



**AUSTRALIA: NORTHERN TERRITORY -
TOP END BIRDING**

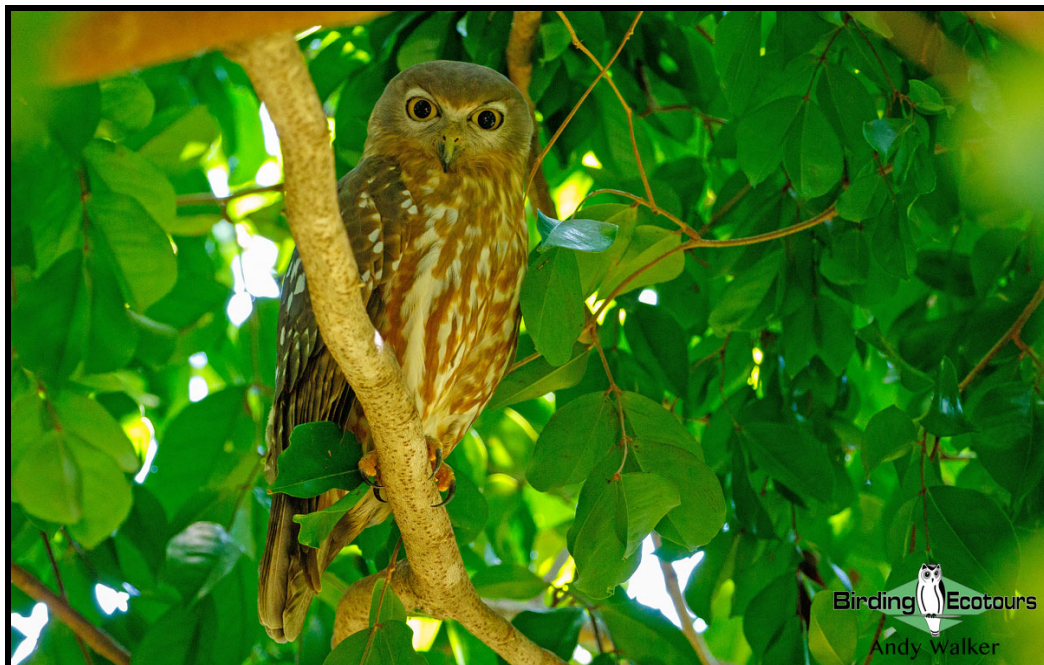
17 – 25 SEPTEMBER 2024



*The exquisite **Rainbow Pitta** is one of our targets on this trip.*

Our Northern Territory – Top End Birding tour has been fully updated following further exploration of the region. This tour travels along a well-trodden path around the Top End of the Northern Territory in a loop starting and ending in the coastal city of Darwin, then moving across to Kakadu National Park (via the excellent Adelaide River and Mary River areas), and finally calling in to the township of Pine Creek, before returning north to Darwin. The tour focuses on the special and endemic birds of the region and is ideal for anyone who has never birded Australia before, or anyone who has only birded the east or west of the country as lots of exciting new birds will be on offer in this fantastically bird-rich area in the north of Australia.

Darwin is one of the top birding cities in the world with numerous key species on offer right within the city and we will venture into botanic gardens, mangroves, beaches, and monsoon forest for a wide range of quality and specialist birds. Highlights possible around the city include **Rainbow Pitta, Chestnut Rail, Beach Stone-curlew, White-breasted Whistler, Red-headed Myzomela, Arafura Fantail, Arafura Shrikethrush, Northern Rosella, Red-collared Lorikeet, Varied Lorikeet, Paperbark Flycatcher, Canary White-eye, Green-backed Gerygone, Mangrove Robin, Mangrove Fantail, Torresian Kingfisher, Rufous Owl, and Barking Owl.**



Barking Owl can often be found roosting around Darwin.

Kakadu is famous for its ancient rock art but this area also has some of the most incredible wetlands in the whole country and vast mixed flocks of waterfowl can be seen – it really is an impressive sight watching flocks of hundreds of **Australasian Swamphens, Magpie Geese, Comb-crested Jacanas, and Pied Herons**, with **Sarus Crane, Brolga, and Black-necked Stork** dotted around among them. Raptors are abundant in the area with top targets including **Wedge-**

tailed Eagle, Red Goshawk, Pacific Baza, and Black-breasted Buzzard. Numerous localized species can be found here too such as **Black-banded Fruit Dove**, **Chestnut-quilled Rock Pigeon**, **Partridge Pigeon**, **Mangrove Golden Whistler**, **Black-tailed Treecreeper**, **Sandstone Shrikethrush**, **Great Bowerbird**, **Cockatiel**, and **White-lined Honeyeater** to name a few.



*The stunning and localized **Mangrove Golden Whistler** will be a target in the Top End.*

The final stop of this tour will be the furthest south we venture, near the town of Katherine, where we will look for the spectacular **Gouldian Finch**, as well as a range of other equally impressive finches, likely to include **Masked Finch**, **Long-tailed Finch**, and **Crimson Finch**. Additional targets from this area include **Hooded Parrot**, **Red-winged Parrot**, **Budgerigar**, **Red-backed Kingfisher**, (Northern) **Crested Shriketit** (a monotypic family), and **Varied Sittella**. For a complete desert adventure, consider combining this tour with our **Northern Territory – Alice Springs Birding** tour in the south of the territory, for a range of local desert specials such as **Spinifexbird**, **Spinifex Pigeon**, **Banded Whiteface**, **Rufous-crowned Emu-wren**, and much more!

For those wishing to explore Australia further, this tour (and the aforementioned **Northern Territory – Alice Springs Birding** tour) can be combined with our other Australian offerings: **Australia: Tasmania – Endemics and the Orange-bellied Parrot**, **Eastern Australia: from the Outback to the Wet Tropics**, and **Western Australia: Southwest Specialties**. We can also offer a range of custom tours, pelagic trips, photo tours, or target-species trips to this vast continent-country.

Itinerary (9 days/8 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Darwin

After your late-morning arrival in Darwin you will make the short transfer to our city hotel. We will meet at the hotel for lunch prior to a late-afternoon birding session in the city where we are sure to get our lists off to a great start with a selection of common local birds and likely some of the regional specials such as **Orange-footed Scrubfowl**, **Red-headed Myzomela**, **Paperbark Flycatcher**, **Red-collared Lorikeet**, **White-gaped Honeyeater**, **Blue-faced** (“White-quilled”) **Honeyeater**, **Rufous-banded Honeyeater**, and **Rose-crowned Fruit Dove**.

After our evening meal we will go through our checklist from the afternoon’s birding session (as we will do on every evening – as we do on all of our tours) and go through our plans for the next week or so of exciting birding, starting off with the plans for the following day’s city birding.

Overnight: Darwin

Day 2. Birding the Darwin environs

We will spend the full day birding around Darwin. Coastal habitats including tidal mudflats, mangroves, and coastal monsoon forest will be searched for the secretive **Chestnut Rail**. Further targets here will include **Mangrove Gerygone**, **Canary White-eye**, **Shining Flycatcher**, **Broad-billed Flycatcher**, **Mangrove Fantail**, **Mangrove Robin**, and **White-breasted Whistler**. Shorebirds here can include **Beach Stone-curlew** and **Grey-tailed Tattler**.



*We will hope to repeat the fantastic views of **Chestnut Rail**, as we have had on previous tours.*

Monsoon forest around the city offers a great many species including one of the many standout targets of the trip, **Rainbow Pitta**. It is a magical sight to see this avian jewel hopping around on the forest floor. Here plenty of other birds are possible, such as **Canary White-eye**, **Arafura Shrikethrush**, and **Arafura Fantail**. We may even get lucky and find a roosting **Large-tailed Nightjar**. The **Orange-footed Scrubfowl** nest mounds here are breathtaking and certainly are impressive engineering feats to witness! We will look out for **Varied Lorikeets**, **Red-collared Lorikeets**, and **Northern Rosellas** here too, as well as an assortment of honeyeaters, trillers, and cuckooshrikes.

Our lunch will be taken at one of the many delightful locally owned coffeeshops where we are sure of some great food and excellent service. Once we have finished our lunch, we will be sure to head out birding again to make the most of our time in the city. One site that we will fit into our day's birding is the George Brown Darwin Botanic Gardens. Here we can find some great birds and marvel at the incredible plants growing here – it's hard to not dream of birding in Madagascar when walking through the baobab garden! Some of the species we hope to encounter during our time here include **Rose-crowned Fruit Dove**, **Australian Figbird**, **Bush Stone-curlew**, **Rufous Owl**, **Barking Owl**, **Tawny Frogmouth**, **Azure Kingfisher**, **Double-barred Finch**, **Blue-winged Kookaburra**, **Northern Fantail**, **Red-headed Myzomela**, and **Brahminy Kite**.

Overnight: Darwin



Red-headed Myzomela is an attractive small honeyeater and one we should enjoy seeing (along with many other species of this varied family) while in the Top End.

Day 3. Darwin to Mary River Area

After a final early morning birding session around Darwin, we will commence our drive into the more remote areas in the east of our circuit. Along the way to the famed Kakadu National Park, there are several great birding areas and we will call in at some of these. One such spot is Fogg Dam Conservation Reserve. The wetland landscape of the Adelaide River floodplain is stunning and usually packed full with an assortment of wetland birds such as **Comb-crested Jacana**, **Wandering Whistling Duck**, **Green Pygmy Goose**, **Pied Heron**, **Black-necked Stork**, **Brolga**, **Australasian Darter**, **White-necked Heron**, **Straw-necked Ibis**, **Royal Spoonbill**, and **Nankeen Night Heron** (along with many more widespread species). Smaller passerines around the floodplain include the globally widespread, but in Australia very localized (and potentially warranting specific species status with a couple of other subspecies) **Zitting Cisticola**, along with **Golden-headed Cisticola**, **Double-barred Finch**, and **Crimson Finch**. The monsoon forest and forest edge along the floodplain here is also great for plenty of species as well, including **Blue-winged Kookaburra**, **Forest Kingfisher**, **Pheasant Coucal**, **Arafura Fantail**, **Rainbow Pitta**, **Paperbark Flycatcher**, **Leaden Flycatcher**, **Lemon-bellied Flyrobin**, **Hooded Robin**, **Jacky Winter**, **Green-backed Gerygone**, and **Mangrove Golden Whistler**.

We will spend the night at Mary River. Here we will look for the regional special **Black-tailed Treecreeper**, but other targets will include **Bush Stone-curlew**, **Red-tailed Black Cockatoo**, **Mistletoebird**, **Rufous Whistler**, **White-throated Honeyeater**, **White-winged Triller**, **Torresian Crow**, **Red-collared Lorikeet**, **Helmeted Friarbird**, **Green Oriole**, and we might even find **Channel-billed Cuckoo** – this is one of *the* most impressive cuckoos in the world!

Overnight: Mary River



*Another localized species that we will be looking for on this tour, **Black-tailed Treecreeper**.*

Day 4. Mary River to Kakadu National Park

We will spend the early morning enjoying birds around the Mary River area. Our accommodation is set in grounds that attract a range of birds (**Red-tailed Black Cockatoos** are often feeding around our rooms) and we will likely explore areas from the previous afternoon for more of our targets such as **Black-tailed Treecreeper**, **Mangrove Golden Whistler**, **Rufous-banded Honeyeater**, and **Varied Lorikeet**.

Our route into Kakadu National Park takes us through great habitat and we will keep our eyes peeled for roadside **Silver-backed Butcherbird**, **Northern Rosella**, **Black-breasted Buzzard**, and **Wedge-tailed Eagle**. There are several excellent waterholes (known as billabongs here) and we will stop and check a few of them where we could find **Magpie Goose**, **Wandering Whistling Duck**, **Raja Shelduck**, **Hardhead**, **Australasian Swamphen**, **Brolga**, **Comb-crested Jacana**, **Australian Tern**, **Whiskered Tern**, **Australasian Darter**, **Australian Pelican**, **Pied Heron**, and **Black-necked Stork**. Some of the above are often present in flocks of several hundred and offer a spectacular sight (and sound).



*The tiny **Pied Heron** is sure to delight.*

The afternoon will be spent birding within Kakadu National Park, making a start on the birds mentioned for Days 5-6 as we check-in for our three-night stay in the area.

Overnight: Kakadu National Park area

Days 5 - 6. Kakadu National Park

We will have two full days to explore this excellent, wildlife rich area, as well as the afternoon of Day 4 and morning of Day 7. There are several target birds on our radar here, many can be found among the impressive sandstone hills, either in the monsoon forest surrounding them in the case of **Northern Rosella**, **Black-banded Fruit Dove**, **Rainbow Pitta**, **Forest Kingfisher**, **Northern Fantail**, **White-lined Honeyeater**, **Helmeted (Sandstone) Friarbird**, **Green Oriole**, and **Olive-backed Oriole**, or actually in the hills themselves, such as **Chestnut-quilled Rock Pigeon**, **Sandstone Shrikethrush**, and **Little Woodswallow**. The area is often very busy with birds and we will likely see many other species as we bird our way around it.



*Incredibly well-camouflaged, we will certainly need to have our eyes peeled to locate the **Chestnut-quilled Rock Pigeon**.*

Dry woodland areas in the vicinity are also home to **Partridge Pigeon**, **Red-winged Parrot**, **Cockatiel**, **Galah**, **Great Bowerbird**, **Red-backed Fairywren**, **Buff-sided Robin**, **White-bellied Cuckooshrike**, **Pied Butcherbird**, and **Blue-winged Kookaburra** among others.

While in the area we will also check out several waterholes and riverine systems that may offer us further chances of some of the waterbirds previously mentioned, or maybe something rare or different like a **Great-billed Heron**, **Little Kingfisher**, or **Azure Kingfisher**.

We will also make sure to visit some of the spectacular rock art, etched thousands of years ago by the indigenous people which offers a fantastic window into the human history of the region.

Overnights (two nights): Kakadu National Park area



*We will look for **Cockatiel** during our time in the Kakadu area.*



***Blue-winged Kookaburra** will be one of our target birds during the tour.*

Day 7. Kakadu National Park to Pine Creek

We will bid a sad farewell to the Kakadu area after our final morning birding session. We will slowly drive southwest to the township of Pine Creek. Along the way we will look for **Black-breasted Buzzard** and other raptors, along with **Red-backed Kingfisher**, **Northern Rosella**, **Red-winged Parrot**, and **Silver-backed Butcherbird**.

Our accommodation, right in the township of Pine Creek offers us a great chance to find one of the area's special birds, **Hooded Parrot** and we will spend some time locating this species. If time permits, we will make a start on the birds mentioned for Day 8.

Overnight: Pine Creek Township

Day 8. Pine Creek Area

We will spend time birding in the bush in the vicinity of Pine Creek where we will look for several target birds including a range of finches, with the beautiful **Gouldian Finch** being one of the most desired. Other gorgeous finches possible here include **Masked Finch**, **Long-tailed Finch**, **Crimson Finch**, **Double-barred Finch**, and **Zebra Finch**. We also stand a good chance of seeing **Hooded Parrots** again and may even get lucky and find the highly nomadic **Budgerigar**. Other possibilities include **Varied Sittella**, **Bar-shouldered Dove**, **Peaceful Dove**, **Rainbow Bee-eater**, **Great Bowerbird**, **Rufous-throated Honeyeater**, **Silver-crowned Friarbird**, and **Black-faced Woodswallow**,



Masked Finch is a chunky bird which we will hope to find alongside several other species.



Crimson Finch is another finch species we hope to find on this tour.

As we spend the day exploring other areas nearby, we will look out for several other species that we may have yet to see during the tour, such as **Apostlebird**, **Australian Bustard**, **Black-fronted Dotterel**, **Red-kneed Dotterel**, **Fairy Martin**, **Grey-crowned Babbler**, **Diamond Dove**, **Common Bronzewing**, and **Spotted Harrier**.

Overnight: Pine Creek Township

Day 9. Pine Creek to Darwin, where the tour concludes

After a final morning birding in the Pine Creek area targeting the species mentioned for Day 8 and potentially enjoying a final sighting of **Gouldian Finch** or **Hooded Parrot**, we will commence our journey north back to Darwin. The tour will conclude in the late afternoon in time for your evening flight home or onto one of our other Australian tours.

Overnight: Not included

Please note that the itinerary 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.

Duration: 9 days
Group Size: 6 - 8
Dates: 17 - 25 September 2024
Start: Darwin, Northern Territory
End: Darwin, Northern Territory
Prices: AU\$9,974 per person sharing – based on 6 - 8 participants (2024)

Single Supplements: AU\$2,087 (2024)

Price includes:

All accommodation (as described above from Day 1 through Day 8)
Meals (from lunch on Day 1 until lunch on Day 9)
Expert tour leader
National park/birdwatching reserve/protected areas entrance fees
Private transportation during the tour and transfers (possibly shared) to and from the airports

Price excludes:

International or domestic flights to get to/from Darwin
Any pre- or post-tour accommodation, meals, or birding/sightseeing/etc. excursions
Visa if required
Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts, laundry, internet access, phone calls, etc.
Any pre- or post-tour accommodation, meals, or birding/sightseeing/monument excursions
Soft/alcoholic drinks (drinking water is safe from the taps, please bring a refillable water bottle)
Personal travel insurance
Gratuities (please see our [tipping guidelines blog](#))