

Wildlife of Australia's Northern Territory

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Darwin
Day 2	Fogg Dam
Day 3	Litchfield NP
Day 4	Litchfield NP - Katherine
Day 5	Katherine
Day 6	Katherine - Kakadu
Day 7/8	Kakadu
Day 9	Kakadu - Darwin
Day 10	Darwin



Images from top: Forest Kingfisher, Jabiru Stork, Ghost Gum at sunset

Dates & Prices

See website (tour code AUS06)

Grading

Day walks only. Grade A

Focus

Birds, other wildlife & Aboriginal culture

Highlights:

- Enjoy wildlife in spectacular landscapes up to 2.5 billion years old.
- Visit Litchfield National Park, Pine Creek & Katherine Gorge
- Explore Kakadu's Ramsar listed wetlands
- Numerous 'Top-end' and other endemic birds: Banded Fruit-dove, Chestnut-quilled Rock-pigeon, Hooded Parrot, White Lined Honeyeater etc.



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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.

Day 1

Darwin

On arrival at Darwin International Airport this morning you will be met by Luke, your local wildlife guide who will accompany you to your hotel in time for lunch.

This afternoon you will begin your birding tour around Darwin. In the tropical suburban parks and gardens, a good number of species are likely to be seen, including Orange-footed Scrubfowl, Magpie Goose, Radjah Shelduck, Little Egret, Pied Heron, Straw-necked and Australian White Ibis, Whistling and Black Kite, Masked Lapwing, Bar-shouldered Dove, Peaceful Dove, Pied Imperial-Pigeon, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Forest Kingfisher, Rainbow Bee-eater, Helmeted, Silver-crowned and Little Friarbird, White-gaped, Rufous-banded and Brown Honeyeater, Yellow Oriole, Figbird, Rainbow Lorikeet, Double-barred Finch, Chestnut-breasted Mannikin and White-breasted Woodswallow.



Masked Lapwing

Historically, a coastal trading and administrative centre, Darwin is known just as well for bouncing back from disasters. More than 60 Japanese bombing raids challenged Darwinians during world War II, but it was Cyclone Tracy, on Christmas Day 1974, that truly tested the city and its residents. The severe tropical cyclone destroyed seventy per cent of the city's houses, causing fatalities and a high number of casualties, prompting the evacuation of more than 30,000 residents to southern Australia – it is considered the country's worst natural disaster. However, following the decimation of the city's infrastructure, the recreation of Darwin has resulted in a robust and bustling city.

Day 2

Fogg Dam

This morning you will be up early to visit the mangroves around Leanyer sewerage ponds which are home to a number of gerygones, flycatchers, fantails and honeyeaters including the beautiful Red-headed Honeyeater. Also at the sewerage ponds are Pink-eared Duck, Wandering Whistling-duck, Radjah Shelduck, Magpie Goose, Pied Heron, Brahminy and Whistling Kite.

From the sewerage ponds you will make your way to the mudflats and sand dunes of Buffalo Creek and Lee Point which are excellent places to see migratory and wading birds. Possible sightings also include Chestnut Rail, Green-backed Gerygone, Rufous-banded and Red-headed Honeyeater.

After lunch you will travel on to Fogg Dam Conservation Reserve, one of several parks in the lower Adelaide River catchment that provide havens for wildlife in Darwin's developing rural fringe. The Reserve has an international reputation as a superb birding site, with a high density of wetland and monsoon forest specialities, such as Grey Whistler, Broad-billed and Restless Flycatchers. August to November is the best time to see large numbers of birds, as it becomes one of the few water bodies remaining amongst

the surrounding dry wetlands. These wetlands have international significance because of their beauty, natural systems and importance to Aboriginal people.

Originally, an artificial dam built for a rice project in the 1960's, it failed, but left the Top End with a wonderful lake with juxtaposed monsoon, paperbark forest and floodplains. Four species of egrets (mainly Intermediate), Black-necked Stork, or Jabiru, and other birds dot the eastern side of the causeway, occasionally joined by Brolga, Purple Swamphen and the odd Banded Land Rail. Jacana are common amongst the waterlilies on the other side. Clamorous Reed-Warbler, Golden-headed Cisticola, Tawny Grassbird and White-browed Crake may be sighted in the open. Finches likely to be seen include the Chestnut-breasted Mannikin, Double-barred and the



Purple Swamphen

very attractive Crimson Finch, inhabiting the pandanus and the reedbeds. In the monsoon forest the pretty Rainbow Pitta hops around on the ground, the pale blue patch on its wing flashing amid the dark undergrowth, and the sonorous notes of Yellow Oriole and Rufous Shrike-thrush fill the air.

Fogg Dam is also good for reptiles and amphibians, such as Water Python and Keelback. You then leave the dam and travel to Palmerston to explore more mangrove stands, to search for additional birds occurring in this type of habitat, including Little and Collared Kingfisher, Mangrove Golden Whistler, White-breasted Whistler, Mangrove Robin, Mangrove Fantail, Black Butcherbird and Yellow White-eye. A visit to Howard Springs Nature Park, provides the opportunity to explore part of the 248 hectares of diverse habitats including monsoon forest, extensive swamps and riverine areas. These areas provide valuable protection for the wildlife habitats, especially for Magpie Geese, Whistling Ducks, Radjah Shelducks and Pygmy Geese. Amongst the shady picnic areas there is access to a beautiful spring-fed swimming pool, surrounded by a monsoon forest. You can often see Ibis and Agile Wallabies on the lawns near the main pool, also a variety of fish including Barramundi, can be seen from the weir wall.

From the Dam you will continue on the Stuart Highway 1 ½ hours to the small town of Batchelor, your base for the next two nights and situated close to the entrance of Litchfield National Park

Day 3

Litchfield National Park

This morning we will start our exploration of Litchfield National Park, known for its numerous waterfalls and plunge pools surrounded by thick, spring fed monsoon forest, which features include a closed canopy, emergent palms, trees with buttress roots, fleshy fruits, dark, soft leaves with drip tips, and vines. Also present are the striking termite mounds, rising as much as three metres or more in height. Shaped like massive slabs, they rise out of the ground with their flat sides facing east and west, with the thin ends on a north-south axis, thus giving rise to the term "magnetic." Rather than being influenced by magnetic forces, the mounds are actually expertly crafted to enable their flat, broad sides, and hence the mounds themselves, not to catch too much heat from the sun during the hottest part of the day.

Litchfield Park is also known for the diversity of habitats supporting many interesting examples of Top End plants. Litchfield National Park was originally the lands of the Wagait aboriginal people, but was later named after the explorer Frederick Henry Litchfield, a member of the first European expedition to the area in 1864.

During your time here you may see Yellow Oriole, Figbird, Koel, Spangled Drongo, Great Bowerbird, Dollarbird, Rainbow Bee-eater and Black Kite and other raptors. Wildlife species include the Antilopine Wallaroo, Agile Wallaby, Sugar Glider, Northern Brushtail Possum, Black and Little Red Flying Foxes and the Dingo.

Day 4

Litchfield NP (via Pine Creek) to Katherine



Australian Figbird

Early this morning, depart Batchelor and travel 150 kilometres south to the little town of Pine Creek, a small settlement developed around an old goldmine, where you will visit the sewage ponds. Several bird species are to be found in the vicinity, but one regular is the pretty little Black-fronted Dotterel which breeds here. Finches, including the Masked, Long-tailed and Double-barred are common, as is the Red-backed Fairy-wren, Cockatiel, Hooded Parrot, Red-winged Parrot, Red-tailed Black Cockatoo and two species of woodswallow may also be seen. Also found throughout the area in suitable habitat is the endemic Partridge Pigeon, a rather tame little bird that waddles and has a startling red face. In areas of

stringybark, a eucalypt with thick fibrous bark, one can hear the call of the Black-tailed Treecreeper.

Continue on to the Fergusson River where you might have good views of Hooded Parrot and if fortunate, Gouldian Finch, amongst the myriad of other birds including Crimson and Star Finch. You will also visit the nearby beautiful Leliyn (Edith Falls), located on the western boundary of Nitmiluk National Park (Katherine Gorge). The paperbark and pandanus fringed natural pool at the base of the falls is safe for swimming throughout most of the year, and the scenic bush surrounds make Leliyn / Edith Falls an ideal location for birding. Within the immediate surrounds of the falls, you can see a range of habitats including the sandstone escarpment, riverine corridor and open eucalypt woodland. As we approach the town of Katherine, we will search the region for difficult to locate species such as Red Goshawk, Chestnut-backed Button-quail and Crested Shrike-tit

Later this afternoon you travel to Nitmiluk Gorge (Katherine Gorge), one of the state's best known attractions along with Kakadu, consisting of thirteen natural gorges flanked by towering sandstone cliffs. Evidence of long habitation by the Jawoyn and Dagomen Aboriginal people is clearly visible in the rock art that adorns the cliff faces. We will join the Nabilil Dreaming Sunset Cultural Cruise late afternoon, for a tranquil boat trip, which will enable you to sit back and relax as you learn about the spiritual world of Jawoyn culture and history. You will also learn about the music and stories of the Jawoyn against a magnificent backdrop of towering cliff faces changing colour with the setting sun. Experience the spectacular beauty of the gorge by candlelight while enjoying a smorgasbord supper.

Two nights will be spent in Katherine.

Day 5

Katherine

This morning depart very early for an exploration of the Victoria Highway. This is a spectacular drive with views of escarpments, unique boab trees and the Victoria River, which runs into deep valleys and dramatic gorges. Birding along the Victoria Highway you will search for the beautiful Purple-crowned Fairy-wren,

and in the escarpments for White-quilled Rock Pigeon. There may also be opportunities to see Spinifex Pigeon, Grey-fronted Honeyeater, Red-capped Robin, Crimson Chat and Pictorella Mannikin. The Victoria Highway can be a haven for raptors, possibly including Grey Falcon, Square-tailed Kite, Black-breasted Buzzard and Spotted Harrier. We will stop at either Joe Creek or Escarpment walk as the Highway intersects the Victoria River for stunning views over the Victoria River Valley.

We will need to take the full day to explore the more interesting sites, but it is well worth the time, as the area is very good for wildlife in general and also for aboriginal culture amongst the sheer beauty of an ancient and stunning landscape.

Day 6

Kakadu



White-bellied Sea Eagle

Depart early, in order to travel to Kakadu National Park. The name Kakadu comes from an Aboriginal floodplain language called Gagudju, which was one of the languages spoken in the north of the park at the beginning of the twentieth century. Although languages such as Gagudju and Limilngan are no longer regularly spoken, descendants of these language groups are still living in Kakadu. Aboriginal languages used in the Park today include Kunwinjku from the north-eastern region, Gun-djeihmi from the central region and Jawoyn from the southern region.

Kakadu National Park is managed jointly by the Aboriginal traditional owners and the Director of National Parks. Aboriginal people have occupied Kakadu's landscape continuously for at least 50,000 years. Evidence that humans have lived in the area is found throughout the Park, particularly in the rich heritage of Aboriginal art and archaeological sites.

The Park includes the entire watershed of the South Alligator River, also the East Alligator, West Alligator and Wildman Rivers. The western rim of the Arnhem Land plateau, with sheer and spectacular escarpments, waterfalls, overhangs and caves, is also within the Park. The escarpment ranges in height from about 30 to 330metres over some 500 kilometres. Relative rock plate stability means that within Kakadu National Park there are very old rocks as well as modern land forms and because of its great age of over 2,000 million years, much of the area has deeply weathered landforms, represented by spectacular scenes of deep, jagged incisions into the escarpment.

Over half the region is forest or open woodland, but it includes savannas, plateau spinifex and outliers, riverine fringing forest, wetlands, floodplain sedgelands, monsoon forests, tidal, coastal, aquatic and marine habitats as well as the southern hills and basins. As a consequence of the area's intricate relief, there are also numerous micro-habitats, and the wildlife of the plateau is ecologically very diverse, containing a distinctive assemblage of species, many of restricted range.

The floodplains and wetlands of Kakadu in particular, are important refuges and feeding grounds for many Australian waterbirds, especially during the dry season and in the autumn up to one million waterbirds of 60 species gather. These species of migratory birds include the Little Curlew, Snipe and Godwit. The populations of some waterbirds that are abundant in Kakadu are largely restricted in Australia to a narrow band along the northern coastline. Typical of these birds are the Magpie Goose, Green Pygmy

Goose, Burdekin Duck and the Wandering Whistling Duck. Other commonly seen and more widespread waterbirds are the Jabiru, the Comb-Crested Jacana (or Lotus Bird) and species of cormorants, darters, egrets, ibises and herons. The extremely rich avifauna of the Park, around 270 species, includes a third of the species found in Australia. This natural and cultural heritage of Kakadu National Park has been recognised by the inscription of the park on the World Heritage List. The wetlands are recognised for their international significance, under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (the Ramsar convention). Due to the international wildlife significance of Kakadu, Australia has entered into agreements with the governments of China and Japan to protect the breeding and summer grounds of the migratory birds.

A number of reptiles live on Kakadu's floodplains. Northern snake-necked turtles are perhaps the most frequently seen turtles; they bury themselves in mud as the water dries up at the end of the dry season. The larger Pig-nosed Turtles are more secretive; it was recent Aboriginal rock art paintings of the Pig-nosed Turtle that first suggested to scientists that these animals occurred in the area. Freshwater and Macleay's water snakes are sometimes seen swimming gracefully through the water. King Brown Snakes and Water Pythons are common on the floodplains; dusky rats form a large part of their diets. Estuarine crocodiles are found in both freshwater and saltwater and are often seen on the Yellow Water and East Alligator River boat cruises. Their nests are usually mounds of mud and rotting vegetation next to permanent water. Nesting occurs during the wet season (between December and April), and about 80 per cent of mature females nest each year, laying about 50 eggs, although generally, at least 75 per cent of the eggs laid fail to hatch because the nest becomes flooded.

The paperbark (*Melaleuca* spp.) forests that fringe the floodplains provide ideal nesting sites for wetland associated birds such as the Jabiru, the White-bellied Sea Eagle, the Whistling Kite and the Green Pygmy Goose. Paperbark forests are also home to the Brush Cuckoo, the Lemon-bellied Flycatcher, the Rufous-banded Honeyeater and the Restless Flycatcher.

Flowering paperbarks also provide food for nectar-feeding birds such as honeyeaters and lorikeets. Kingfishers such as the Blue-winged Kookaburra and the Forest Kingfisher, with its distinctive white wing patches, are often seen darting through the paperbark forest. The Rainbow Bee-eater and several species of flycatcher are also often seen. The Mistletoe Bird feeds on the berries of the parasitic mistletoe plant on the paperbarks, spreading the plant's seed to other parts of the forest. Paperbark forests also provide a safe haven for Agile Wallabies, who must leave the safety of treed areas to drink and graze at the water's edge.



Rainbow Bee-eater

Today you will travel to Gunlom Falls, which was used as a spectacular backdrop in the first Crocodile Dundee film. The falls drop off the 600 million year old dramatic rock face of the Arnhem Land escarpment, although during September, as it is the dry season, it is likely only to be a trickle. There is an option to hike up the sandstone escarpment, which will provide good views across the vast expanse of

eucalypt forest. You could see Black-tailed Treecreeper, Varied Sitella, Chestnut-quilled Rock-pigeon, the rare White-throated Grass-wren and possibly hear the echoing whistles of the Sandstone Shrike-thrush. The grasswren lives in the coarse Spinifex grass that grows between the boulders, spending long periods avoiding the hotter part of the day by hiding in the rock crevices. There will be a chance to see Frill-necked Lizards, Agile Wallabies and Black Wallaroos as well. For those not keen to hike, Gunlom Falls is perfect for a swim – in the company of the colourful, but sometimes raucous Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos.



Agile Wallaby

Later this afternoon, you will join a cruise on Yellow Water Billabong, located at the end of Jim Jim Creek, a tributary of the South Alligator River. The South

Alligator river system, which is the largest in the Park, contains extensive wetlands that include river channels, floodplains and backwater swamps. The cruise provides you with a unique opportunity to experience this diverse and sublimely beautiful area and it's associated wildlife. The canopied cruise boat is skippered by an experienced guide.

Yellow Waters is a tranquil land locked billabong 10 kilometres in area, where you can see beautiful comb crested Jacana, proud hawks and eagles to the majestic Brolga and Jabiru. Large estuarine crocodiles also populate Yellow Water, feeding on the abundant wealth of fish. Paperback forests, pandanus and fresh water mangroves line the foreshores, with a profusion of bright pink waterlilies.

You will spent two nights in Kakadu.

Day 7

Kakadu

Leave your accommodation early and head for the art site of Nourlangie (now renamed Anbanbang). Scattered throughout the rock shelters are paintings done by Aboriginal people some thought to be over twenty thousand years old. Ubirr and Nourlangie are the best known of the approximately 5,000 recorded rock art sites in Kakadu National Park. Many of the art sites are restricted, due to the request of the Aboriginal people and are accessible by invitation only.

We will then travel further on to Maguk. The 1km walk leading to the gorge passes a paperback swamp which is a fantastic place to see rainbow pittas as well as spangled drongo. Maguk itself is a true spectacle in itself with a natural plunge pool at the base of a steep gorge.

The Warradjan Cultural Centre is located only a short distance from your hotel and is certainly worth a visit today.

Day 8

Kakadu

Early this morning, check-out of your hotel and travel north to Ubirr Rock, with spectacular views across the billabongs, wetlands and the distant Arnhemland escarpment. At Ubirr, witness the distinct Aboriginal rock art and learn of this area, significant to Aboriginal communities of the past and present.

Today you will also embark on a 2 hour Guluyambi Cultural Cruise along the East Alligator River. Your aboriginal guide will explain to you the culture and local mythology surrounding the river and you will also have the opportunity to learn about the traditional uses of the local flora and fauna.

Then travel on to Mamukala wetlands to look for open forest and wetland birds from an observation tower and via the many walking tracks on the edge of the wetlands where thousands of Magpie Geese gather at the end of the dry season. Continue to the Bardedjildji Sandstone rock country, where the rocks are layered like heaps of pancakes and look for Sandstone Shrike-thrush, Chestnut-quilled Rock-pigeon. Continue to the Bardedjildji Sandstone rock country, where the rocks are layered like heaps of pancakes and look for Sandstone Shrike-thrush, Chestnut-quilled Rock-pigeon, and the Wilkin's Short-eared Rock-wallaby.

Day 9

Kakadu to Darwin

Today there is option (at own expense & locally organised) to take a scenic flight over Arnhem Land – a highly ecommended experience for breathtaking views of the river systems and floodplains of the Arnhem Land Escarpment.

Then we travel west and depart Kakadu heading for Darwin, stopping at interesting spots along the way including the South Alligator River, Mary River and Adelaide River.

On arrival this evening in Darwin we will enjoy a farewell dinner at a local restaurant.

Day 10

Darwin

After checking out of your hotel this morning you will take a final local trip in search of shorebirds and the rest of the day will be at your leisure before your final trip to the airport or onward arrangements in Australia.



Golden Oriole

Tour grading

This is a birdwatching and wildlife tour that covers the very best of the Northern Territory's fine selection of habitats. There will inevitably be some long drives during the tour, but they will mainly be on good, metalled roads with plenty to view. Equally, however, there will be ample opportunities for walking through the great variety of habitats, at a gentle pace, allowing the relaxed pace and itinerary of this tour to be suitable for most ages and levels of fitness.

Weather

September is at the end of the period known as the "Dry Season", which is the most popular time of the year for visitors, as the humidity is at its lowest and the nights are relatively. Average temperatures range from evening temperatures around 10 - 18 degrees Celsius to daytime temperatures around 28 - 32 degrees Celsius.

Food & accommodation

Accommodation will be in a variety of comfortable hotels, motels and lodges, all with private facilities. All meals during tour are included in the cost. Additional drinks during meals and stops whilst on tour will be at one's own expense.

Extensions

There is a mind-boggling array of extension options throughout Australia which we would be happy to organise for you. One recommended option is a stay at Davidson's Arnhem Land Safaris at the end of your tour.

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.