

Australia Tropical Trip Report (Nov 6 - 14, 2022)

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Day 1 - Darwin

After introductions in Darwin at our hotel we drove to the Darwin Sailing Club for an outdoor dinner at the waterfront bistro. Here we were entertained by Blue- faced Honeyeaters and Red-collared Lorikeets moving into roost in palm trees.

Day 2 - Darwin

A day exploring birding sites close to Darwin, after checking out the nesting Tawny Frogmouths in the park by our hotel. Starting at Lee Point where waders and terns were gathered for the high tide; here we found Whimbrel, Far Eastern Curlew, Great Knot, Sanderling, Caspian and Gull-billed Tern among many others. There was even a passing Brown Booby out to sea. Later at the Buffalo Creek mangroves, we heard the elusive Chestnut Rail and saw Red-headed Myzomela, Shining Flycatcher and Australian Yellow White-eye. After lunch at Eva's Café at the Darwin Botanic Gardens, we had a search for owls, finding Barking Owl roosting, and many other birds including Orange-footed Scrubfowl.



Barking Owl © Rob Elvish



Bar-breasted Honeyeater © Rob Elvish

Day 3 - Kakadu National Park

Moving inland and east towards Kakadu National Park. Our first stop was Fogg Dam conservation reserve, where we started with a walk in the monsoon forest, revealing Arafura Fantail, Grey Whistler and the star attraction, Rainbow Pitta. Built in the 1950s to supply water for a now abandoned rice irrigation project, the dam has become a key water bird conservation area. Whatever the water level in the dam, there are always a range of habitats for water birds here, leading to a large diversity of species. Both Plumed and Wandering Whistling -ducks, Green Pygmy Goose, White-browed Crake, Brolga, Comb-crested Jacana, Pied Heron, Glossy, Australian and Straw-necked Ibis were just a few of the many species here. The riparian forest along the Adelaide River has long been a site for the Black- tailed Whistler. But lately it has not been so reliable. Selecting a new piece of what look like ideal habitat we were quickly rewarded with great views of a pair. Our first stop in Kakadu National Park, Mamukala Wetlands, had similar species to Fogg Dam, but much closer views from the bird hide of many of them. A large resort built in the shape of a crocodile in Jabiru was our accommodation for the next few days.

Day 4 - Yellow Waters Cruise

An early drive to join the yellow waters cruise before breakfast. As the dry season progresses the water and wildlife are concentrated in the remaining pools. Here our boats were able to get very close to spectacular large saltwater crocodiles and many water birds. Black-necked Stork, Great-billed Heron and White -bellied Sea-Eagles were highlights before our breakfast at the Cooida resort, followed by birding in the surrounding parklands.



Yellow Water boat ride



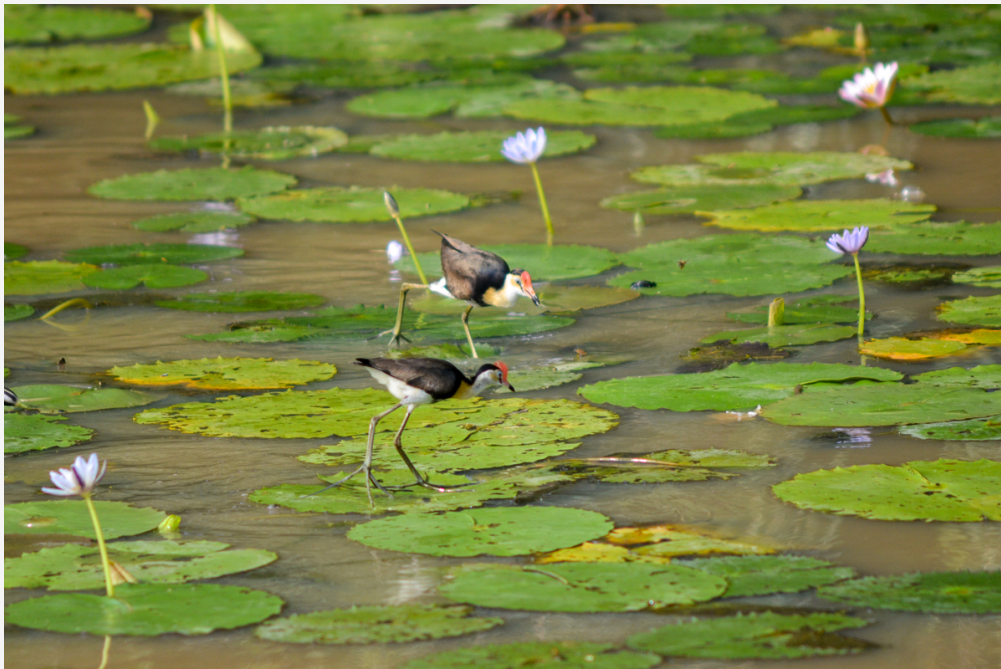
Black-necked Stork © Rob Elvish



Great-billed Heron © Rob Elvish



White-bellied Sea-Eagle © Rob Elvish



Comb-crested Jacana © Rob Elvish



Agile Wallaby © Rob Elvish



Saltwater Crocodile © Rob Elvish



Dingo © Rob Elvish

After a visit to Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Center we returned to Jabiru for lunch and a rest. Late afternoon saw us checking out the Fruit Bats at the football oval, the sewerage ponds, airport and the uranium mine tailings dam, adding bird species to our tally along the way. A night drive produced a feral cat and Bush Thick-knee with a chick.



Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo © Rob Elvish

Day 5 - Nourlangie Rock & Ubirr rock

Nourlangie Rock, an outlying rock massive from the East Arnhem Land Escarpment is usually a good site for the sandstone endemic birds. Here we climbed to a lookout and visited some of the rock art sites. At nearby Narwulanja we found Chestnut- quilled Rock -Pigeon but only heard the White -lined Honeyeaters, always calling somewhere out of reach. In the afternoon we drove to Cahills Crossing on the East Alligator River where we found Rainbow Pitta again and watched the crocodiles watching the crossing. We searched Merl campground for Partridge Pigeon without success, before moving on to Ubirr rock art site for sunset.





Aboriginal rock art Tasmanian Tiger/Thylacine © Rob Elvish



Taking a photo of Chestnut-quilled Rock-Pigeon

Day 6 - Nourlangie Rock to Pine Creek

An early return to Nourlangie Rock resulted in sightings of the elusive, White-lined Honeyeater. On the way to Pine Creek a stop for lunch at the ranger station resulted in close views of a Silver-backed Butcherbird, a species that can be very hard to find. Birding around the town in Pine Creek is always worthwhile, with Black Fruit Bats in the trees in the park, resident Great Bowerbirds with bowers and Hooded Parrots coming in to roost in the evening; even in palms in our accommodation's gardens.



Silver-backed Butcherbird © Rob Elvish



Hooded Parrot © Rob Elvish

Day 7 - Edith Falls

An early start took us to pools in a creek near Edith Falls where we hoped to find finches coming to drink. Recent rains meant the birds had lots of choices of places to drink. But eventually a group of Gouldian Finches moved overhead, without stopping at our chosen pools. However, we did see Crimson, Double-barred, Masked and Longtailed Finches there, along with Red-backed Fairywrens. Later birding around Edith Falls in Nitmiluk National Park and at some stops on the way back to Pine Creek produced many more species including Rufous-throated Honeyeater, Banded Honeyeater and a Black Bittern.



Great Bowerbird's bower © Rob Elvish

Day 8 - Pine Creek and return to Darwin

A morning walk through a patch of tropical savanna near Pine Creek gave us more views of finches, including some Gouldians, and Varied Sittella, Black-tailed Treecreeper, Jacky- winter, while the waste water ponds had Red-kneed and Black-fronted Dotterels. Today we returned to Darwin with birding enroute, with stops at Adelaide River and the magnetic termite mounds. This species of termite builds tall wedge shaped nests with the long axis orientated North to South, to control the interior temperature. Our tour ended with a final dinner back where we started, at the Darwin Sailing Club, for sunset.



Day 9 - Departure

Departure flight to Cairns for those moving on to the Eastern Australia tour.