our first pair of this critically endangered monarch, together with their single off-spring. The islands other endemic taxon, *boanensis* Common Paradise Kingfisher was calling everywhere, and we easily found a couple while enjoying another pair of monarchs. It was disappointing to see the spot that James had at least 10 birds in 2010 had been recently cleared though a substantial amount of habitat still remains which should safe guard this species for some considerable time.
With time a consideration today we didn’t hang about, head back to Seram, lunch, then back to Ambon to catch the evening ferry to Buru, a surprisingly good night sleep were had in the cabin, though rather short as we arrived in Buru in the wee hours, enabling us to head straight to the hills for shortly after sunrise.

We had four days at our disposal on the island to seek out as many of the 20 or so endemics as possible, along with a few more splits and other Moluccan specialities. As is typical in Maluku, the dawn chorus was a deathly silence, and it took a little while for things to heat up, literally. Buru Friarbird got the ball rolling, shortly followed by a pair of Buru Racquet-tails perched by the roadside. Our first feeding flock was then found, containing Buru White-eye, bournensis Northern Fantail, Buru Oriole, Buru Flowerpecker, Wakolo Myzomela (of the vocally distinctive endemic race), examinata Drab Whistler, and best of all, a pair of canopy-dwelling Buru Cuckoo-shrike giving prolonged views – the latter a surprisingly scarce and difficult endemic. Further on, we heard a Buru Thrush calling down a steep ravine, as several Red-breasted Pygmy Parrots flew over and landed close-by. Another feeding flock this time contained our first Buru Leaf Warbler (currently yet another Island Leaf Warbler) and White-naped Monarch.

Moving to slightly higher ground, Tawny-backed Fantail and Golden Whistler were the next to be served up, along with yet more white-eyes and leaf warblers before we sneaked into the dense, dark undergrowth and into the home of an excellent confiding Red-bellied Pitta that brightened up the tangles as he called and called just three metres away. What a successful morning! We deserved a short siesta in the incredibly plush, beachside resort before staying in the lowlands for our afternoon birding.

The lowlands hold two endemics and offered us the best chance of Moluccan Masked Owl – hoping to clean-up in one go, we worked hard, though not so hard for the first bird, as a Buru (Black-tipped) Monarch was already waiting for us right next to the vehicle for when we disembarked! A fruiting tree Rob’s October tour found with Buru Green Pigeon unfortunately wasn’t looking too promising anymore so we headed to find our own fruiting tree. Another pair of monarch followed, along with a Spangled (Buru!) Drongo, when several Moluccan King Parrots and a flock of Buru Mountain Pigeons alerted us to the prospect of fruit, somewhere, which we eventually found containing loads of Brown Cuckoo Doves, Claret-breasted and Superb Fruit Doves, Moluccan and Pied Imperial Pigeons, and a single, female Buru Green Pigeon! This rates as one of the most difficult and unpredictable of the islands endemics, so we were ecstatic with a job well-done, only to find yet another fruited tree, this time housing at least 6 Green Pigeons busy devouring the trees ample fruit.

A seemingly protracted dusk eventually fell, and with it so did Moluccan Masked Owl, as we found a single, vocal bird within minutes of searching as it peered down at us for a good 5 minutes before we decided to leave it in peace.

Moluccan Masked Owl and Red-bellied Pitta, Buru

Up and out early the next morning we headed to the hills once more, with a stop on-route for Buru Boobook, which eventually appeared where we hoped it would. Currently classed as a Moluccan Boobook, the four vocally distinct, and very different looking races will soon all be split, and the vocalisations of the Buru birds being particularly distinctive, and only recorded and identified for the first time by James, in 2012. We pressed up, rising to nearly 1400m as the now non-functional logging road has pressed even further into the heart of Buru – we could even get within touching distance of the once isolated montane Rana Lake – with logging road coming up from the south it won’t be long now before the mountains are cut in half by the massive logging operations here. However, this logging road has enabled the birder to now reach virtually all the Buru’s endemics without much exertion. One in particular, Blue-fronted Lorikeet, a critically endangered parrot previously known only from specimens from by Rana Lake was of particular interest, as just the previous month, Craig Robson et. al. had found a bird in a flowering tree not far from our location. Being ready and alert paid off, for James anyway, as during our field breakfast, the tell-tale call of lorikeets were heard from above, only for 4 of them to flash close-by, and down into the valley to give James, and Vino, our trusted local guide, the time to appreciate them, though unfortunately Hans hands were tied up with coffee
and sandwiches to reach for the bins! We continued, ever mindful of being ‘at the ready’, as we had a few more select endemics to find. Buru Jungle Flycatcher appeared at the roadside within minutes of looking – our first of three during the morning, the occasional feeding flock of warblers, white-eyes, whistlers and fantails kept activity moving before we headed up a dark gulley above us after hearing the high-pitched call of a thrush. Waiting inside, we were welcomed by a Buru Bush Warbler (a certain split from Chestnut-backed) that sang from a clear, mossy perch though the thrush remained tantalisingly upslope, leading us further up also. Eventually we picked the perfect spot, whereby the thrush came in, remaining ever-so elusive as it hopped across the forest-floor in front of us but concealing itself just too well until eventually he behaved like many Geokichla – getting himself so worked up he gave up the ghost and flew up, to perch on several clear branches for stunning, prolonged views, allowing us to admire the intricate patterning of plumage not illustrated in the field guide – grey flanks, subtle white eye-ring, beautifully marked lower-breast, from every angle.

Back on the road, Black Eagles were in continual view, up to 3 at a time, and finally a pale-phase Pygmy Eagle soared above the road – a much-wanted bird. We were now left with one major target, Buru Honeyeater, as the road still isn’t quite high enough for the near-mythical Madanga, and though James rediscovered Black-lored Parrot in 2012, we weren’t holding our breath for that one given the briefness of our visit. We staked-out a flower tree, and within minutes a pair of honeyeaters flew straight in, not to the flowering tree, but the tree right next to us – superb!

Given that we had hit an unprecedented number of targets over just 5 days of birding we left Indonesia a couple of days ahead of schedule, enabling us to spend our final morning in the central mountain range just outside of Kuala Lumpur, in Malaysia for our final target, the endemic Mountain Peacock Pheasant. Though the time of year is not ideal, as they start to breed, after a protracted wait we were finally serenaded by a couple of fine males twice, the second time giving us prolonged views down to a few metres – what better way to finish off a wonderful weeks birding in Maluku!
Island Whistler and ‘Mistletoebird’, Kai Kecil

Kai Besar White-eye and Kai Coucal, Kai Besar

Common Paradise Kingfisher, Boano and Ambon White-eye, Ambon
Moluccan King Parrot and Buru White-eye, Buru

Buru Jungle Flycatcher and Buru Bush Warbler, Buru

Buru Thrush and Buru Honeyeater, Buru
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