

# First record of the Blue Crowned Pigeon *Goura cristata* on Seram

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Three species of crowned pigeons, *Goura* spp., are found throughout New Guinea and some neighbouring islands (Goodwin 1970, Coates 1985, Beehler *et al.* 1986, Howard & Moore 1991). The most westerly record of the Blue Crowned Pigeon *Goura cristata* is from the island of Misool (just to the west of the Vogelkop Peninsula of New Guinea), but it has also been erroneously recorded from Timor (White & Bruce 1986).

On 25 August 1991 a Blue Crowned Pigeon, destined for the cooking pot, was obtained from the villagers of Melinani, a few kilometres inland from the town of Wahai (2°48'S, 129°35'E) on the northern coast of Seram, central Moluccas. The bird was one of two that had been captured while feeding in a hollow, rotten tree stump in lowland tropical forest inland from the village of Wasa (approximately 15 km south of Wahai). The second bird later escaped from captivity. The remaining bird had been captive for about one week, but had only been fed sugar water so that it was emaciated and weighed only 1.35 kg. It was in moult, which may explain the ease with which it was captured and the discrepancy in wing-lengths. Measurements from the skin are as follows: wing-length, 330 mm (left)/316 mm (right), tail-length 247 mm, tarsus-length 82 mm, bill-length 34.5 mm. The skin is in the collections of the National Museums of Scotland (reg. no. NMSZ 1992.006). On the basis of wing measurements it is most similar in size to a male from Misool Island, which is nearest geographically (Table 1). However, because the specimen from Seram was in moult, its wing feathers may not be fully grown. It was not possible to sex this specimen, because the carcass was eaten. The villagers describe the Blue Crowned Pigeon as being abundant in lowland forests, but rarely caught because although it lives on the ground it is easily alarmed and flies up into the trees for safety. It was only because the birds were feeding inside a tree stump that it was possible to approach and capture them. The villagers call the bird *Mambruk*, which is not a universal name for pigeons, because, for example, the White-eyed Imperial Pigeon *Ducula perspicillata* is called *Pombo*.

We did not observe any Blue Crowned Pigeons in lowland or alluvial tropical forest during the three days that we were travelling through this habitat. Unfortunately, we were not made aware of the possible presence of this species until the end of our stay on Seram. It is possible that it could have been imported to Seram, although a number of factors suggest that this is not so. Firstly, local people have a unique local name for this bird, which suggests that it is a familiar species in the local avifauna. Secondly, they volunteered information as to its habits and habitat which conforms to what is recorded in the literature (e.g. Goodwin 1970, Beehler *et al.* 1986). Thirdly, Wahai is an active centre for the export of birds, especially



TABLE 1  
Wing measurements of Blue Crowned Pigeons *Goura cristata minor* from Waigeu, Misool and Seram (after Ripley 1964, Mees 1965, P. Colston pers. comm.)

	Sex	Wing-length (mm)
Seram	male?	316/330*
Misool	males	325–335
Misool	females	312–324
Waigeu	males	350–365
Waigeu	females	333–353

\*Specimen in moult; wing feathers may not be fully grown.

lories (*Eos bornea*, *E. semilarvata*), lorikeets (*Trichoglossus haematodus*) and cockatoos (*Cacatua moluccensis*), to the neighbouring island of Ambon and, thence, to Jakarta. No wild birds were recorded on the boat coming to Seram from Ambon, but more than a hundred wild birds were recorded travelling back to Ambon. Between 5,000 and 15,000 birds are exported annually by one trader in Wahai, all of which are sent to Ambon. It seems very unlikely that wild birds would be imported from New Guinea via Ambon to be sold for food, when the local avifauna represents an abundant and free source of protein and can be sold for money to buy essentials such as salt. In addition, the people of Melinani are not sufficiently wealthy to indulge themselves in the purchase of exotic birds as pets or meals.

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