

Wildlife of Southern Australia

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1/2	Depart London / In flight
Day 3	Arrive Sydney
Day 4	Blue Mountains National Park
Day 5	Sydney to Melbourne
Day 6	Werribee Treatment Plant
Day 7/9	You Yang Ranges & Great Ocean Road
Day 10/12	Lake Mungo
Day 13/16	Far East Gippsland
Day 17	Arrive London

Departs

October

Grading

Day walks only. Grade A

Focus

Birds and mammals



Images from top: Rainbow Lorikeet & Short-beaked Echidna



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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

Fly London to Sydney

Fly from London Heathrow to Sydney today, we usually use Singapore Airlines however alternative flights may be available if required. Please contact the Naturetrek office for further information.

Day 2

In Flight

Day 3

Arrive Sydney

On arrival this morning you will have time to relax and have lunch before visiting the Royal Botanic Gardens this afternoon for a first glimpse of some of Australia's varied and colourful bird species. An oasis of 30 hectares in the heart of the city, it is ideally located near the water, with some of the most spectacular views in the city overlooking all of Sydney's famous icons. Originally established around 1816, as a buffer zone between the Governor's residence and the penal colony, it now holds an outstanding collection of plants from around the world, which in turn attract a significant number and variety of birds. You will have ample opportunity to begin to familiarise yourself with some Australian birds which have adapted well to life in the big city. Common birds will include Australian White Ibis, Little Back and Little Pied Cormorant, Dusky Moorhen, Pacific Black Duck, Australian Wood Duck and the widespread Silver Gull.

In the trees and on the lawns are Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Rainbow Lorikeet, Noisy Miner, the introduced Common Myna, Australian Magpie, Pied Currawong, Laughing Kookaburra, Welcome Swallow, and if you are lucky, Superb Fairy-wren and Buff-banded Rail. After this preliminary wildlife introduction, you take a scenic journey back to your hotel via the attractive views of the harbour and the world famous Bondi Beach. Dinner is not included this evening as there are a number of excellent nearby restaurants for you to sample depending on your preferences.



Rainbow Lorikeets

Day 4

Blue Mountains

This morning you may explore the breath-taking Blue Mountains, with its stunning scenery and extensive areas of "bush", creating a wide diversity of habitats within the National Park including heath, rainforest, eucalypt woodlands and open forest. Structurally, the Blue Mountains are part of the greater Sydney Basin, which consists of layers of sedimentary rocks laid down over the past 300 million years. The Blue Mountains and Great Dividing Range were formed about 50 million years when the area was uplifted. More recently, volcanic flows covered large areas of the mountains in basalt. These have largely worn away, leaving only occasional outcrops on the high peaks.

In the eucalypt forest, we will look for Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Crimson Rosella, Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo, Rainbow Lorikeet and the elusive Southern Emu-wren. Whilst exploring the rainforest we will search for Satin Bowerbird, Superb Lyrebird, Eastern Whipbird and Catbird. Hopefully, we may locate some of the particularly attractive species such as Beautiful Firetail, Rock Warbler and Flame Robin. Rainforest habitat also offers a chance to find the lovely Rose Robin, Russet-tailed Thrush, Red-browed Treecreeper and Satin Bowerbird.



Laughing Kookaburras

These fascinating birds are well known for the courting behaviour of males, who perform their own songs and display, perfectly mimicking other forest birds' songs, as well as any other noise it may hear!

In the open forests, banksias and grevilleas line the understorey of the Blue Mountains' open forests. The flowers attract the honeyeaters, silvereyes and Eastern Spinebills. Other birds of the open forest include Laughing Kookaburras, Crimson Rosellas, Grey and Pied Currawongs, Scarlet Robins, Scrub Wrens, Tree Creepers, Spotted Quail-thrushes and Striated Thornbills.

Distinctive birds of the closed forest include the King Parrot, Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo, White-naped Honeyeater, Wonga Pigeon, Brown and Striated Thornbill, Satin Flycatcher, Eastern Yellow Robin, Grey Fantail, White-browed Scrub Wren and Golden Whistler. Many birds rely on the forests and woodlands of the Blue Mountains not just for food, but also for shelter. Eastern Rosellas, Crimson Rosellas, Galahs and Cockatoos all need tree hollows to nest in. In similar habitat there are smaller birds like Thornbills, Scrub Wrens, Rufous Whistlers and Spotted Pardalotes.

Woodlands have plenty of grassy clearings, which suit the larger marsupials, including Eastern Grey Kangaroos, Common Wombats, Red-necked Wallabies, Wallaroos and Swamp Wallabies. Other species occurring within the park include Koala, echidnas, Brush-tailed and Common Ringtail Possums, Bandicoots, Spotted-tailed Quolls and Grey-headed Flying Foxes.

Day 5

Sydney to Melbourne

This morning you will fly from Sydney to Melbourne where you will meet your guide for transfer to your central hotel. The rest of the day will be yours to explore 'the world's most livable city' under your own steam. We would highly recommend a visit to the Royal Botanical Gardens which occupy 38 hectares in the heart of the city and represent over 8,500 species of native and exotic plants. Enjoy dinner with your guide this evening.

Day 6

Werribee Treatment Plant

Enjoy a visit to the Western Treatment Plant (WTP) today. This is a Ramsar listed Wetland of International Importance and regarded as one of Australia's top birding locations. It is a mosaic of lagoons, saltmarshes, waterways, swamps, and both rocky and sandy shoreline. This habitat diversity results in an incredible bird list

of over 280 species, with high numbers of waders, waterfowl and other water birds occurring. A small selection of bird species we may see are Red-kneed Dotterel, Red-necked Avocet, Red-necked Stint, Chestnut Teal, Freckled Duck, Pink-eared Duck, Fairy Tern, Lewin's Rail and Pied Cormorant. Lunch and dinner are not included today.

An optional tour is available later this afternoon to travel to St Kilda (*at your own cost*). Enjoy dinner in a local restaurant, then go to St Kilda Pier to witness the return of the Little Penguin colony from their long day of fishing in Port Phillip Bay, and watch them waddle from the water to their burrows.



New Holland Honeyeater

Day 7

You Yang Ranges

Today is all about wildlife conservation. We'll stop in the You Yangs Ranges where we'll be involved a world renowned Koala Conservation program. You will be introduced to each Koala as an individual, with a history, social life and family. You will learn all about these threatened mammals, and probably have some great photographic opportunities.



Koalas
rarest mammals, including Eastern Barred Bandicoot, Red-bellied Pademelon, Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby and Eastern Quoll.

Then we'll travel on to Serendip Sanctuary to see and learn about the conservation of some of Australia's rarest birds. Look for Brolga, Yellow-billed Spoonbill, Cape Barren Goose, Tawny Frogmouth, Australian Bustard, Bush Crested Shrike-tit, Restless Flycatcher, Purple-crowned Lorikeet, White-winged Cough and Whistling Kite.

After dinner at a local pub we'll spend a few hours at nearby privately-owned Mt Rothwell Conservation and Research Centre on an evening spotlighting expedition to see some of Australia's

Day 8

The Great Ocean Road

Depart this morning to see some of the world's most spectacular coastal scenery. We follow the Great Ocean Road to the surging surf coast, and walk in the magnificent rainforests of the Otway National Park. Here we will look for Pied Currawong, Gang Gang Cockatoo, Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Satin Bowerbird, a number of Honeyeaters, Golden Whistler, Scarlet Robin, Grey Fantail, Musk Lorikeet, Rainbow Lorikeet and Crimson Rosella. Your guide will explain the formation of these mighty forests.

Travel through Port Campbell National Park, looking out for echidnas, wallabies, lizards and colourful birds which make their home in the coastal heathlands. There will be an opportunity to linger a while to take in some of nature's handiwork at the Twelve Apostles and the Loch Ard Gorge, and hear stories about the terrible shipwrecks of the past. The main clifftop viewing areas offer opportunities to spot Australasian Gannet, Wandering Albatross, Nankeen Kestrel and Peregrine Falcon. And in the Loch Ard Gorge car park, the endangered Rufous Bristlebird sometimes makes an appearance. In the coastal heath you may see Singing Honeyeater, Southern Emu Wren and Superb Fairy-wren.



The Twelve Apostles

Day 9

The Great Ocean Road

This morning we will enjoy one last look at the coast, in the dramatic morning light, before returning to Melbourne across the vast grasslands of the Western Plains. Created by intense volcanic activity over the past 2 million years, the 7000 volcanoes of the Western Plains are now extinct, but the resultant savannah is pasture to a rich wool growing area. We stop en-route to drive to the top of an extinct volcano, with spectacular views across the plains. From the summit we see some of the hundreds of volcanic lakes scattered across the plains. Later we pass Lake Corangamite, the largest permanent lake in Australia, often covered with prolific birdlife.

We continue on to Melbourne Airport arriving in the late afternoon for our internal flight to Mildura. On arrival, you will be met by your guide and transferred to your accommodation in the small outback town of Wentworth. *(Please note dinner at the airport will be at your own expense this evening).*

Day 10

Rivers and Lakes of the Outback

After an early rise we drive south to Hattah-Kulkyne National Park. This 50,000 hectare reserve is famed for its incredible mix of dryland and wetland bird life and other wildlife in an extraordinary environment where both red and yellow sand dunes meet riverine forest beside a large system of natural lakes and wetlands. We'll spend the morning here and expect a high bird count on the way there and in the park itself. Hattah Kulkyne is also home to a wide range of reptiles including two species of large monitors and snakes and lizards.



Wedge-tailed Eagle

At Hattah Kulkyne National Park, we will look for Regent Parrot, Major Mitchells Cockatoo, Australian Ringneck, Chestnut-crowned Babbler, Apostlebird, Crested Bellbird, Black-tailed Native-hen, Blue-billed Duck, Freckled Duck and Darter. There may also be a chance to see Eastern Bearded Dragon.

After lunch beside the lake system we head north to Lake Mungo in the Willandra Lakes World Heritage Area along straight dirt roads deep into the desert. Upon arrival – in the late afternoon – we check into Mungo Lodge then begin a 2 day wildlife journey of walks and drives that allow us to investigate the wildlife of this remarkable place including an amazing variety of desert birds, two species of kangaroos, emus and a remarkable variety of desert vegetation.

Lake Mungo is part of a huge dry lake system with an extraordinarily diverse array of habitats varying from dense mallee woodlands, cypress pine/buloke woodlands, mulga scrub and vast expanses of saltbush. Huge white sand dunes rise high above the dry lake beds and have been eroded in some areas allowing burrowing birds like the White-backed Swallow to build their nests. We often see Major Mitchell Cockatoos and Cockatiels in this region along with chats and arid land fairy wrens. The Crested Bellbird is often heard and sometimes seen. Raptors including the Spotted Harrier, Black Falcon, Grey Falcon and Wedge-tailed Eagle are known to nest in the area. There is a possibility of seeing Mallee Fowl but they are extremely rare. Emus are abundant.

To begin this journey we walk to a lookout over the dry lakebed of Lake Mungo near sunset. Here you will learn how the Willandra Lakes System dried out over thousands of years as the climate warmed

Day 11

Wildlife & Culture on a 50,000 Year Journey

Early this morning we rise before sunrise for a light snack before heading off to explore the ancient “shoreline” of dry Lake Mungo. At this time of day wildlife abounds; cockatoos, parrots, kangaroos and emus are often seen in large numbers. Many native Australian birds & animals also inhabit the beautiful dune fields and saltbush plains of Mungo. At dawn and dusk Red and Western Grey Kangaroos graze together in the low vegetation – heads raising and lowering silently in the solitude of the vast dry lake-bed. This is one of the best places to see wildlife in Australia. Bird life at Mungo is both rich and rare – resident Wedge-tailed Eagles



Galahs

soar overhead and nest in the few desert trees, giant flightless Emus swagger about the plains in small bands. Brown Falcons & Nankeen Kestrels hunt low flying birds and insects. Most beautiful of all is the Pink (Major Mitchell's) Cockatoo with its fabulous multicoloured crest – this is a great place to see this remarkable bird. Galahs and Little Corellas are a common sight. Some of Australia's most vividly colourful parrots are also seen at Mungo, including Mulga Parrots, Mallee Ringnecks, Blue-bonnets and Red-rumped Parrots, often in the desert pines where noisy Chestnut-crowned Babblers also live & make their large communal nests.

Splendid and White-winged Fairy-wrens regularly pop up on top of saltbushes, a sudden, brilliant flash of blue, and Red-backed Kingfishers dart past. Shingleback & Central Bearded Dragon lizards are often seen basking in the sun in these delicate arid ecosystems.

We return to the Lodge for a relaxing brunch before driving across the dry bed of Lake Mungo to lunettes (wind-curved sand dunes) to begin a “story line” through 50,000 years of Aboriginal History beginning at the lake bed and rising high into the eroded dunes. We will learn about the people who lived at this place, see evidence of their camp sites, view the remains of their cooking fires and, depending on the movement of the sand and soil, you may even help with the discovery of new sites! Your guide will also point out evidence of extinct fauna. It will become obvious that this now dry arid area was once a thriving wetland where large numbers of waterbirds and animals co-existed beside a vibrant population of Aboriginal People for tens of thousands of years. Where people lived they also died and not far from where you will be walking is the oldest recorded human cremation in the world. Burial sites continue to be exposed throughout the Willandra Lakes World Heritage Area and are monitored carefully by Traditional Owners to minimise disturbance and engender respect for their ancestors. We cannot take you to these sacred areas (they are not accessible) but it is wonderful to know that the person who is guiding you is a descendent of these enduring people.

Next we begin our circumnavigation of Lake Mungo. Travelling by vehicle and on foot you will pass through four ecosystems ranging from dry lakebeds to rich sandy bush country. As we travel we’ll stop often to search for birds and other animals and learn about the vegetation in this constantly changing landscape. During the drive there is the opportunity to climb high into the huge Mungo dunefield for stunning views across the desert. As the daylight fades we often see large numbers of both Western-grey and Red Kangaroos grazing beside the road.

This evening, if the skies are clear, we’ll study the stars of the Southern Hemisphere - including the Southern Cross. The stars in the Outback on a clear night shine very brightly.

Day 12

Mildura to Melbourne

After an optional morning bird walk we enjoy a final breakfast in the outback before driving out of the desert to fly back to Melbourne. On arrival enjoy the remainder of the day at your leisure.

Day 13

Melbourne to Far East Gippsland

Travel past internationally acclaimed RAMSAR wetlands of the Lakes District of East Gippsland, then transfer by ferry to an island sanctuary, with a thriving colony of wild Koalas. Whilst spotting for Koalas there should also be Echidnas, Wallabies, Kangaroos and a variety of parrots, honeyeaters and seabirds to look out for.

Day 14

Far East Gippsland

After a relaxing breakfast, travel into the rugged mountain forests of East Gippsland. Today we will visit both dry and wet mountain forests, visit the famous Snowy River, and walk beside a wilderness creek where the landscape changes dramatically from the sunny, dry slopes to the near-rainforest of the gully. We may see

Gippsland Water Dragon, Cunningham Skink, Swamp Wallaby, Echidna, Koala, and a good variety of bird species such as Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Crimson Rosella, King Parrot, White-throated Treecreeper, Red-browed Finch, Rufous Fantail, Eastern Yellow Robin, Scarlet Robin, Yellow-tufted Honeyeater, White-eared Honeyeater, Olive-backed Oriole, Wonga Pigeon, Superb Lyrebird, Wedge-tailed Eagle and Australian Wood Duck. Your Wildlife Guide will provide detailed information of the formation of these mighty forests, and help you search for lyrebirds, parrots, goannas, wallabies and honeyeaters. Birds and reptiles are abundant, but other human visitors are few.

Day 15

Secluded River Estuaries on the Wilderness Coast



Eastern Grey Kangaroo

First walk into a large lowland (warm temperate) rainforest in search of birds and wallabies. Then walk through a heathland and along a forest-lined river to its estuary in Australia's Coastal Wilderness. We hope to see White-bellied Sea Eagle, Black Cormorant, Silver Gull, Pacific Gull, Little Tern, Sooty & Pied Oystercatchers, Black Swan, Azure Kingfisher, Buff-banded Rail, White-faced Heron, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo, Tawny-crowned, Lewin's, White-eared, New Holland & Crescent

Honeyeaters and Silvereye. Visit a quiet beach with a complex dune system for beach and ocean-going birds. After lunch take a walk on the nearby rocky headland, peering into rock pools, walking past wind-sculpted coastal shrubs looking at the expanse of the 90 mile beach. Spend a little time on a beautiful beach removing old fishing nets which wash up from the sea and sometimes back out, where they trap and kill sea creatures. Our dinner tonight is a picnic in the bush overlooking the beach (weather permitting). On our way back to Orbost we will search the plains for wallabies, kangaroos and wombats, including Swamp Wallaby, Eastern Grey Kangaroo and Common Wombat.

Day 16

Snowy River to Melbourne

This morning depart East Gippsland after one last visit to the beach at the Mouth of the Snowy River, looking for Little and Fairy Terns, Australasian Gannet (out at sea), Great Egret, Black-fronted Dotterel and Pacific Gull. On the way back to Melbourne visit the Krowathunkoolong Keeping Place, an informative Aboriginal Cultural Centre in Bairnsdale. We also search for Grey-headed Flying-foxes in their daytime roosts beside the river at Bairnsdale. A large colony set up there in 2013 now provides great viewing opportunities. (They may move on at any time though). We continue on to Melbourne Airport arriving in the late afternoon for a late flight back to the UK.

Day 17

Arrive back in London today.

Tour grading

This is a birdwatching and wildlife tour that covers the very best of Southern Australia's fine selection of habitats producing a diverse range of habitats and a high number of the bird species occurring in the country. As you will be traveling across three states of Australia, equivalent to the distance of several European countries, there will inevitably be some long drives. However, we will be driving mainly on good, metalled roads with plenty to view on our drives. 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 suitable for most ages and levels of fitness.

Weather

The month of October, is spring in southern Australia, so the weather should be generally sunny and pleasant, although the occasional showery, windy day is possible, it will generally be quite cooler at nights. Southern Victoria will be cooler than the others areas we visit, with daytime temperatures ranging from 18 to 22°C, but warmer by a few degrees in New South Wales and South Australia. Nighttime will be cooler inland than the coast, with temperatures generally around 8°C.

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.