

# Queensland's Birds and Mammals

## Bargain Birdwatching Tour

### Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

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#### Outline itinerary

**Day 1/2** Depart London/in flight

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**Day 3** Cairns

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**Day 4** Michaelmas Cay

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**Day 5/7** Atherton Tableland

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**Day 8/9** Julatten

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**Day 10/11** Daintree National Park

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**Day 12** Depart Cairns

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**Day 13** Arrive London

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#### Departs

October & May (see website)

#### Focus

Queensland's natural heritage and wildlife, especially birds and mammals

#### Grading

A. Gentle birdwatching walks at most sites; all easy and optional

#### Dates & Prices

See website (tour code AUS01) or brochure



Images (from top to bottom)  
Yellow-bellied Sunbird, Azure Kingfisher & Blue-faced Parrot Finch



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**NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.**

This trip is based on targeting all the 13 bird species (listed with an asterisk), which are endemic to the Wet Tropics World Heritage area, as well as many Australian endemics throughout the area.

## Day 1

### Depart London

Depart London Heathrow on your flight to Brisbane. There are other flight options available if required, as Emirates, who we usually use, fly from Gatwick, Manchester, Birmingham, Newcastle and Glasgow, although it will depend on availability and an extra cost is likely.

## Day 2

### In flight

## Day 3

### Cairns

On arrival at Brisbane International Airport, collect luggage, pass through customs and transfer to the domestic terminal for your flight to Cairns, departing mid-morning. On arrival you will be met by your Australian guide and transferred to your Cairns hotel.

Cairns lies tucked between lush green mountain rainforests and the northern shore of Trinity Inlet, discovered by Captain Cook on Trinity Sunday in 1770. Established as a seaport in 1876 to serve the Hodgkinson goldfield, Cairns was named after Governor William Wellington Cairns. The city's prospects dived with that of the goldfields in the 1880's before the sugar and banana plantations became major contributors to the economy. Today the city is a delightful blend of architectural classics, from the early British-built public buildings to the rambling Australian country pubs; a handsome and interesting place, rich in history, character and charm. Once a quiet backwater of Australia's tropical north, Cairns now has a population of 140,000 and is a bustling cosmopolitan community, rivaling Townsville as the landing point for visitors to the country's fastest growing tourist area. It is blessed with a magnificent backdrop of rugged, rain forested hills and overlooks a tidal, mangrove-lined bay that attracts a wealth of waterbirds.

After lunch, depending on the weather, a stroll along the Esplanade is usually an excellent introduction to tropical Australian birding, with Rainbow Lorikeet, Double-eyed Fig-Parrot, Varied Honeyeater, Australasian Figbird, Helmeted Friarbird and (in summer) Pied Imperial Pigeon, likely in the shady trees, while the mangroves may give us a Mangrove Robin. Depending on the tide and time of the year, waders that we might see could include Eastern Curlew, Grey-tailed Tattler, Terek Sandpiper, Black-fronted Dotterel and Red-necked Stint. Larger birds such as White-faced Heron, Eastern Reef Egret and Australian Pelican are often along the shoreline, while terns such as Caspian, Crested and Gull-billed or even an Osprey may be seen fishing. Silver

Gulls, Australian White Ibis and Magpie Larks are more likely to be catching picnic scraps, chased by pugnacious Willie Wagtails.

## Day 4

### Michaelmas Cay

Today we will focus on the Great Barrier Reef, taking a full-day trip by catamaran to Michaelmas Cay, a National Park renowned as a nesting site for terns and noddies. A cay is a small sandy island that has formed on top of the reef, and on Michaelmas Cay some low scrub has grown from the seabird guano on the island, attracting yet more seabirds, but all vegetation was removed by Cyclone Ita in April 2014. However, the cay still holds large numbers of breeding and resting seabirds. Thousands of terns swarm above the island, predominantly ground-nesting Sooty Terns, Common Noddies and some Brown Boobies and possibly Black-naped, Crested and Lesser Crested Terns, Great and even Lesser Frigatebirds and occasionally Bridled Tern. Ruddy Turnstones may be seen on the shoreline.

Some two hours out to sea from Cairns, Michaelmas Cay offers all the pristine beauty of the outer reef, being surrounded by coral reefs, and clear, warm turquoise seas full of colourful reef fish which you may choose to enjoy either by glass-bottomed boat/submarine, or by snorkelling from the boat or the beach (equipment provided). On returning to the mainland you will spend your second night in Cairns.

## Day 5

### Cairns to Atherton Tableland

Travel north to Kuranda, birding along the way. Depending on tide times and areas visited earlier, perhaps visit Cairns Esplanade and/or Centenary Lakes. Species on the lakes and channels may include Australian Darter, Little Pied and Little Black Cormorant, Radjah Shelduck, Magpie Goose, Royal Spoonbill and three species of egrets. The surrounding trees often yield Yellow Oriole, Black Butcherbird, Olive-backed Sunbird, Mistletoebird and various honeyeaters.

We may visit a local wetland, Cattana wetlands, to look for Crimson Finch and White-browed Crake before beginning our ascent of the Dividing Range. In the village of Kuranda, we can visit the Barron River Gorge viewpoint. Common species often include Scaly-breasted Lorikeet, Emerald Dove and the elusive Wompoo Fruit-Dove, whose call echoes down from the rainforest canopy. Other possibilities include Little Shrike-thrush, Large-billed Scrubwren, and Spotted Catbird. Also look for the brilliant blue Ulysses butterfly and the vivid green of the Cairns Birdwing butterfly which provide flashes of colour among the trees.

Travel inland to the Atherton Tableland, an area of attractive upland dairy farming country, broken by pockets of high altitude rainforest (that hold some massive epiphytic curtain figs), deep volcanic lakes and wetlands. We will have a three night stay at in the picturesque village of Yungaburra – a National Trust village with eighteen heritage listed buildings. Close to the beautiful volcanic crater lake of Eacham, Barrine and Tinaroo, our accommodation is ideally located for easy access to a wide range of habitats including rainforest, wet sclerophyll forest and the more open eucalypt and woodland areas. We will look for some of the region's endemic birds and mammals in nearby rainforest and at the famous 'Cathedral' and 'Curtain' Fig trees.

## Day 6 - 7

### Atherton Tablelands

The Atherton Tablelands are part of the World Heritage listed Wet Tropics region and were once densely covered with high altitude rainforest. Today the area is one of upland dairy farming and rolling agricultural country, broken by pockets of remnant rainforest (that hold some massive strangler figs), deep volcanic lakes and wetlands.

During your stay you will visit walking tracks in the rainforest around both Lake Eacham and Lake Barrine, home to some of the region's endemic birds and mammals such as the forest-dwelling Musky Rat Kangaroo, the smallest and most primitive of all the kangaroos. Species we will be seeking during our stay Yungaburra include \*Chowchilla, \*Tooth-billed Bowerbird, \*Golden Bowerbird, \*Victoria's Riflebird (one of Australia's birds-of-paradise), \*Bridled Honeyeater, \*Grey-headed Robin, \*Bower's Shrike-thrush, \*Pied Monarch and \*Atherton Scrubwren, plus Spotted Catbird, Yellow-breasted Boatbill, Eastern Whipbird, Brown, Gerygone, Brown Cuckoo Dove, and White-headed Pigeon. Other species we will possibly see include Orange-footed Scrubfowl, Golden Whistler, and Red-backed Fairy-wren.

During our three days we will also experience a dawn chorus to be remembered at the Cathedral Fig Tree (r only). We will also spend a period at dusk, waiting to see the unobtrusive Platypus on one of the Tableland creeks. Part of one day may be spent on the western edge of the Tablelands with good opportunities for sighting some of the dry interior species. These are likely to include Eastern Yellow Robin, Grey Shrike-thrush, Leaden Flycatcher, Little Lorikeet, Brown Quail, Brolga and Yellow-tinted Honeyeater. For those with energy to go spotlighting after dinner, there will be a chance to sight some of the unusual mammals on the upland rainforests. These may include Green Ringtail Possum, Lemuroid Ringtail Possum, Common and Coppery Brushtail Possum, Red-legged Pademelon and, with luck, Lumholtz's Tree-Kangaroo.

## Day 8

### Yungaburra to Julatten

This morning we travel to Julatten for a two night stay at the well-known birding lodge Kingfisher Park, located in the rural community of Julatten. With its mixture of rainforest, cattle, sugar cane and rural small holdings, and its proximity to both magnificent Mount Lewis and the dry bushland west of the mountains, Julatten offers an exceptional variety of bird species, including all the Wet tropics endemics. Kingfisher Park Lodge is a comfortable and welcoming lodge, established specifically for visitors with an interest in birds and wildlife, its 12 acres of rainforest, pools and creek frontage being an absolute paradise for birders especially. We will (weather permitting), visit Mt Lewis, a true rainforest wilderness, accessible only by dirt road. This large area of rugged mountains and mysterious valleys is often shrouded in mist, and much research is yet to be done on the flora and fauna of this extensive upland forest.

This section of the journey affords ample opportunities for sighting birds which inhabit the drier, open woodlands of the area. En route, stop at Granite Gorge for a chance to see the resident, endemic rock wallabies, and visit Mareeba wetlands and Lake Mitchell for an assortment of wetland birds. Species today may include

Great Bowerbird, Chest-nut-breasted Mannikin, Double-barred Finch, Pied Butcherbird, Blue-winged Kookaburra, Crested Pigeon, Striated Pardalote, Pale-headed Rosella, Black-faced and White-bellied Cuckoo – shrike, Collard Sparrowhawk, Sarus Crane, Australian Bustard, Squatter Pigeon, Red-winged Parrot, Little Friarbird, Apostlebird, Blue-faced Honeyeater, Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo and Galah.

Some possible wetland species could include Comb-crested Jacana, Black-necked stork, Green-pygmy Goose, Australian Grebe, Black Swan, Pacific Black-Duck, Rajah Shelduck, Hardhead, Grey Teal, Wandering and Plumed Whistling Duck, White-faced and White-necked Heron, Glossy Ibis, Black-fronted Dotterel, Pink-eared Duck, Great Crested Grebe, Little Pied Cormorant, Latham's Snipe, Black-winked stilt, Masked Lapwing and occasionally Cotton Pygmy-Goose. We should reach Kingfisher Park before dark.

Birding around the lodge can also be very productive and likely species are Red-necked Crake, Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher (Nov to March), \*Lesser Sooty Owl, Noisy Pitta, Emerald Dove, Scarlet Honeyeater, Red-browed Finch, Little Friarbird, Pale-yellow Robin, Spectacled Monarch, and \*McLeay's, Yellow-spotted and Graceful Honeyeaters. An evening or early morning visit to the creek may allow a sighting of Platypus or Azure Kingfisher.

## Day 9

### Kingfisher Park, Julatten

Kingfisher Park is an ideal base for visiting Mt Lewis, the Mossman River and the dry tropical woodland around Mt Carbine. An old logging clearing in the upland rainforest of Mt Lewis offers the best opportunity in North Queensland of sighting the elusive Blue-faced Parrot-Finch (November/March). Other possible species could include Topknot Pigeon, White-throated Treecreeper, \*Fernwren, White-cheeked Honeyeater, Eastern Spinebill, Australian King-Parrot, Yellow-throated Scrubwren, Barred Cuckoo-Shrike and \*Mountain Thornbill.

Spend the afternoon in the dry tropical woodlands around Maryfarms and Mt Carbine, where possible species include the Australian Bustard, Red-winged Parrot, Galah, Apostlebird, grey-crowned Babbler, Pale-headed Rosella, Great Bowerbird, Red-tailed Black Cockatoo, White-throated Gerygone, Torresian crow and Double-barred Finch.

There may be an opportunity to spotlight after dark for creatures such as Eastern Barn Owl, Striped Possum and Leaf-tailed Gecko.

## Day 10

### Julatten to Daintree National Park

After a final walk around the Lodge with a chance to photograph birds that come to the feeders, we then move onto the area known as the Daintree, which includes Cape Tribulation, for a chance to see rare and primitive plants and additional bird species that might even include the elusive Cassowary.

In 1770 Captain James Cook ran hard upon a coral reef off the wild rainforest coastline. Looking ashore he named the most prominent headland "Cape Tribulation – because here began all our troubles." The Daintree River was named after George Daintree, a Queensland Government geologist of the 1800's.

Positioned on a point of the globe that has escaped the wrath of successive ice ages, volcanic upheavals and climatic changes, the Daintree/Cape Tribulation coastline remains a refuge for a collection of flora and fauna little changed since the dinosaurs roamed the earth. This area of primeval forest, occupying only a tiny fraction of Australia, is home to a disproportionately high percentage of native mammals, birds and butterflies. The area is also rich in the history and culture of the Aboriginal people who have lived in these rainforests for tens of thousands of years. Theirs is amongst the oldest surviving oral culture on earth with kinship structures and spiritual beliefs bound closely to the rainforest environment.

Although cattle grazing and arable farming have been tried over the years, no large or permanent farming businesses have succeeded; the wet tropical climate and rugged terrain have saved it from the full impact of European settlement. In the early 1980's the subdivisions created in the Daintree/Cape Tribulation rainforest and the bulldozing of a track between Cape Tribulation and Bloomfield attracted world attention and debate about the future of the rainforests in the area. Today the area is protected under World Heritage listing, and managed by the Wet Tropics Management Authority in association with local and state authorities.

It is only an hour's drive to Daintree Village, but we will stop at one of the coastal communities for a picnic lunch and we'll try for birds such as Mangrove Robin, Beach Stone Curlew and Radjah Shelduck. Later in the afternoon we'll arrive at the little village of Daintree, alongside the Daintree River.

## Day 11

### Daintree National Park

We start with an early morning boat cruise on the Daintree River, departing at 0600 or 0630, exploring this excellent area for some of the more elusive species such as Great-billed Heron, Papuan Frogmouth and Little Kingfisher, as well as many resident species such as the Darter, Little Pied Cormorant, Large-billed Gerygone, Shining Flycatcher, Yellow Oriole and Azure Kingfisher.

After breakfast, cross the Daintree River by ferry and take a walk at the Jindalba section of the Daintree National Park, which offers a good opportunity for sighting the Southern Cassowary, providing there is a reasonable quantity of fruit on the ground. Other species likely in this area could include Yellow-breasted Sunbird, Little Shrike-Thrush, \*Pied Monarch.

Spend time at the Daintree Discovery Centre, an accredited World Heritage Centre. Nestled amongst the rainforest, it provides well illustrated information on the flora and fauna of the area. It also offers the opportunity to climb a four storey tower to search amongst the rainforest canopy for birds such as the Mistletoe bird and Double-eyed Fig Parrot. There will also be time to explore the diversity of the plants, including many rare and primitive species in the lowland forest.

We re-cross the Daintree River and return to our accommodation in Daintree Village. Tonight we will dine out at a local restaurant.

## Day 12

## Daintree to Cairns

If flight times allow, we will take an early morning walk before returning to Cairns Airport along the (scenic coastal Captain Cook Highway) for the flight home via Brisbane.

## Day 13

Arrive London



*Michaelmas Cay*

## Tour grading

This is a birdwatching and wildlife tour that covers the very best of Queensland's fine selection of habitats (indeed, some of the very best that Australia has to offer) with – especially by Australian standards – minimal traveling (once you have arrived in Australia!). We will be driving largely on good, metalled roads and enjoying generally short wildlife walks at a gentle pace, the relaxed pace and itinerary of this tour making it suitable for most ages and levels of fitness.

## Weather

The months of May/June are approaching the middle of winter in Northern Australia, but it is hardly a cold time of the year. Weather is very pleasant in the low to mid twenties, with some days even warmer. Evenings can be cool though, particularly in the Atherton tablelands, down to single figures.

October is generally warmer and more humid.

## Food & accommodation

Accommodation will be in a variety of comfortable hotels, lodges and chalets, all rooms with private facilities. All meals during tour are included in the cost, apart from the first lunch and dinner in Cairns.

## How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk), or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.

Please note that as this is a Bargain Selection tour, therefore carefully costed to maximise value for money, it may be necessary to impose a small group surcharge of 10% on groups falling short of required numbers..

If you would like to extend your holiday and possibly include O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat, Fraser Island and whale watching, inland to Uluru (Ayers Rock), across to Kakadu National Park, or a city visit to Sydney or Melbourne, please let us know and we will be happy to help.

(Images by Gwen Owen, Tourism Queensland & O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat)