

The Reptiles & Amphibians of Australia

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

- Day 1** Outbound flights
- Day 2** Arrive Cairns
- Day 3** Mareeba via Mowbray River
- Day 4** Mareeba to Chillagoe
- Day 5** Explore Chillagoe
- Day 6** Chillagoe to Yungaburra
- Day 7 – 8** Atherton Tablelands
- Day 9** Atherton Tablelands to Alice Springs
- Day 10** Ghan via West Macdonnell Ranges
- Day 11 – 13** Curtain Springs
- Day 14** Return to Alice Springs
- Day 15 – 16** Inbound flights

Departs

November

Focus

Reptiles and Amphibians

Grading

Important: please read the 'Tour Grading and Focus' section at the end of the document before booking.

Dates & Prices

See website (tour code AUS10) or brochure



From top: Northern Leaf-tailed Gecko (*Saltuarius cornutus*),
Boyd's Forest Dragon (*Lophosaurus boydii*)
& Chameleon Gecko (*Carphodactylus laevis*)



Naturetrek

Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

GU34 3HJ

UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

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.

Day 1

Outbound flights

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

Arrive in Cairns

Usually, we would expect to arrive in Cairns around mid-morning. On arrival you will be transferred to your Cairns hotel, where the rest of the day is yours to rest and recover from your long flights.

Your guide will meet you at the hotel for a welcome dinner later on. Energy and weather dependent, there may be an option for a first nocturnal 'road cruise' this evening (*at the discretion of your guide*).

Day 3

Mareeba via Mowbray River

This morning, we will head north out of Cairns and up the coast along the famous Captain Cook Highway - also known as the Great Barrier Reef Drive. Our major target this morning is perhaps Australia's most iconic reptile - the Saltwater Crocodile (*Crocodylus porosus*). These formidable 'Salties' are the largest living reptiles on Earth, with some males exceeding six metres in length and weighing more than a ton, though most range between three and five metres. With luck, we will spot one cruising through an estuary or basking along the riverbank. We will also check for Rusty Monitor (*Varanus semiremex*) here.

Then, we will turn and head inland towards the savannah woodland and granite country around Mareeba; a distinctly drier habitat. We will search open woodland and rocky outcrops for various skinks and dragons, such as Eastern Two-lined Dragon (*Diporiphora australis*) . If we are lucky, the surrounding area may also produce the iconic Frill-necked Lizard (*Chlamydosaurus kingii*).

Later this evening, we will do some 'road cruising', searching for snake species including Brown Tree Snake (*Boiga irregularis*), Australian Scrub Python (*Similia kinghorni*), two subspecies of Carpet Python (*Morelia Spilota*), Northern Death Adder (*Acanthophis praelongus*), and the elusive Black-headed Python (*Aspidites melanocephalus*). The rare Northern Quoll - a native marsupial predator - is also possible in this area, as is the endangered Waterfall Frog (*Mixophyes nannotis*).

Day 4

Mareeba to Chillagoe

This morning, we will visit Granite Gorge for the chance to see the highly localised Mareeba Rock Wallaby. These small, nocturnal marsupials normally forage on grasses and herbs at night, but here they have become quite confiding – often approaching visitors in search of a handout. Pythons and skinks are possible here, alongside some interesting dry country birds, such as Squatter Pigeon, Great Bowerbird and Blue-winged Kookaburra.



Northern Velvet Gecko (*Oedura coggia*)

Then, we continue deeper into the dry country towards the limestone cave systems, fossil beds, and striking rock formations of Chillagoe. The area is rich in cultural and geological history, and its complex terrain creates numerous microhabitats that shelter a variety of reptiles.

Chillagoe can be excellent for geckos including Chillagoe Ring-tailed Gecko (*Cyrtodactylus mcdonaldi*), Northern Velvet Gecko (*Oedura castelnaui*), Northern Spotted Velvet Gecko (*Oedura coggia*), Queensland Zigzag Gecko (*Amalosia queenslandia*), Box-patterned Ground Gecko (*Lucasium steindachneri*), and Common Prickly Gecko (*Heteronotia binoei*). If conditions are wet or humid, frogs might include Australian Green Tree Frog (*Pelodryas caerulea*), White-lipped Tree Frog (*Sandyhana infrafrenata*), and Ornate Burrowing Frog (*Platyplectrum ornatum*).

Day 5

Chillagoe

We have a full day to explore the dry zone around Chillagoe. Lizards dominate the diurnal scene. Eastern Two-lined Dragon (*Diporiphora australis*) is commonly recorded in the area, typically seen basking on rocks or fence posts. Skinks are abundant and varied, with species including the locally endemic Chillagoe Litter Skink (*Lygisaurus roccoco*), and the Outcrop Rock Skink (*Liburnascincus mundivensis*), a species closely tied to the area's distinctive geology.

Snakes recorded here include Spotted Python (*Antaresia maculosa*) - often found around structures or in caves - and Brown Tree Snake (*Boiga irregularis*), usually active at night. MacLeay's Water Snake (*Pseudechis polylepis*) and Arafura File Snake (*Acrochordus arafureae*) can be found around spring-fed pools and waterholes. Yellow-spotted Monitor (*Varanus panoptes*) is present, and can be seen patrolling roadsides or termite mounds in the heat of the day. Freshwater Crocodile (*Crocodylus johnstoni*) is around too.

Day 6

Chillagoe to Yungaburra

This morning, we turn eastward and head back inland, climbing from the savannah back into the rainforest-cloaked highlands of the Atherton Tablelands. Here, the cooler, wetter climate supports a new range of herpetofauna, as well as an amazing diversity of birds, mammals, insects and plants - it's quite simply one of Australia's finest wildlife destinations.

Our base for the next three nights is the delightful Chambers Wildlife Lodge, nestled on 20 private acres of lush highland rainforest in the heart of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. We will have access to a refreshing swimming pool, an expansive rainforest deck with comfortable lounge chairs, and a communal relaxation area fitted with a pool table and a wildlife library.

The lodge also boasts a specially designed nocturnal viewing area, gently illuminated each evening to enhance the observation of nocturnal mammals. This can facilitate excellent views of such species as Krefft's Glider, Northern Long-nosed Bandicoot, Yellow-footed Antechinus, Fawn-footed Melomys, and, if fortunate, the beautiful Striped Possum.

The trails around the lodge are home to two big nocturnal reptilian targets - Chameleon Gecko (*Carphodactylus laevis*) and Northern Leaf-tailed Geckos (*Saltuarius cornutus*), as well as frogs such as White-lipped Tree Frog (*Sandyprana infrafrenata*), Northern Barred Frog (*Mixophyes schevillii*) and Rainforest Stony-creek Frog (*Rhyacophantes jungguy*).

Day 7 – 8

Atherton Tablelands

We spend the next two days exploring some of the most accessible and rewarding rainforest and riparian habitats in the Atherton Tablelands. Our focus will be on the volcanic crater lakes of Lake Barrine and Lake Eacham, as well as stretches of the Johnstone River, all of which support a rich mosaic of vegetation and exceptional herpetofaunal diversity.

Lake Barrine and Lake Eacham are both deep, rain-fed crater lakes ringed by lush upland rainforest. The surrounding forests provide habitat for Boyd's Forest Dragon (*Lophosaurus boydii*), Eastern Water Dragon (*Intellagama lesuerii*), and Prickly Forest Skink (*Gnypetoscincus queenslandiae*). The nearby forest floor and understorey are home to rainforest frogs including White-lipped Tree Frog (*Sandyprana infrafrenata*), Dainty Tree Frog (*Ranoidea gracilenta*), and Green-eyed Tree Frog (*Ranoidea serrata*). With some luck, we may also find Common Mistfrog (*Mixophyes rheocola*) and Waterfall Frog (*Mixophyes nannotis*) - both Wet Tropics endemics restricted to pristine, fast-



Common Mistfrog (*Mosleyia rheocola*)

flowing streams. We will look for Chameleon Gecko (*Carphodactylus laevis*) and Northern Leaf-tailed Gecko (*Saltuarius cornutus*) after dark on buttress roots and tree trunks.

Amphibians, arboreal skinks, and snakes, such as Keelback (*Tropidonophis mairii*) and Common Tree Snake (*Dendrelaphis punctulata*) are often found near water sources. Depending on the success of previous days, there's also scope to take some time to explore the lower reaches of the Johnstone River, where the rainforest gives way to mangrove-lined estuaries and tidal wetlands. This is classic Saltwater Crocodile (*Crocodylus porosus*) country.

A huge diversity of snakes are possible, but what we see will be as much down to luck as the skill of your guide - some nights can produce plentiful, other nights - nothing - that's the way it goes in the tropics. Potential highlights include Brown Tree Snake (*Boiga irregularis*), Jungle Carpet Python (*Morelia spilota cheynei*), Australian Scrub Python (*Similia kinghorni*), Red-bellied Black Snake (*Pseudechis porphyriacus*), Eastern Brown Snake (*Pseudonaja textilis*), Northern Dwarf Crowned Snake (*Cacophis churchilli*), Rough-scaled Snake (*Tropidechis carinatus*), Slaty-grey Snake (*Stegonotus australis*), and the rare Northern Death Adder (*Acanthophis praelongus*).



Northern Death Adder (*Acanthophis praelongus*)

There's also potential to encounter a diverse range of mammals, including the stocky, bear-like Lumholtz's Tree-kangaroo, the primitive Musky Rat-kangaroo, up to six possum species, and Red-legged Pademelon. We can also check for the iconic Platypus in one of the many clear streams around Yungaburra. By day, the forests are alive with brilliantly coloured butterflies and endemic birds, with possible highlights including Southern Cassowary, Tooth-billed Bowerbird, Golden Bowerbird, Victoria's Riflebird (one of Australia's birds-of-paradise), Chowchilla, Pied Monarch, Spotted Catbird, and Yellow-breasted Boatbill, alongside several fruit-doves and honeyeaters.

Day 9

Atherton Tablelands to Alice Springs

We will return to Cairns today and connect our flight to Alice Springs. Time permitting, we may pass via Etty Bay for the chance to see the spectacular Southern Cassowary - not a herp, but a living dinosaur, and surely one of nature's most impressive creatures!

On arrival at Alice Springs Airport, we will collect our vehicle and transfer to our accommodation.

This evening we will enjoy our first Red Centre road cruise. Possible snakes in the area include Western Brown Snake (*Pseudonaja mengdeni*), Mulga Snake (*Pseudechis australis*), Orange-naped Snake (*Furina ornata*), Centralian Carpet Python (*Morelia bredli*), and Children's Python (*Antaresia childreni*), among others. The diversity of geckos is also impressive.

Day 10

Ghan via West Macdonnell Ranges

Stretching west of Alice Springs, the West MacDonnell Ranges (Tjoritja) are an ancient chain of rugged mountains and dramatic gorges carved over hundreds of millions of years. This spectacular landscape forms part of the ancestral lands of the Arrernte people, who hold deep cultural and spiritual connections to the region. Permanent waterholes tucked within the gorges support a surprising variety of life, including a remarkable number of endemic reptiles.

This is the realm of the Perentie (*Varanus giganteus*). Growing up to 2.5 metres in length, these mighty reptiles are the largest living lizards in the world after the Komodo Dragon. Though we have a good chance of seeing one, more commonly encountered diurnal lizards include Long-nosed Dragons (*Gowidon longirostris*), Slater's Ring-tailed Dragons (*Ctenophorus slateri*), and Central Bearded Dragons (*Pogona vitticeps*) – often seen sunning themselves by the roadside or scurrying between rocky outcrops. The Black-headed Monitor (*Varanus tristis*) is also possible, while a sighting of the elusive Pygmy Mulga Monitor (*Varanus gilleni*) would be a rare treat. We will also keep our eyes peeled for the endearing Black-flanked Rock-Wallaby; a hardy macropod, well-adapted to this harsh environment.

Unfortunately, the habitat here has been impacted by the spread of invasive Buffel Grass. It's still worth exploring, though later we will continue further south of Alice Springs to a classic Aussie roadhouse where the spinifex remains in better condition. The biodiversity here is in stark contrast to the wet forests of the east. This is a land where Emus replace cassowaries and Dingoes patrol the roadsides, while flocks of nomadic parrots such as Australian Ringneck, Mulga Parrot and Budgerigar pass overhead. We will also keep a look out for the magnificent Wedge-tailed Eagle (one of the largest eagles in the world) and the attractive Pink Cockatoo - a real desert specialist.

We will set out this evening on a cruise. As with any herping tour, it's impossible to predict what we might encounter – but the possibilities include: Curl Snake (*Suta suta*), Unbanded Shovel-nosed Snake (*Brachyurophis incinctus*), Centralian Carpet Python (*Morelia bredli*), Desert Death Adder (*Acanthophis pyrrhus*), Centralian Bandy-Bandy (*Vermicella vermiformis*), Inland Marbled Velvet Gecko (*Oedura cincta*), Common Prickly Gecko (*Heteronotia binoei*), Centralian Rough Knob-tailed Gecko (*Nephrurus amyae*), Northern Spiny-tailed Gecko (*Strophurus ciliaris*), Variable Fat-tailed Gecko (*Diplodactylus conspicillatus*), Western Hooded Scaly-foot (*Pygopus nigriceps*), Centralian Burrowing Frog (*Platyplectrum spenceri*), and Gillen's Tree Frog (*Pelodryas gilleni*), among others.

Day 11 – 13

Curtain Springs

Today we travel a little further west towards Curtain Springs, another classic Red Centre roadhouse. The red sandy soils support a hardy mix of arid-adapted shrubs, grasses, and ephemeral herbs that burst into bloom after rare rainfall events.

This mosaic of vegetation types creates ideal conditions for a range of desert wildlife, especially reptiles. The area is renowned for its diversity of lizards, including Ctenotus skinks, dragons, and geckos, as well as larger monitors such as the Perentie and Sand Goanna (*Varanus gouldii*). But the crown jewel of the region is no doubt the Thorny Devil (*Moloch horridus*). We will need luck on our side to encounter one, but we will certainly be trying!



Thorny Devil (*Moloch horridus*)

Other key targets include Smooth Knob-tailed Gecko (*Nephrurus levis*), Pale Knob-tailed Gecko (*Nephrurus laevissimus*), and Bynoe's Gecko (*Heteronotia binoei*), all of which may be found. The elusive Desert Banded Snake (*Simoselaps anomalus*) occasionally turns up in sandy country, while the Woma Python (*Aspidites ramsayi*) - though rare - remains a tantalising possibility here. Large elapids like the Mulga Snake (*Pseudechis australis*) are never far away, and smaller species such as the delicate Beaked Gecko (*Rhynchoedura ornata*) may be spotted crossing roads at night. Other elapids to look for include Monk Snake (*Suta monachus*) and Ringed Brown Snake (*Pseudonaja modesta*). As always, a torch, patience, and a bit of luck may reveal all sorts of surprises.

We're also within easy reach of Uluru, whose immense sandstone form dominates the desert horizon. It's a place of deep cultural importance to the Anangu people and one of Australia's most recognisable landmarks. We will make time during our stay to visit the national park and take in its atmosphere, especially around sunrise or sunset when the rock's colours shift with the light.

Day 14

Return to Alice Springs

It's a long drive back across the desert to our hotel in Alice Springs today.

This evening, we visit the nearby Alice Springs Desert Park for an exclusive nocturnal tour. Set against the backdrop of the West MacDonnell Ranges, the Mulga Walk area of the Desert Park is not open during the day and features a large predator-proof enclosure preserving intact desert habitat teeming with life. While the focus of our time in the Red Centre is herpetofauna, our final evening offers a rare chance to observe some of Australia's most endangered desert mammals up close – including Bilby, Golden Bandicoot, Spectacled Hare-wallaby, Woylie (Brush-tailed Bettong), and Mala (Rufous Hare-wallaby), the latter now extinct in the wild on mainland Australia.

Day 15 – 16

Depart Alice Springs – Arrive London

Today we depart Alice springs and fly back to London

Iron Range pre-tour extension

Day 1

Arrive in Cairns

Usually, we would expect to arrive in Cairns around mid-morning. On arrival you will be transferred to your Cairns hotel, where the rest of the day is yours to rest and recover from your long flights.

Your guide will meet you at the hotel for a welcome dinner later on. Energy and weather dependent, there may be an option for a first nocturnal 'road cruise' this evening (*at the discretion of your guide*).

Day 2

Lockhart River

We transfer to the airport today for our short flight to Lockhart River on the Cape York Peninsula – the most northerly point of Australia and one of the country's last great wildlife frontiers. Stretching from the Wet Tropics to the Torres Strait, Cape York spans tropical savannah, termite-mound grasslands, expansive wetlands, mangroves and the country's largest area of lowland rainforest.

We will be heading to Lockhart River on the edge of Kutini-Payamu (Iron Range), where rainforest trails support a high diversity of endemics. At this time of year, the roads in and out of this region are impassable, and it can only be accessed by air. This remote and rarely visited part of Australia is home to some incredibly exciting herpetofauna, and some of it at surprisingly high density.

The major target for our stay is no doubt the Southern Green Python (*Morelia viridis*), which cannot be found anywhere else in Australia. Other serpentine highlights may include anything from

Australia's largest snake, the Amethystine Python (*Simalia kinghorni*), to the Coastal Taipan (*Oxyuranus scutellatus*), one of its most venomous.

Day 3 – 4 (Day 0 – 1 of main tour)

Iron Range

We have three nights to fully immerse ourselves in the Iron Range. At this time of year, it can be extremely hot and humid, particularly in the middle of the day, and so we will likely spend part of the day sheltering and relaxing. The mornings, afternoons and evenings, however, are perfect for reptile and amphibian activity.



Burton's Legless Lizard (*Lialis burtonis*) (Aspidites melanocephalus) and Carpet (*Morelia spilota*). We may also encounter the snake-like Burton's Legless Lizard (*Lialis burtonis*).

Snakes can be very active here, and may include the nocturnal Brown Tree Snake (*Boiga irregularis*), the diurnal Common Tree Snake (*Dendrelaphis punctulatus*), the semi-aquatic Keelback (*Tropidonophis mairii*), the arboreal Northern Tree Snake (*Dendrelaphis calligaster*), and the iconic Northern Death Adder (*Acanthophis praelongus*). Other python possibilities include Water (*Liasis fuscus*), Spotted (*Antaresia maculosa*), Black-headed

Monitor lizards, or goannas, are another highlight of a visit here. Specialities here include Canopy Goanna (*Varanus keithhornei*) and Blue-tailed Monitor (*Varanus doreanus*), alongside the more widespread Yellow-spotted Monitor (*Varanus panoptes*).

Geckos include the spectacular Giant Tree Gecko (*Pseudotrichadactylus australis*) and range-restricted Iron Range Ring-tailed Gecko (*Cyrtodactylus hoskini*), while frogs may include White-lipped Tree Frog (*Sandyroana infrafrenata*), Beautiful Tree Frog (*Litoria bella*), Green Tree Frog (*Pelodryas caerulea*), Fringed Tree Frog (*Ranoidea eucnemis*), Australian Wood Frog (*Papurana daemeli*), Marbled Frog (*Limnodynastes convexiusculus*), Bridled Rocket Frog (*Litoria nigrofrenata*), Northern Banjo Frog (*Limnodynastes terraereginae*), and Striped Rocket Frog (*Litoria nasuta*).

The birdlife here contains many highly sought-after and localised tropical species including Palm Cockatoo, Trumpet Manucode, Eclectus Parrot, Magnificent Riflebird, Yellow-billed Kingfisher, and Chestnut-breasted Cuckoo, with Papuan Pitta, Black-winged Monarch and Buff-breasted Paradise-Kingfisher all potentially present at this time of year. Mammals feature here too, and include Common Spotted Cuscus, Cape York Melomys, Striped Possum, and Dingo.

Day 5 (Day 2 of main tour)

Return to Cairns

We return to the airport for our (likely afternoon) flight to Cairns, where we will catch up with the rest of the group and settle into our accommodation.

Tour Grading

On a typical day on our herpetology tours we will begin searching in the field after breakfast, when the sun has begun warming the substrates and landscapes, often getting into the vehicles at 9am and, after stopping for approximately one hour for lunch (which is often a continental-style picnic eaten in-situ), we will continue into early-evening when we will stop for a rest and dinner. Most evenings it will be possible to do excursions in search of nocturnal species, which will on average be for three hours after dinner. With an equal percentage of the target reptile and amphibian species likely to be nocturnal, these night searches are an important part of the tour but are optional, with some participants preferring to rest on some of the days. On average, 5-8miles are walked per day.

We will focus our time in the field on building an enviable list of reptile and amphibian species seen. Whilst searching, there is no doubt we will come across a huge variety of amazing fauna and flora, of which we will also take time to enjoy, but reptiles and amphibians will strongly remain our focus. Sensitively checking under stones, logs and other refugia is an effective way of finding many species. Some of the target reptile or amphibian species may require longer field hours to locate and therefore this tour is suitable, and most enjoyable, for experienced naturalists who, aside from wishing to see the region's rarely-seen reptiles and amphibians, relish being in the field searching for and identifying the vast array of birds, mammals, butterflies, invertebrates, and other wildlife which can be found sharing the wonderful habitats that we will explore on the tour.

In summary, Naturetrek herpetology holidays are suitable, and offer tremendous value, for those of whom spending most of their holiday time in wildlife habitats and for whom seeing some of the world's superb reptiles and amphibians is the focus of their time away.

On this holiday we will of course often be walking on rocky terrain with some occasional small ascents required.

Weather

We are visiting in the midst of the wet season in FNQ, key for amphibian and snake movement – it will be hot and humid. For those booking the Iron Range extension, the experience is closer to visiting PNG than what one might imagine of visiting Australia!

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, starting with dinner on Day 2 and ending with breakfast on Day 15.

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.