

# Tasmania - The Wilderness Isle

Naturetrek Tour Report

3 - 17 November 2019

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Flame Robin



Superb Fairy Wren



Echidna



Platypus

Report & Images by Cat Davidson



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Tour participants: Cat Davidson (leader), with nine Naturetrek clients

## Day 1/2

Sunday 3rd/Monday 4th November

Travel to Tasmania

## Day 3

Tuesday 5th November

A beautiful clear and sunny Tasmanian day. Tour leader, Cat met five of our merry gang at the Hobart airport and we made our way into Hobart to check in to the Salamanca Inn where the other four guests were waiting to meet us. With rooms all sorted we headed out to grab some lunch at a lovely local bakery.

Our first adventure was to head to the very top of Kunanyi (Mount Wellington) where the wind was brisk and the temperature was sharp, but the view was spectacular out across the Tasman Peninsula and down to Bruny Island. We walked around the edge of the carpark and came across our target bird, a male Flame Robin, glowing bright orange and sitting proudly on the weathered mountaintop boulders. As we were departing the top of the mountain, we saw a magnificent Wedge-tailed Eagle gliding in giant circles in front of us. Our next stop was lower down where we saw a fantastic alpha male Superb Fairy Wren and several bold Crescent Honeyeaters. Down in a gully it was very quiet amongst the beautiful ancient tree ferns. We heard two Fan-tailed Cuckoos, trilling to each other very loudly above our heads, but they were well hidden in the foliage. A Grey Currawong landed briefly high up in a rainforest tree, showing off his white vent and then vanished.

We drove down to a park in the centre of Hobart for our final location of the afternoon and there we saw a wonderful selection of parrots including Eastern Rosella, Musk Lorikeet, Long-billed Corella and Galah. There were also Noisy Miners zipping about everywhere and down by the beach, Silver Gull, Welcome Swallows, Masked Lapwing and sitting out on a diving platform some Black-faced Cormorants.

Returning to our hotel we relaxed until dinner, then had a great meal and discussed our upcoming plans.

## Day 4

Wednesday 6th November

This morning we departed Hobart and made our first stop at a dry sclerophyll woodland. This was very productive birding and we saw bright Rainbow Lorikeets (sadly introduced to Tasmania), bold New Holland Honeyeaters and many excellent sightings of Yellow-throated Honeyeaters and Yellow Wattlebird. Both Spotted and Striated Pardalotes were seen as well Wood Duck (also known as Maned Duck) and Chestnut Teal on the little pond.

We stopped further down the channel at a coastal park and immediately began to see a wonderful selection of birdlife. On the water were Black Swans, Australian Pelican, Chestnut Teal and a Tasmanian Nativehen who was unusually swimming around in the ocean. On the grass were Superb Fairywren, Common Bronzewing and Yellow-rumped Thornbill. In the trees were Dusky Woodswallow, Long-billed Corella, Black-faced Cuckoo Shrike, Yellow Wattlebirds, Brown Thornbill and Green Rosella.

We made our way to Kettering to catch the next ferry to Bruny Island and only minutes after reaching land, we saw a wonderful Echidna in a field. We could pull over safely so were able to observe him for 15 minutes while he went about his business completely unperturbed by our presence just over the fence. Stopping at a farm track gave us another endemic and we saw our first Dusky Robin who sat on a fence post for a wonderfully long time.

We then drove on to Inala and after settling in briefly to our various accommodations before we took a short walk around the privately-owned 1,500 acre Inala Conservation Reserve. At the Pardalote Platform we saw some great sightings of the Forty-spotted Pardalote. We continued on a loop through the lower reaches of the dry sclerophyll forest and saw a beautiful pair of Scarlet Robins as well as both Brown and Tasmanian Thornbills. Across the mossy ground we saw a beautiful scattering of Tall Bird Orchids and Sundews.

After dinner we headed out to The Neck to see the Short-tailed Shearwaters coming in to land at dusk and the adorable Little Penguins coming out of the ocean after dark.

## Day 5

## Thursday 7th November

Before we went on the Bruny Cruise, we spent some more time exploring Inala. Some of the group who had not seen them the day before, saw the stunning Beautiful Firetail pecking at seeds. We had our first sighting of Black-headed honeyeater as well as more lovely views of Dusky Robin, Tasmanian Thornbill, Tree Martin, Striated Pardalote, Grey Shrike Thrush and Dusky Woodswallow amongst many other bush birds.

Heading to Adventure Bay, we put on all our warmest clothes and faced the Southern Ocean on the Bruny eco-cruise. It was a blustery day, but the landscape was stunning and we still saw a decent selection of coastal and sea birds including Black-faced Cormorants, Australasian Gannet, Short-tailed Shearwater and some brief sightings of Shy Albatross wheeling by the boat on the return journey. We went as far as The Friars, a collection of craggy rocks at the Southern end of Bruny Island and there we saw Australian Fur Seals lounging on the rocks and tumbling around in the curling waves. On return to shore, we were very glad of the warmth of the building and the delicious hot lunch waiting for us.

Once reinvigorated, we dodged the showers to find a beautiful White Wallaby and to visit rainforest to try and see some of the wet habitat specialist birds among the stunning Antarctic Tree Ferns *Dicksonia antarctica*, Sassafras *Atherosperma moschatum* and Myrtle Beach *Nothofagus cunninghamii*. The birdlife was pretty quiet, but the lush temperate rainforest was beautiful and glistening in the rain.

We drove down to the beautiful back lane behind Adventure Bay and stopped on the coast hoping to see a Hooded Plover and there was a beautiful obliging individual on the shoreline. We drove back to Inala over Mount Mangana and took some time before dinner to rest in our cabins.

After dinner we took a drive to look for mammals seeing Bennett's Wallaby, Tasmanian Pademelon and Brush-tailed Possum, but it seemed to be too windy and wet for the Quolls that night.

## Day 6

## Friday 8th November

Today we were leaving Bruny Island and making our way towards Mount Field. Before we left the island we first visited beautiful Cape Bruny Lighthouse. On a beach on the way south we had great sightings of Red Capped

Plover and on arrival at the lighthouse many on the group got a lovely look at a sneaky Brown Quail. Around the area we also saw a female Flame Robin a juvenile Dusky Robin and some excellent views of an Australian Pipit.

At a nearby beach we had a Bassian Thrush prowling the campground, an Olive Whistler calling loudly, but not showing himself, and a wonderful sighting of a pair of Satin Flycatchers dancing through the Eucalyptus.

Back on the mainland of Tasmania we made a rainy stop at a lagoon in Hobart where we had a fabulous selection of new birds including Freckled Duck, Hardhead, Australian Shoveler, Grey Teal, Purple Swamphen, Great Egret and many, many Eurasian Coot.

After quickly checking in at Junction Hotel, we made our way to Mount Field National Park and took the walk out to Russell Falls through the stunning dripping rainforest. After taking in the splendor of the waterfall in full flow, we had wonderful sightings of Tasmanian Thornbill, Tasmanian Scrubwren and a family of Pink Robins with two fat chicks being fed by their attentive parents.

We then walked the Tall Trees walk amongst the towering Swamp Gums *Eucalyptus regnans* and had utterly fantastic views of some endemic Tasmanian Scrubtits as well as more glorious Pink Robins. Returning home to New Norfolk, we then had the most incredible dinner in a very unique dining room.

## Day 7

## Saturday 9th November

Waking at the Junction Motel, we had a fine breakfast amongst the eclectic art collection and set off on our days adventures. There was a great deal of ground to cover this morning and before we departed New Norfolk, we had a quick try for a Tawny Frogmouth who sadly left us hanging.

We made a profitable stop outside at a large dam where we saw four new birds for the tour, Cape Barren Goose, Hoary Headed Grebe, Australian Shelduck and several tiny Black-fronted Dotterel through the scope. As we headed West, the weather closed in around us, first heavy rain, then heavy sleet and finally wet snow. By the time we were at Derwent Bridge and heading over the high pass, we were driving through an inch of slush and birding prospects were very slim. Even through the rain, we could see the strange beauty of the devastation of the landscape around Queenstown.

We continued down the winding hill into Strahan and straight to the train station where we were greeted with the news that the heavy rain had caused a tree to fall across the tracks and our adventure would be somewhat curtailed. With delicious Tasmanian canapes and a glass of bubbles we rolled through beautiful temperate rainforest enjoying the views and live commentary about those who built the railway and those who lived in this stunning yet unforgiving landscape.

During our stop at Lower Landing we walked a short walk through the rainforest and saw Yellow-throated Honeyeater and Grey Shrikethrush amongst the rainforest trees of Huon Pine, King Billy Pine, Celery Top Pine and Myrtle Beech. Returning a little earlier than anticipated, we checked into our rooms at Strahan Village and took some time to go birding out on some heathland. Whilst the birds were quiet and elusive, we were rewarded instead by a fantastic sighting of a Platypus who was swimming and hunting in a ditch only ten metres in front of us. A wonderful end to the day, including a Swamp Harrier on the way back to dinner at the hotel.

## Day 8

## Sunday 10th November

Today was a lovely cruise from Strahan down the Gordon River. First we sailed out to the harbour entrance and along the way saw seabirds sitting upon various rocks, Salmon Farms and Branches including Great Crested Tern, Black-faced Cormorant, Silver, Kelp & Pacific Gulls. Once we headed down the river, the water was calmer and the boat switched to a very quiet electric mode. We had several sightings of Great Cormorant by the water's edge and kept a sharp eye out hoping for Azure Kingfisher which sadly never manifested.

Going ashore at a landing within the national park, we got a wonderful selection of Temperate Rainforest botanical species including Horizontal *Anodopetalum biglandulosum* and Whitey Wood *Melicytus ramiflorus*. We could hear an Olive Whistler but were rushed back on board before we had a chance to track him down. Our next chance to get ashore was on Sarah Island where we were guided around by an excellent local guide who told us the fascinating story of the penal history of the island and the ship building that went on there. Between the stories we kept on birding and saw Black Currawong, Tasmanian Thornbills and Dusky Woodswallow amongst others bush birds.

Back at Strahan we took a quick return trip to the heathland to see if the Platypus was still around, but they had moved on and the ditch was dry. We too headed north and drove through the showers to reach Cradle Mountain National Park, stopping just before the entrance to view a beautiful Wombat by the side of the road. We settled in to our gorgeous cabins and met for a delicious dinner at the lodge.

## Day 9

## Monday 11th November

Waking up within the beautiful confines of Cradle Mountain National Park meant that even the walk to breakfast was beset with sightings of Pademelon, Wallaby and Wombats.

Our first beautiful walk for the day was the Enchanted Forest walk where the welcome sun broke through the mossy trunks and lit up the fast-flowing river creating a verdant paradise. We saw a very fine Pink Robin pair dancing through the trees as well as several Black Currawong, a Crescent Honeyeater and at the end of the walk a very fine Tiger Snake gliding through the buttongrass.

With the sky clear and the sun shining bright we zoomed down to Dove Lake where the view of Cradle Mountain was spectacular, sharp, clear and dusted with snow. Staying ahead of the crowds we walked around to Glacier Rock and enjoyed the various new angles on the mountain.

At Ronny's Creek, we had morning tea and took a walk along the boardwalk where several wombats were feeding close to the track. We then had a quick explore of the replica Waldheims Chalet before walking the lovely loop track through the magnificent Celerytop Pine, Myrtle Beech and King Billy Pine forest with a maze of gnarled roots and twisted trunks like a backdrop from a Grimm's fairy tale.

At the interpretation centre, we walked the Pencil Pines Falls loop and viewed the grand waterfall in full flow. Over lunch we were visited at very close quarters by three endemic birds, the Black Currawong, Yellow-throated Honeyeater and Tasmanian Scrubwren.

In the afternoon we departed the park and travelled to The Vale Of Belvoir where we admired the striking colour contrast of Button Grass, Richea and *Eucalyptus Coccifera*. Down by the lake we saw some Australian Pipits, several Hoary Headed Grebes on the water and a new bird for the tour sitting up on top of a bush, a Striated Fieldwren. On our return to our rooms we saw a very handsome Echidna fossicking in the grass near the road as well as several more Wombats grazing throughout the fields.

Several of the group met up for one more walk on the stunning King Billy Track. We saw four pairs of Scrubtit amongst the trunks which was incredible.

After dinner we went out on a wee nocturnal drive and a short spotlighting walk. We saw lots of Pademelon, Wombat, Wallaby, Brush-tailed Possum and one Eastern Quoll dashing over the road.

## Day 10

## Tuesday 12th November

A very crazy morning of weather, snow, wind, rain and sun, all occurred even before breakfast. Saying farewell to the Wombats we headed north out of the National Park.

Our first stop was a lookout over Mount Roland which was looking fantastic. While taking some scenic shots we saw Swamp Harrier, Brown Falcon and Skylark.

At a garden near Latrobe we had fantastic sightings of Platypus coming to the surface of the ponds and drifting around amongst the Eurasian Coot, Hardheads, Chestnut Teal and Black Swan. Taking a walk through the plantings, we began by trying to track down a Pallid Cuckoo who was calling repeatedly, we were eventually rewarded when he flew past us several times. We then had a very nice sightings of Beautiful Firetail, Tasmanian Thornbill, a female Golden Whistler and Yellow Honeyeaters amongst others as we looped back to the Platypus Ponds. Throughout our time in the garden, we saw at least three Wedge-tailed Eagles and some of the group had a great sighting of a Brown Goshawk.

We drove on to the Don River and had lunch next to some bushland, where we strolled through the Eucalyptus and Melaleuca forest and saw Brown Thornbill, Dusky Woodswallow, Black-faced Cuckoo Shrike and Kookaburras.

Near Devonport we saw wonderful Banded Lapwing close by the road and Skylarks twisting and soaring over the field, just in time before the rain came pouring down.

At Narawntapu National Park, we walked out onto the Spring Lawns to see Foresters Kangaroos and also got great views of a cluster of White-fronted Chats on the grass and some Australian Pipits. We walked to a bird hide overlooking the pond and amongst the waterbirds on the water we also saw a Black-fronted Dotterel and a Red-necked Stint on the far shore.

A final stop on the beach for afternoon tea gave us distant sightings of a pair of White-bellied Sea Eagles circling up high. We arrived at Penny Royal in Launceston to spend the night in a charming old renovated Windmill and Blacksmiths building.

## Day 11

### Wednesday 13th November

Our first stop after a fabulous breakfast was the Tamar wetlands. Despite the high winds there were lovely sightings of Black Swan, Shelduck, Purple Swamp Hen, Great Egret, Silvereye chicks and thousands of Chestnut Teal and Grey Teal.

We then went on to a lake where we had fabulous views of nesting Royal Spoonbills and heard the merry song of a Reed Warbler amongst the rushes, but he chose not to show himself. Returning to the bus we saw a Pademelon staring curiously at us from across the road.

We drove to Campbell Town for lunch and saw the convict bricks along the street and the carved wooden trees by the bridge. At a stop on the way south, the wind had not abated, but we ploughed on and were rewarded by excellent views of Flame Robin, Striated Pardalote, Yellow Wattlebird and a Grey Shrikethrush amongst others.

The next stop was Bicheno where we saw thousands of Great Crested Terns in their breeding colony. Offshore Australasian Gannets were wheeling in the wind and on a nearby rock two large Australian Fur Seals lay sunning themselves. Several teeth-rattling gusts of wind of up to 100 kmph led us to head for our home for the next two nights, Freycinet Lodge within Freycinet National Park.

## Day 12

### Thursday 14th November

Bright and early, we headed up to Cape Tourville for some birding before our Wineglass Bay Cruise. It was calm and sunny and stunningly beautiful out across the ocean. As we walked around the boardwalk we saw Tasmanian Scrubwren, New Holland Honeyeater and Brown Thornbill. We could hear the sound of Australian Fur Seals barking on the rocks just off shore and Gannets twirling high above the sparkling blue water.

On our way to Coles Bay we had a spectacular sighting of an incredible rare bird for Tasmania, a Spotted Quail-thrush who showed wonderfully several times along the road even allowing us to take some photographs as it sauntered away into the bush.

On this new bird high, we jumped on board our cruise boat and sailed out into the morning. Very soon, we passed a pair of White-bellied Sea Eagles sitting together high on a branch. As we traversed the shoreline we saw many Great Crested Tern, Black Faced Cormorant, Australasian Gannets, Pacific , Kelp and Silver Gulls and a brief sighting of a Shy Albatross. We saw a selection of ages of Australian Fur Seals including several tiny svelte black pups on the cliffs. The landscape was magnificent with incredible Granite cliffs and incredible red algae on the rocks. There was also a hugely impressive White-bellied Sea Eagle's nest.

Once back on land we regrouped and then headed out once more. At Moulting Lagoon we walked a track across the Samphire and saw Red-capped Plover, Scarlet Robin and Australian Pipit scooting about. There were Skylarks singing and dancing, Kelp Gulls nesting and once we got around the corner a great view of some pelicans and cormorants sitting together on a tiny island.

A final walk along the start of the Wineglass Bay Track was pretty quiet for birds but gave us lovely views of the geology before we returned to our cabins.

## Day 13

## Friday 15th November

The group had voted to leave very early and catch the first ferry to Maria Island, so we loaded up the trailer, and were first in the door for breakfast and then headed south to Triabunna. There were a few clear sightings of Eastern Spinebill in the car park before we departed. Despite the frustration of some unbearably slow vehicles dawdling along the road, we made it to the ferry by the skin of our teeth. A half hour crossing over the Mercury Passage with the wind on our tail and that wind did not let up all day. The diminutive Hooded Plover wonderfully close to the walkway on the protected beach site and the first species on the land were the enormous Cape Barren Geese.

We set off for the Painted Cliffs and despite the high wind, we saw a selection of bush birds along the way including a tree full of vocal Swift Parrots, Laughing Kookaburra, Yellow Wattlebird and for some their best sightings yet of Black-headed Honeyeater.

Wombats were a wonderful frequent feature along the route, fluffy, adorable, solid little Wombats, busily minding their business in the fields and in the bush all around the trail.

Returning to Darlington along the shore we saw more Wombats, Tasmanian Nativehen and Cape Barren Geese. We had lunch amongst the historic buildings on Maria Island. We decided to make our way up to the Fossil Cliffs for the afternoon, and on route saw a Wombat with a joey's head poking adorably out of her backwards-facing pouch.

After the glorious majesty of the Fossil Cliffs, we came back over the airstrip where there were hundreds of Foresters Kangaroos lounging in the shelter of the hill while we battled our way through the wind. We had fantastic sightings of Australian Pipit and more dazzling Flame Robins on the way down the hill.

There was enough time to explore the graveyard and a few of the historic buildings before a nasty squall came through and we took shelter in the old commissariat store before re-boarding the ferry and returning to Triabunna. Our final drive took us back into Hobart and to the welcoming arms of Salamanca Inn where we had our delicious farewell dinner.

## Day 14

## Saturday 16th November

This morning was meant to simply be a transfer to the airport, but as we had so frustratingly dipped on our final endemic bird, the Strong-billed Honeyeater due to the challenging high winds throughout the tour, I pulled in all my contacts and got the sights of the most recent sightings around Hobart. We went to two sights and Inala Guide Catherine Young was kind enough to join us to increase our chances. We saw many birds including excellent Grey Currawong which had never given us clear views before now and many Yellow-throated Honeyeater and Tasmanian Scrubwren which was lovely, BUT sadly no Strong-billed Honeyeater.

We then went back to the hotel to grab our luggage trailer and off to the airport to say our fond farewells.

## Day 15

Sunday 17th November

Those travelling back arrived back in London

Thank you all so much for a great tour, it was wonderful to spend time with you and see such extraordinarily beautiful places. I do hope you enjoyed it as much as I did. I hope we get to cross paths again somewhere on this fabulous planet.

Very best wishes, Cat

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Forester's Kangaroos



Wombat