



Eastern Australia Trip Report (Nov 5 - 21, 2025)

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Day 1: Guests arrived at the Baybliss restaurant for dinner amidst a chorus of noisy Rainbow Lorikeets and Brown Honeyeaters. After introductions, dinner and a handout of the checklists we got ready for a big day birding around Cairns. Day 2: After breakfast we made our way to Cairns Botanical Gardens, a beautiful spot of intertwined freshwater and saltwater lakes. We started the birding off nicely with excellent views of Black Butcherbird, Magpie Goose and Helmeted Friarbird. Metallic Starling, Nankeen Night Heron, Torresian Kingfisher and the iconic Laughing Kookaburra were also seen well. At the end of the walk, we were treated to the morning's highlight of a roosting Rufous Owl. Departing from here, a quick stop at the Cairns Cemetery offered exceptional views of Double-eyed Fig-Parrot feeding near eye level, while Rainbow Bee-eater, Sahul Sunbird and Mistletoebird also showed well. We spent the rest of the late morning at the northern end of the Cairns Esplanade. Here, highlights were a pair of Red-tailed Black Cockatoo and several Varied Honeyeaters, as well nesting Willie Wagtails and Torresian Imperial Pigeons. A Rose-crowned Fruit Dove was also briefly seen flying in and out of some fruiting figs. A full morning's birding completed, we returned to the Cairns Botanical Gardens for a delicious lunch before taking a rest back at accommodation. The rest of the day, was focused on the waders feeding at the north end of Cairns Esplanade as the tide came in. We were fortunate to see many species including Terek Sandpiper, Grey-tailed Tattler, Curlew Sandpiper, Greater and Siberian Sand Plovers, and the endangered Eastern Curlew. As the light faded, we didn't have to walk far to reach our scenic dinner spot at the popular Muddy's Café.



Rufous Owl © Daniel Terrington

Day 3: We eagerly made our way to Cairns Port in preparation for a 2-hour catamaran ride to the extraordinary seabird breeding colony at Michaelmas Cay on the Great Barrier Reef. On our way out, we were delighted with many Bridled Terns and brief views of Black Noddy, Little Tern and Black-naped Tern. Once at the Cay, we were greeted with a Great Frigatebird soaring high over the many thousands of breeding Sooty Terns and Common Noddies. A trifecta of Boobies also welcomed us, with Brown, Masked and Red-footed all seen well, including downy chicks and juveniles. Both Greater and Lesser Crested Tern were present on the island too, with the occasional Ruddy Turnstone also making an appearance. After lunch on the catamaran, we enjoyed a twenty-minute semi-submersible boat ride to see the vibrant reef. Among the many colourful reef fish, ancient giant clams and spectacular corals, we were very happy to see Green Sea Turtle. Back on the catamaran, we enjoyed afternoon tea and a coffee before returning to Cairns for dinner. Near the harbour, Osprey and Little Heron concluded a wonderful day at sea.



Michaelmas Cay © Daniel Terrington

Day 4: We loaded our bags in the vehicles early, ready to move to our accommodation at Port Douglas. Our first stop was Cattana Wetlands, a beautiful conservation park in the northern part of the city. Here, the song of the Green Oriole was ever-present as we picked up many target birds: Comb-crested Jacana, White-browed Crake, Brown-backed Honeyeater and Crimson Finch. A quick stop at Yorkeys Lagoon afterwards was helpful for viewing our first Chestnut-breasted Munias and Radjah Shelducks before heading to Port Douglas for lunch. Checking in to our accommodation, we were thrilled to find a pair of Papuan Frogmouths roosting outside the motel car park during an early afternoon break. The day finished off with a pleasant couple of hours birding the dams and aquaculture farms near Port Douglas. Highlights of the afternoon included both Wandering and Plumed Whistling Duck, Green Pygmy Goose, Radjah Shelduck, Pied Stilt, Black-shouldered Kite and Pheasant Coucal. A skulky Buff-banded Rail was also seen by some in the group. Everywhere we went, Bush Thick-knees and Australasian Swamphens were abundant around Port Douglas. Day 5: We needed to have an early start to reach the Daintree River Jetty for a morning boat ride. On arrival, the rainforest was already active with a Wompoo Fruit Dove showing well in the carpark and several Channel-billed Cuckoos flying overhead. Although it remained elusive, the distant roar of a Great-billed Heron as we stepped onto the boat made for an exciting start to the day. Heading upstream, we were soon rewarded with a very obliging pair of the cryptic Black Bittern, what would surely become bird of the day! We also had excellent views of Azure Kingfisher, Shining Flycatchers, Brahminy Kite and a young Saltwater Crocodile. After the boat, we enjoyed a pleasant coffee stop in town before returning to Port Douglas for lunch. The afternoon was spent birding up at Nine Mile Road near Julatten. This session proved to be tough work, as rainforest birding often is, but we came away with nice views of Wompoo Fruit Dove, Pale-yellow Robin, Yellow-spotted Honeyeater, Macleay's Honeyeater and Cryptic Honeyeater. Spotted Catbird and Australian Spectacled Monarch were also briefly seen, but undoubtedly the best sighting of the afternoon was a very confident Pied Monarch giving the bitterns a run for their money as the day's highlight.



Daintree Boat trip © Kye Turnbull

Day 6: We returned to Julatten to visit another birding site along Sides Road, where the open viewing of adjacent farmland made for rainforest birding that was somewhat less challenging. We soon lucked upon a fruiting fig tree full of Barred Cuckooshrike, White-bellied Cuckooshrike and Australasian Figbird, where we also managed glimpses of Superb Fruit Dove. Although Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher called frequently, they refused to emerge from the dark rainforest into view. We did however manage excellent views of Eastern Spinebill, Wompoo Fruit Dove, Forest Kingfisher and Lemon-bellied Flyrobin. After this, we moved onto Abattoir Swamp for some very obliging Yellow Honeyeater, Brown-backed Honeyeater, Red-backed Fairywren and Lovely Fairywren. This was followed up by a stop beside some dry grassy paddocks in Mount Carbine where we scanned for Australian Bustard. Eventually, we caught sight of a small group of bustards including one with young in tow. After lunch at the family-run Hungry Pug Café in Mareeba, we made our way to Granite Gorge for the afternoon to obtain close encounters with both Squatter Pigeon and Mareeba Rock-Wallaby, also collecting nice views of Pacific Baza, Blue-faced Honeyeater and a Great Bowerbird visiting his bower. To finish the day, we made a quick roadside stop for Sarus Crane near Yungaburra before checking in to our accommodation at Chambers Rainforest Lodge. After a delicious pub dinner in town, waiting at the lodge's possum feeding station rewarded us with close views of Krefft's Glider and Northern Long-nosed Bandicoot while Rufous Owl called in the distance.



Sugar Glider © Kye Turnbull

Day 7: Gathering at the cars after breakfast, we were spoiled with amazing views of Bower's Shrikethrush, Spotted Catbird and Victoria's Riflebird, some of which were coming to eat fruit from the feeders beside our lodgings. From here we made our way to Mount Hypipamee where we quietly observed a male Golden Bowerbird singing near his towering metre-high bower decorated with lichens and flowers. We were then spoiled with views of many endemic birds of the Tablelands region including Tooth-billed Bowerbird, Grey-headed Robin Bridled Honeyeater and Mountain Thornbill before heading off to the next birding site in the dry forests of Wondecla. At a toilet stop in Herberton along the way, we picked up our first Crested Pigeons and Noisy Miners, two species that would be observed daily in the latter half of the trip. Late morning birding in Wondecla proved fruitful with an abundance of honeyeater activity including Scarlet Myzomela, White-cheeked Honeyeater, Banded Honeyeater and the localised population of Fuscous Honeyeaters known as the 'Herberton Honeyeater', alongside a supporting cast of Dingo and Eastern Shrike-tit. For lunch we visited the Lake Barrine Teahouse, where Great Crested Grebe and Topknot Pigeon were abundant. The afternoon was spent searching for Platypus, an unsuccessful endeavour for most in the group, despite managing excellent views of Spectacled Flying Fox, Lumholtz's Tree Kangaroo and Eastern Saw-shelled Turtle. After a pub dinner, a few in the group returned to Mount Hypipamee for spotlighting, where we had close encounters with Green Ringtail Possum, Lemoroid Ringtail Possum, Coppery Brushtail Possum and a second tree kangaroo.



Golden Bowerbird © Daniel Terrington

Day 8: The highlight of an early morning around Chambers Lodge was a displaying male Victoria's Riflebird at one of the feeding stations. The trails behind the lodge were quiet, although the northern 'Little Treecreeper' subspecies of White-throated Treecreeper was seen well. Red-necked Crake was also heard and Musky Rat Kangaroo was seen by some in the group. Although Platypus remained elusive, returning to the creek behind Yungaburra was well worth it for nice views of Fairy and Brown Gerygones, and our best views yet of Yellow-breasted Boatbill. The group split up at this point with the majority hoping to see Brolga and Southern Cassowary. Some of the group had already seen these two charismatic species, so opted for a more direct return to Cairns via stops in open farmland for Eastern Yellow Wagtail, Crimson Finch and Chestnut-breasted Munia as well as a plethora of beautiful butterflies including the Red Lacewing, Ulysses Swallowtail and Cairns Birdwing. The rest of the group made a pre-lunch stop at Bromfield Swamp, quickly finding a pair of Sarus Crane. As we waited in hope for Brolga, a few more cranes trickled in and we enjoyed nice views of Black-faced Cuckooshrike and Black-faced Monarch. Finally, just before we left for lunch, a pair of Brolga flew in to join the rest of the cranes. We watched in awe as the Brolgas then began to dance together, joining in our own celebrations albeit much more gracefully! An enjoyable morning was topped off with incredible daytime views of a Lumholtz's Tree Kangaroo crossing the road as we headed to a lovely lunch stop at a dairy farm café. The plan for the rest of the day was to make the hour long drive to Etty Bay where we would seek out the biggest target of the trip for many. This proved very successful, as we appreciated crippling views of a Southern Cassowary walking along the road before even arriving at our destination! Heading north back to Cairns, we made one final stop in some lowland rainforest at Behana Gorge where several Superb Fruit Doves called directly overhead but gave us only brief glimpses once again.



Victoria's Riflebird © Daniel Terrington

Day 9: After breakfast, we made our way to the Cairns Airport, with some seeing Common Sandpiper on the drive. By lunchtime we had touched down in Brisbane and immediately made our way to the summit of Mount Gravatt for a café lunch. This area is known for its high density of Koalas, and we managed to find one before we had even driven to the top! After spending some time distracted by the Koala and a small flock of Scaly-breasted Lorikeets, we enjoyed a delicious lunch, fighting off the many hungry Blue-faced Honeyeaters and Grey Butcherbirds trying to steal our food. We then began our afternoon drive up to the beautiful O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat. Along the way, we stopped for our first good views of Galah and Little Corella, Wonga Pigeon and White-headed Pigeon. Arriving at the retreat in the late afternoon, we got an immediate taste of things to come, with close encounters of Crimson Rosellas and Australian King-Parrots feeding on the front lawn and landing on our heads.



O'Reillys

Day 10: Our only full day at O'Reilly's proved challenging due to rain and fog, but for those who decided to persevere, there were many highlights! The day started off nicely with several very friendly Satin and Regent Bowerbirds welcoming us out the front of the lodge, approaching within arm's length. On the trail, we were fortunate to obtain excellent close-range views of Australian Logrunner, Eastern Whipbird, Eastern Yellow Robin, White-browed Scrubwren and Yellow-throated Scrubwren. Paradise Riflebird and Green Catbird showed briefly but were difficult to view in the thick fog, and a vocal Albert's Lyrebird remained hidden in the dense understorey. Back at the lodge, we were constantly entertained by the parrots landing on us, as well as the many Red-browed Finch and Wonga Pigeon feeding close-by. Finding a brief gap in the rain early in the afternoon, we once again hit the trails and were rewarded with excellent views of Russet-tailed Thrush, though we failed to see Noisy Pitta, Green Catbird and Rose Robin which were calling around us. After a long day of challenging conditions, we dug into a delicious buffet dinner and prepared for another big morning. A few in the group joined for a short spotlighting session, where we had brilliant observations of Southern Long-nosed Bandicoot, Eastern Ringtail Possum and Short-eared Brushtail Possum despite the fog.



O'Reillys © Daniel Terrington

Day 11: The rain had cleared overnight so we made the most of it, birding the trails for the early morning before we departed for Sydney. The highlight of the day was undoubtedly Albert's Lyrebird, which distracted us away from a vocal Noisy Pitta. Though we never saw the pitta, we managed to come away with exceptional views of our three other major targets in Green Catbird, Paradise Riflebird and Rose Robin. On top of this, we improved our views of White-headed Pigeon, Black-faced Monarch and even admired a Satin Bowerbird tending to its bower. Some were lucky enough to see a rare Rainforest Peacock Spider amongst the leaf litter. By mid-morning we had to move on, and so we loaded into the vehicles for the long drive back to Brisbane Airport. Along the way, some of the group spotted Pale-headed Rosella, Royal Spoonbill and Common Bronzewing. Poor weather in the afternoon resulted in delays flying to Sydney, so we arrived just in time for a late dinner before settling in at our hotel accommodation.



Satin Bowerbird bower © Daniel Terrington

Day 12: Originally scheduled for a pelagic trip, plans for Day 12 were shuffled around by some urgent boat maintenance. Instead, we spent the day birding close to the city. We kicked off our morning birding with a walk in Royal National Park where we had our first views of Spotted Pardalote, Sahul Cicadabird, Little Wattlebird and Dollarbird. However, the highlight was not until our return in the late morning when a very obliging female Superb Lyrebird offered extended views while it bathed just metres off the track. What a thrill to have seen both lyrebird species in just two days! In the afternoon, we crossed back into the city for a short walk in the Sydney Botanical Gardens. Our big target here was Powerful Owl, which we quickly found at a reliable roosting site. What a privilege it was to be able to spend time admiring Australia's largest owl with a backdrop of the Opera House and Harbour Bridge in one of inner Sydney's most beautiful urban parks! We finished the day's birding with a walk around Centennial Park, where we observed a colony of both Black and Grey-headed Flying Fox. We also added a few common wetland birds to the trip list with Pied Cormorant, Hoary-headed Grebe, Black Swan and Brown Goshawk.



Powerful Owl © Scott Baker

Day 13: We had found an alternative boat to take us out the following day, so at 7 am we embarked on an exciting pelagic trip from Rose Bay into deep waters off the shelf. Activity was high on the way out, with hundreds of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters being the most abundant bird of the day. In deeper water, Grey-faced Petrel were a constant presence, but we also enjoyed good views of Providence Petrel, White-capped Albatross and both subspecies of Black-browed Albatross. Six different shearwater species, Wilsons' and White-faced Storm Petrel, and a Pomarine Jaeger completed a thrilling day at sea. After the boat trip, we made our way south for our one night's stay at Gerringong.



Providence Petrel © Scott Baker

Day 14: Another early start was necessary to make it to Barren Grounds for the best hours of birding. On the way up, we were blessed with good views of not one, not two, but three Superb Lyrebirds beside the road! The extensive heath at Barren Grounds is always challenging birding but can be rewarding when the resident skulkers do show themselves. This time we got lucky with outstanding views of one of Australia's rarest birds, the Eastern Bristlebird, within a few minutes of starting our walk! This bird is a member of one of the most difficult-to-observe Australian endemic bird families and is a treat to see at all, let alone with such sensational views. The rest of the walk was largely uneventful and while everyone was pleased with good views of Variegated Fairywren, calling Beautiful Firetail and Southern Emuwren were reluctant to show themselves. Working our way back north, we stopped in at Nepean Dam where we observed a beautiful male Superb Lyrebird displaying to a rather disinterested female. This was followed by our first views of the state's only endemic bird, the Rockwarbler. Other nice birds seen in the forest here included White-eared Honeyeater, White-throated Gerygone and Fan-tailed Cuckoo. As we had a long way to drive for our next accommodation, we had lunch on the road and didn't stop until we reached Evans Lookout in the Blue Mountains. While always worth a stop for the spectacular views of the 'Grand Canyon' and its blue-tinged mountains, this area can also be fruitful for birding. This time was no exception as we had multiple remarkable encounters with Rockwarblers feeding their young under our feet! Birding in the bush was fairly quiet at this time of day, so we soon left for our final birding stop at Lithgow Wastewater Treatment Plant, where Australasian Shoveler, Pink-eared Duck and Blue-billed Duck were welcome additions for the trip.



Eastern Bristlebird © Scott Baker



Rockwarbler © Scott Baker

Day 15: In the early morning at our Wallerawang accommodation, a few small flocks of Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos flew overhead. We then headed towards the Capertee Valley via a bakery stop to collect our breakfast and lunch for the day. Stopping at various birding sites along Glen Davis Road, the morning's birding was active and enjoyable. Eastern Rosella and Red-rumped Parrot were present everywhere we stopped, although they were mostly seen as fly-bys and only occasionally perched for photos. Hooded Robin, Restless Flycatcher, Brown Treecreeper, Jacky Winter and Diamond Firetail were highlights at the first birding spot, and we also managed nice views of White-plumed and Fuscous Honeyeater there. Our second birding stop was at Coco Creek where we saw Striped Honeyeater very well and had our second encounter with Eastern Shrike-tit. Turning off at Crown Station Road, the birding started off well with Red-rumped Parrots feeding in the grass. A Common Bronzewing carrying nesting material and a male White-winged Triller also showed themselves nicely. This site proved to be a good area for picking up many smaller bushbirds including Striated Pardalote, Weebill, Yellow Thornbill and Yellow-rumped Thornbill. While we were watching these bushbirds foraging, a pair of Wedge-tailed Eagles made a low pass overhead, giving us our best views of this species for the trip. By the late morning, birding activity was dropping off, but we headed to Glen Alice to see if we could pick up a few more dry forest targets. The best addition from this stop was Grey-crowned Babbler, although some of the group also saw two Brown Falcons on the way there. Heading to Glen Davis for lunch, we stopped along the roadside for excellent views of Rufous Songlark and Diamond Firetail. As bird activity was growing quiet, we headed back to Wallerawang for an afternoon break before making our way to Lake Wallace for the last two hours of the day. This proved to be a big success, with Spotless Crake and Buff-banded Rail showing well in a muddy reedbed, and two Latham's Snipe flushing from the lake's edge. Musk Duck, Australian Reed Warbler and Red Wattlebird (which had somehow remained elusive until now!) were also welcome additions to the trip list.



Blue Mountains © Daniel Terrington

Day 16: We spent the final morning of our last full day birding in the Blue Mountains. Following an early breakfast in Lithgow, we first chased a lead for a possible Gang-gang Cockatoo nest site near Blackheath along Megalong Road. Though we found no sign of Gang-gangs initially, we enjoyed our second encounter with a singing Rose Robin which some had missed earlier in the trip. Golden Whistlers and a pair of Australian King Parrots inspecting a nest hollow made for some enjoyable birding before we eventually heard the distinctive creaky-door call of a pair of Gang-gang Cockatoos flying in to land right above the vehicles. Everyone in the group enjoyed extended views of this pair, which distracted most from the Red-browed Treecreepers coming in at the same time. From there, we made our way to the Mount Victoria Cemetery, picking up our two targets in Buff-rumped Thornbill and a very obliging male Scarlet Robin. Although missed by most of the group, some were lucky enough to witness a group of three Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos land right above the parking spot. With the best birding hours behind us, the rest of the morning was spent on the Kings Tableland where we sought Chestnut-rumped Heathwren and Glossy Black Cockatoo. These both proved rather elusive and while some managed glimpses of the heathwren, the only evidence of cockatoos that we could find were the many piles of chewed up *Allocasuarina* cones. Nevertheless, good views of New Holland Honeyeater, Eastern Spinebill and Variegated Fairywren made for some enjoyable late morning birding. After a satisfying lunch stop at the famous 'Mountain High Pies', it was time for us to make our way to Sydney for the afternoon. One final birding stop at Sydney Olympic Park added Musk Lorikeet to the trip list, and gave us our best views of Chestnut Teal, Superb Fairywren and Pied Stilt. After checking in to our accommodation in Sydney, it was time to finish off with a delicious but bittersweet meal at the La Boca Bar & Restaurant to conclude what had been a successful and adventure-filled birding trip. With some heading home and others heading onward to more adventures in Tasmania, it was finally time to say goodbye.



Gang-gang Cockatoo © Daniel Terrington

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