



Sunrise Birding, LLC  
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# AUSTRALIA

June/July 2009 - *TRIP REPORT*

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## Day 1 - 29<sup>th</sup> June

Most of the group had been on the Birdseekers tour in Papua New Guinea and arrived in Cairns from Port Moresby in the evening. Bart was travelling in Australia and arrived in Cairns previously. Our guide Roy picked us up at the Cairns airport and brought us to our hotel where we settled in for the night in the midst of excitement and anticipation of our birding tour of Queensland.

## Day 2 - 30<sup>th</sup> June

After breakfast we set off to explore the avian delights around Cairns. It was a gorgeous morning and from the hotel parking lot, we had our first **Metallic Starlings**, **Common Mynas**, a couple of **Straw-necked Ibis** across the street and some **Magpie Larks**. Our first birding stop was a mud flat area on the coast where a **Beach Stone-Curlew** was seen very well. A great start! We scanned the expanse toward the open water and found plenty of **Silver Gulls**, **Sacred Kingfisher**, **White-faced Heron**, **Eastern Curlew**, and **Striated Heron**. Our scanning was interrupted by the sound of a **Mistletoebird** perched on top of a tall tree near the beach and we had excellent views of this attractive bird, Australia's only species of Flowerpecker. Looking back toward the sea we found a couple of **Red-capped Plovers**, **Bar-tailed Godwit**, and two close and very handsome **Black-fronted Dotterels**. Behind us, the trees above held **Figbirds**, **Varied Honeyeater** and **Yellow Oriole** and now there was a pair of **Mistletoebirds** displaying with each other in the canopy. We walked along the edge of some mangroves and soon found a **Mangrove Robin** sat on low a branch allowing good views. Further on, we added **Brown Honeyeater**, **Spangled Drongo**, **Spotted Dove**, and **Peaceful Dove** to our rapidly growing list. One last check of the mud flats yielded a **Collared Kingfisher** on a post and a **Sacred Kingfisher** that flew in and perched below it for a nice comparison. A few **Eastern Reef Egrets** were seen as well before we moved on to our next area, the Cairns cemetery. We drove in the main entrance and immediately found several **Bush Thick-knees** sat on and around the gravestones. A couple of **Laughing Kookaburras** showed well perched in a tree as we drove by and there were a few very colourful and active **Rainbow Bee-eaters**. A small flock of **Nutmeg Mannikins** was feeding in a mowed grass area and as we rounded the corner toward the exit, a **Helmeted Friarbird** was seen in a paperbark tree. A **White-bellied Cuckoo-Shrike** was also seen in a distant tree and below that was a **Varied Triller**. Not bad for a cemetery!

We continued on to Centenary Lakes and were soon watching our first noisy **Sulphur-crested Cockatoos** flying around a tree across the road. A **Brahminy Kite** was also seen and some **Double-eyed Fig-Parrots** whizzed by and landed at the top of a tree allowing scope views in bad light. On the lakes we saw **Australasian Darter**, **Pacific Black Duck** and **Australian White Ibis** and the trees around held **Dusky Honeyeater** and **Black Butcherbird**. We walked along the edge of a woodland and peered in at an **Australian Brush-turkey** scratching for insects on the forest floor. A nice boardwalk led through a Pandanus Swamp Forest where there were incredibly large Paperbark trees (*Melaleuca* sp). The boardwalk ended on a street which wound around to the Cairns Botanical Garden where we enjoyed a drink before continuing back toward the lakes. Along the road we had a group of **Metallic Starlings** and a close **Orange-footed Scrubfowl**. Nearby **White-breasted Woodswallows** were circling overhead and a lovely bright blue **Ulysses Butterfly** fluttered through. A cracking male **Olive-backed Sunbird** was working the side of a tree and looked brilliant in the morning light. We entered the forest again and happened upon a group of **Double-eyed Fig Parrots** feeding on some fruits in a tree. They were well camouflaged but low in the tree and we enjoyed excellent views of them. Out in an open area there was a group of three **Bush-Thick-knees** under a small palm and a **Yellow Honeyeater** working a low branch. Across one of the ponds we had a **Great Egret** perched and we made our way around to another pond to see a **Large-billed Gerygone** at close range. Gina and Roy went to get lunch supplies and pick up Jill and Neil who were shopping for their own supplies and while they were out, the rest of the group had fabulous views of a confiding **Forest Kingfisher**. Our picnic lunch in the park included close visits by hungry **Black Butcherbirds** and after a short break we were off again birding. A **Grey Goshawk** was seen flying overhead and a **Torresian Imperial Pigeon** flew over as well.

We stopped in town to see a colony of **Spectacled Fruit Bats** in the trees just above a building. The sight was amazing with hundreds of these large, endangered bats hanging out right in the middle of the city! Our

next stop was an obligatory sewage works (the mark of any good birding tour) which held **Pied Stilts, Silver Gulls, Cattle Egret**, and some **Pacific Black Ducks**. Across the street, a group of **Nutmeg Mannikins** were seen as well as a **White-bellied Cuckoo Shrike**. We travelled out of town to another area of sugar cane fields. A **Collared Sparrowhawk** was perched low in a gap between two fields and remained as we turned the vehicle around and looked into the gap again. On the other side of the road, we had **Nankeen Kestrel** perched on a high post and an **Australasian Pipit** on a mound of dirt. Looking back toward the cane, a few **Crimson Finches** were spotted and we enjoyed fine views of a bright red male as well as a few females.

We continued on in the heat of the day stopping at another pond where there were a hundred or so **Green Pygmy-geese** nicely showing their green iridescent backs. **Australasian Darters** were perched in the trees and two **Radjah Shelducks** showed well on the middle branch of a close tree. Across the pond two **Nankeen Night-Herons** were spotted – one adult and juvenile and there were some **Brown-backed Honeyeaters** in the trees above our heads. A lone **Grey Teal** was seen at the far end of the pond and a few more were found with the Pygmy Geese. There were many **Welcome Swallows** around and a few **Pacific Black Ducks** as well as some **Rainbow Bee-eaters** and a **Sacred Kingfisher**. Our next stop was in Yorkey's Knob for a pit stop which gave us a chance to survey the ocean waters and spot some distant **Brown Boobies** out over the water.

At another pond, we had several **Magpie Geese** and our first **Hardheads** however distant. A quick stop at a culvert with **Fairy Martins** nesting underneath allowed flight views of the birds as they left their nests. The sun was getting low so we headed back to Cairns and walked along the waterfront esplanade. It was a lovely evening and despite the throngs of walkers, bikers, picnickers, etc, we found several birds along the shore including **Great Knot, Eastern Curlew, Gull-billed Tern, Crested Tern, Pied Stilt, and Australian Pied Oystercatcher**. Another spot further up the coast held **Royal Spoonbills** which were flushed by the parading marines jogging and chanting down the boardwalk. Fortunately, the other birds in the area were not so skittish and when we walked closer we had views of **Australian Pelicans**, a few **White-faced Herons, Great, Little, and Intermediate Egrets, Australian White Ibis**, more **Crested Terns** and an **Australian Darter**. There were hundreds of **Rainbow Lorikeets** in the trees all along the esplanade and moving in noisy flocks up and down the waterfront. Our final stop of the evening was at an open grassy area where we had more **Magpie Larks, Nutmeg Mannikins, Willie Wagtails**, and a confiding **Golden-headed Cisticola**. As it was getting dark, we headed back to the hotel for a lovely meal and review of the days excellent birding.

### Day 3 – 1<sup>st</sup> July

After breakfast we were picked up at the hotel to go to the Cairns waterfront and to board our 32 metre Schooner Rig Catamaran for a cruise out to the Great Barrier Reef. It was a perfect day for an ocean cruise with clear blue skies and a light breeze. On the way to the waterfront, some of us caught a glimpse of an **Australian Hobby** on top of the hospital and when we reached the dock, there was a **Peregrine Falcon** on top of the mast of the ship. We settled in on the upper deck and as we motored out of the inlet we noted a few **Crested Terns** on the channel marker posts. After a couple of hours of motor sailing, the boat anchored just off Michaelmas Cay, a small sandy island surrounded by corals of the Great Barrier Reef. Now a National Park and protected seabird sanctuary, the island was buzzing with birds. We scanned the waters around the island as well as the shoreline where there were many **Brown Noddies, Brown Boobies** and hundreds of **Sooty Terns** that were busy nesting.

During the course of the day, some of us took advantage of the opportunity to snorkel and dive the reef and tour it in a large semi-submersible and in doing so we saw many colourful reef fish, sea slugs, giant clams, several **Green Turtles**, and a **White-tipped Reef Shark**. We also had time to look around the very active **Sooty Tern** colony which had several pairs with eggs and a few young chicks. At one point from the boat, we saw a **Masked Booby** flying toward the island, a good sighting for the trip. It was a fabulous day and on the way back we were serenaded by one of the crew who played guitar up on the foredeck and sang traditional Australian folk and modern songs. It was a lovely evening so when we returned to shore we decided to walk back to the hotel taking the route along the esplanade which once again was buzzing with people and birds. The walk yielded large numbers of **Rainbow Lorikeets** moving in every direction and along the shoreline we had **Australian Pelicans, a White-faced heron, Silver Gulls, Australian White Ibis** and many **Masked Lapwings**. As we were about to leave the waterfront and head toward our hotel we spotted both **Varied Honeyeaters** and **Brown Honeyeaters**.

### Day 4 – 2<sup>nd</sup> July

After breakfast we checked the cemetery again and found the **Bush Thick-Knees** as well as **Straw-necked Ibis, Rainbow Bee-eaters**, and **Willie Wagtails**. Centenary Lakes had **Orange-footed Scrubfowl, Spangled Drongo, Helmeted Friarbird, Rainbow Lorikeets**, and **Brown Honeyeater**. One of the mostly dried up ponds had a **Little Kingfisher** perched on some Lotus flower heads and this little beauty was well seen for several minutes. A **Sacred Kingfisher** also came in which was excellent for comparisons.

Then we headed out of Cairns along the Cooke Highway overlooking the beautiful coast of the Coral Sea. Our destination was the Atherton Tablelands and access to a variety of habitats including wet tropical forest, farmland and the dry Queensland interior. As we drove we scanned the sea for cetaceans and had a few glimpses of **Bottle-nosed Dolphins** porpoising in the offshore waters. Once we turned inland there were many **Fairy Martins** patrolling over open areas. In a mowed sugar cane field we saw several **Cattle Egrets**, a **White-necked Heron** and several **Black-winged Kites** which were soaring above the fields. We stopped in Mossman for a few supplies and then drove into the hills. Some raptors were seen circling so we made a quick stop on the road for a **Black Kite** and a juvenile **White-bellied Sea Eagle**. On the way back to the vehicle a couple of **Yellow Orioles** were spotted in some nearby trees. We continued up into the Rex Range, a wet tropics Global Heritage area and checked on overlook for a view of the valley below. Further on there was a fish farm with several ponds that held **Little Egret**, **Pacific Black Duck**, **Little Pied Cormorant**, a few **Hardheads** and a nice **Forest Kingfisher** perched on a post.

We arrived at Kingfisher Park lodge and were soon drawn to the feeders which had **Yellow-spotted Honeyeater** at very close range, several **Crimson-browed Finches**, and our first **Macleay's Honeyeaters**. We had some time before lunch so we birded around the car park and found **Little Shrike-Thrush**, a very bright **Golden Whistler**, a very handsome **Spectacled Monarch**, and a gorgeous **Scarlet Honeyeater**. There was also **White-throated Treecreeper**, **Grey Fantail**, and **Dusky Honeyeater**. Nice car park! We followed a small trail to an old orchard where there was a **Pale-yellow Robin** perched on an open branch, and several **Brown Cuckoo-doves** flew over as Bart spotted an **Emerald Dove** perched on a horizontal branch. A smart pair of **Yellow-breasted Boatbills** working along a tangle was quite striking and the sight of the male got a dance from Roy. You know it's good when the guide dances! The trail led to an area near a stream where there was **Rufous Fantail**, **Large-billed Scrub Wren**, and **Fairy Gerygone**. Heading back toward the lodge we had good looks at **Varied Triller** and a **Bar-shouldered Dove**.

We enjoyed lunch on the lodge veranda while ticking our first **Lewin's Honeyeater** and some of us had our first look at **Grey-headed Thrush**. In the afternoon we drove further into the mountains. A **Swamp Harrier** was seen from the vehicle but got away too fast so we continued on to a stop along the road where there was **Northern Fantail**, **Chestnut-breasted Mannikin**, and another **Yellow-breasted Boatbill**. Some female **Lovely Fairywrens** were spotted and soon we were looking at a pair including two stunning male **Lovely Fairywrens** which moved quickly along the bushes. We moved forward to head them off and Steve got excellent photos of this little beauty.

A **Rufous Whistler** showed while another **Scarlet Honeyeater** was seen in the canopy above. Continuing on we added **Lemon-bellied Flycatcher** and a **Blue-winged Kookaburra** that flew up to perch on a power stanchion. We entered some more open farm country and found our first **Agile Wallabies** in a field not far away. On the other side of the road a lotus-filled pond held **Purple Swamphens**, both **Plumed** and **Wandering Whistling Duck**, and some **Comb-crested Jacanas**. As we were about to leave a **Spotted Harrier** appeared and gave quite a show as it coursed over the wetland. Further on, we stopped for a group of **Red-backed Fairy Wren** females at the edge of an open field. A **Spangled Drongo** was seen in the background and some **Sulphur-crested Cockatoos** flew over. Our next stop was for a raptor perched in a tree which turned out to be a **Brown Falcon**. The bird took flight and was chased by a **Black-winged Kite** and the two proceeded to join in what can only be described as an aerial joust for several minutes. As the Kite attacked, the Falcon would roll over with its talons turned up in defence. It was amazing to watch as most of the attacks were from behind and yet the Falcon knew just when to rear up. After several minutes, the **Brown Falcon** admitted defeat by flying off. What a show! The only thing that could top that was an even bigger raptor and sure enough our next sighting was a huge **White-bellied Sea Eagle** soaring. It was a fabulous raptor day!

The next stop was at Abbatoir Swamp where the car park was again very birdy with **White-throated Honeyeater**, **Brown Honeyeater**, several **Rainbow Bee-eaters**, **Peaceful Dove**, and **Yellow-faced Honeyeater**. We walked a boardwalk into the swamp and in the trees along the way there was a close **White-bellied Cuckoo Shrike** and from the hide, we had a couple of **Forest Kingfishers** and a **Blue-winged Kookaburra**. As we were watching those, a **White-browed Crake** called from behind the hide and we spent several minutes searching for it but it did not show. Continuing on, we stopped and walked another trail between some cane fields to look for **Blue-faced Parrot-Finch**. We found their favoured food and some people in the front of the group saw some birds fly off but the birds were not cooperating. A few **Silvereyes** showed well and Kevin found a **Victoria's Riflebird** working on a dead stump – a nice consolation for missing the Parrot-Finches.

We continued driving and reached another area where a **Pheasant Coucal** flew off in front of us. A couple of young **Lemon-bellied Flycatchers** on a fence gate gave us a bit of an identification challenge and further on a pair of **White-cheeked Honeyeaters** showed well near another fence. In a distant tree there were a few **Scaly-breasted Lorikeets** and **White-bellied Woodswallows**. While on the way back there was a **Grey Goshawk** perched on a power stanchion and we had **Brown Goshawk** and **Whistling Kite** perched. We

returned to the lodge and some of us immediately went to the orchard to see a pair of **Papuan Frogmouths** in a tree. At dusk, we walked to an open area scoping an **Australian Owlet Nightjar** peering out of its tree hole.

Then our guide spotlighted a **Masked Owl** coming out of a hole in a large tree. The bird perched and then called to another tree which held three young **Masked Owls** and they began to appear as well. Yet another tree held another **Masked Owl** for a total of six for the evening! Back at the lodge, our host showed us a pair of **White-lipped Tree Frogs** and some **Desert Tree Frogs** that spent the evening under the roof of his cottage. We enjoyed a lovely dinner under an open air canopy and just as we were about to go back to our rooms a **Northern Brown Bandicoot** appeared under the bird feeders as well as an **Australian Bushrat**.

### Day 5 – 3<sup>rd</sup> July

After an early breakfast we drove to Daintree Village arriving by dawn ready for our 6:30 AM boat ride on the Daintree River. It was a misty morning on the river and our first bird was an **Azure Kingfisher** near the dock. We started our cruising staying close to the bank where a pair of **Shining Flycatchers** showed well at eye level in some trees overhanging the river and a **Large-billed Gerygone** was found. A **Helmeted Friarbird** was spotted on the treetops and a **Striated Heron** flew across in front of us. There were plenty of **Welcome Swallows** around winding in and out of the fog and as we slowed down to check a sandy area onshore where there was an “intermediate” **Masked Lapwing** and an **Australian Pipit**. A pair of **Hardheads** flew by and as the fog was lifting we had a sighting of the rare **Great-billed Heron**. A **Nankeen Night-Heron** was seen perched on some low vegetation and some **Figbirds** and **Yellow Orioles** were seen in the higher branches. Another **Great-billed Heron** flew in and perched on a tree ahead of us before taking flight up the river. Continuing on we had **Little Shrike-Thrush**, **Spangled Drongo** and **Grey Whistler**, a **Little Egret** (the form without the yellow toes), **Black-fronted Dotterel** and a tree full of **Cattle Egrets** as well as a couple of **Little Pied Cormorants** with them. A **Brown Goshawk** quickly flew off its perch but a nice male **Australian Darter** was much more confiding allowing us close views and photos. As we drifted close into a group of overhanging trees we got superb views of a confiding pair of **Papuan Frogmouths** perched together. Nearby a **Whistling Kite** was flying above and a **White-faced Heron** was also seen. We motored to an area of mangroves where there was **Leaden Flycatcher**, **Dusky Honeyeater**, another **Grey Whistler** and another **Papuan Frogmouth**. An **Australian White Ibis** took flight just before we spotted a **Little Bronze (Gould’s) Cuckoo** perched high in a tree where we then manoeuvred the boat around to try and get a better look at it. On the way back we had both male and female **Olive-backed Sunbird** and very close looks at a **Forest Kingfisher** perched out over the river on a fallen tree. As we approached the dock, an **Australian Hobby** was seen perched on a dead tree.

We took a few minutes for a coffee break at a nearby restaurant which allowed us fantastic views of two **Pacific Bazas** which flew in and perched in the trees nearby. On the way back toward the lodge we stopped at a fish farm which had plenty of **Pied Stilts** and a **White-bellied Sea Eagle** perched in a low tree at the far edge of the ponds. Some **Fairy Martins** bathing in a puddle allowed close views from the van and soon we were winding our way back up the mountains to the lodge for a picnic lunch.

In the afternoon, we drove up to Mount Lewis picking up a **Bassian Thrush**, **Yellow-throated Scrub Wren**, and **Grey Fantail** alongside the road on the way. We arrived at the parking area which was very birdy and added **Bridled** and **White-cheeked Honeyeater** as soon as we got out of the van. As we walked up the track, several **Atherton’s Scrubwrens** showed well, not the least bit phased by our presence. One area had a group of five **Chowchillas** scratching amongst the dead leaves on the ground allowing us great views of males and females. As we ascended the trail we had **Mountain Thornbill**, **Eastern Spinebill**, **Grey Shrike-Thrush** and **Brown Cuckoo-dove** and an **Australian Brush-turkey** that was sunning itself on the trail. There were several **Yellow-throated Scrub Wrens** on the path as well. Soon after we had turned back, Kevin snapped his fingers and motioned us to come forward to see what turned out to be one of our best birds of the trip a superb looking male **Golden Bowerbird** working a tree and eating fruits. The bird was a stunner and we had excellent views as it worked up and down tangles and in low branches for several minutes feasting on small berries. Continuing down we had a **Pied Monarch** that quickly disappeared, and a difficult **Tooth-billed Bowerbird**. Another small group of **Chowchillas** had a pair of **Fernwrens** with them and we enjoyed amazingly close views of the birds on the edge of the trail. As we arrived back at the van, a few **Topknot Pigeons** flew over continuing on instead of landing as we hoped.

We arrived back at the lodge in the late afternoon and checked a small pond near the orchard where an **Azure Kingfisher** was perched and an **Orange-footed Scrubfowl** was working the muddy edge. Down at the little stream, several birds were coming in to bathe including **Pied Monarch**, a couple of **Rufous Fantails**, **Grey Fantail**, **Lewin’s Honeyeater**, **Grey-headed Robin** and **Yellow-faced Honeyeater** all showing well. On the way back, a **Wompoo Fruit-dove** got away before most were able to see it. By now it was dark so we walked back to the lodge for dinner.

### Day 6 – 4<sup>th</sup> July

This morning some of us met on the veranda before breakfast to see the **Spotted Catbird** come into the feeder. The bird arrived but was very wary. Fortunately, a pair showed very well later while we were having breakfast. Our pre-breakfast walk through the gardens yielded **Pied Monarch**, **Scarlet Honeyeater**, **Yellow-spotted Honeyeater**, **Golden Whistler**, **Grey Whistler** and **Graceful Honeyeater**. A **Brown Cuckoo-dove** was seen in the orchard as were a few **Rainbow Bee-eaters** and here some of us had a chance to catch up with a **Wompoo Fruit-Dove** that showed high in the trees. After breakfast, we set off in the van stopping at the cane break area where we finally got on some **Blue-faced Parrot Finches** feeding on seeds. Roy drove us through savannah habitat and we got out of the vehicle a few times to bird some open grasslands. Here **Australian Magpie** and **Nankeen Kestrel** were becoming common. More unusual was a **Red-backed Kingfisher** seen perched on a fence, and nearby on another post was a **Brown Falcon**. **Pied Butcherbird** was seen and a **Crested Pigeon** showed well on a wire. The wires also held **Blue-winged Kookaburras**. A stop at the Carbine Roadhouse for a snack produced **Blue-faced Honeyeaters** in the trees above and yet another look at **Pied Butcherbird**. We moved across the street where a group of **Apostlebirds** were feeding in a fruiting tree, and a couple of **Great Bowerbirds** allowed us all excellent views.

Our next stop was on an open dry grassland area near some ponds. As we walked out on the track a **Royal Spoonbill** flew over and a juvenile **Peaceful Dove** was seen perched close to the track. A small group of trees at the edge of the pond held a **Restless Flycatcher**, new for the trip, and from an open area overlooking the pond we saw **Australasian Grebe**, **Little Pied Cormorant**, and **Pacific Black Ducks**. A **White-throated Honeyeater** was seen in some trees near the edge and a little further away a **Forest Kingfisher** was perched. As a **Brown Goshawk** was seen soaring over the lake, an **Australian Reed Warbler** called from some reeds on the shoreline but eluded being seen by most of us.

We moved on to another pond in the dry farmlands where several **Double-barred Finches** were feeding on a bank. A couple of **Red-tailed Black Cockatoos** flew over the hills in the distance and we then had great views of a confiding **Brown Treecreeper** working along the trunks of the low trees nearby. Suddenly a commotion from a group of four **Red-tailed Black Cockatoos** caught our attention and as we watched, an adult **Wedge-tailed Eagle** appeared above the tree tops. The bird flew up a few times allowing great views as the Cockatoos continued on over the hills.

We enjoyed a picnic lunch alongside a stream in the Brooklyn Wildlife Sanctuary and then began to make our way back through the countryside. A group of eight **Galaha**s feeding on the ground close to the road were a gorgeous sight to behold. A little further on four **Squatter Pigeons** also close to the road allowed good views as well. We stopped again to bird at the small pond and had nice views of a **Striated Pardalote** that was calling from the low trees, followed by a group of **Pale-headed Rosellas** that landed in a tree right in front of us and as we walked around the pond we found a few **Black-throated Finches**, **White-throated Gerygone**, and had quick looks at a **Grey-crowned Babbler**. Our next stop was to look at a tree full of hundred's of **Blue-faced Honeyeaters** and then we were on bustard watch as we drove through the grasslands. We scanned the tall grasses and soon saw the telltale head of a bird, its body hidden in the tall grass. We waited for it to move, and after a few patient minutes an **Australian Bustard** walked out of the grasses and showed well. The bird then flew across the road behind us and disappeared. Just ahead was another **Australian Bustard** near a fence. It appeared to want to cross the road but its path was blocked by the fence so the bird took flight and crossed in front of us – an amazing view of Australia's largest flying bird!

Back out to the main road, we had a very close **Nankeen Kestrel** on the ground, while a quick look on another side road led to a stop for a **Brown Falcon** on a fence post. Our attention was diverted again by yet another close **Australian Bustard** that flew across in front of us. What a day! As the sun set, we made our way back to the lodge for our final dinner at Kingfisher Park.

### Day 7 – 5<sup>th</sup> July

This morning, our bird walk before breakfast yielded a selection of **Honeyeaters** including **Lewin's**, **Macleay's**, **Yellow-spotted**, **Scarlet**, and **Dusky**, all on one flowering Eucalyptus tree. There was also a **Pied Monarch** and we had good views of a **Wompoo Fruit-Dove** in the scope. We also had both male and female **Yellow-breasted Boatbills**, a **Laughing Kookaburra** and a **Little Shrike Thrush**.

After breakfast, we bid farewell to our hosts and were on our way to the Atherton Tablelands for the last days of our tour. **Forest Kingfishers** were seen during the drive and in a residential area we had some **Great Bowerbirds**, **Bar-shouldered Doves**, **Nankeen Kestrel**, and a **Collared Sparrowhawk** that flew over and disappeared quickly. In Mount Molloy, a group of **Red-winged Parrots** showed well on top of a tree including a nice view of the male showing its red wings. We drove out toward Lake Mitchell passing **Intermediate Egrets** in the wetlands along the lakeshore. At a gate which led to a causeway there were **Golden-headed Cisticolas** working in some grasses. While watching the Cisticolas, a **Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike** was also seen and a couple of **Australian Magpies** were around. We drove into an area

that had an open view of the lake which held **Little Pied Cormorants**, **Australian Darters** many **Maggie Geese**, and several pairs of **Australian Black Swans**.

A **Swamp Harrier** flew over as we walked through another gate and further along the causeway. A group of **Red-backed Fairy Wrens** showed in some nearby scrub and a **Pheasant Coucal** flew through quickly. **Fairy Martins** and **Welcome Swallows** were flying over the lake and we scoped some **Comb-crested Jacanas** walking on the lily pads.

Our next stop was near a golf course where about three dozen **Eastern Grey Kangaroos** were sitting in the shade just off the fairway. We stopped for supplies in town and then travelled on stopping for a tree full of **Red-tailed Black Cockatoos** not far from the road. We passed by several farm fields around Atherton and searched through the many **Sarus Cranes** feeding to get good views of the similar looking **Brolga**. A **Wedge-tailed Eagle** was perched on a fence post along one of the fields and some **Australian Pipits** were easily seen. **Golden-headed Cisticolas** were also seen on the fences and there were flocks of **Nutmeg Mannikins** around. Another field held several **Straw-necked Ibis**, some **Masked Lapwings** and another **Spotted Harrier**.

We enjoyed a picnic lunch in a park and then moved on to Hasties Swamp National Park which had a pond that was full of birds including Purple **Swamphen**, **Dusky Moorhen**, and **Maggie Goose**. There was a **Bush Stone Curlew** under some trees and then we went into a hide overlooking the water which had hundreds of **Plumed Whistling Ducks**. The pond also had **Little Black Cormorant**, **Australasian Grebe**, a few **Pacific Black Ducks**, **Hardheads** and **Eurasian Coot**. Outside the hide, a **Brown Falcon** was posing on an open perch allowing for good views and photos.

We moved on to the village of Malanda picking up **Crested Pigeon** on the power lines in town. Once settled into our accommodation we went back out again in the afternoon to a forested area which held **Tooth-billed Bowerbird**, a female **Victoria's Riflebird**, a male **Eastern Whipbird**, and a **Mountain Thornbill**. The sun was beginning to set when we arrived at the Bromfield Swamp overlook where we watched as some **Sarus Cranes** flew out. We were slightly distracted by some activity across the road where a **Brown Gerygone** and **Large-billed Scrub Wren** were foraging Roy laid out cheese, crackers and wine and we enjoyed the lovely evening watching the spectacle of the **Sarus Cranes** and **Brolgas** flying into the crater landing gracefully and some of them even finishing with a dance. With the sunset behind us, the scene was nothing short of magical! Later in the evening we had dinner at an historic inn and then made our way back to the hotel for the night.

### Day 8 – 6<sup>th</sup> July

This morning before breakfast we went to an area to look for fabled Platypus. There were a few turtles around but no sign of Platypus perhaps because of the chill of the morning. On the way back we stopped in town for a few **Pied Carrawongs** and this turned out to be a very productive stop as it also included views of **Australian King-Parrots** bathing in the dew on some treetop leaves and some big flocks of **Little Corellas** that flew over.

After breakfast, we visited Curtain Fig Tree Park, a tract of Mabi Forest which holds the Tablelands most famous tree – the **curtain fig**. We were greeted by a **Pale Yellow Robin** as we walked into the boardwalk that led to the big tree, a Green Fig which has strangled two other trees over time creating a massive curtain-like structure. A **Grey-headed Robin** was seen on the ground below the boardwalk and there were a few **Brown Gerygones** in the trees just above eye level. Our next stop was near a bridge over Peterson Creek where we checked a quiet pond and to our amazement and delight found a **Platypus** that showed very well surfacing several times allowing photos. We were thrilled to have such good views of this elusive animal – an Australian icon!

Our next stop was at Lake Eacham which was fairly devoid of birds except for an **Australian Darter** perched on the far shore. A **Crimson Rosella** flew over and was relocated on a perch for scope views and **Grey Fantail** and **Mistletoebird** were seen in the trees as we walked the road. There was a bit more activity at our next stop overlooking another lake. As we walked from the car park, an **Eastern Spinebill** was seen working a bush, and over the lake there were several **Welcome Swallows** while a small group of **Pacific Black Ducks** approached as we arrived at the lake shore. Further out, we could see our first and only **Great Crested Grebes** of the trip and nearby an **Australian Little Grebe**. A woodland track on the hillside above the shore revealed a **Musky Rat-kangaroo** and a male **Eastern Whipbird** scratching in the leaves at the base of a palm right next to the trail allowing views at less than a metre.

We enjoyed a picnic lunch and then drove through some farm areas. At one point, a **Forest Kingfisher** flew along side us keeping up with the vehicle for several hundred metres. We stopped at the Cathedral Fig Tree and were greeted by the ubiquitous **Australian Brush-turkey** in the car park, although getting photos of this bird seemed problematic for Steve. The trail to the fig held **Brown Gerygone**, **Large-billed Scrub Wren**,

and **Little Shrike Thrush**. Another **Musky Rat-Kangaroo** was seen and we had good views of **Tooth-billed Bowerbird** and a female **Victoria's Riflebird** in the trees above.

In the afternoon we headed back to Cairns stopping at Goomburra Park for our last birding of the tour. Some fruiting trees held a good number of **Brown Orioles** and a bright male **Figbird**. A couple of **Double-eyed Fig Parrots** flew in and scope views revealed their superb colours. Some **Metallic Starlings** were around and a **Brahminy Kite** flew over, while a very confiding **Laughing Kookaburra** allowed close approach and photo opportunities. Later we checked into our hotel and enjoyed a nice dinner. We said goodbye to our excellent host and guide Roy with memories of many great birds seen on our Queensland extension.

It was a pleasure leading this tour under the expert direction of Roy and with a group of birders who were flexible, easy going, fun, and whose positive karma was rewarded with many excellent sightings of wonderful birds and Platypus! Thank you all for a great trip!

Steve & Gina

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