TRIP REPORT: AUSTRALIA’S TOP END

DATES: 23-31 OCTOBER 2013

GUIDE AND PHOTOS: NICK LESEBERG

Easily my favourite part of Australia to go birding, the Top End is hard to beat for a combination of nature and scenery. From the monsoon forests of Darwin to the open savannas around Katherine, the floodplains of Kakadu and the sandstone escarpments of Victoria River, the scenery is as spectacular as some of the amazing birds. The extreme climate in the Top End can make birding a challenge, but when your targets include Gouldian Finch, Rainbow Pitta and Hooded Parrot, motivation is easy to find.

Dry conditions throughout inland Australia and also across the Top End this year meant there wasn’t much standing water around. This had also affected the movements of some species, pushing a few unusual birds further north than normal. Some of the regular species were a little thin on the ground as a result, but we still managed to pick up all our major targets, plus a few unexpected species. The highlight of a Top End trip is always difficult to choose, but the three clear contenders this year were particularly difficult to separate. A small party of Purple-crowned Fairywrens kept us enthralled, while our only group of Gouldian Finches for the trip gave walkaway views. Maybe the highlight though, not because of rarity but because we had such a great view, was an absolutely stonking Rainbow Pitta on our first day of the trip. Good luck picking a winner between those three!

Watching a stately Black-necked Stork wade slowly through a lily-covered wetland, a quintessential birding Top End experience.

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Day 1: Wednesday, 23rd October 2013 - Darwin

Darwin in the build-up to the wet season can be a hot and oppressive place, particularly in
the afternoon. But, it doesn’t seem to bother the birds, so as long as you are willing to get
out in the heat there are birds to find. We decided to kick things off on our first afternoon
with a visit to Howard Springs on the southern outskirts of Darwin, an area of monsoon
forest that always has a few birds around, making it the ideal place to get your list off to a
good start. The first bird we saw on arrival was an Orange-footed Scrubfowl, a common
megapode around suburban Darwin, whose powerful legs have been the scourge of many a
local gardener. Scrubfowl scratch away at the soil wherever they are, whether that’s leaf
litter in the forest or someone’s beautifully manicured garden. There were several birds
around and we also found a few huge active mounds which the males were maintaining to
incubate their eggs. Moving into the forest things were initially quiet until we hit a little
patch of activity, with Northern Fantail, Rufous Shrike-thrush and Large-billed Gerygone. A
Rainbow Pitta called in the distance, but we only managed fleeting and distant views of this
little gem. The undoubted highlight of the afternoon was a fantastic male Rose-crowned
Fruit-Dove which sat up nicely in the canopy, allowing us to get the ‘scope on him and soak
up his glorious colours.

We left Howard Springs and returned to Darwin, checking out the Knuckey Lagoons, which
were brimming with waterbirds. At our first stop on Fiddler’s Lane we picked up Wood and
Marsh Sandpipers, uncommon waders here in Australia. There were plenty of Magpie
Geese around, plus a few Red-kneed Dotterels, Black-fronted Dotterels and Glossy Ibis.
Moving to the larger Ironstone Lagoon we picked up both Plumed and Wandering
Whistling-Ducks, Comb-crested Jacanas, several pairs of Green Pygmy-geese and a distant
White-browed Crake. Perhaps the highlight though was a pair of majestic Black-necked
Storks regally supervising the wetland, an iconic bird of the Top End. A quick final stop at
Holmes Jungle picked up a dazzling male Crimson Finch, before we headed off for dinner.

In this guide’s opinion there is only one place to have dinner in Darwin, and that is Stokes
Hill Wharf. A delicious laksa while enjoying the sunset is a quintessential Darwin experience,
and there are usually a few birds around to keep things interesting. While enjoying dinner
we picked up Greater Crested, White-winged, Gull-billed and Little Terns as the sun set
over Darwin Harbour. Following dinner we had one final bird to twitch, and it was a roaring
success. Within seconds of arriving at a Nightcliff park we had found a trio of fledgling
Barking Owls, loudly harassing one of their parents for dinner (or is it breakfast if you’re an
owl?). One adult arrived with a rat which it could barely dismember fast enough for the
youngsters to wolf down. It was a great way to finish our first day, and on that note we
headed for home and bed before things kicked off in earnest tomorrow morning.

Bird of the Day: Barking Owl
The adult Barking Owl couldn’t dismember the rat fast enough for the youngsters. Watching them feeding was one of the trip’s great experiences.


We were up early and on our way to Buffalo Creek where we spent an enjoyable hour wandering around through the monsoon forest. We had arrived early enough to try for Large-tailed Nightjar, which unfortunately didn’t show so we had to content ourselves with Black Butcherbirds, Spangled Drongo, gorgeous Red-headed Honeyeaters, a small party of Australian Yellow White-eyes and a tricky Green-backed Gerygone. We heard several Rainbow Pittas calling but none would show themselves, and neither would Chestnut Rail, so we pressed on to Lee Point, picking up a small party of creepy Bush Thick-knees on the way. On the beach at Lee Point we sorted through a few small flocks of waders, scoring both Greater and Lesser Sandplovers, Red-necked Stints and Red Knots. A Brown Booby flapped
by offshore and we spotted a nice **Little Bronze-Cuckoo** in the canopy, but otherwise things were fairly quiet. As we were shaping up to leave I thought to have one more crack at Rainbow Pitta and boy was I glad we did. We moved into the forest towards a calling bird, before it went quiet, leaving us thinking we’d missed it. About five seconds after I muttered a few expletives under my breath it suddenly started calling from right behind us, and we whipped around to see an absolutely cracking **Rainbow Pitta** calling at eye level only a few yards away. Better still, it sat there watching us for several minutes allowing us to soak up the jet-black body, shining blue shoulder patches and bright red vent. Always a bird that gets the heart pumping!

![Rainbow Pitta](image)

*Maybe bird-of-the-trip, this stunning Rainbow Pitta gave us incredible views at Lee Point.*

With the pitta in the proverbial bag we headed over to Leanyer where we walked in to the edge of the sewage works to search for a few mangrove specialties. On the way we picked up a few **White-winged Trillers**, which turned out to be one of the most common birds of the trip. We also spotted a couple of blood-red **Crimson Finches** along with a pair of dapper **Chestnut-breasted Munias**. **Mangrove Gerygone** gave itself up eventually, but otherwise it was getting a little warm so activity was starting to drop off. Still, we managed to get a couple of very nice **Radjah Shelducks** and probably the morning’s rarest bird, a **Little Ringed Plover** within the sewage ponds themselves. On that note we called it quits for the morning, packing up and getting ready to head south.
From Darwin we pressed south to Adelaide River where we had a brief stop for lunch before doing a little birding around town. Always a good spot for lorikeets we soon had the unique ‘Red-collared’ race of **Rainbow Lorikeet**, plus several small parties of the gorgeous **Varied Lorikeet**. A **Brush Cuckoo** sat up nicely, while a **Silver-backed Butcherbird** also gave fantastic views. Leaving Adelaide River behind we continued south to our overnight stop in Katherine. It was an extremely hot day, so after arrival we had a rest for a couple of hours before heading out in the late afternoon to a small waterhole near town. It was pretty quiet although we still managed to pick up a few bits and pieces. **Banded Honeyeaters** were nice to see, and we also scored **Silver-crowned Friarbirds** and **Rufous-throated Honeyeaters**. The highlight though was undoubtedly a trio of colourful **Red-winged Parrots** we were able to watch feeding at close range. On that note we called it quits and headed back to Katherine for dinner and a couple of refreshing beers.

Bird of the Day: **Rainbow Pitta**

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**Day 3: Friday, 25th October 2013 – Katherine to Victoria River.**

It seems silly to start every day of a birdwatching trip report with ‘we were up early’ – of course we were! This time we were on our way south of Katherine to spend the morning birding the Central Arnhem Road. Things got off to a good start with **Yellow-tinted Honeyeater**, **White-throated Gerygone** and **Paperbark Flycatcher** all found easily. While eating our breakfast we heard the distinctive piping call of **Black-tailed Treecreeper** which finally gave good views after a bit of a chase, followed closely by a small party of smart **Black-chinned Honeyeaters** of the distinctive northern ‘Golden-backed’ race. Easily the highlight of the morning though was a bird which has eluded me for many years, the very rare northern race of **Crested Shrike-tit**. A common bird in eastern Australia, the distinctive northern race is extremely scarce and known from only a few sites across the Top End. I had searched for it many times and was very excited to finally find it! The morning wasn’t over though as we continued east to see what we could find. The day had started to warm up but we still managed a few good birds including a nice **Red-backed Kingfisher**, a flock of.
Cockatiels, plus a small party of Long-tailed Finches. By mid-morning it was getting too hot for birding and too hot for birders, so we returned to Katherine for a short break then lunch.

*This Crested Shrike-tit is the rare northern race ‘whitei’, and was probably the highlight of the trip for me!*

We had a couple of hours driving ahead of us, a good way to spend the heat of the day as we made our way southwest from Katherine towards the escarpments of the Victoria River. We made a short detour down the Buntine Highway, stopping at wetland that still held a little water, enough to be pulling in quite a few waterbirds. A couple of stately Black-necked Storks stood around the edge, while a surprise Yellow-billed Spoonbill fed in the shallows along with its Royal cousin. Both Sharp-tailed and Wood Sandpipers foraged on the exposed mud, with a few graceful Australian Pratincoles also joining them. Plumed and Wandering Whistling-Ducks swam on the open water with Green Pygmy-geese, while Black and WhISTLING Kites circled overhead. A few passerines were attracted to the water also, with Arafura Fantail and both Double-barred and Masked Finches found nearby. We also had fantastic views of several multi-coloured Rainbow Bee-eaters hawking over the open areas.

We dragged ourselves away from the waterhole and continued on to Victoria River, clocking up Spotted Harrier and Star Finch on the way, the only time we would see each species on the trip. After arriving at the Victoria River Roadhouse we checked in then waited for things to cool down a bit before heading out again. Our first stop by the Victoria River produced a small party of the absolutely gorgeous Purple-crowned Fairywrens, one of the Top End’s
most sought after birds. We then backtracked a little, heading north to Sullivan Campground to spend the late afternoon watching the comings and goings at a small billabong. We picked up an Australian Bustard on the way which slowly wandered off the road allowing extended views, while the billabong was a hive of activity. We picked up Shining Flycatcher, many Banded and White-gaped Honeyeaters, plus several flocks of Varied Lorikeets feeding in some flowering eucalypts nearby. The most unusual sighting of the afternoon though, and possibly of the trip, was a trio of Pied Honeyeaters. Usually a bird of the dry inland, these birds were well north of their usual range. As the sun set we left the waterhole, with dinner and a cold beer calling us.

Bird of the Day: Purple-crowned Fairywren

Not always an easy bird to find in the Top End we found several Australian Bustards around Timber Creek and Victoria River, including this one wandering by the roadside.

Day 4: Saturday, 26th October 2011 – Victoria River to Katherine via Timber Creek.

Always a big day on the tour and one the guide is apprehensive about, today we would be searching for one of the Top End’s iconic species, the peerless Gouldian Finch. We got away before sunrise and headed for Timber Creek, having to take it slowly to avoid the many Agile Wallabies and even a few Antilopine Wallaroos that were feeding on the grassy verges beside the road. We arrived at our first site and had a quick breakfast before going for a wander through some of the open grassy woodland favoured by the finches. It was fairly quiet although we did pick up a Singing Honeyeater and flushed a buttonquail which
gave the briefest of glimpses. It was probably a Little Buttonquail but we didn’t get a good enough view to clinch the ID. Returning to the car we heard the distinctive high-pitched ‘peee-peee’ of some finches and whipped around to see a small flock fly past – **Gouldian Finch**! Unfortunately they didn’t stop nearby, descending into the long grass ahead of us. We crept forward, eventually seeing a few birds briefly in some low shrubs before the flock flew up from the ground and perched in full view about 20 yards in front of us. Victory! This incredibly obliging flock sat up for about 10 minutes allowing us to enjoy ‘scope views of about 15 birds, including dull younger birds, a few pale females and several brightly coloured males including both red-headed and black-headed morphs. The purple breast band, electric blue nape, yellow belly and emerald green wings surely make this one of the world’s cutest birds.

With a load off our shoulders (mine anyway!) we moved on to a nearby waterhole which still had a bit of water left. The previous wet season had not been a big one, making the region very dry and increasing the value of any remaining water. We picked up a few flocks of **Budgerigars** on the way, a bird which only occasionally makes it this far north and an indication of how dry conditions must be further inland. Arriving at the waterhole we spent nearly an hour watching who was coming and going. A surprise was a **Rufous Night-Heron** roosting in the thick vegetation beside the waterhole, but otherwise it was the usual suspects, with **Yellow-tinted**, **White-gaped**, **Rufous-throated**, **Brown** and **Banded Honeyeaters**, **Little** and **Silver-crowned Friarbirds**, **Crimson**, **Long-tailed**, **Masked** and **Double-barred Finches**.

![Buff-sided Robin](image)

*After a bit of effort, we got nice views of a pair of Buff-sided Robins at Timber Creek.*
With mid-morning approaching we still had a handful of species we needed to knock over, so left the waterhole behind, stopping at a nearby patch of more open woodland to search for the elusive **Red-browed Pardalote**. This bird’s ventriloquial call and secretive habits can make it difficult to track down and it proved to be the case again! We could hear a bird calling and after much searching saw it briefly in a tree about 50 yards away. Heading that way we were standing under the small tree searching the outer foliage for a good 5 minutes and thinking it had snuck out on us, before we spotted it sitting quietly, allowing us to examine the spotted crown and small red ‘brow’. Our next stop was Timber Creek itself where quick trips to Policeman’s Point and the airfield were unproductive before a trip up the escarpment produced the hoped for **Gray-fronted Honeyeater**. Moving into the small township we found a pair of striking **Buff-sided Robins** by the creek itself, followed shortly after by a couple of **Pallid Cuckoos**. That would be it for the day as we returned to Victoria River to have lunch then drive the couple of hours back to Katherine. With most of our targets in the bag and temperatures over 100F we decided we had earned an afternoon off!

**Bird of the Day:** **Gouldian Finch**

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**Day 5: Sunday, 27th October 2011 – Katherine to Mary River Roadhouse.**

With our list in pretty good shape we decided to head south for Mataranka, hoping we might run across a Red Goshawk somewhere. Up until last year a pair had nested regularly in the area, but unfortunately they had moved on this year and what had been a reliable site for this extremely rare raptor was now just a shot in the dark. Still, you have to be in it to win it, so we went down for a look. We picked up **Apostlebird, Yellow-throated Miner** and even an **Australasian Magpie** on the way down. The magpie is a common bird in southern Australia, but rare here at the northern extremity of its range. We had breakfast at Bitter Springs then went for a wander without getting anything too unusual. We enjoyed better views of a few birds we had already seen including **Blue-winged Kookaburra, Mistletoebird** and **Crested Pigeon**, while a **Channel-billed Cuckoo** flew past uttering its raucous call but unfortunately not stopping. A **Brown Goshawk** gave us some brief excitement but there was no sniff of its red friend. We left Bitter Springs and headed to the south side of town, spotting a large raptor floating across the road on the way. Another false alarm, but not a bad one as we had great views of a pair of **Pacific Bazas** soaring low overhead. Continuing on to John Hauser Drive we stopped at a few places along the Waterhouse River although **Common Bronzewing** was the only species of any interest. In spite of our best efforts we had dipped on the goshawk, so made our way back to Katherine for lunch.

We made our way north from Katherine to Pine Creek then turned east for the Mary River Roadhouse, right on the southern edge of Kakadu National Park and our base for the next two nights. It had been another very hot day so we took a short break before driving into the park and to Nourlangie Rock. One of the park’s major tourist attractions, Nourlangie...
It retains some of the best and most accessible examples of Aboriginal rock art in the Top End. It is also a great spot to find a couple of great birds, including the Top End endemic, Black-banded Fruit-Dove. We started off wandering through the rock galleries, admiring the art while searching the overhanging fig trees for a resting dove. We couldn’t find any doves, but we did find a couple of Helmeted Friarbirds of the localised sandstone race, plus another sandstone specialist and Top End endemic, White-lined Honeyeater. We ran into another couple of birders as we made our way out of the galleries and up to the lookout. Sure enough more pairs of eyes helped, as we found a solitary Black-banded Fruit-Dove sitting quietly in a sheltered gully. Hot and sweaty but happy after our search we decided to call it quits for the day, returning to the roadhouse for dinner and the now obligatory beer.

Bird of the Day: Pacific Baza

It may not have been the raptor we were hoping for, but this Pacific Baza was still a pretty good consolation prize for our morning spent at Mataranka.

Day 6: Monday, 28th October 2013 – Plum Tree Creek and Pine Creek.

We had to get up quite early this morning as we made our way to Plum Tree Creek, targeting the remainder of the possible sandstone specialties – the handful of birds that only occur around the sandstone escarpments across Australia’s Top End. It is a rocky and exposed habitat so we needed to get in early and find the birds before it became too hot. After the short hike in we positioned ourselves on top of a large sandstone bluff, flushing a couple of Short-eared Rock-Wallabies that bounded nimbly across the precipitous rock
faces and quickly out of sight. We didn’t have to wait long until we spotted our first Sandstone Shrike-thrush, a dull bird whose melodic, piping songs echo through the gorges. We improved on yesterday’s views of White-lined Honeyeater, then set to searching for our next target, Chestnut-quilled Rock-Pigeon. A distant bird was spotted sitting quietly on a bluff, well-camouflaged and plump, looking just like a rock. Unfortunately it soon scuttled out of view, but soon another showed itself, and by the time we left we’d had good views of several. Leaving Plum Tree Creek we continued on to Gunlom, a scenic swimming hole at the base of a sheer escarpment and a great place to have a refreshing dip after clambering about the sandstone outcrops. Before swimming though, we went for a quick wander around the campground, finding a couple of pairs of gorgeous Northern Rosellas and a hulking Pheasant Coucal which unusually sheltered in the top of a tall, dense tree. After that it was swim time!

After a couple of close shaves I was very glad we were able to get extended views of several gorgeous Northern Rosellas in the campground at Gunlom.

We returned to Mary River for lunch and a break before heading off to Pine Creek for the afternoon. Our first port of call was the sewage ponds which are only small, but sometimes hold some good birds. The most surprising find here was Pink-eared Duck, a bird more common further south, but another example of some of the strange bird movements occurring this year. There were Black-fronted and Red-kneed Dotterels plus a few Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos floating around but not much else. We moved on to Copperfield Dam where there was a bit more activity. Our target here was Bar-breasted Honeyeater, a bird that can be tricky, but which eventually gave itself up. A small flock of Cockatiels came
over looking for a drink and sat long enough for us to admire them through the ‘scope. A search for Chestnut-backed Buttonquail was fruitless so we moved into Pine Creek itself in search of our next target. The local football field seems a strange place to search for a rare endemic, but this year it delivered; we had seen our first pair of **Hooded Parrots** before even getting out of the car, and over the next 20 minutes we watched several pairs and small groups arriving to roost in the trees around the field. We even attracted a small crowd, sharing some great ‘scope views of these dashing parrots with the locals. We had dinner in Pine Creek while waiting for darkness to fall, before setting out on our final twitch for the day, not a bird this time but a mammal. Not just any mammal either, but Australia’s largest microbat, the **Ghost Bat**. Around Pine Creek these rare bats roost in several old mine shafts, so we stationed ourselves at an entrance where they would come out. We could see several that had already left and were coursing back and forth overhead. We also managed to spot one still waiting at the entrance and were able to get the ‘scope on it as it hung from the top of the shaft, checking out the huge ears and large eyes. We left the bats behind and returned to the roadhouse, spotting a **Tawny Frogmouth** on the way, then heading to bed after a huge day.

**Bird of the Day:** **Northern Rosella**

Day 7: Tuesday, 29th October 2013 – Pine Creek to Cooinda.

A quick examination of our list showed only one major hole, a bird which has proved to be quite difficult the last few years, Partridge Pigeon. I had some info on recent sightings in the Pine Creek area, so we returned to Copperfield Dam. We briefly spotted a fleeing **Hooded Parrot** as we drove in, before stopping for breakfast. There was a bit of activity around the dam although nothing we hadn’t seen before. Still, we enjoyed repeat views of **Northern Rosella** and also **Leaden Flycatcher**, a species we had seen poorly earlier in the trip. After breakfast we went for a drive towards Umbrawarra Gorge, hoping to spot some pigeons foraging by the roadside. Arriving at the gorge we’d had no luck, so went for a short wander around the campground. **Yellow-throated Miners** were common and we also picked up

*We had great views of quite a few Hooded Parrots, including this fantastic male.*
another Silver-backed Butcherbird. As we wandered around we lucked upon a couple of plump brown birds scurrying out of sight, which after a bit of effort proved to be Partridge Pigeons. We tried to get a little closer, flushing a couple quite close to us that we hadn’t even noticed. Very happy with our efforts we headed back out towards Pine Creek, finding another party of the pigeons on the way. These ones allowed great views as we used the car as a hide while they went about their business on the roadside. Another brief stop near Copperfield Dam to try for Chestnut-backed Buttonquail was unsuccessful, then it was back to Mary River and the on to Cooinda for lunch.

After a long day yesterday we were happy to have an easy afternoon around Cooinda, visiting the fantastic Aboriginal cultural display at the Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre, before a leisurely walk along the river at Mardugal Campground. Mammals were actually a highlight of the afternoon, with a few Agile Wallabies hanging around, plus a Common Brushtail Possum spotted peering out of its hollow. There were a few birds about including two pairs of Shining Flycatcher engaged in a turf war, allowing us to get quite close and admire their crests and the male’s shimmering satin blue plumage. Blue was a theme for the afternoon as we had great views of a pair of Forest Kingfishers, and our first looks at the gorgeous little Azure Kingfisher. Also around were Spangled Drongos, a neat Arafura Fantail, with a bit of effort a couple of Varied Trillers, and also a nice Blue-winged Kookaburra. Happy with our haul for the afternoon, and with the time ticking over to beer o’clock, we returned to Cooinda to do our lists and grab dinner.

Bird of the Day: Partridge Pigeon

Partridge Pigeon has become pretty hard to find in the Top End, so we were very happy to get great views of several birds beside the road to Umbrawahra Gorge.
Day 8: Wednesday, 30th October 2013 – Cooinda to Darwin.

Perhaps the highlight of any birding trip to the Top End is an early morning cruise on Kakadu’s Yellow Water billabong. Late in the dry-season when water is scarce, billabongs like this one are magnets for thousands of waterbirds, which crowd the muddy edges while waiting for the rains to arrive. Before our boat departed we could hear the squeaky crowing of **White-browed Crakes** from the waterside vegetation, although none would show themselves. **Whiskered Terns** flapped around overhead, with a couple of **White-winged Terns** also joining the throng. Soon after pushing off we saw our first **Estuarine Crocodile**, a ‘small’ female at only three metres long. The list of waterbirds we saw was long, and during the cruise **Australasian Darters**, **Little Pied Cormorants**, **Plumed and Wandering Whistling-Ducks**, **Great and Intermediate Egrets**, **Pied Herons** and **Rufous Night-Herons** were rarely out of sight. The cruise started on a smaller watercourse before joining the South Alligator River. As we joined the river we saw a large dominant male ‘Saltie’ or **Estuarine Crocodile** basking on the riverbank, the undisputed king of the river. Moving along the river we spotted **Green Pygmy-geese**, stately **Black-necked Storks** and many **Magpie Geese** foraging on the floodplains, plus a couple of beautiful **Green Tree Snakes** draped in a tree and soaking up the morning sun. We even spotted a **Dingo**, Australia’s only species of native dog sitting quietly under some riverside bushes. One of our primary targets on the trip is Australia’s smallest kingfisher, the **Little Kingfisher**, and we luckily spotted one just as we had reached our turnaround point. It was amazingly confiding, sitting quietly as the boat approached, allowing all on board great views and even a few photos. Moving to another section of river we were surprised to pick up a pair of **Sarus Cranes**. Usually found further east in Queensland, they are rare visitors to the Top End so we were lucky to spot this pair. We also saw several of their close cousins, the **Brolga**, out on the vast dry floodplains. Moving out onto a smaller floodplain that still held some shallow water we found **Marsh Sandpipers**, **Red-kneed** and **Black-fronted Dotterels**, **Royal...**
Spoonbills and Glossy Ibis. A couple of White-bellied Sea-Eagles sat watch over all from the top of some high snags, while Whistling Kites wheeled overhead for the entire trip. With so much activity the couple of hours seems to fly by and the trip always finishes too soon. Still it had been a great morning and we celebrated with the fantastic Cooinda breakfast banquet.

The tiny Little Kingfisher is a high priority target on the Yellow Water cruise, and we had great views of this very confiding individual sitting quietly by the water.

Our time in Kakadu complete, we packed up then started the long drive back to Darwin. We made a stop at Adelaide River where we had no luck with the Black-tailed Whistler, only hearing it calling from thick undergrowth. Back in Darwin we grabbed some lunch then had a break before heading out for the afternoon. I had some recent gen on a possible site for Little Curlews, so it was off to Holmes Jungle for a short hike to a nearby floodplain. The most obvious birds on our arrival were several hundred Brolgas and thousands of Magpie Geese clustered around a steadily shrinking wetland. There were some waders foraging on the muddy edges but the heat haze was making it difficult to identify them. As we made our way closer though, we were able to pick out quite a few Little Curlews, with maybe 200 birds foraging on the rapidly drying mud. With a couple of mangrove birds still needed we returned to Buffalo Creek where a few of the usual suspects were kicking around but nothing we hadn’t seen already. There was quite a bit of activity at the boat ramp with people returning from their day’s fishing, but even still I wandered down to check out the exposed mud upstream. A large bird standing out on the mudflat piqued my interest, but it wasn’t until I raised my bins that I realised it was a Chestnut Rail, right out in the open! We
quickly got it in the ‘scope before it disappeared back into the mangroves, only to reappear a few minutes later for another look. It then took a bit of a run up and launched into the air, trying to fly across the creek. These are relatively large rails, and I had certainly never seen one fly before – it turns out for good reason! After the initial jump the bird continued to lose height until it splashed down in the middle of the creek (which was about 40 yards across), swimming the rest of the way to the other side. Lucky there were no crocodiles around. It was late in the afternoon by now so we returned to our hotel for dinner, although our birding wasn’t quite finished. After sunset we had one more target, so it was off to East Point where it only took us a few minutes to find a couple of Large-tailed Nightjars, a great way to end our last full day in the Top End.

Bird of the Day: Chestnut Rail

Although it is a large rail (about the size of a chicken), Chestnut Rails are quite shy, so we were chuffed to get great views of this one right out in the open.


Our last day in the Top End saw us returning to Leanyer for a few mangrove species we still needed. I suspected we had been a little late on our last visit, so this time we arrived at first light and walked in. It was a good call as we soon had a Mangrove Robin posing in front of us, followed by a more secretive Black-tailed Whistler, although with persistence we managed great views of a dashing male. Other birds in the area included a mixed party of
Long-tailed, Masked and Crimson Finches plus a few Chestnut-breasted Munias. With most of the easy birds now in the bag we turned our attention to a couple of tougher species, deciding to check some mangroves at Nightcliff for White-breasted Whistler. This rare bird has a few isolated populations around Darwin but unfortunately they eluded us this time. Still, we were rewarded for our efforts with another Black-tailed Whistler, good views of Broad-billed Flycatcher, a gorgeous Red-headed Honeyeater and surprisingly, a Brown Goshawk grabbing a Common Sandpiper off the mudflats.

We had a break from birding during the middle of the day, taking the opportunity to do some souvenir shopping and grab some lunch before one final afternoon expedition to the Nightcliff foreshore. The first bird we saw was a Buff-banded Rail foraging on the lawns of the park and giving good views. The main reason for our visit though was to catch the waders coming into roost on the rising tide, giving us the opportunity to check out a number of species all in close proximity. Our primary target was Oriental Plover and we soon found a few of those, while we also picked out Terek Sandpiper, Gray-tailed Tattler, both Lesser and Greater Sandplover, Pacific Golden-Plover and several Great Knots. Wandering along the foreshore we also picked up a nice pair of Collared Kingfishers along with an Osprey passing by offshore.

Not as shy as other rails, Buff-banded Rail can sometimes be seen foraging in parks and gardens, like this one at Nightcliff in suburban Darwin.

These would be our last new birds for the trip as we had to finish up and get to the airport. We would be heading over to Cairns to continue our Australian odyssey down the east coast, but what a way to get a birding trip started! We had done pretty well, amassing a
good list and not missing any of the major targets, even picking up a few ‘write-ins’ or unexpected birds for the trip. Even though the conditions were tough at times, the Top End is hard to beat for a spectacular combination of birds, animals and scenery. These trips always remind me why it is my favourite part of Australia to go birding.

Bird of the Day: **Buff-banded Rail**

**BIRD LIST**

Taxonomy and nomenclature closely follow the latest Clements update. Parentheses denote an alternate name used by some checklists.

Total: **222** species, including two heard only (H).

**DUCKS, GEESE AND SWANS: Anatidae**

1. **Magpie Goose** *Anseranas semipalmata*  
Common across the Top End and present around most permanent wetlands.

2. **Plumed Whistling-Duck** *Dendrocygna eytoni*  
Common on wetlands across the Top End, seen most days of the trip.

3. **Wandering Whistling-Duck** *Dendrocygna arcuata*  
Not as common as Plumed Whistling-Duck, but small numbers present on most wetlands.

4. **Radjah Shelduck** *Tadorna radjah*  
Another common duck, present in small numbers on most wetlands across the Top End.

5. **Green Pygmy-goose** *Nettapus pulchellus*  
Seen on most of the large wetlands around Darwin and Kakadu. Particularly common on the Yellow Water cruise.

6. **Pacific Black Duck** *Anas superciliosa*  
Less common than in southern Australia, but usually a few birds at most wetlands throughout the trip.

7. **Gray Teal** *Anas gracilis*  
Not always a common species in the Top End, we found small numbers on a few of the wetlands visited.

8. **Pink-eared Duck** *Malacorhynchus membranaceus*  
I was surprised to find this species at a couple of wetlands in the Top End this year. Dry conditions inland have probably pushed a few birds north.
9. **White-eyed Duck** *Aythya australis*
A fairly common species, we saw these ducks on a few wetlands including Yellow Water this year.

**MEGAPODES: Megapodiidae**

10. **Orange-footed Scrubfowl** *Megapodius reinwardt*
Fairly common in suburban Darwin, we saw these birds at Howard Springs and also Buffalo Creek.

**GREBES: Podicipedidae**

11. **Australasian Grebe** *Tachybaptus novaehollandiae*
A common bird on wetlands throughout the trip.

**STORKS: Ciconiidae**

12. **Black-necked Stork** *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*
Quite common across the Top End, with pairs resident at most of the large wetlands. Always a few on Yellow Water.

**BOOBIES AND GANNETS: Sulidae**

13. **Brown Booby** *Sula leucogaster*
We only had distant views of one bird offshore at Lee Point.

**CORMORANTS AND SHAGS: Phalacrocoracidae**

14. **Little Black Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax sulcirostris*
Fairly common, seen on a few occasions throughout the trip. Quite a few seen on Yellow Water.

15. **Little Pied Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax melanoleucos*
Quite common with birds present at most wetlands throughout the trip.

**ANHINGAS: Anhingidae**

16. **Australasian Darter** *Anhinga novaehollandiae*
A common bird across the Top End, present at most wetlands. Seen most days of the trip.
PELICANS: Pelecanidae

17. **Australian Pelican**  *Pelecanus conspicillatus*
Fairly common around Darwin, and also seen on a few larger wetlands further inland.

HERONS, EGRETS AND BITTERNS: Ardeidae

18. **Pacific (White-necked) Heron**  *Ardea pacifica*
Not a common bird in the Top End, but seen on a few wetlands around Darwin and on Yellow Water.

19. **Great Egret**  *Ardea alba*
Common across the Top End and seen at most of the large wetlands.

20. **Intermediate Egret**  *Mesophoyx intermedia*
Less common than the previous species, but seen on a few wetlands around Darwin and also at Yellow Water.

21. **White-faced Heron**  *Egretta novaehollandiae*
Widespread, and fairly common across the Top End, on wetlands, rivers and open grassy areas.

22. **Little Egret**  *Egretta garzetta*
The least common egret, seen a few times along the coast including Lee Point and Nightcliff.

23. **Pacific Reef-Heron**  *Egretta sacra*
Only seen once on rock platforms at Nightcliff.

24. **Pied Heron**  *Egretta picata*
Common on wetlands around Darwin, with large numbers at Knuckey Lagoon and on Yellow Water.

25. **Cattle Egret**  *Bubulcus ibis*
Fairly common across the Top End, particularly around cattle.

26. **Striated Heron**  *Butorides striata*
Only seen once on this trip, from the boat ramp at Buffalo Creek.

27. **Rufous Night-Heron**  *Nycticorax caledonicus*
We saw several birds on the Yellow Water cruise, with singles near Timber Creek and also at Gunlom.
IBIS AND SPOONBILLS: Threskiornithidae

28. **Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus*
Fairly common across the Top End, present on most wetlands. Several on Yellow Water where they are regularly seen.

29. **Australian Ibis** *Threskiornis molucca*
A common bird seen throughout the trip.

30. **Straw-necked Ibis** *Threskiornis spinicollis*
A common bird, particularly in open grassy areas. Seen most days of the trip.

31. **Royal Spoonbill** *Platalea regia*
Seen at a few wetlands during the trip. A few birds on Yellow Water where they are seen regularly.

32. **Yellow-billed Spoonbill** *Platalea flavipes*
Surprisingly found one on a small wetland by the Buntine Highway. Not expected on this trip.

OSPREY: Pandionidae

33. **Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus*
Already split by the IOC, this species is a potential split as Eastern Osprey by Clements. One bird was seen on the coast from the Nightcliff foreshore.

HAWKS, EAGLES AND KITES: Accipitridae

34. **Pacific Baza** *Aviceda subcristata*
A pair of these beautiful raptors soared overhead at Mataranka, with another seen soaring along the escarpment at Gunlom.

35. **Black Kite** *Milvus migrans*
Very common, with a few birds usually somewhere within sight. Seen every day of trip.

36. **Whistling Kite** *Haliastur sphenurus*
Although not as common as the previous species, still seen every day of the trip.

37. **Brahminy Kite** *Haliastur indus*
Seen a couple of times around Darwin including Leanyer sewage works and along the Nightcliff foreshore.

38. **White-bellied Sea-Eagle** *Haliaeetus leucogaster*
Often present at larger wetlands and along some larger rivers, we saw birds at Timber Creek but had our best views of the resident pair on Yellow Water.
39. **Spotted Harrier** *Circus assimilis*
One bird floated across the road along the Buntine Highway. We got quite good views as it circled back and perched briefly.

40. **Brown Goshawk** *Accipiter fasciatus*
Fairly common across the Top End, we saw this species most days although it was often fleeting glimpses. We saw one bird pluck a Common Sandpiper from the mudflats at Nightcliff.

41. **Collared Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter cirrocephalus*
Seen once near Victoria River crossing, where it was bathing in a roadside pond.

42. **Wedge-tailed Eagle** *Aquila audax*
Seen a couple of times, usually soaring overhead as we were driving.

**BUSTARDS: Otididae**

43. **Australian Bustard** *Ardeotis australis*
Not always easy to find in the Top End, we ended up seeing this fantastic bird a few times around Victoria River Crossing and also at Timber Creek.

**RAILS, GALLINULES AND COOTS: Rallidae**

44. **Buff-banded Rail** *Gallirallus philippensis*
One bird seen foraging in gardens at the Nightcliff foreshore.

45. **White-browed Crake** *Porzana cinerea*
We heard several birds calling at Knuckey Lagoon, and managed to get the ‘scope onto one distant bird. Also heard while boarding the boat for the Yellow Water cruise.

46. **Chestnut Rail** *Eulabeornis castaneoventris*
We had great views of this shy species foraging on a mudflat from the boat ramp at Buffalo Creek.

47. **Purple Swamphen** *Porphyrio porphyrio*
Not as common in the north as in southern Australia, we saw a few birds while on the Yellow Water cruise.

48. **Eurasian Coot** *Fulica atra*
Not common in the Top End but we still saw it on a few wetlands including Leanyer sewage ponds and the Pine Creek sewage ponds.
CRANES: Gruidae

49. **Sarus Crane** *Grus antigone*
A rare vagrant to the Top End, we saw a pair of birds on the Yellow Water cruise.

50. **Brolga** *Grus rubicunda*
Fairly common this year, we saw Brolgas on several days, with large numbers at Holmes Jungle swamp and a few while on the Yellow Water cruise.

THICK-KNEES: Burhinidae

51. **Bush Thick-knee** *Burhinus grallarius*
Fairly common around suburban Darwin, we saw a group of about ten birds near Lee Point and also a pair at East Point.

STILTS AND AVOCETS: Recurvirostridae

52. **Pied Stilt** *Himantopus leucocephalus*
A common bird found on most wetlands throughout the trip.

OYSTERCATCHERS: Haematopodidae

53. **Pied Oystercatcher** *Haematopus longirostris*
A couple of birds were seen on sandflats at Buffalo Creek.

PLOVERS AND LAPWINGS: Charadriidae

54. **Masked Lapwing** *Vanellus miles*
A common species around wetlands and open areas, seen on every day of the trip.

55. **Red-kneed Dotterel** *Erythrogonys cinctus*
This bird was surprisingly common this year and there were a few present at most of the wetlands we visited throughout the trip.

56. **Black-bellied (Gray) Plover** *Pluvialis squatarola*
A few birds were seen at Lee Point and Buffalo Creek on each visit.

57. **Pacific Golden-Plover** *Pluvialis fulva*
A few birds amongst the mixed flock of waders roosting on the rock platforms at Nightcliff. One also seen at Lee Point.

58. **Lesser Sand-Plover** *Charadrius mongolus*
A few birds in mixed wader flocks at Lee Point and Nightcliff.
59. **Greater Sand-Plover** *Charadrius leschenaultia*
A fairly common wader, seen in mixed wader flocks at Buffalo Creek, Lee Point and Nightcliff.

60. **Red-capped Plover** *Charadrius ruficapillus*
A few pairs present as usual on the beaches at Lee Point and Buffalo Creek.

61. **Little Ringed Plover** *Charadrius dubius*
A regular visitor to Australia each summer, but only in very small numbers, we found one bird on the edge of the Leanyer sewage ponds.

62. **Oriental Plover** *Charadrius veredus*
Most birds had already passed through by late-October, still we found a few birds roosting in the mixed flock of waders at Nightcliff, and also spotted one bird flying over the football field at Pine Creek.

63. **Black-fronted Dotterel** *Eleyornis melanops*
This small plover is fairly common and was seen on several wetlands throughout the trip.

**JACANAS: Jacanidae**

64. **Comb-crested Jacana** *Irediparra gallinacea*
Fairly common in the Top End, we saw jacanas on most of the large lily-covered wetlands we visited. Many seen on the Yellow Water cruise.

**SANDPIPER AND ALLIES: Scolopacidae**

65. **Terek Sandpiper** *Xenus cinereus*
A few birds were spotted in the mixed wader flocks roosting at Nightcliff.

66. **Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos*
Common around the edges of the sewage ponds at Leanyer. Also seen along the creek edges at Buffalo Creek and on the mudflats at Nightcliff.

67. **Gray-tailed Tattler** *Tringa brevipes*
A few present in wader flocks at Lee Point and also Nightcliff.

68. **Common Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia*
Seen only a couple of times, once at Lee Point and again along a creek near Leanyer sewage ponds.

69. **Marsh Sandpiper** *Tringa stagnatilis*
Seen on a few occasions on small freshwater wetlands, including Knuckey Lagoon and also Yellow Water.
70. **Wood Sandpiper** *Tringa glareola*
   Seen on a few freshwater wetlands including Knuckey Lagoons and the small wetland on the Buntine Highway.

71. **Little Curlew** *Numenius minutus*
   On our last full day in Darwin we were lucky to track down this summer migrant on a rapidly drying swamp at Holmes Jungle.

72. **Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus*
   A few birds were seen on the beach at Buffalo Creek, with more at the wader roost at Nightcliff.

73. **Far Eastern Curlew** *Numenius madagascariensis*
   A couple of distant birds at Buffalo Creek, but better views on the mudflats at Nightcliff.

74. **Bar-tailed Godwit** *Limosa lapponica*
   Several seen on the beach at Buffalo Creek in mixed wader flocks.

75. **Ruddy Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres*
   A few birds seen in mixed wader flocks at Lee Point, Buffalo Creek and Nightcliff.

76. **Great Knot** *Calidris tenuirostris*
   Several present at Buffalo Creek and few birds roosting at Nightcliff.

77. **Red Knot** *Calidris canutus*
   A couple of birds in a mixed wader flock at Lee Point.

78. **Sanderling** *Calidris alba*
   Several birds in mixed flocks at Lee Point and Buffalo Creek.

79. **Red-necked Stint** *Calidris ruficollis*
   Fairly common at Buffalo Creek and Lee Point.

80. **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper** *Calidris acuminata*
   Seen on a few freshwater wetlands including Knuckey Lagoons and a small wetland on the Buntine Highway.

81. **Curlew Sandpiper** *Calidris ferruginea*
   A handful of birds seen at Lee Point.

**PRATINCOLES AND COURSERS: Glareolidae**

82. **Australian Pratincole** *Stiltia Isabella*
   A few birds seen near a wetland on the Buntine Highway southwest of Katherine. A few also seen from the Yellow Water cruise and on the South Alligator River floodplain.
GULLS, TERNs AND SKIMMERS: Laridae

83. Silver Gull  
*Larus novaehollandiae*  
A common bird around Darwin, seen at most coastal sites.

84. Little Tern  
*Sternula albifrons*  
A few birds were seen from Stokes Hill Wharf, with more roosting at Lee Point.

85. Gull-billed Tern  
*Gelochelidon nilotica*  
A couple of birds seen from Stokes Hill Wharf, with others seen at the Leanyer sewage ponds and also on the mudflats at Nightcliff.

86. Caspian Tern  
*Hydroprogne caspia*  
Seen once at Knuckey Lagoon and a few times at Buffalo Creek.

87. White-winged Tern  
*Chlidonias leucopterus*  
Only a couple of birds were seen from Stokes Hill Wharf, but there were many birds hawking over the Leanyer sewage ponds. A couple also seen at Yellow Water.

88. Whiskered Tern  
*Chlidonias hybrida*  
Fairly common on most freshwater wetlands visited throughout the trip.

89. Common Tern  
*Sterna hirundo*  
A couple of birds were seen roosting at Lee Point.

90. Great Crested Tern  
*Thalasseus bergii*  
A few birds seen from Stokes Hill Wharf, with more seen on the beach at Lee Point.

PIGEONS AND DOVES: Columbidae

91. Emerald Dove  
*Chalcophaps indica*  
We had good views of a single bird foraging on the ground at Howard Springs.

92. Common Bronzewing  
*Phaps chalcoptera*  
Fleeting glimpses of a few birds flying across the road, with good views finally of a bird along John Hauser Drive at Mataranka.

93. Crested Pigeon  
*Geophaps lophotes*  
Seen a few times in the drier areas around Katherine and further southwest.

94. Partridge Pigeon  
*Geophaps smithii*  
This bird seems to be becoming increasingly hard to find. I missed it on my last Top End trip and thought we may dip again, but we eventually had good views of small flocks near the camping area at Umbrawarra Gorge and on the road into the gorge.
95. Chestnut-quilled Rock-Pigeon *Petrophassa rufipennis*
We had great views of several birds on the sandstone outcrops at Plum Tree Creek.

96. Diamond Dove *Geopelia cuneata*
Fairly common in the drier areas southwest of Katherine.

97. Peaceful Dove *Geopelia placida*
Common throughout the Top End, seen at many sites and on every day of the trip.

98. Bar-shouldered Dove *Geopelia humeralis*
Another common species throughout the Top End, although not quite as common as peaceful Dove. Seen every day of the trip.

99. Black-banded Fruit-Dove *Ptilinopus alligator*
A Top End endemic with a very restricted distribution in Arnhem Land, after quite a bit of searching we eventually found one of these birds resting in a shaded gully at Nourlangie Rock.

100. Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove *Ptilinopus regina*
Although fairly common in monsoon forest around Darwin and heard often, we had to work hard before we got ‘scope views of one of these gorgeous little pigeons at Howard Springs.

101. Torresian Imperial-Pigeon *Ducula spilorrhoa*
These large black-and-white pigeons are common in suburban Darwin and were seen well several times.

**CUCKOOS: Cuculidae**

102. Pallid Cuckoo *Cuculus pallidus*
A couple of birds were seen outside the roadhouse at Timber Creek.

103. Brush Cuckoo *Cacomantis variolosus*
Common by voice across the Top End, we had good views at Adelaide River and also Bitter Springs near Mataranka.

104. Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx basalis*
Seen only briefly at Bitter Springs near Mataranka.

105. Little Bronze-Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx minutillus*
Fairly common around Darwin, we heard it several times and had our best views of a pair of birds at Lee Point.

106. Australian Koel *Eudynamys cyanocephalus*
Common by voice, particularly in suburban areas, we saw birds at Adelaide River, Chinaman Creek and also Bitter Springs.
107. **Channel-billed Cuckoo** *Scyphrops novaehollandiae*
We had only fleeting glimpses of one of these enormous cuckoos flying past at Bitter Springs.

108. **Pheasant Coucal** *Centropus phasianinus*
After poor views of a bird which scrambled to the top of a large tree at Gunlom, we had better views while on the Yellow Water cruise.

**OWLS: Strigidae**

109. **Barking Owl** *Ninox connivens*
A trip highlight was a family group of five Barking Owls at Nightcliff, two adults and three hungry youngsters. Watching the young birds trying to get at a rat one of the adults had caught was hilarious.

**FROGMOUTHS: Podargidae**

110. **Tawny Frogmouth** *Podargus strigoides*
We saw one bird after dark on the drive from Pine Creek to Mary River. We managed to find it perched by the road for some good views.

**NIGHTJARS AND ALLIES: Caprimulgidae**

111. **Spotted Nightjar** *Eurostopodus argus*
We had very brief views of one bird flushed from the highway between Victoria River and Timber Creek.

112. **Large-tailed Nightjar** *Caprimulgus macrurus*
We had great views of a couple of these birds in monsoon forest at East Point in Darwin.

**SWIFTS: Apodidae**

113. **Pacific (Fork-tailed) Swift** *Apus pacificus*
A handful were seen soaring high overhead at Leanyer sewage ponds.

**KINGFISHERS: Alcedinidae**

114. **Azure Kingfisher** *Ceyx azurea*
Good views of several of this little purple gems on the Yellow Water cruise, with another bird seen along the river at Mardugal.
115. **Little Kingfisher** *Ceyx pusilla*
We spotted a couple of these tiny kingfishers on the Yellow Water cruise, with point-blank views of one a highlight of the trip.

116. **Blue-winged Kookaburra** *Dacelo leachii*
A common bird across the Top End, particularly in the open forests south of Darwin. We even managed to rescue one which had become tangled in a barbed-wire fence near Katherine, allowing close up views of that incredibly massive bill.

117. **Forest Kingfisher** *Todiramphus macleayii*
Fairly common throughout the Top End, particularly around Darwin, we had good views at Lee Point, Buffalo Creek and Yellow Water.

118. **Red-backed Kingfisher** *Todiramphus pyrrhopygius*
Seen once along the Central Arnhem Highway, with another bird heard calling along the Buchanan Highway near Timber Creek.

119. **Collared Kingfisher** *Todiramphus chloris*
Our last new bird of the trip was a pair of these kingfishers on the rock platform at Nightcliff.

120. **Sacred Kingfisher** *Todiramphus sanctus*
Seen on a few occasions in the drier areas around Katherine, and also once on Yellow Water.

**BEE-EATERS: Meropidae**

121. **Rainbow Bee-eater** *Merops ornatus*
Common throughout the Top End, we saw these beautiful birds several times each day.

**ROLLERS: Coraciidae**

122. **Dollarbird** *Eurystomus orientalis*
A common species, particularly south of Darwin, we saw them most days of the trip.

**FALCONS AND CARACARAS: Falconidae**

123. **Australian Hobby** *Falco longipennis*
We had great ‘scope views of a bird sitting on a communications tower near Leanyer sewage ponds.

124. **Brown Falcon** *Falco berigora*
A fairly common raptor in the drier areas south of Darwin, we saw them on several occasions, including a bird on a nest beside the highway near Katherine.
COCKATOOS: Cacatuidae

125. Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo *Calyptorhynchus banksii*
A common bird across the Top End, we saw multiple flocks of this majestic species each day of the trip.

126. Galah *Eolophus roseicapilla*
Fairly common in the drier areas south of Darwin we saw these beautiful cockatoos most days of the trip.

127. Little Corella *Cacatua sanguinea*
Common across the Top End, even in suburban Darwin, we saw this species most days.

128. Sulphur-crested Cockatoo *Cacatua galerita*
A common and noisy bird throughout the Top End, we saw this species every day of the trip.

129. Cockatiel *Nymphicus hollandicus*
Uncommon in the drier areas south of Darwin, we saw a small flock at Copperfield Dam and another along the Central Arnhem Highway.

PARROTS: Psittacidae

130. Rainbow Lorikeet *Trichoglossus haematodus*
A common and beautiful parrot that was seen every day of the trip. The subspecies in the Top End is the distinctive 'Red-collared' race.

131. Varied Lorikeet *Psitteuteles versicolor*
South of Darwin this beautiful lorikeet was quite common, with groups often passing overhead. We had our best views at Adelaide River where there were several small groups feeding in flowering eucalypts.

132. Northern Rosella *Platycercus venustus*
This species can be tricky to find, but after a few brief glimpses of birds flying away we eventually had great views of several birds in the campground at Gunlom. We also came across a pair at Copperfield Dam which we admired in the morning sun.

133. Hooded Parrot *Psephotus dissimilis*
One of the Top End’s most sought after endemics, we had great views of several birds coming to roost at the local football field in Pine Creek.

134. Budgerigar *Melopsittacus undulatus*
This nomadic species is not regular in the Top End, but dry conditions in Australia’s interior resulted in some strange bird movements this year, including an influx of Budgerigars in the southern Top End. We saw a few flocks along the Central Arnhem Road, but they were most common around Timber Creek where we saw some quite large flocks of several hundred birds.
135. **Red-winged Parrot** *Aprosmictus erythropterus*
This striking species is common in the Top End and we saw it most days, with some great views of feeding birds around Katherine.

**PITTAS: Pittidae**

136. **Rainbow Pitta** *Pitta iris*
After hearing it several times at Howard Springs and getting fleeting glimpses of a distant bird we were eventually rewarded with point blank views of one of these stunning birds in monsoon forest at Lee Point.

**BOWERBIRDS: Ptilonorhynchidae**

137. **Great Bowerbird** *Chlamydera nuchalis*
A common bird across the Top End we saw this species most days, including an immaculate bower sheltered under a bush at the Victoria River Roadhouse.

**AUSTRALASIAN TREECREEPERS: Climacteridae**

138. **Black-tailed Treecreeper** *Climacteris melanurus*
Seemingly not as common this year as previously, we found a pair along the Central Arnhem Road which after a bit of effort gave good views.

**FAIRYWRENS: Maluridae**

139. **Red-backed Fairywren** *Malurus melanocephalus*
Quite common in the savannah woodlands across the Top End, we came across this species several times including some dashing males.

140. **Variegated Fairywren** *Malurus lamberti*
We saw a couple of birds near a wetland on the Buntine Highway, plus a pair of the distinctive sandstone race *rogersi* on the sandstone outcrops of Plum Tree Creek.

141. **Purple-crowned Fairywren** *Malurus coronatus*
Always a target bird in the Top End and luckily quite easy to find, we found a small party of these absolutely gorgeous fairywrens near Victoria River Crossing.
HONEYEATERS: Meliphagidae

142. Pied Honeyeater *Certhionyx variegatus*
Three birds at Sullivan Campground near Victoria River Crossing was probably the most unexpected sighting of the trip. Usually a bird of the arid interior, these were probably another species pushed out by the very dry conditions inland.

143. White-lined Honeyeater *Meliphaga albilineata*
This Top End endemic was seen briefly at Nourlangie Rock, but we had much better views on the outcrops of Plum Tree Creek.

144. Singing Honeyeater *Lichenostomus virescens*
Not a common species in the Top End, we saw a single bird along the Buchanan Highway while searching for Gouldian Finches.

145. White-gaped Honeyeater *Lichenostomus unicolour*
Common throughout the Top End, we saw this species most days.

146. Yellow-tinted Honeyeater *Lichenostomus flavescens*
This dapper little honeyeater is fairly common in the savannas around Katherine and southwest to Timber Creek, where we saw them at several sites.

147. Gray-fronted Honeyeater *Lichenostomus plumulus*
We only saw this bird once, on the escarpment above Timber Creek where they can often be found.

148. Yellow-throated Miner *Manorina flavigula*
Seen a few times in the drier habitats south of Darwin, including at Mataranka and the camping area at Umbrara Gorge.

149. Bar-breasted Honeyeater *Ramsayornis fasciatus*
A tricky species, we saw one bird at Copperfield Dam and heard another along the river at Mardugal.

150. Rufous-banded Honeyeater *Conopophila albogularis*
This species is common around Darwin and Kakadu, often seen around water.

151. Rufous-throated Honeyeater *Conopophila rufogularis*
A common species in the drier savannas around Katherine, we saw this bird at several sites.

152. Dusky Myzomela *Myzomela obscura*
Sometimes easy to find, this species was only seen once this year in the campground at Gunlom.

153. Red-headed Myzomela *Myzomela erythrocephala*
Quite common in mangroves around Darwin, we saw this species near the Leaneyer sewage ponds, at Buffalo Creek and also in mangroves at Nightcliff.
154. **Banded Honeyeater** *Cissomela pectoralis*
This snappy little honeyeater was very common in the savannas around Katherine and Timber Creek this year.

155. **Brown Honeyeater** *Lichmera indistincta*
A common bird across the Top End in all habitats, we saw this species most days.

156. **White-throated Honeyeater** *Melithreptus albogularis*
Fairly common across the Top End, we saw this species at several sites throughout the trip.

157. **Black-chinned Honeyeater** *Melithreptus gularis*
A thinly spread species in the drier parts of the Top End, we saw this bird a couple of times on the Central Arnhem Road. These northern birds are of the distinctive ‘Golden-backed’ race.

158. **Blue-faced Honeyeater** *Entomyzon cyanotis*
A very attractive honeyeater, this species is common across the Top End, and was seen on each day of the trip.

159. **Little Friarbird** *Philemon citreogularis*
Another common species, we saw them at most sites during the trip, particularly in the drier southwest.

160. **Helmeted Friarbird** *Philemon buceroides*
We saw the distinctive sandstone race *ammitophila* at both Nourlangie Rock and Plum Tree Creek. This subspecies is endemic to the Top End and is a prospective split as ‘Sandstone’ Friarbird.

161. **Silver-crowned Friarbird** *Philemon argenticeps*
Common across the Top End, we saw this species on each day of the trip from Darwin right through to Timber Creek.

**PARDALOTES: Pardalotidae**

162. **Red-browed Pardalote** *Pardalotus rubricatus*
This is a tricky species to find, but with a bit of effort we finally had good views of one in the dry open woodlands near Timber Creek.

163. **Striated Pardalote** *Pardalotus striatus*
A fairly common species right throughout Australia, we saw these species on a few occasions, in the savannas southwest of Katherine an once in Darwin.
THORNBILLS AND ALLIES: Acanthizidae

164. Weebill  
*Smicronis brevirostris*
Australia’s smallest bird, this species is fairly common in the drier areas area Katherine, where we saw it several times.

165. Green-backed Gerygone  
*Gerygone chloronata*
A monsoon forest species whose ratchety call is commonly heard, they can be difficult to see as they forage in the canopy. We eventually had good views of one at Buffalo Creek, with others seen at Bitter Springs and Mardugal.

166. White-throated Gerygone  
*Gerygone olivacea*
We saw this species once on the Central Arnhem Road and also along the Buntine Highway.

167. Large-billed Gerygone  
*Gerygone magnirostris*
We only saw this species a couple of times, once in monsoon forest at Howard Springs and again at Buffalo Creek.

168. Mangrove Gerygone  
*Gerygone levigaster*
We only saw this species in the mangroves around the Leanyer sewage ponds.

PSEUDO-BABBLERS: Pomatostomidae

169. Gray-crowned Babbler  
*Pomatostomus temporalis*
A fairly common communal species, we saw them at Lee Point, Adelaide River and Pine Creek among other places.

WOODSWALLOWS: Artamidae

170. White-breasted Woodswallow  
*Artamus leucorynchus*
A common bird across the Top End, we saw this species each day, often perched on powerlines in suburban areas.

171. Masked Woodswallow  
*Artamus personatus*
A species I didn’t expect to see, there were several birds in a small flock along the Bullita Access Road near Timber Creek. Another inland species probably pushed north by the dry conditions inland.

172. Black-faced Woodswallow  
*Artamus cinereus*
Common in the drier areas south and southwest of Katherine.

173. Little Woodswallow  
*Artamus minor*
This species didn’t seem as common as previous years. We only saw a handful of birds, once along the Central Arnhem Highway and also along the Buntine Highway.
BELLMAGPIES AND ALLIES: Cracticidae

174. **Silver-backed Butcherbird** *Cracticus argenteus*
Sometimes a tricky bird to find, we had great views of a very vocal bird at Adelaide River, with another seen at the camping ground at Umbrawarra Gorge.

175. **Pied Butcherbird** *Cracticus nigrogularis*
Another species common in the drier areas around Katherine and Timber Creek, we saw them at several sites. This bird’s beautiful piping call is always a joy to hear.

176. **Black Butcherbird** *Cracticus quoyi*
Fairly common in monsoon forests around Darwin, we saw this species at Buffalo Creek tending a nest with nestling, and also in mangroves at Nightcliff.

177. **Australasian Magpie** *Gymnorhina tibicen*
At the fair northern limit of its range here, we saw one bird on the outskirts of Mataranka.

CUCKOO-SHRIKES: Campephagidae

178. **Black-faced Cuckooshrike** *Coracina novaehollandiae*
A fairly common bird across the Top End, seen most days.

179. **White-bellied Cuckooshrike** *Coracina papuensis*
Almost as common as the Black-faced Cuckooshrike, we saw several in the drier areas south and southwest of Katherine.

180. **White-winged Triller** *Lalage tricolor*
This was one of the commonest birds of the trip, and was seen at most sites on every day of the trip.

181. **Varied Triller** *Lalage leucomela*
A fairly common species in monsoon forest across the Top End, we saw them at Buffalo Creek, Lee Point and Mardugal, plus a few other spots.

SITELLAS: Neosittidae

182. **Varied Sittella** *Neositta chrysoptera*
We saw a couple of flocks of this neat little species in the Pine Creek area. The birds found in the Top End are the ‘white-winged’ race, *leucomela*. 
WHISTLERS AND ALLIES: Pachycephalidae

183. Crested Shrike-tit  *Falcunculus frontatus*
The northern race *whitei* is very rare, and a bird I had never seen, so I was very excited to find one along the Central Arnhem Road on this trip.

184. Rufous Shrike-Thrush  *Colluricincla megarhyncha*
This fairly nondescript species was seen only once at Howard Springs.

185. Gray Shrike-Thrush  *(H)  *Colluricincla harmonica*
A common species in eastern Australia, we didn’t put too much (any!) effort into finding one. We did hear one in woodland near the Pine Creek sewage ponds.

186. Black-tailed Whistler  *Pachycephala melanura*
After a bit of effort we had great views of a very nice male in mangroves near the Leanyer sewage ponds. We subsequently saw another in mangroves at Nightcliff.

187. Gray Whistler  *Pachycephala simplex*
A fairly nondescript bird, we saw this bird once in monsoon forest at Lee Point.

188. Rufous Whistler  *Pachycephala rufiventris*
Fairly common in the drier woodlands south of Darwin we saw this bird a few times in the Katherine area.

OLD WORLD ORIOLES: Oriolidae

189. Olive-backed Oriole  *Oriolus sagittatus*
Seen on a few occasions in the drier forests south of Darwin, we saw this bird along the Central Arnhem Highway and also at Bitter Springs.

190. Green (Yellow) Oriole  *Oriolus flavocinctus*
Common by voice in the monsoon forests around Darwin and Kakadu, we did get good views of birds at Buffalo Creek, Adelaide River and the campground at Gunlom.

191. Australasian Figbird  *Sphecotheres vieilloti*
A common species, particularly in urban areas around Darwin and Katherine, we saw this bird most days.

DRONGOS: Dicruridae

192. Spangled Drongo  *Dicrurus bracteatus*
Fairly common in the monsoon forests of Darwin and Kakadu, we saw this species most days of the trip.
FANTAILS: Rhipiduridae

193. **Northern Fantail** *Rhipidura rufiventris*
Fairly common across the Top End, particularly near water, we saw them several times on the trip.

194. **Willie-wagtail** *Rhipidura leucophrys*
Not as common in the Top End as it is in eastern and southern Australia, we still saw them on a few occasions around Katherine and Kakadu.

195. **Arafura Fantail** *Rhipidura dryas*
Sometimes a tricky species, we saw it several times this year, first at a wetland on the Buntine Highway, again at Mardugal, on the Yellow Water cruise, and finally in mangroves at Nightcliff.

MONARCH-FLYCATCHERS: Monarchidae

196. **Magpie-lark** *Grallina cyanoleuca*
A very common species throughout Australia that we saw on every day of the trip.

197. **Leaden Flycatcher** *Myiagra rubecula*
We picked up this bird on a few occasions, with our best views at Copperfield Dam near Pine Creek.

198. **Broad-billed Flycatcher** *Myiagra ruficollis*
Usually found around water, we first saw this bird in riverside vegetation on the Yellow Water cruise, again at Adelaide River and also in mangroves at Nightcliff.

199. **Paperbark Flycatcher** *Myiagra nana*
Always a vocal and active species, that is quite common throughout the Top End. We saw it most days of the trip, with good views along the Central Arnhem Road and also at Copperfield Dam.

200. **Shining Flycatcher** *Myiagra alecto*
A species that is always found near water, they are quite common on the Yellow Water cruise. We also saw them at Sullivan Campground, Mardugal and in mangroves near Leanyer sewage ponds.

CROWS, JAYS AND MAGPIES: Corvidae

201. **Torresian Crow** *Corvus orru*
The common corvid in northern Australia, we saw this species each day of the trip.
WHITE-WINGED CHOUGH AND APOSTLEBIRD: Corcoracidae

202. Apostlebird  
*Struthidea cinerea*  
Usually seen around Katherine and further south, we saw one group on the Central Arnhem Road and another on the outskirts of Mataranka.

AUSTRALASIAN ROBINS: Petroicidae

203. Jacky-winter  
*Microeca fascinans*  
Seen only once, in dry woodland along the Buchanan Highway while searching for Gouldian Finches.

204. Lemon-bellied Flycatcher  
*Microeca flavigaster*  
Quite a common species across the Top End, we saw this species most days of the trip.

205. Mangrove Robin  
*Eopsaltria pulverulenta*  
We had great views of a very confiding bird in mangroves near the Leanyer sewage ponds.

206. Buff-sided Robin  
*Poecilodryas cerviniventris*  
After a bit of effort we found a pair of these striking robins in riparian vegetation in Timber Creek.

LARKS: Alaudidae

207. Australasian Bushlark  
*Mirafra javanica*  
We briefly saw a bird at Knuckey Lagoon but didn’t pursue it, expecting to see it later in eastern Australia.

SWALLOWS: Hirundinidae

208. Fairy Martin  
*Petrochelidon ariel*  
Seen on a few occasions around Timber Creek, usually around water, which they need to build their mud nests.

209. Tree Martin  
*Petrochelidon nigricans*  
Less common than in eastern Australia, we saw this species along the Buntine Highway and also on the Yellow Water cruise.

210. White-backed Swallow  
*Cheramoeca leucosterna*  
There is often a pair of these beautiful swallows to be found somewhere around Hay, but this year we had no luck. We eventually found a pair in a mixed flock with Fairy Martins about 100km north of Hay on our drive to Lithgow.
GRASSBIRDS AND ALLIES: Megaluridae

211. Rufous Songlark (H) *Cincloramphus mathewsi*
Heard once along the Central Arnhem Road, this species is very common in south-eastern Australia so we didn’t pursue it.

CISTICOLAS AND ALLIES: Cisticolidae

212. Golden-headed Cisticola *Cisticola exilis*
Quite common in any grassy areas across the Top End, we saw this species on several occasions. They were particularly common at Holmes Jungle in Darwin.

YUHINAS, WHITE-EYES AND ALLIES: Zosteropidae

213. Australian Yellow White-eye *Zosterops luteus*
Another bird usually found near water, we saw this species a couple of times at Buffalo Creek, again at Adelaide River and also in the mangroves at Nightcliff.

FLOWERPECKERS: Dicaeidae

214. Mistletoebird *Dicaeum hirundinaceum*
A common bird that was heard most days of the trip and seen regularly. We had our best views at Bitter Springs near Mataranka and in mangroves at Nightcliff.

WAGTAILS AND PIPITS: Motacillidae

215. Eastern Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla tschutschensis*
We unexpectedly came across a single individual beside the road as we were leaving Holmes Jungle on our last full day of the trip.

WAXBILLS AND ALLIES: Estrildidae

216. Crimson Finch *Neochmia phaeton*
This brilliant red finch is quite common around water throughout the Top End, and we saw it well several times.

217. Star Finch *Neochmia ruficauda*
A difficult bird to find this year, we only saw them once when luckily we picked up a small flock flying across the highway near Victoria River Crossing. Screeching to a halt we managed to find them perched and got nice ‘scope views.
218. **Double-barred Finch** *Taeniopygia bichenovii*
Fairly common across the Top End, we saw this species most days of the trip at several sites.

219. **Masked Finch** *Poephila personata*
The very dry conditions made finding finches difficult this year. We first caught up with this species at a small wetland on the Buntine Highway, and again at a waterhole near Timber Creek. We finally saw them again in grassland near the Leanyer sewage ponds in Darwin.

220. **Long-tailed Finch** *Poephila acuticauda*
As with Masked Finch, the very dry conditions made finding this species difficult this year. We first found a small group along the Central Arnhem Road, with a few more at a waterhole near Timber Creek. We also saw a few in grassland near the Leanyer sewage ponds in Darwin.

221. **Gouldian Finch** *Erythrura gouldiae*
One of the top targets on any visit to the Top End, we saw only one flock of this gorgeous bird along the Buchanan Highway near Timber Creek. Luckily we got great views as they sat up and allowed us ten minutes to gaze at them through the ‘scope.

222. **Chestnut-breasted Munia** *Lonchura castaneothorax*
Thin on the ground this year, we only saw them in grassland near the Leanyer sewage ponds, in a mixed group with several other finch species.

**MAMMAL LIST**

**BRUSHTAIL POSSUMS:** Phalangeridae

1. **Common Brushtail Possum** *Trichosurus vulpecula*
We saw this species a few times, with one individual peering out of its roost hollow at Mardugal, and another at East Point while searching for Large-tailed Nightjar. Perhaps most surprising was a mother with her young one clinging to her back, seen climbing through mangroves near Leanyer sewage ponds early one morning.

2. **Agile Wallaby** *Macropus agilis*
A common macropod across the Top End, we had good views of this species at several sites, particularly around Victoria River Crossing and Timber Creek.

3. **Antilopine Wallaroo** *Macropus antilopinus*
We saw this species a few times around Victoria River Crossing, and again in Kakadu, usually in the early morning while foraging beside the road.
4. **Short-eared Rock-Wallaby** *Petrogale brachyotis*
Having missed this species at Victoria River, we caught up with a couple on the sandstone outcrops at Plum Tree Creek.

FRUIT BATS: Pteropodidae

5. **Black Flying-fox** *Pteropus alecto*
A common species across the Top End, we had our best views at Howard Springs where there is a large colony roost.

6. **Little Red Flying-fox** *Pteropus conspicillatus*
While searching for Ghost Bats we saw a couple of these small flying-foxes flying overhead.

FALSE VAMPIRE BATS: Megadermatidae

7. **Ghost Bat** *Macroderma gigas*
One of Australia’s rarest bats, we had great views of several Ghost Bats leaving a mine shaft after dusk near Pine Creek.

DOGS AND FOXES: Canidae

8. **Dingo** *Canis lupus*
Australia’s only native dog, we spotted one resting quietly under some bushes on the bank during our Yellow Water cruise.

PIGS: Suidae

9. **Pig** *Sus scrofa*
Another introduced species which has caused much environmental damage, one large wild pig was spotted crossing the road in Kakadu.

HORNED Ruminants: Bovidae

10. **Swamp Buffalo** *Bubalus bubalis*
A species introduced to Australia in the early-1800s, after reaching pest proportions numbers have been reduced, although a few still persist. We saw a couple of animals on the South Alligator River floodplain on our Yellow Water cruise.
REPTILE LIST

1. Freshwater Crocodile  
   *Crocodylus johnstoni*
2. Estuarine Crocodile  
   *Crocodylus porosus*
3. Northern Yellow-faced Turtle  
   *Emydura tanybaraga*
4. Swamplands Lashtail  
   *Gowidon temporalis*
5. Asian House Gecko  
   *Hemidactylus frenatus*
6. Green Tree Snake  
   *Dendrelaphis punctulata*

FROG LIST

1. Green Tree Frog  
   *Litoria caerulea*

BUTTERFLY LIST

1. Evening Brown  
   *Melanitis leda*
2. Varied Eggfly  
   *Crocodylus johnstoni*
3. Common Crow  
   *Euploea core*
4. Lesser Wanderer  
   *Danaus chrysippus*
5. Swamp Tiger  
   *Danaus affinis*