



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

6 – 22 NOVEMBER 2019



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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. More than 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.

Our journey begins at the cosmopolitan city of Melbourne, Victoria, 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 in New South Wales 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, Queensland, 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 **Paradise Riflebird**, **Regent Bowerbird**, **Satin Bowerbird**, **Noisy Pitta**, **Albert's Lyrebird**, 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 nights should also produce a host of endearing and unusual nocturnal birds and mammals, which may include **Papuan Frogmouth** and **Barking Owl**. Other target birds in the north include **Australian Bustard**, **Victoria's Riflebird**, **Tooth-billed**, **Great**, and **Golden Bowerbirds**, and **Great-billed Heron**.

During our time in Australia we will look for some of the country's incredible and unique animals, including Platypus, Short-beaked Echidna, Koala, Red Kangaroo, Eastern Grey Kangaroo, Common Ringtail Possum, Common Brushtail Possum, Musky Rat Kangaroo, and Common Wombat. The birds in Australia are incredible, but so are the mammals, reptiles, and

amphibians that we will see; they combine to result in an awesome wildlife-filled experience. This continent is a naturalist's dream!

For those wishing to continue exploring Australia, this tour can be combined with our set of tours following this one: **Australia: Tasmania and the Orange-bellied Parrot 2019** (23 - 28 November 2019) followed by **Australia: Top End Birding 2019** (29 November - 7 December 2019) followed by **Australia: Southwest Specialties 2019** (8 - 16 December 2019), 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).

Itinerary (17 days/16 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Melbourne and travel to Aireys Inlet

We will aim to depart the Melbourne Airport area at 8:00 a.m. If you'd like us to organize a hotel for the night before please let us know; it would be our pleasure to assist.

Over the course of the day we will enjoy some of Australia's common and widespread birds that are likely to be new for the first-time visitor to Australasia, such as **Magpie-lark**, **Rainbow Lorikeet**, **Sulphur-crested Cockatoo**, **Willie Wagtail**, **Laughing Kookaburra**, and **Australian Magpie**. The songs and calls of the first and last of these six species are beautiful and instantly recognizable, but it is the call of the kookaburra which is synonymous of the dream of being in Australia. When you hear one you know exactly where you are in the world. Although all of these species are common they are all wonderful birds and should not be overlooked.

We drive around Melbourne to the world-famous Werribee Western Treatment Plant area along the coast. Included in the Ramsar list of Wetlands of International Importance in 1983, this extremely rich, huge area contains a network of sewage treatment lagoons, unmodified saltmarsh, creeks, and lakes, which host large numbers of both sedentary and migratory waterbirds. We will navigate a series of roads around this area where water levels permit, 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 often great for raptors, and we may find **Black-shouldered Kite**, **Wedge-tailed Eagle**, **Australian Hobby**, and **Brown Falcon**.

We then continue southward along the coast to Aireys Inlet for the night. Along the way a few stops may produce **Southern Emu-wren**, **Black-tailed Nativehen**, **Black-fronted Dotterel**, **Cape Barren Goose**, and **White-winged Chough**. Maybe we'll even be spotting our first Eastern Grey Kangaroo or Koala along the way.

Overnight: Aireys Inlet

Day 2. Aireys Inlet to central Victoria

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 spend most of the morning exploring the scenic coastal heathlands of southwest Victoria, seeking 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.

As the day progresses we drive inland into central Victoria for our first taste of 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 3. Central Victoria to Ouyen

After some brief morning birding around Inglewood we continue onward to the Ouyen area in northwestern Victoria. Along the way we will stop at Lake Tyrrell, a salt-crusted and mostly dry lake bed 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 **Eastern Bluebonnet**, which we will target during our time here.

Founded in 1921, Wyperfeld National Park protects a significant tract of semi-arid mallee, woodland, and heathland. Depending on local conditions we may visit this site as we are passing. High on our list of priorities here would be the appropriately-named **Malleefowl**, **Southern Scrub Robin**, **Splendid Fairywren**, **Southern Whiteface**, and other birds of the dry Australian interior are also possible.

In the late afternoon we will arrive in Ouyen in the mallee habitat. Due to the number of secretive and highly-sought birds here we will spend two nights and days birding the area, giving us plenty of time to try and connect with some of the arid area's great birds like **Malleefowl**, notable for incubating its eggs in large nesting mounds.

Overnight: Ouyen

Day 4. Birding Hattah-Kulkyne National Park

As one of Australia's largest and most pristine mallee reserves, Hattah-Kulkyne National Park boasts a wide variety of bird species that are much more difficult to see elsewhere, such as **Mallee Emu-wren** and **Striated Grasswren**. We will spend the full day birding within and around the park and town. In addition to the species mentioned above, we will be looking for one of the most spectacular parrots in all of Australia, **Major Mitchell's 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**. Possibly we'll have our first look at the huge Red Kangaroo here too.

Overnight: Ouyen

Day 5. Hattah-Kulkyne National Park, travel to Deniliquin, and Plains-wanderer night trip

We will have another morning birding in the wonderful Hattah-Kulkyne National Park, where we will continue to seek out the area's specialties, maybe including **White-winged Chough**, **Apostlebird**, **Chestnut Quail-thrush**, and many more. As the morning progresses we will head out of Victoria into neighboring New South Wales. We will likely stop at Lake Tutchewop along the way, which, depending on water levels, may hold the elegant **Red-necked Avocet** and the dapper **Banded Stilt**.

We will have a long day today, because during the evening we will 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 (but its closest living relatives are thought to be the seedsnipes of South America!). 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

Day 6. Transfer to Chiltern via Gulpa Island

After a late night we allow ourselves to sleep in a little bit before continuing our journey to Chiltern via Gulpa Island and various other sites in the Riverina bioregion. Targets on this more laid-back day include the vivid **Superb Parrot**, the elusive **Gilbert's Whistler**, and the striking **White-backed Swallow** as we aim to arrive in Chiltern in the mid-afternoon.

Overnight: Chiltern

Day 7. Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park to Healesville

Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park, established in October 2002, 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, with considerable luck, even the Critically Endangered (IUCN) **Regent Honeyeater** (this site being one of its last strongholds, but they are still exceedingly rare here). 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. We may even come across the unusual Short-beaked Echidna here.

After lunch we continue our journey southward to the town of Healesville near the city of Melbourne for the night. Here we will have a chance for some evening spotlighting for birds such as **Greater Sooty Owl** and mammals, possibly possums and gliders.

Overnight: Healesville

Day 8. Birding near Melbourne and conclusion of the "Outback" part of the tour

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**, **Pilotbird**, **Olive Whistler**, **Eastern Whipbird**, **Flame Robin**, **Rose Robin**, **Pink Robin**, **Red-browed Treecreeper**, **Rufous Fantail**, and more. It is sure to be a wonderful end to the birding on this part of the tour. We will continue back to Melbourne, thus completing our circuit of Victoria, where we will spend the night in an airport hotel ahead of an early flight the next day.

Overnight: Melbourne

Day 9. Transfer from Melbourne to Brisbane and 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 could obtain our first sightings of **Comb-crested Jacana**, **Red-backed Fairywren**, and more while we search for them.

Afterwards we drive to the world-famous O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat at Lamington National Park. 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: Lamington National Park

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 full 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 mid-story and canopy include **Paradise Riflebird**, **Topknot Pigeon**, **Black-faced Monarch**, 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, a good number of which only come out at night.

Overnight: Lamington National Park

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

We will have a pre-breakfast birding walk into the forest near our accommodation once again, where we will keep searching for new and interesting species, maybe finding a cryptically-plumaged **Russet-tailed Thrush** or the gorgeous and rather cute **Rose Robin**. After another sumptuous O'Reilly's breakfast we will drive off the mountain and head back toward the city in time to make our flight further north on our tour of the Australian east coast.

When we arrive into Cairns, depending on the tide time we might make the short jaunt from our hotel to the Cairns Esplanade to enjoy its variety of shorebirds, from the hulking **Far Eastern Curlew** to the dainty **Terek Sandpiper**. We may also check a short stretch of mangrove forest nearby for **Mangrove Robin** and **Varied Honeyeater**, localized habitat specialists. We are sure to see plenty of **Torresian Imperial Pigeons**, **Australasian Figbirds**, and **Metallic Starlings** flying around near our accommodation.

Overnight: Cairns

Day 12. Great Barrier Reef Trip and travel to Kuranda

The Great Barrier Reef is an ecosystem of many superlatives that no words can do justice. After an early 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. We will spend some time here. Weather and sea conditions permitting we should be able to land on the cay to get close-up views of these seabirds. There is also the likelihood of snorkeling here, but for this part of our reef trip the focus is really on the birds, though we will also keep our eyes peeled for dolphins and sea turtles.

After lunch the boat usually moves across to Hastings Reef, where there will be an option to snorkel, scuba dive, or take a glass bottom boat tour, all three options giving a wonderful opportunity to observe the plethora of shockingly colorful life below the surface. When we return to shore in the mid-afternoon we will jump into our van and head into the rainforest to the west of Cairns to the Kuranda area, where we will spend the night.

Overnight: Kuranda

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

Our main target bird for the morning, and if successful likely to be a 'bird of the trip' contender, is the humongous and rare **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 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 **Pacific Emerald Dove** and **Macleay's Honeyeater**. We might also get lucky and see the local **Victoria's Riflebird** (a bird-of-paradise) displaying in and around the lodge gardens.

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 the next couple of 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 time 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. We can, with some luck, also find **Victoria's Riflebird** and **Spotted Catbird** in the gardens of our accommodation. Nocturnal activity is also wonderfully exciting here, and we will be sure to spend some time searching a range of possums, gliders, and more, as well as the diurnal Musky Rat Kangaroo. Here we will also have a look for the bizarre Platypus!

Overnight: Lake Eacham

Day 14. Birding Atherton Tablelands

On our second day in the area we make our way northwards 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, Spotted Harrier, 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: Julatten

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.

A small area of rainforest in an otherwise agricultural landscape is an amazing sight, and this small block of habitat is home to some remarkable species. We will find lots of new birds here with some target birds including **Papuan Frogmouth**, **Yellow-breasted Boatbill**, **Graceful Honeyeater**, **Pied Monarch**, **Superb Fruit Dove**, **Forest Kingfisher**, and **Noisy Pitta**. The high-altitude rainforest at Mount Lewis offers another chance at **Golden Bowerbird** and several very restricted-range endemics such as **Fernwren**, **Chowchilla**, **Mountain Thornbill**, **Atherton Scrubwren**, **Blue-faced Parrotfinch**, and more. Evening spotlighting on the lodge grounds may produce **Lesser Sooty Owl** or **Barking Owl** and the possibility of some more interesting mammals and reptiles.

Overnight: Julatten

Day 16. Daintree River Cruise

We will need an early start today to arrive in time for our dawn 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 Cattana Wetlands in the afternoon. Here we hope to obtain views of the vivid **Crimson Finch** and the retiring **White-browed Crake**.

Upon arrival in Cairns we pay an afternoon visit to the Cairns Botanical Gardens and Centenary Lakes. 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. We will enjoy a final evening meal together with the difficult task of choosing the ‘Bird of the Trip’, never an easy thing to do in Australia.

Overnight: Cairns

Day 17. Transfer to Cairns Airport, tour concludes

After some optional early morning birding in Cairns, we transfer to the Cairns Airport, where the tour ends mid-morning, or continue on our Tasmania tour with flights to Hobart.

Duration: 17 days
Group size: 4-8
Date: 6 - 22 November 2019
Start: Melbourne, Victoria
End: Cairns, Queensland

Tour Price: AU\$10,560 per person sharing (4-8 people)
Single Supplement: AU\$1,825

Price includes:

All reserve entry fees shown in the itinerary

Lodging (from day 1 through day 16)

Meals (from lunch on day 1 until breakfast on day 17)

Expert bird guide during the entire trip

Private transportation during the tour and transfers (possibly shared) to and from the airports

Boat trips on the Daintree River and the Great Barrier Reef

Price excludes:

International airfare

Accommodation and meals before/after tour

Domestic flights within Australia during tour (Required Melbourne-Brisbane and Brisbane-Cairns. We will book these for you and provide costs to ensure that everyone is on the same flight – estimate about AU\$600)

Gratuities

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

Please note that the itinerary above 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.