



*Red Goshawk in Kakadu National Park (all photos taken on this tour & by Mike Watson).*

# NORTHERN AUSTRALIA

**11 – 26 SEPTEMBER 2016**

**LEADER: MIKE WATSON.**

This was the second time we had operated this itinerary, the best of Australia's legendary Northern Territory combining the Red Centre and the Top End. Again we had a fabulous series of encounters with some of Australia's most sought after birds (as well as some of its other fauna). Standout moments included: point blank Inland Dotterel with a thunder storm approaching on the gibber plains near Eridunda; an equally approachable White-browed Treecreeper in the ancient Ironwood forest at Alice Springs; insanely habituated Spinifex Pigeons at the beautiful Ormiston Gorge; perky little Dusky Grasswrens and Rufous-crowned Emuwrens in the Spinifex grass near Alice Springs; a nomadic honeyeater-fest at Uluru where Black and Pied were breeding in profusion with the desert in bloom; a Chestnut Rail watched gathering nesting material in a tidal creek in Darwin; a huge Rufous Owl peered down at us in Darwin's Botanical Garden; a pair of majestic Red Goshawks tended their nest in Kakadu; a roosting flock of gaudy Hooded Parrots disgraced themselves at our resort in Pine Creek; a pair of (Northern) Crested Shrike-Tits was building a nest in the highest twigs of a gum tree near Katherine, the feisty little Purple-crowned Fairywrens at Victoria River and gorgeous Rainbow Pittas that lit up several monsoon forest locations in the Top End, to mention just a few highlights. Aussie specialities new for this itinerary were: Great-billed Heron; Square-tailed Kite; Little Eagle, White-browed Crake, Little Buttonquail, Australian Raven, (Sandhill) Striated Grasswren; Star Finch and Pictorella Mannakin.



*Rainbow Pitta, East Point, Darwin - the world's showiest pitta!*

A long list of Birdquest diamond birds included the trio of Arnhemland endemics, Chestnut-quilled Rock Pigeon, Black-banded Fruit Dove and White-lined Honeyeater. Three widely scattered flocks of the red-faced nominate form of Partridge Pigeon gave first timers a wrong impression of the status of this sometimes tricky-to-find species. Despite water now lying everywhere, some finches continued to visit their favourite pools, although not always to drink and we saw the lovely Gouldian Finch (including both red and black faced adults) at a couple of places.

The rest of the diamond species were as follows: Magpie Goose; Plumed and Wandering Whistling Ducks; Raja Shelduck; Green Pygmy Goose; Orange-footed Scrubfowl; Black-necked Stork; Straw-necked Ibis; Royal Spoonbill; White-necked and Pied Herons; Australian Pelican; Australian Pied Cormorant; Australasian Darter; Eastern Osprey; Black-shouldered Kite; Black-breasted Buzzard; Wedge-tailed Eagle; Spotted Harrier; Australian Bustard; Brolga; Chestnut-backed Buttonquail, Bush and Beach Stone-curlews; White-headed Stilt; Masked Lapwing; Oriental Plover; Black-fronted Dotterel; Comb-crested Jacana; Far Eastern Curlew; Silver Gull; Common Bronzewing; Crested Pigeon; Diamond Dove; Rose-crowned Fruit Dove; Torresian Imperial Pigeon; Horsfield's Bronze and Pallid Cuckoos; Spotted Nightjar; Blue-winged Kookaburra; Torresian and Red-backed Kingfishers; Cockatiel; Red-tailed Black and Major Mitchell's Cockatoos; Galah; Little Corella; Red-winged, Mulga and Bourke's Parrots; Australian Ringneck; Varied and Red-collared Lorikeets; Budgerigar; Western and Great Bowerbirds; Black-tailed Treecreeper; Variegated, Splendid, Red-backed and White-winged Fairywrens; Dusky and Red-headed Myzomelas; Banded and Brown Honeyeaters; Little, Helmeted and Silver-crowned Friarbirds; Blue-faced, Black-chinned and White-throated Honeyeaters; Crimson and Orange Chats; Rufous-banded, Rufous-throated and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters; Yellow-throated Miner; White-fronted, White-gaped, Singing, Yellow-tinted, Grey-headed and White-plumed Honeyeaters; Red-browed and Striated Pardalotes; Redthroat; Weebill; Mangrove, Western, Large-billed, Green-backed and White-throated Gerygones; Inland, Chestnut-rumped, Yellow-rumped and Slaty-backed Thornbills; Southern and Banded Whitefaces; Grey-crowned and White-browed Babblers; Chiming Wedgebill; Cinnamon Quail-thrush; White-breasted, Masked, Black-faced and Little Woodswallows; Black, Grey, Silver-backed and Pied Butcherbirds; Australian Magpie; Black-faced and White-bellied Cuckooshrikes; White-winged and Varied Trillers; Varied Sitella; Crested Bellbird; Grey, Mangrove Golden and Rufous Whistlers; Little, Grey and Sandstone Shrikethrushes; Australasian Figbird; Green Oriole; (Desert) Grey, Mangrove and Arafura Fantails; Magpie-lark; Leaden, Broad-billed, Shining and Paperbark Flycatchers; Torresian Crow; Apostlebird; Buff-sided,



*Long-tailed Finches, Central Arnhem Highway*

Mangrove and Hooded Robins; Lemon-bellied Flyrobin; Jacky Winter; Red-capped Robin; Horsfield's Bush Lark; White-backed Swallow; Fairy Martin; Rufous Songlark; Spinifexbird; Canary White-eye; Mistletoebird; Crimson, Masked, Long-tailed, Zebra and Double-barred Finches and Australian Pipit. [Half of the group also saw Painted Finch at Ormiston Gorge the day before the tour (and the rain) started.]

Australia also has a rich diversity of endemic mammals and reptiles and we enjoyed some very interesting sightings such as: cute Black-flanked Rock Wallabies and majestic Red Kangaroos in the Red Centre; Short-eared Rock Wallabies on the escarpments in the Top End; the awesome Saltwater Crocodiles of Kakadu's Yellow Waters cruise; Central Bearded and Gilbert's Dragons in the Red Centre and Central Military Dragon at Uluru. However, we also found a heart-breaking moribund Thorny Devil (maybe the world's most spectacular lizard?) on the road near Uluru, which had been hit by a vehicle and literally died in our hands. The North also has some wonderful landscapes from the red sandstone gorges of the Western MacDonnell Range to the awesome red monolith of Uluru (or Ayer's Rock) in the south to the wild and untamed escarpment country of the Kakadu and Gregory regions in the Top End. Other non-avian attractions included aboriginal rock art in Kakadu, Darwin's pretty coastline complete with numerous WWII relics and a couple of the territory's famous roadhouses at Eralunda and Victoria River.

The birding outcome was respectable in light of a number of setbacks we encountered. First of all our total was reduced by the lack of list-padding water birds at Alice Springs. Following a recent change in the policy of the water treatment plant towards organised groups we were not able to gain access. This cost us at least 15 species, found nowhere else on this circuit. Secondly we had to contend with exactly the opposite weather conditions we expect at this time of year. Cold and rainy! We hardly had a day without at least some drops of rain and many times it was 'stair-rods'. The road to Gunlom Falls in Kakadu was closed owing to flooding and generally we stayed on the black top this time. Thankfully there were still enough sunny intervals to find most things. Birding in the Top End is also made more challenging by the rampant burning (either 'prescribed' or pyromania) and we were met with newly burnt landscapes at several sites, including the best one for White-quilled Rock Pigeon at Victoria River as well as much of the usually excellent Policeman's Point at Timber Creek. As if all this wasn't enough, there was an aggressive flu bug that hit everyone in our party, affecting our enjoyment of the highlights at times as we soldiered on. Thanks are due to our sharp-eyed and determined group of Birdquesters for overcoming these obstacles and helping to make this tour a success.



*Cinnamon Quail-Thrush on the gibber plains by the Stuart Highway, south of Alice Springs.*

Our birding in the Red Centre started with leaden skies, a cool breeze and drops of rain in the air, quite a contrast to the weather of the preceding days and exactly the opposite weather to what we hope for here, which is basically the usual, clear blue skies, hot and sunny. We did not know it at the time but rain would follow us around for the whole tour, with barely a day without any. This is quite unprecedented for this time of year and records were being set for September rain all over the Northern Territory. Consequently it was still a little too dark to get started under the dark stormy skies as we pulled up at our first birding site on the Stuart Highway, near the Cannonball Run Memorial, which commemorates people killed in the 1994 race, from Darwin to Alice Springs and back, when a Ferrari F40 crashed into a checkpoint killing its occupants, a Japanese duo, along with two track officials. After a quick field breakfast, during which the sun briefly appeared through the clouds, we began our search for some special inhabitants of the gibber plains (pebble deserts) in this area. It was not long before we had enjoyed some great views of Cinnamon Quail-Thrush, including an outrageously approachable juvenile as well as our first two species of fairywren, Variegated and White-winged, both parties containing a gaudy male. Some Australian Pipits were also here, a Pallid Cuckoo flew by for Mike only and a Crested Bellbird singing atop a distant gum tree was our first of many. A large male Red Kangaroo, which had been watching us from a distance, bounded across the gibber, a quintessential Australian scene.

The Stuart Highway runs from Darwin in the north to Port Augusta on Australia's south coast, a 2834km road often known simply as 'the track', it is named after Scottish explorer John McDouall Stuart (1815-66), who was the first European to cross Australia from north to south. We continued south to another area of gibber plains, with a few Bourke's Parrots frustrating some as they whizzed past our van. There would be plenty more chances of this one! A family party of Hooded Robins held us up for a while before the heavens opened and a heavy shower ensued. Fortunately it was well timed and we were able to shelter in the van until it had passed. We were hoping for the enigmatic Inland Dotterel here, however, despite much searching of the extensive plains where they had just finished breeding we were not able to find one of these special birds. Instead we picked up another Gibber Plain inhabitant, the noisy little Banded Whiteface, which duly obliged for all. Another couple of Cinnamon Quail-Thrushes followed, they are common along the highway in suitable habitat. Other birds noted here were Wedge-tailed Eagle, Crested Pigeon, Pallid Cuckoo, Nankeen Kestrel, Spiny-cheeked and Singing Honeyeaters, White-browed Babbler, Southern Whiteface, Black-faced Woodswallow, Black-faced Cuckooshrike, White-winged Triller and Zebra Finch. We also saw another 'big red' here.



*The enigmatic White-browed Treecreeper clings on in the ancient Ironwood Forests of Alice Springs.*

Our next stop on the highway was an area of ancient Ironwood forest, where our man-on-the-spot, Mark Carter, had recently rediscovered the enigmatic White-browed Treecreeper. Although only classified as being of 'least concern' by BirdLife International across its wide range, which encompasses the interior of the southern half of the continent, it is endangered in Northern Territory by a most unusual threat. Alien grasses burn at a much higher temperature than native ones, which can kill the normally fire-resistant Ironwood trees on which the treecreeper depends. It took some considerable time to track down the rather vocal treecreeper but the effort was well worthwhile as we had some great looks at this superb little bird. In the process among the Ironwood and Mulga trees we managed to see all of the interior thornbills of NT: Inland; Chestnut-rumped; Yellow-rumped and even the scarce Slaty-backed. We also added the grim Western Gerygone to this list of small and rather uninspiring birds. Juvenile Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoos were still being fed by their dumb thornbill parents and were easily tracked down by their begging calls. Also in the Ironwood forest a smart Mulga Parrot and a Budgerigar flew by and a couple of family parties of Splendid Fairywrens were about, their electric blue males dazzling us. 'That's the best-looking bird I've ever seen' said David, who could argue with that? Rufous Whistler and Mistletoebird were also added to our list. The blooming desert is a 10+ years event, thanks to prolonged rains this year and a lot of things will breed/grow like crazy before falling virtually dormant again.

Heading back north we embarked on the Tanami Road, a 1035km stock route that links Alice Springs with the Kimberley. The indigenous people of Yuendumu, a settlement 293km along the Tanami Road from Alice, featured in the hilarious Aussie TV series 'Bush Mechanics'. Thankfully we did not need any of their repair techniques on this tour, like packing flat tyres with spinifex grass etc. (It is well worth a watch on YouTube though). Although we ultimately failed in our quest for another enigmatic interior bird, Grey Honeyeater, we did manage a lot of excellent encounters with other specialities in the Mulga forests here. A Little Eagle was new for this itinerary. No less than three Brown Goshawks were up in the sky together over the Tanami, a Brown Falcon carried prey to its nest at Kunnoth Bore, delicately feeding its fluffy chick, a super-smart male Red-capped Robin positively shone in the woodland and as the sun dipped below the horizon we sat waiting around a small waterhole. A Black-fronted Dotterel was in residence and was joined by a steady stream of evening-drinking parrots and pigeons, Common Bronzewing, Crested Pigeons, Galahs and eventually, around 15 of the crepuscular Bourke's Parrots. Australia is fabulous for reptiles and we saw a couple of the more impressive ones today, Central Bearded Dragon and Gilbert's Dragon. The latter is a tree-loving species and promptly sought refuge from us up in the branches.



*Dusky Grasswren, Santa Teresa Road, Alice Springs.*

Next morning saw us at a familiar site along the Santa Teresa road to the southeast of Alice Springs. Happily the devastating quarrying that threatened to destroy the lovely limestone pavement habitat here was stopped and after some time its special birds have returned. Spinifexbirds sang from exposed perches around the parking area and the usually tricky-to-see Rufous-crowned Emu-wren was seen quickly, we watched a family party of adults feeding youngsters. Picking our way through clumps of needle-like spinifex grass we had to search for a while before we were able to find the third speciality of this location, the perky Dusky Grasswren. Another active little family party, it seemed that many of the birds in this region had just finished breeding following the frequent rains this year.

The Santa Teresa Road always produces interesting sightings and another stop resulted in Chiming Wedgebill, a singing bird was eventually in the scope for all to see. At the same place we also managed to see the nomadic White-fronted Honeyeater and more Southern Whitefaces as well as Red-backed Kingfisher and White-backed Swallows. A flock of Cockatiels flew over, and there were frequent small groups of Budgerigars (more than 10,000 of the latter were present here earlier this year!). We made an extensive search for Desert (Grey) Fantail to no avail before it was time to move on and happily on our way back to the van there were some nice scoped daylight views of Bourke's Parrot as consolation.

We returned to Alice for lunch at the Desert Park, where we made another fruitless search for Grey Honeyeater at a site they were seen earlier in the day, again to no avail. Red-browed Pardalote was new here, its distinctive piping call could even be heard from inside the toilet block! A group of migrating Masked Woodswallows passed overhead to the west and more gerygones and thornbills followed as well as the almost ubiquitous Rufous Whistler and Mistletoebird but there was nothing else new here. We ended the birding day at the lovely Ormiston Gorge, however, sadly the heavens opened again here and the rain lashed down. This was a major blow, as the hoped-for Painted Finch did not need to come to the valley bottom to drink today. Such a shame as I had seen it here on both of my pre-tour visits without even trying. Fortunately a few of the insanely habituated Spinifex Pigeons were still around, sheltering behind the toilet block and affording ridiculous views as is usual here nowadays. Ormiston is also home to a population of Black-flanked Rock Wallabies and we had some nice views of one in the large boulders on the southern, shady side of the gorge. Also at Ormiston we saw our first Little Woodswallows, Sacred Kingfisher, White-plumed Honeyeaters, Pied Butcherbird, Grey Shrikethrush and Fairy Martins as well as another couple of Black-fronted Dotterels.



*Ormiston Gorge's Spinifex Pigeons are insanely habituated nowadays.*

Another attraction here is incredibly beautiful trees set in a stark red sandstone landscape. River Red Gums can be found in the bottom of the gorge and along watercourses while on its slopes white-barked Ghost Gums prevail. Visitors to Australia can look at these under-appreciated Eucalypts in a different light in their natural environment. Ormiston is situated in the West MacDonnell National Park, along the Larapinta Trail, which is a 223km long distance footpath linking Alice Springs and Mount Sonder in the west and following the picturesque MacDonnell range. In such a harsh climate and barren landscape hikers can only manage to carry minimum loads so there is a service available to drop food supplies for them along the route as well as several drinking water sources. We persevered at Ormiston in the hope that a Painted Finch would show up but eventually we had to admit defeat and return to Alice.

Next morning we resumed our search for Grey Honeyeater in the Mulga forests along the Tanami Road, however, the cold wind and occasional downpours probably did not help. We did catch up with another Red Centre special, the *albicauda* subspecies of Grey Fantail, which is a very good candidate for a future split. A pair danced around us in the Mulga, flashing their white tails. An Australian Raven was a write-in for this tour. Eventually it was time to move on and check some other areas lest we blow all our time searching in vain for Grey Honeyeater. We dropped back into Alice Springs for those who had not had a chance to visit the lovely Olive Pink Botanical Gardens there before the tour started. The gardens are host to a small population of Western Bowerbirds, including a particularly spectacular bower. The dominant male here tended a wonderful construction, decorated with small white objects, including plastic bottle tops. He had eagerly accepted my donation a couple of days before. If anyone gets too close to his masterpiece he stands his ground and scolds him or her. This behavior may have been the undoing of the previous alpha male, which was killed by a cat after our last visit two years ago. There were also some lovely deep crimson Sturt's Desert Peas growing just outside the botanical garden, surely planted there but this desert pioneer plant species can pop up on rough ground anywhere in Alice.

We spent the afternoon at Simpson's Gap in hope of Painted Finch before the next band of rain hit but again to no avail. We did see some more Black-flanked Rock Wallabies here, hopping around in the large boulder field near the gap itself. However, the best sighting was another excellent encounter with a family party of Dusky Grasswrens at even closer range than the previous day. An Australasian Grebe in the pool at the gap was our first and a Peregrine perching on the cliffs high above was our only one of the tour. A smart male Mulga Parrot



*Black-flanked Rock Wallaby and Ormiston Gorge.*



*A beautiful Inland Dotterel on the red gibber plains north of Eridunda.*

was drinking from a puddle as we rolled up at the Cassia Hills trailhead but unfortunately the skies, which had been threatening rain for some time, darkened further, the temperature dropped and a torrential downpour followed. Game over. We had another gourmet field picnic under the shelter here before we abandoned the Alice region and headed south on the Stuart Highway in the hope of finding a gap in the rain.

This transpired to be a good call as a magnificent Major Mitchell's Cockatoo flew by. A quick 'Ontario Police turn' meant we could follow it for a while as it flew parallel to the highway, flashing its shocking pink underwings and squawking as it went on its way. What a terrific bird! The road here was still wet from another downpour but at least we had a break in which to find some birds. A gorgeous Brown Falcon was perched by the highway and allowed close approach as they often do. Best of all though, was our encounter on the gibber plains with a lovely Inland Dotterel. The skies all around us were leaden, distant thunder rumbled away, forked lightning lit up the landscape and we did not have much time to search so we simply zeroed in on the spot where we had seen Inland Dotterel two years ago. We formed a long line and started walking across the pebble desert and after only a few minutes Barbara struck gold. What a star! It was an amazing feeling to find such a bird like this in these circumstances! The dottie was a juvenile and allowed very close approach just like its Eurasian cousin does. I was a bit worried that the thunder and lightning had changed direction and was now heading towards us and we shouldn't risk being caught on an exposed plain in a storm so we hurried back towards our van and after some more wire fence twisting we were on our way again. The beer at the excellent Eridunda Roadhouse at 'the centre of the centre' tasted very good tonight as Barbara enjoyed her gold star moment. When I checked the grid reference of this year's dotterel sighting, it was only 150m from our 2014 bird! This is obviously a good spot for them at this time of year.

We made an early start next morning for our big red rock day. Uluru (or Ayer's Rock as it used to be known) is the world's best-known monolith. From 2002 onwards the Pitjantjatjara name, Uluru, has been adopted as the primary name, which is befitting as the rock was only named in honour of the 1873 Chief Secretary of South Australia, Sir Henry Ayers and he wasn't even the first European to set eyes on it. The rock is a UNESCO World Heritage site and is one of the world's most familiar landmarks. Uluru rises 348m above the surrounding area, is 863m above sea level (most of its mass lies underground) and has a circumference of 9.4km. We noted that hiking to the top of the rock seems to have been permitted again but thankfully most folks had descended by the time we wanted to take sunset photos. The gorgeous Arkose red sandstone rock glows in the last rays of



*Uluru at sunset and Central Military Dragon (female) in the red sand dunes at Uluru.*



*Black Honeyeater (male), Uluru.*

the evening sun, not as spectacular as I can make it look in Photoshop but a beautiful sight nevertheless. However, this time the birding at Uluru was just as spectacular as the rock. The desert was in bloom with the yellow spikes of Honey Grevillea flowers adding another splash of colour and attracting a veritable honeyeaterfest of nomadic and wandering species. There were many Pied and Black Honeyeaters breeding here this year, the Blacks already had small juveniles in tow and the Pieds made aerial song flights from native pines. We even found another White-fronted Honeyeater, a sub adult, although it was typically quite shy. The best bird sighting was of Sandhill Grasswren (a proposed split from Striated, already adopted by some listing authorities), which popped up only a few metres in front of us but melted away quickly into the clumps of spinifex grass. Barbara caught up with it again later but it remained elusive for most of the day. A Square-tailed Kite flew over our van at Uluru and thanks to some amazing sharp shooting through the window by Ed we had some photographic evidence of this sought-after Aussie endemic. Other raptors included our first Spotted Harrier en route to Uluru and the stunning Crimson Chat was also new for the tour. White-winged Trillers were also much in evidence here and Masked Woodswallows were also breeding in the sand dunes. Although most of us were now succumbing to a horrible flu virus the rain stayed away for a change and we enjoyed our day out to Uluru. Even the kangaroos behaved by mostly staying off the road on the way back to Eridunda this time.

Sunrise saw us back on the gibber plains in search of a couple of species we had not caught up with yet. One of them was something of a hopeful punt but the other, Orange Chat was relatively easy to find. We managed at least eight of them in a walk across the desert. We also saw another nine Inland Dotterels, the one found by Roy being very approachable again, a real delight in the morning sunshine this time. Well-done Roy! We also had by far our best encounter with a couple of big Red Kangaroos, they are such awesome creatures it was difficult to know which to look at first, these or the stunning male Orange Chat. A large female Brown Goshawk was hunting out on the desert. Leave the Orange Chats alone! Driving north on the track we had some very nice raptor encounters with our only Black-breasted Buzzards (or Kites?) of the tour as well as Black-shouldered Kite and numerous other kites and Brown Falcon. We tried the Mulga Forest again for one last shot at Grey Honeyeater and by way of consolation we managed a nice pair of Redthroats, a male feeding a juvenile. This peculiar little warbler can be tricky to find sometimes. Our final action in the Red Centre was a pair of Collared Sparrowhawks nesting in the garden outside the terminal at Alice Springs airport and then it was time to catch a flight to Darwin, gateway to Australia's Top End.



*Inland Dotterel in morning sunshine and below, the desert in bloom by Maryvale Road.*



*Black Butcherbird, East Point Mangroves, Darwin.*

Phew, someone left the heating on! The tropical heat and humidity leaving the airport terminal at Darwin was a welcome change from chilly Alice Springs. Who would ever think we would say that? Birding a new region always results in a flood of new species on the first day but it seemed that the dreaded rain had caught up with us again. In fact most birds we saw in the early morning around Darwin had been soaked to the skin by torrential downpours overnight. Torresian Imperial Pigeons and Little Friarbirds were dotted along power lines everywhere in Darwin's smart suburban streets, Red-collared Lorikeets zoomed overhead and Australasian Figbirds and Green Orioles perched out in the morning sun at East Point to dry out. Thousands of ugly Magpie Geese had invaded the city parks with a couple of Raja Shelducks amongst them, Orange-footed Scrubfowl scratched about the verges and Australian White Ibises and Masked Lapwings added to the new exotic avifauna we were amongst. We began our birding in Darwin in earnest at East Point, an excellent coastal reserve on the west side of the city. Double-barred Finches delighted by the car park and the mangrove boardwalk trail held many of the special coastal dwelling species we were looking for. First up was Black Butcherbird, the killer in the mangroves. We enjoyed some really excellent views in the early morning sunshine as they dried out after the overnight rain. We also saw other mangrove specialists here from the boardwalk itself, the newly split Torresian Kingfisher, Red-headed Myzomela, Mangrove Gerygone, Broad-billed and Shining Flycatchers as well as Mangrove Robin.

On the foreshore some of the shorebirds, which spend the winter in northern Australia had already returned, including Pacific Golden Plover, Greater Sand Plover, Whimbrel, Grey-tailed Tattler, Terek and Common Sandpipers and Red-necked Stint. Offshore terns included a few Whiskered and an Eastern Osprey sat on the rocks with a fishy meal and a pair of Brown Boobies was perched on a distant buoy. A White-bellied Sea Eagle spread panic amongst the shorebirds. In the nearby monsoon forest a couple of Rainbow Pittas dazzled us. They took a little more searching than usual but soon afforded some great views (p.26). Rainbow is the world's showiest and most confident pitta, I wonder if they have never been hunted? Varied Triller and White-gaped Honeyeater were also new for the tour at East Point. The land here belonged to Larrakia tribe or the 'Saltwater People, who presently number around 2,000 and have a vibrant culture associated with the sea. When the first settlers reached Darwin the Larrakia provided them with food but eventually they were marginalised and moved to camps further away from the city. However, in June 2016 the Larrakia finally won their case to have 52,000 hectares of ancestral land returned to them. This was the longest running land claim in Australian History, the Kenbi Land Claim.



*Bush Stone-curlew, George Brown Botanical Gardens, Darwin.*

After our early morning efforts we retired to the lovely Eva's Café at the George Brown Botanical Gardens, which quickly became our favourite food stop in the Top End. After a fancy sit down brunch we explored the gardens themselves, which are a great birding location. Mostly because there is often a day roosting Rufous Owl! We missed this monster owl last time so it was a great relief and joy to see it here again, slumbering amongst some magnificent trees above the rainforest loop. What big talons you have! Also in the gardens was a couple of Bush Stone-curlews, expertly spotted by Michael, which allowed an incredibly close approach, relying on their cryptic camouflage for protection. Some Straw-necked Ibises were our first of the tour and a Black-necked Stork looked somewhat out of place in town. Spangled Drongo was also new for the tour here. We followed this with some less than successful searching for the elusive Chestnut Rail. A filthy mangrove site in town produced a Canary White-eye and some more Torresian Kingfishers and Red-headed Myzomelas but no rail from the rather limited viewing space. We will not bother with this place again we thought. Buffalo Creek on the north side of the city has also been good to us but it can also be frustrating. At least we heard the distinctive loud donkey-like braying call of a rail here but it stayed out of sight on the opposite side of the tidal creek. Our efforts were not helped by the noise created by barramundi fishermen trying to load their boats at the nearby boat ramp. This was made worse by a tide race and some of them made a real mess of it, needing five or so goes to land on their trailers. We gave up here after a while.

Our last stop of the day was Knuckey Lagoons, a wetland site on the southeast side of the city that is usually thronged with waterbirds. Today was no exception. There was a great selection of shorebirds, including White-headed Stilt, Comb-crested Jacana, Marsh (one), Wood (c.25) and Sharp-tailed (six) Sandpipers plus a single Australian Pratincole. A stately Brolga was our first of the tour. Waterfowl were also well represented by hundreds of Magpie Geese, a couple of Wandering Whistling Ducks, Raja Shelduck and Pacific Black Ducks. A Glossy Ibis accompanied a Black-necked Stork and several Royal Spoonbills and herons included some Pied as well as good opportunity to compare Intermediate and Great Egrets (check out the relative size of the eye versus the head). Little Pied and Little Black Cormorants were also present. It was a nice way to end our first day in the Top End and later we retired to a pleasant evening at the Jetty on Darwin's waterfront.

Our second day depended on what we still had left to see after the first so, rather predictably, Chestnut Rail it was then! This is usually one of the toughest nuts to crack but at least we had a hot lead at Buffalo Creek. We just had to figure out a way to see it. Eventually after some considerable effort we succeeded in finding one,



*Pacific Golden Plover, Darwin.*

returning time after time to collect nest material from the muddy banks of the creek. It is a peculiar-looking large rail, with yellow legs, which is often the first thing you see as it picks its way through the mangrove roots. We wondered if this one was repairing a nest after the super high tides combined with torrential rain of recent days? A big relief after I heard some sharp birders had missed it in Darwin lately. There was a roost of terns and shorebirds on the sands at Buffalo Creek before they were flushed away early on. Before they took off we could add Lesser (or Mongolian) Sand Plover, Black-tailed and Bar-tailed Godwits, Far Eastern Curlew, Ruddy Turnstone, Sanderling, Gull-billed Tern, Greater and Lesser Crested Tern and Common Tern. Also here were Brahminy Kite and a quick check along the access road through the monsoon woodland produced some nice birds like Pacific Emerald Dove, Rose-crowned Fruit Dove, Forest Kingfisher, Rufous-banded and Rufous-throated Honeyeaters, White-breasted Woodswallow, Green-backed Gerygone, Arafura Fantail and Grey Whistler. Well the rain didn't stop yet (and it would not for the rest of the tour but it would have been demoralising to know it at this stage). Our next stop was the Channel Island Road Bridge boat ramp where my best Mangrove Robin site has been closed down owing to a laser hazard????!! Paranoid thoughts cross my mind of new and interesting ways to hamper our birding, whatever will they think of next? Striated Heron was new here but there was no sign of Great-billed Heron at one of its regular haunts.

The afternoon saw us dodging very heavy downpours out to the east of Darwin towards Adelaide River. At the river itself we caught up with the very smart Mangrove Golden Whistler as well as our first Paperbark Flycatchers and Crimson Finches. A Saltwater Crocodile cruised past reminding us what lurks in the watercourses all over the Top End. We continued to Fogg Dam, usually an excellent birding location but we were met with a mostly charred landscape and dried up pools that usually host lots of waterbirds. This is quite typical of birding in the Top End with the rampant burning, 'prescribed' or otherwise. Quite often you will arrive to find your chosen destination trashed. We managed a few interesting sightings here including nine Brolgas, our first Nankeen Night Heron, some nice views of albeit soggy Rainbow Bee-eaters and a Brown Falcon. Our first Varied Lorikeets flew over for some but news of a better concentration of waterbirds at the nearby 'Window on the Wetlands' (or rather 'Window on the Charcoal') had us on our way again before the light faded. It was still tipping down with rain but we arrived in time to see a few notable birds, not before the attendant had advised us that they would be closing soon and that we weren't allowed to video anything, because they had a policy for that! Undeterred we eventually located the hoped-for White-browed Crake out on the sole pool with any birds, along with hundreds of both Plumed and Wandering Whistling Ducks and Green Pygmy Geese. Honeyeaters



*Sandstone scenes at Bardedjildji (Clockwise from top): Chestnut-quilled Rock Pigeon; Sandstone Walk scenery; the noisy as hell Blue-winged Kookaburra and the often elusive Partridge Pigeon.*



*Estuarine (or Saltwater) Crocodile, Yellow Water.*

around the centre included our first White-throated while there was a couple of Rose-crowned Fruit Doves for some. It was a rather damp, miserable and grey end to the day today but hey, any day with a Chestnut Rail sighting has got to be a good one!

Early to rise and we were off, heading east towards Arnhemland, fortunately not hitting any of the suicidal Agile Wallabies that seem to be unable to alter their bouncing course once they embark on it. Eventually we arrived at an excellent sandstone site singled out by its reliability for Chestnut-quilled Rock Pigeon, Bardedjildiji. After another tasty field breakfast we hiked out on a very nice trail, *'what are these pigeons on the path?'* said David. Boom! Well-done David! A very approachable pair of rock pigeons scuttled along ahead of us for a while affording some great close views (unlike last time!) before they flew up to some nearby low rocky slopes, their wings whirring like partridges. What a great start! Another sandstone special, Sandstone Shrikethrush also put in an appearance here, the only one we saw this time with the closure of the Gunlom Falls road. Another delightful Rainbow Pitta showed nicely in the monsoon forest near the car park, we also had our first good looks at the striking Blue-winged Kookaburra here and a brief Northern Fantail was our first of the tour. As we drove out back towards the highway a pair of Partridge Pigeons by the roadside was a good pick up.

We had another flock of around 15 Partridge Pigeons driving into our next site, the lovely Nourlangie Rock, I've never seen this declining and sometimes tricky-to-find bird so easily twice in one day before. A short walk eventually came up trumps with the desired Black-banded Fruit Dove, a perched bird high above us in a tree on the sandstone escarpment. Soon afterwards we saw that there were more up there, feeding in a fruiting tree, a total of at least 7, which is a fairly good count. They were distant, although very beautiful. We also saw our first Silver-crowned Friarbirds here before the rain hammered down again and put an end to our birding for the time being. We admired some aboriginal rock art here too, even though it is touched up from time to time to maintain its appearance (in the same way that impressionists' masterpieces have been restored I guess), it is still well worth a look and read of the stories behind the characters involved. Such as Nabalwinjbulwinj(!), a dangerous spirit who apparently eats females after striking them with a yam! Gulp!

Finally we pressed on to Cooida and our very comfortable accommodation for the night. In the late afternoon we took the sunset cruise around the Yellow Water Billabong, a tributary of the South Alligator River. This ought to be a clue to what lies in store for cruise participants. A profusion of Saltwater Crocodiles! We enjoyed some



*Nourlangie Rock and Aboriginal rock art featuring, Nabalwinjbulwinj (top left) and the Lightning Man (top right).*



*The Arnhemland endemic White-lined Honeyeater at Nawurlandja.*

very close encounters from the safety of our large sturdy craft with crocs of up to 4m long. There were some very impressive creatures here, including the dominant alpha male of the area, who even followed us back to the jetty! Our very knowledgeable and enthusiastic guide made the cruise a real pleasure and we learned a lot about the crocodiles' life history, including that the lighter greenish individuals' skin indicates that they have spent time in saltwater, a journey of at least 100km away to the north. There was a lot of other wildlife to be seen, notably two different Great-billed Herons. Other highlights included thousands of Magpie Geese and hundreds of Plumed and Wandering Whistling Ducks. There were smaller numbers of Raja Shelduck, Green Pygmy Geese and herons and egrets including around 10 Nankeen Night Herons. At least three pairs of White-bellied Sea Eagles watched over the huge wetland area and as the rain eased at last a few gaps in the cloud gave way to a lovely sunset after all.

We heard stories of what was happening elsewhere in the region, with all non-tarmac roads closed owing to flooding. Consequently our plans for the next day were amended and we embarked on a low risk day on the tarmac. Fortunately this was one of our 'better weather days', particularly as it involved an appointment with one of Australia's most wanted species. More of that later. Our first port of call involved a back track to the recently reopened Nawurlandja lookout, another picturesque site on the sandstone escarpment. We quickly found the third of the trio of Arnhemland endemics, White-lined Honeyeater. After a couple of frustratingly brief views (as is the norm for this one) Michael spotted it coming back to have another look at us and at last we were all rewarded with some gripping views of this restricted range speciality with its beady blue iris, white lines and yellow gape. Wow! It is a subtle but attractive honeyeater. A Spotted Nightjar, which landed next to us, was another good pick-up and Barbara spotted another couple of Black-banded Fruit Doves perched in trees below us. Driving south we chanced upon a small group of Black-tailed Treecreepers feeding on termite mounds. We watched them for a while before they continued on their way through the open savannah forest. Another good Top End bird! Eventually we arrived at the best bird of the tour, the near mythical Red Goshawk. As we drew closer to their roadside nest we were greeted by one of the pair circling over the road! We pulled up and were able to watch both birds at length, the female tending the nest (its eggs must have been near hatching, if not already, based on subsequent news) and the male perched in a tree nearby. An active nest site is just about the only reliable way to see this scarce and very discreet bird. It has great big goggly eyes and is another crepuscular hunter, which accounts for the dearth of sightings away from nests. A pair of Brolgas by the roadside further on was a little out-of-place.



*Hooded Parrot (male), Pine Creek.*

Re-joining the Stuart Highway at Pine Creek we checked in to our quirky but lovely railway-themed accommodation, commemorating the Ghan, which brought trade to this small settlement. Our afternoon excursion was to the nearby Umbrawarra Gorge, another attractive sandstone landscape with quiet pools along the course of a seasonally flowing river. We had yet another sizeable flock of Partridge Pigeons on the drive-in and added the very localized Silver-backed Butcherbird in its usual haunt and a group of Little Buttonquails flushed all over the place. Also here were our first Pheasant Coucal, Red-winged Parrots and Blue-faced Honeyeaters. A small gathering of honeyeaters was bathing in the waters of the gorge and a couple of large monitors were seen here, at least one of which was a Yellow-spotted. Unfortunately we were unable to re-find the small night bird that we also flushed, which was surely an owlet-nightjar. We ended the day watching Hooded Parrots coming in to roost in the palms around our resort in the centre of Pine Creek. No need to make much effort to see this lovely bird at this time of year, Winnie could even enjoy them in her pyjamas from her porch! The Lazy Lizard next door lived up to its name but their excellent (NT special for me!) pizza was well worth the long wait.

The interior of NT is the place to look for scarce finches and today we began to search for them in earnest. After a good start with Hooded Parrot and a Great Bowerbird at his bower in Pine Creek, things did not go too well with us missing the most sought after of all, Gouldian, at the first two places we checked but rather than stopping to drink they were just passing through briefly. There was water everywhere as the south seemed to have received a lot of rain too so there was no need for finches to go to far to drink, however, some of them seem to maintain their usual daily routine, maybe for social reasons I wonder? We did manage to find some smart Masked and Long-tailed Finches but these are pretty widespread and likely to be encountered in open forest as well as at drinking pools. Crimson and Double-barred Finches were also around today and our first Yellow-tinted Honeyeaters of the tour made an appearance. In need of an easy win we swung by a site near Katherine, where a majestic male Australian Bustard was holding court, in the same place as we had seen this bird two years ago. Many things do not change over the years.

A gang of Grey-crowned Babblers passed by as we headed to our southernmost location on this half of the tour, the Central Arnhem Highway, a 663km road leading to the mining town of Nhulunbuy on the Gove Peninsula. We only travel the first few km as far as the police station at Maranboy Creek, stopping frequently to explore the savannah woodland along its course. We had a few good sightings this afternoon including our first gaudy Black-chinned (or Golden-backed) Honeyeaters as well as (strangely) our first White-faced Herons



*(Northern) Crested Shriketit, Central Arnhem Highway.*

in a roadside pool. Oriental Dollarbird was new for the tour today as was the charming Varied Sitella and the rather drab Jacky Winter. The scorched woodland also produced a couple of old favourites including a stupidly tame Brown Falcon and some more Black-tailed Treecreepers. We also flushed another night bird from a hole in a tree, which was again surely an owlet-nightjar but it flew fast and far and we were not able to relocate it. Towards the end of the session we had some great views of Red-tailed Cockatoos drinking from roadside puddles, which for once did not scarper at first sight of us.

With some local advice we started out again next day and had a lot more success. First of all we staked out one drinking pool, where, although they did not come down to drink, we managed around 60 lovely Gouldian Finches, including both red- and black-faced adults amongst many juveniles (they had a good breeding season this year). Other finches visiting the drinking pool were the usual Masked, Long-tailed, Crimson and Double-barred. A couple of Hooded Parrots flew over (nice to see them in more natural surroundings) and another group of Little Buttonquail was also flushed here, first of all off the road! Off to a good start we drove south again to the Central Arnhem Highway. A Torresian Imperial Pigeon in Katherine was our furthest south this time. We read that September 2016 saw record rainfall in Katherine for the time of year but the Katherine Times reported that thankfully the *'Mangoes are safe'*!

We made a more concerted effort for the lovely 'Northern' Crested Shriketit this time and after a brief sighting, about a kilometre further on we found a pair and better still they were building a nest. A delicate little cup woven from spiders' webs in the highest twigs of a gum tree, swaying gently in the wind. We watched them for ages from a safe distance before we moved on. This northern subspecies is declining across NT and has been proposed as a separate species – watch this space! Along the 'highway', at Maranboy Creek, the creek was full to the brim and there were plenty of birds around in the trees along it. We added Bar-breasted and Banded Honeyeaters in a tree full of honeyeaters here, all squabbling over the best flowers and we also had some good looks at more Crimson and Double-barred Finches. Back on the highway a group of Apostlebirds was drinking from the cockatoo's roadside puddle this time and afforded some nice views. We spent the rest of the afternoon looking in vain for Chestnut-backed Buttonquails to the west of town at the confusingly named Chinaman and (almost) Chainman Creeks. There was not much in the open savannah forest here except for bits of abandoned vehicles and other debris.



*Star Finches, Timber Creek Airstrip.*

Up before sunrise we were on the road again. As dawn broke a huge dark shape appeared to the right of the vehicle, an Australian Bustard. I'd not seen one fly before and it almost blotted out the sky. Another followed it and fortunately they landed within range and we could enjoy some great views of them strutting about in the roadside savannah. A further two birds were also here making four in total. Even better, a shorebird flew towards us calling, a distinctive 'tuk-tuk' call, Oriental Plover! It flew right over our heads, giving a great view and away to the north, one of the first returning birds of the winter. They can usually be found in small numbers at favoured spots around Katherine but this was a very welcome chance sighting. A couple of hours to the west of Katherine lies Victoria River and Gregory National Park. It is another wonderful landscape of red sandstone escarpments and attractive canyons. That is, as long as it hasn't been burnt recently as we discovered that the whole of the best site for White-quilled Rock Pigeon had, at the escarpment walk just west Victoria River Roadhouse. This was very frustrating and we tried very hard to find them in other parts of the escarpment for much of the day without any luck. Most of us were still under the weather and the going was pretty tough as a result, on what would normally be considered leisurely hikes. However, the gorgeous Purple-crowned Fairy-wren raised our spirits considerably, a full plumaged male and his apprentice singing away in the cane grass near the car park were very special indeed and registered in the bird of the trip contest as a result. Easily my best encounter with this lovely bird. Short-eared Rock Wallaby was about the best we could manage on the escarpment before the clouds rolled in again and the rain hammered down. Spotlighting was also rather a waste of time with no response and little activity. A Brushtail Possum was the most interesting sighting.

We were back on the trail of scarce finches again next morning out at Timber Creek, the furthest west we reach on this itinerary. It was disappointing to find that much of the best cane grass area of the famous Policeman's Point had been torched recently leaving nothing but charred trees and scorched earth. Maybe the same idiots who had set fire to Victoria River as well? Ah well, at least we had plenty of other finchy sites in this area up our sleeves. The airstrip was quite birdy and produced the much-hoped-for Star Finch, with at least 12 on view at any one time. The cane grass savannah here had also attracted a Spotted Harrier. Brown Goshawk and several singing Horsfield's Bush Larks. We had another field breakfast in the airstrip terminal, basically an old tin bus shelter before moving on. Timber Creek is also *the* stakeout for Buff-sided Robin and although 'Buffy' was a really splendid bird in its lovely wooded creek, we agreed that if everything proved as easy to see as this, birding would not be as exciting. The roost of Black Flying-foxes here was just as impressive, although perhaps not its smell. Retracing our steps on the Victoria Highway we made some more stops in search of



*Policeman's Point, Timber Creek and Gouldian, Long-tailed (yellow-billed nominate form) and Star Finches drinking.*



*Buff-sided Robin, Timber Creek.*

finches, finding Black-tailed Treecreeper and Varied Sitella as well as Stars at each of them but none of the elusive Pictorella yet. However, our last stop had a lot of potential with small groups of finches coming and going and it was clear that this area had received nothing like the same amount of rainfall that Katherine had so the tiny pools we were watching in a creek bed probably still had their usual powers of attraction. As time went by we notched up six species including plenty of Gouldians (again both red- and black-faced adults) until finally, PICTORELLA MANNIKIN! Get in! After some initial nervous moments we were able to watch up to five birds drinking with the other finches, somewhat making up for our disappointing previous day. A final stop did not produce any drinking passerines but three juvenile Black-necked Storks soaring against a blue sky was very nice. The journey back to Katherine was a lot more cheerful now and we even managed to see some Chestnut-backed Buttonquails at Chainman Creek (Chinaman is closer to the town!) before we ended the birding day. Marked by a pink ribbon on the roadside no less. We only had a couple of spots of rain all day today, this was much more like it the dry, hot and sunny weather we hope for in this region.

Our final birding day started back on the Stuart Highway heading back north to Darwin. A barn owl flashed across the windscreen just out of Katherine and again we managed to find a way through the road-senseless wallabies and one larger 'roo that was either a Euro or an Antilopine. Stopping for coffee and petrol at Adelaide River a group of Great Bowerbirds entertained us on the forecourt, one of them eating a small lizard. Just short of Darwin we stopped off at Howard Springs, a pretty patch of monsoon forest with a nice trail. Flashy Rainbow Pittas wowed us again; one of them had a dispute over a centipede with a feisty small lizard. We also picked up the *parvula* subspecies of Little Shrikethrush here as well as Dusky Myzomela (at last!) plus White-throated and Large-billed Gerygones to complete our list of grim gerygones. A couple of Rose-crowned Fruit Doves delighted, we had our nicest view of a Sulphur-crested Cockatoo and a very showy Nankeen Night Heron was standing on the spillway of the small dam as we left.

We had hoped that some of the later arriving Asian shorebirds would have made it by now and we were delighted to find a group of at least eight Great Knots at East Point, one of them wore leg flags (yellow 57 over blue on the right leg = from an Australian banding scheme). Also here were more Grey-tailed Tattlers and Terek Sandpipers. We appeared to be too early for Little Curlew again sadly, maybe next time? There were also a couple of birds to be found in the mangroves and some caught up with Mangrove Fantail at last although the robin played hard to get again. Rufous-banded Honeyeater was building a tiny cup nest, on the outermost



*Grey-tailed Tattler and storm clouds over East Point, Darwin.*



*Rainbow Pitta, East Point, Darwin.*

twigs of a mangrove and both Broad-billed and Shining Flycatchers showed again. Brunch at Eva's at the botanical gardens was as enjoyable as ever and we paid another visit to the Rufous Owl, which had changed its perch slightly and again allowed some stupendously good views. We had a quick look around Lee Point and Buffalo Creek in the hope of one of the oystercatchers without any luck but Far Eastern Curlews had increased to around 10 now. Needless to say the boat ramp was noisy again so no rails were in easy reach. Our last call of the tour was at Knuckey Lagoons, which were strangely (given the amount of rain lately) a little emptier than before with fewer birds, although Pied Herons had increased to around 10 and there was still a Marsh Sandpiper around, which allowed nice comparison with its nearby cousins, Wood Sandpiper and Common Greenshank. So ended our latest visit to Australia's Northern Territory, one of the world's up and coming birding destinations. After driving more than 4700km and walking 175,289 steps I needed a fairy cake and a lie down!

**BIRD OF THE TOUR (AS VOTED FOR BY THE GROUP)**

1. Red Goshawk
2. Chestnut Rail
- = 3. (Northern) Crested Shrike-tit
- = 3. Rainbow Pitta
5. Inland Dotterel



*Rufous Owl, George Brown Botanical Gardens, Darwin.*

## SYSTEMATIC LIST OF BIRD SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR

The species names and taxonomy used in the report mostly follows Gill, F & D Donsker (Eds). IOC World Bird Names. This list is updated several times annually and is available at <http://www.worldbirdnames.org>.

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>

E = Endangered, V = Vulnerable, NT = Near Threatened, DD = Data Deficient.

**Maggie Goose** ◊ *Anseranas semipalmata* Thousands in the Top End at various sites.

**Plumed Whistling Duck** ◊ *Dendrocygna eytoni* Hundreds at Yellow Water and Window on the Wetlands.

**Wandering Whistling Duck** ◊ *Dendrocygna arcuata* Hundreds at Yellow Water and Window on the Wetlands.

**Raja Shelduck** ◊ *Tadorna radjah* Small numbers noted in the Top End.

**Green Pygmy Goose** ◊ *Nettapus pulchellus* Common at Yellow Water and Window on the Wetlands.

**Pacific Black Duck** *Anas superciliosa* Noted at Knuckey and Window on the Wetlands.

**Orange-footed Scrubfowl** ◊ *Megapodius reinwardt* Common around Darwin.

**Australasian Grebe** *Tachybaptus novaehollandiae* The first was at Simpson's Gap then several in the Top End.

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

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



*White-necked Heron, seen by some before the tour at Ormiston Gorge.*

- Straw-necked Ibis** *Threskiornis spinicollis* Commonly seen across the Top End.
- Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus* Noted at Knuckey Lagoons and Yellow Water.
- Royal Spoonbill** *Platalea regia* Noted at Knuckey Lagoons, Fogg Dam and Yellow Water.
- Nankeen Night Heron (Rufous N H)** *Nycticorax caledonicus* Noted at Fogg Dam, Yellow Water and Howard Springs.
- Striated Heron** *Butorides striata* Four seen at the mangrove sites around Darwin.
- Eastern Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus coromandus* It was common at the various wetlands across the Top End. See note.
- White-necked Heron (Pacific H)** *Ardea pacifica* Three at Yellow Water and one on the Central Arnhem Highway.
- Great-billed Heron** *Ardea sumatrana* Two on the Yellow Water Cruise.
- Great Egret** *Ardea alba* Two on the Santa Teresa Road near Alice and but it was commonly seen in the Top End.
- Intermediate Egret** *Egretta intermedia* Good numbers were seen at the various wetlands across the Top End.
- Pied Heron** *Egretta picata* Small numbers seen across the Top End.
- White-faced Heron** *Egretta novaehollandiae* Two on the Central Arnhem Highway and one at Timber Creek.
- 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* Two on a distant buoy from East Point, Darwin.
- Little Pied Cormorant** *Microcarbo melanoleucos* A few encounters after the first at Knuckey Lagoons.
- Little Black Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax sulcirostris* Five at Knuckey Lagoons.
- Australian Pied Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax varius* Two at Darwin.
- Australasian Darter** *Anhinga novaehollandiae* Regularly seen across the Top End. See note.
- Eastern Osprey** *Pandion cristatus* One at East Point, Darwin. See note.
- Black-shouldered Kite (Australian K)** *Elanus axillaris* One by the Stuart Highway north of Desert Oaks. See note.
- Square-tailed Kite** *Lophoictinia isura* One fly-by photographed at Uluru.
- Black-breasted Buzzard** *Hamirostra melanosternon* Two by the Stuart Highway north of Desert Oaks.
- Little Eagle** *Hieraaetus morphnoides* One along the Tanami Road.
- Wedge-tailed Eagle** *Aquila audax* Five sightings of this magnificent eagle in the Red Centre.
- Red Goshawk** *Erythrotriorchis radiates* A pair of Australia's most-wanted by their nest in Kakadu National Park. **NT**
- Brown Goshawk** *Accipiter fasciatus* Eight birds logged, including three together over the Tanami Road.
- Collared Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter cirrocephalus* A pair by a nest at Alice Springs Airport and three noted in the Top End.
- Spotted Harrier** *Circus assimilis* Singles near Uluru and Timber Creek.



*Beach Stone-curlew, East Point, Darwin.*

- Black Kite** *Milvus migrans* Very common throughout the tour.
- Whistling Kite** *Haliastur sphenurus* Common throughout the tour.
- Brahminy Kite** *Haliastur indus* A couple of sightings in Darwin.
- White-bellied Sea Eagle** *Haliaeetus leucogaster* One at East Point, Darwin and three pairs on the Yellow Water Cruise.
- Australian Bustard**  $\diamond$  *Ardeotis australis* A male near Katherine and another four along the Victoria Highway.
- White-browed Crake** *Porzana cinerea* One at Window on the Wetlands was new for this tour.
- Chestnut Rail**  $\diamond$  *Eulabeornis castaneoventris* A great encounter with one at Buffalo Creek, Darwin.
- Brolga**  $\diamond$  *Grus rubicund* 21 logged in the Top End after the first at Knuckey.
- Chestnut-backed Buttonquail**  $\diamond$  *Turnix castanotus* 8-10 seen at Chainman Creek, Katherine.
- Little Buttonquail**  $\diamond$  *Turnix velox* Small groups flushed along Edith Falls and Umbrawarra Gorge Roads.
- Bush Stone-curlew (B Thick-knee)**  $\diamond$  *Burhinus grallarius* Seven logged. The first at Darwin's Botanical Gardens.
- Beach Stone-Curlew (B Thick-knee)**  $\diamond$  *Esacus magnirostris* Four at East Point, Darwin. **NT**
- White-headed Stilt**  $\diamond$  *Himantopus leucocephalus* Noted at Knuckey Lagoons, Darwin. See note.
- Masked Lapwing**  $\diamond$  *Vanellus miles* Commonly seen in the Top End. See note.
- Inland Dotterel**  $\diamond$  *Peltohyas australis* Again we had amazing looks at this fantastic bird near Erldunda. A total of 10 seen.
- Pacific Golden Plover** *Pluvialis fulva* More than 20 logged at Darwin.
- Lesser Sand Plover (Mongolian Sand P)** *Charadrius [mongolus] mongolus* c.30 seen at Darwin. See note.
- Greater Sand Plover** *Charadrius leschenaultia* c.50 at Darwin.
- Oriental Plover**  $\diamond$  *Charadrius veredus* One seen along the Victoria Highway.
- Black-fronted Dotterel**  $\diamond$  *Elseoyornis melanops* We had good looks at this one both around Alice Springs.
- Comb-crested Jacana**  $\diamond$  *Irediparra gallinacean* Regularly encountered on the various wetlands across the Top End.
- Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa* One at Darwin. See note. **NT**
- Bar-tailed Godwit** *Limosa lapponica* One at Darwin. **NT**
- Eurasian Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus* Nine logged around Darwin.
- Far Eastern Curlew (Eastern C)** *Numenius madagascariensis*  $\diamond$  c.10 at Darwin. **EN**
- Marsh Sandpiper** *Tringa stagnatilis* One at Knuckey Lagoons on both visits.
- Common Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia* Seven logged at Darwin.
- Wood Sandpiper** *Tringa glareola* Around 25 at Knuckey Lagoons.
- Grey-tailed Tattler** *Tringa brevipes* Eleven logged around the coast at Darwin. **NT**
- Terek Sandpiper** *Xenus cinereus* Up to three at East Point, Darwin.



Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo (juvenile), Alice Springs.

- Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos* Small numbers seen around Darwin.
- Ruddy Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres* C.10 at Darwin.
- Great Knot** *Calidris tenuirostris* Eight at East Point, Darwin. **EN**
- Sanderling** *Calidris alba* Around five at Darwin.
- Red-necked Stint** *Calidris ruficollis* c.10 at Darwin. **NT**
- Sharp-tailed Sandpiper** *Calidris acuminata* Six at Knuckey Lagoons, Darwin.
- Australian Pratincole** ◇ *Stiltia isabella* One at Knuckey Lagoons.
- Silver Gull** ◇ *Chroicocephalus novaehollandiae* Common along the coast at Darwin.
- Gull-billed Tern** *Gelochelidon nilotica* Three noted on the coast at Darwin.
- Greater Crested Tern** *Thalasseus bergii* c.10 along the coast at Darwin.
- Lesser Crested Tern** *Thalasseus bengalensis* c.30 along the coast at Darwin.
- Common Tern** *Sterna hirundo* A couple at Buffalo Creek, Darwin.
- Whiskered Tern** *Chlidonias hybrida* Small numbers along the coast at Darwin.
- Spotted Dove (introduced) (S Turtle-D)** *Spilopelia chinensis* Noted around Alice Springs.
- Pacific Emerald Dove** *Chalcophaps longirostris* We had five sightings of single birds around Darwin.
- Common Bronzewing** ◇ *Phaps chalcoptera* Around 30 at Kunnoth Bore near Alice Springs.
- Crested Pigeon** ◇ *Ocyphaps lophotes* Common around Alice and we had a few in the Top End.
- Spinifex Pigeon** ◇ *Geophaps plumifera* Three at Ormiston Gorge.
- Partridge Pigeon** ◇ *Geophaps smithii* Three groups totalling around 35 birds in the Top End. **VU**
- Chestnut-quilled Rock Pigeon** ◇ *Petrophassa rufipennis* Four birds were seen at Bardedjildji.
- Diamond Dove** ◇ *Geopelia cuneata* We had seen several around Alice Springs and also south of Katherine.
- Peaceful Dove** *Geopelia placida* Noted at Ormiston Gorge and then it was common 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* Seven at Nourlangie Rock and two at Nawurlandja.
- Rose-crowned Fruit Dove** ◇ *Ptilinopus regina* Excellent looks at five of these stunners around Darwin.
- Torresian Imperial Pigeon** ◇ *Ducula spilorrhoa* A common sight in suburban Darwin. See note.
- Pheasant Coucal** *Centropus phasianinus* We had several sightings in the Top End.
- Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo** ◇ *Chrysococcyx basalus* Two near Alice Springs.
- Pallid Cuckoo** ◇ *Cacomantis pallidus* Five logged in the Red Centre.
- Brush Cuckoo** *Cacomantis variolosus* One for Mike only in Darwin. **(LO)**



*Brown Falcon near Desert Oaks on the Stuart Highway.*

- Eastern Barn Owl** *Tyto delicatula* One in the headlights on the Stuart Highway. See note.
- Rufous Owl** ◇ *Ninox rufa* One in George Brown Botanical Gardens, Darwin was a tour highlight.
- Spotted Nightjar** ◇ *Eurostopodus argus* A daytime encounter at Nawurlandja.
- Oriental Dollarbird** *Eurystomus orientalis* A couple near Katherine were the only sightings.
- Blue-winged Kookaburra** ◇ *Dacelo leachii* This large and noisy kingfisher was seen throughout the Top End.
- Forest Kingfisher** *Todiramphus macleayii* Good numbers were noted around Darwin.
- Torresian Kingfisher** ◇ *Todiramphus chloris* Six logged in the mangroves near Darwin.
- Sacred Kingfisher** *Todiramphus sanctus* Small numbers seen throughout the tour after the first at Ormiston.
- Red-backed Kingfisher** ◇ *Todiramphus pyrrhopygius* A couple seen around Alice Springs.
- Azure Kingfisher** *Ceyx azureus* Six logged in the Top End.
- 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.
- Australian Hobby** *Falco longipennis* Noted at Knuckey and Coiinda.
- Brown Falcon** *Falco berigora* A total of 11 logged including some close encounters.
- Peregrine Falcon** *Falco peregrinus* One perched at Simpson's Gap.
- Cockatiel** *Nymphicus hollandicus* First noted on the Santa Teresa Road and then a few in the Top End.
- Red-tailed Black Cockatoo** ◇ *Calyptorhynchus banksii* This great bird was fairly common in the Top End.
- Galah** *Eolophus roseicapilla* It was common all along the tour.
- Major Mitchell's Cockatoo (Pink C)** ◇ *Lophochroa leadbeateri* One near Desert Oaks on the Stuart Highway.
- Little Corella** ◇ *Cacatua sanguine* It was regularly seen throughout the Top End. See note.
- Sulphur-crested Cockatoo** *Cacatua galerita* A scatter of sightings in the Top End.
- Red-winged Parrot** ◇ *Aprosmictus erythropterus* Several sightings of this lovely parrot across the Top End.
- Mulga Parrot** ◇ *Psephotus varius* Four noted around Alice Springs.
- Hooded Parrot** ◇ *Psephotus dissimilis* c.50 coming to roost at Pine Creek and a pair at Edith Falls Road.
- Australian Ringneck (Port Lincoln R)** *Barnardius [zonarius] zonarius* ◇ It was common around Alice.
- Bourke's Parrot** ◇ *Neopsephotus bourkii* Excellent looks at this crepuscular drinker at Tanami and Santa Teresa Roads.
- Varied Lorikeet** ◇ *Psittoteles versicolor* Commonly seen in the Top End but always on its way somewhere. See note.
- Red-collared Lorikeet** ◇ *Trichoglossus rubritorquis* It was a very common bird in the Top End. See note.
- Budgerigar** ◇ *Melopsittacus undulates* Back to its usual status in the Red Centre with around 50 logged.
- Rainbow Pitta** ◇ *Pitta iris* We had great looks at this special bird in the Top End on three occasions.



*Pied Honeyeater (male), Uluru.*

- Western Bowerbird** ◊ *Ptilonorhynchus guttatus* Two at Olive Pink in Alice including a terrific bower as well. See note.
- Great Bowerbird** ◊ *Chlamydera nuchalis* It was regularly seen across the Top End.
- White-browed Treecreeper** ◊ *Climacteris affinis* One in the Ironwood Forests of Alice Springs.
- Black-tailed Treecreeper** ◊ *Climacteris melanurus* Seen in Kakadu, Central Arnhem Highway and Victoria Highways.
- Variegated Fairywren** ◊ *Malurus lamberti* A couple of great looks in the Red Centre.
- Splendid Fairywren** ◊ *Malurus splendens* We had splendid looks around Alice on several occasions.
- Purple-crowned Fairywren** ◊ *Malurus coronatus* A great encounter near the Victoria River.
- Red-backed Fairywren** ◊ *Malurus melanocephalus* Noted at Kakadu and Timber Creek.
- White-winged Fairywren** ◊ *Malurus leucopterus* Several family parties were seen in the Red Centre.
- Rufous-crowned Emu-wren** ◊ *Stipiturus ruficeps* Some great views along the Santa Teresa Road near Alice.
- Dusky Grasswren** ◊ *Amytornis purnelli* Family parties seen along the Santa Teresa Road and at Simpson's Gap.
- Sandhill Grasswren** ◊ *Amytornis [striatus] oweni* A couple of sightings at Uluru. See note.
- Black Honeyeater** ◊ *Sugomel nigrum* Common at Uluru, including feeding juveniles.
- Dusky Myzomela** ◊ *Myzomela obscura* Noted at Howard Springs in the Top End.
- Red-headed Myzomela** ◊ *Myzomela erythrocephala* This mangrove bird was seen several times near Darwin.
- Pied Honeyeater** ◊ *Certhionyx variegatus* Common at Uluru, where it was obviously breeding.
- Banded Honeyeater** ◊ *Cissomela pectoralis* Great looks at Maranboy Creek and Timber Creek.
- Brown Honeyeater** ◊ *Lichmera indistincta* Several sightings throughout the tour.
- Little Friarbird** ◊ *Philemon citreogularis* Common across the Top End.
- Helmeted Friarbird** ◊ *Philemon buceroides* Small numbers were seen in the Top End.
- Silver-crowned Friarbird** ◊ *Philemon argenticeps* Common throughout the Top End.
- Blue-faced Honeyeater** ◊ *Entomyzon cyanotis* Regularly seen in the southern part of the Top End.
- Black-chinned Honeyeater (Golden-backed H)** ◊ *Melithreptus laetior* Two on the Central Arnhem Highway. See note.
- White-throated Honeyeater** ◊ *Melithreptus albogularis* We had several sightings in the north.
- Crimson Chat** ◊ *Epthianura tricolor* We had good looks at this stunner Uluru including juveniles.
- Orange Chat** ◊ *Epthianura aurifrons* Eight on the gibber plains north of Eridunda including some males.
- 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 Katherine.
- Bar-breasted Honeyeater** ◊ *Ramsayornis fasciatus* We had good looks at Maranboy Creek.
- Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater** ◊ *Acanthagenys rufogularis* The most common honeyeater in the Red Centre.



*Purple-crowned Fairywren, Victoria River.*

- Yellow-throated Miner** ◊ *Manorina flavigula* Regularly seen in the Red Centre.
- White-fronted Honeyeater** ◊ *Purnella albifrons* One again on the Santa Teresa Road and another at Uluru.
- White-gaped Honeyeater** ◊ *Stomiopera unicolor* It was common in the Top End.
- Singing Honeyeater** ◊ *Gavicalis virescens* It was common in the Red Centre.
- Yellow-tinted Honeyeater** ◊ *Ptilotula flavescens* We had several encounters south of Katherine.
- Grey-headed Honeyeater** ◊ *Ptilotula keartlandi* Several sightings around Alice Springs.
- White-plumed Honeyeater** ◊ *Ptilotula penicillata* We had many good views in the Red Centre.
- White-lined Honeyeater** ◊ *Meliphaga albilineata* We saw two at Nawurlandja and heard another there. See note.
- Red-browed Pardalote** ◊ *Pardalotus rubricatus* Good views at Desert Park, Alice Springs.
- Striated Pardalote** ◊ *Pardalotus striatus* Noted at Alice Springs.
- Redthroat** ◊ *Pyrrholaemus brunneus* A male feeding a juvenile at Desert Park, Alice Springs.
- Weebill** ◊ *Smicronnis brevirostris* Several excellent looks at this tiny bird in the Top End.
- Mangrove Gerygone** ◊ *Gerygone levigaster* Seen at East Point Mangroves, Darwin.
- Western Gerygone** ◊ *Gerygone fusca* We had two sightings near Alice Springs.
- Large-billed Gerygone** ◊ *Gerygone magnirostris* Noted at Howard Springs and East Point.
- Green-backed Gerygone** ◊ *Gerygone chloronota* Good views at Buffalo Creek and Fogg Dam.
- White-throated Gerygone** ◊ *Gerygone olivacea* Noted at Howard Springs.
- Inland Thornbill** ◊ *Acanthiza apicalis* Several sightings near Alice Springs. See note.
- Chestnut-rumped Thornbill** ◊ *Acanthiza uropygialis* Two sightings near Alice Springs.
- Yellow-rumped Thornbill** ◊ *Acanthiza chrysorrhoa* Several sightings near Alice Springs.
- Slaty-backed Thornbill** ◊ *Acanthiza robustirostris* One good sighting of this scarce thornbill near Alice Springs.
- Southern Whiteface** ◊ *Aphelocephala leucopsis* We had good looks on a few occasions around Alice Springs.
- Banded Whiteface** ◊ *Aphelocephala nigrincta* Four near the Stuart Highway south of Alice Springs.
- Grey-crowned Babbler** ◊ *Pomatostomus temporalis* Several sightings in the Katherine area.
- White-browed Babbler** ◊ *Pomatostomus superciliosus* Several sightings in the Red Centre.
- Chiming Wedgebill** ◊ *Psophodes occidentalis* One seen and another heard near Alice Springs.
- Cinnamon Quail-thrush** ◊ *Cinclosoma cinnamomeum* Seen along the Stuart Highway on three occasions.
- White-breasted Woodswallow** ◊ *Artamus leucorhynchus* It was common across the Top End.
- Masked Woodswallow** ◊ *Artamus personatus* A flock of 16 high over Alice and c.30 at Uluru where it was breeding.
- Black-faced Woodswallow** ◊ *Artamus cinereus* It was commonly seen throughout the tour.



*Varied Sittella, Central Arnhem Highway.*

- Little Woodswallow** ◇ *Artamus minor* Several around Alice and also two at Timber Creek.
- Black Butcherbird** ◇ *Cracticus quoyi* Two sightings of this mangrove edge specialist around Darwin.
- Grey Butcherbird** ◇ *Cracticus torquatus* Heard only in the Alice Spring area. **(H)**
- Silver-backed Butcherbird** ◇ *Cracticus argenteus* One was seen very well near Umbrawarra Gorge.
- Pied Butcherbird** ◇ *Cracticus nigrogularis* It was regularly seen throughout the tour.
- Australian Magpie** ◇ *Gymnorhina tibicen* Noted in the Red Centre but it was absent from the Top End.
- 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* Noted along the Stuart Highway, Uluru and Desert Park, Alice Springs. See note.
- Varied Triller** ◇ *Lalage leucomela* It was only seen in the Darwin area in the north.
- Varied Sittella** ◇ *Daphoenositta chrysoptera* Noted on the Central Arnhem Highway and the Bulita Access Road.
- Crested Bellbird** ◇ *Oreoica gutturalis* This secretive bird was seen 3 times nr. Alice but was heard more often than seen!
- Northern Shriketit** ◇ *Falcunculus [frontatus] whitei* Three of these rare birds were seen south of Katherine. See note.
- Grey Whistler** ◇ *Pachycephala simplex* We had four encounters with the nominate race in the Top End.
- Mangrove Golden Whistler** ◇ *Pachycephala melanura* A pair was again seen very well near Adelaide River.
- Rufous Whistler** ◇ *Pachycephala rufiventris* It was a common bird in wooded habitats throughout.
- Little Shrikethrush** ◇ *Colluricincla megarhyncha* Seen in the Howard Springs Reserve near Darwin.
- Grey Shrikethrush** ◇ *Colluricincla harmonica* Seven in the Red Centre plus another 2 heard only and 1 in the Top End.
- Sandstone Shrikethrush** ◇ *Colluricincla woodwardi* Excellent views of one at Bardedjilidji.
- Australasian Figbird (Green F)** ◇ *Sphecotheres vieillotii* Several sightings across the Top End. See note.
- Green Oriole** ◇ *Oriolus flavocinctus* 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* Noted only at Bardedjilidji.
- Grey Fantail** ◇ *Rhipidura albiscapa* A pair of the 'white-tailed' desert subspecies along the Tanami Road. See note.
- Mangrove Fantail (Mangrove Grey F)** ◇ *Rhipidura phasiana* One for some in mangroves near Darwin. See note. **(NL)**
- Arafura Fantail** ◇ *Rhipidura dryas* Noted at Buffalo Creek, Adelaide River and Yellow Water. See note.
- Magpie-lark (Australian M-l)** ◇ *Grallina cyanoleuca* The 'mudlark' was common throughout the tour.
- Leaden Flycatcher** ◇ *Myiagra rubecula* Noted in Kakadu and at Edith Falls Road.
- Broad-billed Flycatcher** ◇ *Myiagra ruficollis* Noted at East Point Mangroves and Adelaide River.



*Apostlebird, Central Arnhem Highway.*

- Shining Flycatcher** ◊ *Myiagra alecto* Noted at East Point Mangroves.
- Paperbark Flycatcher** ◊ *Myiagra nana* It was regularly seen throughout the Top End. See note.
- Torresian Crow** ◊ *Corvus orru* Common across the Top End. (ID of the crows in the Red Centre is not straightforward).
- Australian Raven** ◊ *Corvus coronoides* One along the Tanami Road.
- Apostlebird** ◊ *Struthidea cinerea* A flock of 6 along the Central Arnhem Highway and another 4 on the Victoria Highway.
- Buff-sided Robin** ◊ *Poecilodryas cerviniventris* One was seen very well at Timber Creek. See note.
- Mangrove Robin** ◊ *Peneoenanthe pulverulenta* One at East Point Mangroves and another heard only at Bayview.
- Hooded Robin** ◊ *Melanodryas cucullata* We had five sightings in the Red Centre.
- Lemon-bellied Flyrobin** ◊ *Microeca flavigaster* A scatter of sightings in the Top End.
- Jacky Winter** ◊ *Microeca fascinans* Up to four along the Central Arnhem Highway.
- Red-capped Robin** ◊ *Petroica goodenovii* Three sightings of this stunner in the Red Centre.
- Horsfield's Bush Lark (Australasian B L)** ◊ *Mirafra javanica* Several at Timber Creek airstrip. See note.
- White-backed Swallow** ◊ *Cheramoeca leucosterna* Two on the Santa Teresa Road and one on the Stuart Highway.
- Fairy Martin** ◊ *Petrochelidon ariel* A scatter of sightings after the first at Ormiston Gorge.
- Tree Martin** ◊ *Petrochelidon nigricans* Two noted in the wetlands of the Top End.
- Rufous Songlark** ◊ *Megalurus mathewsi* One on the Santa Teresa Road near Alice.
- Spinifexbird** ◊ *Megalurus carteri* Several seen singing near the Santa Teresa Road.
- Golden-headed Cisticola (Bright-headed C)** *Cisticola exilis* Noted in the wetlands of the Top End and Edith Falls Road.
- Canary White-eye** ◊ *Zosterops luteus* Four sightings along the coast in the Top End.
- Mistletoebird** ◊ *Dicaeum hirundinaceum* A scatter of nine sightings of this little star.
- Crimson Finch** ◊ *Noechmia phaeton* Over 40 logged in the Top End.
- Star Finch** ◊ *Noechmia ruficauda* Three flocks totalling around 30 birds in the Timber Creek area.
- Masked Finch** ◊ *Poephila personata* Noted at four locations in the southern half of the Top End.
- Long-tailed Finch** ◊ *Poephila acuticauda* Both ssp noted, *hecki* (red bill) and nominate (yellow bill, at Timber Creek).
- Zebra Finch** ◊ *Taeniopygia guttata* Common in the Red Centre.
- Double-barred Finch** ◊ *Taeniopygia bichenovii* Noted across the Top End.
- Gouldian Finch** ◊ *Erythrura gouldiae* c.60 at Edith Falls Rd & c.30 near Timber Creek, incl. red & black-faced. **NT**
- Pictorella Mannikin** ◊ *Heteromunia pectoralis* 5-9 at a drinking pool in the Timber Creek area.
- Australian Pipit** *Anthus australis* Noted on five occasions in the Red Centre. See note.



A big Red Kangaroo in motion near Erldunda.

#### Mammals

- Common Brushtail Possum** *Trichosurus cunninghamii* One spotted at Victoria River.  
**Agile Wallaby** *Macropus agilis* Common in the Top End.  
**Euro (Common Wallaroo)** *Macropus robustus* Noted at Alice Springs Desert Park.  
**Red Kangaroo** *Megaleia rufa* Five encounters in the Red Centre.  
**Short-eared Rock Wallaby** *Petrogale brachyotis* Two at Bardedjilidji and one at Victoria River.  
**Black-flanked Rock Wallaby** *Petrogale lateralis* One at Ormiston Gorge and four at Simpson's Gap.  
**Black Flying-fox (Central F-f)** *Pteropus alecto* Common in the Top End.  
**Dingo (introduced)** *Canis familiaris* Two in Kakadu.  
**One-humped Camel (introduced) (Dromedary)** *Camelus dromedarius* Three for some near Uluru (NL).  
**Donkey (introduced)** *Equus asinus* A couple heard along the Central Arnhem Highway. (H)  
**Horse (introduced)** *Equus caballus* c.10 noted at Yellow Water and the Victoria Highway.

#### Reptiles

- Estuarine Crocodile (Saltwater C)** *Crocodylus porosus* One at Adelaide River and c.30 at Yellow Water.  
**Central Military Dragon** *Ctenophorus isolepis* Several in the dunes at Uluru.  
**Long-nosed Dragon** *Gowidon longirostris* Noted at Ormiston Gorge.  
**Swamplands Lashtail** *Gowidon temporalis* Common at East Point, Darwin.  
**Gilbert's Dragon (Ta-ta Lizard)** *Lophognathus gilberti* One in the Mulga Forests along the Tanami Road.  
**Thorny Devil** *Moloch horridus* One found moribund on the road to the Olgas and another long dead road kill there.  
**Central Bearded Dragon** *Pogona vitticeps* Several sightings in the Red Centre.  
**Yellow-spotted Monitor** *Varanus panoptes* One at Umbrawarra Gorge.  
**Common Tree Snake (Green T S)** *Dendrelaphis punctulata* A couple at Yellow Water.



*Gilbert's Dragon, Tanami Road (above) and Central Bearded Dragon, Alice Springs (below).*



*Long-nosed Dragon, Ormiston Gorge (above) and Thorny Devil (dead) near the Olgas (below).*



Western Bowerbird, Olive Pink Botanical Gardens, Alice Springs.

#### NOTES TO THE SYSTEMATIC BIRD LIST

**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 (or 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.

**White-headed Stilt** *Himantopus leucocephalus*

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

**Lesser Sand (or 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.



*Australian Ringneck, Olive Pink Botanical Gardens, Alice Springs.*

**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 spilorrhoea***

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

**Eastern Barn Owl *Tyto javanica***

This form is often lumped in Western Barn Owl *T. alba*, with the name Barn Owl being used for the enlarged species. This rather over-simplified treatment of the Barn Owl complex is surely in need of further work!

**Torresian Kingfisher *Todiramphus sordidus***

Many authors lump this species, and several related species, in Collared Kingfisher *T. chloris*.

**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.

**Australian (or Port Lincoln) Ringneck *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.

**Red-collared Lorikeet *Trichoglossus rubritorquis***

Some authors lump this species in Rainbow Lorikeet *T. haematodus*.

**Western Bowerbird *Chlamydera guttatus***

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

**Sandhill Grasswren *Amytornis [striatus] oweni***

This distinctive form occurring from South Australia west of Port Augusta north through the southern Northern

Territory and the eastern side of Western Australia has been split off from Striated Grasswren by some listing authorities, though not as yet by the IOC.

**Black-chinned (or Golden-backed) Honeyeater *Melithreptus [gularis] laetior***

This distinctive form has been split off by various authors, though not as yet by the IOC.

**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 species 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.

**Crested (or Northern) Shrike-tit *Falcunculus [frontatus] whitei***

The IOC treat this form and Western Shriketit *F. [ff] leucogaster* as subspecies of Eastern Shrike-tit *F. [ff.] 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.

**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.

**Mangrove Grey Fantail *Rhipidura phasiana***

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

**Arafura Fantail *Rhipidura dryas***

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

**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 Pipit *Anthus australis***

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



*The b&w NT: Ghost Gums at Ormiston Gorge.*



*Stuart Highway scenes near Eridunda. Over the course of 4700km on this tour we saw a lot of road trains!*



*Ed and River Red Gums at Ormiston Gorge and below, 'Call the bush mechanics' in the Ironwood Forest near Alice.*