

Birding in Queensland

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1/2	Depart London/in flight
Day 3	Cairns
Day 4	Michaelmas Cay
Day 5/7	Daintree National Park
Day 8/10	Atherton Tablelands
Day 11	Etty Bay
Day 12	Depart Cairns
Day 13	Arrive London

Departs

October

Focus

Queensland's natural heritage and wildlife, especially birds and mammals

Grading

A. Gentle birdwatching walks at most sites; all easy and optional

Dates & Prices

See website (tour code AUS01) or brochure

Highlights:

- Explore the world's largest coral reef ecosystem
- Target all the 13 bird species endemic to the Wet Tropics World Heritage area
- Visit the world's oldest tropical rainforest
- Expertly guided by a local ornithologist guide



From top: Yellow-bellied Sunbird, Azure Kingfisher & Blue Parrot Finch



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Itinerary

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

This trip is based on targeting all the 13 bird species (listed with an asterisk), which are endemic to the Wet Tropics World Heritage area, as well as many Australian endemics throughout the area.

Day 1

Depart London

Depart London Heathrow on your flight to Cairns. Carriers will vary, but usually Emirates, Qantas and Singapore Airlines offer convenient timings. Flights from Gatwick, Manchester, Birmingham, Newcastle and Glasgow are also usually available, although it will depend on availability and an extra cost may be required. Please enquire with the Naturetrek office for further details.

Day 2

In flight

In flight.

Day 3

Cairns

Usually, we would expect to arrive in Cairns around mid-morning. On arrival you will be met by your Australian guide and transferred to your Cairns hotel. Cairns lies tucked between lush green mountain rainforests and the northern shore of Trinity Inlet, discovered by Captain Cook on Trinity Sunday in 1770. Established as a seaport in 1876 to serve the Hodgkinson goldfield, Cairns was named after Governor William Wellington Cairns. The city's prospects dived with that of the goldfields in the 1880's before the sugar and banana plantations became major contributors to the economy. Today the city is a delightful blend of architectural classics, from the early British-built public buildings to the quintessential Australian country pubs; a handsome and interesting place, rich in history, character and charm. Once a quiet backwater of Australia's tropical north, Cairns now has a population of 140,000 and is a bustling cosmopolitan community, rivalling Townsville as the landing point for visitors to the country's fastest-growing tourist area. It is blessed with a magnificent backdrop of rugged, rain forested hills and overlooks a tidal, mangrove-lined bay that attracts a wealth of waterbirds.



After lunch, depending on the weather, a stroll along the Esplanade is usually an excellent introduction to tropical Australian birding, with Rainbow Lorikeet, Double-eyed Fig-Parrot, Varied Honeyeater, Australasian Figbird, Helmeted Friarbird and (in summer) Pied Imperial Pigeon, likely in the shady trees, while the mangroves may give us a Mangrove Robin. Depending on the tide and time of the year, waders that we might see could include Eastern Curlew, Grey-tailed Tattler, Terek Sandpiper, Black-fronted Dotterel and Red-necked Stint. Larger birds such as White-faced Heron, Eastern Reef Egret and Australian Pelican are often along the shoreline, while terns such as Caspian, Crested and Gull-billed or even an Osprey may be seen fishing. Silver Gulls, Australian White Ibis and Magpie Larks are more likely to be catching picnic scraps, chased by pugnacious Willie Wagtails.

Day 4

Michaelmas Cay

Today we will focus on the Great Barrier Reef, taking a full-day trip by catamaran to Michaelmas Cay, a National Park renowned as a nesting site for terns and noddies. A cay is a small sandy island that has formed on top of the reef, and on Michaelmas Cay some low scrub has grown from the seabird guano on the island, attracting yet more seabirds, but all vegetation was removed by Cyclone Ita in April 2014. However, the cay still holds large numbers of breeding and resting seabirds. Thousands of terns swarm above the island, predominantly ground-nesting Sooty Terns, Common Noddies and some Brown Boobies and possibly Black-naped, Crested and Lesser Crested Terns, Great and even Lesser Frigatebirds and occasionally Bridled Tern. Ruddy Turnstones may be seen on the shoreline.



Brown Booby

Some two hours out to sea from Cairns, Michaelmas Cay offers all the pristine beauty of the outer reef, being surrounded by coral reefs, and clear, warm turquoise seas full of colourful reef fish which you may choose to enjoy either by glass-bottomed boat/submarine, or by snorkelling from the boat or the beach (equipment provided). On returning to the mainland, you will spend your second night in Cairns.

Day 5

Daintree National Park

This morning, we begin to make our way by road towards the Daintree National Park. Crossing the Daintree River by ferry, we will move on to the area known as the Daintree, which includes Cape Tribulation, for a chance to see rare and primitive plants and additional bird species. We will take a walk at the Jindalba section of the Daintree National Park, which offers a good opportunity for sighting the Southern Cassowary, providing there is a reasonable quantity of fruit on the ground. Other species likely in this area could include Yellow-breasted Sunbird, Little Shrike-Thrush, and *Pied Monarch. In 1770 Captain James Cook ran hard upon a coral reef off the wild rainforest

coastline. Looking ashore he named the most prominent headland "Cape Tribulation – because here began all our troubles." The Daintree River was named after George Daintree, a Queensland Government geologist of the 1800s. Positioned on a point of the globe that has escaped the wrath of successive ice ages, volcanic upheavals and climatic changes, the Daintree/Cape Tribulation coastline remains a refuge for a collection of flora and fauna little changed since the dinosaurs roamed the earth. This area of primeval forest, occupying only a tiny fraction of Australia, is home



to a disproportionately high percentage of native mammals, birds and butterflies. The area is also rich in the history and culture of the Aboriginal people who have lived in these rainforests for tens of thousands of years. Theirs is amongst the oldest surviving oral culture on earth with kinship structures and spiritual beliefs bound closely to the rainforest environment.

Although cattle grazing and arable farming have been tried over the years, no large or permanent farming businesses have succeeded; the wet tropical climate and rugged terrain have saved it from the full impact of European settlement. In the early 1980's the subdivisions created in the Daintree/Cape Tribulation rainforest and the bulldozing of a track between Cape Tribulation and Bloomfield attracted world attention and debate about the future of the rainforests in the area. Today the area is protected under World Heritage listing and managed by the Wet Tropics Management Authority in association with local and state authorities. Later in the afternoon we'll arrive at our accommodation in the heart of the Daintree rainforest.

Day 6

Daintree National Park

We'll spend all day in the fabulous Daintree National Park including time at the Daintree Discovery Centre, an accredited World Heritage Centre. Nestled amongst the rainforest, it provides well-illustrated information on the flora and fauna of the area. It also offers the opportunity to climb a four-storey tower to search amongst the rainforest canopy for birds such as the Mistletoe Bird and Double-eyed Fig Parrot. There will also be time to explore the diversity of the plants, including many rare and primitive species in the lowland forest. We'll explore some of the trails leading off into the rainforest from our lodge; and visit various parts of the Daintree National Park such as famous Cape Tribulation; pretty Emmagen Creek; the Dubiji boardwalk which meanders through the rainforest and mangroves; and Oliver Creek, home of crocodiles, birds and other tropical creatures.



Day 7

Daintree National Park - Mossman

We begin the day with an early morning boat cruise on the Daintree River, departing at 06:30, an excellent opportunity to search for some of the more elusive species such as Great-billed Heron, Papuan Frogmouth and Little Kingfisher, as well as resident species such as Australasian Darter, Large-billed Gerygone, Shining Flycatcher, Yellow Oriole and Azure Kingfisher. Afterwards, we may head to Stewart Creek Road, hoping to spot such species as Lovely Fairy-wren, Wompoo Fruit-Pigeon, Blue-winged Kookaburra, Spotted Catbird, Spectacled and Black-faced Monarch, Double-eyed Fig-Parrot, Macleay's Honeyeater and Yellow-breasted Boatbill. The area surrounding Daintree Village is also home to Southern Cassowary and Noisy Pitta, while cuckoos might include Pacific Koel, Pheasant Coucal, Little Bronze-Cuckoo and Channel-billed Cuckoo. Later in the day, we'll continue south towards Mossman - our overnight stop - making time to bird along the Mossman-Daintree Road if conditions are favourable. A detour to Newell Beach might be worthwhile given its reputation as one of Australia's most productive sites for swifts and swallows. Here, the overhead wires often attract Australian Swiftlets, Tree Martins, Fairy Martins, Barn Swallows, and Welcome Swallows. With a bit of luck, we may even catch sight of an early summer migrant.



Papuan Frogmouth

Day 8 - 10

Mossman - Atherton Tablelands

This morning, we travel inland to the Atherton Tablelands, an area of attractive upland dairy farming country, broken by pockets of high-altitude rainforest (that hold some massive epiphytic curtain figs), deep volcanic lakes and wetlands. During our three-night visit, we will stay in the



Victoria's Riflebird

picturesque village of Yungaburra – a National Trust village with eighteen heritage listed buildings. Close to the beautiful volcanic crater lake of Eacham, Barrine and Tinaroo, our accommodation is ideally located for easy access to a wide range of habitats including rainforest, wet sclerophyll forest and the more open eucalypt and woodland areas. We will look for some of the region's endemic birds and mammals in nearby rainforest and at the famous 'Cathedral' and 'Curtain' Fig trees.

The Atherton Tablelands are part of the World Heritage-listed Wet Tropics region and were once densely covered with high-altitude rainforest. Today the area is one of upland dairy farming and rolling agricultural country, broken by pockets of remnant rainforest (that hold some massive strangler figs), deep volcanic lakes and wetlands. During our stay, we will visit walking tracks in the

rainforest around both Lake Eacham and Lake Barrine, home to some of the region's endemic birds and mammals such as the forest-dwelling Musky Rat Kangaroo, the smallest and most primitive of all the kangaroos. Species we will be seeking during our stay Yungaburra include *Chowchilla, *Tooth-billed Bowerbird, *Golden Bowerbird, *Victoria's Riflebird (one of Australia's birds-of-paradise), *Bridled Honeyeater, *Grey-headed Robin, *Bower's Shrike-thrush, *Pied Monarch and *Atherton Scrubwren, plus Spotted Catbird, Yellow-breasted Boatbill, Eastern Whistler, Brown, Gerygone, Brown Cuckoo Dove, and White-headed Pigeon. Other species we will possibly see include Orange-footed Scrubfowl, Golden Whistler, and Red-backed Fairy-wren.

During our three days we will also experience a dawn chorus to be remembered at the Cathedral Fig Tree. We will also spend a period at dusk, waiting to see the unobtrusive Platypus on one of the Tableland creeks. Part of one day may be spent on the western edge of the Tablelands with good opportunities for sighting some of the dry interior species. These are likely to include Eastern Yellow Robin, Grey Shrike-thrush, Leaden Flycatcher, Little Lorikeet, Brown Quail, Brolga and Yellow-tinted Honeyeater. For those with the energy to go spotlighting after dinner, there will be a chance to sight some of the unusual mammals on the upland rainforests. These may include Green Ringtail Possum, Lemuroid Ringtail Possum, Common and Coppery Brushtail Possum, Red-legged Pademelon and, with luck, Lumholtz's Tree-Kangaroo. There may also be an opportunity to spotlight after dark for creatures such as Eastern Barn Owl, Striped Possum and Leaf-tailed Gecko.



Lumholtz Tree Kangaroo

Day 11

Atherton Tablelands - Etty Bay

Travel south to Etty Bay, birding along the way. Depending on tide times and areas visited earlier, perhaps visit Cairns Esplanade and/or Centenary Lakes. Species on the lakes and channels may include Australian Darter, Little Pied and Little Black Cormorant, Radjah Shelduck, Magpie Goose, Royal Spoonbill and three species of egrets. The surrounding trees often yield Yellow Oriole, Black Butcherbird, Olive-backed Sunbird, Mistletoebird and various honeyeaters.



Olive-backed Sunbird



We may visit a local wetland, Cattana wetlands, to look for Crimson Finch and White-browed Crake before beginning our ascent of the Dividing Range. In the village of Kuranda, we can visit the Barron River Gorge viewpoint. Common species often include Scaly-breasted Lorikeet, Emerald Dove and the elusive Wompoo Fruit-Dove, whose call echoes down from the rainforest canopy. Other possibilities include Little Shrike-thrush, Large-billed Scrubwren, and Spotted

Catbird. Also look for the brilliant blue Ulysses butterfly and the vivid green of the Cairns Birdwing butterfly which provide flashes of colour among the trees.

Etty Bay is a gorgeous hidden gem: a secluded palm-fringed beach surrounded by lush tropical forests that is best known for spotting the iconic Southern Cassowary right on the beach. Early morning or late afternoon excursions will offer our best opportunities to see these amazing birds patrolling the beach.

Day 12

Etty Bay to Cairns

If flight times allow, we will take an early morning walk before returning to Cairns Airport along the (scenic coastal Captain Cook Highway) to check-in for our overnight flight back to London.

Day 13

Arrive London

We are due to arrive back into London today.

Tour Grading

This is a birdwatching and wildlife tour that covers the very best of Queensland's fine selection of habitats (indeed, some of the very best that Australia has to offer) with – especially by Australian standards – minimal traveling (once you have arrived in Australia!). We will be driving largely on good, metalled roads and enjoying generally short wildlife walks at a gentle pace, the relaxed pace and itinerary of this tour making it suitable for most ages and levels of fitness.

Weather

October falls in the middle of Spring in northern Australia, but it is hardly a cold time of the year. Weather is very pleasant in the mid-twenties, with some days even warmer. Evenings can be cool though, particularly in the Atherton Tablelands.

Food & accommodation

Accommodation will be in a variety of comfortable hotels, lodges and chalets, all rooms with private facilities. All meals during tour are included in the cost, apart from the first lunch and dinner in Cairns.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.

If you would like to spend longer in Australia and extend your holiday in any way, please let us know and we will be happy to help.