Eagle-Eye Tours



Australia: Tropical Birding Trip Report 2022 (Oct 30 - Nov 7, 2022)

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Australia: Tropical Birding Trip Report 2022 (Darwin and Kakadu, NT)

October 30-November 7, 2022 Day 1: Arrival in Darwin - The group met at 6:15pm in the lobby at the Palms City motel. We walked across the road to the Esplanade to see a Tawny Frogmouth roosting in a Milkwood tree, discovered earlier in the day. **Day 2: Darwin -** Breakfast at the motel at 7am and on our way by 7:30. We went straight to East Point and did the monsoon forest walk with the main target being the Rainbow Pitta. We dipped on the pitta but saw a Brown Whistler. Went to the rocks to see shorebirds and saw Terek Sandpiper, Lesser and Greater Sand-plover, Grey-tailed Tattler and Common Sandpiper. Black Butcherbird and Yellow-tinted Honeyeaters were in the small patch of mangrove nearby.



Birding at East Point © Mike Jarvis



East Point © Mike Jarvis

The mangrove boardwalk was our next stop. It was quiet at first but by being patient we eventually saw Red-headed Honeyeaters, Torresian Kingfishers, Broad-billed Flycatchers, Lemon-bellied Flyrobin, Varied Trillers and Brahminy Kite and heard Mangrove Robin. We went to the Botanical Gardens for lunch at Eva's Café where there was a very friendly Black Butcherbird. After lunch we looked, without success, for Rufous Owl but saw a Brown Goshawk, Northern Fantails and Green

Orioles. At Buffalo Creek, where the spring tide was very low, we had distant views of Black-necked Stork, Pied Oystercatchers, Far Eastern Curlew and Whimbrels. At Casuarina Coastal Reserve we saw a White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike on its nest. At nearby Lee Point we didn't see the Gouldian Finches, which had been seen there recently, but we did see hundreds of Chestnut-breasted Mannikins and some Masked and Crimson Finches.



White-bellied Cuckooshrike at Casuarina Reserve © Mike Jarvis

Day 3: Fogg Dam to Kakadu National Park - Left for Fogg Dam at 6:20. We saw a Horsfield's Bushlark on the fence on Middle Point Road, as well as Whistling and Black Kites and Forest Kingfishers. At Fogg Dam we enjoyed a box breakfast (from Palm's City) before walking along the Lily Boardwalk. Highlights included splendid views of a Barking Owl sitting in the open, several views of White-browed Crakes, Comb-crested Jacanas, Green Pygmy-geese and Australasian Darter.



Barking Owl © Cheryl Kiddoo

We drove along the dam wall and saw egrets, Radjah Shelduck, Magpie Geese and Crimson Finches. At the Pandanus lookout we saw a small Estuarine Crocodile, Royal Spoonbills and Plumed and Wandering Whistling-ducks. We continued toward Kakadu, with a stop at Bark Hut for lunch (pizza). Stopped at the Kakadu entrance for photos and to acquaint ourselves with some of the trees and other plants found in the northern savannah of Australia including Billy Goat Plum which has 50 times the vitamin C content of an orange, and Cooktown Ironwood, so dense it sinks. A curious juvenile Pied Butcherbird was in one of the trees close by, looking at us as we looked at him.



Group at Kakadu entry

Stopped for a moment to look at the beautiful Northern Kentia Palm (Gronophylum ramsayi) which is found only in a handful of locations in the area. At the South Alligator boat ramp, we had good views of a stunning male Red-headed Honeyeater and two species of fish, Pop-eyed Mullet and mudskippers. Our next stop was at the Mamukala bird hide where we saw a Collared Sparrowhawk on the ground drinking, an Agile Wallaby with a joey, thousands of ducks and geese and a Black-necked Stork in the distance. Little Corellas with begging young were in the Paperbark trees around the hide. **Day 4: Kakadu National Park**- Left Jabiru at 5:45am to be in time for the Yellow Water cruise at 6:45am. Being the end of the dry season the water level in the billabong was very low but our skipper steered us through without getting stuck. Skipper and guide, Mandy Muir, is a traditional owner and senior skipper with 35 years' experience on Yellow Water.



Yellow Water Cruise

A highlight was seeing a Torresian Crow eating a poisonous Cane Toad by flipping it on its back and eating it safely from the belly. Cane Toads have poisonous glands on the back of their necks. This behaviour by Crows is a recent adaptation and is now being used by other species including Australia White Ibis (personal observation by Barry).



Torresian Crow picking at poisonous Cane Toad

We also saw Estuarine Crocodiles including a mid-sized one eating a large Barramundi on top of the bank safely out of reach of a larger crocodile. The bird life was prolific.



Crocodile eating a Baramundie



Yellow Water cruise

After the cruise we had a buffet breakfast at the resort and then went to the Warradjan Cultural Centre. After spending some time learning about various aspects of local Indigenous culture we birded around the grounds of the centre. This was quite productive because of the water sprinklers. We returned to Jabiru (60 kms), bought lunch at the grocery store, ate in our rooms and had a siesta until 3:30. At 3:30 we left for Ubirr. From the lookout at Cahill's crossing (overlooking the only road crossing into Arnhem Land on the East Alligator River) we saw Dollarbird, Little Egret and Eastern Koel.



Group at Ubirr

From there we went to the art site and viewed ancient rock art, including Warradjan, the Pig-nosed Turtle, an 18th century Dutchman with his hands in his pockets and smoking a pipe and the famous painting of a Thylacine. Everyone in the group climbed up to the Nadaab lookout for the spectacular views across the Nadaab floodplain. We saw a pair of Sandstone Shrike-thrush in the rocks and later Leaden Flycatcher and a Tawny Frogmouth. The temperature reached 43 degrees celcius today!



Exploring Ubirr

Day 5: Kakadu National Park - We had a 5:45am start with a box breakfast at Mamukala wetlands. We did the loop walk and saw Crimson Finches and Peaceful and Bar-shouldered Doves, but no Long-tailed Finches.



Birding at Mamukala wetland

We headed out to Ubirr again and had good views of a Partridge Pigeon and then four Chestnut-quilled Rock Pigeons in the rock formations at Bardedjilidji. Then it was back to Jabiru for lunch and a siesta.



Chestnut-quilled Rock-Pigeon at Bardedjilidji



Group at Bardedjilidji

One of the highlights of any visit to Kakadu is Burrungkuy (Nourlangie). However, access was closed due to a bush fire for the duration of our stay. As an alternative Barry took guests, who wanted to do the Yellow Water cruise again, back to Cooinda for the sunset cruise and Mike took the others to the Bowali Visitor Centre, the Jabiru sewerage treatment plant and then to the now decommissioned uranium mine site. **Day 6: Kakadu to Pine Creek -** Packed up before our buffet breakfast at 7am, then left the Crocodile Inn and headed for Pine Creek at 8am. Our first stop was at a 4-metre termite mound near the road, giving us the opportunity to have a close look and discuss the amazing aspects of the ecology of these insects.



Group at termite mound

Our next stop was Bukbukluk lookout where we saw Pied Butcherbirds and Dollarbirds. Barry's group had a chance encounter with a foraging flock of Gouldian Finches beside the highway. Next stop was Harriot Creek where we expected to see a resident pair of Silver-backed Butcherbirds, but they were elusive today. We continued to Pine Creek where we had lunch. We saw Masked and Long-tailed Finches on powerlines as we came into town. After lunch we checked out a Great Bowerbird's bower. We looked up and saw a flock of more than 200 Pacific Swifts hawking for insects. After a rest we re-grouped and walked around the town, explored the water gardens and an old railway track, where we had spectacular views of Hooded Parrots, Northern Rosella, Red-winged Parrots and Red-collared Lorikeets feeding in tree blossoms.



Hooded Parrot at Pine Creek

Day 7: Pine Creek - We had a 5am breakfast at the Railway Resort then left at 5:30 for the Edith Creek Gouldian location. We saw a flock of about a 100 Gouldians fly over then drop down to forage giving us good scope views. We also had great close views of two male Red-backed Fairywrens fighting with a female nearby. At the old Edith River bridge, we had good scope views of a Brush Cuckoo calling.



Edith River



Birding at Edith River

We got fuel and snacks at Katherine then headed west to Brandy Bottle Creek where we saw a huge group of Little Friarbirds, White-quilled Honeyeaters, Apostlebirds and others coming to drink. Also, a dozen or so Cockatiels came and perched in a dead tree nearby. The group in the second bus got close views of a Wedge-tailed Eagle in a dead tree close to the road. There was a roadkill wallaby nearby. More Cockatiels were seen at the Pine Creek Cemetery in the evening. Back at Pine Creek there were Hooded Parrots on the powerlines as we walked to dinner. **Day 8: Pine Creek to Darwin -** Breakfast was at 6:30 am. We heard a Pallid Cuckoo calling and saw it as it flew off. At the Pine Creek Cemetery we walked through the nearby bushland. Unfortunately, the birds were exceptionally quiet, but we had the opportunity to see new sections of termite mounds being built. We left Pine Creek for Darwin. Our first stop was Adelaide River, where a semi-tame Emu was strolling around the town. We drove down a section of Marrakai Road where we saw a pair of Wedge-tailed Eagles quartering. Next, we went to Howard Springs and did the circuit walk through monsoon forest habitat. We saw Brown Whistler, Shining Flycatcher and had glimpses of Rainbow Pitta. We stopped at a park in a Palmerston suburb and saw Silver-backed Butcherbird and Yellow-throated Miners. Our last stop before checking in at the Palms City Resort was at the Charles Darwin National Park where we saw honeyeaters coming to drink at a puddle caused by a leak in reticulation, and a glimpse of a Northern Rosella.



Birding in Charles Darwin National Park

We into our motel and then went out to Sailing Club for dinner. Back to the motel our final bird call for this section of the tour. Total bird species seen was 160 with 2 species heard only.



Dinner at the Sailing Club

Day 9: Darwin and Departure for Cairns – We left our accommodation for the airport and flight to Cairns at 7.20am, arriving in Cairns at 11.30am