

Quail Thrush Tour

October 14th to October 26th 2016

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Species seen 154

Route Gosford, Cobar, Port Augusta, Nullarbor Roadhouse, Cocklebidy, Balladonia, Esperance, Kookynie, Kalgoorlie. Madura, Ceduna, Peterbough, Cobar, Gosford

Target Species- Copper-backed Quail-Thrush, Nullarbor Quail-thrush Western Quail-thrush. Naretha Bluebonnet, Western Fieldwren

Copper-backed Quail-thrush.

We were extremely lucky to get this bird as quickly as we did. Conditions were average being drizzling rain, cold and windy. We turned off the Eyre highway 17 kms east of Kimba onto Sectus Tank Rd, then left on Middleback Rd. As soon as we were clear of the cultivated land heading for Secret rocks Conservation Park, We flushed a male off the road, which kindly stayed around to give us excellent views.

Nullarbor Quail-Thrush

We arrived in the late afternoon and decided to drive the track down the fence. Conditions were appalling with strong wind. The good season had generated knee high grass so it was difficult if not impossible to see much at all. The next morning the wind had dropped so we headed on the Caves Track. There was certainly less grass here and conditions were much better. After lots of stops and searching, we finally flushed a quail-thrush from the side of the road. However, we were unable to relocate it on the deck. Another km or so on a party of 3 Quail-thrush ran across the road. The male paused at the edge of the road long enough to provide great views. We were able to follow this party and got glimpses as they ran between the salt bush and when they flew but didn't get good binocular views again.

If conditions are "normal", I would suggest the track along the fence is the best option because it is far more open. If as conditions are now the Caves Track is better because you have more chance of seeing them on the road.

Other Species Little Button-quail, Rufous Fieldwren, Slender-billed Thornbill, Brown Songlark, Australasian Pipit, Bustard

Naretha Bluebonnet

Following the directions from Bernie O'Keefe, we drove the 100 plus kms, into Rawlinni Station turned left at the four way cross roads of the track, found the tank, stepped out of the car and found the birds. Just like twitching should be. We saw two parties of 3 and 4 or 5. They were drinking at the trough and were very confiding.

The road in is a challenge. The first 30 km to the Arrubiddy homestead is a good dirt road, the next 15-20 km not tragic. The last 10-15 is a bit better as there are long claypan sections between the rocky ridges. The middle section is horrendous. You spend your time in 2nd or 3rd gear, dodging rocks. Mind you all the road in that area are similar. For example, the road to Eyre bird observatory after about 15 km in was so bad we turned around because we figured it would take another hour to drive if it didn't improve and my ancient 80 series Landcruiser had been tortured enough.

The drive took us 3 hours each way. While you don't need 4WD per se, you need high clearance and off road suspension otherwise it would be a disaster.

Permission is not required from Arrubiddy to drive through the property. We dropped by and gave them a couple of bottles of wine in the hope they might provide some information on the location of the Bluebonnet on their property. However, the lady (Rhonda) would not be described as birder friendly and if I was to go there again, I wouldn't bother contacting her.

Tim Dolby and Rohan Clarke in their book "Finding Australian Birds" recommend Arrubiddy for Nullarbor Quail-thrush and Naretha Bluebonnet. The habitat looks good for the Quail-thrush but not for Bluebonnet. I will ask for their comments on Facebook.

NB The track is not sign posted. It is opposite the entrance to Cocklebidy Roadhouse. My odometer said 104 km to the four way track. You will see the windmills on your left prior to reaching this point. It is a couple of gates onto Rawlinni Station

Other Species; Australasian Pipit, Wedge-tailed Eagle, Nankeen Kestrel, Zebra Finch, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Yellow-throated Miner

Western Fieldwren

We arrived into Esperance ahead of schedule and as rain was forecast the next day we decided to try for the Western Fieldwren in Cape Arid that afternoon

We finished up seeing two different pairs along Poison Creek Road, with reasonable if somewhat distance views of the males singing from a perch.

4WD drive is required on Poison Creek Road and we managed to get bogged which was not a big deal.

We saw a close to 2 metre Western Brown Snake crossing the road and a 1.2 metre Tiger Snake a km or so later.

Other species: Blue-breasted Wren, Tawny-crowned Honeyeater, Swamp Harrier

Western Quail-thrush

We were at Niagara Dam in the early afternoon and spent an hour or so walking along the fence at the top of the ridge on both sides of the dam. Eventually Rob flushed a male WQT on the slope toward the main road on the western side of the into the Dam. There was at least a male and a female and possibly two other birds. We all got tickable but unsatisfactory views. The birds stay 40-50 metres ahead of you and it's impossible to get a decent binocular view

After spending the night at the Grand hotel Kookynie(an interesting experience), we were back at the site early the next morning with a different game plan. We played the call, waited a few minutes and played it again. The male appeared the obligatory 40-50 metres away and circled around. We were all able to get amazing views.

The site is 600 metres from the turnoff to Niagara dam on the right hand (western) side as you are driving in.

Other Species: Slatey-backed Thornbill, Western Bowerbird, Crested Bellbird, Horsfield Bronze cuckoo, Inland Thornbill. Mulga Parrot, Red-capped Robin.