



The magnificent Regent Bowerbird showed superbly at Lamington! (Andy Jensen)

EASTERN AUSTRALIA

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Eastern Australia has a reputation as having a huge variety of habitats and a great biodiversity, and this tour did not disappoint in that regard. To do this region full justice, one could easily spend a few months working from south to north along the coast, or vice versa, and venturing inland towards the centre of the continent and some of the more arid regions covered by the tour extension. However, with the reality of time constraints, we squeezed in virtually everything this region has to offer in the space of three weeks on the main tour, followed by an additional 12 days on the Queensland outback extension.

This vast region can turn on virtually any climatic condition also, although October is a relatively benign time of year when cyclones and searing heat are not likely. That said, on arrival in Sydney we were greeted by what the local media dubbed a “super-storm” which brought flash flooding to the city of Sydney and unseasonal snow

to the Blue Mountains, and we ended the trip in the sun-baked grazing country inland from Cairns. During the intervening period, we were blessed with pleasant weather, which enabled easy birding at most times, aside from the occasional period during the middle of the day when the heat ensured that a siesta could be taken. The weather god's even blessed us with the wind dropping sufficiently to allow the arranged pelagic to get out of Swansea, where we obtained point blank views of many different species of seabird, including both Antipodean and Wandering Albatross, which together were voted as bird of the trip.

It was clear from the trip that parts of Eastern Australia are in the grip of the early stages of a drought, as a result of the impending El Nino cycle, with many farmers doing it tough, and particularly graziers starting to feel the pinch. Although this was reflected in some areas, such as the late arrival of some summer migrants in North Queensland, and the unusually parched Capertee Valley west of Sydney, virtually all the eastern Australian endemics were seen.

Australia is home to an extraordinary avifauna, with an eclectic mix of gaudy, unique and often bizarre families and species, many of which are exceedingly tame. Highlights included the bizarre Superb Lyrebird showing incredibly well in the wet forest around Sydney, New South Wales' only endemic species, the Rock Warbler entertaining us in the Capertee Valley singing from its rocky home, the gaudy and very obliging Regent Bowerbird in southeast Queensland, a vagrant Asian Dowitcher near Brisbane, the restricted range Eungella Honeyeater in central Queensland, and an extraordinary host of restricted range endemic species in the wet tropics of north Queensland, including Victoria's Riflebird, Lesser Sooty Owl and Southern Cassowary.

Iconic species such as Laughing Kookaburra, Black Swan, Satin Bowerbird, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo and Olive-backed Sunbird as usual generated plenty of interest for the first few sightings and showed incredibly well for the photographers, but by the end of the trip were relegated to mere supporting cast as the flow of new, exciting and showy species just kept on coming.

That said, Eastern Australia is home to its fair share of skulkers, and this tour did not disappoint when it came to connecting with these species. In New South Wales, we obtained fantastic views of the elusive Ground Parrot and Eastern Bristlebird in the heathland around Sydney as well as the skulking Pilotbird in the wetter forest areas, and were lucky to get views of probably Australia's most elusive species, the Rufous Scrub-bird in the Barrington National Park. Moving into Queensland, we obtained stunning views of Albert's Lyrebird at the famous O'Reilly's in Lamington National Park, beat the crowds near Rainbow Beach to connect with the increasingly rare Black-breasted Button-quail, and in the Wet Tropics of North Queensland obtained memories that will last a lifetime with views of Rufous Owl, Golden Bowerbird and the elusive Fernwren.

Despite the change of leader, the extension continued in the same fashion, as target after target fell. It did get hot, indeed seriously hot around Mount Isa and Cunnamulla where daytime highs peaked at around 43°C, but once again we dodged the heat when we needed to and enjoyed many fabulous experiences. Particular mention should go to the fantastic flock of Golden-shouldered Parrots and amazing encounters with Red Goshawks in the far north; an unexpected flock of Spotted Whistling Ducks, White-streaked Honeyeaters and a gorgeous Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher in the Cooktown area; stunning Carpentarian and Kalkadoon Grasswrens, Spinifex Pigeons, gorgeous Painted Finches, Pictorella Mannikins and flocks of Oriental Plovers in the Mount Isa area; delightful Chestnut-breasted Quail-thrushes, Hall's Babblers, Major Mitchell's Cockatoos, Bourke's Parrots and beautiful Crimson Chats delighted, and as a last finale, we bagged Black Falcon, Banded Lapwings and superb Ground Cuckooshrikes in the Lockyer Valley on the final morning! To add to the fun, nomads such as Cockatiels, Budgerigars, Masked and White-browed Woodswallows and Pied Honeyeaters were also much in evidence. We were also looked after and fed superbly well by our many hosts!

In total, during the (nearly) five weeks, we amassed very close to 450 species (nearly 370 of which were recorded on the main tour), a very impressive total as it represents nearly three quarters of the regularly occurring mainland Australian species!! As well as this, a number of mammals and reptiles were seen, including point-blank views of the iconic Platypus.

The group assembled in Sydney in the afternoon and evening of 14 October, with it becoming increasingly clear that the weather was not going to be quite as expected for those coming out from Europe and the United States, expecting to top up on their tan at the same time! As the afternoon and evening wore on, the winds

picked up and soon we were in the grip of gale force winds and heavy rain. Car park birds seen as the tour commenced officially late afternoon, just before dinner, included New Holland Honeyeaters, and both Red and Little Wattlebirds.

We had hoped that this would all blow over overnight, to enable us to commence birding the following morning when the tour started. The local media was in overdrive calling this a superstorm, and on waking up the following morning, reports were in of 120 kph plus winds, over 100 mm of rain, and snow in the Blue Mountains. More pressingly, the weir which we needed to cross to access our first birding site was cut off, forcing an early change of plans. The weather had largely blown through overnight, but it was still windy, with occasional rain, resulting in a cold early morning with waterproofs and woollies required – not typical Australian birding conditions!

Keen and undeterred by the inclement weather, we still headed out early to Royal National Park (Australia's oldest national park) near Sydney, where rather than crossing the weir at Audley to go down Lady Carrington Drive, we were forced to stay on the northern side of the Hacking River around Reid's Flat and the picnic area. The introduction to Australian birding for many of the group was good though despite the challenging conditions, with Fan-tailed Cuckoo, King Parrot, Scarlet Honeyeater, Eastern Spinebill, Brown Gerygone, Grey Fantail, Grey Shrike-thrush, Sacred Kingfisher and brilliant views of Eastern Whipbird all recorded. The first fairy-wrens were as ever popular, with garish male Superb Fairy-wrens entertaining the group. On the river, Australian Wood Duck, Australasian Grebe, Little Black and Little Pied Cormorants and Australian Swamphens were all recorded.

As it was clear the water levels were not dropping any time soon, to enable us to get to our main birding areas in Royal National Park, we decided to drive off into the city earlier, to try an occasional day roost of Powerful Owl and come back to Royal National Park later when conditions had improved further. On reaching the botanic gardens we set out in search for some roost trees which were occasionally favoured. Eventually the distinctive hulking mass of a Powerful Owl was located huddled in the top of a tall tree, sheltering from the conditions. It seemed like the local possums had been safe the previous night as it was not clutching the remains of the previous night's prey as they are often wont to do. Great views were obtained, as the owl attempted to remain inconspicuous to avoid the unwanted attentions of mobbing Noisy Miners and other such species, a task at which it was remarkably successful given its huge size.



All smiles in the group after great views of the Powerful Owl and the promise of an early lunch! (Bob Ashford)



This Powerful Owl sheltered from the wind and rain in Sydney and sat watching us from its roost (Andy Jensen)

Buoyed by this early success of an often challenging species to find, we explored another couple of sites around the Sydney CBD area, obtaining the first views of many different species including Grey Teal, Hard-head, Fairy Martin, Red Wattlebird and the only Long-billed Corella of the trip, seen in a flock of Little Corellas in a Sydney park. This species is typically found in gum woodlands in Victoria and southern New South Wales, although self-sustaining small introduced populations are now present in other major cities across Australia. A Mallard was also seen – most Australian Mallards have a great deal of farmyard genes in them, but this looked pure.

After lunch we ventured back to Royal National Park where the weir was now passable. We first explored the Wattle Forest area where sharp eyes from the group picked out a Little Eagle overhead. A stunning Azure Kingfisher perched on riverside branches and gave good views to all, and a male Satin Bowerbird entertained posing close by to its bower. This species decorates its bower with blue items, comprising parrot feathers and flowers away from civilisation, and bottle tops and sugar wrappers where close to civilisation! Males don't acquire full adult plumage until their seventh year.

A calling Olive-backed Oriole was eventually tracked down and gave good views, as it maybe regretted its early return from its winter migration. They are excellent ventriloquists as evidenced by the difficulty in locating some of the individuals of this typically aloof oriole. A calling Black-faced Monarch was seen, and a few Shining

Bronze Cuckoos, also recently returned summer migrants, were also recorded, as were the first male Australian Golden Whistlers, always a popular bird.



Shining Bronze Cuckoo braved the cold conditions in Royal National Park wondering what it had returned south to (Andy Jensen)

Further into the Wattle Forest, we eventually located our main target here, the wonderful Superb Lyrebird. We were treated to wonderful close views of a foraging bird, oblivious to our presence, before it moved off across a small creek and up the hill slope the other side. An expert mimic, about 80% of its song consists of other sources, both natural (other birds and wildlife) and mechanical (phones, chainsaws etc). A Green Catbird also called and was eventually located, showing well to the group. Following this success, we headed off to a known site for Rock Warbler on the coastal cliffs of Wattamolla, but the windy conditions did not help here, with no Rock Warblers seen, although our first Crimson Rosellas and Pied Currawongs were well received by the group. The last new bird of the day was a roadside Common Bronzewing, before we headed off back to our accommodation to dry out and warm up, and reflect on a successful first day despite the challenges imposed upon us by Mother Nature.

The following day dawned calm and bright, and it was soon clear we were to be in for a temperate day weather wise fortunately. This was fortuitous, as our itinerary was to take us to the often aptly named, Barren Grounds nature reserve. Visits here in wet and windy weather are often barren in terms of species seen, although the site was so named by settling farmers who found the soils too impoverished to grow crops upon. This was fortunate for the local ecology however, and the result today is a wonderful rich heathland area full of native flowers, and a bird community which includes a number of scarce species hard to see elsewhere.

The drive to Barren Grounds was enlivened by the first Goldfinches of the trip, as well as somewhat more excitingly for the Europeans on the tour, the first White-necked Heron. After yesterday's success, another Superb Lyrebird was seen on the road on the drive up the range, although it did not hang about for long, perhaps wisely on a busy road.

The first stop was made in an area of woodland on the edge of the nature reserve, where the target species was heard instantly upon getting out of the cars! After a brief distraction for a perched Yellow-tailed Black-cockatoo, a magnificent species in its own right, we were soon focused on the search for the target quarry – Pilot-bird. A thinly distributed species, and often elusive, we were soon enjoying fantastic views as it foraged and called along the edge of track seemingly unconcerned by our presence just yards away.



Pilotbird showed well for this species at Barren Grounds although never stayed still for long (Andy Jensen)

A Gang-gang Cockatoo was also heard whilst we were viewing the Pilotbird, but sadly it could not be located and it did sound rather distant. After being sated with the views of the Pilotbird, we continued on up the access road to Barren Grounds and were soon exploring the heathland habitats for some of the site's more key species. The contrast to the previous day could not be starker, as the winds were negligible and the sun shown, and perhaps encouraged by this change in conditions, the first Eastern Bristlebirds were soon heard calling. The site is probably the main site to see this threatened and elusive species, and soon we were enjoying stunning views of a pair in full view out in the open feeding on the main track. Various other birds were heard calling in the vicinity of the sighting as well. We continued along the circuit, and soon the first Striated Thornbill of the tour was also seen, offering a good comparison in the same area to the more common Brown Thornbill. As we continued to search the heathland for its other key species, the first Southern Emu-wren were also seen, with up to 15 birds eventually being seen. This species is relatively abundant in these heathland habitats, but never easy to see and the views obtained were a treat for this species. So named after their wispy, emu-like tail feathers, this species is reluctant to fly and has a weak flight and can be vulnerable to bush fires. Also at Barren Grounds, we enjoyed the vista from the Illawarra Lookout looking out over the escarpment. A Peregrine soaring overhead was the first of the trip, the Australian subspecies has particularly large talons, allowing it to tackle larger prey species such as the Galah.

An aptly named Beautiful Firetail was also present along the walk to the viewpoint, but sadly did not stay for long. Back at the vehicles, a Pied Currawong lurked expecting handouts from the group – although it was sadly disappointed as sandwiches and biscuits were kept for personal consumption only! Over lunch we were also entertained by another Satin Bowerbird bower nearby as well as great views again of the usually skulking Eastern Whipbird. The iconic whip call of the latter species is one of the most well-known Australian bird calls and performed as a duet – the male makes the drawn out whip crack and the female responds with a “choo-choo”. After lunch, we tried the nearby Budderoo National Park, which holds a similar range of species to Barren Grounds. Dusky Woodswallows were new, and more Southern Emu-wrens were recorded as were a few Eastern Bristlebirds. After the earlier brief views, stunning close views of Beautiful Firetail were well received and a lucky few obtained views of Ground Parrot as it was flushed from the heath. Sadly, it could not be relocated despite much further searching, but we would have one final shot for this species here again the following morning.



Beautiful Firetail certainly lives up to its name – this one showed well in Budderoo National Park (Andy Jensen)

After an al fresco breakfast at the bakery in Jamberoo the following morning, we ventured back up the mountain to try again for Ground Parrot at the location of the previous afternoon's sighting. First we stopped off at Barren Grounds where the previous morning we had heard Gang-gang Cockatoo, but sadly there was no sound of the distinctive creaky hinge like call this morning. At this time of year birds are moving from the lower elevations to the higher areas of the Great Dividing Range to breed and we hoped that the previous day's heard only record would not be the only one of the trip. Another Superb Lyrebird was seen on the road nearby and the previous day's Pilotbird was also still calling.

On arrival at Budderoo National Park, once more we began the search for the elusive Ground Parrot. Overnight rain had raised the water levels in the wet heathland further, but after some initial fruitless searching, the jackpot was finally struck thanks to the sterling efforts of the two Bob's, when a single bird flushed ahead of us, before settling back down into the heath. It flushed again, and the group was able to obtain excellent flight views in beautiful light, as it flew and banked in front of us before again landing out of sight. Delighted with the views of this tricky species, which lasted a great deal longer than the typical distant up and down flop of this species, we moved on to begin our long journey to Lithgow, a couple of hours inland from Sydney, with little of note from the drive, aside from Robertson's famous "Big Potato" – one of many Australian tourist attractions where the local specialty is "honoured" with a large fibreglass model in the town!

First stop was a small roadside wetland near Picton where a host of new species were encountered. A Black-shouldered Kite sat sentinel on a roadside power pole, whilst on the wetland a female Australian Shoveler with young was the highlight as well as a number of Hoary-headed Grebes and a pair of Black-fronted Dotterel. Heavy traffic delayed our arrival at our next stop, although it did prolong our time to view the magnificent Blue Mountains as we drove up the eastern slopes to cross the range to get to Lithgow. Near Blackheath we stopped at Evans Lookout, although the drive down to the lookout was punctuated by a roadside stop for an exquisite male Scarlet Robin. This bird performed beautifully, perched just overhead on low hanging branches and even launching into song at times. Australia's robins truly are a highlight of the avifauna of the region.



A stunning Scarlet Robin was a roadside bird on the way to Evans Lookout (Andy Jensen)

After eventually reaching the lookout, we took in breathtaking views of the sandstone rock formations across the valley, whilst obviously on the lookout for some of the area's special birds at the same time! The first Brown-headed Honeyeaters and White-browed Scrubwrens were seen as well as great views of White-throated Treecreeper and another Peregrine was noted overhead. Sadly, the car park was rather busy on a fine day, and the local Rock Warblers had obviously moved off down the slopes to more secluded areas.



The view from Evans Lookout in the majestic Blue Mountains. The group seemingly more interested in searching for Rock Warbler (Bob Ashford)

We drove back off to the highway to continue our journey to Lithgow, when another roadside bird stop was required, as a flock of Gang-gang Cockatoo were heard feeding in trees along the road. The birds were soon tracked down to a row of trees behind some roadside houses, and despite some bemused looks from a very friendly local cleaning his gutters out, who was more than happy with us to view these birds behind his house, excellent views were obtained. A group of up to a dozen birds moved around feeding in the trees for over 10 minutes, before the group eventually dispersed off into the surrounding woodland. A wonderful encounter, and our luck was in before the birds move off to breeding grounds.



There were a number of encounters with Gang-gang Cockatoo including this beautiful male near Blackheath (Andy Jensen)

From Blackheath, we descended the western slopes of the Blue Mountains and reached our overnight destination of Lithgow. But first there was birding to be done, and where better than the highlight of any self-respecting bird tour, the local sewage treatment ponds! On scouring of the ponds, a variety of wildfowl was seen, with the highlights being a couple of hundred Pink-eared Duck (always a popular bird with its distinctive zebra striped plumage and bizarre spatulate bill), some more Australian Shovelers including some fine males, and in particular five magnificent Freckled Duck. This nomadic duck is one of Australia's rarest wildfowl, and moves in response to water levels from inland areas to the coast in times of inland drought. In particular, a red billed male was a particular highlight as many of the birds moving coastwards are female.

We then moved on to Lake Wallace, where on getting out of the car, a Little Raven was immediately heard. This corvid is on the edge of its range here, with Australian Raven being the dominant corvid in coastal New South Wales. As with all Australian corvids though, call is the best method to distinguish these species, and the more clipped cawing of Little Raven was immediately distinctive from the mournful, and almost depressed sounding Australian Raven, who always sounds fed up with their lot in life. After views of the Little Raven, and nearby Australian Reed Warblers and Red-browed Finches were obtained, attention turned to the lake itself. In the distance Whiskered Terns fed over the water, and large rafts of Eurasian Coot (often mooted as a future split, it is smaller than the European version, with a bluish bill), Hoary-headed Grebe and various common ducks were present. Good numbers of Great-crested Grebe were seen, a good candidate for a split from

the familiar European species, as the Australian birds do not have a non-breeding plumage. We then began searching through the massed wildfowl for some of the more unusual and key species of the area. Soon the bizarre and almost grotesque Musk Duck was located, with many males busy performing their unusual bubbling display to try and impress the females. Soon, on the far side of the lake a handsome male Blue-billed Duck was located although it was diving frequently and often secreted itself amongst a large raft of Hoary-headed Grebe, although the group all obtained good views. Further exploration of the margins of the lake revealed groups of Red-rumped Parrot and Eastern Rosella, and near the boat club the distinctive call of the Little Grassbird was soon heard, and eventually the bird showed extremely well on the edges of the reeds. Dusk was closing in though, and as difficult as it was to tear ourselves away it had been a long, but extremely successful day.

The next day was a full day in the Capertee Valley northwest of Lithgow. This world famous birding site is known for a variety of woodland and grassland species, and in particular as a breeding area for the endangered Regent Honeyeater. However, leading up to the trip, reports coming out of the Capertee indicated that all was not right, and the old lady of Australian birding was not herself. The area had been incredibly dry, and due to there being little rain, little was blossoming in the valley. With little blossoming, it was not looking good for many of the valley's specialities, including Regent Honeyeater. There had been no reports this season of Regents anywhere in the valley, so we were not hopeful of finding this species.

On arrival in the valley it was clear that little was blossoming, although reports of the demise of the valley perhaps seemed to have been overstated as we hit the ground running. Our first of many roadside stops yielded a family party of the declining Hooded Robin, as well as several scarce Diamond Firetail – a cracking finch, Australia has some wonderful members of this family. All around Jacky Winters, a wonderfully named Australian flycatcher, Rufous Songlarks and White-plumed Honeyeaters were calling, and the area was extremely birdy.



The beautiful, but currently very dry, Capertee Valley (Andy Jensen)

We continued on further into the valley, with the next roadside stop yielding a group of the stunning Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters feeding by a roadside creek, as well as a group of the strange White-winged Chough. This is an odd looking species which lives in social clans, which normally consists of one breeding pair, with younger

birds assisting. The nest is a large bowl of mud. Two Turquoise Parrots buzzed through, although they were sadly only seen by Andy and Bob and could not be relocated. An extremely secretive ground feeding species, the best bet in seeing this bird is seeing a flying bird land and tracking it down, but these birds kept on going.

The new species just kept on coming, and at further roadside stops we obtained views of Grey-crowned Babbler, Rufous Songlark, Black-chinned Honeyeater, Striped Honeyeater, the beautifully marked Spotted Pardalote, Zebra Finch, White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike, Restless Flycatcher, Western and White-throated Gerygones and a foraging group of Varied Sittellas, the Australian equivalent of nuthatch, often climbing down trunks to feed, but in noisy groups, unlike its European cousin. It was difficult to know where to look at times! After the concern of the previous day of seeing the species at all, Gang-gang Cockatoo seemed to be mocking this worry, with two further groups seen on the drive down the valley of 3 and 12 birds respectively. Near the turn to Glen Davis we were treated to views of a Southern Whiteface on a roadside fence gathering nesting material, and the first Yellow-rumped Thornbills were seen. Australia's largest thornbill, it builds a double storey nest, with a "false" cup on top and a chamber below. Theories as to why range from predator or parasitic cuckoos deterrent, a roosting place, or a practice nest for helpers (this species is a co-operative breeder).

Following lunch, we continued further into the valley and past Glen Alice to a spot for Speckled Warbler, a scarce species in the area. Many other thornbills and gerygones were seen with great views of Yellow Thornbill, Weebill (Australia's smallest bird), Striated Thornbill, Buff-rumped Thornbill and White-throated Gerygone obtained, before eventually a Speckled Warbler was located close to the road and proceeded to give point blank views to the group.



This Speckled Warbler in the Capertee Valley put on a great show (Andy Jensen)

Seeking respite from the heat of the afternoon sun, we visited a known spot for Regent Honeyeater along a shady creek line, but there was, as expected, no sight or sound of this species. Present here though were the first Brown Treecreepers of the trip (easily noticed by European birders, its call sounds remarkably similar to the "pink-pink" given by Chaffinch!), as well as a nesting Restless Flycatcher. A dry country species, this flycatcher is colloquially known as "scissors-grinder" due to its call.

Nearby in the churchyard at Glen Alice, a small covey of Brown Quail were flushed, and we were lucky also to encounter a pair of the elusive Painted Button-quail. A small group of Musk Lorikeet were notable, in that few nectivorous parrots had been seen all day, and Musk was definitely not the lorikeet we had expected to encounter if lorikeets were present in such small numbers. While the group watched the lorikeets a beautiful Red-rumped Parrot fed unobtrusively nearby, pleasing the photographers in the group.



Many beautiful Red-rumped Parrots were seen in our time in New South Wales including this one in the Capertee (Andy Jensen)

The day concluded with a last look around Glen Davis where the noisy colony of Bell Miners was located and birds showed for the group. For such a noisy species, they could be surprisingly inconspicuous in the canopy. Although native to Australia, this colonial species is considered a pest in many areas as their arrival often results in them driving away other birds from the area, and lowering the biodiversity of the section of woodland they chose to inhabit.

The following morning we returned to the Capertee for a last try for some of its remaining specialities. We drove straight through to Glen Davis and worked back out of the valley, trying not to stop on the way, which as anyone that has birded the Capertee can tell you, is easier said than done! A magnificent pair of Wedge-tailed Eagles was seen, as well as groups of Zebra and Double-barred Finches. The former species can occur here in large numbers, although dry conditions at present are not conducive. This species is able to breed just over two months from hatching, so is capable of increasing in numbers hugely in a short period when conditions are good. An obliging Brown Falcon also perched right by the roadside. A stocky falcon, it is often mistaken for a hawk due to its slow wing beats.



This Rock Warbler showed well after a bit of searching in the Capertee Valley (Janet Jones)



Brown Falcon on sentinel duty in the Capertee (Andy Jensen)

In Glen Davis we encountered a noisy group of White-naped and Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters working through the woodland on the scree slopes, and a singing Brush Cuckoo was located and showed well. This species often calls throughout the night, and is sometimes called brain fever bird for good reason, in that its incessant call can drive people crazy! We continued to bird the rocky slopes, in search of our main quarry, and after what seemed like the umpteenth stop, it was located – Rock Warbler, New South Wales' only endemic species. A pair entertained us for a prolonged period, singing and foraging around us, unconcerned by our presence.

Sadly we had to drag ourselves away from the valley for our long drive to the next overnight location near Newcastle on the coast of New South Wales, north of Sydney. The valley had one last treat in store for us though, with a group of Plum-headed Finch located on a roadside fence. This was an unexpected bonus, as little grass was seeding and generally finch numbers were low, so we had expected that this nomadic species had moved on to greener pastures somewhere away from the Capertee.

The long drive to Newcastle produced little of note, with a short stop in the Blue Mountains yielding little other than news that the following day's pelagic was looking extremely unlikely due to strong winds forecast. We pressed on to Swansea, just south of Newcastle, and met local birder Phil, who as suspected confirmed that the pelagic was indeed cancelled which necessitated a little reshuffle of plans, and heading up to the Gloucester tops a little earlier in the week. After dinner, Phil took us to a few locations looking for some nocturnal species. Little was calling however, as the wind was steadily picking up, although we were treated to views of Southern Boobook and two Tawny Frogmouth, as well as hearing a frustratingly briefly calling Masked Owl which sadly could not be located.

The following morning dawned windy, which vindicated the decision of the previous day. Instead of venturing out to the continental shelf some 50 km offshore, we instead found ourselves heading down to the mangroves

at Swansea in search of some new species for the list. A brief view of the sea and the increasing chop developing, convinced all further that this was a better plan today than trying to get out to sea! First on the agenda was Lewin's Rail which despite a few birds being heard, remained stubbornly out of site. Brown Honeyeaters showed well however, the first of this species seen on the trip, at the southern limit of its range. Bacon and egg rolls were a popular breakfast choice, if only to get out of the wind for a brief period. The woodlands around Cessnock were quiet in the windy conditions, although the first Little Lorikeet were seen as well as plenty of Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters, and an encounter with a Red-bellied Black Snake, which was most unexpected in the dry woodland, being found more often hunting frogs in wetter grassland habitats. Phil then took us to a few wetland sites in the area, the first of which being known for holding large numbers of Latham's Snipe. This species which breeds in Japan and spends the northern hemisphere winter in Australia, is one of the earliest returning waders each season, and over 40 were seen at the site, with many more no doubt hidden in the long grass. A group of Glossy Ibis were also encountered here.

We moved on to the Hunter Wetland Centre for lunch where the group enjoyed their meal whilst sitting and watching the comings and goings on the lake outside the visitor centre. The first Magpie Geese were seen as well as Royal Spoonbill, and many beautiful egrets with fine breeding plumes. Following lunch we headed to the shoreline at Newcastle where conditions were now fairly wild. Wind and rain made viewing difficult, although between the showers we noted a group of Wedge-tailed Shearwater offshore, and on the rocky platform below the seawall, a Ruddy Turnstone and a group of seven Sooty Oystercatcher were recorded. We made one final stop on the outskirts of town at a small rather innocuous looking duck pond which held a roost of handsome Nankeen Night-herons, before bidding farewell to Phil and starting on the drive to Gloucester to be in position for the next day's birding. The drive itself was fruitful, with a group of White-headed Pigeon showing well in a small village on the way to Gloucester. This species loves Camphor Laurel and is one of the few benefits of the spread of that noxious weed. Also on the drive, in a small flooded field on the outskirts of Gloucester we encountered a Yellow-billed Spoonbill, a species which moved coastwards from usual inland haunts in good numbers a few years previous, and some still remained around.

The reason for our visit to the Gloucester area was to attempt to see the infamous Rufous Scrub-bird. Many a birder has tried and failed to see this species, whilst simultaneously having both eardrums perforated by the incredibly noisy song of a bird sat just yards away out of view in the dense vegetation. This elusive nature, has given the species a highly sought after status, and it is perhaps, with the exception of the near mythical Night Parrot and Buff-breasted Button-quail, the hardest of Australia's birds to see.

To give ourselves the best opportunity we arrived early in the morning, to the species' favoured Antarctic Beech forest home at the Gloucester Tops in Barrington National Park. The habitat is dense undergrowth, which aids this species skulking nature. The drive up presented the usual distractions, with more Superb Lyrebirds being seen, and views of a few singing Bassian Thrush from the car, although as is typical for this species, they skulked off soon after the initial sightings. The first Brown Cuckoo-doves were also seen showing well on the road. Conditions were poor, with low cloud and fog prohibiting views of anything much further than the end of our binoculars, and little was singing in the murk, aside from a brief snatch of song from one scrub-bird which did not call again. We moved on to a circuit track which often holds singing scrub-birds although on this occasion none could be heard let alone seen. All was not lost though, with singing Rose Robin, and views of Bassian Thrush, Red-browed Treecreeper, Satin Bowerbird, Leaden Flycatcher, Yellow-throated Scrubwren and Black-faced Monarch providing some compensation.

We pushed on though, searching for the main reason for the visit and slowly worked along the access road listening out for calling scrub-birds. Eventually a calling bird was located, and following a tense game of cat and mouse, with the Rufous Scrub-bird remaining stubbornly out of site despite seeming to be extremely close by, a lucky few were able to obtain brief views as it scurried through a low bush on its way to the next patch of impenetrable undergrowth. During the hunt, while the scrub-bird seemed close to being seen, a pair of Crested Shrike-tit had begun calling in the forest behind, but out of sight, as if taunting us that we could not move and risk disturbing the scrub-bird. This particular Rufous Scrub-bird was not playing ball, so we retired for lunch and trying to find some further calling birds which may be a little more obliging. Following lunch, a couple of Crescent Honeyeater were seen, the only records for the trip of this species at the northern extent of its range at Gloucester Tops. Further scrub-birds were calling, but were far in from the track, and impossible to get to.

As a last roll of the dice, we tried down the initial road again, listening out for calling birds. Soon another individual was located, which sounded close to the road, where the group may get a view. After some waiting, the bird approached closer and closer, until we could see the grass moving in front of us, as the bird was clearly coming in to have a look. A lucky few obtained views as it moved through the grass immediately in front of us, before it slipped away as unobtrusively as it had come, and was not heard or seen again. Sadly we had to leave, in order to return to Swansea in time for our rescheduled pelagic the following day.



The group patiently waiting for Rufous Scrub-bird to emerge at Gloucester Tops (Bob Ashford)

On the drive down we stopped at the campsite at the Gloucester River, where a flowering grevillea held large numbers of honeyeaters. Such a congregation had not escaped the notice of the local raptors, and we were treated to breathtaking views of an aerial dogfight as a Collared Sparrowhawk singled out an unfortunate New Holland Honeyeater, which launched a series of evasive manoeuvres before eventually living to fight another day escaping the hawk's grasp. With the honeyeaters well and truly spooked by the commotion, we hit the road to get to Swansea and our overnight destination, to rest up for our pelagic the following day.

As is the way with pelagic birding trips, the group gathered expectantly at the wharf early in the morning of the day of the voyage – conversation centred around the weather conditions, the expected state of the sea, and mostly what birds we may encounter. Fortunately the strong winds of two days previously had blown through, and following a calmer day the next day, the sea had calmed down greatly and there was little swell or chop to speak of. As we ventured down the seaway towards open waters, species such as Pied Oystercatcher, Striated Heron and many Greater Crested Terns were noted.



The group prepare to cross the Swansea bar on our pelagic day – thankfully the seas were calm outside of the seaway and the jackets were no longer needed! (Andy Jensen)

Upon crossing the bar, the first seabirds were immediately apparent with groups of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters milling around offshore. This species breeds on islands down the Australian east coast and is the most commonly encountered shearwater. It was not long before the first Short-tailed Shearwaters were seen however, on their southward migration from wintering grounds off Alaska, back to their breeding islands off southern Australia. This species is often encountered in the thousands on its migration, even hundreds of thousands on peak days, and is prone to large wrecks, such as in 2013 when tens of thousands were washed up dead or dying along the east coast of Australia. These natural events, although distressing for birders to witness, are seemingly part of the natural cycle of this species.

The first Australasian Gannets were also seen, their nearest breeding grounds in New Zealand, or western Victoria, showing just how far these birds forage from their breeding colonies on fishing trips. The group busily worked through the shearwater flocks searching for anything different on the way out to the shelf, and it was

not long before a Sooty Shearwater was noted – its silvery underwing, and longer winged and billed structure separating it from the similar, more common Short-tailed Shearwater. An Australian Fur-seal also entertained, as it loafed on its back and seemingly begged for scraps. The skipper told us that the seals around Swansea had become used to free handouts from fishing vessels and had become habituated in this way. Small groups of Oceanic Bottlenose Dolphin and Common Dolphin were less obliging and only seen briefly.

After the initial burst of inshore activity, as is the way with most pelagics, numbers dropped off as we began to cross the abyssal plain to reach our eventual destination of the continental shelf edge, and some canyons where upwelling water resulted in attractive foraging areas for pelagic species. Many species come no closer to shore than these canyons, save to breed, so we progressed on in the aim of maximising our time at these hotspots.

It was not long before the first albatross were seen though with Black-browed and Shy Albatross both picking up the boat and following at a distance to see if any scraps were to be thrown overboard. These were the first albatross for at least one person on board, which is always a special moment, and even the hardened seabirders were heartened by the sighting of these birds. Both Fluttering and Hutton's Shearwaters were also seen, although they did not linger and seemed to be moving through the area only. The Hutton's was seen well enough to see the hooded appearance and dirty underwings distinguishing this species. A few Wilson's Storm-petrel were also seen foraging over the sea surface, some of which were only a few kilometres offshore, so we hoped this to be a good sign of things to come.

Eventually the continental shelf and our berleying spot was reached, and we began to throw berley overboard, a mixture of fish oil, fish guts and chicken liver. It was a revolting mixture, but it clearly worked as the effect was instantaneous with birds appearing from nowhere as they caught a sniff of the berley. For the next few hours we sat enthralled as an array of seabirds came in, and proceeded to feed just feet off the back of the boat, unconcerned by the group watching their antics as they squabbled amongst each other for the tastiest morsels.

The dominant species in terms of numbers was Short-tailed Shearwater, a species that rarely comes in to feed off the back of the boat. They seemed ravenous and it was clear that they were hungry after their southern migration. We all hoped that there would be no repeat of the previous year with tens of thousands of hungry shearwaters washing up onshore, and that there was enough food to sustain them further on their migration. Also among the shearwaters were smaller numbers of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters.



A feature of the pelagic was the southbound migration of Short-tailed Shearwaters from Alaska to breeding grounds off Southern Australia – many were clearly ravenous and fed behind the boat (Andy Jensen)

The dominant species in terms of attitude were the albatross! The pecking order was quite clear – a Yellow-nosed Albatross turned up early on in proceedings, but it was not able to get a look in at the melee developing behind the boat and it was not seen again. Shy and Black-browed Albatrosses were the next in line, and fed respectfully at a distance, on any scraps that floated away from the boat. Although the adult Black-browed Albatrosses were easily identified by their dark eyes, some of the juveniles could have been Campbell's Albatross, which is identical to Black-browed Albatross in this plumage. Then came the big boppers – Wandering type albatross. Whatever your view of the taxonomy of this group, these birds truly are ocean masters, appearing without a flick of the wings and then at the last moment barrelling into the feast, with shearwaters and smaller albatross having to rapidly get out of the way!

Up to 10 birds were seen during the day, with most being Antipodean Albatross of the form *gibsonii*. This is the standard "Wandering" Albatross type in Eastern Australia. There were two larger birds which aroused a little suspicion though, being noticeably whiter on the wing than the smaller birds present, and these birds were identified as Wandering Albatross of the form *exulans* (also appropriately known as Snowy Albatross). Whatever the name, these birds put on a great show, feeding just feet from the back of the boat, almost from the hand at times, and it was a real privilege to see these ocean giants up close and share some time with them. The group clearly agreed, and these birds were voted bird of the trip, so it was clearly worthwhile trying to rearrange this pelagic after the first attempt was cancelled because of the weather.

A number of other species took the opportunity to join in the feast, Wilson's Storm Petrel daintily picking up small tidbits off the water's surface, and both Great-winged and Providence Petrels (the latter species breeding only on Lord Howe Island, and so called as it sustained the early settlers) gracefully wheeling around the vessel, coming in to pick up a morsel, and taking off again. After a few hours of viewing it was sadly time to return to shore, before a forecast strong northerly change, so reluctantly we turned on the engines and turned for home. The way back in was quieter, but a reasonable number of birds followed us back in from the shelf edge clearly hoping the feast had not finished. Some distant Humpback Whales including a mother and calf were also seen, and a Parasitic Jaeger (or Arctic Skua to the Brits in the party!) menaced a group of Greater Crested Terns and was new for the trip.

We disembarked back in Newcastle, thanked the skipper for a memorable day at sea, and headed off for dinner, and the long process of sorting through the rapidly bulging memory cards, full of images of the day!



Prolonged close views of large albatrosses were the highlight of our trip off Newcastle, and these birds were voted bird of the trip – this is an Antipodean Albatross (race gibsonii) (Andy Jensen)



Whilst two Wandering Albatross (*Diomedea exulans*) were also seen and proceeded to sit off the back of the boat and gobble up the berley on offer (Andy Jensen)





Several mollymawks were also seen including this young Black-browed Albatross (Andy Jensen)

Our last day in New South Wales and we were up early to try a few local sites around Newcastle before our early afternoon flight to Brisbane. First on the agenda was Ash Island, an area of freshwater and brackish wetlands and grassland. We slowly drove round this excellent, but large site, scanning from the car and listening out for anything of interest. Many stops were made in the grassy areas, and along the mangrove lined creeks, with the first Golden-headed Cisticola, Tawny Grassbird and Mangrove Gerygones soon all under the belt, as well as a pair of Goldfinches. Little Grassbird and Australian Reed Warbler were also heard, but were secreted away deep within the reedbeds. We soon arrived at the area of wetlands, where aside from large numbers of both Grey and Chestnut Teal, the most numerous species was Red-necked Avocet, with up to 400 of these beautiful waders present. Also loosely associating with the avocet were approximately 20 Marsh Sandpipers. A number of Royal Spoonbill were also present offering good photographic opportunities, and a Caspian Tern sat alone in the middle of the wetland.

As with any congregation of waterfowl, raptors were present, with Brown Goshawk flying through and a Swamp Harrier quartering the wetlands. In the distance, an Eastern Osprey nest was located atop a electricity pylon with four birds in attendance, presumably adults and fledged young. Recently split from the familiar Western Osprey of Europe and North America, this form differs from the European and American species in being smaller and having a darker breast-band and paler head.

The main purpose of the visit was to try and locate White-fronted Chat, as this was the only possible site for the species on the tour. There was no sign in some of the usual spots along Wagtail Way (no wagtails were seen either - this area often plays host to small numbers of Eastern Yellow Wagtail, a rare species in eastern Australia, although usually later in the summer) and we began to explore further afield. Eventually we located two birds near the entrance to the reserve, and two birds were seen well in wet grassland close to the track, even song flying at times. Placed among the honeyeaters, they don't really behave like the other members of the family, feeding on the ground on insects. They do share the same brush tipped tongue as other honeyeaters though.

With this species under the belt it was on to the next site. Stockton sandspit is a well-known roost site close to Newcastle which often holds good numbers of shorebirds both roosting on the spit and roost at high tide, but

also foraging on the intertidal areas as the tide dropped. Unfortunately on our visit the birds had largely decided to roost elsewhere, perhaps disturbed by some workers nearby, and the tide was high so no intertidal areas were exposed. That said, a group of Far Eastern Curlew were present on the roost site, and a small group of Pacific Golden Plover hid in the adjacent grass, along with a couple of Red-capped Plover. The first Little Egret of the tour were also seen. A group of Black-tailed Godwit was seen to fly in and land on the other side of the roost bund wall unfortunately out of site. With time pressing for our flight, we had to move on.

From Stockton Sandspit to the airport, there was little of note save for another group of a couple of hundred Red-necked Avocet on a roadside pond, and the first Black Kite of the trip overhead. After checking in and lunch at the airport, we bid farewell to New South Wales, with some fond memories of its birding, and already began looking forward to the next exciting chapter and what Queensland had to offer.

We landed in Queensland, excited about what Australia's best birding state had to offer. The diversity on offer was huge, from the cool rainforests on the Queensland/New South Wales border, to exciting coastal shorebird and mangrove habitats, dry eucalypt forests and inland grasslands, freshwater lakes and the rainforests of the Wet Tropics around Cairns. On landing and getting our luggage and the vehicles sorted, we hit the road to our first birding destination. Immediately the difference in the avifauna was noticeable, with Figbird, Blue-faced Honeyeater and Scaly-breasted Lorikeet all abundant and seen on the drive. The difference in the corvids was less noticeable, but we had moved into Torresian Crow territory and the first of many records of this species were seen. Again, call was the main noticeable feature that this transition had occurred.

It was late afternoon, so there was little opportunity for birding at our destination, Lamington National Park by the time we got there. Instead on the drive we enjoyed great views of Pale-headed Rosellas in the dry farmland at the base of the range, as well as a Pheasant Coucal slowly crossing the road. The drive up the mountain road as it got dark was a taster of what the following day had to offer with both White-browed and Yellow-throated Scrubwren zipping across the road in the gathering gloom of the evening, as well as a Bassian Thrush and a number of other *zosteras* that could either have been this species or Russet-tailed Thrush. Logrunners and Green Catbirds called off into the darkening forest, and the first Australian Brush Turkeys were seen. By the end of the drive, appetites were well and truly whetted for the coming days, and we were also treated to great views of a Carpet Python basking on the road taking advantage of the last traces of heat coming off the bitumen.

Finally we arrived at the famous O'Reillys guesthouse and checked in. The reception and accommodation was adorned with pictures of the wildlife that makes this area so popular with visitors. Hopefully the following day we would be seeing many of these species in the flesh. We sat down for the first of many wonderful, filling meals in the restaurant over the next few days, knowing we would have to do plenty of walking to stop our waistlines expanding too rapidly before we left!

Due to the refusal of the Queensland government to adopt daylight savings time, early morning alarm calls were even earlier than required in New South Wales. However, the early bird catches the worm, particularly in Australia where the heat of the day is always a quiet time and mornings and evenings have peak activity. The group gathered outside our accommodation with a view to going on a quick morning walk before returning for breakfast. That said, this was no easy task. Even around the accommodation area, O'Reilly's was producing the goods. Two stately Wonga Pigeons wandered around the grassed areas, unconcerned by our presence, Topknot Pigeons flew low overhead from their overnight roosts to find feeding trees, Eastern Whipbird displayed atypical boldness feeding in the open on the lawns, and the first groups of Crimson Rosella and King Parrot were seen, coming down expecting to be fed and even perching on our heads when we were not paying attention. Best of all though, were the two iconic bowerbird species for which O'Reilly's is rightly so famous – Satin Bowerbird and the dashing Regent Bowerbird. Some splendid males of both species were seen, and offered good photo opportunities.

However, despite all this activity we had to drag ourselves away as some of the species which are found in the forest around O'Reilly's were calling. We started out along the magnificently named Python Rock track, where soon the first Noisy Pittas were seen, showing well to the group. In total, six pittas were seen along the walk, with more heard giving their distinctive "walk to work" call in the forest. Called the devil-devil bird by some Indigenous Australian groups, this species was believed to steal their children by luring them into the forest



Our first day in Queensland at O'Reilly's produced several beautiful male Satin Bowerbirds (Andy Jensen)

with their distinctive call. We continued on the walk, encountering more Yellow-throated and White-browed Scrubwrens than you can shake a stick at, as well as the first Large-billed Scrubwren and more Brown Gerygone. Brown Cuckoo-dove were a constant aural backdrop of the walk, as was the calls of both Black-faced and Spectacled Monarchs, both of which were seen well. Many beautiful Rufous Fantails were also seen, their tails lighting up the forest as they chased around in the understory looking for insects. The ever entertaining Logrunners were also noted, with several pairs seen busily foraging in the leaf litter, and tossing debris to one side with abandon as they searched for food.

Most of O'Reilly's trickier to see species were also encountered on this pre-breakfast walk, so much so we began to wonder if there would be anything left to see for the rest of our stay! Green Catbirds were as vocal as ever, and a couple of individuals were seen as they crashed through the forest. Mostly a frugivore, it supplements its diet with other birds to feed its young during the breeding season, hence the unpopular reaction this species often garners from other smaller species in the forest. Best of all, a Paradise Riflebird was eventually tracked down as it called from its display tree, its harsh grating call resounding through the forest. It was difficult to believe any female would be attracted to that! But on viewing the handsome iridescent plumage of the male high in the canopy, the attraction of the bird soon became clear. A strikingly marked in its own right female bird, was also seen in the same tree. This species has an unusual habit of draping cast off snake skins over the edge of their nests, perhaps as a deterrent to predators, or for decoration

With all of O'Reilly's specialities falling one by one, the group began the fun and games of trying to separate the zoothera thrushes present on the track. Several birds were seen, some of which showed incredibly well for this family, so much so that it was difficult to see the key feature of the outer tail, as the birds did not flush and fly away as they normally do when people approach! Eventually though, a number of Bassian Thrush were seen, and a couple of Russet-tailed Thrush also, with the key feature of more white in the outer tail feather noted. Despite what is often said about elevational ranges, both species definitely overlap and occur in the area around O'Reilly's.

After this action packed morning we returned to the lodge for a wonderful breakfast, extremely content with the birds seen already. Following breakfast we headed out on a walk along one of the tracks leading out in a different direction, which also took in an overhead boardwalk. Many of the species seen before breakfast were

seen again. A Green Catbird showed well at eye level from this structure, and Rose Robins were also seen calling. Another female Paradise Riflebird was seen, and this time much lower down offering fabulous views. Whilst we were watching the riflebird, the distinctive call of Crested Shrike-tit was heard, and soon we were enjoying good views of this enigmatic species. Although widespread, it is not easy to see anywhere, and any day one is seen is a good day. Highly satisfied with our morning's efforts, we returned back to the accommodation for lunch, where we were joined by some uninvited guests with up to ten Regent Bowerbirds raiding the feast looking for scraps wherever they could be found, as well as the more usual Crimson Rosella and King Parrot.

After an early afternoon break, we took in another of O'Reilly's excellent walking trails, although activity in the afternoon was greatly reduced. We visited the Wishing Tree, and put in our order for the following morning – Albert's Lyrebird, the only bird at O'Reilly's that was eluding us so far, and a tricky bird to see currently with many birders and groups struggling to see this bird on their visits. Back at the accommodation, in the last minutes of light, small numbers of White-throated Needletail were seen moving ahead of a storm cell, early returning birds from their northern hemisphere breeding grounds.



The group posing beneath the Wishing Tree at O'Reilly's – it is bad luck to tell people your wish but presumably Albert's Lyrebird in the morning was high on many wish lists (Bob Ashford)

After dinner we went out spotlighting although the forest was disappointingly quiet, aside from a single Southern Boobook. A variety of mammals were seen also including Mountain Brushtail Possum, Ringtail Possum, and both Red-necked and Red-legged Pademelon. It had been a highly successful day though, and plans were laid for the morning to try for that one outstanding lyrebird. The following morning and we began the search in earnest for Albert's Lyrebird. Apparently a female bird with young had been seen recently between the lodge and the mountain gardens, although it was a large area and with a large number of people about the chances were maybe not good.

We began the search around the lodge grounds but there was no sign, and we decided to try the mountain gardens instead. Just as we began that search a call from Bob alerted us to the fact that he had found the fe-

male Albert's Lyrebird and its nearly fully grown young feeding around the accommodation blocks. We quickly rushed back, but were stopped in our tracks by another lyrebird feeding along the service track right out in the open. The bird showed outrageously well with no fear, quite an atypical view, with the bird normally scurrying off into the forest at the first sign of approach. After a while enjoying the view, we then went on to see the two birds Bob had located which were also showing ridiculously well, digging around in the leaf litter outside an accommodation block.



The highlight of our time at O'Reilly's was stunning views of three separate Albert's Lyrebird out in the open feeding unconcerned by our presence – this has been a tough bird to see here recently (Andy Jensen)

Restricted to southern Queensland and northern New South Wales around the Border Ranges, as a winter breeder and vocal only in winter we were lucky to see this bird. It was hard to walk away from such views, but we left the birds in peace to finish our packing and prepare to move on. Post breakfast, we bid a fond farewell to O'Reillys and began the long drive to Rainbow Beach, stopping first to look at some handsome Whiptail Wallabies on the drive down the mountain.

First stop on the way was a few sites near Andy's home on the Pine River, where a few local specialities were lined up. A pair of Brolga were present on a roadside marsh, amongst the more common Eastern Cattle Egret and White-faced Herons. Then a short distance further on we stopped in at Osprey House, where the eponymous pair of Osprey were present on their nesting structure. Also here, an Australian Owlet-nightjar was in its usual roost site, a nest box next to the centre, basking at the entrance in the morning sunshine. Collared Kingfisher was also seen in the mangroves near here, and the first Brahminy Kite of the trip was overhead.

After this whistle-stop tour, we moved on to our next stop, where we planned to catch the high tide at Toorbul, and view the wader roost present there. On the drive in a small group of Common Greenshank and Pied Oystercatcher were noted. On arrival at the roost, it was clear the dominant species was Bar-tailed Godwit, with over 2000 birds crammed into the small roost area. Within the main flock, several Black-tailed Godwit were also noted, as well as small groups of Great Knot, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Grey-tailed Tattler and Curlew Sandpiper. Approximately 20 Whimbrel formed the head of the roost, perched on the grassy bank above the main sandy area. Searching of the flock also located scarcer wader species, which included three Red Knot, one with remnants of breeding plumage. These birds were likely to still be on passage, most Red Knot seen in southeast Queensland are on their way to New Zealand. Several terns were also present comprising Caspian,

Greater Crested and Gull-billed. All the terns appeared to relate to the Australian race *nilotica* although the Asian race *affinis* was present in the Toorbul area earlier in the year, but is very distinctive (a lot smaller and daintier) and hard to overlook. After a short while, John's sharp eyes picked out a possible Asian Dowitcher amongst the godwits. Eventually the bird was seen again, although it could often go missing in the flock. Finally all the group got good views of this vagrant species to southeast Queensland, often as its distinctive sewing machine feeding action gave its presence away. In the mangroves adjacent to the roost, Mangrove Gerygone were heard, and a pair of Mangrove Honeyeater were seen, which were new for the trip.

After we left Toorbul, we hit the road to reach our overnight destination of Rainbow Beach. There was little of note on the drives. On arrival in Rainbow Beach, we checked into our accommodation, whilst being distracted by groups of Rainbow Bee-eater, White-throated Honeyeater and Little Friarbird in the car park and surrounding grounds. Following dinner we went out spotlighting, and heard both Barking Owl, an unusual bird locally in this wet forest habitat, typically being found further inland in drier habitats, and two Marbled Frogmouth, a more expected species here. Sadly both the owl and frogmouth were distant, and could not be located for views.

An early start was required the next morning to be at our first stakeout ahead of the hordes of weekend tourists and beach goers. Quite remarkably, the endangered Black-breasted Button-quail has chosen Inskip Point, a popular area of campsites, with many day trippers also making the journey to the area to catch the barge over to Fraser Island. Or perhaps more accurately, the campsites and beach goers have chosen their site, and the birds are still tolerating their presence, albeit they are becoming increasingly difficult to see here. This species is becoming increasingly rare across its range due to habitat clearance and fragmentation, and Inskip Point is the site to see this bird.

We arrived early and thankfully most campers were still in bed, and although the first fishermen were up and about, we had some time before the masses started wandering and driving through the button-quails habitat. The strategy with this bird is simple – walk through the habitat slowly listening for the bird's low booming call, watch out for movement, and look for platelets (little bowl shaped depressions formed by the bird when feeding) to indicate signs of recent presence in an area.

This is all very well in practice, but after the first few walks through there was not a sight nor sound, and fears of this species becoming increasingly tough here began to be strengthened. Nevertheless, the general birding was still great and an excellent distraction. Large numbers of the handsome Bar-shouldered Dove were the dominant feature of the vine scrub, with the more obviously attractive Rainbow Bee-eater also present and hawking for insects from exposed perches. Little Shrike-thrush, handsome Red-backed Fairy-wren, Mangrove Honeyeater, White-cheeked Honeyeater, Varied Triller, and Leaden Flycatcher were all recorded in the scrub, and a handsome male Cicadabird heard calling was seen well in a nearby tree. A small group of Fairy Gerygone were heard, and showed stunningly well towards the tip of the point – this species is becoming increasingly common here, seemingly increasing its spread further south. Overhead, White-breasted Woodswallows were a constant aural backdrop, and a group of White-throated Needletail, up to 100 birds disappeared as quickly as it materialised, although for the intervening period they were present, stunning views were obtained as they fed low overhead.

The sandbars offshore could not be neglected either, with groups of waders and terns loafing and moving to and from feeding grounds. Waders present included Bar-tailed Godwit, Great Knot, Whimbrel, Grey-tailed Tattler, Sooty Oystercatcher, and best of all a Sanderling, picked out by John flying past the point. Amongst the roosting terns, Little and Common were both new for the trip, the Common Terns being of the race *longipennis*, different from the nominate European race. Sadly though the Beach Stone-curlew were not present on the beach at the tip of the point, as suspected the weekend hordes put paid to the idea of that bird being present, and they had obviously moved off to one of the many secluded inaccessible beaches in the area – it is a wonder they don't stay there the whole time. This species is highly sensitive to its nesting beaches being disturbed. Despite all the distractions, and there were many, the search for the button-quail had to go on. Re-fuelled by an al fresco packed breakfast, we wandered down the same loop again, and eventually in a small area located two Black-breasted Button-quail, a male and a female bird. Seeing them, despite knowing they were in the rough area, was another matter, but eventually most of the group saw one or both of the birds as they worked under the vine scrub unobtrusively. A large Sand Goanna was also seen, and came in to our impersonations of the button-quails call, so it is clear that the button-quail need to have their wits about them

at this site! The site was getting increasingly busy, and with no further sign of the button-quail, and the heat of the day beginning to set in (southeast Queensland was experiencing unusually hot conditions for the time of year) it was time to move on. We headed back towards Gympie, with one observer seeing a Black-necked Stork on a roadside wetland, and then after lunch, continued the drive on to Brisbane to be in place for a spot of night birding later on.

On a slightly delayed arrival in Brisbane due to heavy traffic on the highway, we first stopped in at a site in western Brisbane where Square-tailed Kite was breeding. The adult was visible on the nest immediately on stepping out of the vehicles, its pale head obvious against the mass of twigs and sticks. Then soon the smaller, browner head of the juvenile popped up, and eventually both adult and juvenile were seen well standing around the nest. It was great to see such a scarce raptor so close to the city, and for such a prolonged period at the nest, despite it being on a busy thoroughfare for walkers and joggers. Once the group had their fill, we moved on to the base of Mount Coot-tha to try for our first target night bird.



Our last day in Brisbane was capped off by fantastic views of a nesting Square-tailed Kite – a scarce raptor across Australia (Andy Jensen)

Around the car park on arrival, the first Spangled Drongo of the tour were seen as well as flyover Rainbow, Scaly-breasted and Little Lorikeets. Bizarre looking Channel-billed Cuckoos flew overhead also. This noisy cuckoo parasitizes Torresian Crow nests, and is a wierd looking bird, like a flying umbrella stand! The group gathered expectantly in the clearing just before dusk, startling a couple of joggers as we were in a circle chatting waiting for dusk to fall. On dusk, right on cue, the eerie call of the White-throated Nightjar was heard, best described as a maniacal chuckle, and soon a bird appeared overhead and made several low passes over the clearing hunting for insects, showing well in the spotlight as it flew past. Eventually the bird moved off up the hill, and was heard calling again in the distance, so it was time to move on before the gates were locked at 7pm and so we weren't stranded for the night! After dinner, we moved off to our final spotlighting site of the evening, a traditional site for Grass Owl. Sadly none could be found, and the birds had not been seen in recent months. The grassland was very dry so perhaps the birds have moved off to more fruitful hunting grounds temporarily.

After a long day yesterday, there was a slightly more relaxed start to proceedings today, before our flight to Mackay in the early afternoon. We pottered about a few sites on the outskirts of Brisbane, firstly visiting Gold Creek Reservoir in the western suburbs. An abrupt roadside stop was in order first though, when a group of three Bush Stone-curlew were seen in a large garden by the access road. An ungainly looking wader, this was popular with the group and posed for good photos. Also while we viewed the curlews, several Little Lorikeet zipped overhead. Gold Creek reservoir itself is relatively impoverished for waterbirds, perhaps it is too deep. The main attraction of this site is the woodland species found surrounding the reservoir. Among the common species, Spectacled Monarch and Emerald Dove were seen, although sadly there was no sign of the White-eared Monarchs at their usual creek crossing. A Pacific Baza was seen briefly in a tall tree by the car park, and the group enjoyed good views of this odd looking raptor.

From Gold Creek reservoir, we headed off to the foothills of the D'Aguilar Range, and Bellbird Grove. The heat of the day was setting in, and today was forecast to be a scorcher, the hottest October day in Brisbane for some time. Consequently bird activity was low, and little was seen, aside from White-throated Honeyeater, Buff-rumped Thornbill and Cicadabird. We decided to cut our losses and head off to the cooler conditions of the airport and prepare for our flight to Mackay. On landing in Mackay and picking up the vehicles we began the drive up to the Eungella Range through the extensive cane fields of the coastal plain. Large groups of Magpie Geese milled about in these fields, and a few Dollarbird and Forest Kingfisher sat atop roadside wires. As evening drew in, small numbers of White-throated Needletail flashed across the road, feeding on insects low over the cane fields. After the steep ascent up the escarpment to Eungella village, we drew into our accommodation but were distracted by the staggering sight of a colony of Black Flying-foxes leaving their daytime roost. For over 15 minutes the skies were darkened as what must have numbered hundreds of thousands of bats poured out of the roost overhead to feeding sites within the surrounding forest. It was an eerie, but spectacular experience. It would be a wonder if there was any fruit left for the birds to feed on tomorrow!

The main reason for the visit to Eungella, was to see the endemic Eungella Honeyeater, which has a highly restricted range in the area. First discovered in the 1970s and initially passed off as a southern population of the more widespread Bridled Honeyeater around Cairns, this species is one of the last new species of bird to be discovered in Australia. Eungella is a local Indigenous word meaning "mountains of the mist" and on rising the following day it soon became clear why. Cloud was rolling up the valley and up the escarpment and the village was shrouded in thick fog. Thankfully though, where we were heading, further up the range into the national park was above this cloud and a fine day awaited us up there. Before we left the accommodation though, a tame Buff-banded Rail entertained as it foraged through the flowerbeds looking for food.

The drive up to our first stop was punctuated by a few bird sightings, with plentiful Brown Cuckoo-Doves seen flying across the road and feeding in roadside trees, as well as smaller numbers of Emerald Dove and Top-knot Pigeon. These three species would be a feature of the morning, although generally columbid activity was low – perhaps those bats had eaten all the fruit? A Pallid Cuckoo was seen only by Andy as it flew in front of the car, and landed briefly, but it had moved on before we had all disembarked the vehicles. A pair of Cotton Pygmy-geese were located on a farm dam close to the road, and provided good scope views. This species is rapidly declining so any sighting is always gratefully received.

King Parrots were also present in good numbers, and as we got out of the car at our first stop a male Regent Bowerbird flew over, and would be the only one of the day, although more Satin Bowerbirds were seen. Spectacled and Black-faced Monarchs, and Rufous Fantails called in the surrounding forest, and the first Dusky Myzomelas were seen. Noisy Pittas were also obvious in their presence, calling away, but none were close enough to the track to be seen. A beautiful Grey Goshawk slowly moved across the canopy, and settled in a roadside tree and afforded good views. This viewing was bought to an abrupt halt however, when the first Eungella Honeyeater was heard calling, and soon good views were obtained by all as it worked through the low scrub next to the road. Subsequently, more birds were heard and seen nearby in another patch of rainforest.

The main mission achieved we moved on to try for a non-feathered target on the tour – platypus. The Broken River resort near Eungella is a known hot spot for this species, although sadly not today. We waited at the viewing area for a while, but aside from a beautiful pair of Azure Kingfisher, some Varied Triller, and a flowering tree full of Dusky and Scarlet Myzomelas and Eastern Spinebill, there was little to be seen. There would be another chance when up in North Queensland to connect with this enigmatic species.

We drove on stopping for a roadside Pheasant Coucal to try another patch of forest which is sometimes good for fruit-doves. So far, there had been little in the way of pigeons or doves calling in the other areas of forest visited and the same was the case here. However, after a while the distinctive call of Rose-crowned Fruit-dove could be heard, although seeing this small fruit-dove as they sat motionless in the thick canopy was a different matter. Eventually a couple of birds were located as they moved from tree to tree and perched views were obtained. More Eungella Honeyeater were present here, with up to six birds seen and heard calling loudly in the roadside vegetation.

We headed back to the Eungella lodge for lunch and enjoyed the spectacular view from the viewpoint atop of the escarpment. Over lunch, a pair of Channel-billed Cuckoo performed a flyby, and better still, a pair of Grey Goshawk were found circling, eventually breaking out into performing a display flight – wonderful stuff over a coffee and cake. With all seen at Eungella we had hoped to see (aside from a certain Platypus) we began the return to Mackay to catch our late afternoon flight to Cairns. During the heat of the day little was seen, aside from the ever vigilant Black Kites searching for a feed, and most took the opportunity of a snooze, but this rest was rudely interrupted by a Pacific Baza perched by the road. Unlike the previous day, this bird hung around for a prolonged period.



A roadside stop was made on the way from Eungella to Mackay for a showy Pacific Baza (Andy Jensen)

Whilst we were watching this raptor, we took the opportunity to scope a nearby wetland which looked promising for one species in particular, being covered in lilies. A variety of common wildfowl, herons and egrets were seen, including our first Wandering Whistling-ducks. Soon the target bird was spotted, Comb-crested Jacana (also known as lily trotter). Despite the heat haze, we had good views as they delicately picked their way across the lilies on the nearside of the lake. In the distance, a pair of Whiskered Tern were also noted.

Finally on to Mackay, where we stopped off at the Mackay botanic gardens. It was still warm, so we took it easy wandering slowly along the footpath along the edge of the lake. Hundreds of Plumed Whistling-duck and

Magpie Geese were present, and the start of a hint of the north Queensland flavour of the coming days was provided, with the first sightings of Torresian Imperial Pigeon, Hornbill Friarbird and Olive-backed Sunbird.



Plumed Whistling-duck were abundant in Mackay botanic gardens (Andy Jensen)

After the whistle-stop tour of Eungella and the Mackay region, it was onto another internal flight, this time to Cairns to continue our birding there. By the time we had arrived it was late and dark, so we checked into our hotel to recharge the batteries a little for the coming days. The Cairns region is among the richest in Australia for its birdlife, and it would be a full itinerary the next few days to see all of its specialities.

Another day, and another morning where it was difficult to get beyond the car park of our accommodation! Torresian Imperial Pigeons flew overhead from their overnight roosts, and this striking pigeon would be a common site for the rest of our time in North Queensland, including Kingfisher Park where it is a recent colonist. Also seen from Machans Beach well out to sea, this species regularly commutes between Cairns and the Barrier Reef islands to feed and roost. Noisy gangs of Metallic Starling roamed through the suburbs looking for another fig tree to strip. The first of many White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike was also noted, and a group of honeyeaters in the car park included Yellow and White-throated, and Hornbill Friarbird, with a couple of Olive-backed Sunbirds to boot. It was going to be a good day, with plenty to see around Cairns, a mecca of Australian birding. And with plenty to see it was on to our first stop, the nearby Centenary Park.

We began by wandering round the margins of the freshwater lake, where Magpie Geese and a Striated Heron was recorded. More of the species we noted at our accommodation were seen, as well as some Figbirds of the yellow-bellied northern race, and the first Orange-footed Scrubfowl of the tour – a bizarre looking megapode, with an even more bizarre call which would be heard frequently over the coming days. Australian Swiftlet foraged overhead and attention was often drawn skywards as a few noisy Double-eyed Fig Parrot bombed through the gardens, never stopping for long. Eventually good perched views were obtained. A pair of Green Oriole showed well to show the salient identifying features from Olive-backed Oriole which we had seen earlier on in the tour, and a nesting Black Butcherbird was also found. A Little Bronze Cuckoo was heard and then showed well in a tall tree. The new species were coming thick and fast.



Black Butcherbirds carried menace wherever they were present, and were frequently found first by the scolding of other birds; this Figbird is of the yellow bellied northern race – plenty were seen during our time in North Queensland (Andy Jensen)

We continued on and explored some of the creeks and the saltwater lake that are also found at the site. A group of Radjah Shelduck were on the saltwater lake, and the creek. This species is a relatively recent addition to the Cairns avifauna, typically being found further north, but with occasional records as far south as Rockhampton.



Radjah Shelduck were present at the Centenary Lakes with several ducklings (Andy Jensen)

Also along the creekline, was a pair of Common Sandpiper and somewhat incongruously a Grey-tailed Tattler. We began searching for our next target and eventually a female Lovely Fairy-wren was located as it moved furtively through the mangroves. Unlike most other fairy-wrens, this really is a secretive species, and it is a hard

bird to find in North Queensland so the omens were good. Gratifyingly it was also a female – this species being unusual in having such a distinctive female plumage with lovely pastel blues and whites. Most other female fairy-wrens are the archetypal LBJ. Also seen whilst searching for the calling Lovely Fairy-wren was a pair of Large-billed Gerygone, showing the typical white spot at the base of the bill distinguishing it from the similar Mangrove Gerygone.

It was time to move onto our next site, as we had largely exhausted our options here. It had been an excellent introduction to North Queensland birding although we needed to be at our next site before it got too hot, and at the site after that before the tide came in – there was a lot to see! Next on the agenda was the Jack Barnes mangrove boardwalk near Cairns airport. Despite horror stories from Andy of mosquitoes the size of crows on his last visit, it was a surprisingly pleasant walk, with no bitey critters about, including the Saltwater Crocodile which sometimes inhabit this area and necessitate the boardwalk being closed! A group of Scaly-breasted Munia was seen by the parking area, and in the mangroves themselves we had great views of a pair of Shining Flycatchers – a truly beautiful species.

Next and onto the famous Cairns esplanade, where we set about working through the waders for which the esplanade is renowned. In the trees behind the esplanade, Varied Honeyeaters were seen along with more Double-eyed Fig Parrots including some good perched views. The tide was rising which provided optimum conditions for viewing. Waders present included Mongolian and Greater Sandplover, Black-tailed and Bar-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel, Far-eastern Curlew, Greenshank, Grey-tailed Tattler, Terek Sandpiper, Great Knot, Red-necked Stint, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and Curlew Sandpiper. All showed at very close range as the tide pushed them closer to the walkway, and the birds seemed unconcerned by the range of passers by. At the northern end of the esplanade, we tried for the local Mangrove Robin. But on the way we were distracted by the sight of a stately Beach Stone-curlew stood on the edge of the mangroves. We obtained great views, before the bird had a quick stretch and flew off to the south along the esplanade. A real bonus bird, after missing out at Inskip Point.



Our first day in Cairns produced this fantastic Beach Stone Curlew along the esplanade, seemingly unconcerned by the busy thoroughfare just yards away (Andy Jensen)

We moved on expecting a long slog through the mangroves to see our quarry, when we noticed a bird flying up from the grassland in the park to a small tree – a Mangrove Robin. Incredulous at the views this bird was giving we were staggered to notice two more birds in the same area. This bird was supposed to be a skulker in the mangroves, not parading around on effectively a lawn like a European Robin! Also in this area was another Little Bronze Cuckoo.



A big highlight of our time in Cairns was wonderful views of a roosting Rufous Owl, right in the city centre. Mangrove Robins belied their name and skulking reputation to show fantastically well in the grassland and trees next to Cairns esplanade (Andy Jensen)

Before lunch we made one last stop, for a potential Rufous Owl. One had been roosting at various locations in the city all winter, but was not being seen with any regularity, and during the spring the birds move from the coastal lowlands to the hinterland to breed. However, this bird was still being seen occasionally so there was a chance. We parked outside its sometimes favoured tree, an enormous canopied fig and began looking. Despite being a big owl it could easily be hidden somewhere in the dense canopy out of sight. However, today was not one of those days and soon we located the magnificent Rufous Owl gazing down at us. A real highlight of the tour, and an increasingly tough bird to see in Australia with the regular birds in Darwin botanic gardens seemingly going awol. The owl was fairly sleepy, so after we all had good views, and photos were obtained with its eyes open, we decided to head off for lunch and celebrate an extremely successful mornings birding. It was three (!) of the groups birthday's today, and we could not have wished for a better selection of birds to celebrate this event.

Following lunch we moved on to the north of Cairns to a good wetland site, Cattana Wetlands, where although the time of day was not ideal, there would hopefully be some good birding to be had. A Little Eagle was seen on the drive. It was hot, and we took it easy walking around, but the birding was good. On the lake there was a pair of Radjah Shelduck, and a dozen Green Pygmy Geese were also seen. There were also numerous Comb-crested Jacana and best of all a White-browed Crake, seemingly ignoring the manual on how crakes are supposed to behave, by wandering around out in the open on the lily pads. In the lakeside vegetation, a small group of dapper Crimson Finch was seen, the only birds of the tour.

To get out of the heat, we went off to refuel and have an ice cream at the same time, before we went off for a relaxing end to the day down at Machans Beach and the mouth of the Redden River. It was high tide, but the tide was dropping, and a variety of waders and terns were present, including a pair of Sanderling. We scanned

the distant roosting terns in case anything unusual turned up, but nothing did so we called it quits and went back to our hotel. On the way though, just past the Centenary Lakes, we encountered a roadside flock of 35 Bush Stone-curlew – an impressive congregation of this species – standing around like garden ornaments on the front lawns of one street. It was a fitting end to a thoroughly enjoyable and successful day.



Several Bush Stone Curlew were seen around town including a loose group of over 30 birds near our hotel (Andy Jensen)

Ask any birder visiting Australia, and in particular the Wet Tropics of North Queensland which species they would like to see the most, and a significant proportion would answer Southern Cassowary. This species was the main target for today as we travelled from Cairns to our next overnight destination, Kingfisher Park at Jullatten. We left Cairns at dawn, with a plan to bird Black Mountain Road outside Cassowary House, where we would have breakfast and hopefully see the Cassowary come in for some fruit.

She was in early for breakfast that day, so Phil and Sue kindly called to let us know and we got there a little earlier than planned to share some time with this special bird stood just feet away feeding on fruit - a breathtaking sight. After a good while, we left her in peace, venturing down the road again to do some birding before our arranged breakfast time. Both Spectacled and Black-faced Monarchs were seen, Double-eyed Fig Parrots zipped overhead, and a small group of White-throated Needle-tail passed over. A Victoria's Riflebird was heard but remained frustratingly out of view. We also had our first encounter with a tricky species pair – Graceful and Yellow-spotted Honeyeater. Best distinguished by call, we obtained good views of a few different birds to ascertain both species were involved.

Having built up an appetite it was back for breakfast at Cassowary House and what a breakfast it was. The food was excellent, but the setting even better, as we sat back on the veranda and watched the comings and goings of birds to the fruit and sugar water that had been put out. Macleay's Honeyeaters were new for the list, as was a Spotted Catbird coming down for fruit. Best of all, a pair of Victoria's Riflebird showed stunningly well, the

male even indulging in a spot of display and calling at times. A Black Butcherbird also popped down to enjoy the feast, and down below Musky Rat Kangaroo fed on scraps. Just as we were thinking of making a move, the male Southern Cassowary came in with its young chick to feed. It had been coming in later in the day and we feared we may miss it, but it came in right on cue and we enjoyed fabulous views from the veranda as they fed down below. A memorable experience being so close to such a timid and scarce bird.



Macleay's Honeyeaters were seen at many sites (Andy Jensen)

We dragged ourselves away and began the drive further north to Kingfisher Park, as there were a few more stops on the way. First we headed to the Mareeba Wetlands. In the surrounding area there were thousands of Magpie Geese in the fields. The drive in down a long dirt track was eventful, with two sightings of Australian Hobby, one bird showing particularly well. A Black-necked Stork was seen briefly on a roadside billabong before it flew off, and a little further along, a Blue-winged Kookaburra was seen. The highlight of the drive in though was a group of five Australian Bustard seen in a field just off to the side of the access track, including one young bird.

On the main lake itself, more Comb-crested Jacana and Green Pygmy Geese were seen, and a small group of Wandering Whistling Duck made up for distant views in the heat haze near Mackay the other day. A group of Chestnut-breasted Mannikin were coming in to take advantage of spilled seed near the Gouldian Finch re-introduction project aviaries, and just outside the visitor centre, a Lemon-bellied Flycatcher was seen – a dry country specialist in this area, as well as a female or young Asian Koel. Up until now we had only been able to hear this species, so the good views afforded here were welcome. Two Emu were seen, and apparently formed part of a self-sustaining population that had become established at the centre. Following lunch, we went for a drive south of Mareeba to an area which is popular with feeding cranes during the day, and we were not to be disappointed with 15 Sarus Crane, 10 Brolga and another 12 distant crane sp. seen feeding in the fields.

Next we visited Lake Mitchell, just south of Mount Molloy. The actual lake itself was rather disappointing for wetland species, although nevertheless three Cotton Pygmy-goose, 10 Green Pygmy-goose, a Glossy Ibis and



Stunning views of both male and female Victoria's Riflebird were obtained (Andy Jensen)

10 Comb-crested Jacana were seen. The highlight at Lake Mitchell, was the views of a pair of White-winged Triller on the drive out, the first of the trip. Finally, it was on to our home for the next four nights, Kingfisher Park. This famous destination at Julatten, northwest of Cairns is high on the agenda of any birding trip to the region. After a warm welcome from Keith and Lindsay, and a bit of an introduction to the site, we went out birding for the last hour or two of light. More Macleay's, Yellow-spotted and Graceful Honeyeaters were seen, as well as more Spectacled and Black-faced Monarchs. A Cicadabird was heard calling and gave a more like a whistled call (given by the rainforest form in North Queensland), which is different to the more buzzy call of the nominate form. This pair has been mooted as a likely split in the future – watch this space...and the surrounding areas.

A couple of Orange-footed Scrubfowl mounds were located, with attendant workers, and Pale-yellow Robin and Wompoo Fruit-dove were found in the orchard, both new species for the trip list. Both Topknot Pigeon and Torresian Imperial Pigeon were also noted, both flying overhead and feeding in large trees surrounding the orchard. Other species present included a Little Bronze Cuckoo calling, but it could not be tracked down, and may have related to the subspecies Gould's Bronze Cuckoo, of which more was to come later.



In the Cairns hinterland we had a wonderful encounter with this male Southern Cassowary as well as seeing its youngster and a female bird (Andy Jensen)

A Barking Owl was heard calling a good hour or so before nightfall, and it was eventually tracked down to a tree in the forest adjacent to the orchard. A second bird started calling, and the first bird moved off, but not before we all had excellent views.

The highlight of the afternoon however, was non-avian. Good views of platypus were obtained at the creek, as the platypus foraged unconcerned right below us. This made up for missing this species at Eungella, and this iconic species was one of the tour highlights. We then spent some time waiting by the famous crake pool, to see if the species after which it is named, Red-necked Crake would come in. This forest rail is a real skulker,

with many people spending a week here and not seeing this species, and it was no surprise when we drew a blank. Still, three more nights to try! Other mammals seen later on, as it got dark, included Fawn-footed Melomys, Northern Brown Bandicoot, Spectacled Flying-fox and a Yellow-footed Antechinus, which caused great hilarity as it kept trying to get into the kitchen. Many of these species were found on the spotlighting later on that we did around the lodge grounds, although no night birds could be heard. A Leaf-tailed Gecko was also seen though high in a tree.



Pale-yellow Robin were seen in the grounds of Kingfisher Park (Pete Morris)

Kingfisher Park is well situated to access a number of different habitats in the northern end of the Atherton tablelands, including rainforest, open forest, dry grasslands and wetland sites. We would take in a sample of all of these in the coming days, but first it was off up Mount Lewis, an area of lush upland rainforest near Julatten. The drive up produced the first Barred Cuckooshrike, as well as numerous Emerald Doves and Brown Cuckoo-doves, and many scrubwrens flitted across the road – mostly Yellow-throated.

We eventually arrived at our destination and unpacked the delicious breakfasts that Lindsay had prepared for us, and tucked in whilst catching up with the first few species around the famous clearing. Sadly it was too early in the season for Blue-faced Parrot-finch, and they were also not at their wintering areas. No-one really knows where they go in the interim period – there is still a lot of mystery in Aussie birding. The first new birds began to be seen though with good views had of a Bower's Shrike-thrush. The high altitude equivalent of Little Shrike-thrush, endemic to North Queensland, although confusingly, Little Shrike-thrush does occur, and the race here also has a darker bill like this species. Also seen were the first Bridled Honeyeaters and their noisy calls became a frequent feature of the morning.

We ventured off down the track to the dam, and more of the North Queensland endemics kept falling. Atherton Scrubwren, a similar looking species to Large-billed, but plainer looking and more terrestrial in its habits, were seen and were a common bird along the walk. More skulking were the first Fernwren, although up to a dozen of this tricky skulker were seen on the walk, and many eventually showed well at close range.

Honeyeaters included Graceful, Yellow-spotted, Lewin's and Macleay's, and splitting the three former species provided many challenges along the walk. Spotted Catbird and Victoria's Riflebird were both heard calling, but not seen, and it was difficult to imagine topping the views we had of these birds the previous day. Soon, we located a distinctive call from within the forest, and on closer inspection we found the source of the call, a



Fernwren skulked in the murky undergrowth up the top of Mount Lewis although some showed well for this species. Bridled Honeyeater was seen well at various sites in the higher country inland from Cairns (Andy Jensen)

Tooth-billed Bowerbird sat by his bower. There is not much to the bower of this species (maintaining a cleared “court” area at which they sing) and this bowerbird is not the most attractive of the family, but it certainly has a restricted range being found only in the uplands of North Queensland.

Further on and after the track split, we located our first Chowchilla. In the same family as the Logrunner which we had seen earlier in the trip, these birds had exactly the same *modus operandi* and were busy foraging through the leaf litter, tossing everything aside in the search for a tasty morsel. It was noted that the Fernwren and scrubwrens were often in attendance, looking for anything disturbed by the Chowchillas. We reached the dam, where a Nankeen Night-heron was disturbed from its roost, a surprising location so high up, and began to work our way back along the track to the clearing. Grey Fantail of the dark mountain race *kaesti* were seen, and some thornbills in the low trees above the track were grilled, and proved to be Mountain Thornbill, yet another of the endemic species to the area. They showed well, and eventually the distinctive pale eye of this species was seen. A Superb Fruit-dove was also located sat in a bare tree above the track and we enjoyed rare perched views in the open of this species. There was only one of the expected endemics up here left to see, and it wasn't long before it was located – Grey-headed Robin. This striking robin proved to be uncharacteristically skittish, although eventually most of the group had good views. Back at the vehicles, a Golden Bowerbird was heard giving its strange electrical interference call somewhere in the distance, but it called only once and could not be found despite searching. More Bridled Honeyeater were seen over coffee.

We drove back down the mountain to check out an area Keith had tipped us off about the previous day, a fruiting fig near the bottom of the mountain. We were not too be disappointed – what a spectacle it was. Many Double-eyed Fig-parrot were present although they could be hard to locate when sat quietly feeding. This was not a problem we had for the noisy Metallic Starling present though. A few more Superb Fruit-dove were seen, but the main attraction was the large group of over 50 Barred Cuckooshrike. They seemed to be feeding in the one tree, then moved on mass to a neighbouring tree to let the figs they had just eaten digest a bit. Such numbers of this species though are a very rare sight.

It was back for lunch at Kingfisher Park after a thoroughly enjoyable morning's birding, and a fruitful one at that. Over a middle of the day break, some of the group took the opportunity to relax, whilst others sat back and watched the comings and goings at the feeders outside our rooms, as Emerald Dove, Red-browed Finch and Spotted Catbird came down to feed.

After the break, it was off out again, to a completely contrasting habitat from the morning's birding – part of the beauty of this part of the world. We were to explore some of the drier grassland and woodland inland from



Up Mount Lewis a fruiting tree full of Barred Cuckoo Shrikes (up to 50 birds!) was a wonderful site (Andy Jensen)

Mount Molloy, out towards Mount Carbine. It was still warm though, so most of the initial birding was done from the air conditioned comfort of the vehicles. At the appropriately named Bustard Downs (or Maryfarms) we counted up to 25 Australian Bustard in the parched paddocks along the roads in this area. Many were on the road itself, and we had to grind to a halt to avoid them!



In the drier country inland from Cairns, many Australian Bustards were seen including this adult and young bird (Andy Jensen)

We had been told that a few species typically found further inland were in the area at the moment. Soon we were enjoying views of Australian Pratincole, a dainty wader, on the close cropped grass by the mango farm, but sadly the Oriental Plover that had been present early in the week had moved on. Into the woodland at the end of the road, by a dried up creekline, we soon located our second target bird – Banded Honeyeater. This nomadic species is found across drier parts of North Queensland, but is not reliable anywhere, and there presence in the area was a real bonus. Oddly, most of the group of c.20 birds, if not all, seemed to be males.

Back to Mount Molloy, and we popped into the local school grounds to see if one famous resident was present. The school playground is known as a bower for Great Bowerbird, and on pulling into the car park, there he was! School was out, and the teachers there are very welcoming of birders (even a sign on the gate saying to come in!) so we got out, and watched this bird go about its business. A group of Red-winged Parrot were in the same tree, and new for the trip also. Finally it was back to Kingfisher Park for the second instalment of the Red-necked Crake vigil. Wompoo Fruit-dove and Pale-yellow Robin were seen in the orchard on the way down, and a pair of Channel-billed Cuckoo flew overhead. We sat patiently by the bench and began the wait. A beautiful Pied Monarch was a real distraction as it foraged up and down the tree trunk by the viewing area, and it was great to get this sometimes tricky species under the belt. Males and females similar although males have complete white collar. Many of the group decided to go back to the platypus viewpoint for a second look at that species instead. Soon however, the Red-necked Crake appeared, although there were only a few of us left there to enjoy it. It showed well, albeit briefly at the front of the pool, before it scurried off into the forest. The group returned after a runner had gone to get them, but it was too late, and the bird did not come back in the rest of that evening while we waited.



A spotlighting expedition from our base in Julatten produced stunning views of this Lesser Sooty Owl, just seconds after Papuan Frog-mouth was seen (Andy Jensen)

After dinner, we decided to head off on a spotlighting mission up Mount Lewis. We had been hoping Lesser Sooty Owl would be calling around the lodge grounds as they sometimes do, but with that not happening, we tried up Mount Lewis instead. There was nothing calling as we slowly drove back down the mountain and tried a few different spots, but eventually a magnificent Papuan Frogmouth was seen in the spotlight perched by the side of the road on a low tree. As we got out to view this bird, a Lesser Sooty Owl started calling nearby – where to look!? After a bit of cat and mouse, it was soon clear that two Lesser Sooty Owls were present, and we had brief views in flight as the birds flew overhead. After a while though, it all slotted into place, and the shadowy shape of an owl landed right in front of us, low down. The group were let know where to look, and the spotlight went on the spot it landed, and there it was – a beautiful silvery creature staring down inquisitively at us. Wonderful views, we sat entranced watching it for some time before it eventually flew off into the forest. It had been another great day – albeit a long one. It was back to Kingfisher Park to rest up for the next day.

We left Kingfisher Park early, as we had a long drive to get to our first site this morning in the southern part of the Atherton Tablelands. On the drive, we stopped for a spectacular flock of Red-tailed Black-cockatoo feeding in the fields just outside of Mareeba. We estimated approximately 750 birds were present, and with the raucous calling going on, this was quite a spectacle. The first cranes of the day were seen as well, both Sarus and Brolga, and by the end of the day estimates for both species in the agricultural fields of the area totalled 150 and 50 respectively. We arrived at our first site, and set off expectantly into the forest. We were visiting the bower of a Golden Bowerbird, one of the region's most secretive and hard to see species. This species is endemic to North Queensland occurring only in forests above 700m in the Wet Tropics.

We soon found the bower, a large maypole type structure (the largest of any Australian bowerbird), and waited for the owner to appear. Soon a male was heard calling, and then it appeared out of the depths of the forest. Initially views were a little distant, but soon a young male turned up which did us a favour as the older male flew to chase it away and landed right above our heads. We had crippling views as it preened and sat on a horizontal branch immediately above us. After some time, the bird flew off and we moved on back to the vehicles for a well-earned breakfast, thoroughly satisfied with the excellent views and intimate experience of spending some time in the company of this rare bird at its bower.

Back at the vehicles, a male Victoria's Riflebird was seen, as was another Spotted Catbird and a Tooth-billed Bowerbird. Fernwren called off in the forested areas, as did Bower's Shrike-thrush. Bridled Honeyeaters showed well, and after the previous day's atypical shyness up at Mount Lewis, Grey-headed Robin was a showy car park bird!



A Spotted Catbird was also present nearby – a bird more easily heard than seen (Andy Jensen)



Golden Bowerbird near his bower in the hinterland behind Cairns was a massive highlight for all. The bird even regaled us with calling on occasion and chased off an intruding young male (Andy Jensen)

We moved on to the Curtain Fig Tree near Atherton, an impressive structure formed when a fig strangled a host tree, then the host tree died and toppled over, and vertical fig roots descended from the host tree forming a curtain like structure. At this site, we had great views of Wompoo Fruit-dove, and Jan and Brian were lucky to see a dapper Yellow-breasted Boatbill. On a return visit to try for this species again, we also had great views of Pied Monarch and a Grey Whistler.

We then moved on to the nearby Hasties swamp, to take advantage of the shade of the hide here as it was warming up fast. Around the car park, several White-cheeked Honeyeater were seen. The swamp, or lake really, was full of wildfowl – with thousands of Magpie Geese and Plumed Whistling-ducks present. Searching through the hoards located a dozen Pink-eared Duck, several Wandering Whistling-duck, and best of all approximately 30 Freckled Duck. This species is a rare visitor to North Queensland, although these birds have been at the swamp for 18 months now. However, 30 birds was a good count and the largest for some time. Around the margins of the swamp, several egrets and herons were seen including White-necked Heron and a dozen Glossy Ibis. Waders were represented by a Latham's Snipe, a Common Sandpiper, Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and a family of Black-fronted Dotterel. At the far end of the lake, three Buff-banded Rail fed unconcerned right out in the open. The best bird at the swamp was unfortunately only seen by a couple of the group – Bob and John described a hepatic phase Oriental Cuckoo perfectly as it flew along the far shoreline – falcon like flight, brown plumage and notching on the undertail.

It really was hot now, so we retreated for a lunch overlooking the picturesque crater lake of Lake Barrine, where we had sandwiches and tea and scones – very civilised! The birding was pretty quiet here though, aside from another Tooth-billed Bowerbird so we moved on to Emerald Creek Falls near Mareeba. On the way, large flocks of Black Kite followed the plough, and better still two Spotted Harrier were seen – a beautiful, but scarce raptor in the region. We had great views of one in particular as it quartered a roadside strip of rough grassland. Strangely for a harrier, this species nests in trees.

We took a slow drive down the access road to Emerald Creek, where a flock of 15 Dollarbird and several Red-winged Parrot were of note. At the creek itself, we walked the creek looking for White-browed Robin, but sadly none could be found. On the drive out however, we encountered a Squatter Pigeon by the roadside, and it flew up into a nearby tree, where everyone could enjoy good scope views. This was the northern subspecies of Squatter Pigeon, with the red eyering.

Finally, we visited Abattoir Swamp near Mount Molloy, before we were due to have dinner in the Mount Molloy pub. The swamp was something of a misnomer, as there appeared to be no water present at all, and judging by the state of disrepair of the boardwalk it hadn't been visited for some time anyway. That said, a group of Brown-backed Honeyeater were the target bird here, and we encountered a group just below the car park. Finally, after dinner, a slow drive back to Kingfisher Park paid dividends as a Barn Owl was encountered by the roadside, sat on a post. It sat motionless in the headlights for a while, before silently flying off to continue hunting.

The last full day of the main tour, and a day of mopping up a few species we had not yet seen. We started out at Mowbray National Park near Julatten, where we soon encountered our target, Chestnut-breasted Cuckoo. This species is normally found north of Cooktown, but there appears to be an isolated population here. The rich chestnut underparts, and reduced white on the undertail distinguished it from the similar Fan-tailed Cuckoo. We also heard and then found a stunning male Yellow-breasted Boatbill, and this little gem performed very well close to the road. A cracking little aberrant flycatcher, with a striking plumage and almost ludicrously proportioned bill.

After breakfast at Kingfisher Park, we were told by Lindsay that she had just heard a Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher calling. This species was late back across north Queensland this year, and this was the first record in Australia for the season. Unfortunately, we could not track the bird down and it did not call again – when they arrive they usually call infrequently and it's a real needle in a haystack job. Whilst we looked for the kingfisher though, we had good views of Grey Whistler, and another two Yellow-breasted Boatbill, while a calling Little Bronze Cuckoo was tracked down and as suspected earlier in the week, proved to be of the race *russatus* (Gould's Bronze Cuckoo). Previously a separate species, but now treated as a race of Little Bronze Cuckoo it displayed the distinctive rufous wash to the upperparts and bronzed breast bars of this species.

We went out to the Mount Carbine region again, to try a site we did not have time to reach the other day. There is an isolated population of White-gaped Honeyeater past Mount Carbine – whilst this is a common bird around Townsville and other parts of North Queensland, it is surprisingly scarce in the Cairns region. A few Australian Bustard were seen around Bustard Downs on the drive through. At the honeyeater site, we walked along the creekline listening out for that species. Red-winged Parrot were present, and a group of six Great Bowerbird were seen working through the creekside vegetation. Large-billed Gerygones also called along the creek. The name gerygone means "born of song" which refers to the melodic call of all gerygones. Many honeyeaters were present, including Yellow, Brown, White-throated, Scarlet and more Banded Honeyeaters (up to six birds – clearly they had moved into this area), and eventually the target bird, White-gaped Honeyeater. The birds were a little flighty, but eventually everyone had good views.

We began to head back to Kingfisher Park for lunch, stopping again around Maryfarms to look at the fields. A dozen Australian Pratincole were present but again no Oriental Plover. A pair of Wedge-tailed Eagle showed nearby right beside the road. The last stop before lunch was in Mount Carbine township – a short drive down a dirt track and the target bird was encountered – the charismatic Apostlebird. This garrulous species normally goes around in groups of 6-10 (rarely 12!) but clearly some were missing today or having a lie in as we saw four birds. Nevertheless, we had great views as they preened and sat in a tight group, before they moved off over the road and away.



Apostlebirds in the Mount Carbine were a good few short of living up to their name. Many dainty Emerald Doves were seen in our time in North Queensland (Andy Jensen)

Back at Kingfisher Park we enjoyed lunch overlooking the bird feeders again, as many different species came down to feed including some beautiful Emerald Doves and the usual Orange-footed Scrubfowl.

We reviewed our options - we really were missing only one species in the area – the Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher. Neither Keith or Lindsay had heard the bird again that morning, but we decided to potter around the park that afternoon in case it called again. Firstly Keith took us to see a roosting Papuan Frogmouth that was present on the next door neighbour's property, and this was a nice addition to the night views the previous evening. Whilst we took it in turns for groups to see the frogmouth, a Double-eyed Fig-parrot fed low overhead on some cluster figs. Australia's smallest parrot, they excavate their own nest holes as opposed to utilising old holes of other species – quite a feat for such a small bird.



Stunning views were obtained near Kingfisher Park of a Double-eyed Fig Parrot feeding on cluster figs. We had a number of good sightings of this species, far removed from the typical view of one zipping overhead (Andy Jensen)



A roosting Papuan Frogmouth near its nest, was a highlight of the last day of the main tour. This species nests in very exposed areas of trees which when the temperature exceed 30c is an odd strategy (Andy Jensen). They come to life at night! The bird on the right was photographed at Lotusbird Lodge on the extension, and was one of a vocal pair around our chalets there (Pete Morris)

Keith also showed us a Lemon-bellied Flycatcher's nest – the smallest nest of any Australian bird, on an exposed branch. An Australian Owlet-nightjar called briefly nearby, perhaps confused at what time of day it was!

Back in Kingfisher Park, we slowly wandered around the orchard area, seeing more Grey-headed Robins, a Victoria's Riflebird, a few Superb Fruit-dove and another Pied Monarch, but there was no sight nor sound of the kingfisher again. We ended the afternoon down at the crake pool, after Pete had arrived, but unfortunately the Red-necked Crake did not come in that night – one night out of three even is good going in terms of a strike rate for that bird being seen at the pool.

The final morning, we had one last look for the kingfisher around the lodge grounds, but there was no sight nor sound. The usual suspects were present from the previous days, and we took the time to enjoy a last look at many of these species. After breakfast, we said our goodbyes, wished those going onto the tour extension good luck, and headed off to Cairns for the group to connect with their flights back home or onto the next destination.

It was an unusual situation for me (Pete) to be in, taking over a tour half way through! Usually I know exactly what's been seen, what hasn't and by whom, but on this occasion I had a lot to learn, and had to be careful not to pass by birds that I assumed were common, but that hadn't been seen already! We got there though and quickly started hunting down the missing targets! After a final wander around at Kingfisher Park, and having admired the Papuan Frogmouths again, we loaded up the landcruiser and headed north. It was already warming up, but that was OK as we were heading into dry country to look for drinking birds. We soon found a nice pool to wait by, and it wasn't long before our quarry, the scarce Black-throated Finch showed up amongst the more common Double-barred Finches. We admired these for a while and then checked another pool, where



Black-backed Butcherbirds were common in the drier woodland on the Cape York Peninsula (Pete Morris)

yet more were coming down to drink. Also here were a couple of Brown Treecreepers of the unusually dark *melanotus* subspecies, Red-backed Fairywrens, singing White-throated Gerygones, and a large and noisy group of Apostlebirds. Continuing north, we paused at a shady roadhouse for a fairly simple lunch where we were entertained by colourful Red-winged Parrots, bold Laughing Kingfishers and the localized Black-backed Butcherbird.

As temperatures cooled and excitement rose, we met up with an old friend of mine, Sue, at Artemis Station. Twenty three years earlier, Sue had found us by the roadside, offered us accommodation and showed us Golden-shouldered Parrots. She has since been a real champion for this rare and endangered species! As we met with her, it was interesting to see the workings of the cattle station, but we had to drag Sue away from her duties... Within a few minutes we were ducking under a fence and watching our first Golden-shouldered Par-



More than 35 fabulous Golden-shouldered Parrots got the extension off to a great start! (Pete Morris)

rots, but were totally unprepared for the amazing treat we were in for. The views kept getting better and better, and before we left, we had more than 30 of these rare and exquisite parrots feeding quite literally at our feet! Awesome stuff and proof that Sue's efforts were working. Tired but happy, we drove on, arriving at the lovely Lotusbird Lodge just at dusk, in good time for our first freshly-prepared, delicious meal that we were treated to routinely here.



These amazing Red Goshawks entertained us for a morning on the Cape York Peninsula (Pete Morris)

We began the next morning with another of those must-see encounters. As soon as we got out of the vehicles I could hear the Red Goshawk, one of Australia's rarest and most sought-after birds! Moments later the scope was fixed on the bird and we were able to spend a considerable amount of time studying both parents and a juvenile. We had a real Attenborough moment, as we watched the female pluck and eat a Laughing Kookaburra, bones and all, right in front of us! The nearby woodlands were productive too, with good numbers of Banded, White-throated and Yellow-tinted Honeyeaters, Lemon-bellied Flyrobins and a flock of Varied Sittellas. Having had our fill, we returned to the lodge and explored the excellent wetland. Good numbers of common waterbirds were present and amongst the more interesting species seen were a showy Latham's Snipe, a stately pair of Brolgas, numerous attractive Green Pygmy Geese and several Raja Shelduck. We were also entertained by numerous Blue-winged Kookaburras around the lake.



Blue-winged Kookaburras and Forest Kingfishers were common around Lotusbird Lodge (Pete Morris)

In the afternoon, we paid the impressive Lakefield National Park a first visit. As we crossed the Marina Plains, we were impressed by the numbers of Brolgas and Australian Pratincoles on view, and stopped to scrutinize a few Horsfield's Bush Larks, a new bird for the tour. A quick visit to the mangroves yielded several Red-headed Myzomelas, an obliging Broad-billed Flycatcher and some smart Fairy Gerygones. We then made our way south into the park, pausing for a pair of Azure Kingfishers as we went. It was pretty hot and generally quiet, though some productive wetlands yielded good numbers of birds including a Wood Sandpiper and some delightful juvenile Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, and we also enjoyed some more Black-backed Butcherbirds. An evening owling attempt was unfortunately not productive, but the spectacle of thousands upon thousands of Little Red Flying-foxes leaving their roost was an impressive sight! We drove back for our next culinary treat, dodging the Agile Wallabies as we went!

The following morning, Papuan Frogmouths were calling away as we got up, and we got some marvellous views as the pair fed around the chalets. As we enjoyed breakfast, a Pied Heron came in for a free handout, scrapping with Masked Lapwings for the tit bits that were on offer! We reluctantly tore ourselves away from the lodge (though Sue showed us their amazing Gouldian Finch breeding pens before we left – they're hoping to reintroduce the species to the area), and made our way back through Lakefield National Park. This time it was a little more birdy! A first stop yielded Bar-breasted Honeyeaters and noisy Grey-crowned Babblers, and as we headed on to the plains, a couple of Sarus Cranes were found amongst the many Brolgas. But the best action was around the waterholes as these were a magnet to thirsty birds in the hot and dry conditions. Hundreds



Bar-shouldered Doves (top) and Peaceful Doves were regular visitors to the waterholes (Pete Morris)

of Bar-shouldered and Peaceful Doves clattered around nervously, but it was the finches that really grabbed our attention, as well as the attention of a hungry Australian Hobby. Hundreds of Star Finches were hiding in a bush that the hobby continually attacked, but it was unable to dislodge the finches from the bush. Eventually it gave up, allowing the finches to drink, and we were then able to admire good numbers of Star, Black-throated, Masked and Double-banded Finches drinking side by side, providing quite a spectacle. Also here was our only Rufous-banded Honeyeater of the tour. Further on, we admired a flock of noisy Red-tailed Black Cockatoos, but by now it was hot, and we continued on to a random lake which looked like a decent spot to take our picnic lunch!

The choice of lunch spot proved to be a good one. Whilst tasty sandwiches and sticky chocolate cake were being consumed, I had a little sneak around the lake and soon found a flock of nine Spotted Whistling Ducks. This is a recent colonist on the Cape York Peninsula and is still a rarity in Australia, so was an excellent addition to our Australia list. We continued on, under the watchful eye of my navigator, Surfer Dude, and after a series



A flock of nine Spotted Whistling Ducks were a pleasant bonus (Pete Morris)

of narrow dirt roads, found ourselves at the Mclvor River crossing, north of Cooktown. Sadly, a cyclone had caused substantial damage to the trees in the area, but it was still birdy, and we soon found several Tropical Scrubwrens and a fine Black-winged Monarch, two welcome additions to our list! Other more widespread species such as Green Oriole and Macleay's Honeyeater were much in evidence too, and for the leader, a Black Bittern popped up. We then made our way down to Cooktown and checked out a small wetland where Spotted Whistling Ducks had been sighted a week previously. They were nowhere to be seen, making this lunchtime's surprise that bit more special!



This Black-winged Monarch showed very well at the Mclvor River crossing (Pete Morris)

As usual we were off early, this time checking the Shipton's Flat Road south of Cooktown. Initially we tried lower areas which were birdy, but failed to yield our targets. By now the likes of Wompoo and Superb Fruit Doves, Noisy Pitta, Tropical Scrubwren and the likes were old hat, and we wanted more! We continued higher, into some drier forest and here the avifauna changed. Scarlet Myzomela became common, Brown-backed Honeyeaters showed well, Northern Fantails danced by, and a pair of Lovely Fairywrens popped up, and we were tantalized by the calls of a seemingly invisible White-streaked Honeyeater. We continued to search for this elusive quarry, but there was no sign of any more. Then, as if by magic, a gorgeous male Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher suddenly popped up, and all of a sudden life seemed good. Although initially difficult to see, this wonderful bird laid on a real show for us, and erased any memories of them not having arrived at Kingfisher Park! With the bit between our teeth again, we returned to where we had heard the honeyeater, and soon found it feeding in a flowering eucalypt. Indeed two or three elusive birds moved in and out of the tree and after some patience we secured some good views of this attractive and localized endemic!



The amazing Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher was a real highlight, and one we thought we might miss! (Pete Morris)

It was now hot and rumbling tums suggested lunch was due, so we put the pedal to the metal and headed to a pleasant air-conditioned road house, where we were greeted by a Great Bowerbird. We then continued south, pausing at Maryfarms where more Australian Bustards entertained, before making our way back to Kingfisher Park for a pre-arranged dinner date!. Fortunately we could scratch the kingfisher hunt, and we just relaxed in the grounds, enjoying the many rainforest endemics on show, hoping a Red-necked Crake would put in an appearance, which sadly it did not! We then returned to Cairns for the night.



This stately Australian Bustard was unusually bold! (Pete Morris)

Our early flight to Mount Isa meant that we needed to leave in the dark, but by the time we left the terminal at Mount Isa it was warming up! We had the best part of three days to explore Mount Isa, and began by exploring some spinifex-covered just outside town. It was already hot, and despite some effort, we found little new other than a few Diamond Doves and Grey-headed Honeyeaters. After a break, we visited the shore of Lake Moondarra and immediately struck gold with some brilliant views of striking Painted Finches. A major target and happy faces. Also here were Zebra Finches, Rufous-throated and Grey-fronted Honeyeaters and good numbers of common waterbirds, as well as our first Cockatiels. We ended the day at a nearby park which was full of Indian Peafowl! A very dubious feral tick if ever there was one! We instead turned our attentions to some localized Cloncurry Ringnecks and nomadic Varied Lorikeets, both of which showed well and Silver-crowned Friarbird was new for some.

We were up early the following day and headed to the MacNamara road, a road that leads to some mines northwest of Mount Isa. It took a while of wandering through spinifex (a good hobby for a masochist!) before we struck gold with a wonderful group of three Carpentarian Grasswrens which gave unsurpassable views! Supposedly one of the toughest, we were given a real treat. The supporting cast was good too, with a very showy

Spinifexbird, Black-faced and Little Woodswallows and some fabulous Spinifex Pigeons. Later we found a dripping tap where more Spinifex Pigeons and a variety of other species were coming to drink. Another great experience! Nearby, we also had great looks at a pair of scarce Black-tailed Treecreepers. A few stops on the way back failed to yield much new and we retired for a siesta after a rather filling sub!

In the afternoon, we began at the sewage ponds. A good variety of common waterbirds were on offer though nothing new, but a fine Pallid Cuckoo and our first Red-backed Kingfisher were much admired. We then continued our hobby of plodding through spinifex, this time, on rocky slopes, to increase the difficulty level! At the first spot we drew a blank and failed to find any grasswrens. We did however find some smart Purple-necked Rock Wallabies, and our first Budgerigars flashed by. We then moved to another spot and again struggled. A Grey-headed Honeyeater gave great views and more Diamond Doves posed, but we were nearly back at the car when we finally found a pair of Kalkadoon Grasswrens. But they made it up to us, treating us to another intimate display – two rare and delightful grasswrens in a day – can't be bad?!



The fabulous grasswrens of Mount Isa. Top, Carpentarian Grasswren and above, Kalkadoon Grasswren (Pete Morris)



A lovely flock of Oriental Plovers at Lake Moondarra were a welcome bonus (Pete Morris)

With most targets under the belt, we decided to explore the shallower western shores of Lake Moondarra the following morning. This proved to be productive as the low water levels (apparently the lake was at about 20% of capacity) were very attractive to birds, and what was the lake bed was dry plains, attractive to plovers. We spent a few hours, admiring the waders. Hordes of Sharp-tailed Sandpipers were joined by smaller numbers of many species, including a few unexpected here such as Greater Sandplover, Grey Plover and two juvenile Pectoral Sandpipers! Black-necked Storks and Brolgas patrolled the edges and in the drier areas, hundreds of Red-capped Plovers were joined by numerous Australian Pratincoles and an unexpected Pacific Golden Plover. Even better, as we drove out, we found several groups of delightful Oriental Plovers, totalling more than 100 individuals. After a bit of effort, some showed at very close range, allowing us to admire the delicate structure of this rare plover. Further on we admired great flocks of Cockatiels coming down to drink, and found a write-in in the shape of a pair of Paperbark Flycatchers. We moved back across to the east side of the lake, but by now it was getting hot, but we still managed more great views of Painted Finches and found a Horsfield's



Unusually high numbers of Painted Finches around Mount Isa were great to see (Pete Morris)

Bronze Cuckoo some smart Long-tailed Finches, the only Pictorella Manakin found was an immature that only hung around for some of the group.

The afternoon was a strange one; windy, occasional rain and plenty of thunder. We tried various spots in town for bowerbirds to no avail, though did get our first excellent views of Budgerigars while looking. Then, after a quick call, we were invited to a local birders garden, as he had a bower there. He turned out to be a very friendly and entertaining host. The Spotted Bowerbird performed well, and a party of Golden-backed Honeyeaters were a superb bonus. After a tour of Bob's impressive ornithological library, we made our way back to our lovely hotel, where yet another feast awaited us!



Golden-backed Honeyeaters showed beautifully in Mount Isa (Pete Morris)

There was little to add on our final morning, so we decided to again bird around Lake Moondarra. Cloncurry Ringnecks and Varied Lorikeets put on a fine show, and our final real target of the area, the rare Pictorella Manakin, posed beautifully in the scope alongside a fine array of other finches. Back on the other side, the two Pectoral Sandpipers gave more great views, but we couldn't find anything else new, so we headed back to the hotel. After packing and a quick freshen up, we drove to the airport and took a flight down to Brisbane, ready for the final leg of our adventure. Driving through and out of Brisbane was a bit of a culture shock, and with the traffic, we had little time for birding on the way through to Toowoomba. We did manage one stop though, and here we added Fuscous Honeyeater, another new one for the list!

The following day required a bit of driving as 700km lay between us and our destination. Fortunately Australian roads are largely straight and fast (though best not to go too fast!), and even with a couple of stops, we were in Cunnumulla for lunch. A stop at St George produced a few new birds including our first Splendid Fairywrens and Red-capped Robins, and we also found a Hooded Robin on the nest. Once in Cunnumulla, we discovered a great lunch venue, made arrangements to visit Bowra Sanctuary and checked in to our hotel.



The subtly attractive Bourke's Parrot is quite a stunner when seen close-up (Pete Morris)

Bowra Sanctuary was acquired in 2010 by the Australian Wildlife Conservancy, and is managed by Birds Queensland. Since its acquisition it has rapidly become a key site for several southwest Queensland specialities, and as such, became our focus for most of the time during our stay in Cunnamulla. We went into the sanctuary on two afternoons and three mornings, exploring the various habitats on offer in this fine reserve. Much time was spent around the office, as the waterhole here proved excellent, especially in the morning and during the heat of the day. Here Red-kneed Dotterels, Black-tailed Nativehens, a Latham's Snipe and Yellow-billed and Royal Spoonbills rubbed shoulders with the more common waterbirds present. Hordes of Budgerigars and Cockatiels came down to drink, and on our one morning visit, these were joined by stunning Major Mitchell's Cockatoos (a species we saw several times in the sanctuary), Blue Bonnets and colourful Mulga Parrots. Spotted Bowerbirds were resident here, and a special feature was the good numbers of lovely Plum-headed Finches which frequently came down to drink. Driving through the park, we found numerous Emus, splendid nomadic Masked and White-browed Woodswallows, Mallee Ringnecks and shy groups of Chestnut-crowned babbblers. Careful searches through the stony mulga yielded the real 'biggies'. Chestnut-breasted Quail-thrush



The delightful Chestnut-breasted Quail-thrush (Pete Morris)



Plum-headed Finches were common around the waterholes at Bowra Sanctuary (Pete Morris)

was the first to show, a real beauty that treated us to a fine performance. The subtle Bourke's Parrot also proved confiding once found, but it took a little effort (well, not until the second morning) to find the rare Hall's Babbler, which once found showed very well. Out on the plains we found skittish White-winged Fairywrens and other explorations in the sanctuary yielded a pair of the rare Redthroat and some smart White-browed Treecreepers and Crested Bellbirds, as well as more common species such as Spiny-cheeked, Singing and Striped Honeyeaters and Inland and Chestnut-rumped Thornbills, and overhead we noticed a group of Pacific Swifts. We also enjoyed some excellent encounters with impressive Red Kangaroos.

On the other afternoon, we decided to head out further west and check out Lake Bindegolly. From the perspective of the lake, this proved a rather poor move, as due to very low water levels, we could barely see the lake! It was also searingly hot, well into the 40s, but we did not let this deter us! Several typically skittish flocks of Little Crows were flushed off the road, where they were feasting on carrion, and in the area around the lake we



Hall's Babbler eventually showed well at Bowra Sanctuary (Pete Morris)



Even this stunning Crimson Chat was finding the heat difficult! (Pete Morris)

soon found some delightful Crimson Chats which included some fabulous males. As an extra bonus, we found a couple of smart male Pied Honeyeaters, one of Australia's tougher nomads! On the way back we stopped off at Eulo, where we were able to study more Bourke's Parrots coming down to drink at dusk.

Following our final morning in Bowra Sanctuary, we had the small matter of another 700km drive back to Toowoomba! This we achieved without too much fuss, with just one real stop at St George. Here we searched again for Black-eared Cuckoo, but in the 43°C heat, it was not too surprising that they were not in evidence. What was surprising was that we found the host species, Speckled Warbler, which granted some good views. By the time we arrived back in Toowoomba, we were ready for the Thai feast that awaited us!



Splendid Fairywren is most certainly aptly-named (Pete Morris)

This group was not one for resting. The easy option on the last morning was to take it easy, head for the airport and head-off! We chose to leave early, drive to the Lockyer Valley and meet up with my brother and his friend Paul. We had three targets in mind, and with their help, we found all three! The easiest was Banded Lapwing which was present in reasonable numbers, including several recently fledged juveniles. The second to be seen was Black Falcon. We saw three birds initially, and later another (or one of the same) circling with some Black Kites and a Wedge-tailed Eagle. The final one was the hardest but ultimately the best, as a wonderful Ground Cuckooshrike gave wonderful views at point blank range! A wonderful way to round off a wonderful tour, and as we made our way back into Brisbane and on to the airport, we had many, many memories to reflect back on over the previous five weeks! No doubt about it, Australia really is a great birding destination!



Major Mitchell's Cockatoo were a delight as always, and Ground Cuckooshrike was a last minute bonus! (Pete Morris)



Spinifex Pigeon is such an iconic Australian species! (Pete Morris)

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR

Species which were heard but not seen are indicated by the symbol (H).

Species which were only recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (LO).

Species which were not personally recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (NL).

Species marked with the diamond symbol (◇) are either endemic to the country or local region or considered 'special' birds for some other reason (e.g. it is only seen on one or two Birdquest tours; it is difficult to see across all or most of its range; the local form is endemic or restricted-range and may in future be treated as a full species).

Note that annotations in the systematic list largely refer to sightings on the main tour with the exception of species that were only recorded on the extension, or for species where significant or exceptional numbers were seen on the extension, or where the sighting on the extension was otherwise noteworthy in the context of the tour. Sightings on the extension are annotated either 'on the extension' or (ext).

Southern Cassowary ◇ *Casuarius casuarius* A female and a male with chick were seen at Cassowary House.

Emu ◇ *Dromaius novaehollandiae* Two were seen at Mareeba Wetlands. Plenty around Cunnumulla on the extension.

Magpie Goose ◇ *Anseranas semipalmata* First seen at the Hunter Wetland Centre; common in North Qld.

Spotted Whistling Duck ◇ *Dendrocygna guttata* 9 on the extension in Lakefield NP were a pleasant bonus!

Plumed Whistling Duck ◇ *Dendrocygna eytoni* 200+ at Mackay botanic gardens then over 1,000 at Hasties swamp.

Wandering Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna arcuata* A few seen near Mackay, Mareeba wetlands and Hasties swamp.

Black Swan ◇ *Cygnus atratus* Present in small numbers at most wetland sites, with highest counts around Swansea.

Raja Shelduck ◇ (Radjah S) *Tadorna radjah* Breeding at Cairns Centenary Park, and a pair at Cattana wetlands.

Pink-eared Duck ◇ *Malacorhynchus membranaceus* Over 100 at Lithgow sewage works, and 10 at Hasties swamp.

Freckled Duck ◇ *Stictonetta naevosa* Five at Lithgow sewage works, then up to 30 birds at Hasties swamp.

Maned Duck ◇ (Australian Wood D) *Chenonetta jubata* Small numbers present throughout the tour, often in dry areas!



Emus were common on the outback extension (Pete Morris)

- Cotton Pygmy Goose** *Nettapus coromandelianus* Two seen on a small dam near Eungella and three at Lake Mitchell.
- Green Pygmy Goose** ◇ *Nettapus pulchellus* First seen at Cattana wetlands, then at many other wetlands in the north.
- Mallard (introduced)** *Anas platyrhynchos* Just the one seen – in Centennial Park, Sydney.
- Pacific Black Duck** *Anas superciliosa* Present in small numbers at most wetland sites.
- Australasian Shoveler** ◇ *Anas rhynchotis* A female with young at Picton, then 30 (inc. males) at Lithgow sewage works.
- Grey Teal** *Anas gracilis* Seen in small numbers at a several different wetland sites on the main tour and extension.
- Chestnut Teal** ◇ *Anas castanea* First seen in Sydney, then in small numbers at various different wetland sites.
- Hardhead** ◇ *Aythya australis* Present in small numbers at most wetland sites. Abundant on Lake Moondarra on the extension.
- Blue-billed Duck** ◇ *Oxyura australis* Just the one bird seen, a male at Lake Wallace, near Lithgow.
- Musk Duck** ◇ *Biziura lobata* This bizarre duck was seen at Lake Wallace, nr Lithgow and in the Lockyer Valley on the extension.
- Australian Brushturkey** ◇ *Alectura lathami* First seen on the Gloucester Tops, then seen on most days in Qld.
- Orange-footed Scrubfowl** *Megapodius reinwardt* Present at most sites near Cairns.
- [**Indian Peafowl (introduced)** *Pavo cristatus* Birds near Mount Isa on the extension were a bit dubious, but ornate!]
- Brown Quail** ◇ *Coturnix ypsilophora* Three flushed in the Capertee Valley was the only record.
- Wandering Albatross** ◇ *Diomedea exulans* Two birds of the race *exulans* ('Snowy' Albatross) on the pelagic .
- Antipodean Albatross** ◇ *Diomedea antipodensis* Seven birds seen on the Swansea pelagic.
- Black-browed Albatross** *Thalassarche melanophris* Five seen on the pelagic from Swansea.
- Shy Albatross** ◇ *Thalassarche cauta* Five seen from the Swansea pelagic.
- Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross** ◇ *Thalassarche carteri* Just the one from the Swansea pelagic.
- Great-winged Petrel** ◇ *Pterodroma macroptera* Ten on the pelagic, this species breeds off New Zealand.
- Providence Petrel** ◇ *Pterodroma solandri* Three birds were seen on the Swansea pelagic.
- Wedge-tailed Shearwater** *Puffinus pacificus* Over 200 on the Swansea pelagic. Breeds on local offshore islands.
- Sooty Shearwater** *Puffinus griseus* Two of this species were seen on the pelagic.
- Short-tailed Shearwater** *Puffinus tenuirostris* Good numbers on the Swansea pelagic.
- Flesh-footed Shearwater** ◇ *Puffinus carneipes* Breeds on Lord Howe Island; two birds were seen on the pelagic.
- Fluttering Shearwater** ◇ *Puffinus gavia* Up to ten on the Swansea pelagic.
- Hutton's Shearwater** ◇ *Puffinus huttoni* Similar to the previous species; just one was seen on the Swansea pelagic.
- Wilson's Storm Petrel** *Oceanites oceanicus* Approximately 20 seen on the pelagic, inc. some quite close inshore.
- Australasian Grebe** *Tachybaptus novaehollandiae* Seen in small numbers at many wetland sites throughout.
- Hoary-headed Grebe** ◇ *Poliiocephalus poliocephalus* Spectacular numbers at Lake Wallace where over 500 seen.
- Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus* Up to 30 at Lake Wallace, Lithgow. Also seen on the extension.
- Black-necked Stork** ◇ *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* 1 near Brisbane, 2 in North Qld. and a few on the extension.
- Australian White Ibis** *Threskiornis moluccus* Common and ubiquitous throughout urban, farmland and grassland habitats.
- Straw-necked Ibis** ◇ *Threskiornis spinicollis* Scarcer than preceding species, found in drier grasslands.

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* Up to 50 near Newcastle, then 15 at Hasties swamp and good numbers on the extension.

Royal Spoonbill ◊ *Platalea regia* Encountered in small numbers at a variety of wetland sites.

Yellow-billed Spoonbill ◊ *Platalea flavipes* Seen on the drive to Gloucester Tops. Several at Bowra on the extension.



Royal (left) and Yellow-billed Spoonbill at Bowra Sanctuary (Pete Morris)

Black Bittern *Dupetor flavicollis* (LO) One seen by Pete at the Mclvor River Crossing on the extension.

Nankeen Night Heron (Rufous N H) *Nycticorax caledonicus* Up to ten near Newcastle then singles around Cairns.

Striated Heron (Mangrove H) *Butorides striata* One seen at Swansea, then a few seen around Cairns.

Eastern Cattle Egret *Bubulcus coromandus* Common throughout, in pasture and grazing country.

White-necked Heron ◊ (Pacific H) *Ardea pacifica* Small numbers seen throughout, mostly in ones or twos, in grazing pasture.

Eastern Great Egret *Ardea [alba] modesta* Small numbers present throughout.

Intermediate Egret *Egretta intermedia* Small numbers throughout and relatively common north of Cairns.

Pied Heron ◊ *Egretta picata* Just one confiding individual at Lotusbird Lodge on the extension.

White-faced Heron *Egretta novaehollandiae* Fairly common, small numbers at many wetlands and damp grassland.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* The scarcest egret, seen first at Stockton sandspit, then odd birds in Qld.

Australian Pelican ◊ *Pelecanus conspicillatus* Fairly common on lakes and inshore, particularly nr Newcastle and Cairns.

Australasian Gannet ◊ *Morus serrator* Seven seen on the pelagic.

Little Pied Cormorant *Microcarbo melanoleucos* Fairly common throughout, found on many freshwater areas.

Little Black Cormorant *Phalacrocorax sulcirostris* Fairly common throughout, found on freshwater areas in small nos.

Australian Pied Cormorant *Phalacrocorax varius* Scarcer than the preceding two species, and found in marine areas.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* Present in small nos. at many wetland areas, and on the coast around Newcastle.

Australasian Darter (Australian D) *Anhinga novaehollandiae* A common sight and sound at many wetland sites.

Eastern Osprey *Pandion cristatus* Small numbers were seen from Newcastle to Cairns.

Black-shouldered Kite ◊ (Australian K) *Elanus axillaris* Seen in small numbers throughout, mainly over grassland.

Square-tailed Kite ◊ *Lophoictinia isura* An adult bird and its well grown chick was seen on the nest west of Brisbane.

Pacific Baza *Aviceda subcristata* One at Gold Creek reservoir, and another on the drive from Eungella to Mackay.

Little Eagle ◊ *Hieraaetus morphnoides* Three encounters – one over Royal NP, and two around Cairns.

Wedge-tailed Eagle ◊ *Aquila audax* Small nos. in a variety of locations from Sydney on; mainly in drier areas.

Red Goshawk ◊ *Erythrotriorchis radiatus* Astounding views of a pair and a juvenile at a nest in northern Qld.

Grey Goshawk ◊ *Accipiter novaehollandiae* A single at Eungella, then two displaying birds from the viewpoint there.

Brown Goshawk *Accipiter fasciatus* Several encounters, typically on a drive, or with the bird as a fly-through.

Collared Sparrowhawk *Accipiter cirrocephalus* Two sightings on the main tour and sev. good views on the extension.

Swamp Harrier ◊ *Circus approximans* One seen near Newcastle, then two a few days later at Ash Island.

Spotted Harrier ◊ *Circus assimilis* Two birds seen around Atherton, one very well. Unusual in the area.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans* First seen at Newcastle, then common and widespread in northern Qld.

Whistling Kite *Haliastur sphenurus* Widespread, more so than Black Kite, but never in as high numbers.

Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus* First seen around Brisbane, then a few encounters on the coast around Cairns.

White-bellied Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster* Seen on eight days, in singles or pairs. Usually by lakes or coasts.

Australian Bustard ◇ *Ardeotis australis* Five were seen at Mareeba Wetlands, then up to 25 were seen at Maryfarms.

Red-necked Crake ◇ *Rallina tricolor* Seen at Kingfisher Park, but unfortunately only by two of the group.

Buff-banded Rail *Gallirallus philippensis* First seen at Eungella, then three were at Hasties swamp, in the open.

Lewin's Rail ◇ *Lewinia pectoralis* (H) Several birds were heard calling near the mangroves in Swansea.

White-browed Crake *Porzana cinerea* One was at Cattana wetlands, showing very well.

Australian Swamphen ◇ *Porphyrio [porphyrio] melanotus* Small numbers were seen at most wetland areas.

Dusky Moorhen *Gallinula tenebrosa* Small numbers were seen at most wetland areas.

Black-tailed Nativehen ◇ *Tribonyx ventralis* Three were seen well at the Bowra Sanctuary.

Eurasian Coot (Common C) *Fulica atra* Small nos. on most wetlands, although over 600 were seen around Lithgow.

Sarus Crane *Grus antigone* Seen on the Atherton tableland, with 10 on one day and 150 in total on the next.

Brolga ◇ *Grus rubicunda* Two were seen near Brisbane, then smaller numbers (than Sarus) on Atherton tablelands.



It's interesting that Brolgas (left) and Sarus Cranes live side-by-side in Northern Australia! (Pete Morris)

Black-breasted Buttonquail ◇ *Turnix melanogaster* A pair were seen by most of the group at Inskip Point.

Painted Buttonquail ◇ *Turnix varius* Two were flushed at Glen Alice in the Capertee, and offered reasonable flight views.

Bush Stone-curlew ◇ (B Thick-knee) *Burhinus grallarius* First seen around Brisbane, then common around Cairns.

Beach Stone-curlew ◇ (Beach Thick-knee) *Esacus magnirostris* One was at the northern end of Cairns esplanade.

Pied Oystercatcher ◇ (Australian P O) *Haematopus longirostris* Recorded at a number of coastal sites.

Sooty Oystercatcher ◇ *Haematopus fuliginosus* Two groups seen around Newcastle, then one at Inskip Point.

White-headed Stilt *Himantopus leucocephalus* Small numbers present throughout on freshwater wetland sites.

Red-necked Avocet ◇ *Recurvirostra novaehollandiae* Seen around Newcastle, c600 at two sites and a few on the extension.

Banded Lapwing ◇ *Vanellus tricolor* Great views of a decent flock in the Lockyer Valley on the extension.

Masked Lapwing *Vanellus miles* Common and widespread.

Red-kneed Dotterel ◇ *Erythrogonys cinctus* Excellent views at Bowra Sanctuary on the extension.

Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva* 15 at Stockton sandspit, 1 at Machans Beach and 1 at Lake Moondarra on the extension.

Grey Plover (Black-bellied P) *Pluvialis squatarola* (LO) Seen at Lake Moondarra on the extension.

Red-capped Plover ◇ *Charadrius ruficapillus* Seen at Stockton sandspit, Toorbul and Cairns. 100s at Lake Moondarra!



Clockwise from top left: Red-capped Plover; Black-fronted Dotterel; Pacific Golden Plover and Red-kneed Dotterel (Pete Morris)

- Mongolian Sand Plover (Mongolian P)** *Charadrius [atrifrons] mongolus* Only at Cairns where several on the esplanade.
- Greater Sand Plover** *Charadrius leschenaultii* Seen at Cairns esplanade, and a few at Lake Moondarra on the extension.
- Oriental Plover** ◇ *Charadrius veredus* 100 or more near to Mount Isa on the extension, with some fantastic views.
- Black-fronted Dotterel** ◇ (B-f Plover) *Euseyornis melanops* Seen at a variety of freshwater wetland sites, and Cairns esplanade.
- Comb-crested Jacana** ◇ *Irediparra gallinacea* First seen in the Mackay area, where 10 birds at 2 sites, then around Cairns.
- Latham's Snipe** ◇ *Gallinago hardwickii* Good numbers seen on a wetland near Newcastle with over 30 birds seen.
- Asian Dowitcher** ◇ *Limnodromus semipalmatus* This vagrant to Qld. was seen at Toorbul.
- Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa* Seen at Stockton sandspit, Toorbul, Inskip Point and Cairns esplanade.
- Bar-tailed Godwit** *Limosa lapponica* Seen at Stockton sandspit, then at Toorbul (c.2100 birds), Inskip Point and Cairns.
- Eurasian Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus* First seen at Toorbul and Inskip Point, then at Cairns and Machans Beach.
- Far Eastern Curlew** *Numenius madagascariensis* First seen at Stockton sandspit, then a few at Inskip Point and Cairns.
- Marsh Sandpiper** *Tringa stagnatilis* 15 on the wetlands at Ash Island, Newcastle and many on the extension. **Common Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia* Ten were roosting at Toorbul, then a few at Cairns esplanade.
- Wood Sandpiper** *Tringa glareola* 1 seen in Lakefield NP on the extension, and heard elsewhere.
- Grey-tailed Tattler** *Tringa brevipes* First seen at Toorbul and Inskip Point, then at Cairns and Machans Beach.
- Terek Sandpiper** *Xenus cinereus* Seen only at Cairns esplanade, with approximately 20 birds present.
- Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos* Two were present at Cairns Centenary Park, then one at Hasties swamp.
- Ruddy Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres* One at Newcastle on the foreshore was the only record.
- Great Knot** *Calidris tenuirostris* First seen at Toorbul, then lesser numbers at Inskip Point, Cairns and Machans Beach.
- Red Knot** *Calidris canutus* Three at Toorbul was the only record.
- Sanderling** *Calidris alba* One at Inskip Point and two at Machans Beach the only records.
- Red-necked Stint** *Calidris ruficollis* Surprisingly not seen until Cairns, where c.100 were on the esplanade.
- Pectoral Sandpiper** *Calidris melanotos* Two juveniles at Lake Moondarra on the extension were a surprise.
- Sharp-tailed Sandpiper** *Calidris acuminata* First seen at Toorbul, then at Cairns esplanade. Also at Hasties swamp.
- Curlew Sandpiper** *Calidris ferruginea* Seen only at Toorbul and Cairns esplanade.
- Australian Pratincole** ◇ *Stiltia isabella* Up to 12 at Maryfarms near Julatten and good numbers on the extension.



More waders... *Elegant Australian Pratincoles* showed a number of times; *Sharp-tailed Sandpipers* (left - this is a lovely juvenile) were joined by two *Pectoral Sandpipers* at Lake Moondarra. Some *Latham's* (or *Japanese*) *Snipes* gave good views during the tour (Pete Morris)



Silver Gull ◇ *Chroicocephalus novaehollandiae* Small flocks on the coast throughout, commonest around Newcastle.

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* Seen at Toorbul, Inskip Point, Cairns esplanade and Machans Beach.

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia* First seen at Ash Island, then at several other wetlands in small numbers.

Greater Crested Tern *Thalasseus bergii* Seen regularly whenever at the coast.

Little Tern *Sternula albifrons* A few fishing off Inskip Point, and c.50 were roosting and fishing off Machans Beach.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* Approximately 30 off Inskip Point. These birds are of the Siberian race, *longipennis*.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida* First seen at Lake Wallace, then also inland from Mackay.

Parasitic Jaeger (Arctic Skua) *Stercorarius parasiticus* One was seen on the pelagic from Swansea.

Rock Dove (introduced) (Feral Pigeon) *Columba livia* Common and widespread.

White-headed Pigeon ◇ *Columba leucomela* Seven on the drive to Gloucester Tops.

Spotted Dove (introduced) *Spilopelia chinensis* Common and widespread, particularly in urban areas.

Brown Cuckoo-Dove ◇ *Macropygia phasianella* First seen on way up to Gloucester Tops, then regular in rainforest.

Pacific Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps longirostris* Seen in rainforest habitat from Mackay northwards.

Common Bronzewing ◇ *Phaps chalcoptera* Only a few seen, first seen in Royal NP.

Crested Pigeon ◇ *Ocyphaps lophotes* Common and widespread, particularly in urban areas and farmland.

Spinifex Pigeon ◇ *Geophaps plumifera* Great views of these brilliant birds in the Mount Isa area on the extension.

Squatter Pigeon ◇ *Geophaps scripta* One was seen on the access road to Emerald Creek Falls.

Wonga Pigeon ◇ *Leucosarcia melanoleuca* Fantastic views of this stately pigeon at O'Reilly's.

Diamond Dove ◇ *Geopelia cuneata* Common around Mount Isa and Cunnamulla on the extension.



Diamond Doves were common on the outback extension (Pete Morris)

Peaceful Dove *Geopelia placida* Common in the Capertee Valley and around Cairns.

Bar-shouldered Dove ◇ *Geopelia humeralis* A few seen around Newcastle, and common and widespread further north.

Wompoo Fruit Dove ◇ *Ptilinopus magnificus* Good views at the Curtain Fig, Kingfisher Park and on the extension.

Superb Fruit Dove *Ptilinopus superbus* First seen up Mount Lewis, then later around Kingfisher Park.

Rose-crowned Fruit Dove ◇ *Ptilinopus regina* Frustrating views around Eungella was the only record.

Torresian Imperial Pigeon ◇ *Ducula spilorrhoa* Common and widespread around Cairns.

Topknot Pigeon ◇ *Lopholaimus antarcticus* Common sight in rainforest habitat from Brisbane north.

Pheasant Coucal ◇ *Centropus phasianinus* A few seen from Brisbane north, usually flying in front of the vehicles!

Pacific Koel ◇ (Australian K) *Eudynamis orientalis* A few heard calling throughout; good views at Mareeba.

Channel-billed Cuckoo ◇ *Scythrops novaehollandiae* Seen first at Mount Coot-tha, then at a few more sites in the north.

Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo ◇ *Chrysococcyx basalis* Two heard on the main tour, seen well at Mount Isa on the extension.

Shining Bronze Cuckoo ◇ *Chrysococcyx lucidus* Heard and seen in small nos. throughout; occurs in wet woodland.

Little Bronze Cuckoo ◇ *Chrysococcyx [minutillus] minutillus* Heard and seen around Cairns.

Gould's Bronze Cuckoo ◇ *Chrysococcyx [minutillus] russatus* Seen at Kingfisher Park.

Pallid Cuckoo ◇ *Cacomantis pallidus* One was seen on the way to Eungella, and seen very well on the extension.

Chestnut-breasted Cuckoo ◇ *Cacomantis castaneiventris* A single bird was seen in Mowbray NP.

Fan-tailed Cuckoo ◇ *Cacomantis flabelliformis* Seen, and heard in most woodlands between Sydney and Cairns.

Brush Cuckoo *Cacomantis variolosus* First heard, then seen well in the Capertee, then a couple around Cairns.

Oriental Cuckoo *Cuculus optatus* (NL) A hepatic phase bird seen only by John and Bob at Cattana wetlands.

Lesser Sooty Owl ◇ *Tyto multipunctata* Two were heard, with one seen brilliantly, up Mount Lewis.

Australian Masked Owl ◇ *Tyto novaehollandiae* (H) One was heard with Phil while spotlighting around Swansea.

Eastern Barn Owl *Tyto delicatula* One was seen on the drive back from Mount Molloy to Kingfisher Park.

Rufous Owl ◇ *Ninox rufa* Magnificent views in Cairns; this species is normally found in the Cairns hinterland in summer.

Powerful Owl ◇ *Ninox strenua* Great views of one in Sydney on the first morning of the tour.

Barking Owl ◇ *Ninox connivens* One heard near Rainbow Beach, then a pair at Kingfisher Park were seen twice.

Southern Boobook ◇ *Ninox boobook* One was seen when out spotlighting with Phil, then a few others heard.

Marbled Frogmouth ◇ *Podargus ocellatus* (H) Two distant birds were heard calling at Bymien near Rainbow Beach.

Papuan Frogmouth ◇ *Podargus papuensis* Great views at Mount Lewis, Kingfisher Park (roosting) and Lotusbird Lodge (ext).

Tawny Frogmouth ◇ *Podargus strigoides* One when spotlighting around Swansea and 1 en route to Gloucester Tops.

White-throated Nightjar ◇ *Eurostopodus mystacalis* One at Mount-Coot-tha near Brisbane.

Australian Owlet-nightjar ◇ *Aegotheles cristatus* One near Brisbane, and 1 calling in the middle of day at Kingfisher Park!

Australian Swiftlet ◇ *Aerodramus terraereginae* Regularly seen overhead in the Cairns area.

White-throated Needletail *Hirundapus caudacutus* First seen at O'Reilly's, then c.100 over Inskip Point early morning.

Pacific Swift (Fork-tailed S) *Apus pacificus* c20 over Bowra Sanctuary on the extension. A scarce bird.

Oriental Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis* Seen in small numbers throughout.

Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher ◇ *Tanysiptera sylvia* Fabulous views of a superb male near Cooktown on the extension.

Laughing Kookaburra ◇ *Dacelo novaeguineae* This Australian icon was seen in small numbers every day.

Blue-winged Kookaburra ◇ *Dacelo leachii* One on the drive to Mareeba wetlands. Common on the extension.

Forest Kingfisher ◇ *Todiramphus macleayii* Seen from Gloucester north. Often in dry habitats and not tied to water.

Collared Kingfisher *Todiramphus chloris* A mangrove and coastal species, seen around Brisbane, and also at Cairns.

Sacred Kingfisher *Todiramphus sanctus* Present in small numbers throughout.

Red-backed Kingfisher ◇ *Todiramphus pyrrophygus* Seen very well a couple of times on the extension.

Azure Kingfisher *Ceyx azureus* One in Royal NP, a pair at Eungella and a few on the extension.

Rainbow Bee-Eater *Merops ornatus* More frequently heard than seen, although good views at several sites.

Nankeen Kestrel *Falco cenchroides* Seen on a number of the drives in grassland habitats.

Australian Hobby ◇ *Falco longipennis* Two on the drive down to Mareeba wetlands and several on the extension.



Rainbow Bee-eater and Australian Hobby both showed well (Pete Morris)

Brown Falcon ◇ *Falco berigora* First seen in the Capertee Valley, then in the dry country inland from Cairns etc.

Black Falcon ◇ *Falco subniger* Good views of at least 3 in the Lockyer Valley on the extension.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* Seen at Barren Grounds, in the Blue Mountains at Evans Lookout and on the extension.
Red-tailed Black Cockatoo ♦ *Calyptorhynchus banksii* c750 near Mareeba and good numbers in Lakefield NP (ext).
Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo ♦ *Calyptorhynchus funereus* One at Barren Grounds, and 2 in the Blue Mountains.
Gang-gang Cockatoo ♦ *Callocephalon fimbriatum* 12 near Blackheath, and 15 seen in the Capertee Valley.
Major Mitchell's Cockatoo ♦ (Pink C) *Lophochroa leadbeateri* Great looks in Bowra on the extension. Stunner!
Galah ♦ *Eolophus roseicapilla* Common and widespread, but always good to see!
Long-billed Corella ♦ (introduced) *Cacatua tenuirostris* One seen in Sydney in a large flock of Little Corella.
Little Corella ♦ *Cacatua sanguinea* Small numbers seen most days, with up to 50 birds daily.



Three widespread cockatoos: Galah, Red-tailed Black Cockatoo and Little Corrella (Pete Morris)

Sulphur-crested Cockatoo ♦ *Cacatua galerita* Small numbers seen most days.

Cockatiel ♦ *Nymphicus hollandicus* This nomad was very common around Mount Isa and Cunnumulla on the extension.

Rainbow Lorikeet ♦ *Trichoglossus moluccanus* Small numbers were seen most days.

Scaly-breasted Lorikeet ♦ *Trichoglossus chlorolepidotus* First seen in Brisbane, and small numbers from there north.

Varied Lorikeet ♦ *Psitteuteles versicolor* This smart lorikeet was common around Mount Isa on the extension.

Musk Lorikeet ♦ *Glossopsitta concinna* Three in the Capertee Valley was the only sighting.



Nomadic Cockatiels and Varied Lorikeets (above left) were common around Mount Isa (Pete Morris); Rainbow Lorikeets were widespread and common for much of the tour (Brian & Gina Lloyd)

Little Lorikeet ◊ *Glossopsitta pusilla* Two around Newcastle and 10 on the way to Gold Creek reservoir near Brisbane.
Mallee Ringneck ◊ *Barnardius [zonarius] barnardi* A few seen well at Bowra Sanctuary on the extension.
Cloncurry Ringneck ◊ *Barnardius [zonarius] macgillivrayi* Excellent views of this localized form near Mount Isa (ext).
Crimson Rosella ◊ *Platycercus elegans* Seen in small numbers from Sydney to Mackay in forested habitats.
Pale-headed Rosella ◊ *Platycercus adscitus* First seen on the drive to O'Reilly's, and seen in drier country after that.
Eastern Rosella ◊ *Platycercus eximius* Seen regularly in NSW; small numbers seen from Lithgow onwards.
Bluebonnet ◊ *Norhiella haematogaster* A few of these subtly beautiful parrots showed well at Bowra on the extension.
Red-rumped Parrot ◊ *Psephotus haematonotus* Seen only in the Capertee Valley and around Newcastle.
Mulga Parrot ◊ *Psephotus varius* Great views of several at Bowra Sanctuary on the extension.
Golden-shouldered Parrot ◊ *Psephotus chrysopterygius* Stunning views of 36+ near Musgrave on the extension.



More colourful parrots! Cloncurry Ringneck (top) is restricted to a small area around Mount Isa. Blue Bonnet (left) and Mulga Parrot both showed very well at Bowra Sanctuary on the extension (Pete Morris)

Bourke's Parrot ◇ *Neopsephotus bourkii* Great views of these subtle parrots at Bowra and Eulo on the extension.
Turquoise Parrot ◇ *Neophema pulchella* Two seen in the Capertee Valley, but unfortunately only by Andy and Bob.
Budgerigar ◇ *Melopsittacus undulatus* This classic nomad was pleasingly common near Mount Isa and Cunnumulla (ext).
Eastern Ground Parrot ◇ *Pezoporus wallicus* Great views at Budderoo NP. A scarce and secretive species.
Australian King Parrot ◇ *Alisterus scapularis* Small numbers seen most days when in forested habitat.
Red-winged Parrot ◇ *Aprosmictus erythropterus* Seen in the drier country around Mount Molloy and Mount Carbine etc.
Double-eyed Fig Parrot ◇ *Cyclopsitta diophthalma* Surprisingly common around Cairns and further north.



Budgerigars were frequent on the outback extension, while a male Red-winged Parrot is hard to beat! (Pete Morris)

Noisy Pitta ◇ *Pitta versicolor* First seen at O'Reilly's where plentiful. Seen (and more often heard) from here northward.

Albert's Lyrebird ◇ *Menura alberti* Three at O'Reilly's were a treat – outstanding views of a usually elusive species.

Superb Lyrebird ◇ *Menura novaehollandiae* First seen at Royal NP, then at Barren Grounds and Gloucester Tops.

Rufous Scrubbird ◇ *Atrichornis rufescens* Two seen at Gloucester Tops, although both extremely fleetingly.

Green Catbird ◇ *Ailuroedus crassirostris* First seen in Royal NP, then good views at O'Reilly's.

Spotted Catbird ◇ *Ailuroedus melanotis* First seen at Cassowary House, then at other North Qld. rainforest sites.

Tooth-billed Bowerbird ◇ (T-b Catbird) *Scenopoeetes dentirostris* Seen up Mount Lewis and Mount Hypipamee.

Golden Bowerbird ◇ *Prionodura newtoniana* Magnificent views of a male at his bower in North Qld.

Regent Bowerbird ◇ *Sericulus chrysocephalus* Great views of this gaudy bowerbird at O'Reilly's, and 1 at Eungella too.

Satin Bowerbird ◇ *Ptilonorhynchus violaceus* Seen in rainforest habitat all the way from Sydney to Cairns.

Great Bowerbird ◇ *Chlamydera nuchalis* Seen at the bower at Mount Molloy, also seen near Mount Carbine.

Spotted Bowerbird ◇ *Chlamydera maculata* Great bird, seen brilliantly around Mount Isa and Cunnumulla on the extension.

White-throated Treecreeper ◇ *Cormobates leucophaea* Seen in small numbers in forest habitat throughout.

Red-browed Treecreeper ◇ *Climacteris erythroptis* A few seen at Gloucester Tops.

White-browed Treecreeper ◇ *Climacteris affinis* Great views of a few at Bowra Sanctuary on the extension.

Brown Treecreeper ◇ *Climacteris picumnus* Seen in the Capertee Valley and north of Julatten on the extension.

Black-tailed Treecreeper ◇ *Climacteris melanurus* Great views of a pair near to Mount Isa.

Lovely Fairywren ◇ *Malurus amabilis* A female seen at Cairns Centenary Park and a pair near Cooktown on the extension.

Variiegated Fairywren ◇ *Malurus lamberti* Only seen at Barren Grounds, around Newcastle and at Inskip Point.

Superb Fairywren ◇ *Malurus cyaneus* Far more common than the previous species, seen regularly throughout the main tour.

Splendid Fairywren ◇ *Malurus splendens* Aptly-named, and common around Bowra Sanctuary on the extension.

Red-backed Fairywren ◇ *Malurus melanocephalus* A very smart species, seen at Inskip Point, Eungella and on the extension.

White-winged Fairywren ◇ *Malurus leucopterus* Several at Bowra on the extension, though no full-plumaged males.

Southern Emu-wren ◇ *Stipiturus malachurus* Seen regularly at Barren Grounds and Budderoo NP.

Carpentarian Grasswren ◇ *Amytornis dorotheae* Stunning views near Mount Isa, a highlight of the extension.

Kalkadoon Grasswren ◇ *Amytornis ballarae* Also seen brilliantly near Mount Isa, another highlight of the extension.

Dusky Myzomela ◇ *Myzomela obscura* Seen from Eungella onwards, with particularly good nos. at Kingfisher Park.

Red-headed Myzomela ◇ *Myzomela erythrocephala* Good views of a few in Lakefield NP on the extension.

Scarlet Myzomela ◇ *Myzomela sanguinolenta* First seen at Royal NP, then small numbers northward to Cooktown (ext).

Eastern Spinebill ◇ *Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris* Seen in rainforest and wet forest habitats throughout.

Pied Honeyeater ◇ *Certhionyx variegatus* Three seen well at Lake Bindegolly on the extension. A tough one to see.



The nomadic Pied Honeyeater and the localized White-browed Treecreeper were two goodies on the extension (Pete Morris)

Banded Honeyeater ◇ *Cissomela pectoralis* c20 at Maryfarms, c6 near Mount Carbine and common at Lakefield NP (ext).
Brown Honeyeater ◇ *Lichmera indistincta* First seen in the mangroves at Swansea, then common in Qld.
Crescent Honeyeater ◇ *Phylidonyris pyrrhopterus* Only briefly at Gloucester Tops, close to northern extent of its range.
New Holland Honeyeater ◇ *Phylidonyris novaehollandiae* Common and widespread throughout NSW.
White-cheeked Honeyeater ◇ *Phylidonyris niger* Prominent at Inskip Point, then seen in North Qld. at Hasties Swamp.
White-streaked Honeyeater ◇ *Trichodere cockerelli* After some effort, great views near to Cooktown on the extension.
Striped Honeyeater ◇ *Plectorhyncha lanceolata* A few in the Capertee, at Hunter Wetlands, and on the extension.
Macleay's Honeyeater ◇ *Xanthotis macleayanus* Small numbers at most sites from Cassowary House onwards.
Little Friarbird ◇ *Philemon citreogularis* Seen at Rainbow Beach and Inskip Point and common on the extension.
Hornbill Friarbird ◇ *Philemon yorki* Seen in good numbers from Cairns onwards.
Silver-crowned Friarbird ◇ *Philemon argenticeps* Several seen on the extension; especially common around Mount Isa.
Noisy Friarbird ◇ *Philemon corniculatus* Small numbers seen from Sydney to Mackay most days, and on the extension.
Blue-faced Honeyeater ◇ *Entomyzon cyanotis* Seen from Brisbane onwards in small numbers.
Black-chinned Honeyeater ◇ *Melithreptus [gularis] gularis* One in the Capertee, the only record of this declining species.
Golden-backed Honeyeater ◇ *Melithreptus [gularis] laetior* Great views of this stunner near Mount Isa on the extension.
Brown-headed Honeyeater ◇ *Melithreptus brevirostris* Seen in the Blue Mountains and also in the Capertee Valley.
White-throated Honeyeater ◇ *Melithreptus albogularis* Seen in small numbers throughout Qld.
White-naped Honeyeater ◇ *Melithreptus lunatus* Seen in the Capertee Valley and around Newcastle.
Crimson Chat ◇ *Epthianura tricolor* Another stunner seen superbly at Lake Bindegolly on the extension.
White-fronted Chat ◇ *Epthianura albifrons* Two were at Ash Island near Newcastle.
Rufous-banded Honeyeater ◇ *Conopophila albogularis* Just one, in Lakefield NP on the extension.
Rufous-throated Honeyeater ◇ *Conopophila rufogularis* Common around Mount Isa on the extension
Bar-breasted Honeyeater ◇ *Ramsayornis fasciatus* Several seen well in Lakefield NP on the extension.
Brown-backed Honeyeater ◇ *Ramsayornis modestus* c6 at Abattoir Swamp near Julatten and a few on the extension.
Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater ◇ *Acanthagenys rufogularis* Common in the Cunnumulla area on the extension.



Spiny-cheeked and Striped Honeyeater; two of the more unusual looking members of this diverse family (Pete Morris)

Little Wattlebird ◇ *Anthochaera chrysoptera* Common and widespread in NSW, and again at Inskip Point.
Red Wattlebird ◇ *Anthochaera carunculata* Present throughout NSW but in smaller numbers than its smaller cousin.
Bridled Honeyeater ◇ *Bolemoreus frenatus* In upland forests around Cairns, particularly Mount Lewis and Mount Hypipamee.
Eungella Honeyeater ◇ *Bolemoreus hindwoodi* Good numbers were seen around Eungella.
Yellow-faced Honeyeater ◇ *Caligavis chrysops* Present in small numbers throughout.
Yellow-tufted Honeyeater ◇ *Lichenostomus melanops* Good numbers in the Capertee Valley and around Newcastle.
Bell Miner ◇ *Manorina melanophrys* A number of colonies were encountered, first in the Capertee Valley.
Noisy Miner ◇ *Manorina melanocephala* Common and widespread, this species chases off any other species in its territory.
Yellow-throated Miner ◇ *Manorina flavigula* Quite common on the extension.
White-gaped Honeyeater ◇ *Stomiopera unicolor* A few seen at a creek north of Mount Carbine.
Yellow Honeyeater ◇ *Stomiopera flava* A striking honeyeater of the drier country around Cairns.

Varied Honeyeater ◇ *Gavicalis versicolor* Seen only at Cairns, the North Qld. equivalent of the following species.
Mangrove Honeyeater ◇ *Gavicalis fasciogularis* First seen at Toorbul, then also seen around Inskip Point.
Singing Honeyeater ◇ *Gavicalis virescens* Several in the Cunnumulla area on the extension.
Yellow-tinted Honeyeater ◇ *Ptilotula flavescens* Common in Lakefield NP on the extension.
Fuscous Honeyeater ◇ *Ptilotula fusca* A few seen near to Toowoomba on the extension.
Grey-headed Honeyeater ◇ *Ptilotula keartlandi* Great views around Mount Isa and in Bowra on the extension.
Grey-fronted Honeyeater ◇ *Ptilotula plumula* Common in the Mount Isa area on the extension.



Grey-fronted (left) and Grey-headed Honeyeaters, two dry country specialists, were both seen well around Mount Isa (Pete Morris)

White-plumed Honeyeater ◇ *Ptilotula penicillata* Common in the Capertee Valley. Widespread in southern Australia.
Graceful Honeyeater ◇ *Meliphaga gracilis* Seen at a variety of sites from Cassowary House onwards.
Yellow-spotted Honeyeater ◇ *Meliphaga notata* Common in rainforest habitats around Cairns and further north.
Lewin's Honeyeater ◇ *Meliphaga lewinii* Common and widespread, its machine gun like call was a prominent feature.
Eastern Bristlebird ◇ *Dasyornis brachypterus* Five seen at Barren Grounds, and a further three at Budderoo NP.
Spotted Pardalote ◇ *Pardalotus punctatus* Small numbers seen (and more often heard) throughout in NSW.
Striated Pardalote ◇ *Pardalotus striatus* Seen in the Capertee Valley, and more heard in Qld. Also seen on the extension.
Pilotbird ◇ *Pycnoptilus floccosus* One seen very well at Barren Grounds. Another skulking species which belied its reputation.
Rockwarbler ◇ (*Origma*) *Origma solitaria* Excellent views of a pair in the Capertee. NSW's only endemic bird.
Redthroat ◇ *Pyrrholaemus brunneus* A pair seen very well at Bowra on the extension. A tricky bird.
Speckled Warbler ◇ *Sericornis sagittatus* Cracking views of this scarce bird in the Capertee Valley and near St George (ext).
Fernwren ◇ *Oreoscopus gutturalis* Up to ten at Mount Lewis, showing very well. A skulking species, and a Wet Tropics endemic.
Atherton Scrubwren ◇ *Sericornis kerri* Seen up Mount Lewis, another Wet Tropics endemic.
White-browed Scrubwren ◇ *Sericornis frontalis* Common and widespread from Sydney to Mackay.
Yellow-throated Scrubwren ◇ *Sericornis citreogularis* A few seen in rainforests throughout; common around Cairns.
Large-billed Scrubwren ◇ *Sericornis magnirostra* First seen at O'Reilly's then further views around Mackay and Cairns.
Tropical Scrubwren ◇ *Sericornis beccarii* Great views at a couple of sites in the Cooktown area on the extension.
Weebill ◇ *Smicornis brevirostris* Australia's smallest bird, great views in the Capertee Valley and on the extension.
Brown Gerygone ◇ *Gerygone mouki* Small numbers in rainforest habitat between Sydney and Brisbane, and at Eungella.
Mangrove Gerygone ◇ *Gerygone levigaster* First seen in mangroves at Ash Island, then around Brisbane.
Western Gerygone ◇ *Gerygone fusca* A couple seen in the Capertee Valley – on the eastern edge of its range here.
Large-billed Gerygone ◇ *Gerygone magnirostris* A few seen in North Qld., usually in association with riverine habitats.
White-throated Gerygone ◇ *Gerygone olivacea* Heard in Royal NP, then excellent views in the Capertee Valley. Also ext.

Fairy Gerygone ◇ *Gerygone palpebrosa* A small group at Inskip Point. Also ext. The only gerygone with sexual dimorphism.

Mountain Thornbill ◇ *Acanthiza katherina* Several up Mount Lewis. Another Wet Tropics endemic.

Brown Thornbill ◇ *Acanthiza pusilla* Common and widespread from Sydney to Cairns.

Inland Thornbill ◇ *Acanthiza apicalis* A few seen well at Bowra Sanctuary on the extension.

Chestnut-rumped Thornbill ◇ *Acanthiza uropygialis* Quite common at Bowra Sanctuary on the extension.

Buff-rumped Thornbill ◇ *Acanthiza reguloides* Good views in the Capertee Valley, also heard at Bellbird Grove near Brisbane.

Yellow-rumped Thornbill ◇ *Acanthiza chrysorrhoa* A small group was seen on both days in the Capertee Valley.

Yellow Thornbill ◇ *Acanthiza nana* Seen in the Capertee Valley on both days, then a few also around Newcastle.

Striated Thornbill ◇ *Acanthiza lineata* Seen at Barren Grounds, Budderoo NP, Gloucester Tops and O'Reilly's.

Southern Whiteface ◇ *Aphelocephala leucopsis* Three on a fence line in the Capertee Valley was the only record.

Grey-crowned Babbler ◇ *Pomatostomus temporalis* Two seen briefly in the Capertee Valley. Several on the extension.

Hall's Babbler ◇ *Pomatostomus halli* Great views of a small flock at Bowra on the extension. Took some effort!

Chestnut-crowned Babbler ◇ *Pomatostomus ruficeps* Several flocks seen well at Bowra Station on the extension.

Australian Logrunner ◇ *Orthonyx temminckii* This charismatic species was at O'Reilly's, feeding noisily in leaf litter.

Chowchilla ◇ *Orthonyx spaldingii* Six were seen at Mount Lewis, in the same family as the preceding species.

Eastern Whipbird ◇ *Psophodes olivaceus* Heard in many places, this skulker was seen outrageously well at O'Reilly's.

Chestnut-breasted Quail-thrush ◇ *Cinclosoma castaneothorax* Great views at Bowra on the extension. Stunner!

Yellow-breasted Boatbill ◇ *Machaerirhynchus flaviventer* Seen at a few sites around Cairns.

Black Butcherbird ◇ *Cracticus quoyi* Seen in small numbers around Cairns.

Grey Butcherbird ◇ *Cracticus torquatus* Encountered in small numbers from Sydney to Mackay.

Black-backed Butcherbird ◇ *Cracticus mentalis* Several seen well in North Qld. on the extension.

Pied Butcherbird ◇ *Cracticus nigrogularis* Small numbers seen throughout the tour. A surprisingly melodious song.

Australian Magpie ◇ *Gymnorhina tibicen* Commonly encountered throughout; of the black-backed race.

Pied Currawong ◇ *Strepera graculina* Commonly encountered in woodland habitats from Sydney to Mackay.

White-breasted Woodswallow *Artamus leucorhynchus* First seen around Newcastle, then common in Qld.

Masked Woodswallow ◇ *Artamus personatus* Several of these nomads in the Cunnumulla area on the extension.

White-browed Woodswallow ◇ *Artamus superciliosus* A cracker, seen well around Cunnumulla on the extension

Black-faced Woodswallow ◇ *Artamus cinereus* Seen around Mount Isa and Cunnumulla on the extension.

Dusky Woodswallow ◇ *Artamus cyanopterus* Small numbers seen at Budderoo NP and the Capertee Valley.

Little Woodswallow ◇ *Artamus minor* Excellent views around Mount Isa and Cunnumulla on the extension



It was a good trip for woodswallows! Here's Little Woodswallow (left) and Masked Woodswallow (Pete Morris)

Ground Cuckooshrike ◇ *Coracina maxima* A cracker in the Lockyer Valley on the extension.

Black-faced Cuckooshrike *Coracina novaehollandiae* Encountered throughout in small numbers.

Barred Cuckooshrike ◇ (Yellow-eyed C-s) *Coracina lineata* A magnificent sight of c50 birds in a fruiting fig on Mount Lewis!

White-bellied Cuckooshrike *Coracina papuensis* Seen in the Capertee and Newcastle, then common from Cairns onwards.

Common Cicadabird *Coracina tenuirostris* First seen at Inskip Point, then regularly heard and occasionally seen in Cairns.

White-winged Triller ◇ *Lalage tricolor* Two in the dry country around Lake Mitchell and a few on the extension.

Varied Triller ◇ *Lalage leucomela* Up to 10 at Inskip Point, then found daily in small numbers in North Qld.

Varied Sittella ◇ *Daphoenositta chrysoptera* A group in the Capertee Valley [*chrysoptera*] and on the extension .

Crested Bellbird ◇ *Oreoica gutturalis* Several seen well, including one at a nest, at Bowra, on the extension.

Eastern Shriketit ◇ *Falcunculus [frontatus] frontatus* Heard at Newcastle and Gloucester Tops; seen well at O'Reilly's.

Grey Whistler ◇ *Pachycephala simplex* One seen at the Curtain Fig Tree, then great views of 1 at Kingfisher Park.

Australian Golden Whistler ◇ *Pachycephala pectoralis* Reasonably common in wetter forests from Sydney to Cairns.

Rufous Whistler *Pachycephala rufiventris* A dryer country bird than the preceding species, found from Sydney to Cairns.

Bower's Shrikethrush ◇ *Colluricincla boweri* Seen well on Mount Lewis; grey head and dark streaking on the chest.

Little Shrikethrush ◇ *Colluricincla megarhyncha* Seen regularly in small numbers from Brisbane to North Qld.

Grey Shrikethrush ◇ *Colluricincla harmonica* In small nos. throughout, this beautiful vocalist was more often heard than seen.

Australasian Figbird ◇ (Green F) *Sphecotheres vieilloti* Common from Brisbane northwards.

Olive-backed Oriole ◇ *Oriolus sagittatus* Heard in a few locations from Sydney to Cairns, and seen well in places.

Green Oriole ◇ (Yellow O) *Oriolus flavocinctus* Two seen in Cairns Centenary Park and several on the extension.

Spangled Drongo *Dicrurus bracteatus* First seen in Brisbane, then a relatively common bird in North Qld.

Willie Wagtail *Rhipidura leucophrys* This Australian icon was seen in small numbers on all days.

Northern Fantail ◇ *Rhipidura rufiventris* Excellent views of a few in the Cooktown area on the extension.

Grey Fantail ◇ *Rhipidura albiscapa* Frequently encountered from Sydney to Mackay in all but the driest habitats.

Rufous Fantail ◇ *Rhipidura rufifrons* First seen at Evans Lookout, then common at O'Reilly's, with birds from there north.

Spectacled Monarch ◇ *Symposiachrus trivirgatus* Seen at O'Reilly's, then regular from Cairns onwards.

Black-faced Monarch ◇ *Monarcha melanopsis* Seen in small numbers throughout, but not common.

Black-winged Monarch ◇ *Monarcha frater* Great views of a stunner at the McIvor River on the extension.

Pied Monarch ◇ *Arses kaupi* Another Wet Tropics endemic, seen at Kingfisher Park and at the Curtain Fig Tree.

Magpie-lark ◇ (Australian M-I) *Grallina cyanoleuca* Common and widespread throughout.

Leaden Flycatcher ◇ *Myiagra rubecula* Small numbers seen and heard throughout from Sydney to Cairns.

Broad-billed Flycatcher ◇ *Myiagra ruficollis* Good views in the mangroves at Lakefield NP.

Shining Flycatcher ◇ *Myiagra alecto* A pair was seen at the Jack Barnes mangrove boardwalk in Cairns. Also on the extension.

Paperbark Flycatcher ◇ *Myiagra nana* A few seen in woodlands by Lake Moondarra, Mount Isa, on the extension.

Restless Flycatcher ◇ *Myiagra inquieta* Seen in the Capertee Valley including great views of a bird at the nest.



Little Shrikethrush and Restless Flycatcher showed well on the main tour and extension (Pete Morris)

Torresian Crow *Corvus orru* The common corvid of Qld., frequently encountered.

Little Crow ◇ *Corvus bennetti* A few typically shy flocks seen around Lake Bindegolly on the extension.

Little Raven ◇ *Corvus mellori* Found only at Lake Wallace, near Lithgow, on the edge of its range.

Australian Raven ◇ *Corvus coronoides* The common corvid of NSW – and more in inland areas of Qld on the extension.

White-winged Chough ◇ *Corcorax melanorhamphos* Groups in the Capertee Valley, inland from Newcastle and extension.

Apostlebird ◇ *Struthidea cinerea* Four in Mount Carbine, then common in dry country (often near water) on the extension.

Paradise Riflebird ◇ *Ptiloris paradiseus* A few were seen at O'Reilly's including a male high in its display tree calling.

Victoria's Riflebird ◇ *Ptiloris victoriae* Seen well at Cassowary House; also Mount Lewis, Kingfisher Park and Mount Hypipamee.

Grey-headed Robin ◇ *Heteromyias cinereifrons* First seen up Mount Lewis then at Mount Hypipamee and Kingfisher Park.

Mangrove Robin ◇ *Peneoenanthe pulverulenta* Outrageous views of three birds in Cairns, feeding in the grass.

Pale-yellow Robin ◇ *Tregellasia capito* Found in small numbers in the rainforest habitats inland from Cairns.

Eastern Yellow Robin ◇ *Eopsaltria australis* Common and widespread in forest and scrub habitats throughout.

Hooded Robin ◇ *Melanodryas cucullata* A group of 4 in the Capertee Valley, also extension - a rapidly declining species.

Lemon-bellied Flyrobin ◇ (L-b Flycatcher) *Microeca flavigaster* Seen at Mareeba Wetlands and on the extension.

Jacky Winter ◇ *Microeca fascinans* Good numbers of this open country species in the Capertee Valley and extension.

Rose Robin ◇ *Petroica rosea* First at Gloucester Tops, then also seen at Lamington. The most arboreal of Australian robins.

Scarlet Robin ◇ *Petroica boodang* A beautiful male was seen on the drive to Evans Lookout.

Red-capped Robin ◇ *Petroica goodenovii* Some stunners were seen on the extension, especially at Bowra Sanctuary.

Horsfield's Bush Lark (Australian B L) *Mirafra javanica* A few seen in Lakefield NP on the extension.

Welcome Swallow *Hirundo neoxena* Commonly encountered throughout when in open habitats.

Fairy Martin ◇ *Petrochelidon ariel* Seen in small nos. in the south. Largest numbers in the Capertee Valley and on the extension.

Tree Martin ◇ *Petrochelidon nigricans* Frequently encountered in open woodland habitats, in small numbers.

Australian Reed Warbler ◇ *Acrocephalus australis* Seen at Lake Wallace, a few more seen and heard, including extension.

Rufous Songlark ◇ *Megalurus mathewsi* Good numbers heard and seen in the Capertee Valley. Also extension.

Little Grassbird ◇ *Megalurus gramineus* Seen at Lake Wallace, Lithgow, then heard at Ash Island wetlands.

Spinifexbird ◇ *Megalurus carteri* A very showy individual obliged near to Mount Isa on the extension.



Spinifexbird and Red-capped Robin were two more of the goodies from the extension (Pete Morris)

Tawny Grassbird *Megalurus timoriensis* Only seen at Ash Island wetlands, near Newcastle.

Golden-headed Cisticola (Bright-headed C) *Cisticola exilis* Common at Ash Island wetlands; many seen and heard.

Silveryeye ◇ *Zosterops lateralis* Small flocks were seen throughout in woodland areas.

Metallic Starling (Shining S) *Aplonis metallica* Commonly encountered from Cairns northward.

Common Myna (introduced) *Acridotheres tristis* A commonly encountered introduced species.

Common Starling (introduced) (European S) *Sturnus vulgaris* Commonly encountered in NSW.

Russet-tailed Thrush ◇ (R-t Ground T) *Zoothera heinei* Only positively recorded at O'Reillys, where at least 3 were seen.

Bassian Thrush ◇ (Australian Ground T) *Zoothera lunulata* First at Gloucester Tops, then common at O'Reilly's.

Common Blackbird (introduced) *Turdus merula* Two seen in Robertson on a fuel stop were the only ones of the trip.

Mistletoebird ◇ *Dicaeum hirundinaceum* Small numbers seen throughout, particularly abundant in the Capertee Valley.

Olive-backed Sunbird (Yellow-bellied S) *Cinnyris jugularis* Several were seen most days in northern Qld.

House Sparrow (introduced) *Passer domesticus* Small numbers were seen throughout, mostly in urban areas.

Painted Finch ◇ (P Firetail) *Emblema pictum* This beauty was present in good numbers near Mount Isa on the extension.

Beautiful Firetail ◇ *Stagonopleura bella* One seen briefly at Barren Grounds, then three in Budderoo NP.

Diamond Firetail ◇ *Stagonopleura guttata* Another cracking Australian finch, several in the Capertee Valley.

Red-browed Finch ◊ (R-b Firetail) *Neochmia temporalis* Small numbers seen throughout.
 Crimson Finch ◊ *Neochmia phaeton* Eight were at Cattana wetlands near Cairns – often found near cane fields.
 Star Finch ◊ *Neochmia ruficauda* 100s in Lakefield NP on the extension were an amazing sight.
 Plum-headed Finch ◊ *Neochmia modesta* Four on a fenceline in the Capertee Valley then 100s at Bowra on the extension.
 Masked Finch ◊ *Poephila personata* A few drinking in Lakefield NP on the extension.
 Long-tailed Finch ◊ *Poephila acuticauda* Several seen near to Mount Isa on the extension.
 Black-throated Finch ◊ *Poephila cincta* Great views at several drinking spots north of Cairns on the extension.
 Zebra Finch ◊ *Taeniopygia guttata* Seen in the Capertee Valley, and common on the extension.
 Double-barred Finch ◊ *Taeniopygia bichenovii* First seen in the Capertee Valley, then at Mareeba Wetlands and Mount Lewis.
 Scaly-breasted Munia (introduced) (Nutmeg Mannikin) *Lonchura punctulata* Small numbers seen around Cairns.
 Chestnut-breasted Mannikin ◊ *Lonchura castaneothorax* A group was seen at Mareeba wetlands.
 Pictorella Mannikin ◊ *Heteromunia pectoralis* A smart group scoped up near to Mount Isa on the extension.
 Australian Pipit ◊ *Anthus australis* Small numbers seen in grassland habitats throughout.
 European Goldfinch (introduced) *Carduelis carduelis* Two on the drive to Barren Grounds, then two at Ash Island.



On the extension, we spent a fair amount of time looking at various waterholes, and in the hot dry conditions, this proved productive. In Lakefield National Park we watched Masked Finch (top) with Black-throated Finches (and above) alongside Double-barred Finch (above left) and hundreds of Star Finches (left). No surprise an Australian Hobby was hanging about (Pete Morris)



The largest kangaroo, Red Kangaroo, was frequent in the Cunnumulla area (Pete Morris)

MAMMALS

- Platypus (Duck-billed P)** *Ornithorhynchus anatinus* Two were seen at Kingfisher Park – great views of this Aussie icon.
- Yellow-footed Antechinus** *Antechinus flavipes* Seen at Kingfisher Park, where it raided the feeders!
- Northern Brown Bandicoot** *Isodon macrourus* Below the feeders at Kingfisher Park.
- Mountain Brushtail Possum** *Trichosurus caninus* A few seen when spotlighting at O'Reilly's.
- Common Ringtail Possum** *Pseudocheirus peregrinus* A few seen when spotlighting at O'Reilly's.
- Musky Rat-kangaroo (Musk R-k)** *Hypsiprymnodon moschatus* Several at Cassowary House, great views from the veranda.
- Agile Wallaby** *Macropus agilis* Seen in North Qld. at Cattana Wetlands, Mareeba wetlands and Maryfarms etc
- Western Grey Kangaroo** *Macropus fuliginosus* Seen at Bowra Sanctuary on the extension.
- Eastern Grey Kangaroo** *Macropus giganteus* Seen at various sites in NSW and southeast Qld.
- Euro (Common Wallaroo)** *Macropus robustus* A few of these woolly creatures were seen near to Mount Isa on the extension.
- Red-necked Wallaby** *Macropus rufogriseus* Seen on the way to Toowoomba on the extension.
- Red Kangaroo** *Macropus rufus* The best kangaroo! Several in Bowra Sanctuary on the extension.
- Purple-necked Rock Wallaby** *Petrogale purpureicollis* Lovely views of several in Mount Isa on the extension.
- Whiptail Wallaby** *Macropus parryi* On the drive up to O'Reilly's – a beautiful animal, also aptly called Pretty-faced Wallaby.
- Red-legged Pademelon** *Thylogale stigmatica* Common at O'Reilly's, also seen at Kingfisher Park.
- Red-necked Pademelon** *Thylogale thetis* Common at O'Reilly's.
- Black Wallaby (Swamp W)** *Wallabia bicolor* Several seen in the Capertee Valley and around Swansea.
- Black Flying-fox** *Pteropus alecto* The spectacular site of several hundred thousand leaving a roost at Eungella was a highlight.
- Spectacled Flying-fox** *Pteropus conspicillatus* Seen in the orchard at Kingfisher Park while spotlighting.
- Grey-headed Flying-fox** *Pteropus poliocephalus* A roost present in Sydney Centennial Park.
- Little Red Flying-fox** *Pteropus scapulatus* The huge roost in Lakefield NP on the extension seem to be this species.
- Fawn-footed Melomys** *Melomys cervinipes* Showed well at the feeders at Kingfisher Park.
- Black Rat (introduced) (Roof R)** *Rattus rattus* (LO) One ran in front of the car at Engadine on our way back from dinner.
- Red Fox (introduced)** *Vulpes vulpes* One on the beach at Royal NP and another at Lake Wallace, near Lithgow.

Australian Fur-Seal (Afro-Australian F-S) *Arctocephalus pusillus* Seen on the pelagic off Newcastle.

Pig (introduced) (Wild Pig, Wild Boar) *Sus scrofa* A couple in Lakefield NP on the extension.

Brown Hare (introduced) *Lepus europaeus* One on the drive to Gloucester Tops, and another on the drive to O'Reilly's.

European Rabbit (introduced) *Oryctolagus cuniculus* A few scattered records – a big problem for Australian farmers.

Common Dolphin *Delphinus delphis* A small group on the pelagic off Swansea.

Common Bottlenose Dolphin (C Bottle-nosed D) *Tursiops truncatus* A few groups on the pelagic off Swansea.

Humpback Whale *Megaptera novaeangliae* Distant views of a mother and her calf on the Swansea pelagic.



Fawn-footed Melomys (top) was attracted to the feeders at Kingfisher Park; Purple-necked Rock Wallaby (left) was seen just outside Mount Isa town, whilst Agile Wallaby was common north of Cairns (Pete Morris)

TOP 10 BIRDS OF THE MAIN TOUR

The top ten birds of the trip, voted for by all participants were as follows. Each person had five votes, and in total some 20 species received a vote, showing how tough a decision it was to narrow it down to just five birds.

- 1st **WANDERING/ANTIPODEAN ALBATROSS**
- 2nd **Golden Bowerbird**
- 3rd **Southern Cassowary**
- 4th **Ground Parrot**
- 5th **Lesser Sooty Owl**
- 6th **Victoria's Riflebird**
- 7th **Albert's Lyrebird**
- 8th= **Powerful Owl**
- 8th= **Logrunner**
- 10th **Red-tailed Black-cockatoo**

TOP SIX BIRDS OF THE EXTENSION

- 1st **CARPENTARIAN GRASSWREN**
- 2nd **Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher**
- 3rd **Red Goshawk**
- 4th **Chestnut-breasted Quail-thrush**
- 5th **Golden-shouldered Parrot**
- 6th **Spinifex Pigeon**



It wasn't just the birds - the magnificent landscapes helped make this an unforgettable adventure! (Pete Morris)