

# 2018 State of Palau's Birds



*Natural History Section*



*Belau National Museum*




**"Siempre adelante y nunca atrás" – St. Junipero Serra**  
**"Ever forward and never back."**



*Front Cover – White-breasted Woodswallow.*  
*© Glenn McKinlay*  
*This page – Rusty-capped Kingfisher.*  
*© Mandy T. Etpison*





**State of Palau's Birds 2018**  
**9<sup>th</sup> Annual Report of the National Program for**  
**Monitoring Forest and Coastal Birds**

This 2018 report is dedicated to Alan R. Olsen,  
Former Manager of the Belau National Museum Natural History Section  
and Co-Editor of 8 editions of this report.





# Ngesechel a Cherechar Belau National Museum

BNM Resolution No.: 2018-002

## RESOLUTION

### HONORING ALAN RAYMOND OLSEN

**Mission**  
In the belief that “no song, no performance, no act of creation can be properly understood apart from the culture in which it is found and of which it is a part, the purpose of the Belau National Museum (BNM) as a major component of nation building is to identify, contextualize, create and record Palau’s past and present through collection, identification, documentation, preservation, interpretation, education, research and exhibition of cultural and natural property for the people of Palau.

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WHEREAS, Alan R. Olsen was born in May 23, 1946 in Chicago, Illinois; and

WHEREAS, Alan R. Olsen joined the first Peace Corp Volunteer training program in 1966 in Key West, Florida, arriving in Palau in November 6, of the same year as Micro 1, assigned to teach English as a second language; and

WHEREAS, Alan R. Olsen as a Peace Corp Volunteer became the son of late Timulch and Usengchelel of Ngatpang Municipality and a brother to Rosang Timulch; and

WHEREAS, Alan R. Olsen as a Peace Corp Volunteer, taught English, Science, and Math in primary and secondary schools; conducted training workshops for Palauan teachers. In addition, Alan R. Olsen worked on agriculture and fisheries projects including surveys for the effectiveness of control programs for the coconut rhinoceros beetles and indigenous crocodile population, and the control program of crown-of-thorns starfish; and

WHEREAS, Alan R. Olsen married Angelina Smaserui of Ngaremelengui Municipality in September 5, 1970 and is survived by his three children, five grand-children, a brother and a sister; and

WHEREAS, Alan R. Olsen led an exemplary career as an Entomologist for the United States Food and Drug Administration from 1972 to 2002; and

WHEREAS, Alan R. Olsen became the Branch Director for the United States Food and Drug Administration from 2002 and retired in 2003; and

WHEREAS, Alan R. Olsen was appointed as Emeritus Entomologist of the Belau National Museum on a voluntary basis from 2003 to 2009; and

WHEREAS, Alan R. Olsen was appointed to manage the Natural History Section of the Belau National Museum in 2010; and

WHEREAS, Alan R. Olsen as the Manager of the Natural History Section implemented the Executive Order No. 280 issued by former President Johnson Toribiong for “National Program for Monitoring Forest and Coastal Birds; Mandating the monitoring of birds diversity and bird indicator species by the Belau National Museum; and



WHEREAS, Alan R. Olsen published the first annual “State of Palau’s Birds” report in December 2010 containing an authoritative account of the current state of Palau’s birds as a contribution to Palau International Commitments under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change; and

WHEREAS, Alan R. Olsen through the National Bird Monitoring Program, initiated the citizen’s scientists e-birding program, Palau Bird Record Committee, Ngermeskang Bird Sanctuary, and the Bird Monitoring/Training Program; and

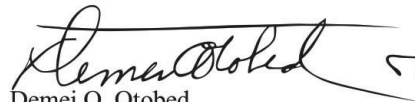
WHEREAS, Alan R. Olsen has been monitoring and publishing the annual “State of Palau’s Birds’ report until his untimely passing on Sunday, June 24<sup>th</sup>2018; and

WHEREAS, Alan R. Olsen as a Manager of Natural History has raised the profile of not only the Belau National Museum but the Republic of Palau as a bird hot spot for endemic, coastal and migratory birds to the world; and

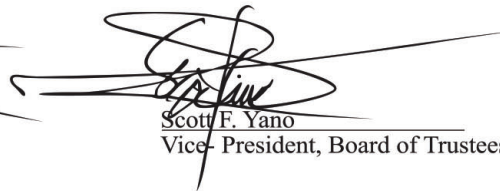
Now, therefore, be it resolved that certified copies of this resolution be presented to Mrs. Angelina Smaserui Olsen;

Be it further resolved that certified copies of this resolution be presented to His Excellency Tommy E. Remengesau, Jr., the Honorable Senate President Hokkons Baules and the Honorable House Speaker Sabino Anastacio.

Adopted this 6<sup>th</sup> day of July 2018 in Koror, Republic of Palau.



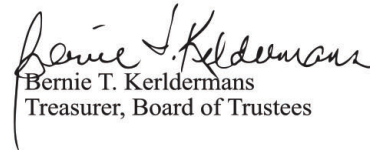
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# Palau Bird Records Committee

In 2018 these exciting migrant bird species were seen in Palau. These records are still to be officially verified by the committee. If you see an unusual bird please report to [palaubirdrecords@gmail.com](mailto:palaubirdrecords@gmail.com) (take photos and write notes if possible)



Red-rumped Swallow  
NEVER SEEN BEFORE in Palau  
Glenn McKinlay, Alan Olsen,  
Milang Eberdong



Little Bunting  
NEVER SEEN BEFORE in Palau  
Alain Jortay and Glenn McKinlay



Blue-and-white Flycatcher  
NEVER SEEN BEFORE in Palau  
Seen in Rock islands by Koror State  
Monitoring Team



Rainbow Bee-eater. SECOND record in Palau.  
This species migrates from Australia, and in  
Palau was seen before only in the SW islands  
Seen at Lake Ngardok by Milang Eberdong



Gray-faced Buzzard. Rare migrant.  
Seen at Malakal, Long Island and Airai



Eyebrowed Thrush  
Rare migrant  
Seen in Peleliu by Heather  
Ketebengang and others from  
Palau Conservation Society



# Palau Bird Records Committee

## First report is now published

The first report of the Palau Bird Records Committee was published in 2018 as a peer reviewed scientific paper in “Western Birds”. This was a result of an outstanding effort led by Alan Olsen and the Palau Bird Records Committee.

*“After compiling a historical list of 158 species of birds known to occur in Palau, the Palau Bird Records Committee accepted 10 first records of new occurrences.”*

### **Palau has the richest bird diversity of any island group in Micronesia**

The report includes the full list of 168 bird species that are now officially recognized for Palau. Copies of the report can be provided on request from the Belau National Museum.

Thank you to all who contributed, especially people who reported birds to the committee.

### **FIRST REPORT OF THE PALAU BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE**

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UMAI BASILIUS and YALAP YALAP, Palau Conservation Society, P.O. Box 1181, Koror, Palau 96940

**ABSTRACT:** After compiling a historical list of 158 species of birds known to occur in Palau, the Palau Bird Records Committee accepted 10 first records of new occurrences of bird species: the Common Pochard (*Aythya ferina*), Black-faced Spoonbill (*Platalea minor*), Chinese Pond Heron (*Ardeola bacchus*), White-breasted Waterhen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*), Eurasian Curlew (*Numenius arquata*), Gull-billed Tern (*Gelochelidon nilotica*), Channel-billed Cuckoo (*Scythrops novaehollandiae*), Ruddy Kingfisher (*Halcyon coromanda*), Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*), and Isabelline Wheatear (*Oenanthe isabellina*). These additions bring Palau's total list of accepted species to 168. We report Palau's second records of the Broad-billed Sandpiper (*Calidris falcinellus*), Chestnut-winged Cuckoo (*Clamator coromandus*), Channel-billed Cuckoo, White-throated Needletail (*Hirundapus caudacutus*) and Oriental Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus orientalis*). This report concludes with a current list of the bird species known from Palau.

This is the first report of the Palau Birds Records Committee (PBRC). Situated in the western equatorial Pacific and within the East Asian/Australasian Flyway, Palau has the richest bird diversity of any island group in Micronesia



*Mengaluliu*, White-breasted Woodswallow (*Artamus leucorhynchus*) is currently considered an endemic subspecies of the White-breasted Woodswallow. However, the Palau birds are distinctive and may actually be a separate species endemic to Palau. Palau woodswallows seem to have always been uncommon, and were thought to live only in Northern and Central Babeldaob. However, they are very easy to shoot with air guns, and it appears likely that they have become extinct in Babeldaob in the past 5 years. Fortunately a small number have been discovered to be living in the rock islands, and they have been breeding (but not always successfully). They are attractive very social birds and often seen side by side together on a branch. The numbers are so low that the Palau woodswallow would most likely be **CRITICALLY ENDANGERED** if evaluated by IUCN Red List Criteria. It is very important that they are not harmed or disturbed. If you do see woodswallows, please report to the Belau National Museum (Glenn McKinlay).

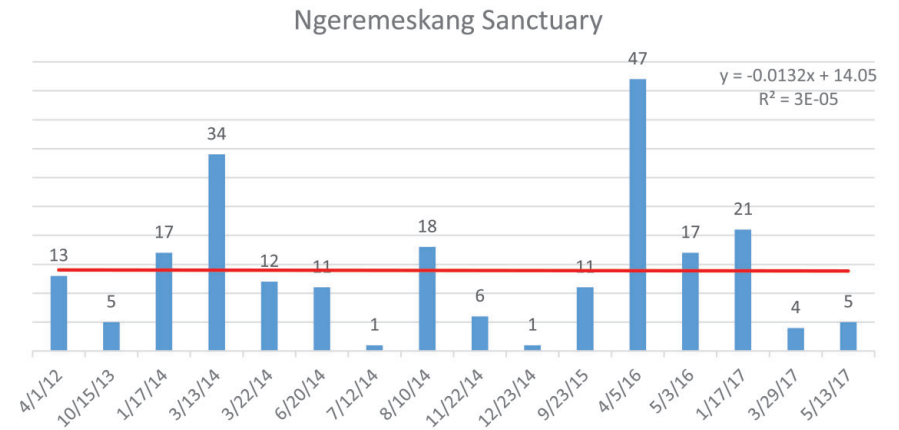






Belochel, Micronesian Imperial Pigeon (*Ducula oceanica*)

© Jon Vogt



This chart shows bird counts that Milang Eberdong and Alan Olsen took at the sanctuary. Each count was for 8 minutes. The spike at 4/5/16 was during a prolonged drought when birds gathered at the sanctuary for water (Data analysis by Alan Olsen).

There is concern regarding the trend of decreasing populations of *belochel* (*Ducula oceanica*) over the past decades. It is illegal to hunt *belochel* in Palau as it is a threatened species. In 2020, the Belau National Museum will undertake a comprehensive forest bird survey to determine the level of decline of *belochel*.



## State of Palau's Megapodes: Post 2012 Rat Eradication

Since the completion of the rodent eradication project in 2012, the four relocated megapodes were returned to their home on Ngeanges Island. Each megapode was released where it was originally captured. The Koror Rangers and Belau National Museum continue to monitor the megapodes of Ngeanges to determine the long-term success of the project. The number of active nests increased from four active nests in 2012 to nine active nests in 2018. It is recommended to survey megapode nesting mounds annually to document how environmental changes influence nesting activities (Daisuke Horii and Princess Blailes 2018).

Princess Blailes (left) and Milang Eberdong (right) assessing a megapode nest.



Milang Eberdong assessing a megapode nest.



A Koror State Ranger assessing a megapode nest.





## State of Palau's Birds: First Saturday Birdwatch at Long Island Park

Since 2013, the Belau National Museum (BNM) has held educational bird watching events at Ngermalk Island (Long Island Park and Conservation Area) on the first Saturday of every month in the morning (6:00 am-8:00 am) to raise awareness of coastal and forest birds. A total of 94 birders joined the first Saturday events in 2018 with up to 17 participants per month. A cumulative total of 31 bird species – 21 resident species, five introduced species and five migratory species were observed. The rare, Black-crowned Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) and the Gray-faced Buzzard (*Butastur indicus*) were observed (Daisuke Horii and Milang Eberdong 2018).

Bird watchers at Long Island.



Black-crowned Night Heron  
(*Nycticorax nycticorax*)



Gray-faced Buzzard  
(*Butastur indicus*)





## State of Palau's Birds: What Is Being Done to Improve the Status of Birds

### Rock Island Southern Lagoon (RISL) Bird Monitoring

Koror State Department of Conservation and Law Enforcement (DCLE) conducted a RISL bird and bat monitoring project in October 2017 to September 2018. A total of 42 species were recorded including a new species record of Palau: the Blue-and-white Flycatcher that was observed at Euidelchol in October 2018. During April to June 2018, the DCLE team observed a nesting pair of White-breasted Woodswallows at Ngeruktabel, however the nest was abandoned.

The highest species richness was at Ngemelis (32 species), Jellyfish Lake (31 species) and Ngchus (31 species). Jellyfish Lake had the highest mean number of keystone indicator species (Micronesia Imperial Pigeon, Palau Bush Warbler, Palau Fruit Dove) except the Micronesian Megapode. Habitat loss and harassment of wildlife were ecological challenges. Operational challenges were weather conditions and lack of equipment to photo document rare birds and unique bird behavior. Ten surveyors were trained by the BNM team over a 42 day period. The DCLE team established 14 sites, 28 stations and 1 transect for monitoring. Seven sites are monitored monthly and 7 are monitored semi-annually (Daisuke Horii 2018).



*Left Margin from Top to Bottom: Blue-and-white Flycatcher, DCLE Team, White-breasted Woodswallow, and DCLE Team at work.*  
*Lower Enlarged Photograph Nesting pair of White-breasted Woodswallow.*

© Daisuke Horii

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# News from Peleliu Lkes IBA



July 21 2018	August 21 2018	Sept 4 2018
<b>962 shorebirds</b>	<b>1530 shorebirds</b>	<b>2342 shorebirds</b>
<b>16 species</b>	<b>20 species</b>	<b>19 species</b>
<b>113 Gray-tailed Tattlers</b>	<b>384 Gray-tailed Tattlers</b>	<b>473 Gray-tailed Tattlers</b>

July-August **is now confirmed as an important time** for shorebirds arriving after breeding in the Arctic



# News from Peleliu Lkes Important Bird Area

*August 21, 2018*

*THREE*

*Far Eastern*

*Curlew*

*(deleerrok)*





# Flagged shorebird migrants in Palau, to Sept 2018

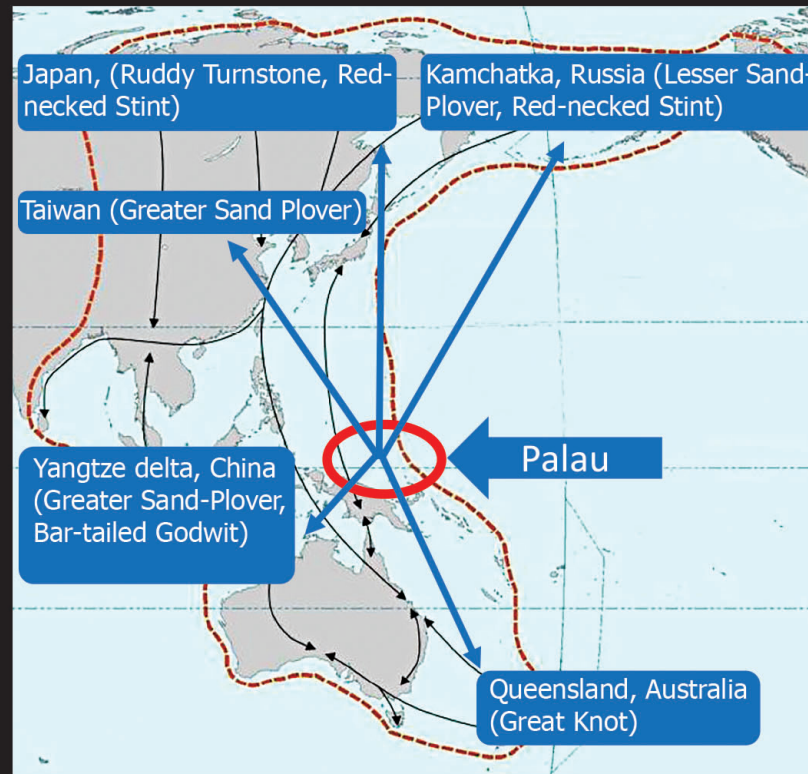
**Ruddy Turnstone**



**Greater Sand Plover**



**Greater Sand Plover**



**Red-necked Stint**



**Great Knot**





# State of Palau's Birds: What Is Being Done to Improve the Status of Birds

## MONITORING MIGRATORY SHOREBIRDS

First flagged shorebird from Taiwan.

Each research area in the East Asian Australasia Flyway uses unique coloured leg flags. In 2018 a bird with white over blue flags was found (at Peleliu Lkes IBA). This was the first bird with Taiwan flags found here in Palau.



This bird is a Greater Sand Plover. It breeds in central Asia, so it must have stopped over in Taiwan before reaching Palau.

### Greater Sand Plover migration: Central Asia, Taiwan, Palau



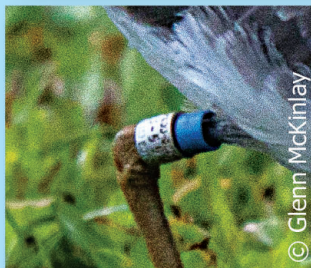


# State of Palau's Birds: What Is Being Done to Improve the Status of Birds

## MONITORING MIGRATORY SHOREBIRDS

### Banding Migratory Shorebirds in Palau

Each year thousands of migratory shorebirds arrive in Palau, after breeding in the Arctic. However, these bird populations are at serious risk, largely due to coastal habitat loss along their migration routes within the "East Asia Australasia Flyway". These birds migrate between many countries, so their conservation requires international co-operation. Each year researchers place coloured leg flags on shorebirds to understand their migration routes. Reporting observations of shorebirds with leg flags is one way in which Palau is contributing to the international conservation efforts.



Blue plastic leg band and numbered metal ring.

### Palau Is Their Home

Year after year, these birds returned to the same locations in the hamlets of Palau where they were originally banded and some remained there for the entire season (September – May). For many migratory shorebirds, Palau is their primary residence, not the Siberian nesting grounds where they spend only three months of the year.

This Gray-tailed Tattler (*Tringa brevipes*) was banded at Meyuns Baseball Field in February 2009. It has been seen in Meyuns in 2010, 2016, 2017 and again in 2018. This bird will have flown to Siberia to breed then returning to Meyuns each year for 10 years – a huge distance to fly. This shows that individual shorebirds do depend on specific home territories in Palau.

Also in 2018, another Palau banded Gray-tailed Tattler was seen in Ngatpang, and a Pacific Golden Plover was seen by Milang Eberdong of BNM in Malakal.



## State of Palau's Birds: What Is Being Done to Improve the Status of Birds

### MONITORING MIGRATORY SHOREBIRDS

The Northern Peleliu Lkes is recognized as an international Important Bird Area for migratory shorebirds. The Belau National Museum recommends it to be nominated for the Palau Protected Areas Network, so that these shorebirds and their habitat in Palau can be preserved for future generations.



Alan Olsen at Peleliu Lkes IBA, 2017



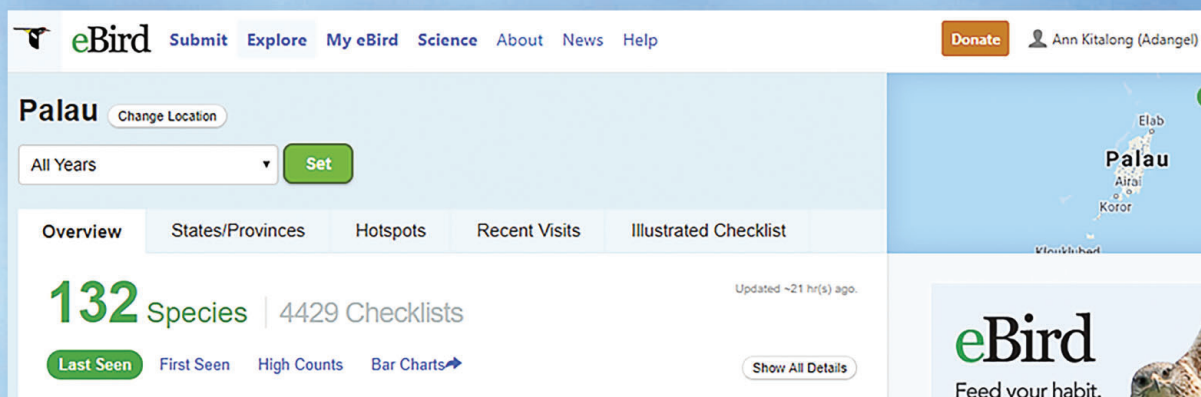
Belau National Museum Staff at Peleliu Lkes, 2018



## State of Palau's Birds: What Is Being Done to Improve the Status of Birds

### The Palau *eBird* Crowdsourcing Project

The cumulative number of submissions from Palau to the *eBird* website ([www.ebird.org](http://www.ebird.org)) of global crowd sourced data from citizen-scientists passed a landmark of 4,429 checklists. Although the data are submitted by experienced citizen-scientists, the *eBird* database can be explored by anyone with an interest in birds. The *iBird* app for Palau that complements the *eBird* crowdsourcing project is available from <https://itunes.apple.com>.



*The Palau eBird Project is funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Small Grants Programme (GEF/SGP) implemented by UNDP and the GEF Palau National Project.*

*The Palau iBird application was funded by the Palau Conservation Society and the Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation.*

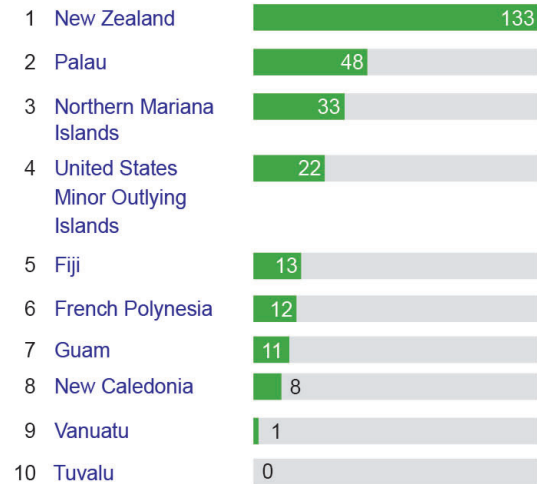


# State of Palau's Birds: What Is Being Done to Improve the Status of Birds



## Top Countries

BY SPECIES



Every year, the *eBird* website sponsors a "Global Big Day" where birdwatchers from around the world spend the day counting birds and submitting the results to the *eBird* website. The Global Big Day that was held on May 5, 2018 broke the record for most species reported in a single day (7,025 species) thanks to more than 28,000 participants from 170 countries.

Palau

[Change Location](#)

Global Big Day May 5, 2018

[Set](#)

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology  
GLOBAL BIG DAY

[Overview](#)

[States/Provinces](#)

[Recent Visits](#)

**48** Species | 27 Checklists

Updated ~21 day(s) ago.

Palauan participants reported a total of 48 species on Global Big Day. Nine of those species were Palau endemics that were not reported from any other country thereby assisting in reaching the record-breaking total number of species for a Global Big Day. Moreover, Palau ranked number 2 in the Pacific Ocean region for total number of species from a country (New Zealand was #1). The above charts record Palau's achievements (and bragging rights) for the 2018 Global Big Day. The background photo shows field ornithologist Milang Eberdong counting birds in Ngiwal on the Global Big Day.

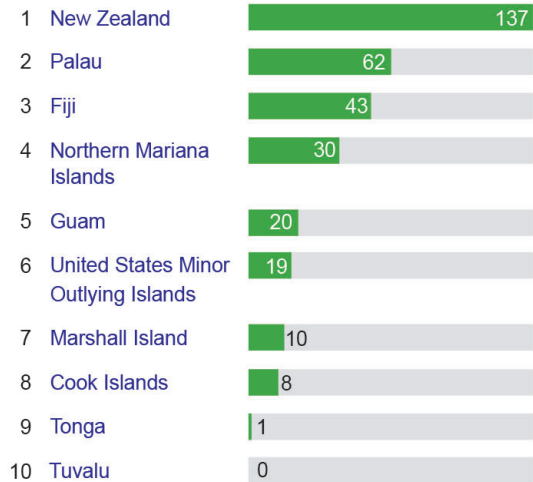


# State of Palau's Birds: What Is Being Done to Improve the Status of Birds



## Top Countries

BY SPECIES



Every year, the *eBird* website sponsors an "October Big Day" where birdwatchers from around the world spend the day counting birds and submitting the results to the *eBird* website. The October Big Day that was held on October 6, 2018 reported 6,136 species in a single day thanks to more than 17,000 participants from 146 countries.

Palau

October Big Day Oct 6, 2018

The Cornell Lab GLOBAL **BIG DAY**

Overview | States/Provinces | Recent Visits

**62** Species | 25 Checklists

Updated ~12 day(s) ago.

On October 6, 2018, more than 17,000 birders around the world went birding together for the first **October Big Day**. Reporting from 146 countries, they tallied 6,136 species of birds: more than half of the world's birds in a single day. eBirders added 21,149 pictures to their lists, photographing 2,356 species in these 24 hours. This is a new height for a single day of October birding. Palauan participants reported a total of 62 species on October Big Day. Ten of those species were Palau endemics that were not reported from any other country. Moreover, Palau ranked number 2 in the Pacific Ocean region for total number of species from a country (New Zealand was #1). The above charts record Palau's achievements for the 2018 October Big Day.



# State of Palau's Birds: What Is Being Done to Improve the Status of Birds

## TRAINING AND AWARENESS

The National Program for Monitoring Forest and Coastal Birds continues to provide training opportunities for PAN conservation officers. In 2018, training activities included field personnel of the Rock Islands Southern Lagoon UNESCO World Heritage Site. In addition to on-site training sessions, the training program holds monthly sessions at Long Island Conservation Park to broaden awareness of resident bird species, especially endemic forest birds. The event at Long Island is open to visiting bird-watchers and eco-tourists as well as local bird enthusiasts.



*Bird-watchers gather at Long Island Conservation Park on the first Saturday of every month (6:00 AM)*



# The Book of Nature is one and indivisible – Benedict XVI

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



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**eBirders:** Milang Eberdong, Yoko Higashide, Daisuke Horii, Ann Hillmann Kitalong, Glenn McKinlay, Alan Olsen, Angelina Smaserui-Olsen, Skye Yalap, Lomalinda Gabriel, Kirk LaGory, Heather Ketebengang, Mark O'Brien, Alain Jortay, Peter Kaestner, Chase Meyar, Blaize Obakrairar, Julien Ueda, Estanislaus Antonio, Pasqual Bultedaob, Ongor Adelbai, Marcus Miller, Moss Mira, Malena Chen, Donna Pairo, Evie Chauncey, James Stanford, Rick Pettebone, Sorcha Basilius, Cheryl Calaustra, Tyler Ulai, Tony Ford-Hutchinson, Robert Tizard

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Website: <https://ebird.org>





**CONNECTING PALAU**



**WITH THE WORLD**



***Conservation is a cause that has no end.  
There is no point at which we say, "Our work is finished." ~Rachel Carson***