



Eastern Australia Trip Report (Nov 2023)

[Link: Eastern Australia Trip Report \(Nov 2023\)](#)

Once again, our late Spring Eastern Australia tour has proven very successful. Fortunate with both weather and bird sightings, this itinerary encompasses key birding destinations from north Queensland to central New South Wales. The journey begins in Cairns, leading into a full week of exploration in the 'Wet Tropics' regions, featuring boat tours to the Great Barrier Reef and the Daintree River. Along the way, encounters with Estuarine Crocodiles, Southern Cassowaries, and Tree-Kangaroos provided memorable wildlife experiences, complemented by a rich array of exceptional endemics. Venturing into South-east Queensland, we enjoyed a couple of fabulous days and nights at the renowned O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat. The retreat's lush surroundings added to the enchantment, creating the perfect backdrop for birdwatching. Finally, our journey concluded in the famous harbor city of Sydney. Here, we embarked on a pelagic bird-watching tour at the continental shelf and spent several days exploring the spectacular Blue Mountains and Capertee Valley. Over the course of these action-packed 15 days, we witnessed numerous highlights and amassed an impressive total list of 315 bird species, not to mention some delightful mammal sightings. Massive thanks to all involved, including the dedicated participants and the exceptional staff at Eagle-Eye who contributed to making this tour a success. Nov 11: We began the day early taking advantage of a fortuitous tide and pleasant morning conditions. Trundling down to the nearby Cairns Esplanade, we observed regulars such as Great Knot, Bar-tailed Godwit, Siberian Whimbrel, and Far Eastern Curlew congregating on the sand banks. The area also featured a scattering of Curlew and Terek Sandpipers. Later, a drive to ETTY Bay proved fruitful with sightings of two Southern Cassowaries, one of which crossed the road—a noteworthy encounter, given their status as a priority species in the Wet Tropics. In the afternoon at Cattana Wetlands, casual birding produced surprises, including Lovely Fairywren, Mangrove Robin, and Torresian Kingfisher also recorded at a site closer to town.



Southern Cassowary © Scott Baker

Nov 12: The day was dedicated to exploring Michaelmas Cay in the Great Barrier Reef, renowned as one of the wonders of the natural world. Upon arrival, we marvelled at the sight of thousands of seabirds, including Sooty Terns, Common Noddys, and Brown Booby, many with chicks and eggs. The strict controls on the site allowed for a close and special experience, providing excellent opportunities for photographers. Notable sightings included Black-naped, Roseate, and Bridled Terns, Great Frigatebird, Red-footed Booby, and the major highlight—a pair of Masked Booby, a new addition to my life list.



Michaelmas Cay © Scott Baker



Masked Booby © Scott Baker

Nov 13: Traveling from Cairns to Port Douglas via Mareeba and the Tablelands, our first stop at Davies Creek Nat Park proved successful with the somewhat elusive White-browed Robin. Overhead, a pair of Wedge-tailed Eagles garnered attention. The next destination was Granite Gorge Nature Park, where we easily observed Squatter Pigeon and the endemic Mareeba Rock-Wallaby. A highlight was the sighting of a Great Bowerbird at a bower, a new bird and family for most. Looping back to the coast and picking up some nice birds on the way, we spotted Brolga, Buff-banded Rail, Red-backed Fairywren, and White-browed Crake. Nov 14: An early morning boat cruise up Daintree River was a tour highlight. The World Heritage-listed forest region, known as the 'Wet Tropics,' provided an incredible experience, including close encounters with two large Saltwater Crocodiles. Excellent bird sightings featured the rare Spotted Whistling Duck and shy Black Bittern. We also enjoyed views of nesting Papuan Frogmouth. Later in the day, tropical woodland sites near Mt Carbine yielded additions to the trip list, including Apostlebird, Pale-headed Rosella, Red-winged Parrot, Grey-crowned Babbler, and Australian Bustard.



Daintree River © Scott Baker



Spotted Whistling-Duck © Scott Baker



Papuan Frogmouth © Scott Baker

Nov 15: Heading back to the Tablelands, we spent time on the slopes of Mt Lewis, near Julatten. A pair of Southern Cassowary on the drive up was a nice surprise, as this species is rarely observed at this location. The rainforest here is home to several local higher altitude endemics, and with some effort, we recorded the skulking Fernwren and Chowchilla. Other sightings included Tooth-billed Bowerbird, Spotted Catbird, Bower's Shrike-thrush, Mountain Thornbill, Atherton Scrubwren, and Bridled Honeyeater. A vocal Noisy Pitta remained in the 'heard-only' category—for now. A quick stop at Hasties Swamp Bird Hide produced a few waterbirds, with Magpie Geese and Plumed Whistling-Ducks in the hundreds making up the big numbers.



Grey-headed Robin © Scott Baker

Nov 16: A relaxing breakfast with the birds at Chambers Lodge Rainforest Retreat provided much-improved views of Victoria's Riflebird and Spotted Catbird. A visit to Mt Hypipamee Nat Park provided some views of the secretive Golden Bowerbird—our only encounter with this species. Nov 17: Transiting to Cairns via Nerada Tea Plantation, where we observed the rare Lumholtz's Tree-Kangaroo. Returning to Cairns, we explored the Esplanade on the dropping tide, spotting shorebirds and terns that had eluded us previously. Nov 18: A big day of travel began with a flight to Brisbane and then heading to the southern hinterland region, including Lamington National Park. On the route, we made a stop for another mega-mammal, the iconic Koala, at a bushland reserve south of Brisbane. Staying at the highly regarded O'reillys Rainforest Retreat, set within the forest and overlooking a region known as the Scenic Rim. Marbled Frogmouth that evening—a notable addition.



Koala © Scott Baker

Nov 19: A full day was dedicated to exploring the rainforest, staying mostly local. Some of the best birding occurred on the walkways close to the resort itself. Most of the sub-tropical specialists, including Green Catbird, Regent Bowerbird, Southern Logrunner, and Paradise Riflebird, were showing well. Other notable sightings included White-headed, Wonga, and Topknot Pigeons, Noisy Pitta, Satin Bowerbird, and more. The environment proved to be a target-rich one, as remarked by one of the participants.



Regent Bowerbird © Scott Baker

Nov 20: A close encounter with Albert's Lyrebird just prior to departure marked a memorable and much-appreciated conclusion to the stay at O'reilly's. The birds had been less cooperative on previous days. Then it was back to Brisbane and the harsh reality of city traffic and airport congestion, followed by a one-hour flight to Sydney, New South Wales, for the next leg of the tour. Nov 21: This day featured a pelagic tour departing from Sydney Harbour and traveling east to the continental shelf (around 50 km offshore). The conditions were overcast with choppy seas that subsided later in the day. It was a relatively quiet day birdwise, but the selection was entertaining. Overall numbers were down, though several Shearwater species, including Short-tailed, Flesh-foot, and Wedge-tailed, were dominant. Other notable sightings included Black-browed Albatross, Shy Albatross, Providence Petrel, and both Wilson's and White-bellied Storm-Petrels. Three Pomarine Jaegers were also observed.



Providence Petrel © Scott Baker

Nov 22: We tried our luck at some local reserves in suburban Sydney before making our way up to the 'Blue Mountains.' The sandstone escarpment at Evans Lookout is a known site for the endemic Rockwarbler. This species is a priority for any birder in NSW, and we successfully connected on the first attempt, enjoying excellent views of two birds at close range.



Rockwarbler © Scott Baker

Nov 23: Exploring the Blue Mountains National Park began at sunrise at 'The Three Sisters' lookout, known for its dramatic scenic values despite some fog and light rain. Excellent views of the Superb

Lyrebird were obtained. Moving next to a site near Wentworth Falls, we observed the Chestnut-rumped Heathwren, a tricky skulker, and a flock of the threatened Glossy Black-Cockatoos. Later in the day, Red-browed Treecreeper was added to the list from a site further west. The day concluded at Lake Wallace, where Musk Duck, Great-crested Grebe, Spotless Crake, and Baillon's Crake were showing nicely, despite the poor weather.



Birding in the Blue Mountains © Scott Baker



Wentworth Falls © Scott Baker

Nov 24: The focus shifted to the Capertee Valley, regarded as one of the top birdwatching destinations in NSW. Starting in the township of Capertee and working our way through to Glen Davis, we visited various birdwatching hotspots along the way. Many box-ironbark specialists were active, and we enjoyed views of Jacky Winter, Eastern Shriketit, White-throated Gerygone, and Hooded Robin. A memorable encounter with a pair of Brown Quail occurred, and other notable sightings included Pallid Cuckoo, Turquoise Parrot, Restless Flycatcher, and both White-browed and Grey-crowned Babblers. Nov 25: Making tracks for Sydney for the conclusion of the tour, we briefly stopped at the Mt Victoria Cemetery, where we eventually connected with a flock of Gang Gang Cockatoo. Improved views of Varied Sittella and Buff-rumped Thornbill were also obtained. The weather was wet and overcast for the most part, with not many new birds, but the trip concluded with a total of 315 species in 15 days—a satisfying result, perhaps even a record. [Eastern Australia Nov 2023 species list](#)