Eagle-Eye Tours



Eastern Australia Trip Report (Nov 7 - 23, 2022)

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Day 1: Arrival in Cairns We met the new guests for this section of the tour for dinner. **Day 2: Cairns** We spent the morning on the Cairns Esplanade but saw few shorebirds as the tide was very high. However, we had splendid views of a Rose-crowned Fruit Dove and Mangrove Robins and in the mangroves, we saw Torresian Kingfishers. A very friendly Willy Wagtail followed us around wherever we went. Late morning, we left Cairns for Etty's Beach in the hopes of seeing a Cassowary. Had lunch at Innisfail on the way and searched in the forest near the beach and caravan park. One of our group spotted a male with a chick but it disappeared in to the long grass very quickly. In a field on the western side of the hill behind the bay we saw a Cassowary from the road, but it also disappeared into long grass before everyone saw it.



Ettys Beach © J Leonatti

We returned to Cairns, had dinner and observed a full eclipse of the moon on the way back to the hotel. **Day 3: The Great Barrier Reef** We left the hotel at 7:30 for the wharf and departed for Michaelmas Cay. After two hours sailing, we spent 4 hours at the cay, observing Brown Boobies, Brown Noddy, Bridled, Sooty, Crested and Lesser Crested Terns, Great Frigatebirds and Ruddy Turnstones. Lunch was served on the boat.



Sailing to Michaelmas Cay © J Leonatti



Trip to Michaelmas Cay © Mike Jarvis



Brown Boobies nesting on Michaelmas Cay © Mike Jarvis



Brown Noddies at Michaelmas Cay © J Leonatti

Some clients enjoyed snorkelling and others went on the glass bottomed boat. More refreshments were served before we returned to Cairns. **Day 4: Julatten, Mt Carbine and Kingfisher Birdwatchers Lodge** We had an early start in anticipation the tide on the Esplanade would be good for closer views of migratory shorebirds and it was. Whilst the diversity of species of shorebirds migrating to Australia hasn't changed much in recent years the numbers have plummeted. Instead of there being thousands of birds on the Cairns mudflats there are now only hundreds and the same applies all over the country. We saw small groups of Whimbrel, Far Eastern Curlew, Black-tailed and Barred-tailed Godwits, Great Knot, Red-necked Stint, Sharp-tailed and Curlew Sandpiper, Grey-tailed Tattler and the resident Red-capped Plover and Masked Lapwing. There was also a Little Tern, but the biggest surprise was a leucistic Australian Pied Oystercatcher. Leaving Cairns, we drove over the rainforest clad hills to the dry savannah woodlands in the rain shadow on the western side. The change in vegetation is dramatic and our aim today was to see bird's characteristic of this habitat. We bought lunch at the Mareeba deli and ate it in a park where Blue-faced Honeyeaters were the most common species. On the road again we drove north through Mt Molloy and on to West Mary Road looking for Bustards which fortunately were abundant as usual. A Black-breasted Buzzard circled above us showing its distinctive white underwing patches. The caravan park at Mt Carbine was our next stop. The owner, Nikki, greeted us with a big welcoming smile, as she always does, and news of the resident birds. The Tawny Frogmouths had two chicks in a poor excuse for a nest. Tawny Frogmouths in North Queensland are considerably smaller than those further south which is consistent with Bergman's rule. We had our first views of Great Bowerbirds, and an impressive bower, Apostlebirds, Pale-headed Rosella, Galah, Red-winged Parrot, Noisy Friarbird and Blue-winged Kookaburra.



Bower © J Leonatti

Our final stop for the day was Kingfisher Birdwatchers Lodge at Julatten, our home for two nights. It was an immediate feast of birds with waves of Chestnut-breasted Mannikins and Red-browed Finches coming to feeders and the spectacular Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher calling but remaining elusive. Barry and Mike cooked dinner for the guests with supplies purchased from Mareeba and we had a bird call rich in new species. **Day 5: Daintree River, Kingfisher and Mt Molloy** We left for the Daintree boat cruise at 5:30am. Thirty-five bird species were observed on the river including Black Bittern, Azure Kingfisher, Shining Flycatcher, Radjah Shelduck and two nesting Papuan Frogmouths. We also saw two Estuarine Crocodiles. After the cruise we enjoyed breakfast at the 'Croc' café in Daintree Village.



Daintree River cruise © Mike Jarvis

Back at the Kingfisher Lodge we saw Red-tailed Black Cockatoos, Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfishers, the endemic Macleay's Honeyeater, Spectacled Monarch and many more. We had lunch at the lodge and Buff-breasted-Paradise Kingfishers ate mealworms with us while we ate our lunch. We went for a walk around the grounds and then drove to Mount Molloy Primary School. Here we saw Squatter Pigeons, Red-winged Parrots, White-bellied Cuckooshrike, Eastern Koel, Pied Currawong, Grey-crowned Babbler and Yellow Honeyeater.



Kingfisher Park © Mike Jarvis





Kingfisher Park © Mike Jarvis



Kingfisher Park © Mike Jarvis

We again had dinner cooked by Mike and Barry and volunteer sous chefs. We used the large table in the covered area for our bird call. **Day 6: Kingfisher and the Atherton Tablelands** The dawn chorus at Kingfisher was loud and glorious but one call was dominant, the Grey Whistler. Our challenge was to see one which was easier said than done. In the meantime, on our 6am walk we saw Rufous Shrikethrush, Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher, Lemon-bellied Flyrobin, Yellow

Spotted, Cryptic and Yellow-faced Honeyeater and fast flocks of Metallic Starlings who had a large colonial nest in a nearby park. We had breakfast in the garden with the Paradise Kingfishers, Chestnut-breasted Mannikins and Red-browed Firetails. One of the kingfishers looked a little sad as it had no long white tail feathers! We packed up and left Kingfisher Lodge and explored McDougal Road where we got excellent views of Golden-headed Cisticolas. From Mt Molloy we drove back south to Mareeba, where we saw an Emu in a newly ploughed paddock, then on Atherton and nearby Hasties Swamp, Queensland's smallest national park. There are very few ducks at the swamp because most species had gone to breed inland in the south-west of Queensland where there was extensive flooding, but quite a variety of birds were seen, nevertheless. There were 25 species including a charming family of Red-backed Fairywrens.



Birdwatching at Hasties Swamp © Mike Jarvis

From there we went to Yungaburra and had lunch by Peterson's creek where Platypus live. We didn't see them then but got excellent views the next day. We checked into our accommodation at the Kookaburra Motel and drove to Lake Barrine. Here we had magnificent views of Victoria's Riflebird, Bower's Shrikethrush and over 50 Great Crested Grebe on the lake and fleeting views of a Yellow-breasted Boatbill.



Looking for Platypus © Mike Jarvis



Platypus encounter © Mike Jarvis

Back at Yungaburra we had dinner at the local pub and did our bird call. **Day 7: Atherton Tablelands** After breakfast at the Kookaburra Lodge we went to the lookout over Bromfield Swamp which is the top of an extinct volcano. No Brolgas were seen but a fruiting *Ficus virens* was full of birds feeding. We saw Barred Cuckooshrike, Australasian Figbird, Wompoo Pigeon and Silvereye.



Cauliflory © Mike Jarvis

Next stop was Mount Hypipamee National Park where we saw Crimson Rosella, a Golden Bowerbird’s bower and had an amazing encounter with a male Cassowary and his two chicks. They came out of the forest and walked to within a few feet of us. We kept very still!

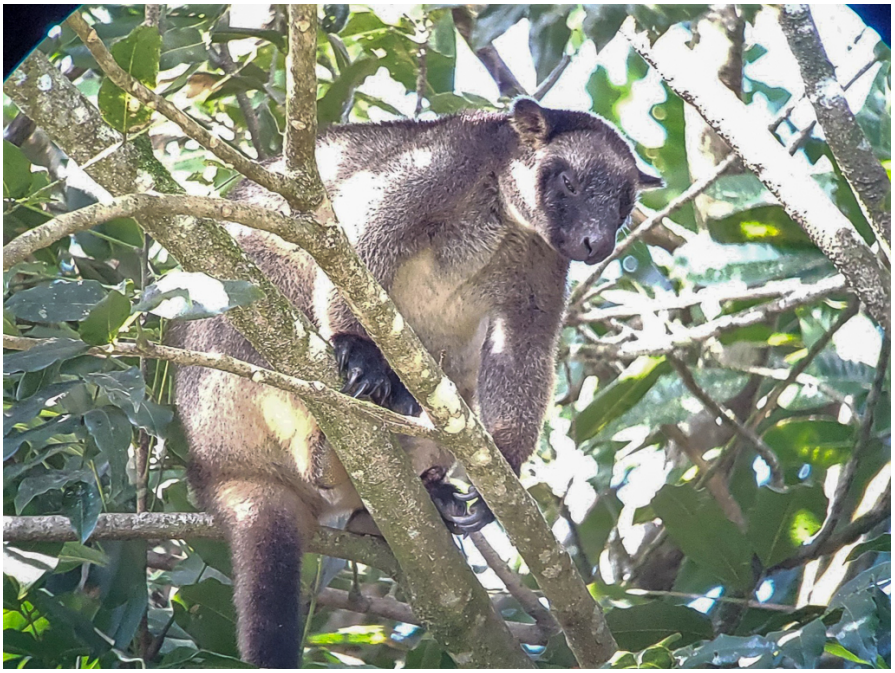


Cassowary at Mt Hypipamee © Mike Jarvis



Taking photos of Cassowary © Mike Jarvis

Then we drove down to Springvale Road where we saw Grey Butcherbirds, Noisy Miners, Fuscous, Scarlet and Banded Honeyeaters and a Grey Shrikethrush. After lunch at Herberton, we went to the Nerada Tea Factory and saw Lumholtz Tree Kangaroos in the tall trees at the front of the property. At a nearby creek, we spotted a Buff-banded Rail, all had good views from the vehicles.



Tree Kangaroo © J Leoonatti

Back at Yungaburra we enjoyed dinner at the pub again. After dinner we went spotlighting and stargazing. We saw a White-tailed Rat and a Green Ringtail Possum but didn't see the Southern

Cross. **Day 8: Atherton Tablelands** We had breakfast in our rooms and made a 7am start. Our first stop was the Curtain Fig Tree. Here we saw Brown Gerygones, Bower's Shrikethrush and heard a Spotted Catbird. We stopped at the Bromfield Swamp viewing platform where we saw Brolgas and Sarus Cranes. At Mount Hypipamee we saw of Bridled Honeyeaters, King Parrots, Brown Gerygone, Grey Fantail and a Pied Monarch, which is a local endemic. A Golden Whistler made a brief appearance too.



Curtain Fig © Mike Jarvis

During a visit to Crater Lakes Rainforest Lodges, Victoria's Riflebirds came close to us to feed on mealworms. A male displayed on a vine about 10 metres away from us. There were also Lewin's Honeyeaters, a Boyd's Forest Dragon and a pair of Eastern Whipbirds. It was a fantastic opportunity to appreciate up close the amazing iridescence of the riflebird's plumage.



Victoria's Riflebird © Mike Jarvis



Brush Turkey © Mike Jarvis

At Lake Eacham we saw a Great Cormorant, Archer Fish and had good views of a Double-eyed Fig Parrots feeding in a fruiting tree. We had lunch at Lake Barrine Tea House then another effort to see Chowchillas on the forest walk. We were unsuccessful but had good views of Musky Rat-kangaroo and saw and heard a displaying Tooth-billed Bowerbird. His calls consisted of his own grinding metallic sounds mixed with mimicry of other birds including Spangled Drongo and King Parrot. On

our way back to Cairns we stopped at the Cathedral Fig Tree and had good views of Chowchillas there.



Boyd's Forest Dragon © Mike Jarvis

Day 9: Transfer to Brisbane and Lamington National Park Up at 3:30 for a 6am departure, breakfast and coffee at the airport. Arrived at Brisbane at 8:30, picked up hire cars and went straight to the Brisbane Port. Unfortunately, access to Swan Lake was closed due to roadworks but with the help of a security guard we gained access to the shore bird roost. Chestnut Teal was a new bird for the tour. They are coastal ducks so were one of the few species of duck that hadn't flown inland to breed in the flood waters. Marsh Sandpiper was the only new species of shorebird. We had sandwiches for lunch on the Moreton Bay foreshore, saw Eastern Osprey and Tree Martins, then drove down to Nandeebie Park where we saw a Koala with joey high up in a tree. There were also Australian Magpies, Galahs and a Pied Butcherbird and we heard Mangrove Honeyeater.



Koala watching



Koala © J Leonatti

We left Brisbane for the slow windy journey to Lamington National Park, stopping at Kamarun lookout at 5pm for a panoramic view of the region. Arriving at O'Reilly's around 5:30pm we were dazzled by King Parrots, Crimson Rosellas and others on a balcony and the lawn around the entrance.



King Parrot © R Welsh

Day 10: Lamington National Park At 5am, curious Crimson Rosellas on the balcony were only inches away from us.



Crimson Rosella at O'Reillys © J Leonatti



O'Reillys



Rosellas trying to get their photo taken © Mike Jarvis

We did a very productive 6am walk along the border track and surrounds. Saw over 30 species including splendid views of Regent's and Satin Bowerbirds, Green Catbirds, a very obliging Logrunner and a Wedge-tailed Eagle soaring across the valley. We also had a good look at an active Satin Bowerbird bower.



Satin Bowerbird Bower © J Leonatti

After lunch, we went for a walk to Python Rock, overlooking Kerry Valley, through magnificent subtropical rainforest. Barry provided very interesting interpretation; he lives nearby and has an intimate knowledge of the area. The birding highlights were a female Paradise Riflebird feeding close by and a Noisy Pitta that wasn't as obliging but was seen by most of the group.



O'Reillys Python Rock Walk © Mike Jarvis



Python Rock Walk © J Leonatti

Day 11: Transfer to Brisbane Airport



Having breakfast at O'Reillys © Mike Jarvis

We went for a 6am walk around O’Reilly’s and had great close views of Albert’s Lyrebird, Green Catbird and a Logrunner. The usual Crimson Rosellas, Eastern King Parrots and Eastern Whipbirds followed us as we went, some landing on our heads. We did the Tree Top Circuit and three people climbed the tree lookout.



O'Reillys Tree Top Walk © Mike Jarvis

We went back to the Lodge for a hearty breakfast and we departed for Brisbane airport. We flew to Sydney and transferred to our hotel. We bought our breakfast from the hotel for the next day. **Day 12: Pelagic Trip** After breakfast in our rooms we left for the dock at 6:30 am. We enjoyed the iconic scenery of Sydney Harbour on our way out to Sydney Heads and the Tasman Sea beyond.



Sydney Coastline © J Leonatti



Sydney Harbour and Opera House © Mike Jarvis

Conditions on the open water were much rougher than predicted and several people in the group were seasick. Barry and the skipper made the decision to turn back as conditions were only going to get worse. We did see hundreds of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, Short-tailed and Fluttering Shearwaters and a Pomarine Jaeger but did not get out to the continental shelf where the pelagic species are seen. When we arrived back in the harbour, we were taken on a sight-seeing trip around the harbour before docking.



Sydney pelagic tour © Mike Jarvis

We had lunch at Centennial Park and searched for a Powerful Owl, but to no avail. We saw many other species and then went out to Royal National Park where we saw our first of many New Holland Honeyeaters and a White-bellied Sea-eagle. The highlight of the visit was not a bird, although it does lay eggs. It was an Echidna.



Echidna © J Leonatti

Day 13: Sydney to the Blue Mountains We had breakfast at the hotel at 7am, then departed at 8:30am. Our first stop was the Royal Botanical Gardens where we all had views of a Powerful Owl. We left Sydney on a highway for the Blue Mountains. At Wentworth Falls township, we had lunch and then explored tracks in heath habitat. We continued to the town of Blackheath and checked in to our accommodation. At 3:30 we went to Govett's Leap lookout, but the National parks Service had closed the road for reconstruction of the lookout following damage in bushfires in 2020. We then we went to Evans Lookout which was open but with restricted access. We dipped on Superb Lyrebird but had brief views of Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos flying over.



Govetts Leap Lookout

Then we had dinner at a very old hotel which has the distinction of having had Charles Darwin as a patron in the 1830's. **Day 14: Blue Mountains** Very cold and windy this morning so we moved our planned start time back to 6:30. We did the Evans Lookout walk again but still without success although we got good views of White-throated Treecreeper. We went back to the motel and packed up. Next stop was Mount York lookout, which was impacted by the 2020 fires. We saw Striated and Brown Thornbills, but the westerly wind was gale force, so birding was difficult. We left the Blackheath region and headed to Lithgow. At the wastewater plant we saw a good range of ducks including Blue-billed and Pink-eared. From there we went to check in to our accommodation at Wallerawang and drove around the town and the lake. We saw about 30 species including great views of Superb Fairywren and a loudly singing Australian Reed Warbler. The highlight was a pair of Musk Ducks.



Birding in Wallerawang © Mike Jarvis

Day 15: Capertee Valley After breakfast at the motel we picked up our sandwiches from the bakery and departed for Capertee Valley. We spent the day exploring various locations. Even though the vegetation in the valley was lush, due to months of rain, bird numbers and diversity were much lower than previous years. We saw Australian Ravens harassing a Wedge-tailed Eagle as we drove to Glen Davis campground where a group of White-winged Choughs joined us for lunch. Black-chinned Honeyeater was the other highlight of Glen Davis. Glen Alice was our most rewarding location with sightings of Diamond Firetail, a family of Eastern Crested Shriketit, a Rufous Songlark, Hooded Robin and Little Lorikeets feeding in the eucalyptus blossoms.



Betsy Ice Cream celebration

Day 16: Blue Mountains and Sydney After breakfast and checkout, we walked around Lake Wallace before heading off to the Blue Mountains. We explored the magnificent botanic gardens at Mount Tomah and had superb views of a performing Superb Lyrebird. At nearby Mount Wilson, we saw a pair of beautiful Gang Gang Cockatoos. In 2020 bush fires that started near Mt Wilson ravaged vast areas of the Blue Mountains. Most of the forest appears to be recovering well but areas closer to Lithgow show little sign of regeneration even after 2 years! We stopped to enjoy the iconic Blue Mountains view of the Three Sisters rock formation from Echo Point, Katoomba.



Three Sisters, Australia © J Leonatti



Mount Tomah © J Leonatti

From here it was back to our accommodation at Sydney airport. Total number of bird species seen was 262 with 5 heard only.



Group photo at Cathedral Fig