



**AUSTRALIA: FROM THE OUTBACK TO
THE WET TROPICS**

28 OCTOBER – 12 NOVEMBER 2018



© Andy Walker/Birding Ecotours 2016

Plains-wanderer is one of our targets on this trip.

Australia, the island continent, is a remote landmass that drifted away from Antarctica tens of millions of years ago. Without significant volcanic activity and other mountain-building forces, it is also the flattest continent with the world's oldest soils. Despite its lack of topography, this incredible landmass is one of extremes. The Outback, the continent's core, is a vast and hostile desert with unpredictable weather patterns that sometimes flush the landscape with green. Along the edges, more regular precipitation allows ancient rainforests, heathlands, and fire-resistant sclerophyll woodlands to grow. Due to its long isolation and harsh environments, Australia is now home to birds of a different feather, including eight endemic bird families and a further seven shared only with neighboring New Guinea. About 300 bird species are endemic to Australia, making it second only to Indonesia in this regard. Throughout this country's every extreme, its amazing avifauna has shown the adaptability and resiliency to survive in even the most challenging environments. In addition, this avifauna is just dripping with charismatic species, from bowerbirds to parrots to fairywrens to kookaburras to cassowaries to lyrebirds. Throughout the course of this tour we sample habitats ranging from the arid plains north of Deniliquin to the wet rainforests of the Atherton Tablelands in search of as many of these wonderful birds as possible, while also appreciating the many other unique plants and animals along the way. This continent is a naturalist's dream!

Our journey begins at the cosmopolitan city of Melbourne in southeast Australia, visiting coastal heathland for several localized habitat specialists such as **Gang-gang Cockatoo** and **Beautiful Firetail**. Further north and west towards the interior, arid Mallee vegetation and saline lakes provide habitat for the mound-building **Malleefowl**, the impossibly blue **Splendid Fairywren**, and the evocatively named **Major Mitchell's Cockatoo** among a host of other species. On one evening we make a special effort to observe the monotypic **Plains-wanderer** in the dry plains north of Deniliquin, before swinging southeast through the sclerophyll forests of Chiltern and the temperate forests near Melbourne for targets such as **Turquoise Parrot** and **Superb Lyrebird**.

After an internal flight from Melbourne to Brisbane we drive up to the famous O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat, nestled within a large tract of subtropical rainforest, for a totally new set of birds such as **Regent Bowerbird** and **Australian Logrunner**.

On the last leg of our journey we explore the wet tropics of far northern Queensland to explore one of the world's most ancient rainforests for key species such as **Southern Cassowary** and **Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher**. We also take a day trip to the Great Barrier Reef, where the colors and diversity of the fish and corals rival those of the birds. Evening spotlighting sessions on many of these days should also produce a host of endearing and unusual nocturnal birds and mammals, which may include **Tawny Frogmouth**, green ringtail possum, and sugar glider.

For those wishing to continue exploring Australia, this tour can be combined with our **Australia Pre-tour: Tasmania and the Orange-bellied Parrot 2018** (22 - 27 October 2018) tour, our **Australia: Northern Territory Top End Specialties 2018** (13 - 21 November 2018) tour, and our **Birding Tour Australia: the Southwest 2018** (22 - 30 November 2018) tour, so that all four Australia tours could be combined. We can also arrange other extensions (e.g., sightseeing trips to Sydney, Uluru, etc., and pelagic trips).

Please note that the detailed itinerary below cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation,

updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors.

Itinerary (17 days/16 nights):

Day 1. Birding near Melbourne and Healesville

After a morning arrival into Melbourne we depart the airport area around 8 a.m. The participants on the Tasmania pre-tour will arrive the night before, and we recommend arrival the night before for other tour participants too.

We spend most of the day at Bunyip State Park about 40 miles east of Melbourne, birding wet sclerophyll forest and swampy heathlands. Within these mossy forests we hope to find several of Australia's most charismatic and emblematic birds. **Superb Lyrebird**, an unrivalled mimic and the world's largest songbird, will be chief among our targets. The forest and heathland communities are also home to **Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo**, **Eastern Whipbird**, **Flame Robin**, **Rose Robin**, **Red-browed Treecreeper**, and more.

After lunch we continue our journey to the town of Healesville, for the night. Here we will have a chance for some evening spotlighting for birds (**Greater Sooty Owl**, **White-throated Nightjar**) and mammals, weather and jet-lag permitting.

Overnight: Healesville

Day 2. Healesville to Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park

Morning birding around Healesville will give us a chance for **Superb Lyrebird**, **Pilotbird**, **Olive Whistler**, **Crescent Honeyeater**, **Satin Flycatcher**, and those species above. We'll continue by driving to the Chiltern area.

Established in October 2002, Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park protects what is arguably the best flora and fauna assemblage of box-ironbark forest and woodland in Australia, as well as forming an important link between the foothills of the Australian Alps with the plains of the Murray River. The trees which define this habitat produce an abundance of nectar when flowering, attracting birds from far and wide. The sounds of birds can be almost deafening during these times! Targets attracted to these blooms include **Little Lorikeet**, **Black-chinned Honeyeater**, **Painted Honeyeater**, and perhaps even the Critically Endangered (IUCN) **Regent Honeyeater** (this site being one of its last strongholds). Elsewhere in the forest we search for the rainbow-like **Turquoise Parrot**, the bark-peeling **Crested Shrike-tit**, the ground-dwelling **Speckled Warbler**, and more.

Overnight: Chiltern

Day 3. Transfer to Deniliquin via Gulpa Island and Plains-wanderer trip

After some more birding in the Chiltern area, perhaps finding **Turquoise Parrot**, **Gang-gang Cockatoo**, or **Painted Buttonquail**, we'll head towards Deniliquin via Gulpa Island and various other sites in the Riverina Bioregion. Targets will include the vivid **Superb Parrot**, the elusive **Gilbert's Whistler**, and the striking **White-backed Swallow**.

This evening we go out with Philip Maher to search for the bizarre **Plains-wanderer**, the sole representative of an endemic Australian family most closely related to the shorebirds. Although this species is the star attraction of this site, we may also encounter other birds, such as **Inland Dotterel**, **Banded Lapwing**, **Stubble Quail**, **Eastern Barn Owl**, or **Australian Owlet-Nightjar** on this nocturnal foray.

Overnight: Deniliquin

Days 4 and 5. Transfer to, and birding Hattah-Kulkyne National Park

After a late night we'll have a more relaxed morning around Deniliquin before we travel across to one of Australia's largest and most pristine Mallee reserves, Hattah-Kulkyne National Park. Hattah-Kulkyne boasts a wide variety of bird species that are much more difficult to see elsewhere, such as **Mallee Emu-wren** and **Striated Grasswren**. In addition to these two species we spend the morning here looking for one of the most spectacular parrots in all of Australia, **Major Mitchell's (Pink) Cockatoo**. Hopefully, the cockatoo will be accompanied by a rich and colorful supporting cast of dry country specialties, such as **Regent Parrot**, **Mulga Parrot**, **Crested Bellbird**, and **Emu**. Nearby, Lake Tutchewop may hold the elegant **Red-necked Avocet** and the dapper **Banded Stilt**.

Due to the number of secretive and highly-sought-after birds here we'll spend two nights in the town of Ouyen, giving us plenty of time to try and connect with some of this arid area's great birds like **Malleefowl**, notable for incubating its eggs in large nesting mounds.

Overnights: Ouyen

Day 6. Ouyen to Central Victoria

After some brief morning birding to target any species we may have missed we'll continue through central Victoria toward our destination of Inglewood. Sites we may visit (depending on weather conditions and species still sought) include Wyperfeld National Park and Lake Tyrrell. Founded in 1921, Wyperfeld National Park protects a significant tract of semi-arid Mallee, woodland, and heathland. High on our list of priorities here is the appropriately-named **Malleefowl**. **Southern Scrub Robin**, **Splendid Fairywren**, **Southern Whiteface**, and other birds of the dry Australian interior are also possible. Lake Tyrrell is a salt-crusted and mostly dry lakebed surrounded by saltbush and samphire. Despite its unlikely appearance this low vegetation is home to several charismatic birds, such as **Orange Chat**, **White-winged Fairywren**, and **Bluebonnet**, which we will target during our time here.

Once in central Victoria we'll visit some box-ironbark forest, a habitat endemic to Australia. Because the component tree species in this habitat are such prolific flower and nectar producers, there is a correspondingly high diversity of nectar-feeding honeyeaters and lorikeets, including the normally scarce and local **Purple-gaped Honeyeater**, **White-fronted Honeyeater**, and **Purple-crowned Lorikeet**.

Overnight: Inglewood

Day 7. Central Victoria to Aireys Inlet

A morning in central Victoria may produce the gorgeous **Painted Honeyeater**, **Eastern Rosella**, **Scarlet Robin**, **Black-eared Cuckoo**, **Shy Heathwren**, and more.

After a morning birding this area we'll continue south to pick up the Great Ocean Road and the coastal heathland habitats near Aireys Inlet. Composed of dense, low shrubs and scattered, twisted trees, coastal heathland occurs on impoverished soils with poor drainage. Despite the nutrient-poor soils this habitat boasts a very high diversity of plants as well as a unique community of birds that depend on them. We'll seek out some of these unique species, such as **Southern Emu-wren**, **Beautiful Firetail**, and **Rufous Bristlebird**. Areas of taller vegetation may host the endearing **Gang-gang Cockatoo**, while a sea watch may yield **Black-browed Albatross**, **Australasian Gannet**, and other pelagic birds offshore.

Overnight: Aireys Inlet

Day 8. Aireys Inlet to Melbourne

After some morning birding around the heathlands near our accommodation we travel across to the Melbourne

Water Western Treatment Plant area in Werribee. Included in the Ramsar list of Wetlands of International Importance in 1983, this extremely rich site contains a network of sewage treatment lagoons, unmodified saltmarsh, creeks, and lakes, which host large numbers of both sedentary and migratory waterbirds. Among a wide assortment of other species, **Freckled Duck**, **Pink-eared Duck**, and **Musk Duck** will be top priorities, as well as the secretive **Australian Crake** and the highly localized **Striated Fieldwren**. The area is usually great for raptors, and we'll look out for **Wedge-tailed Eagle** and **Little Eagle**.

We'll continue on to Melbourne, where we'll spend the night in an airport hotel in sight of an early flight the next morning.

Overnight: Melbourne

Day 9. Transfer from Melbourne to Lamington National Park

After an early morning flight we arrive in Brisbane, the state capital of Queensland, to continue our tour. We first stop at a few mangrove sites near the airport itself, searching for the endemic **Mangrove Honeyeater** and **Mangrove Gerygone**. Nearby wetland sites often hold the elusive **Spotless Crake**, and we should obtain our first sightings of **Comb-crested Jacana**, **Red-backed Fairywren**, and more while we search for it.

Afterwards we drive to the world-famous O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat. A colorful and interesting suite of birds attends the lodge feeders here, including **Crimson Rosella**, **Australian King Parrot**, **Regent Bowerbird**, **Satin Bowerbird**, **Australian Brushturkey**, and **Wonga Pigeon**. These birds are unusually tame, often feeding right out of people's hands and providing excellent opportunities for photography.

Overnight: O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat

Day 10. Full day birding Lamington National Park

Situated in the heart of Lamington National Park, O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat is well known for its rainforest location, diverse wildlife, and interesting history. Using the lodge as our base, we spend the better part of the day exploring the verdant network of subtropical rainforest trails in search of several spectacular birds unique to the area. **Albert's Lyrebird**, **Australian Logrunner**, and **Noisy Pitta** inhabit the forest understory, while birds in the midstory and canopy include **Paradise Riflebird**, **Topknot Pigeon**, and **Green Catbird**. We will make a concerted effort to see all of these species during our stay, as well as leaving time to enjoy the site's good variety of mammals.

Overnight: O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat

Day 11. Transfer from Brisbane to Cairns, birding the Cairns Esplanade

We need an early start today to bird a site or two around Brisbane before catching our flight to Cairns.

Upon arrival in Cairns we pay an afternoon visit to the Cairns Botanical Gardens and Centenary Lakes to give us our first taste of the Australian wet tropics. This lush park is home to a rich assortment of birds, including **Orange-footed Scrubfowl**, **Bush Stone-curlew**, **Torresian Imperial Pigeon**, **Black Butcherbird**, and more. As the afternoon wears on a variety of woodland species, such as **Rainbow Bee-eater**, **Brown-backed Honeyeater**, and **Yellow Honeyeater** becomes more active, often bathing on the edges of a freshwater lake.

With careful attention to the tide table we make the short jaunt over to the Cairns Esplanade to enjoy its large variety of shorebirds, from the hulking **Far Eastern Curlew** to the dainty **Terek Sandpiper**. We also check a short stretch of mangrove forest nearby for **Mangrove Robin** and **Varied Honeyeater**, localized habitat specialists.

Overnight: Cairns

Day 12. Great Barrier Reef

The Great Barrier Reef is an ecosystem of many superlatives that no words can do justice. After breakfast we board a boat that will take us out to experience this incredible reef system. Our first stop is Michaelmas Cay, a tiny islet that hosts an impressive number of nesting seabirds. **Sooty Tern**, **Brown Noddy**, and **Greater Crested Tern** dominate, but **Lesser Crested Tern**, **Black Noddy**, and **Black-naped Tern** are also possible. **Brown Booby** can be seen perched on man-made structures, while marauding **Great** and **Lesser Frigatebirds** often soar overhead. The boat then makes a stop at Hastings Reef, where there will be an option to snorkel or take a glass bottom boat tour. When we return to shore in the afternoon we head west to Cassowary House for the night.

Overnight: Cassowary House, Kuranda

Day 13. Birding near Kuranda, transfer to Chambers Wildlife Rainforest Lodges

Our main target for today is the hulking **Southern Cassowary**, the largest bird in Australia by weight. Cassowary House has hosted a family of these imposing birds for many years. While we venture off to a nearby rainforest road in the morning for our first shot at a variety of new fruit doves, monarch flycatchers, and honeyeaters, we will remain in contact with our lodge host, should a cassowary venture into the gardens. Other visitors to the Cassowary House feeders include the normally reclusive **Red-necked Crake** as well as **Common Emerald Dove** and **Macleay's Honeyeater**.

In the late morning we continue our journey southwest to the Atherton Tablelands, but not without stopping at a couple of wetland sites for **Sarus Crane** and **Brolga**, **Wandering** and **Plumed Whistling Ducks**, and other open-country species. We spend the course of the next two days visiting a variety of sites on the Atherton Tablelands, a fertile plateau hosting several habitats from high altitude rainforest to drier eucalypt woodland. There will be a lot of targets to fit into these days, so expect long days as we try to connect with as many of them as possible. Although we will keep our itinerary flexible based on our growing trip list, we will likely spend the first day birding the cooler wet forest of Mount Hypipamee National Park, Lake Barrine, and the Curtain Fig Tree for **Tooth-billed Bowerbird**, **Golden Bowerbird**, **Wompoo Fruit Dove**, **Grey-headed Robin**, **Chowchilla**, and more.

Overnight: Chambers Wildlife Rainforest Lodges, Eacham Close

Day 14. Birding the Atherton Tablelands

On our second day in the area we make our way northward along the much drier eastern edge of the Atherton Tablelands, stopping at various sites, which may include Granite Gorge Nature Park, Mount Carbine, Lake Mitchell, and the Maryfarms Road. Much like on the previous day there will be no shortage of potential targets. **Australian Bustard**, **Squatter Pigeon**, **Red-tailed Black Cockatoo**, **Blue-winged Kookaburra**, and **Great Bowerbird** are only a sample of the many wonderful birds we may encounter today. After a long day of birding we settle in at Kingfisher Park Birdwatchers Lodge for the next two nights.

Overnight: Kingfisher Park Birdwatchers Lodge

Day 15. Birding Mount Lewis and Kingfisher Park Birdwatchers Lodge

The signature species at Kingfisher Park Birdwatchers Lodge, **Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher**, is fully migratory in this part of its range, arriving in November to nest with the advent of the rainy season. We carefully time this itinerary to coincide with the arrival of this spectacular kingfisher to the Atherton Tablelands. Otherwise the day will be mostly about connecting with species that we may have previously missed during our travels, such as

Yellow-breasted Boatbill and **Noisy Pitta**. The high altitude rainforest at Mount Lewis offers another chance at **Golden Bowerbird**, **Fernwren**, **Mountain Thornbill**, and more. Evening spotlighting on the lodge grounds may produce **Lesser Sooty Owl** or **Barking Owl**.
Overnight: Kingfisher Park Birdwatchers Lodge

Day 16. Daintree River Cruise

We will need an early start today to arrive in time for our cruise along the scenic Daintree River. By scanning the sandy banks and lush riverside vegetation from the comfort of our boat we will keep a sharp eye out for the bulky **Great-billed Heron**, family groups of **Shining Flycatcher**, the cryptically camouflaged **Papuan Frogmouth**, and flocks of the diminutive **Double-eyed Fig Parrot** – maybe even the rare **Little Kingfisher**.

Back on dry land we will search the surrounding forest for **Lovely Fairywren** and the sandy beaches for **Beach Stone-curlew**, before driving south toward the Cattana Wetlands in Cairns in the afternoon. Here we hope to obtain views of the vivid **Crimson Finch** and the retiring **White-browed Crake**.

Overnight: Cairns

Day 17. Transfer to Cairns International Airport

After some optional early morning birding we transfer to the Cairns International Airport, where the tour ends mid-morning, or continue onto the Australia: Top End Birding Specialties tour with a flight to Darwin.

Duration: 17 days/16 nights
Group size: 3 – 8
Date: 28 October - 12 November 2018
Start: Melbourne
End: Cairns

Price: AU\$9,154 per person sharing (7-8 participants)
 AU\$11,090 per person sharing (5-6 participants)
 AU\$12,440 (3-4 participants)

Single Supplement: AU\$2,575

Price includes:

All reserve entry fees shown in the itinerary

Lodging

Meals

Expert bird guide during the entire trip

Private transportation during the tour

Transfers to and from the airports

Price excludes:

International airfare

Domestic flights within Australia

Gratuities

Items of a personal nature (e.g. drinks, snacks, alcoholic beverages, laundry, souvenirs, phone calls, internet access, etc.)