Australasia -- Cinclosomatidae: New species of jewel-babbler from New Guinea: *Ptilorrhoa urrissia* (Hooded Jewel-babbler)

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Woxvold, I. A., B. G. Gamui, L. Legra, S. Yama, B. Koane, and S. Tulai. 2025. A new species of jewel-babbler (Cinclosomatidae: *Ptilorrhoa*) from the Southern Fold Mountains of Papua New Guinea. Ibis 2025, 20 pp. doi: 10.1111/ibi.70016

Main Points:

(1) The evidence for this exceptional discovery comes entirely from trail-camera images (Fig. 1) and associated audio recordings. The species was described from these photos because the authors were unsuccessful in obtaining a specimen despite many attempts.

(2) This jewel-babbler is exceedingly rare and elusive, known only from a few individuals at a single, remote locality in the Southern Fold Mountains of east-central New Guinea.

(3) This may be only the second new species of bird described in our lifetime from the central ranges of New Guinea (the second species being *Aegotheles terborghi*). All other new birds described from the island in modern times have originated from the various coastal ranges.

(4) Characterized by numerous field marks, this distinctive jewel-babbler cannot be confused with any other *Ptilorrhoa* species. (See Table 1 in Woxvold et al. 2025 and Figure 2 of this proposal)

(5) To underscore its uniqueness, it's important to state that *P. urrissia* is not a member of a superspecies and instead lives in sympatry with its presumed closest relatives.

(6) A quorum of 5 members of the Austalasian RAG supported this proposal (none of the RAG opposed, and the rest did not comment). We discussed the unusual procedure of describing this species without a conventional study skin for a type specimen and found it acceptable in this case, recognizing the reasons given by the authors: the lack of success in obtaining a specimen, the conservation risk of taking an individual from such a seemingly small population, and the adequate quality and number photos available. As Guy Dutson noted "these (limited morphological and vocal data) differ to a greater degree than shown by some other pairs of sympatric congeners", thereby meeting 'yardstick' standards.

(7) We acknowledge concerns that *Ptilorrhoa urissia* has been named without a traditional specimen. We further acknowledge that TaxCom may fear a precedent could be set by accepting the recommendation to recognize the species. However,

we endorse Woxvold et al.'s care in explaining that they did not take the decision lightly to name the species without a traditional specimen. They set a high standard for naming a species without a traditional specimen and this should allay any fears TaxCom may have that an epidemic of such naming might ensue. Naturally the naming of the species has met with some cynicism in informal chatgroups and social media accounts. But we respectfully suggest that the critics involved may indeed have been fortunate enough not to have discovered a new taxon in Papua New Guinea under the circumstances described. We reiterate that Woxvold et al. stressed that naming a new species without a preserved specimen 'is permissible under the Code but is discouraged unless justified by special circumstances' (ICZN 2017, p. 96). The ICZN makes four recommendations to support such an action, and Woxwold et al. addressed each.

First, authors should provide reasons why an unpreserved specimen was used as the name-bearing type (Recommendation 73G), describing efforts taken to obtain a specimen from the wild and/or from natural history collections (Recommendation 73H. Second, authors should give reasons for naming the species before a preserved specimen is available, such as being under a conservation threat (Recommendation 73G). To these first two criteria, Woxvold et al. noted that *Ptilorrhoa urrissia* is a shy and elusive species that is uncommon at the only known site of occurrence. They conducted two mist-net surveys (June 2015 and November 2018), and we are aware of a further trip in 2026 that has been completed with no further luck. They targeted ground-dwelling and understorey birds on Iagifu Ridge, with more than 6250 net-metre-hours of effort expended before the last 2026 trip. Attempts after 2018 were hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing logistical and security issues, and some of us on the Australasian RAG are all too familiar from first-hand experience with these difficulties in PNG. Mist-netting has a limited chance of success; as slow-moving terrestrial foragers, jewel-babblers seldom fly and are infrequently captured in mist-nets. Woxvold et al. conducted an extensive search for existing specimens in natural history collections (and one of us (LJ) assisted in that search at AMNH, while TKP likewise checked for specimens at BPBM), examining more than 700 skins held at 24 institutions (see Compared material in the paper). In the meantime, impacts from hunting, invasive species, industrial project operations and development, climate change and possibly interspecific competition are ongoing (see Population status on Iagifu Ridge in the paper) and present a potentially serious risk to the viability not only of the Iagifu Ridge population, but also of other populations that may occur in similar habitats nearby. Consequently, and given the legitimacy of doing so under the Code, they felt it is important formally to name the taxon now, to raise awareness about the species and to garner support for conservation efforts at the type locality and searches at other possible sites of occurrence.

Third, authors should also 'consult with specialists in the group in question' (Recommendation 73I). As part of their research, Woxvold et al. discussed the identity of the new *Ptilorrhoa* form with three experts in Australo-Papuan avian taxonomy, all of whom agreed that it represents a new species-group taxon. Finally,

authors 'should provide extensive documentation… of potentially diagnostic characters' via, for example, photographs (Recommendation 73 J). *Ptilorrhoa urrissia* exhibits numerous diagnostic features (see Diagnosis, Table 1 of the paper), each of which is visible in the photographs shown in Figures 3 and 4 of their paper and in the Supplementary Online Material.

Recommendations:

Accept and list this taxon as a monotypic species, *Ptilorrhoa urrissia*, Hooded Jewel-Babbler, with the range given as the Southern Fold Mountains of New Guinea (better the geographical NG, vs. the political PNG). The species is to be positioned in the AviList sequence following *Ptilorrhoa leucosticta* and preceding *P. caerulescens*.

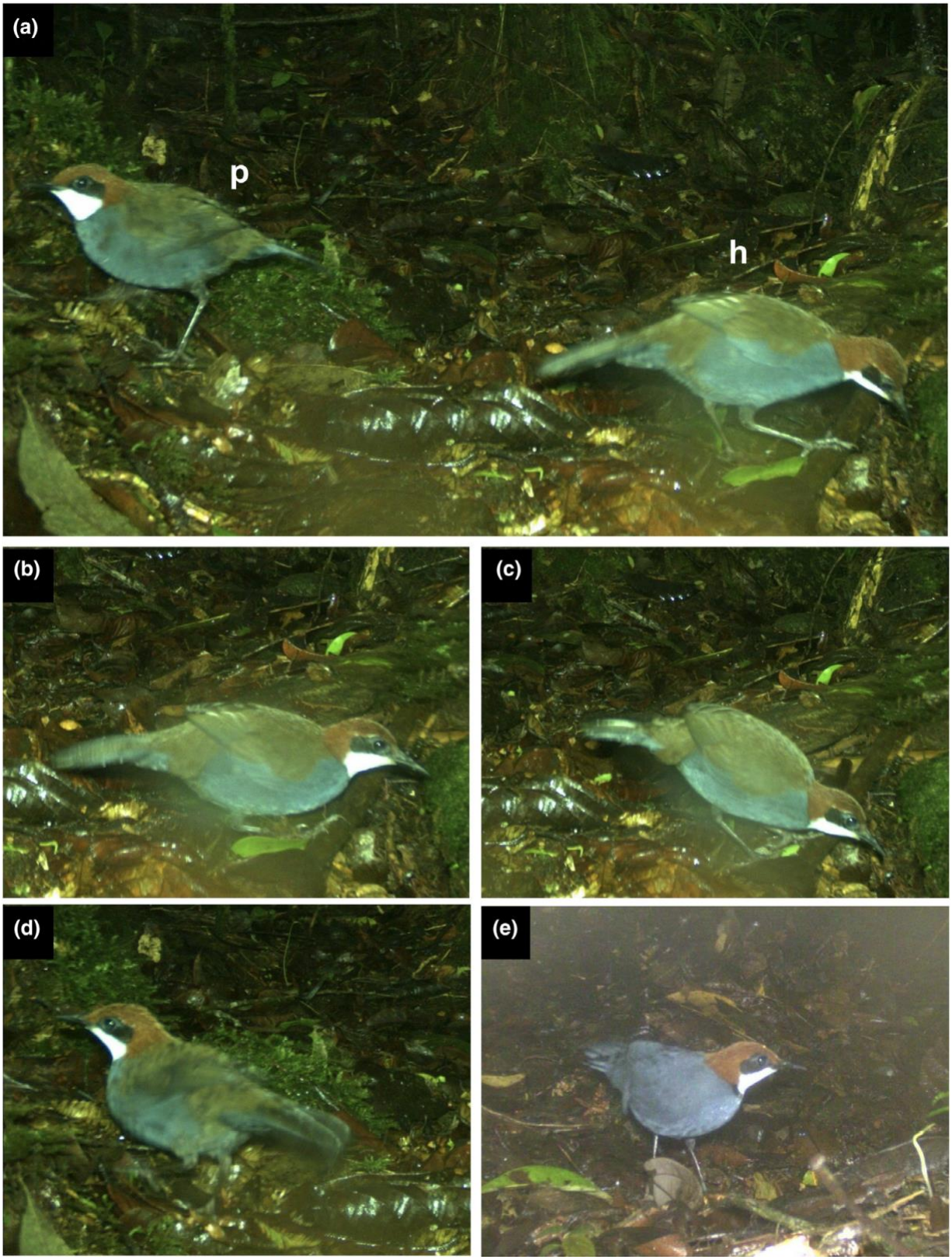

Figure 1. Reproduction of Woxwold et al. 2025:6, their Figure 3. “Camera trap images of the holotype and two paratype *Ptilorrhoa urrissia*, taken during a 3-month sampling period in a

high-density array covering 0.5 ha (see Methods). The holotype (a–c, marked 'h' in (a)) and one paratype (a and d, marked 'p' in (a)), putative adult female and juvenile with female-type plumage, respectively, were photographed together on 1 January 2020; the images shown are part of a sequence of 20 photographs taken over a period of 87 s. The putative adult male paratype (e) was photographed less than 40 m away on 8 March 2020."

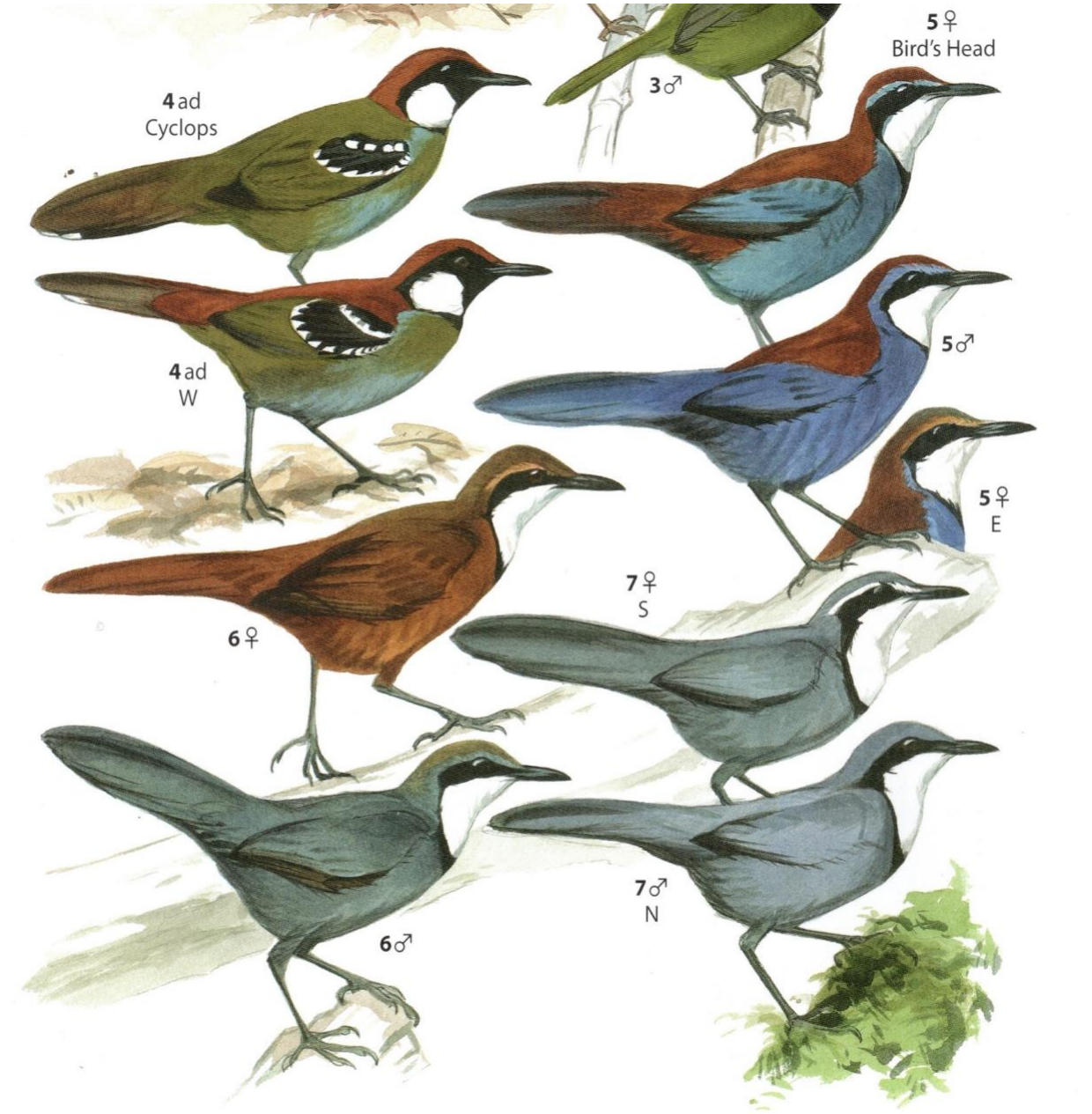

Figure 2. All previously known species of jewel-babblers, to compare with newly described *Ptilorrhoa urrissia* in Figure 1. (4) Spotted Jewel-babbler (*P. leucosticta*); (5) Chestnut-backed Jewel-babbler (*P. castanonota*); (6) Brown-headed or Dimorphic Jewel-babbler (*P. geislerorum*); (7) Blue Jewel-babbler (*P. caerulescens*). Reproduced from Pratt & Beehler, 2014, Birds of New Guinea, 2nd ed., Princeton U. Press.