

## **Australia: 11-29 May 2022**

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This was our first trip to Australia, and we opted to do it independently. I'm certainly not opposed to guided trips, after all, I was a bird guide ([www.southwestbirders.com](http://www.southwestbirders.com)) for 16 years. A guide will net you more birds and save you time. But we wanted the flexibility of doing things on our own, at our own pace. And we didn't mind the extra preparations and study involved. We spent 5-6 days each in the vicinity of three locations: Brisbane, Cairns, and Alice Springs. We flew between these cities on either Qantas or Virgin Australia and then rented small SUVs from each airport. We prepared our own meals and ate out. Expenses were higher than in the United States, for some items dramatically so. We stayed at two lodges geared especially for birders: O'Reilly's in Lammington National Park and Kingfisher Park Birdwatching Lodge. In other locations I looked for nicer accommodations with microwaves and refrigerators. Our hosts and almost everyone we met in Australia were very friendly and polite. The drivers were courteous, and perhaps due to the exorbitant fines, did not speed. And it's like Great Britain, you drive on the left side of the road. A couple of our destinations were closed due to Covid or weather-related flooding/damage, but the majority were accessible. We tallied 230 birds over the course of our trip, a figure I'm happy with given the horrible weather the first week, and the time of year (late fall as opposed to the spring).

### **Brisbane**

9-10 May 2022, Monday-Tuesday

We boarded in LAX on Monday, and since the 14-hour flight jumped the date line, we arrived on Tuesday evening. We picked up our Sixt rental and headed to our Comfort Inn motel. Although the chain is the same as in the U.S., the accommodations aren't quite as nice. Still, it was adjacent to a park, a rare find in Brisbane.

11 May 2022, Wednesday

Since our internal clocks weren't yet adjusted, we arose shortly after 3:00 a.m. and headed to Whites Hill Reserve in search of nocturnal creatures, e.g. koalas and owls. As we pulled into the park what looked like a small owl flew past, and when it landed we saw it was a Tawny Frogmouth! A fine way to start out our list. At the end of the road we chased down some Bush Stone-Curlews, and then walked on a trail in the light rain. We spotted a couple more frogmouths and then scored with the iconic Laughing Kookaburra. As the sky brightened the rain worsened and we gave up on the koala chase. At Wellington Point, another good spot for both koalas and birds, we added our first of many Australian Brushturkeys and Grey Fantails, as well as our first honeyeaters. But no koalas. The rain got worse so we moved on to Sandy Camp Road Wetlands. The rain has abated, and we were happy to pick up many new species, including our first Forest Kingfishers, Australian White Ibis, Wandering Whistling Ducks, and a bird that was to follow us everywhere--the Willie Wagtail. At a lunch stop I tried a wagyu burger--it turned out to be my tastiest burger ever. At the nearby Wynnum Mangrove Boardwalk and park we added the shockingly pink Galahs, Pied Currawongs, and White-faced Herons as the rain set in again. By the day's end we were up to 50 species despite the rain.

12 May 2022, Thursday

This morning the rain held off as we visited the Anstead Bushland Reserve. A couple of flowering bushes and trees were magnets for the beautiful Rainbow and Scaly-breasted Lorikeets. And we heard our first Eastern Whipbird, who's call is indeed much like the cracking of a bullwhip! Variegated and Red-backed Fairywrens were the first of several species we spotted in this genus. As the rain started up again we headed west to Shelley Road Park, and on the way crossed paths with a flock of spectacular and noisy Sulphur-crested Cockatoos. The park was closed, and we were worried about a couple of rising fords we had crossed, so we quickly returned back towards Brisbane. At Oxley Commons, perhaps the number one birding site in the city, we added a number of birds despite the rain. Straw-necked Ibis was the first, and was soon followed up with Red-browed and Double-barred Finches, Spangled Drongo, Golden Whistler, and Tawny Grassbird. This afternoon we switched to different accommodations closer to the mountains west of Brisbane, the Paperbark

B&B, where we moved into a fine little apartment in a corner of their large home. Dinner was at an Indian Restaurant down the street; tasty pork and lamb curries.

13 May 2022, Friday

After a large and tasty breakfast fixed by Belinda at the Paperbark B&B we set off in light rain towards Mt. Nebo. Enoggera Reservoir access was closed due to flooding, so we headed farther up the mountain. Bellbird Road was also closed, but we parked outside the gate and walked in. We came upon a bird feeding party, and in a short span of time ticked off Lewin's and Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, White-throated Creeper, Spotted Pardalote, and Pale Yellow Robin. As the rain worsened we drove up to Maciala Carpark, and tried one of the rain forest trails. But shortly after we entered the forest the rain really let loose, and I headed back to the car. Suzanne's outfit was pretty waterlogged by the time she returned. We gave up and headed downhill. As we were waiting at the light on a one-way section of mountain road Suzanne found a thin, inch-long leech biting her foot. She screamed, pried it off, and flung the beast my way. I finally got hold of it and tossed it out the window, but not before it tried to attach itself to me, too. We had a late lunch on the patio of the Discovery Center, where Noisy Miners and Grey Butcherbirds would rob unsuspecting guests of their chips (fries). During a break in the rain we drove out to the coast in the Redcliffe area, and just before the next downpour scored with a dark-phase Pacific Reef Heron. More poking around the peninsula turned up Striated Heron and Little Pied Cormorant. We celebrated our day with wine and curry leftovers from the night before.

14 May 2022, Saturday

We got a break from the rain as we headed south, and then up into the McPherson Range to the lush tropical forests of Lammington National Park and O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat. Birds were plentiful along the narrow, winding, damaged road and we saw Brown Cuckoo-Dove, King Parrot, and Wedge-tailed Eagle. Once we checked into the lodge we started on the trails, quickly adding Australian Logrunner and Wonga Pigeon. From the suspended canopy walkway we watched a beautiful Crested Shriketit, and on our return we glimpsed our first bird of paradise, the Paradise Riflebird. We shared mushroom soup and duck (a bit dry) at the lodge restaurant.

15 May 2022, Sunday

At 0645 we met the resident bird guide for a short (45 min) walk through the rainforest. It started out in front of the reception area with great photo ops of him (and the participants) feeding beautiful black and gold Regent Bowerbirds, Lewin's Honeyeaters, and showy Crimson Rosellas. On the trail he continued the show by feeding the Yellow-throated and White-browed Scrubwrens ground up nuts. He introduced us to a Satin Bowerbird bower replete with blue plastic bits of trash, mostly milk bottle caps. After a fine buffet breakfast at the lodge restaurant, the rain was pretty constant so I worked on my photos while Suzanne headed out and did the treetop catwalk again, and then visited with the ladies at the park headquarters, picking up some suggestions for bird-finding. After lunch we birded together in the rain, walking towards Morans Waterfall. After a mile she continued on towards the falls in the downpour as I headed back to the lodge, birding along the road. The rain finally eased up and I started hearing and seeing birds: Albert's Lyrebird, Eastern Spinebill, a close-up female Paradise Riflebird, and lots of honeyeaters and scrubwrens. When I met up with Suzanne later we tried for the lyrebird again without success, but she scored with a pretty Rose Robin. Dinner was up in the bar, where we shared fish and chips (broiled fish and French fries), and Suzanne enjoyed a couple of fruity Rosellas (tequila, blue curacao, strawberry liqueur, etc.). A night walk didn't turn up any bioluminescent fungi, owls, or other nocturnal birds, but we did hear some bats and brush possums.

## **Cairns**

16 May 2022, Monday

The sun was out! We walked the access road again and soon heard an Albert's Lyrebird singing. Otherwise a lot of the regulars. I watched an immature male Satin Bowerbird collect some blue trash in the parking lot. We returned to the lodge to eat at the breakfast buffet and took photos right outside of the dining room of Regent

and Satin Bowerbirds, who were also eating--a breakfast of chopped-up fruit. We checked out and headed downhill. At Duck Creek Road Suzanne spotted a couple of red-legged pademelons--a small forest wallaby. Farther down the road we heard the clear ringing call of the Bell Miner. Sunshine was a welcome relief. We caught an afternoon flight to Cairns, and after gathering up our rental, made our way to the Cairns City Palms motel, spotting our first White-bellied Sea Eagle enroute. It was nice enough, with a king size bed and kitchen facilities. We walked to the nearby Cock and Bull and shared a tasty meal of fried crocodile and kangaroo schnitzel. So far, the Australian house Chardonnays have been very good. As in Brisbane, the flying foxes were quite common at dusk, and it seemed like there were even more parrot flocks flying about than in Brisbane.

17 May 2022, Tuesday

We found two trip birds in the parking lot for the Cairns wharf, Peaceful Doves and Common Mynas. The Seastar Catamaran out to the Great Barrier Reef was a pretty smooth ride, and with my system full of Scopolamine, I felt none of my usual queasiness. Michaelmas Cay is a really low sandy atoll with large numbers of nesting sea birds. Suzanne, I, and another birder took a dingy ride there, and had 30 minutes to scan the Sooty and Greater Crested Terns, Brown Boobies, Brown Noddies from the small accessible beach. Then a crew member picked us up in the glass bottom boat and motored us up and down the closed beach so we could scan the shoreline. We added Lesser Crested and Black-naped Terns. Lunch onboard the boat was a nice buffet: chicken, veggie dishes, and cold cuts. At Hastings Reef both Suzanne and I snorkeled in stinger suits to keep any jellyfish at bay. Nice coral heads, beautiful blue-lipped clams, and a colorful fish abounded. I got chilly and exited the sea in short order, but Suzanne stayed in for a good hour or more. We got back close to 4:00 p.m. and headed to Centenary Lake, where a short walk turned up two handsome Radjah Shelducks and a female Black Butcherbird. And lots of mosquitoes. We retreated to our motel and then went back to the Cock and Bull for more meat.

18 May 2022, Wednesday

We slipped out early and drove south and west into the Atherton Tablelands, stopping first at Lake Barrine. Large numbers of Crested Grebe graced the lake; this was to be our only sighting of them. But the ring trail was pretty quiet so we moved on to Lake Eacham Lake, where there were far more tourists than birds. Our next stop, at the Curtain Fig National Park, was more rewarding. The huge fig tree was a fine sight, and a Victoria's Riflebird called from the forest. In the parking area we spotted several Eastern Yellow Robins and watched a flock of Double-eyed Fig Parrots snacking on the fruiting fig trees. From there we headed north to Kingfisher Park Birdwatchers Lodge, our base for the next three days. As Andrew checked us in and showed us our villa, he pointed out the birds on the grounds. As luck would have it, a Red-necked Crake was coming in to a water tray in front of our patio. Macleay's and Blue-faced Honeyeaters drank from sugar-water feeders hanging directly in front of us, while Double-barred Finches fed on seed feeders in the garden. A true birders paradise! We fixed our own dinners in the kitchen for the next couple of nights.

19 May 2022, Thursday

At Mary Farms we soon found our primary target, the Australian Bustard. These large five-foot tall game birds display well in the fields and along the road early in the morning. A row of flowering eucalyptus trees held a bevy of honeyeaters, and we added Yellow, White-throated, and Noisy Friarbird. Our next stop was the Mt. Carbine Caravan Park, where we were pleased to see Blue-winged Kookaburras, Apostlebirds, and Pale-headed Rosellas. Galahs were hanging from their bills and performing other antics. We found there was no longer access to Lake Mitchell, but Suzanne identified a distant Magpie Goose from a roadside pull off. We drove up the rural Wetherby Road, adding a colorful Striated Pardalote and the graceful Rainbow Bee-eaters. A short drive down the pastoral McDougal Road turned up a family of Agile Wallabies--what a treat to see these small marsupials hopping along. Unfortunately, the humid weather finally got to my Sony RX10 superzoom that evening and it failed to turn on.

20 May 2022, Friday

At sunup we did a two-hour bird walk with Carol, the proprietor. The star attraction of this lodge is the Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher, but come fall they usually migrate north to Papua New Guinea. So we were quite lucky to have a lingering bird in the lodge's forest, which Carol attracted by tapping on the mealworm feeding bowl. We walked the grounds and surrounding countryside, seeing lots of birds like Yellow-breasted Boatbill, Channel-billed Cuckoo, Rufous Shrike-thrush, and Grey Whistler. Up the hill at a senior care facility she showed us two roosting Papuan Frogmouths. Afterwards we drove up the narrow, windy, dirt road to Mt. Lewis, where we located beauties such as Grey-headed Robin, Bridled and Yellow-spotted Honeyeaters, and Eastern Spinebill. Suzanne identified the song of the Chowchilla, our one and only. Later that afternoon I heated my camera under a table lamp to dry out the innards, and the camera starting working again. After dark I crept up to Carol and Andrew's nocturnal feeding station, and was able to watch and photograph a Northern Brown Bandicoot and several Fawn-footed Melomys.

21 May 2022, Saturday

We left Kingfisher Park early and drove over the Macalister Range back east to the ocean. We searched a number of coastal areas for Beach Thick-knee (Stone-curlew) before finding our target at Wonga Beach. Farther north, starting at Daintree Village, we explored Stewart River Road. We heard the call of the Superb Fruit-Dove and Suzanne flushed a Great-billed Heron. It was a beautiful and birdy road, but we'd already spotted the other residents. In the early afternoon we took the ferry over the Daintree River (\$49 AU for a round-trip fare) and checked into our room at the Daintree Manor B&B. A nice, spartan room with a beautiful shared porch, dining area, and lounge. The access driveway made us wish we'd hired a 4x4; we spewed gravel every time we made our ascent. After receiving birding and shark lore from our host, we drove north and hiked the Jindalba Boardwalk in the ancient tropical Daintree National Park. We thought we'd hit the jackpot when we came upon a couple who whispered to us that they were watching a Southern Cassowary; alas, it turned out to be an Orange-footed Scrubfowl. We did however, see several of the garishly purple Cassowary Plums that the birds feast upon. We visited the famous Daintree Ice Cream Company and sampled the wattleberry, sapote, mango, and coconut flavors. At the Madja Boardwalk we enjoyed the interpretive signs explaining the various trees, ferns, and ecosystems. We shared a proper tasty fish and chips dinner at Thorton's by the beach. That night Suzanne heard a Southern Boobook calling, and later on we both heard a Sooty Owl whining several times. These were to be our only owls for the trip.

22 May 2022, Sunday

We arose early to take the ferry back south and then drove to Daintree Village, where we caught an early boat trip and saw our first crocodiles, several beautiful Little and Azure Kingfishers, a large Pheasant Coucal, and some lovely Shining Flycatchers. Green Orioles serenaded us from the tree tops as we motored along. The trip was about two hours long, and well worth the \$60 AU per person charge (<https://www.daintreeriverwildwatch.com.au/HOME.4.0.html>). Afterwards we crossed the river back to the north side and resumed our exploration of the busy Daintree National Park, stopping at overlooks, beaches, and a couple more boardwalks. On a quiet side street we spotted two huge Southern Cassowaries (over 165 pounds and as tall as I) feeding by the side of the rainforest. The beaches were beautiful, but the water was murky, making the threat of crocodiles high (this according to our B&B host). We kept our distance. We had an early dinner at Thorton's, given the limited choices in the area.

23 May 2022, Monday

After a late, elaborate breakfast at Daintree Manor, we crossed the Daintree River one final time on the ferry. We headed back south past the Kingfisher Lodge and explored the access road to the Mareeba Wetlands. It was very birdy, with excellent numbers of parrots, lorikeets, several Pheasant Coucals, lots of honeyeaters, and as a bonus, several wallabies. But no luck with our target Emu. A bit farther along at the Mareeba Golf Course we laid eyes on a mob of our first eastern red kangaroos. At least one of the females had a joey in her pouch. On the way back to Cairns I spotted a Nankeen Kestrel perched on a power pole. We again stayed at the City

Palms Hotel, and again walked back to the Cock and Bull for dinner. But unfortunately were too early--they were serving only from a limited late lunch menu--which turned out to be less than adequate.

## **Alice Springs**

24 May 2022, Tuesday

We took an early flight from Cairns to Alice Springs, and picked up our car from Thrifty. A good helping of summer rains meant many birds in the area. We first checked in to our stand-alone A-frame at the upscale Desert Palms. We enjoyed the convenient parking directly in front of our room, but the arrangement of the beds in the somewhat cramped quarters needed work. Just up the road was the Olive Pink Botanical Gardens, where we immediately found new birds throughout the grounds, such as White-plumed Honeyeater, Yellow-throated Miner, Zebra Finch, and Diamond Dove. The dry heat was a nice change from the humid tropics. A drive by of the Ilparpa Sewage Ponds included peaking through the fence at Red-necked Avocets, Australasian Grebes, and dozens of Black Kites. We then headed west along Ilparpa Road, exiting on the access road to the archery range. This side road proved excellent, and we added Hooded and Red-capped Robins, Brown Falcon, Major Mitchell's (Pink) Cockatoo, and Red-tailed Black Cockatoo. Unfortunately a locked gate prevented us from checking out Conlan's Lagoon.

25 May 2022, Wednesday

Shortly prior to 0730 we met our escort Maria for the Ilparpa Sewage Lagoons at the Alice Springs wastewater treatment facility. Rules to access this very worthwhile location are found at <https://www.powerwater.com.au/about/community/bird-watching>. We spent about two hours circling the ponds, scanning hedgerows, and keeping one eye on the sky for raptors. A Spotted Crake, two Whiskered Terns, and five Red-capped Plovers were a fine surprise. The Red-necked Avocets and Pied Stilts were quite striking in the sun. Grey Teal numbers were high, and other waterfowl were represented by a handful of individuals: Pink-eared Duck, Chestnut Teal, and Maned Whistling-Duck. There were undoubtedly others, but lighting, eclipse plumage, and lack of a scope hindered us. A nesting Black Swan objected to me walking by on the dike, and gave me a short chase.

From here we traveled north to Kunnoth Bore, where we spotted the access track as seen on Google Maps (0.8 km south of Tanami Road). The trees close to the watering hole were alive with huge flocks of Budgerigars, Cockatiels, and Zebra Finches as they awaited their turn to fly in for a drink. Brown Falcons and Gray Goshawks stood by to pick off the stragglers. A pair of Black-shouldered Kites was nesting on an abandoned windmill support. It was an amazing sight, with calls and chattering to match. We drove down the Hamilton Downs Youth Camp Road, stopping at several places in the savannah. A male Red-capped Robin was an eye-catching sight. Suzanne spotted a Burke's Parrot, and I found its mate, so we didn't feel the need to return here in the evening to watch them come in to the waterhole for their post sunset drink. Walking in the outback away from the road is an excellent way to get close to the birds, but take care not to stand on an anthill, or rip through any of the many large spider webs stretched between bushes and trees. One of the spiders I spied was a good four inches in diameter (the legs, that is), and resembled our garden spider--I believe it was an Australian golden orb spider.

Our final stop for the day was the Telegraph Station Historical Reserve, where we walked around the nicely landscaped park. New to us were the Black-faced Woodswallows flying overhead. Galahs and Australian Ringnecks fed in the trees and on the lawn.

26 May 2022, Thursday

We spent all of today along the West McDonnell Range. We saw far more tourists than birds, especially at the several stops with campgrounds. But the scenery was grand, and we also had excellent looks at a dingo that was loping along the road. Simpson's Gap was the least crowded; at the headquarters was a family of Gray-

crowned Babblers and the usual Spiny-cheeked and White-plumed Honeyeaters. At Ellery Big Hole we dodged the tourists to hear and get a glimpse of Painted Finches. There was a fine amount of water left at Ormiston Gorge, but the drying pool meant falling oxygen rates in the water, leading to a fish die-off. The crows and three White-necked Herons were taking full advantage of the seafood bounty. At the Painted Ochre Cliffs we were swarmed with flies, and had to spend considerable energy fighting them off. Despite this added nuisance, the trail and parking lot held a number of fine birds: our first Western Bowerbird, honeyeaters, our first Weebills, fairy wrens, and our first Red-backed Kingfisher. We did a 1.2 km hike into Serpentine Gorge and were graced with a new variety of honeyeater: Grey-headed. These were the dominant honeyeaters in this section of the savannah.

27 May 2022, Friday

A chilly morning at 48 degrees (9°C). We drove south from the airport along St. Teresa Road, stopping at the stream crossing at 11.4 km and other places in the mulga woods and savannah where we saw bird activity. Brown Falcons were scattered about, and we saw several hunting goshawks. The best raptor, though, was an Australian Hobby perched on dead tree top. Honeyeaters were represented by Spiny-cheeked, White-plumed, and Singing. We saw our first Rufous Songlarks in great quantities, followed in short order by our first Crested Bellbirds. Two pairs of Southern Whitefaces were good, as was a Chestnut-rumped Thornbill. Here we also saw our first Mulga Parrots, among the many flocks of Budgerigars and lesser numbers of Cockatiels and Australian Ringnecks. Red-backed Kingfishers were pretty common. We did not, however, fare so well with emuwrens and other grass birds, finding none at all. Around noon we headed back to town for lunch and gift shopping.

28 May 2022, Saturday

We only had time for a final brief morning birding outing, so we again birded the Archery Range access road (off Ilparpa Road), adding one new bird, the White-backed Swallow. During our hour there we had Western Bower Birds, Australasian Ringnecks, White-plumed and Brown Honeyeaters, a flock of Yellow-throated Miners, two Black Kites, Rufous Whistlers, and the usual complement of Willie Wagtails. A pair of Red Goshawks riled up a family of Galahs. Early afternoon saw us back in Brisbane, where we did our preflight Covid testing, so that we could re-enter the United States. Finding a place open for an early evening meal proved challenging, but we eventually found Byblos, a fine Mediterranean restaurant on the Brisbane River. We spent the night at the very adequate Novena Palms Motel close to the Kedron Brook Wetlands Reserve (which we never visited).

## **Brisbane**

29 Mar 2022, Sunday

An early morning hike (I'm positive it was uphill both ways) in search of koalas at Whites Hill Reserve was no doubt good for our legs and our lungs, but didn't turn up any of the furry mammals. So we once again headed over to the end of Blight Street at Wellington Point, where by good fortune another family of tourists had just spotted a koala slumbering high up in a eucalyptus tree! We found it directly and afterwards sorted through dozens of Brown Honeyeaters to come up with four Scarlet Myzomelas. At the Wynnum Mangrove Boardwalk we added Mangrove Honeyeater. Suzanne also got my prior Mangrove Gerygone, and I got her prior White-faced Heron. And it was so very nice to bird Brisbane in the sunshine--as opposed to the non-stop rain from three weeks ago. Our final Australian birds were the Welcome Swallows saying goodbye to us from the airport. The flight home was 13 hours, and we gained back the day we lost at the start of our trip. According to the clock, we actually arrived before we left!