



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

29 OCTOBER – 15 NOVEMBER 2024



Major Mitchell's Cockatoo is one of our gorgeous 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 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 small-group 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**. Farther 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



*We will search for **Plains-wanderer** (a monotypic family) in the dry plains of New South Wales.*

Following our time in New South Wales we will swing 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 stunning 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 visit 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, with a chance to swim with **Green Turtles**. 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 **Great-billed Heron**, **Australian Bustard**, **Victoria's Riflebird**, **Tooth-billed Bowerbird**, **Great Bowerbird**, **Golden Bowerbird**, **Fernwren**, and **Chowchilla** to name a few.



*The massive **Southern Cassowary** can be seen in northern Queensland.*

During our time in Australia we will also 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!

Sometimes we do this tour in the reverse order shown in this itinerary. Please confirm the route for your tour with us before purchasing your flight tickets.

For those wishing to continue exploring Australia (and we fully recommend it), this tour can be combined with our set of tours preceding and following this one: **Australia: Tasmania – Endemics and the Orange-bellied Parrot**, **Australia: Northern Territory – Top End Birding**, and **Western Australia: Southwest Specialties**. From 2022 you can also join our new **Northern Territory – Alice Springs Birding** tour (it will fit perfectly between our Top End and Western Australia tours). All five of our Australian birdwatching tours could be combined into one long tour, or you could just do one or two (or more!), whatever suits your time. We can also arrange further extensions (e.g., sightseeing trips to Sydney, Uluru, etc., and pelagic trips) if you wish.

Itinerary (18 days/17 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Melbourne

Non-birding day with your arrival into Melbourne airport, the rest of the day will be at your leisure. We will meet in our hotel near the airport for an evening welcome dinner together.

Overnight: Melbourne Airport Hotel



*The gaudy **Rainbow Lorikeet** can be seen around Melbourne.*

Day 2. Melbourne to Aireys Inlet

Over the course of the day we will enjoy some of Australia's common and widespread, yet beautiful and interesting birds, such as **Magpie-lark**, **Rainbow Lorikeet**, **Sulphur-crested Cockatoo**, **Willie Wagtail**, **Laughing Kookaburra**, and **Australian Magpie**.

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 Crane** 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 will even spot our first **Eastern Grey Kangaroo** or **Koala** along the way!

Overnight: Aireys Inlet



Beautiful Firetail inhabits low shrubs in central Victoria.

Day 3. 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 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 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 4. Central Victoria to Ouyen

After some brief morning birding around Inglewood we continue 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**, and **Southern Whiteface**, and other birds of the dry Australian interior are also possible.



*A top target while in mallee habitat will be **Malleefowl**.*

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 5. 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 will have our first look at the huge **Red Kangaroo** here too.

Overnight: Ouyen



*The rare **Mallee Emu-wren** (it is considered Endangered by BirdLife International) can be found in Hattah-Kulkyne National Park.*

Day 6. 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**.



*The fairywrens are sure to be one of the most-enjoyed birds of the trip, this is a **Splendid Fairywren**, one of several fairywren species likely on the tour.*

We will have a long day today, because during the evening we will go out 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 7. Transfer to Chiltern via Gulpa Island

After a late night we allow ourselves to sleep in 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 midafternoon.

Overnight: Chiltern

Day 8. 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 and forms 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 (BirdLife International) **Regent Honeyeater** (this site being one of its last strongholds, but it is still exceedingly rare here). Elsewhere in the forest we search for the rainbow-like **Turquoise Parrot**, the bark-peeling **Crested Shriketit**, 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



*Parrots are sure to continually impress during this tour, this is **Turquoise Parrot**.*

Day 9. 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 (60 kilometers) 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



Flame Robin is one of the three robin species we can see around Melbourne.

Day 10. 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**, **Torresian Kingfisher**, 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 gardens here, including **Crimson Rosella**, **Australian King Parrot**, **Regent Bowerbird**, **Satin Bowerbird**, **Australian Brushturkey**, and **Wonga Pigeon**. These birds are unusually tame and provide excellent opportunities for photography.

Overnight: Lamington National Park



*Gorgeous **Regent Bowerbirds** are often present around our rooms!*



*The Lamington area will offer us our first chance at seeing a bird-of-paradise; this being a **Paradise Riflebird**.*

Day 11. 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 12. 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 drive off the mountain and head back toward the city in time to make our flight farther north on our tour of the Australian east coast.

When we arrive in 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 13. 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 enjoying the spectacle. 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.



*The birds around Michaelmas Cay are outstanding, but the underwater life is just as mesmerizing. It's well worth jumping in, with a great chance of finding a **Green Turtle** amongst a myriad of kaleidoscopic tropical fish.*

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 midafternoon 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 14. Birding near Kuranda, transfer to Chambers Wildlife Rainforest Lodges

Our main target bird for the morning, and if we are 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.



*The far-carrying call of **Spotted Catbird** will alert us to their presence, we will hope for good views like this.*

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 Whistling Duck** and **Plumed Whistling Duck**, 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 looking for a range of possums, gliders, and more, as well as for the diurnal **Musky Rat Kangaroo**. Here we will also have a search for the bizarre **Platypus**.

Overnight: Lake Eacham

Day 15. Birding 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**, **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



*Present in the dry north, we will be on the lookout for **Blue-winged Kookaburra**.*

Day 16. 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 to nest in November with the onset 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 17. 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 Crane**.

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**, become 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



*One of the toughest kingfishers to find in Australia, we will hope to find the **Little Kingfisher** while on a boat trip on the Daintree River.*

Day 18. Transfer to Cairns Airport, tour concludes

Non-birding day with your departure from Cairns Airport.

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: 18 days
Group Size: 6 - 8
Dates: 29 October - 15 November 2024
Start: Melbourne, Victoria
End: Cairns, Queensland
Prices: AU\$16,307 per person sharing – based on 6 - 8 participants (2024)

Single Supplements: AU\$2,388 (2024)

Price includes:

All accommodation (as described above from day 1 through day 17)
Meals (from lunch on day 1 until breakfast on day 18)
Expert tour leader
National park/birdwatching reserve/protected areas entrance fees
Boat trips on the Daintree River and the Great Barrier Reef
Private transportation during the tour and transfers (possibly shared) to and from the airports

Price excludes:

International flights

Domestic flights within Australia during tour (Required Melbourne-Brisbane and Brisbane-Cairns. We can book these for you and provide costs to ensure that everyone is on the same flight – estimate about AU\$800)

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](#))