



One of the star birds of the Top End - a red headed male Gouldian Finch (János Oláh)

NORTHERN AUSTRALIA

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LEADER: JÁNOS OLÁH and MIKE WATSON

Birdquest has been operating tours to Australia for many years now but the northern part has never been explored with such an itinerary. So this was our pioneering tour to the Northern Territory, where we combined the Red Center and the Top End in one adventure in search of a wide range of special and exciting species. Although on a 'first' tour it is difficult to judge the results but we certainly saw most of our target birds amongst a total of 276 species seen (and for once none were heard-only!). Notable highlights included Chestnut Rail, Chestnut-backed Buttonquail, Inland Dotterel, Oriental Plover, Spinifex and Partridge Pigeons, Chestnut- and White-quilled Rock Pigeons, Black-banded Fruit-Dove, Hooded Parrot, Rainbow Pitta, Rufous-crowned Emu-wren, Purple-crowned Fairywren, Dusky Grasswren, Grey Honeyeater, Slaty-backed Thornbill, Cinnamon Quail-thrush, Ground Cuckooshrike, Northern Shrike-tit, Sandstone Shrikethrush, Spinifexbird, Buff-sided Robin, Painted Finch and Gouldian Finch.

The timing of this tour is crucial as some of the hard-to-find birds in the Top End are most easily seen at the end of the dry season. This year we were lucky as the weather was normal (we cannot say this often nowadays) and although it did get hot, indeed very hot around Pine Creek and Katherine where daytime highs peaked at over 40C with all the great birds and the constant supply of ice creams we had a great time!

We visited a variety of habitats and had some amazing landscape experiences, which included a short visit to the famous and second largest monolith in the World: Uluru or Ayers Rock.

In a mere 16 days we covered a lot of ground, which is normal for birding in Australia, however, with great infrastructure this was all done in a rather easy and relaxing way. The tour started at Alice Springs, where we spent a few days to explore the West Macdonnell Range, with its spectacular gaps and gorges plus the surrounding mulga, mallee and spinifex hummock grasslands. Later we drove further south to Eridunda and onto Kata Tjuta National Park. After a short flight we arrived in Darwin on the Timor Sea coast and drove to the famous Kakadu National Park with its unique tropical wetlands, open woodlands and the Arnhem Land Escarpment. Further south we spent some time around Katherine, where we explored some eucalypt woodland habitat before moving to Victoria River and finally back to Darwin and its lush tropical habitats.

Apart from the real Northern Territory specialities we also had a fine supporting cast which included a lot of migrant shorebirds around Darwin like masses of Great Knots, a fine Beach Stone-Curlew, the colourful Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove, and day-roosting pair of Barking Owls, Blue-winged Kookaburra, the tiny Little Kingfisher, Black Falcon, the stunning Major Mitchell's Cockatoos, a few Bourke's Parrots, beautiful Crimson Chats plus some nomads such as Cockatiels, Budgerigars, Masked Woodswallows, White-fronted and Pied Honeyeaters, Yellow-rumped Mannakin and Long-tailed Fiches.

Non-avian highlights included mammals such as Red Kangaroo and Black-flanked Rock Wallaby and of course the amazing Ayers Rock at sunset!



Black-flanked Rock Wallaby (left) and Ayers Rock or Uluru from an unusual angle at sunset (right) (Mike Watson).

The tour began at Alice Springs in the Red Centre and on our first morning we visited a lovely patch of spinifex covered hillside in search of the skulking Dusky Grasswren. Grasswrens are an iconic group of

skulkers of this amazing continent and hence they are rather high on the wishlist of most visiting birders. Not much later as we stepped out of the car we heard the subtle call of the grasswrens and we were soon watching a pair as they were hopping along a the rocks allowing excellent views for the group. In fact this was the first bird we actually had a proper look on the tour - what a start! We also had the first flyover group of nomadic Budgerigars and several Black-faced Woodswallows. Our search continued in the spiny spinifex tussock habitat in search of the Rufous-crowned Emu-wren, which is another skulking bird. Actually this one is really difficult to see and it took us about one hour to get a proper view after we glimpsed the first bird. Finally, however, it was seen amazingly well by everybody and it was a great feeling to see the two most unobtrusive bird of the region on the first morning. Our morning walk also produced White-winged and Splendid Fairywrens, an Orange Chat, two White-fronted Honeyeaters, two Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoos, Inland Thornbill, White-browed Babblers and Grey Butcherbird. After the most productive period of the day we made a visit to the famous Alice Springs Sewage Works, which is a magnet for waterbirds in this parched landscape.



Dusky Grasswren was the very first bird we saw on the tour (top: János Oláh). Rufous-crowned Emu-wren (bottom left) and Grey Honeyeater (bottom right) are amongst the harder to find birds around Alice Springs (Mike Watson).

Although the activity is usually not the best in the middle of the day our walk around the ponds gave us a superb selection of special Australian waterbirds like Black Swan, hundreds of Hoary-headed Grebes and Pink-eared Ducks, Yellow-faced Spoonbills, a flock of 143 Red-necked Avocets, Red-kneed Dotterel, Red-capped Plover, Black-fronted Dotterel as well as a fine selection of wintering waders like Marsh Sandpiper, Red-necked Stint and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. We also had some more-difficult to observe birds like a Baillon's Crake and several Little Grassbirds. This very birdy but hot area was followed by a fine lunch in the shade and the rest of the afternoon was spent north of Alice. The early hours of the afternoon were not productive but as it started to cool down we got some of our main targets such as the very rare though rather nondescript Grey Honeyeater and the colourful Banded Whiteface along with a male Crested Bellbird, Hooded and Red-capped Robins! We finished the day in a nearby waterhole where lovely Common Bronzewing, Galahs came to drink and finally the secretive Bourke's Parrot also showed up to put the icing on the cake!



Bourke's Parrot is a crepuscular drinker and the easiest place to come see them is by a waterhole (János Oláh).

Early next morning we drove to the nearby Simpson's Gap where we had a nice morning stroll though the Redthroat - our number one target at this location – did not show. It was rather windy but we had a pair of Mulga Parrots, several Budgerigars, a fine Red-backed Kingfisher, an Australian Hobby, a stunning male Red-capped Robin, Rufous Songlark and hundreds of Zebra Finches by a dripping water tap. After breakfast we drove to the Ormiston Gorge, which is a very scenic location west of Alice, in the mighty West MacDonnell Range. On our way to this fantastic place we stopped to look for the much localised Spinifexbird which made us work hard in the spiny grass but eventually we saw one hopping from one spinifex tussock to another. Actually the inland distributed hummock-forming grasses mostly belong to the *Triodia* genus and they are commonly known as spinifex, but they are not part of the coastal *Spinifex* genus. This *Triodia* genus is endemic to Australia and has about 64 recognised species and was widely used by the Australian Aborigines. The seeds were collected and ground to make seedcakes while spinifex resin was an important adhesive used in spear-making. Smoke signals were made to communicate with families a long distance away, as burning spinifex produces a strong black smoke. For birders however they are well known because an exciting selection of special birds leave in this spinifex habitat. After seeing the one of these we continued

to the gorge where we had to walk on rather tough terrain into the canyon in search for another spinifex habitat bird, the Spinifex Pigeon. This iconic and most exotic looking pigeon is largely terrestrial and prefers rocky ground with spinifex cover. In the dry season they are often seen drinking in the remnants of water at the bottom of these gaps and gorges along the mountain range. We made a fair walk into the gorge where we saw lots of Little Woodswallows, Fairy Martins, about 20 Painted Finches, many Grey-headed Honeyeaters and a Black-flanked Rock Wallaby but we had no sign of the much wanted pigeons. On our return to the carpark we met some visiting birders and they told us that the pigeons were seen in the parking area earlier in the morning. We spent some time around the location they were seen but apart from a few Western Bowerbirds and Diamond Doves we had not much luck. It was time for us to return to Alice but on the way back we still visited the Serpentine Gorge where our local help has seen the pigeons before. The last hour of the day the bird activity was very good but we had no luck with the pigeons at this location either! The leading car had Spotted Nightjar and Southern Boobook on the way back to Alice.



The scenic Ormiston Gorge (top left) and a lovely Little Woodswallow (top right) (Mike Watson). Painted Finch (bottom) is most easily seen in the dry season (top; János Oláh).

We decided that before we travel south from Alice Springs we give another chance to see the Spinifex Pigeon so we left very early morning and not much after dawn we were back to the carpark area of the Ormiston Gorge. We quickly spread out and the desperate last search for the pigeon was on. Luckily we finally spotted two Spinifex's Pigeons as they were quietly feeding on some seeds in a little gully. They were used to people so we all got excellent close looks and many photographs of these very long-crested handsome birds. Our field breakfast was well deserved and it certainly tasted better after seeing the morning targets! On the way back to Alice we had a short roadside stop, where we managed to locate a Slaty-backed Thornbill while closer to town the last walk of the morning produced more Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoos, a female Redthroat, several Southern Whiteface and a female Pied Honeyeater as well. This was followed by lunch in town and a visit to the botanical garden where a big old bower of the Western Bowerbird was seen and of course the landlord was at home too!



The stunning Spinifex Pigeon made us work hard this year but it was voted the second best bird of the trip (János Oláh)!

It was time to leave for our next destination so we started our drive south. Our first stop of the afternoon was at the Redbank Waterhole which is an amazing area with spreading river red gum trees along the Hugh River and even in the dry season there is some waterholes left. On the drive into the camping area we saw Black-shouldered Kite, Black-breasted Buzzard, Mulga Parrot and Crimson Chat. Our timing could not have been better as right after we arrived to the mostly dry riverbed and stepped out of the car we heard the raucous call of the Pink or Major Mitchell's Cockatoo and saw a pair majestically flying in the riverbed and landing in front of us to have a sip of water in the heat of the day. It was absolutely magical!

The surrounding waterholes were very busy with flock after flock of Budgerigars coming down to have a quick drink before quickly flying up to the tops of the gum trees along the watercourse. There were also Little Corellas, Galahs, Cockatiels, a flock of 80 Masked Woodswallows, big numbers of Black-faced Woodswallows as well as hundreds of Zebra Finches. We left this interesting area behind and continued south towards Eildunda, which was our final destination for the day. We arrived to the flat, stony, gibber like plain near the roadhouse just as the sun was setting and luckily Terry spotted a Cinnamon Quail-thrush from the road so after some strategic positioning and a little bit of playback we were soon treated with spectacular

looks at this much sought-after bird of the desert! This was indeed a truly fitting final to another great birding day in the Red Centre!



Major Mitchell's Cockatoo (left, Mike Watson) and Budgerigar (right, János Oláh) at the Redbank Waterhole.



Cinnamon Quail-thrush near Eridunda (János Oláh).

The following day we spent the best part of the morning back on the stony plain at Eridunda. We arrived at dawn to the edge of the plain and heard the distant calls of Chiming Wedgebill but somehow they eluded us despite much effort. We decided to cover as much ground on the plain as possible in search of Inland Dotterel. We spread out a fair bit though always kept within each other's sight. We saw a party of White-winged Fairywrens, a distant Cinnamon Quail-thrush and fly-over Budgerigars. We covered a few miles

when suddenly a 'moving stone' rolled out from a little thorny bush and it was an Inland Dotterel. Those further away could only hear as János shouted: 'nobody moves, Inland Dotterel!' We all stopped and carefully moved closer to this fantastic bird. Being calm and cautious payed off as we could watch it for as long as we wanted and some of us even managed a few decent images. Inland Dotterel was the winner of the 'Bird of the trip' competition at the end of the tour! On the walk back to our cars we had excellent looks at several Banded Whitefaces. Back in Eirdunda we had an Australian Hobby by the petrol station and we soon started our journey towards the famous Ayers Rock. We had a few short stops on the three hours journey adding White-backed Swallow to our list. We also had superb close views of Wedge-tailed Eagle on a roadside Red Kangaroo carcass and a superb Major's Mitchell Cockatoo was also seen. We arrived to Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park around midday. After a fine lunch we still had some birding time and spent exploring the sand dunes in search of the virtually unknown desert race of the Striated Grasswren which has been proposed as Sandhill Grasswren *Amytornis oweni* – following the three-way split of Striated Grasswren - and has been recorded around the sunset viewing area near Uluru, but not many people who look there actually succeed - too many tourists and you aren't allowed off the track, so not an ideal spot. So we tried around the airport in similar habitat but the few hours walk only produced some Variegated Fairywrens. Still about an hour before sunset we were back to the Ayers Rock.



Ayers Rock – Uluru in the Kata Tjuta National Park (János Oláh).

This impressive monolith is often called the largest in the world however, Uluru is only the world's second-largest free-standing single, large rock. Its circumference is just over 9km, and it rises 349 metres above the surrounding plain. Only one-seventh of the rock is visible above the ground. The rest lies beneath the ground. The largest rock in the whole world is Mt Augustus (Burringurrah, as it is known by Wajarri Yamatji traditional owners), in Western Australia, located inland, east of Carnarvon, and about 850km north of Perth. It is more than twice the size of Ayers Rock. It rises 717 metres above the stony desert, and extends for a length of 8km - almost the entire circumference of Uluru. It does not attract the same tourist numbers because it contrasts less dramatically with its surroundings, and does not have the colour changes that Ayers Rock displays during the days and seasons. There is some dispute as to whether Mt Augustus is a monolith or a monocline. A monocline is an exposed slab of rock which belongs to the layer of rock underneath. However, technicalities aside, it would seem that both Mt Augustus and Ayers Rock have a claim for the title of the world's largest rock. We drove around the impressive rock and photographed it from all angles. We saw a Peregrine Falcon perched in one of the little crevices. We were back to the sunset viewing carpark for sunset. On the way out of the National Park we also had excellent views of the Olgas. The Olgas is a set of impressive domes to the west of Ayers Rock and believed to originate from a similar time as Ayers Rock. They are comprised of 36 formations, although they are thought to have been one huge piece of rock, much like Ayers, that has weathered over millions of years.



Sunset at the Olgas near Ayers Rock (János Oláh).

We had another morning at Eralunda before we were heading back to the airport. This time we had a windless morning and it did take us long to track down a pair of Chiming Wedgebills. These rather unique birds gave us superb views singing on the top of dry bushes. Other notable birds were two Orange Chats and several White-browed Babblers. On our drive back to the airport we had two very productive stops. The first one was when we located a family party of Ground Cuckooshrikes. This often hard to find bird gave us excellent looks and the juvenile birds were very tame. Our second stop was a good one to pick up some missing birds like Chestnut-rumped and Yellow-rumped Thornbills plus more good looks at Crimson Chat, Southern and Banded Whiteface. There was nothing else for us just to say goodbye to the Red Centre but

we were taking plenty of great memories with us and already excited about the special birds of the Top End! Our flight got into Darwin just as the sun was setting.



Ground Cuckooshrike was seen on our last day in the Red Center (János Oláh).

The second part of the tour, birding in the famous Top End had just started and our first morning saw us at Buffalo Creek near Darwin. The tide situation was not ideal so our hope for the elusive Chestnut Rail was quickly ruined. We could not complain however as we had absolutely magical views of a Rainbow Pitta. This is certainly one of the star birds of the Top End as this is the best place to see this localised pitta. We could watch it feeding along the track allowing close access to the delight of the photographers! Certainly a tour highlight! We also had our first encounters with Orange-footed Scrufowl, Forest Kingfisher, Great Bowerbird, Green-backed Gerygone, Red-headed Myzomela and Rose-crowned Fruit Dove. Our next place was the shrinking waters of the Knuckey Lagoon area where we had our field breakfast with a fine selection of waterbirds like Rajah Shelduck, Green Pygmy Goose, Royal Spoonbills, Pied Herons, Brolga and a selection of waders like Australian Pratincole, Comb-crested Jacana, Black-fronted Dotterel and migrants like Marsh Sandpiper and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. After breakfast we drove to the famous Kakadu National Park.



Rainbow Pitta is one of the top iconic birds of the Northern Territory and it was seen well on our first morning (János Oláh).

We arrived at Cooida in the afternoon to embark on the famous Yellow Water Cruise, which was indeed a unforgettable experience with a lot of birds and 'Salties' alias Saltwater (Estuarine) Crocodiles. In the last three hours of the day we cruised along the Yellow Water Billabong, Kakadu's most famous wetland. It is located at the end of Jim Jim Creek which is a tributary of the South Alligator River. The river system - the largest in Kakadu - contains extensive wetlands that include river channels, floodplains and backwater swamps. In this varied habitat we saw a whole range of exciting birds such as Plumed Whistling Duck, Jabiru or Black-necked Stork, Rufous Night Heron, White-bellied Sea Eagle, Purple Swamphen, Bush Stone Curlew and Australian Pratincole. The two top stars of the cruise however were the tiny Little Kingfisher and the mighty Black Falcon. When the cruise finished it was already sunset and after a fine dinner we headed to our accommodation. We were back to the park early next morning and were heading for the remote Gunlom location situated on the edge of the Arnhem Land Escarpment. Our prime target was three of the star birds of the park: Black-banded Fruit Dove, Chestnut-quilled Rock-Pigeon and White-lined Honeyeater. This area used to be the most accessible location to see the distinctly scarce White-throated Grasswren but the inadequate and absolutely inexplicable fire management cleared it off from this area as they live in old spinifex – minimum 6 years old – tussock covered rocky plateaus which cannot be found nowadays because of burning management. As soon as we arrived at Gunlom we started our climb up to the escarpment before it got very hot. We spent several hours up on the rocky plateau but despite of much effort – especially from Mike who covered a steep slope – we could not locate any of the pigeons though we had superb looks at the rare White-lined Honeyeater. Other star birds we managed to see here were the Sandstone Shrikethrush and the sandstone race of the Helmeted Friarbird. The temperature was rising so we decided to descend to the carpark. In the form of a 'black and white missile' a Banded Fruit Dove flew across but nobody got a decent look at it. In the heat of the day we had a few short stops along the road which produced a large flock of Red-tailed Black Cockatoos, colourful Mistletoebird and Dusky Myzomela.



A Saltwater Crocodile on the Yellow Water Cruise (Mike Watson).



A Black-banded Fruit Dove at Nourlangie Rock (Mike Watson).

In the afternoon we arrived at Nourlangie Rock, which is a famous site in the Kakadu National Park because of its aboriginal paintings. The shelters contain several impressive paintings that deal with Aboriginal mythology but for us the vegetation in the narrow gullies amongst the rock which was interesting as they are often visited by the fruit doves. We were not disappointed as after only half an hour we located this fine looking endemic which can only be seen in the Kakadu National Park. After a bit of chasing we all got good looks at this mega bird while supporting cast included a Blue-winged Kookabura, Pacific Emerald Dove and Peregrine Falcon. Early next morning we were back at the Arnhem Land Escarpment still in the search of the last remaining target the Chestnut-quilled Rock Pigeon. Already as dawn broke we were in position to scan the surrounding hills. Time was ticking away when suddenly a distant Chestnut-quilled Rock Pigeon was spotted on the top of a distinct hill. We walked closer and finally we got proper looks of these strange rock-loving birds. Actually we saw three birds and we also saw the chestnut wing patch as the birds were stretching and finally also when they glided down into a gorge. They like to spend most of the time on the inaccessible slopes, cliff faces on the escarpment but they do go down to feed in the morning hours. After our last main target was also in the bag we had a nice bush breakfast in a nearby dry watercourse where Red-collared Lorikeets, Red-winged Parrots and Banded-, Brown-, White-throated- and Blue-faced Honeyeaters as well as a Dusky Myzomelas were feeding on a flowering tree. It was time to leave for Pine Creek and towards Katherine. We had a brief stop at Pine Creek and Copperfield Dam as well in the heat of the day where we secured great looks at Hooded Parrots as they were sheltering in a shady canopy, Great Bowerbird, a family party of Red-backed Fairywrens, White-winged Triller, Varied Sitella and Australasian Figbirds. Finally we arrived at Katherine in the late afternoon and after checking into our hotel we drove to a wood nearby. We were searching in the grassy patches for the localised and rather scarce Chestnut-backed Buttonquail but we only found Brown Quails, an Eastern Koel, Sacred Kingfishers, Pied Butcherbirds, Grey Shrike-thrush and two Spotted Nightjars at dusk.



A selection of drinking finches at Fergusson River: Long-tailed Finches (top left), Masked Finches (bottom left) and Gouldian Finches (right) (János Oláh).



Male Hooded Parrot drinking by the Fergusson River (János Oláh).

The following day we were searching for probably the most-wanted bird of the Top End: Gouldian Finch. We drove to the Fergusson River early in the morning and positioned ourselves by a waterhole. This place was very busy and we had a wonderful selection of birds coming and going all the time. The best of all however was the flock of about 40 Gouldian Finches with several lovely males of both the black-headed and red-headed form. We also had many Long-tailed Finches, Masked Finches, Double-barred Finches, Crimson Finches, Little Friarbirds, Rufous-throated Honeyeaters, three Northern Rosellas and a large flock of 40 Hooded Parrots. It was an amazing morning and a great success!

After we had proper looks at all the finches we were hoping for we drove back towards Katherine but stopped on the way to check out another location for the elusive buttonquail. This time we got lucky and flushed a Chestnut-backed Buttonquail. We tried to find it on the ground but never really managed to, however, we all got great looks after a few attempts. Happy with our excellent morning we were heading south of Katherine towards Mataranka. This area used to be the place to see the Red Goshawk but there have been no confirmed sightings in the last two years and obviously the birds have moved away. We spent some time around the traditional site but later we drove to an area where we have previously seen the rare Northern Shrike-tit. The last two hours were spent in search of this enigmatic bird but without any success. We saw lots of birds we saw before and even our first Yellow-tinted Honeyeater, a Grey Shrikethrush and our only Olive-backed Oriole of the tour. We also spent some time before dinner to look for owls around the campsite but it was an extremely bright full moon night and nothing was calling at all. On our way back to Katherine at night however the leading car had a Southern Boobook sitting in the middle of the road.

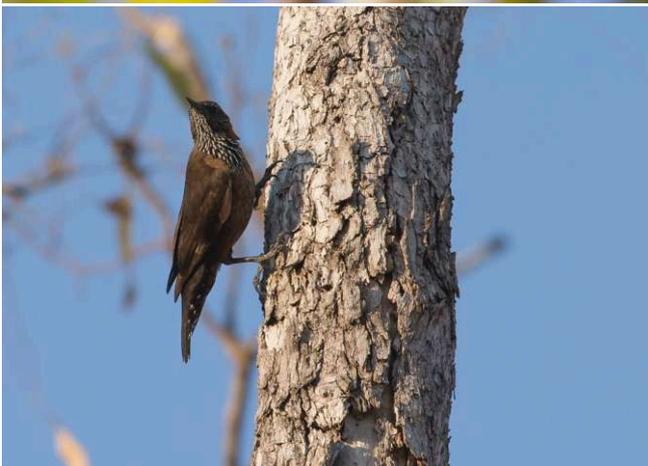


Wedge-tailed Eagle (left, János Oláh) and a fine Blue-winged Kookaburra (right, Mike Watson).

Next morning we decided to try once more for the elusive and rare Northern Shrike-tit before setting out towards the Victoria River. Driving to a nearby location from Katherine we started our random search in suitable looking habitat. Our first walk through mature woodland produced a day-roosting Tawny Frogmouth, two Black-tailed Treecreepers (finally, after several days searching), a fine Pallid Cuckoo, which was also the only one of the tour and Varied Lorikeets. On our second walk we only covered about a few hundred meters when suddenly we heard the shrike-tit and after a few nervous seconds a pair landed above our heads on an old mature gum tree and allowed great looks before they disappeared again without a trace. Absolutely amazing! After this success we visited a dry riverbed where some remnant waterholes attracted lots of birds and we added a few new birds to our list like Bar-breasted Honeyeater, White-throated Gerygone, Striated Pardalote, a flock of 40 Apostlebirds and about 15 Gouldian Finches mixed in a flock of finches.

Just before midday we left Katherine for Victoria River and the heat of the day was spent driving. We arrived to the Victoria River Roadhouse in the early afternoon and after a tasty meal we were heading into the cane grass habitat where we were hoping to find one of our main target at this location, the handsome Purple-crowned Fairywren. Crossing the river we spotted Plumed Whistling Ducks, a fly over Collared Sparrowhawk and our only Great Cormorant of the tour. The riverside cane grass habitat finally gave us several prolonged views of the Purple-crowned Fairywren. There must have been a territorial dispute as we saw two males very high up on a tree – eye level with us as we were standing on the bridge – and they were rather oblivious

of us, busily chasing each other. In total we saw eight fairywrens in a short time. Although the sun was losing its power there was still some time before sunset, so we quickly drove to the nearby escarpment and walked up to a viewpoint where we were scanning the cliff-face in hope for the localised White-quilled Rock Pigeon. Amazingly our luck was still holding as three very distant pigeons were found and although it took some time for everybody to see them we scored on this rarely seen species. This is the paler and smaller *boothi* race here in the western part of the Northern Territory. It was yet again a great final to an action packed day with some of the rarest brds of the Top End.



The rare Northern Shrike-tit (top) and the old gum tree where we managed to find it (bottom right). Black-tailed Treecreeper gave us several great looks at this location as well (Mike Watson).



A male Purple-crowned Fairywren at Victoria River (Mike Watson).

We drove to Timber Creek the following morning admiring the amazing orange full moon just before sunrise. We were looking for finches and mannikins and drove straight to Policeman's Point a few kilometres west of town. We soon located smaller flocks of finches and mannikins and they all aggregated into one large flock at the end. We estimated about 300 Chestnut-breasted Mannikins, over a 100 Yellow-rumped Mannikins and up to a 110 Gouldian Finches. It was quite a flock! A quick field breakfast was followed by a visit to the creek itself where we found a pair of Buff-sided Robins together with hundreds of flying foxes. It was a quick success and by mid morning we were on our way back towards Victoria River and then onto Katherine. We had a few stops to break up the long journey and had a fine selection of birds though there was nothing new for us. We saw an Australian Hobby, Cockatiels, Varied Lorikeets, Red-backed Fairywrens, Banded Honeyeater, Red-browed Pardelote, Weebill, White-throated Gerygone, Varied Sitella, Paperbark Flycatcher and Masked Finch. Unfortunately the much hoped for Australian Bustard did not show up alive but we found the freshly hit dead male close to Victoria River, just where János has seen it a few days earlier. It was a very sad sight to see this huge regal bird on the roadside. When we got back to Katherine in the late afternoon we decided to search for bustards around the airfield but despite much effort we had no joy at this location either. We did see Brown Quails and many Red-winged Parrots. In the evening we met Mike Reed, well-known local birder Katherine birder and he suggested a few locations where we could try to see bustard the following day.

There was one more special pigeon on the Top End list we had not come across yet and indeed it is getting less and less common throughout its range, this is the Partridge Pigeon. It used to be easy to see in the Kakadu National Park but somehow with all the burning they seem to be disappearing from the park and are definitely getting more and more rare. So this morning we drove out of Katherine and to a gorge where we were hoping to find this pigeon. We got to the location and after a bit of search we managed to find as many as 25 Partridge Pigeons. We got superb looks of these pigeon as well and completing the list of special pigeons of the Top End. Additional bonus was a tame pair of Silver-backed Butcherbirds.



Red-browed Pardalote on the Buntine Highway (left) and the localised Yellow-rumped Mannikin (right) at Timber Creek (János Oláh).



Partridge Pigeon is definitely getting more and more scarce across the Top End (János Oláh).

After the pigeon excursion we were back to Katherine as Mike Reed called us with news that he found four Oriental Plovers near his home as well as some Australian Bustards. Although we were hoping to see the plovers in the Darwin area you can never be sure about migrants so we kindly accepted his offer of showing these special birds to us before we left Katherine. We drove to his lovely home and he took us out to a nearby paddock where we quickly found the Oriental Plovers standing in the shade of some small trees. They allowed close approach and we got excellent looks. Three Australian Bustards were also located so indeed it was a great help from Mike!



Oriental Plover (top) and Australian Bustard (bottom) were seen near Katherine (János Oláh).

We reluctantly left the Katherine area behind and certainly this fantastic area gave us really top quality birding in the Top End! We were heading back towards Darwin for the very final leg of the tour. Our first birding stop was north of Pine Creek, where Black-breasted Buzzard and Brolgas were seen. We also had a short stop by the Adelaide River where we finally had perched views of Varied Lorikeets and a Bar-breasted Honeyeater, which was followed by a tasty ice cream! Eventually we rolled into Darwin just as it was getting dark. Our first day in the Darwin area started at Nightcliff at a wader roosting area but the tide was so high that the usual roosting area was also under water. We did manage to find a superb Beach Stone-Curlew, however and it was definitely a great bird to see! Our next port of call was the Buffalo Creek area where we had Pied and Sooty Oystercatchers, a flock of 200 Great Knots, Gull-billed and Little Terns, Varied Triller and Canary White-eye. Later we made a short visit to the Knuckey Lagoon area where we saw Hardhead, Rajah Shelducks, Royal Spoonbill, Brolgas, White-headed Stilts, Marsh Sandpipers and Australian Pratincoles. After the first few hours we decided to visit the famous Botanical garden in search of owls. It used to be a regular place for Barking and Rufous Owl but the latter has not been seen recently. We spent about two hours checking all the suitable roosting places when finally a pair of Barking Owls was found in a stand of thick palm trees. They were not very happy but gave excellent looks and we left them in peace after a few photographs were taken.



A day-roosting Barking Owl (left, Mike Watson) and the fantastic Beach Stone-Curlew (right) near Darwin (János Oláh).

In the afternoon we made a short visit to the Adelaide River Bridge, which is one of the best place to see the rather shy Magrove Golden Whistler. Along the tidal river they live in thick vegetation and just as usual it took some time for us to track it down and see it well! We also picked up a few additional birds like Brush Cuckoo, Arafura Fantail and Large-billed Gerygone. For the final hours of the day we drove to the nearby Fogg Dam which is one of the most well-known location for waterbirds. When we arrived to area the birds were concentrated just to a very few patches of shrinking water and most of the area was dry. We saw hundreds of Glossy Ibises, Pied Herons and various other egrets. It was great birding and two Buff-banded Rails were also new to our list. We stayed until dusk and listened for nightbirds along the access road but apart from a distant Barking Owl and a few Large-tailed Nightjars it was quiet. The next day was our last full day birding on the tour so we planned it very carefully to fit all the birds we still wanted to see. We returned to the Botanical Garden pre-dawn if we can locate any Rufous Owls but the area was silent so we quickly moved to East Point where we had a fine selection of roosting waders along the coast. We had our best looks of the wintering waders this morning which included 300 Great Knot, a Red Knot, many Grey-tailed Tattlers, Ruddy Turnstones, Greater Sand Plovers, Red-necked Stints, Black-tailed Godwits and Terek Sandpipers. Other notable birds along the coast were Brown Boobies, Greater and Lesser Crested Terns, Gull-billed and Little Terns and White-winged Tern. After the wader session we visited a nearby mangrove area where we picked up Collared Kingfisher, Red-headed Myzomela and Black Butcherbird though we could not enter the actual

forest as the tide was high. From here we drove back to Nightcliff where we found no less than 58 Oriental Plovers in amongst the 30 Pacific Golden Plovers and 200 Greater Sand Plovers. The tide was quickly going down by this point so we were back to the mangroves of Buffalo Creek and this time managed to locate the elusive and skulking Chestnut Rail plus we also had a few Grey Whistlers, Green Orioles, Mangrove Gerygone for some and Canary White-eyes. It was hot so we decided to visit a shady spot for the middle of the day and drove to the Howard Springs Reserve. The huge trees gave excellent shelter though it was still very hot and humid. We picked up two new birds though despite the heat, a fine Little Bronze Cuckoo and the distinct *parvula* race of the Little Shrikethrush. Later we drove to the Elizabeth River, where we were hoping to track down Mangrove Robin and our hopes were quickly realized in a thick stand of mangrove. The tide was coming up really quickly and our search for the Great-billed Heron was quickly over when no mudflat was visible along the mangroves. It was getting late anyway so we drove back to Darwin and had our last dinner out on the Stoke Hills Wharf overlooking the bay. This was a great place for a final dinner!



The elusive Chestnut Rail was seen at Buffalo Creek near Darwin (János Oláh).

On our last morning we decided to try yet another mangrove site if we can connect with any other mangrove specialities. This time we had about an hour of daylight before the tide came up high and as we could not enter the mangrove forest properly we had much better looks of the Mangrove Gerygone and also a fine Mangrove Fantail. All the other birds were just repeats like Canary White-eye and Black Butcherbird. The last three hours of the morning was spent at the various parts of the Knuckey Lagoon complex to search for a possible migrant Little Curlew but the only new bird we found was Horsfield's Bushlark. The wetland area at Holmes Jungle Reserve was dry but our last woodland walk produced another look at Rainbow Pitta. It was a great bird to finish this fantastic action-packed tour with a long list of great birds. All was left for us is to drive to the airport where our Birdquest party scattered to different directions! This was a pioneering trip for us but certainly we found most of the special birds and had a great time birding Australia's Northern Territory!



We had superb looks at Inland Dotterel at Eralunda and it was voted the 'Bird of the trip' (Mike Watson).

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).

Conservation threat categories and information are taken from *Threatened Birds of the World*, BirdLife International's magnificent book on the sad status of the rarest 10% of the world's avifauna, and updates on the BirdLife website: <http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/home>

CR = Critically Endangered, **EN** = Endangered, **VU** = Vulnerable, **NT** = Near Threatened

Magpie Goose *Anseranas semipalmata* ◊ Hundreds were seen around Darwin at the various wetlands.

Plumed Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna eytoni* ◊ Common on the Yellow Water Cruise but also seen at Victoria River.

Wandering Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna arcuata* ◊ Good numbers were seen around Darwin.

Black Swan *Cygnus atratus* ◊ It was only seen on the sewage ponds of Alice Springs.

Raja Shelduck *Tadorna radjah* ◊ Regularly encountered on the various wetlands across the Top End.

Pink-eared Duck *Malacorhynchus membranaceus* ◊ We counted about 350 birds on the sewage ponds of Alice.

Maned Duck (Australian Wood D) *Chenonetta jubata* ◇ We counted about 60 birds on the sewage ponds of Alice.

Green Pygmy Goose *Nettapus pulchellus* ◇ Common across the Top End. 240 were seen on the Knuckey Lagoon.

Pacific Black Duck *Anas superciliosa* Regularly encountered on the various wetlands across the Top End.

Grey Teal *Anas gracilis* ◇ We estimated about 400 birds on the sewage ponds of Alice. See note.

Hardhead *Aythya australis* ◇ About 30 birds were seen on the sewage ponds of Alice and a single bird at Darwin.

Orange-footed Scrubfowl *Megapodius reinwardt* ◇ It was regularly seen around Darwin.

Brown Quail *Coturnix ypsilophora* ◇ We had several encounters with this species around Katherine.

Australasian Grebe *Tachybaptus novaehollandiae* It was seen around Alice and also across the Top End.

Hoary-headed Grebe *Poliiocephalus poliocephalus* ◇ We counted about 200 birds on the sewage ponds of Alice.

Black-necked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* ◇ We had some amazing looks at this huge bird in the Top End.

Australian White Ibis *Threskiornis moluccus* Good numbers were seen across the Top End.

Straw-necked Ibis *Threskiornis spinicollis* ◇ We saw some around Alice but it was common across the Top End.

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* A few encounters on the various wetlands across the Top End.

Royal Spoonbill *Platalea regia* ◇ Regularly encountered on the various wetlands across the Top End.

Yellow-billed Spoonbill *Platalea flavipes* ◇ It was only seen on the sewage ponds of Alice Springs.

Nankeen Night Heron (Rufous N H) *Nycticorax caledonicus* Just a few were seen across the Top End.

Striated Heron *Butorides striata* Just three were seen at the mangrove sites around Darwin.

Eastern Cattle Egret *Bubulcus coromandus* It was common on the various wetlands across the Top End. See note.

White-necked Heron (Pacific H) *Ardea pacifica* One was seen at Ormiston Gorge and singles across the Top End.

Great Egret *Ardea alba* Just a few were noted in the Top End.

Intermediate Egret *Egretta intermedia* Good numbers were seen on the various wetlands across the Top End.

Pied Heron *Egretta picata* ◇ Common across the Top End. 500 were seen on the Knuckey Lagoon.

White-faced Heron *Egretta novaehollandiae* One was seen at the Redbank Waterhole and one at Katherine.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* Small numbers were seen on the various wetlands across the Top End.

Pacific Reef Heron (Eastern Reef E) *Egretta sacra* A few were seen at the mangrove sites around Darwin.

Australian Pelican *Pelecanus conspicillatus* ◇ Good looks at several sites across the Top End.

Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster* We had some at East Point near Darwin.

Little Pied Cormorant *Microcarbo melanoleucos* A few encounters on the various wetlands across the Top End.

Little Black Cormorant *Phalacrocorax sulcirostris* A few encounters on the various wetlands across the Top End.

Australian Pied Cormorant *Phalacrocorax varius* ◇ Two were tracked down at Darwin.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* One was seen on the Victoria River.

Australasian Darter *Anhinga novaehollandiae* ◇ Regularly seen across the Top End. See note.

Eastern Osprey *Pandion cristatus* ◇ We had two sightings around Darwin. See note.

Black-shouldered Kite (Australian K) *Elanus axillaris* ◇ Three sightings near Alice and one at Fogg Damn. See note.

Black-breasted Buzzard *Hamirostra melanosternon* ◇ One was seen near Alice and one near Adelaide River.

Pacific Baza *Aviceda subcristata* We had a few sightings in the Kakadu National Park.

Wedge-tailed Eagle *Aquila audax* ◇ Some excellent close views on the roadside near Uluru and also near Katherine.

Brown Goshawk *Accipiter fasciatus* It was commonly encountered across the Top End.

Collared Sparrowhawk *Accipiter cirrocephalus* One on a nest at Ochre Pits and one at Victoria River.

Spotted Harrier *Circus assimilis* ◇ (NL) One was seen close to Alice Springs by some.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans* A very common bird throughout the tour.

Whistling Kite *Haliastur sphenurus* A very common bird throughout the tour.

Brahminy Kite *Haliastur Indus* Just two sightings near Darwin.

White-bellied Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster* Our best views were on the Yellow Water Cruise.

Australian Bustard *Ardeotis australis* ◇ A roadkill was seen at Victoria River but finally tracked down near Katherine.

Buff-banded Rail *Gallirallus philippensis* Two were seen at Fogg Damn near Darwin.

Baillon's Crake *Porzana pusilla* Excellent looks at one on the sewage ponds of Alice Springs.

Chestnut Rail *Eulabeornis castaneiventris* ◇ We had unsuitable tide conditions but still saw one near Darwin.

Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio* A singleton was seen on the Yellow Water Cruise.

Black-tailed Nativehen *Tribonyx ventralis* ◇ Just two were seen on the sewage ponds of Alice.

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra* We estimated about 100 birds on the sewage ponds of Alice. See note.

Brolga *Grus rubicund* ◇ We had excellent looks of them on several occasion in the Top End.

Chestnut-backed Buttonquail *Turnix castanotus* ◇ One was seen near Katherine.

Bush Stone-Curlew (Bush Thick-knee) *Burhinus grallarius* ◇ One was seen in Kakadu NP and other near Darwin.



Pacific Baza in the Kakadu National Park (János Oláh).

- Beach Stone-Curlew (Beach Thick-knee) *Esacus magnirostris*** ◇ Brilliant looks at this magnificent bird near Darwin.
- Pied Oystercatcher (Australian Pied O) *Haematopus longirostris*** ◇ A single bird was near Darwin.
- Sooty Oystercatcher *Haematopus fuliginosus*** ◇ A group of four was seen amongst roosting waders near Darwin.
- White-headed Stilt *Himantopus leucocephalus*** ◇ We saw many around Alice as well as in the Top End. See note.
- Red-necked Avocet *Recurvirostra novaehollandiae*** ◇ We counted 143 birds on the sewage ponds of Alice Springs.
- Masked Lapwing *Vanellus miles*** ◇ Commonly seen throughout the tour. See note.
- Red-kneed Dotterel *Erythrogonyx cinctus*** ◇ It was only seen on the sewage ponds of Alice Springs.
- Inland Dotterel *Peltohyas australis*** ◇ We had amazing looks at this fantastic bird near Erldunda.
- Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*** A few were seen near Darwin.
- Red-capped Plover *Charadrius ruficapillus*** ◇ We had great looks on the sewage ponds of Alice Springs.
- Mongolian Plover (M Sand P) *Charadrius [mongolus] mongolus*** Two were seen at East Point. See note.
- Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultia*** Up to 200 were seen on wader roost around Darwin.
- Oriental Plover *Charadrius veredus*** ◇ We had amazing views of four near Katherine and a flock of 58 at Darwin.



Comb-crested Jacana (left) and Bush Stone-Curlew (right) in the Top End (János Oláh).

Black-fronted Dotterel *Euseyornis melanops* ◇ We had good looks of this one both around Alice and in the Top End.

Comb-crested Jacana *Irediparra gallinacea* ◇ Regularly encountered on the various wetlands across the Top End.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* Just three were seen at East Point near Darwin. See note.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica* (LO) Two were seen at Buffalo Creek.

Eurasian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* A few were seen near Darwin.

Eastern Curlew (Far Eastern C) *Numenius madagascariensis* ◇ Three were seen near Darwin.

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis* A single bird was seen at Alice sewage ponds and several across the Top End.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* Five birds were seen at Alice sewage ponds and several across the Top End.

Grey-tailed Tattler *Tringa brevipes* We had good looks at this bird at East Point.

Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* Ten were seen at East Point near Darwin.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* Three birds were seen at Alice sewage ponds and lots across the Top End.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* A few were recorded at the various 'wader roosts' near Darwin.

Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris* Up to 300 were counted at various 'wader roosts' near Darwin.

Red Knot *Calidris canutus* A single bird was spotted amongst the previous species at East Point near Darwin.

Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis* Five birds were seen at Alice sewage ponds and several across the Top End.

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *Calidris acuminata* Fifteen were seen at Alice sewage ponds and more across the Top End.

Australian Pratincole *Stiltia isabella* ◇ We had two birds at Knuckey Lagoon and one on the Yellow Water Cruise.

Silver Gull *Chroicocephalus novaehollandiae* ◇ It was common along the coast at Darwin.

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* We had two encounters along the coast at Darwin.

Greater Crested Tern *Thalasseus bergii* Small numbers were seen along the coast at Darwin.

Lesser Crested Tern *Thalasseus bengalensis* A singleton was seen at East Point near Darwin.

Little Tern *Sternula albifrons* Small numbers were seen along the coast at Darwin.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* Small numbers were seen along the coast at Darwin.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrid* It was relatively common in the Top End and also on the sewage ponds at Alice.

White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* A singleton was seen at East Point near Darwin.

Rock Dove (introduced) (Feral Pigeon) *Columba livia* It was observed on a few occasions.

Spotted Dove (introduced) (S Turtle-D) *Spilopelia chinensis* We had several around Alice Springs.

Pacific Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps longirostris* We had three sightings of single birds at Buffalo Creek and Kakadu.

Common Bronzewing *Phaps chalcoptera* ◇ Large numbers were seen at a drinking place near Alice.

Crested Pigeon *Ocyphaps lophotes* ◇ It was common around Alice and we had a few in the Top End.

Spinifex Pigeon *Geophaps plumifera* ◇ After some hard work we managed to see this superb bird near Alice Springs.

Partridge Pigeon *Geophaps smithii* ◇ Finally a group of 25 was seen near Pine Creek.

Chestnut-quilled Rock Pigeon *Petrophassa rufipennis* ◇ Three birds were seen on the Arnhem Land Escarpment.

White-quilled Rock Pigeon *Petrophassa albipennis* ◇ The western *boothi* race were seen near Victoria River.

Diamond Dove *Geopelia cuneata* ◇ We had seen several around Alice Springs and also south of Katherine.

Peaceful Dove *Geopelia placida* It was common all across the Top End. See note.

Bar-shouldered Dove *Geopelia humeralis* Another very common bird across the Top End.

Black-banded Fruit Dove *Ptilinopus alligator* ◇ We had good looks at this specialty in Kakadu National Park.

Rose-crowned Fruit Dove *Ptilinopus regina* ◇ Excellent looks at this stunner near Darwin.

Torresian Imperial Pigeon *Ducula spilorrhoa* ◇ It was very common in the Darwin area. See note.

Pheasant Coucal *Centropus phasianinus* We had several sightings in the Top End.

Eastern Koel (Australian K) *Eudynamis orientalis* Regularly heard and singletons were also seen. See note.

Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx basalus* ◇ We saw three individuals near Alice Springs.

Little Bronze Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx minutillus* ◇ One was seen at Howard Springs Reserve near Darwin.

Pallid Cuckoo *Cacomantis pallidus* ◇ Our best looks were along the Central Arnhem Highway near Katherine.

Brush Cuckoo *Cacomantis variolosus* We had two sightings in the Top End.

Barking Owl *Ninox connivens* ◇ Excellent looks at two day-roosting birds in Darwin.

Southern Boobook *Ninox boobook* ◇ Two encounters on night-drives but not for everybody.

Tawny Frogmouth *Podargus strigoides* ◇ We had nice views of one along the Central Arnhem Highway at daytime.

Spotted Nightjar *Eurostopodus argus* ◇ One was seen near Alice by some and two more near Katherine.

Large-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus macrurus* One was tracked down in the Kakadu National Park.

Oriental Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis* It was regularly seen across the Top End.



A pair of Cockatiels and the colourful Rose-crowned Fruit Dove (János Oláh).

- Blue-winged Kookaburra *Dacelo leachii*** ◇ This large and noisy bird was seen throughout the Top End.
- Forest Kingfisher *Todiramphus macleayii*** Good numbers were noted around Darwin.
- Collared Kingfisher *Todiramphus chloris*** Just two were seen in the mangroves near Darwin.
- Sacred Kingfisher *Todiramphus sanctus*** It was regularly seen throughout the tour.
- Red-backed Kingfisher *Todiramphus pyrrhopygius*** ◇ We had several encounters around Alice Springs.
- Azure Kingfisher *Ceyx azureus*** It was common on the Yellow Water Cruise.
- Little Kingfisher *Ceyx pusillus*** ◇ One was seen very well on the Yellow Water Cruise.
- Rainbow Bee-eater *Merops ornatus*** It was regularly seen throughout the tour.
- Nankeen Kestrel (Australian K) *Falco cenchroides*** It was relatively common in the Alice Springs area.
- Brown Falcon *Falco berigora*** Several were seen throughout the tour.
- Australian Hobby *Falco longipennis*** We saw it at Simpson's Gap, Erldunda, Buntine Highway and Katherine.
- Black Falcon *Falco subniger*** ◇ One was seen on the Yellow Water Cruise in Kakadu National Park.
- Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrines*** We saw one perched on Ayers Rock and another at Nourlangi Rock.
- Red-tailed Black Cockatoo *Calyptorhynchus banksii*** ◇ This great bird was common in the Top End.
- Major Mitchell's Cockatoo (Pink C) *Lophochroa leadbeateri*** ◇ We had two sightings near Alice.
- Galah *Eolophus roseicapilla*** It was common all along the tour.
- Little Corella *Cacatua sanguine*** ◇ It was regularly seen throughout the tour. See note.
- Sulphur-crested Cockatoo *Cacatua galerita*** It was most common in Kakadu National Park.
- Cockatiel *Nymphicus hollandicus*** ◇ Excellent looks of this stunning parrot at several locations throughout.
- Red-collared Lorikeet *Trichoglossus rubritorquis*** ◇ It was a very common bird in the Top End. See note.
- Varied Lorikeet *Psitteuteles versicolor*** ◇ After many flight views we saw it well at Adelaide River.
- Port Lincoln Ringneck (P L Parrot) *Barnardius [zonarius] zonarius*** ◇ It was common around Alice. See note.
- Northern Rosella *Platycercus venustus*** ◇ We had three sightings of this scarce bird in the Top End.
- Mulga Parrot *Psephotus varius*** ◇ Three pairs were seen near Alice Springs.
- Hooded Parrot *Psephotus dissimilis*** ◇ We had superb looks near Pine Creek and at the Fergusson River.
- Bourke's Parrot *Neopsephotus bourkii*** ◇ We had excellent looks of this crepuscular drinker near Alice.
- Budgerigar *Melopsittacus undulatus*** ◇ It was common this year around Alice with flocks up to 300 birds.
- Red-winged Parrot *Aprosmictus erythropterus*** ◇ This lovely parrot was commonly seen across the Top End.
- Rainbow Pitta *Pitta iris*** ◇ We had great looks at this special bird near Darwin on two occasions.



A pair of Hooded Parrots near Fergusson River (János Oláh).

- Western Bowerbird** *Ptilonorhynchus guttatus* ◇ Several sightings near Alice including a bower as well. See note.
- Great Bowerbird** *Chlamydera nuchalis* ◇ It was regularly seen across the Top End.
- Black-tailed Treecreeper** *Climacteris melanurus* ◇ Finally it was tracked down along the Central Arnhem Highway.
- Variiegated Fairywren** *Malurus lamberti* ◇ Several great looks around Alice Springs.
- Splendid Fairywren** *Malurus splendens* ◇ We had splendid looks around Alice on several occasions.
- Purple-crowned Fairywren** *Malurus coronatus* ◇ We had about 8 birds along the Victoria River.
- Red-backed Fairywren** *Malurus melanocephalus* ◇ regularly seen in grassy habitat across the Top End.
- White-winged Fairywren** *Malurus leucopterus* ◇ Several family parties were seen near Alice Springs.
- Rufous-crowned Emu-wren** *Stipiturus ruficeps* ◇ This skulker gave us fantastic views finally near Alice.
- Dusky Grasswren** *Amytornis purnelli* ◇ It was virtually the first bird on the tour near Alice Springs!
- Dusky Myzomela** *Myzomela obscura* ◇ We had a few sightings in the Top End.
- Red-headed Myzomela** *Myzomela erythrocephala* ◇ This mangrove bird was seen several times near Darwin.
- Pied Honeyeater** *Certhionyx variegates* ◇ A female was seen near Desert Park in Alice Springs.
- Banded Honeyeater** *Cissomela pectoralis* ◇ Great looks at this handsome bird in the north.
- Brown Honeyeater** *Lichmera indistinct* ◇ One of the most common honeyeaters across the Top End.
- Little Friarbird** *Philemon citreogularis* ◇ Big numbers were seen across the Top End.
- Helmeted Friarbird** *Philemon buceroides* ◇ Small numbers were seen in the Top End - also the Arnhem Land race.
- Silver-crowned Friarbird** *Philemon argenticeps* ◇ It was a common bird throughout the Top End.
- Blue-faced Honeyeater** *Entomyzon cyanotis* ◇ It was regularly seen throughout the Top End.
- Golden-backed Honeyeater** *Melithreptus laetior* ◇ (LO) Three were seen at Ormiston Gorge. See note.
- White-throated Honeyeater** *Melithreptus albogularis* ◇ We had several sightings in the north.
- Crimson Chat** *Epthianura tricolor* ◇ We had good looks of this stunner in the Alice Springs area.
- Orange Chat** *Epthianura aurifrons* ◇ One was seen briefly on our first day and two more at Eridunda.
- Rufous-banded Honeyeater** *Conopophila albogularis* ◇ It was commonly seen near wetlands in the north.
- Rufous-throated Honeyeater** *Conopophila rufogularis* ◇ It was common in dry habitat around south of Pine Creek.
- Grey Honeyeater** *Conopophila whitei* ◇ A singleton of this rare bird was seen very well near Alice Springs.



A male Crimson Chat is definitely one of the most stunning birds of the outback (János Oláh).

- Bar-breasted Honeyeater** *Ramsayornis fasciatus* ◇ We had good looks at two at Adelaide River.
- Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater** *Acanthagenys rufogularis* ◇ The most common honeyeater in the Red Center.
- Yellow-throated Miner** *Manorina flavigula* ◇ Regularly seen around Alice and a flock of 20 near Pine Creek.
- White-fronted Honeyeater** *Purnella albifrons* ◇ Just two were seen on our very first day near Alice Springs.
- White-gaped Honeyeater** *Stomiopera unicolor* ◇ It was common around Darwin.
- Singing Honeyeater** *Gavicalis virescens* ◇ It was common in the Red Center.
- Yellow-tinted Honeyeater** *Ptilotula flavescens* ◇ We had several encounters south of Kathernie.
- Grey-headed Honeyeater** *Ptilotula keartlandi* ◇ Best views and biggest concentration was at Ormiston Gorge.
- White-plumed Honeyeater** *Ptilotula penicillata* ◇ We had many good views in the Red center.
- White-lined Honeyeater** *Meliphaga albilineata* ◇ We had two on the Arnhem Land Escarpment. See note.
- Red-browed Pardalote** *Pardalotus rubricatus* ◇ One was seen at Serpentine Gorge and one near Kathernie.
- Striated Pardalote** *Pardalotus striatus* ◇ One was seen along the Central Arnhem Highway.
- Redthroat** *Pyrrholaemus brunneus* ◇ Finally a female was seen near Desert Park in Alice Springs.
- Weebill** *Smicrornis brevirostris* ◇ Several excellent looks at this tiny bird in the Top End.
- Mangrove Gerygone** *Gerygone levigaster* ◇ We had two sightings in mangroves near Darwin.
- Western Gerygone** *Gerygone fusca* ◇ We had two sightings near Alice Springs.
- Large-billed Gerygone** *Gerygone magnirostris* ◇ Our best views were at the Adelaide River.
- Green-backed Gerygone** *Gerygone chloronota* ◇ We had two sightings around Darwin.
- White-throated Gerygone** *Gerygone olivacea* ◇ We had three sightings of this handsome bird in the north.
- Inland Thornbill** *Acanthiza apicalis* ◇ We had two sightings near Alice Springs. See note.
- Chestnut-rumped Thornbill** *Acanthiza uropygialis* ◇ One was seen near the airport of Alice Springs.
- Yellow-rumped Thornbill** *Acanthiza chrysorrhoa* ◇ Two were seen near the airport of Alice Springs.
- Slaty-backed Thornbill** *Acanthiza robustirostris* ◇ This rare bird was seen at Ochre Pits near Alice Springs.
- Southern Whiteface** *Aphelocephala leucopsis* ◇ We had good looks on a few occasions around Alice Springs.
- Banded Whiteface** *Aphelocephala nigricineta* ◇ We had several encounters but our best looks were at Erldunda.
- Grey-crowned Babbler** *Pomatostomus temporalis* ◇ Just four were seen in the Red Center but it was common later.
- White-browed Babbler** *Pomatostomus superciliosus* ◇ It was regularly seen in the Red Center.
- Chiming Wedgebill** *Psophodes occidentalis* ◇ Two were tracked down near Erldunda.

Cinnamon Quail-thrush *Cinclosoma cinnamomeum* ◇ Excellent looks of this superb bird near Erdunda.
Black Butcherbird *Cracticus quoyi* ◇ Two sightings of this mangrove edge species around Darwin.
Grey Butcherbird *Cracticus torquatus* ◇ We only had two sightings in the Alice Spring area.
Silver-backed Butcherbird *Cracticus argenteus* ◇ A pair was seen very well near Pine Creek. See note.
Pied Butcherbird *Cracticus nigrogularis* ◇ It was regularly seen throughout the tour.
Australian Magpie *Gymnorhina tibicen* ◇ It was common in the Red Center but virtually absent from the Top End.
White-breasted Woodswallow *Artamus leucorhynchus* ◇ It was common across the Top End.
Masked Woodswallow *Artamus personatus* ◇ We had a flock of 80 at the Redbank Waterhole near Alice.
Black-faced Woodswallow *Artamus cinereus* ◇ It was commonly seen throughout the tour.
Little Woodswallow *Artamus minor* ◇ We had great looks around Alice and also saw it in the Top End.
Ground Cuckooshrike *Coracina maxima* ◇ A family party of this scarce bird was seen near Alice.
Black-faced Cuckooshrike *Coracina novaehollandiae* ◇ It was regularly seen throughout the tour.
White-bellied Cuckooshrike *Coracina papuensis* ◇ It was regularly seen across the Top End.
White-winged Triller *Lalage tricolor* ◇ We had several encounters throughout the tour. See note.
Varied Triller *Lalage leucomela* ◇ It was only seen in the Darwin area in the north.
Varied Sittella *Daphoenositta chrysoptera* Finally five were seen well along the Buntine Highway.
Crested Bellbird *Oreoica gutturalis* ◇ This secretive bird was seen twice near Alice. Far more often heard than seen!
Northern Shrike-tit *Falcunculus [frontatus] whytei* ◇ Two of these rare birds were seen south of Katherine. See note.
Grey Whistler *Pachycephala simplex* ◇ We had two encounters with the nominate race near Darwin.
Mangrove Golden Whistler *Pachycephala melanura* ◇ A pair was seen very well near Adelaide River.
Rufous Whistler *Pachycephala rufiventris* ◇ It was a common bird in wooded habitats throughout.
Little Shrikethrush *Colluricincla megarhyncha* ◇ Three were seen in the Howard Springs Reserve near Darwin.
Grey Shrikethrush *Colluricincla harmonica* ◇ Two were seen in the Red Center and two in the Top End.
Sandstone Shrikethrush *Colluricincla woodwardi* ◇ Excellent looks on the Arnhem Land Escarpment.
Australasian Figbird (Green F) *Sphecotheres vieilloti* ◇ A very common bird across the Top End. See note.
Olive-backed Oriole *Oriolus sagittatus* ◇ Just a single individual was seen south of Mataranka.
Green Oriole *Oriolus flavocinctus* ◇ It was commonly seen around Darwin.
Spangled Drongo *Dicrurus bracteatus* We had several encounters in the Darwin area. See note.
Willie Wagtail *Rhipidura leucophrys* It was regularly seen throughout the tour.
Northern Fantail *Rhipidura rufiventris* Four were seen at East Point near Darwin.
Grey Fantail *Rhipidura albiscapa* The 'white-tailed' desert race was seen twice near Alice Springs. See note.
Mangrove Fantail (Mangrove Grey F) *Rhipidura phasiana* ◇ A pair was seen in mangroves near Darwin. See note.
Arafura Fantail *Rhipidura dryas* ◇ Two were seen on the Yellow Water Cruise and two at Adelaide River. See note.
Magpie-lark (Australian M-l) *Grallina cyanoleuca* ◇ The 'mudlark' was common throughout the tour.
Leaden Flycatcher *Myiagra rubecula* ◇ Two males were seen in dry habitat around Katherine.
Broad-billed Flycatcher *Myiagra ruficollis* ◇ It was seen a few times near water in the Top End.
Shining Flycatcher *Myiagra alecto* ◇ We had good looks in the Top End.
Paperbark Flycatcher *Myiagra nana* ◇ It was regularly seen throughout the Top End. See note.
Torresian Crow *Corvus orru* ◇ It was common across the Top End.
Little Crow *Corvus bennetti* ◇ We had many sightings in the Red Center.
Apostlebird *Struthidea cinerea* A flock of 40 were seen along the Central Arnhem Highway.
Buff-sided Robin *Poecilodryas cerviniventris* ◇ A pair was seen very well at Timber Creek. See note.
Mangrove Robin *Peneoenanthe pulverulenta* ◇ One was seen in mangroves near Darwin.
Hooded Robin *Melanodryas cucullata* ◇ We had three sightings in the Red Center.
Lemon-bellied Flyrobin *Microeca flavigaster* ◇ First seen in Kakadu National Park and later a few around Darwin.
Jacky Winter *Microeca fascinans* ◇ Two were seen only in dry habitat south of Katherine.
Red-capped Robin *Petroica goodenovii* ◇ Several excellent looks at this stunner in the Red Center.
Horsfield's Bushlark (Australasian B) *Mirafra javanica* We saw four birds at Knuckey Lagoon. See note.
White-backed Swallow *Cheramoeca leucosterna* ◇ Three pairs were seen on the road to Ayers Rock.
Fairy Martin *Petrochelidon ariel* ◇ It was seen in the Red Center and in the Top End as well.
Tree Martin *Petrochelidon nigricans* ◇ We had regular sightings in the Red Center.
Australian Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus australis* ◇ We saw four birds on the sewage ponds of Alice. See note.
Rufous Songlark *Megalurus mathewsi* ◇ Three birds were seen around Alice Springs.



Australian Figbird near Darwin (Mike Watson).



Buff-sided Robin is a Northern Territory speciality (János Oláh).

Spinifexbird *Megalurus carteri* ◇ This skulker was finally seen well near Ormiston Gorge.

Little Grassbird *Megalurus gramineus* ◇ We saw three birds on the sewage ponds of Alice.

Golden-headed Cisticola (Bright-headed C) *Cisticola exilis* It was common at Holmes Jungle Park near Darwin.

Canary White-Eye *Zosterops luteus* ◇ We had many good looks in the mangroves around Darwin.

Mistletoebird *Dicaeum hirundinaceum* ◇ Several encounters with this colourful little bird.

Painted Finch *Emblema pictum* ◇ We saw about 20 birds in the Ormiston Gorge.

Crimson Finch *Neochmia phaeton* ◇ It was common near water across the Top End.

Masked Finch *Poephila personata* ◇ Flocks of up to 30 were seen at various waterholes in the Katherine area.

Long-tailed Finch *Poephila acuticauda* ◇ Flocks of up to 80 were seen at various waterholes in the Katherine area.

Zebra Finch *Taeniopygia guttata* ◇ It was very common in the Red Center and absent from the Top End.

Double-barred Finch *Taeniopygia bichenovii* ◇ Several encounters across the Top End.

Gouldian Finch *Erythrura gouldiae* ◇ About 165 were seen at three locations in the Katherine area.

Yellow-rumped Mannikin *Lonchura flaviprymna* ◇ We saw well over a hundred near Timber Creek.

Chestnut-breasted Mannikin *Lonchura castaneothorax* ◇ Hundreds were seen near Timber Creek.

Australian Pipit *Anthus australis* We had four sightings in the Red Center. See note.

MAMMALS

Common Brushtail Possum *Trichosurus cunninghamii* Two were seen in Darwin Botanical Garden.

Agile Wallaby *Macropus agilis* It was the most common mammal across the Top End.

Antilopine Wallaroo (Antelope W) *Macropus antelopinus* ◇ At least two were seen in the Top End.

Euro (Common Wallaroo) *Macropus robustus* One was seen near Desert Park in Alice Springs.

Red Kangaroo *Megaleia rufa* We had several in the Erldunda and Ayers Rock areas.

Black-flanked Rock Wallaby (Black-footed R W) *Petrogale lateralis* ◇ One was seen very well in Ormiston Gorge.

Black Flying-fox (Central F-f) *Pteropus alecto* Sometime thousands were seen in the Top End.

European Rabbit (introduced) *Oryctolagus cuniculus* We had some around Alice and also some around Mataranka.

Dingo (introduced) *Canis familiaris* Four encounters in the Red Center.

Donkey (introduced) (Domestic D, D Ass) *Equus asinus* Two sightings in Kakadu National Park.

Horse (introduced) (Domestic H) *Equus caballus* Several encounters all along the tour.

Water Buffalo (introduced) *Bubalus bubalis* We had seen a few in Kakadu National Park.

NOTES TO THE SYSTEMATIC LIST

The most up to date referenced taxonomic list referred to in the Tour Report is that of the IOC World Bird List (v4.4). Available at <http://www.worldbirdnames.org/ioc-lists/master-list/>

Grey Teal *Anas gracilis*

This species was formerly lumped in Sunda Teal *A. gibberifrons*, with the name Grey Teal being used for the enlarged species.

Australian White Ibis *Threskiornis molucca*

This species is sometimes lumped in Sacred Ibis *T. aethiopica*.

Eastern Cattle Egret *Ardea coromandus*

Some authors lump this species in Western Cattle Egret *A. ibis*, using the name Cattle Egret for the enlarged species.

Australian Darter *Anhinga novaehollandiae*

This species was formerly lumped in Oriental Darter *A. melanogaster*, with the name Darter being used for the enlarged species.

Eastern Osprey *Pandion cristatus*

Some authors lump this form in Western Osprey *P. haliaetus*, using the name Osprey for the enlarged species.

Black-shouldered Kite (Australian Kite) *Elanus axillaris*

This species was formerly lumped in Black-winged Kite *E. caerulescens* of Eurasia and Africa with the name Black-shouldered Kite being used for the enlarged species.

Eurasian (or Common) Coot *Fulica atra*

The Australian form *australis* is much smaller than its Eurasian cousin, with a bluish bill and very little white on the trailing edge of the wing. It may be split in future, together with forms occurring in Java and New Guinea, as Australasian Coot.

White-headed Stilt *Himantopus leucocephalus*

This form was formerly lumped in Black-winged Stilt *H. himantopus* with the name Black-winged Stilt being used for the enlarged species.

Masked Lapwing *Vanellus miles*

The recent HBW/BirdLife Illustrated World Checklist splits the southern *novahollandiae* race as Black-shouldered Lapwing from the nominate miles (Masked Lapwing) based on their different plumages and distribution. Although the races interbreed in some parts.

Mongolian (Sand) Plover *Charadrius [mongolus] mongolus*

The IOC refer to this species as Lesser Sand Plover, but Lesser Sand Plover *C. atrifrons* (including *pamirensis*) is now sometimes treated as a distinct species, with the residual *mongolus* being renamed Mongolian Sand Plover. Only *mongolus* in the strict sense has been recorded during this tour.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

The form concerned, *melanuroides*, is sometimes split off as a separate species, Eastern Black-tailed Godwit.

Peaceful Dove *Geopelia placida*

Some authors lump this species in Zebra Dove *G. striata* of Southeast Asia, using the name Peaceful Dove for the enlarged species.

Torresian Imperial-Pigeon *Ducula spilorrhoa*

Some authors lump this species in Pied Imperial-Pigeon *D. bicolor*, using the name Torresian Imperial-Pigeon for the enlarged species.

Eastern (or Australian) Koel *Eudynamys orientalis*

This species (which is sometimes given the name cyanocephala) was formerly lumped in Asian (or Common) Koel *E. scolopacea*, with the name Common Koel being used for the enlarged species.

Little Corella *Cacatua sanguinea*

This species was formerly lumped in Western (or Bare-eyed) Corella *C. pastinator*, with the name Little Corella being used for the enlarged species.

Red-collared Lorikeet *Trichoglossus [haematodus] rubritorquis*

Some authors lump this species in Rainbow Lorikeet *T. haematodus*, but the two forms have often been treated as specifically distinct and are perhaps better treated as allospecies.

Port Lincoln Ringneck (or Parrot) *Barnardius [zonarius] zonarius*

The IOC include Mallee (or Eastern) Ringneck *B. [zonarius] barnardi*, Cloncurry Ringneck *B. [zonarius] macgillivrayi* and Twenty-eight Parrot *B. [z.] semitorquatus*) in this species using the name Australian Ringneck for the whole complex. We have treated the different forms as allospecies to facilitate recording of them as they are possible future splits.

Western Bowerbird *Chlamydera guttatus*

This species was formerly lumped in Spotted Bowerbird *C. maculata*.

Golden-backed Honeyeater *Meliphaga laetior*

The IOC lump this species in Black-chinned Honeyeater *M. gularis*.

White-lined Honeyeater *Meliphaga albilineata*

This species is now endemic to the 'Top End' of the Northern Territory following the splitting off of the form *fordiana* as Kimberley Honeyeater.

Inland Thornbill *Acanthiza apicalis*

This form was formerly lumped in Brown Thornbill *A. pusilla*.

Silver-backed Butcherbird *Cracticus argenteus*

Some authors lump this isolated species of the Top End and Kimberley in Grey Butcherbird *C. torquatus*.

White-winged Triller *Lalage tricolor*

Some authors lump this species in White-shouldered Triller *L. sueurii* of Indonesia, using the name White-winged Triller for the enlarged species.

Northern Shrike-tit *Falcunculus [frontatus] whitei*

The IOC treat this form and Western Shrike-tit *F. [f.] leucogaster* as subspecies of Eastern Shrike-tit *F. [f.] frontatus*, using the name Crested Shrike-tit for the enlarged species. We have treated it as an allospecies as it is a likely future split.

Australasian (or Green) Figbird *Sphecotheres vieilloti*

This species was formerly lumped in Timor Figbird *S. viridis*, with the name Figbird being used for the enlarged species.

Spangled Drongo *Dicrurus bracteatus*

This species is sometimes lumped in Hair-crested Drongo *D. hottentottus*, with the name Spangled Drongo often being used for the enlarged species.

Mangrove Grey Fantail *Rhipidura phasiana*

This species was formerly lumped in Grey Fantail *R. albiscapa*.

Arafura Fantail *Rhipidura dryas*

This species was formerly lumped in Rufous Fantail *R. rufifrons*.

Grey Fantail *Rhipidura albiscapa*

The form found around Alice Springs is the very distinctive *albicauda* race which is considered to be a potentially different species: Desert Fantail.

Paperbark Flycatcher *Myiagra nana*

Some authors lump this species in Restless Flycatcher *M. inquieta*.

Buff-sided Robin *Poecilodryas cerviniventris*

Some authors lump this species (which is restricted to the Kimberley and the Top End) in White-browed Robin *P. superciliosa* of northeast Australia.

Horsfield's (or Australasian) Bushlark *Mirafra javanica*

This species was formerly lumped in Singing Bushlark *M. cantillans*.

Australian Reed-Warbler *Acrocephalus australis*

This species was formerly lumped in Clamorous Reed-Warbler *A. stentoreus*.

Australian Pipit *Anthus australis*

Some authors lump this species in New Zealand Pipit *A. novaeseelandiae*, using the name Australasian Pipit for the enlarged species.

APPENDIX: overall results of the 'Bird of the tour' contest

Species	Points	Nominations
1st Inland Dotterel	34	5
2nd Spinifex Pigeon	32	5
3rd Rufous-crowned Emu-Wren	28	4
4th Gouldian Finch	22	4
5th Major Mitchell's Cockatoo	22	3
5th Rainbow Pitta	22	3