

Queensland's Rainforests & Great Barrier Reef

Naturetrek Tour Report

4 - 19 September 2010



Bar banded Rail



Figbird



Australian White Ibis



King Parrot

Report compiled by Ellen Terrell

Photos by kind courtesy of Phil Shaw



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Days 1-2

Saturday 4th - Sunday 5th September

Travel from UK to Australia (Cairns), via Dubai.

Day 3

Monday 6th September

The earlier arrivals, Trevor, Richard and Phil very obligingly went birdwatching around the airport while waiting for Roberta and Michael to arrive. We all left for Bay Village, with reports of Brown Honeyeater and White-breasted Woodswallows being the first birds seen in Cairns.

We walked down to the Esplanade while waiting for rooms to be ready at Bay Village to find that the tide was nearly fully out, but very luckily managed to see Beach Stone Curlew amongst other waders. Another lucky sighting was Collared Kingfisher hunting crabs in the receding tide, with Varied Honeyeaters in the trees along the boardwalk. We also had good views of Australian Pelican, Little and Great Egret and Brahminy Kite, plus distant views of White-bellied Sea-Eagle in the sky towards the airport and a Black-necked Stork wading along the distant water's edge. Some of the shore birds included Bar-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel, Eastern Curlew, Grey-tailed Tattler and Silver Gull.

We settled into Bay Village, had lunch, then out to Centenary Lakes for a walk in the late afternoon. The walk through the grounds provided a good variety of birds, including a lucky chance sighting of Great-billed Heron lurking in the shadows of a small mangrove creek and a Pacific Baza swooping along the treetops. Other sightings were Orange-footed Scrubfowl, and Aust. Brush Turkey scratching in the gardens, Pacific Black Duck, Little Black Cormorant and Striated Heron around the lake areas, both Straw-necked and Aust. White Ibis on the lawns, plenty of Pied Imperial Pigeons harvesting fruit and carrying nesting material, both Rainbow and Scaly-breasted Lorikeets feeding on Melaleuca blossoms, plus Helmeted Friarbird and Yellow Oriole.

We took a cab back for another look at the Esplanade, but by then the tide was almost in, with very little to see, so back to Bay Village for dinner and a well-earned night's sleep for the jetlagged!

Day 4

Tuesday 7th September

Some had a quick early morning walk along the Esplanade before breakfast, then on the bus to the Marina for the half-day trip to Green Island. On board, we managed to claim some seats on the back deck with fresh air and views of Brown Boobies and Crested Terns on the channel markers going out of Cairns and Common Terns and a pair of nesting Ospreys as we came into the jetty at Green Island.

An early trip on the glass-bottomed boat gave us good views through clear water of corals, giant clams, a variety of reef fish and a couple of Green Turtles. There were many Eastern Reef Egrets, both the white and dark morphs, wading in the shallows as we walked back along the jetty, with abundant Buff-banded Rails and Silvereyes keeping us company wherever we walked on the island. We spent some time looking for Rose-crowned Fruit Dove and were finally rewarded by being able to watch a small group feeding in a fruiting fig tree not far from the jetty. Roberta did some practice snorkelling before lunch, with Michael keeping a good watch on her, followed by a walk around the island before the return boat trip to Cairns, with more Eastern Reef Egrets and a lone Sooty Oystercatcher hunting on exposed coral on the far side of the island.

Once back at the Cairns Marina, we walked back to Bay Village along the Esplanade as the afternoon tide pushed a good quantity of waders towards us, the highlights being both Mongolian (Lesser) and Greater Sandplover, Terek Sandpiper, Red-necked Stint and a Brahminy Kite swooping on Mudskippers.

After a good hot shower to wash off salt and sand, we enjoyed a great Italian meal on the verandah at Donini's Restaurant in the Pier complex overlooking the inlet.

Day 5

Wednesday 8th September

Michaelmas Cay, Cairns Esplanade

A brief early morning walk before breakfast along the Esplanade where Richard spotted a stunned looking Shining Starling who was gently picked up and placed on a low tree to recover, then off to the Marina again, this time to spend the day travelling out to Michaelmas Cay.

The day was overcast with a lumpy chop to the sea, making it quite uncomfortable on the trip out, but the Cay was, as usual, populated by thousands of birds, mostly Sooty Terns and Common Noddies, with small numbers of Brown Booby, Crested Tern and Silver Gull; also two or three Great Frigatebirds occasionally appearing and one lone Ruddy Turnstone wandering around the edges of the noisy nesting colony which was populated by birds in all stages – newly hatched chicks, juveniles, and adults guarding eggs against the marauding Silver Gulls.

The weather improved once we were anchored at the Cay and everyone took a ride on the semi-submersible before lunch. The water was a little hazy from the choppy swell, but still gave us good views of coral, plus many varieties of fish, coral, giant clams and another couple of Green Turtles. Lucky sightings for the day were some brief views of Black-naped Terns taking off from anchored vessels as we approached the cay and a Red-footed Booby on a channel marker on the way back into Cairns; also a Darter on a channel marker and another Black-necked Stork wading in shallows on the return trip.

Once back at the Cairns Marina, we could see the tide was perfect, so we made a quick trip back to collect the 'scopes and then spent the last of the afternoon watching waders on the Esplanade. We saw many of the shorebirds we had seen the day before, plus Intermediate Egret, Royal Spoonbill, Bar-tailed Godwit, Curlew Sandpiper, Red-capped Plover, as well as good numbers of Great Knot & Red-necked Stint. As darkness fell, we finally walked back for a hot shower to wash off the salt and a relaxing dinner in the restaurant at Bay Village.

Day 6

Thursday 9th September

Centenary Lakes, Yungaburra, Atherton Tablelands, Hypipamee Crater

A quick check on the tide along the Esplanade before breakfast, with last views of waders and Shining Starlings wheeling in large numbers from tree to tree and bathing in dewy morning leaves. We packed the mini-bus for the journey up to the Atherton Tablelands, with a few stops along the way.

First was Centenary Lakes to find a pair of roosting Papuan Frogmouths (we had been given a tip from a Cairns birdwatcher who had seen them the day before). Searching the area we thought was the correct one, Michael spotted them first, snoozing close to each other for the day, their feathers a perfect camouflage on the pale, flaky Melaleuca bark. Walking back to the mini-bus, Richard spotted, quite unexpectedly, a pair of White-throated Honeyeaters in Bottlebrush flowers, along with other honeyeaters and Lorikeets.

Next stop was on the outskirts of Cairns for Agile Wallabies grazing in open paddocks, a hunt for a Brush Cuckoo, finally well spotted by Phil, as it was calling incessantly from a mango orchard, and an exciting sight of a Grey Goshawk taking an unsuspecting Magpie Lark at great speed.

We continued on up the Gillies Highway, stopping at a lookout on the way where dozens of butterflies were flying around. We had lunch in Yungaburra, checked into the Kookaburra Motel, and then had a brief break before setting off for the western edge of the Tablelands for a picnic dinner and spotlighting after dark. En route large flocks of Sarus Cranes were foraging in ploughed paddocks and equally large flocks of both Black and Whistling Kites were following tractors and sitting in furrows in the fields. At one stop, we watched Fairy Martins flying in and out of a concrete culvert, making their bottle-shaped mud nests underneath the road.

We arrived at Hypipamee Crater just on dusk for a delightful walk through the forest accompanied by the twinkling light of hundreds of fireflies, a sure sign of an early summer; then enjoyed a picnic dinner by candlelight, interrupted by a Brushtail Possum climbing up a nearby tree. Later, by spotlight, we had views of Brown Lemuroid Possums emerging from their dens high in tall rainforest trees and a lucky close sighting of a Striped Possum. On the way home, we disturbed a Barn Owl from a post in farming country.

Day 7

Friday 10th September

Atherton Tablelands

We had an early morning start, sneaking out of the Motel car park, trying not to wake other guests, for dawn chorus at a Cathedral Fig. Being able to stand inside the forest canopy, underneath the massive, well-named Cathedral Fig as the early morning light filtered through, listening to the ever increasing chorus, made it worth the early start. We had brief glimpses of Chowchillas as they flew down from their roost, their call being the loudest and bubbliest of all in the dawn chorus. We also caught good views of a Victoria's Riflebird low down, but mostly could see only silhouettes of birds in the early light, so as the chorus lessened, we walked back outside into the light for a cup of tea while the sun started highlighting the trees along the outside wall of the forest. Before we could unpack our 'cuppa' were delayed watching a male Riflebird high on a display post, his chest and rump glinting green/turquoise in the morning sun – such a contrast to the black feathers.

We walked along the edge of the forest where birds such as Red-browed Finches, Brown Gerygone, Large-billed Scrub-wren, Lewin's Honeyeater, Golden Whistler, Grey Fantail and Figbirds were bathing in wet, dewy leaves, then warming up in the sun. Topknot Pigeons, Pied Currawongs, Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrikes and Sulphur-crested Cockatoos were high on tall trees or flying overhead and small families of Red-backed Fairy-Wrens were chasing insects in the open grassy paddocks on the road's edge.

Finally we left, with good views of Golden-headed Cisticola, Tawny Grassbird and Australasian Pipit on the way to Lake Barrine where we enjoyed breakfast on the verandah overlooking the lake, with Pacific Black Ducks on the water and Welcome Swallows building nests on the boats moored at the water's edge.

After breakfast, we walked along the track around the edge of the lake, past the twin Kauri trees. These magnificent trees are a pair of primitive conifers thought to be approximately 1000 years old. Once past the twin Kauri trees, we suddenly realized Roberta was no longer with us and backtracked to find her watching a pair of Double-eyed Fig-parrots, very close. We all had lovely views of the two birds steadfastly chipping away bark for a nesting site in soft timber. A little further on, we caught sight of a pair of Eastern Whip-birds racing across the boardwalk and into low shrubs on the water's edge. We spent some time watching movements in the undergrowth until our patience was rewarded when they finally re-appeared near the boardwalk.

Up the hill we could hear Tooth-billed Bowerbirds calling. We crept through the forest, following the call of the birds and looking for the display of leaves spread out on their 'court'. We found two courts, one of the birds was calling from about head height (mimicking all the nearby birds such as Chowchillas, Little Shrike-thrush and Drongo) and the other, further along the track, was calling from a low branch, only about 60cm off the ground. Richard, watching the low one, saw a Musky Rat-kangaroo moving towards the court, only to be chased away by the bird.

Back to the Kookaburra Motel for a short break before heading off for lunch at Tolga Woodworks where our host, Trevor, gave us a demonstration of woodturning while our lunch was being prepared. After lunch, we drove out to Tarzali for excellent views of platypus feeding in the clear waters of Tarzali Lakes. Lewin's Honeyeater and Buff-banded Rail on the walk out to the Platypus pond, and Peter, the owner, showed us mature specimens of the native Red-Claw (freshwater shrimp) before we left. On the way back, a brief stop at Lake Eacham gave us views of Saw-shelled Terrapin and an Eastern Water Dragon catching the last of the afternoon sun on the water's edge. We also watched a pair of Brown Gerygones building a nest on the way back to the mini-bus.

Dinner tonight was at Nick's in Yungaburra. We decided against another night of spotlighting – it had been a long day with the early dawn chorus start.

Day 8

Saturday 11th September

Atherton Tablelands to Kingfisher Park at Julatten

We had an early morning walk before breakfast at a Curtain Fig Tree, Yungaburra, with small birds such as Large-billed and Brown Gerygone calling and chasing insects around this interesting strangler-fig tree and Pale-yellow and Grey-headed Robins in the car park.

A walk down the road along the edge of the forest nearby gave us brief glimpses of White-throated Treecreeper, also Brown Cuckoo-dove and both Little and Bower's Shrike-thrush as well as Spectacled Monarch and a small flock of Barred Cuckoo-shrikes.

After breakfast, packed up, and drove out of Yungaburra, heading for Granite Gorge, stopping at Rocky Creek for Lemon-bellied Flycatcher, Rufus Whistler, Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, Yellow Honeyeater, more White-throated Honeyeaters and brief glimpses of a Wedge-tailed Eagle flying high. Continuing on, taking a back road, we found some Brolgas amongst larger flocks of Sarus Cranes, and in trees nearby, a huge flock of Red-tailed Black Cockatoos, with some of them down on the ground chewing on the stubble in a ploughed paddock.

We arrived at Granite Gorge in time for morning tea to the constant singing of Brown Honeyeaters and a look at some Mareeba Rock Wallabies, most of whom were very sensibly staying in the shade of the granite boulders in the gorge. Roberta alerted us to a Red-bellied Black Snake disappearing under a rock, presumably also looking for shade, the temperature by now up to 34 degrees C – hot & dry! A walk through the camping area rewarded us with good looks at Squatter Pigeon, Olive-backed Oriole, Double-barred Finches, Mistletoebird and Pied Butcherbird, but unfortunately could not find the pair of Tawny Frogmouths who often roost in that area.

We drove into Mareeba for lunch, fuel and ice, and then had a visit to Mareeba Wetlands with a lucky sighting of two Emus on the way into the Reserve. We enjoyed a cool drink in the Visitor Centre overlooking the lagoon with a pair of Pygmy Geese and some Little Pied Cormorants nearby, some pairs of Black Swans in the distance and Brown Honeyeaters still keeping us company in the Bottlebrush flowers.

In the cool of the afternoon, stopped at Lake Mitchell twice, once at a spot where the lake comes close to the road, for Black Swans, Magpie Geese, Australasian Grebe, White-faced Heron; then again further on for good views of Comb-crested Jacanas, Green Pygmy Geese, with Cormorants and Darters drying their wings in the background. We continued on for a late arrival at Kingfisher Park, just as two Red-necked Crakes were calling in the garden along the verandah, but not sighted! We had just enough time for a quick shower before dinner at tables arranged so we could watch the passing parade of Bandicoots, Bush-rats and a White-tailed Rat coming in to feed on grain scattered in the garden while we ate Lindsay's delicious home-cooked dinner on the verandah.

Day 9

Sunday 12th September

Kingfisher Park, Mt Lewis, Mt Carbine, Maryfarms

This morning we had a short walk around the grounds with good views of Brush Cuckoo, Channel-billed Cuckoo, a pair of Forest Kingfishers and flocks of Shining Starling building nests. We spent some time looking for the Noisy Pitta who was living up to his name and calling noisily. However, after only brief glimpses of one bird moving high in the trees, we finally gave up and went back for breakfast on the verandah. This time the passing parade was Red-browed Finches, Chestnut-breasted Mannikins, Emerald, Peaceful and Bar-shouldered Doves, Macleay's Honeyeaters and a surprise visit from a Spotted Catbird taking away big lumps of bananas, presumably feeding young somewhere nearby.

After breakfast, drove up the winding Mt Lewis road to 'the clearing' from where we could walk on rainforest tracks. The morning was cool, overcast and misty, with very few birds to be seen.

We had brief glimpses of Fern Wren, also Green Catbird again, both Little and Bower's Shrike-thrush, but good views of Mountain Thornbills, Spectacled Monarch, Grey Fantails, Lewin's Honeyeaters and Yellow-breasted Boatbill, with Bridled Honeyeaters bathing in a rainforest stream. While searching for Scrub-wrens, we disturbed a Red-bellied Black Snake sunbathing by a mountain pool - this one also seen first by Roberta – she certainly has her 'eye' in for snakes!

We returned back down the mountain to Kingfisher for lunch, and had enough time to look for the Pitta (again unsuccessfully) as well as do some laundry. Once the clothes were on the line, we drove out to Mt Carbine in the later afternoon for good views of Apostlebirds, Red-winged Parrots and Pale-headed Rosellas, with Galahs wheeling around to decorate bare trees in the afternoon light. We also watched Great Bowerbirds courting at their bowers and found a pair of Tawny Frogmouths roosting, with another nearby, spotted by Trevor, ever watchful for raptors! We then turned back towards Julatten with good sightings of Blue-winged Kookaburra along the way and a Little Eagle in the last of the light.

Driving into Kingfisher in the dusk, we stopped in time to avoid running over a 2 metre Amethystine Python crossing the road! Most of us disembarked for a good close look before it disappeared into the rainforest. Once again, we had dinner in company with Bandicoots, this time also seeing a Long-nosed Bandicoot as well as the usual contingent of Northern Brown Bandicoots.

Day 10

Monday 13th September

Lake Mitchell, Kingfisher Park, Mt Molloy, Julatten, Mossman, Daintree Village

We decided to take our breakfast out to the causeway across Lake Mitchell since we had only a brief visit there yesterday on the way through to Julatten. We enjoyed sitting in the morning light on the causeway, serenaded by the ever-present Brown Honeyeaters, with water both sides of us and waterbirds such as Australasian Grebes, Magpie Geese, Comb-crested Jacanas, a small family of Wandering Whistle-ducks, Black Swans, Pelicans and another Black-necked Stork in the distance; also small groups of Green Pygmy Geese, Little Pied, Little Black Cormorants and Darters drying their wings on both sides of us while we munched through Lindsay's home-baked muffins. As a bonus, an Australian Hobby was sitting high above us, showing well in the early light; also an Osprey and White-bellied Sea-eagle hunting over the lake.

We took a short walk along the track past the causeway despite a light sun shower which caught us unexpectedly and caused Michael to don Ellen's purple poncho – we all agreed it looked very fetching! We saw Yellow and Brown Honeyeaters, Lemon-bellied Flycatcher, Red-winged Parrot, a few brief looks at Grey-crowned Babblers as they raced through just off the track, both Rufus and Grey Whistler further on and Black and Whistling Kites circling above.

We returned back to Kingfisher Park for the rest of breakfast and to pack up before heading off down to the coast and Daintree Village. En route, again we called in to a small side road where Blue-faced Parrot-finches are sometimes found at this time of the year, but still no luck! We continued on to the fetchingly-named Abattoir Swamp, but very little was to be seen from the bird hide due to the growth of pasture grass on the swamp. However, in the bush parking area, we saw Blue-faced and Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, Spangled Drongo and good close looks at Northern Fantail chasing insects near the vehicle.

We took the back road to the highway, through open woodland and grazing land, with a few stops at creeks – seeing Aust. White & Straw-necked Ibis, Aust. Magpies, Torresian Crows, Masked Lapwings and plenty of Cattle Egrets in the paddocks, keeping company with the cattle. We also had some good views of Pheasant Coucals, Chestnut-breasted Mannikins and Golden-headed Cisticolas in the grassy edges along the way, also Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, Rainbow Lorikeets and Pale-headed Rosellas, with large numbers of White-rumped Swiftlets overhead and Fairy Martins again flying in and out to their nests under culverts. At last, we got good views of Rainbow Bee-eaters for Roberta and at one stop Richard spotted a Scarlet Honeyeater along a creek.

We drove down the small coastal range to the coast and into Mossman for lunch, where the humidity of the looming wet season was very noticeable. We continued on towards Daintree Village, stopping at a Barramundi fish farm en route where they were cleaning out some of the ponds, so birds like Grey-tailed Tattler, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Black-winged Stilt and Black-fronted Dotterel were enjoying the pickings in the mud. On the coast, we were back to frequent sightings of Pied Imperial Pigeons in fruiting trees, White-breasted Woodswallows and Forest Kingfishers on overhead power lines, and passed a Brahminy Kite and an Osprey, both on nests. We arrived in Daintree Village in time to see an Azure Kingfisher on the pond at Red Mill House, and then had enough time to settle in and have a swim and a ‘cuppa’ on the verandah before taking a walk in the late afternoon looking for Lovely Fairy-Wrens. Along the way, also saw Yellow-bellied Sunbird, Rufus Fantail, Yellow Oriole and flocks of Metallic Starlings building nests. Dinner tonight was in the Village Restaurant, sampling some of the local Barramundi.

Day 11

Tuesday 14th September

Daintree River, Jindalba section of Daintree National Park

Another early start...this time for a morning trip on the Daintree River. Lots of Yellow Orioles were calling as we boarded the boat – Daintree River Experience, with swivel seats – perfect for birdwatchers! We had no sooner got going than Glen, our driver/guide, spotted a pair of roosting Papuan Frogmouths within easy viewing distance. Initially we cruised a short way up Barratt Creek to be rewarded with views of Shining Flycatcher and Azure Kingfisher flashing up the creek; then a clear view of a Wompoo Fruit Dove in the morning sun as we retraced our route back out to the Daintree River, and had a lucky sighting of a pair of Double-eyed Fig-parrots investigating a nest site just before we entered the River.

Out on the river, we saw large flocks of Pied Imperial Pigeons and Rainbow Lorikeets with Spangled Drongos and Helmeted Friarbirds often joining them - all attracted by fruit and nectar., also some brief glimpses of Common Koels, no doubt after the same fruit. Downstream, we spotted a circling Osprey, Whistling Kite and many Cattle Egrets flying towards pastures. As we headed into a small creek upstream, we saw firstly, a juvenile Great-billed Heron, then an adult nearby, and also some fleeting glimpses of Little Kingfisher which unfortunately did not stop long enough for good views. On our way back upstream, we had repeated views of Azure, Forest and Sacred Kingfisher, with White-rumped Swiftlets hunting overhead and Welcome Swallows swooping around the boat. Along the quieter side creeks, Large-billed Gerygones were building their hanging nests camouflaged to look like flood debris.

We went back to Red Mill House for breakfast on the verandah, with Graceful, Macleay's, Dusky and Yellow-spotted Honeyeaters in the garden and Peaceful and Emerald Doves on the lawn.

After breakfast, we took the ferry across the Daintree River, with our first stop being the Jindalba section of the Daintree National Park. Unfortunately we missed seeing a Cassowary and his chicks by only a few minutes, despite a search up a slope where other walkers had seen him disappear and it was hardly consolation to see their photos of the bird! The weather was very humid and quiet for birds, but we had some good views of Pale Yellow Robin, Little Shrike-Thrush and Spectacled Monarch while looking for Cassowary. We called in to the Daintree Discovery Centre nearby for a cool drink, but decided to return later in the day for a walk through their interpretive boardwalk system.

We enjoyed a picnic lunch further north in the shade near Thornton's Beach, with views of Silver Gull and Red-capped Plover along the shores nearby. In the afternoon, we walked on a variety of other tracks and boardwalks through primitive lowland rainforest, seeing many Orange-footed Scrubfowl and Brush Turkeys; and some good views of Large-billed Scrub-wren, Varied Triller and Large-billed Gerygone, and also spent some time taking photographs of Shining Flycatchers in the mangroves before returning to the Discovery Centre. We did one more circuit of the boardwalk at Jindalba still hoping to turn up a Cassowary, but eventually gave up and returned to Red Mill House in the late afternoon.

Day 12

Wednesday 15th September

Travelling – Cairns/Brisbane/O'Reilly's Guesthouse, Lamington National Park

We had a quick drive out to a valley behind Daintree Village before breakfast, with brief glimpses of Lovely Fairy Wren, also Helmeted Friarbird, Black Butcherbird, large flocks of Shining Starlings, many honeyeaters and a grazing Swamp Wallaby in the morning sun, then off to Cairns for the flight to Brisbane. As usual, White-breasted Woodswallows, Kookaburras and Forest Kingfishers were on the power lines along the way; also Nankeen Kestrel and Whistling Kite were seen en route. There was enough time before the flight for one last look at the Esplanade for Brahminy Kite, Gull-billed Tern and White-bellied Sea-eagle.

The bus trip from Brisbane Airport up into the hinterland of the Lamington Plateau took us through farmland with views of Aust. Wood Duck and Pacific Black Duck on ponds and dams, large numbers of Cattle Egrets and Torresian Crows in the paddocks, as well as Crested Pigeon, Pied Butcherbird and Aust. Magpie along the way; also one lucky glimpse of a Banded Lapwing. A brief stop at Canungra Village before the drive up the mountain let Richard find our first Noisy Miner and some good views of both Pretty-face (Whiptail) Wallabies and Eastern Grey Kangaroos as we wound our way upwards in the fading light. We arrived at O'Reilly's in time for dinner, with views through the glass enclosures of the dining room of Mountain Brushtail Possums feeding on fruit outside. Everyone was relieved to be back in a much cooler climate and enjoyed settling into rooms warmed by heaters.

Day 13

Thursday 16th September

O'Reilly's

We started the day with a short early morning walk before breakfast with O'Reilly's guide, Glen Threlfo. Waiting for their morning feed outside the guesthouse entrance, were Regent Bowerbirds, Satin Bowerbirds, King Parrots, Crimson Rosellas and an unexpected visit from a Grey Butcherbird.

Around the paved courtyard near the café, quietly chasing insects were a family of Superb Fairy Wrens, accompanied by a larger flock of Red-browed Finches and a couple of Wonga Pigeons cleaning up yesterday's birdseed, with Red-necked Pademelons grazing on the lawns nearby. Glen then led us along some of the nearby boardwalks with close looks at a delightful range of birds such as Logrunners, Eastern Yellow Robin (nesting), Brown Gerygone, Lewin's Honeyeater, Eastern Whipbird and three different Scrubwrens - Yellow-throated, White-browed and Large-billed.

We started off with Glen in the bus, after breakfast, only to be stopped not far out by the tiny figure of a Brown Antechinus right in the middle of the road. The poor little creature was a male, completely worn out and very close to dying (as all males do), after the mating season. We gently moved the Antechinus off the road, then continued on with Glen, driving first out to Luke's Bluff where we found Tawny Frogmouths roosting in the picnic area, as well as Pied Butcherbirds, Yellow-faced Honeyeaters and Noisy Miners in the Eucalypt blossoms. While scanning near the cliff's edge for raptors, Trevor spotted a Koala and her baby high in a tree on the cliff's edge. We had lots of photo opportunities from many angles as they snoozed in the morning sun, and then we were treated to an aerial tussle between a Grey Goshawk and a Peregrine Falcon, (which was probably defending a nesting site on the cliff), coming out a clear winner. We drove out further to an area where Glen said there was sometimes a chance for Spotted Quail-thrush and counted ourselves extremely lucky to find one actually walking along the track. It then flew up into a small tree right in front of the bus, giving us perfect views...a wonderful sighting of a bird that is usually extremely difficult to see...

We went back to the Guesthouse for lunch on the outdoor balcony of the café where we had to defend our chips from a line-up of beady-eyed Pied Currawongs, and watched Crimson Rosellas expertly tearing open sugar packets to get at the sweet granules! After lunch, we took a long walk, first to the old Botanic Gardens planted many years ago in pioneering days, then along the border track, looking for Albert's Lyrebird. Wandering through the maze of the gardens we saw Eastern Spinebill, Grey Shrike-thrush, Grey Fantail and Striated Thornbill. On the Border Track we saw many Logrunners, Whipbirds and Scrubwrens and at one point spent some time exploring an area where we could see extensive scratchings both sides of the track. We also hear what sounded like Crimson Rosellas calling low to the ground and presumed it was a Lyrebird doing one of its many imitations (since Crimson Rosellas usually feed on seeds in higher branches) but frustratingly did not manage to locate the bird. Eventually we gave up and headed back to the Guesthouse for a late afternoon break before dinner.

Day 14

Friday 17th September

Duck Creek Road, Kerrie Valley, Beaudesert, back to O'Reilly's

Today we spent a full day, again with Glen as our guide. We stopped a couple of times while still in the rainforest to find Black-faced Monarch, Rufus Fantail and Paradise Riflebird. Just after turning into Duck Creek road, we stopped again to watch a yellow Dingo on the track before us, crossing into wet sclerophyl forest. We stopped many times as we descended over the western edge of the plateau into the Kerrie Valley, for Red-browed Treecreeper, Red-backed and Variegated Fairy-wren, Spotted Pardalote, Buff-rumped Thornbill and Varied Sitella. Also found was a roosting Southern Boobook Owl while searching for White-naped Honeyeaters; then on a corner where a large colony of Bell Miners was calling, we had good sightings of Collared Sparrowhawk near an old nest site. Also seen along the way were Yellow-faced Honeyeater and Leaden Flycatcher.

Through the Valley we saw Nankeen Kestrel, Channel-billed Cuckoo, Pheasant Coucal, Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike, Pied Butcherbird, Torresian Crow and Rainbow Bee-eater. We stopped at a series of dams and wetlands before lunch for sightings of Australasian Grebe, Australian Wood Duck, Pacific Black Duck, Little Pied and Little Black Cormorant, Darter, Australian Pelican, White-faced Heron, Great Egret, Cattle Egret, Aust. White Ibis, Comb-crested Jacana and Black-fronted Dotterel. As we headed for our lunch spot near Beaudesert, we stopped at some farmland for good sightings of Common Bronzewing, Crested Pigeon, Galah, Little Corella and Pale-headed Rosella. We enjoyed lunch in a shady park with Brown Cuckoo-Dove, Blue-faced Honeyeaters and Figbirds in trees along the creek behind us. (The female Figbirds look the same here as in north Queensland, but the male birds have a green front, instead of the bright yellow we had become used to in the north.) While packing up, we had good sightings of both Scaly-breasted and Little Lorikeets feeding on Eucalypt blossoms high above.

As we continued on, we stopped at times along the way for birds such as Tree Martin, Striated Pardalotes nesting in sandy banks, Weebill, White-throated Gerygone, White-naped Honeyeater, Double-barred Finch, Red-browed Finch and Tawny Grassbird. Also spotted were Buff-banded Rail and Latham's Snipe at a small lagoon on the return drive, then a Wedge-tailed Eagle was seen drifting across the evening sky before heading back up the range to O'Reilly's. In the rocks on the climb up, we saw both Whiptail (Pretty-face) Wallaby and Red-necked Wallaby enjoying the last of the sun, and on the edge of the road just before the Guesthouse, with barely enough light, we managed to see Bassian Thrush disappearing into the forest. We enjoyed a late dinner, with Glen joining us, and then watched a film he had made on the Satin Bowerbird before supper and bed.

Day 15

Saturday 18th September

O'Reilly's – Brisbane Airport

We enjoyed one last morning walk before breakfast on our last day, with the usual range of Bowerbirds, Whipbirds, Eastern Yellow-Robins, Wonga Pegeons, Superb Fairy-wrens, Red-browed Finches, Crimson Rosellas, Scrub-wrens and Pademelons. Again we got good close looks (probably closer than we wanted!) of Pied Currawongs over lunch, before transferring down into Brisbane to check in for the flight home.

Day 16

Sunday 19th September

Return to the UK



Naturetrek 2010 Tour Group – taken by Ellen Terrell

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