

# Wildlife of Australia's Northern Territory

## Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

### Outline itinerary

<b>Day 1</b>	Outbound flights
<b>Day 2</b>	Arrive Darwin
<b>Day 3</b>	Darwin – Fogg Dam – Litchfield
<b>Day 4</b>	Litchfield National Park
<b>Day 5</b>	Litchfield National Park – Pine Creek – Katherine
<b>Day 6</b>	Katherine
<b>Day 7</b>	Katherine – Kakadu
<b>Day 8 – 9</b>	Kakadu National Park
<b>Day 10</b>	Kakadu National Park – Darwin
<b>Day 11 – 12</b>	Inbound flights

### Departs

October

### 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.



Images from top: Forest Kingfisher, Black-necked Stork, Gouldian Finch



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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

## Outbound flights

We depart London on an overnight flight to Darwin, which will likely have a connection in Singapore or Perth.

## Day 2

## Darwin

After arriving in Darwin, we will begin our holiday birding the city. In the tropical suburban parks and gardens, a good number of species are likely to be seen, including Orange-footed Scrubfowl, Magpie Goose, Rajah 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 3

## Darwin – Fogg Dam – Litchfield

This morning you will be up early to visit the mangroves around Buffalo Creek, which are home to a variety of gerygones, flycatchers, fantails and honeyeaters, including the striking Red-headed Honeyeater. The adjacent mudflats and sand dunes of Lee Point are also excellent for observing migratory and wading birds. Possible sightings include Chestnut Rail, Green-backed Gerygone, and both Rufous-banded and Red-headed Honeyeater. At the nearby sewerage ponds, species such as Pink-eared Duck, Wandering Whistling-Duck, Rajah Shelduck, Magpie Goose, Pied Heron, Brahminy Kite and Whistling Kite may be recorded.

From the sewerage ponds, you will make your way to Fogg Dam Conservation Reserve, with stops along the way. One of several parks within the lower Adelaide River catchment, Fogg Dam provides vital refuge for wildlife in Darwin's expanding rural fringe. It enjoys an international reputation as a superb birding site, supporting a high density of wetland and monsoon forest specialities such as Grey Whistler, Broad-billed Flycatcher and Restless Flycatcher. Between August and November, when water is scarce elsewhere, the reserve becomes one of the few remaining wetland habitats in the region, drawing in large numbers of birds.

These wetlands are internationally significant, not only for their ecological richness and scenic beauty, but also for their cultural value to Aboriginal people.



Chestnut-breasted Mannikin

Originally a rice project in the 1960s, Fogg Dam was abandoned due to the large numbers of Magpie Geese consuming the crops. However, the failed scheme left the Top End with a wonderful legacy: a lake surrounded by a mosaic of monsoon forest, paperbark woodland and floodplains. Four species of egrets (mainly Plumed), many herons, Black-necked Stork and other waterbirds are frequently seen along the eastern side of the causeway, occasionally joined by Brolga, Australasian Swamphen

and the occasional Buff-banded Rail. Jacanas are common amongst the waterlilies on the other side. Australian Reed-warbler, Golden-headed Cisticola, Tawny Grassbird and White-browed Crake may also be sighted in the open. Finches likely to be encountered include Chestnut-breasted Mannikin, Double-barred Finch, and the very attractive Crimson Finch, which favours the pandanus and reedbeds.

In the monsoon forest, the colourful Rainbow Pitta may be seen hopping along the forest floor, the pale blue patch on its wing flashing amid the dark undergrowth, while the sonorous calls of Yellow Oriole and Rufous Shrike-thrush fill the air. Fogg Dam is also notable for its reptiles and amphibians, including Water Python and Keelback.

You then travel to Palmerston to explore further areas of mangroves, searching for additional birds such as 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 habitat, including monsoon forest, extensive swamps and riverine areas. These ecosystems offer critical protection for native wildlife, particularly Magpie Geese, Whistling-Ducks, Rajah Shelducks and Pygmy Geese. Amongst the shady picnic areas there is access to a beautiful spring-fed swimming pool, fringed by monsoon forest. Australian Ibis and Agile Wallabies are often seen grazing on the lawns near the main pool, while Barramundi and other fish can be viewed from the weir wall.

From Palmerston, you'll continue along the Stuart Highway for approximately 1½ 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 4

## Litchfield National Park

This morning we will begin our exploration of Litchfield National Park, renowned for its many waterfalls and plunge pools, which are surrounded by thick, spring-fed monsoon forest. Characteristic features of this forest type include a closed canopy, emergent palms, trees with buttress roots, fleshy fruits, dark soft leaves with drip tips, and a tangle of vines. Another distinctive feature of the park is its striking termite mounds, which can rise to over three metres in height.



Rainbow Bee-eater

Litchfield is also valued for its ecological diversity, supporting a wide range of habitats and numerous examples of classic Top End flora. Originally the lands of the Wagait Aboriginal people, the park 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, bird sightings may include Yellow Oriole, Figbird, Koel, Spangled Drongo, Great Bowerbird, Dollarbird, Rainbow Bee-eater, Black Kite and other raptors. Among the mammals present are Antilopine Wallaroo, Agile Wallaby, Sugar Glider, Northern Brushtail Possum, both Black and Little Red Flying Foxes, and the Dingo.

## Day 5

## Litchfield NP (via Pine Creek) to Katherine



Australasian Figbird

Early this morning, you depart Batchelor and travel south to Pine Creek, a small settlement established during the gold rush era. Here you will visit the “water gardens” in the main street, a well-known spot to look for the rare and localised Hooded Parrot, which comes in to drink during the day. Finches, including Masked, Long-tailed and Double-barred, are common, as are Red-backed Fairy-wren, Cockatiel, Hooded Parrot, Red-winged Parrot, Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo, and two species of woodswallow.

Continuing on to the Fergusson River, we have further chances of seeing Hooded Parrot and, with luck, the much sought-after Gouldian Finch, among a variety of other species such as Crimson and Star Finch.

You will also visit the nearby and picturesque Leliyn (Edith Falls), located on the western boundary of Nitmiluk National Park (Katherine Gorge). The paperbark- and pandanus-lined natural pool at the base of the falls is suitable for swimming through much of the year, while the surrounding bush offers excellent birding opportunities. A variety of habitats can be observed here, including sandstone escarpment, riverine corridor and open eucalypt woodland.

Later this afternoon, you travel to Nitmiluk Gorge (Katherine Gorge), one of the Northern Territory's most iconic natural landscapes. The gorge system comprises 13 dramatic gorges carved through sandstone, with clear evidence of long Aboriginal occupation visible in the ancient rock art adorning the cliff faces.

We will join the Nabilil Dreaming Sunset Cultural Cruise in the late afternoon, a tranquil boat journey offering insight into the spiritual world of Indigenous culture and history. You'll hear music and stories of the Jawoyn people, set against the shifting colours of the sandstone cliffs at sunset. The experience concludes with a candlelit smorgasbord supper, surrounded by the gorge's spectacular scenery.

Two nights will be spent in Katherine.

## Day 6

## Katherine

This morning, depart very early for an exploration of the Victoria Highway, a spectacular route offering views of rugged escarpments, distinctive boab trees, and the winding Victoria River as it carves through

deep valleys and dramatic gorges. Along the way, you'll search for the beautiful Purple-crowned Fairy-wren and, in the escarpments, for the elusive White-quilled Rock-pigeon.

There may also be opportunities to see other specialities of the region, including Spinifex Pigeon, Grey-fronted Honeyeater, Red-capped Robin, Crimson Chat and Pictorella Mannikin. The Victoria Highway can also be excellent for raptors, with possible sightings including Grey Falcon, Square-tailed Kite, Black-breasted Buzzard and Spotted Harrier.

We will stop at either Joe Creek or the Escarpment Walk, where the highway crosses the Victoria River, for stunning panoramic views across the Victoria River Valley.

It will take most of the day to explore the area thoroughly, but the time is well spent — not only is this region rich in wildlife, it also offers a strong sense of Aboriginal cultural heritage set within an ancient and awe-inspiring landscape.

## Day 7

## Katherine – Kakadu

This morning, we travel into the world-renowned Kakadu National Park, one of Australia's most significant cultural landscapes. Kakadu is jointly managed with its Aboriginal traditional owners and has been continuously occupied for at least 50,000 years; a history reflected in its remarkable rock art and archaeological sites.

The park spans the entire watershed of the South Alligator River, as well as the East, West and Wildman Rivers, and includes the western rim of the Arnhem Land plateau, a dramatic escarpment stretching 500 km and rising to 330 metres. Its diverse landscapes range from forest and savannah to spinifex plains, riverine forests, wetlands, monsoon rainforest, coastal and marine habitats.

The park's floodplains and wetlands are especially important as seasonal refuges and feeding grounds for waterbirds. During the dry season and into autumn, up to one million birds of over 60 species may gather here. Some waterbirds that are particularly abundant in Kakadu, including Magpie Goose, Green Pygmy Goose, Rajah Shelduck, and Wandering Whistling-Duck, are largely restricted in Australia to the Top End's coastal fringe. Other widely distributed waterbirds here include



Jabiru

Jabiru, Comb-crested Jacana, and various species of cormorants, darters, egrets, ibises and herons. Kakadu supports around 270 bird species, approximately one-third of all species

found in Australia, and its combined natural and cultural values have earned it inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Kakadu's floodplains are also home to a wide range of reptiles. Northern Snake-necked Turtles are among the most frequently seen, often burying themselves in the mud as billabongs dry out at the end of the season. The larger and more elusive Pig-nosed Turtle is also found here, while water snakes can sometimes be seen swimming gracefully through the wetlands. King Brown Snakes and Water Pythons are both common predators, feeding heavily on the abundant Dusky Rats. Estuarine Crocodiles are found in both freshwater and saltwater systems and are often observed at Yellow Water Billabong and along the East Alligator River. Their nests, typically mounds of mud and rotting vegetation, are usually constructed close to permanent water.

Fringing the floodplains are groves of paperbark forest, which provide ideal nesting habitat for wetland-associated species such as Black-necked Stork, White-bellied Sea Eagle, Whistling Kite and Green Pygmy Goose. These forests also support smaller woodland species, including Brush Cuckoo, Lemon-bellied Flycatcher, Rufous-banded Honeyeater and Restless Flycatcher.



This afternoon is free to relax around the lodge.

Estuarine Crocodile (*Crocodylus porosus*)

## Day 8

## Kakadu National Park & Yellow Water

Early this morning, you will join a cruise on Yellow Water Billabong, located at the end of Jim Jim Creek, a tributary of the South Alligator River. This river system contains extensive wetlands, including river channels, floodplains and backwater swamps. The cruise offers a unique opportunity to experience this diverse and sublimely beautiful landscape, accompanied by an experienced naturalist guide aboard a canopied vessel.

Yellow Water is a tranquil, landlocked billabong covering around 10 square kilometres. Highlights here may include Comb-crested Jacana, Glossy Ibis, Black-necked Stork, Brolga, and various hawks and eagles. Estuarine Crocodiles are frequently seen feeding on the billabong's abundant fish. The foreshore is lined with paperbark forest, pandanus and freshwater mangroves, interspersed with a profusion of bright pink waterlilies.

After the cruise, we head to the renowned rock art site of Nourlangie (Anbangbang). Scattered across its sandstone shelters are paintings created by Aboriginal people, some believed to be over 20,000 years old.

Ubirr and Nourlangie are the most celebrated of the approximately 5,000 recorded rock art sites within Kakadu National Park.

From there, we continue on to Maguk (Barramundi Gorge). The 1 km walk to the gorge passes through paperbark swamp and monsoon forest, a particularly good area to see Rainbow Pitta and Spangled Drongo. At the end lies a striking natural plunge pool at the base of a steep gorge — a true highlight of the park. The Warradjan Cultural Centre is located only a short distance from your hotel and is certainly worth a visit today.

## Day 9

### Kakadu National Park

This morning, we visit Ubirr, one of Kakadu's most iconic sites. From the summit, there are sweeping views across the surrounding billabongs, floodplains and the distant Arnhem Land escarpment. Along the walk, we visit several Aboriginal rock art galleries, where ancient paintings over 20,000 years old reflect the deep cultural and spiritual connection of this landscape to its Traditional Owners.

Later in the morning, we join a 2-hour Guluyambi Cultural Cruise along the East Alligator River. Guided by a local Aboriginal guide, the cruise offers insight into traditional mythology, land use and bush survival. There's also an opportunity to learn about the traditional uses of local plants and animals.

In the afternoon, we continue to the Mamukala Wetlands, where an elevated observation shelter provides excellent views over a floodplain often teeming with Magpie Geese and other waterbirds, particularly towards the end of the dry season. There are also walking tracks along the wetland fringe that allow us to explore the surrounding open woodland.

We finish the day with a visit to the Bardedjildji Sandstone Walk, an area of layered sandstone formations described as looking like "stacks of pancakes". This area offers a chance of encountering Sandstone Shrike-thrush, Chestnut-quilled Rock-pigeon, and the elusive Short-eared Rock-wallaby.

## Day 10

### Kakadu National Park to Darwin



Kakadu National Park

This morning, there is the option (at own expense and organised locally) to take a scenic flight over Arnhem Land. This is a highly recommended experience offering breathtaking aerial views of the river systems, floodplains and escarpments that define the Kakadu and Arnhem Land landscapes. Alternatively, we will visit some of the sites we've been to before, to pick up any species still needed. Afterwards, we begin our journey westward, departing Kakadu and returning to Darwin. Along the way, we will make several stops at interesting locations, including the South Alligator River, Mary River,

and Adelaide River, each offering opportunities for birding, photography, and a final immersion in the Top End's unique landscapes.

On arrival in Darwin this evening, we gather for a farewell dinner at a local restaurant, to reflect on the experiences of the past days and celebrate the conclusion of the tour.

## Day 11

## Darwin & inbound flights

After checking out of your hotel this morning, we will take a final local excursion in search of shorebirds and any species we may have missed during the trip. Depending on flight times, this may include a visit to one of Darwin's coastal or wetland sites. The remainder of the day is at leisure until your transfer to the airport for your flight home to London Heathrow via Singapore.

## Day 12

## London

For those taking the group flights, today we arrive back in London.

## 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

October 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 cool. 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 the tour are included in the cost, starting with dinner on Day 2 and ending with breakfast on Day 11. Drinking water is also provided.

## 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](http://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.