

Australia - Queensland

Naturetrek Tour Report

31 October – 7 November 2015

Report compiled by Carol Iles



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Tour Participants: Carol Iles (Leader) with two Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Saturday 31st October

Cairns to Yungaburra

After 10am pick-up from Bay Village Resort, we made a brief stop on the Esplanade but the high tide restricted shorebird sightings to Great Knot and Bar-tailed Godwit. Varied Honeyeaters, Australian Figbirds and White-breasted Woodswallows joined the list before we moved to Centenary Lakes, via a park where Bush Stone-curlews were lounging by the fence. The regulars on the lake included Radjah Shelduck and Little Black Cormorants, and a stop at one of the tidal channels where a fisherman was cast-netting yielded Great and Little Egret, Striated Heron and Collared Kingfisher. Heading north, a detour to the mouth of the Barron River provided the surprise sighting of a flock of Red-tailed Black Cockatoos feeding in the eucalypts, before we continued north and into the Cattana Wetlands. A short walk allowed us to add Comb-crested Jacana, Green Pygmy Goose, Black Butcherbird and Olive-backed Sunbird, before the increasing heat of the day prompted our departure from the coastal plain and uphill beneath the Skyrail to Kuranda. Choosing the peace of secluded Wrights Lookout for our picnic lunch, we had Silvereyes in the bushes and somewhat distant Pacific Baza and White-throated Needletails overhead.

Moving onward and gently upward over the Dividing Range onto the Tableland, we turned off before Mareeba to take a back road where a stop for Dollarbird also gave us Black-faced Cuckooshrikes, Noisy and Little Friarbirds and Spangled Drongos all fly-catching around a garden's tall trees amid open farmland. A roadside stop for a cuppa gave brief looks at Pale-headed Rosella and, continuing on, we came across a mob of Agile Wallabies before we rejoined the highway towards Atherton.

We saw our first Sarus Cranes en route to Yungaburra where the Platypus viewing area failed in our brief visit to produce its namesake but Purple Swamphens were strolling in the field behind. We checked in to Kookaburra Lodge motel before making our way to Nick's Restaurant for dinner, supervised by the inimitable Anna.

Day 2

Sunday 1st November

Atherton Tableland

After a leisurely 7.30am breakfast on our verandas, we drove only a few km to the shore of Lake Tinaroo. Between rain showers we had looks, some requiring the telescope, at Australian Wood Duck (Maned Duck), Common Sandpiper, Sacred Kingfisher, Caspian Tern, Tawny Grassbird and Black-faced Monarch. Then we drove partway along the Gillies Highway, turning off (via a Golden-headed Cisticola on a fence) to take in the enormity of the Cathedral Fig where a Grey-headed Robin was feeding a juvenile and a Bower's Shrikethrush was nest-building. From the road adjacent we witnessed a Wedge-tailed Eagle being followed by noisy Sulphur-crested Cockatoos with a Grey Goshawk on THEIR tail! Having worn off breakfast somewhat, we decided to make the 1927 teahouse at Lake Barrine our lunch stop, watching the Great-crested Grebes, before taking the short walk to the two endemic Bull Kauri trees and chasing a few honeyeaters and butterflies in the colourful gardens.

Then we drove via Malanda dairy town to Tarzali Lakes to ensure platypus was added to the list. In addition we saw a far less easy species: a Water Rat, swimming fast towards the bank. An afternoon visit to Hasties Swamp produced the anticipated crowds of Magpie Geese and Plumed Whistling Ducks with lesser numbers of Wandering Whistling Ducks, Black-winged Stilts, Royal Spoonbills, White-necked Heron and one Nankeen Night Heron. Panic in the duck ranks alerted us to a Square-tailed Kite passing over, and the telescope came into play for Sharp-tailed Sandpipers on the far bank until we had to leave for our 4pm appointment at the Bat Hospital where Jenny and the team explained everything to do with Flying Foxes and introduced us to their winged friends. Having elected to eat again at Nick's, we went straight from there to the nearby Curtain Fig Tree for some spotlighting, encountering a comical Brushtail Possum waddling along the road as we drove. The Curtain Fig proved quiet for mammals, perhaps due to several spotlighters being there or perhaps due to the noisy young Lesser Sooty Owl we saw with a parent high up in the Curtain Fig! By moving to a nearby road instead, we managed to notch up sightings of Coppery Brushtails and a Green Ringtail Possum before retiring to bed.

Day 3

Monday 2nd November

Atherton Tableland

After a look round historic Yungaburra which included Helmeted (Hornbilled) Friarbird and Fairy Gerygone, we headed out to the Curtain Fig Tree for a daylight view, adding Spectacled Monarch to our total, followed by a stop at Lake Eacham where Brown Cuckoo-Dove and Barred Cuckooshrike made an appearance, before driving to Nerada Tea Plantation where, after a cuppa, the hoped-for Lumholtz's Tree Kangaroos obliged in the form of Mum and teenager 'roo. A cross-country excursion got us to Herberton where a slightly late lunch was obtained in arguably the oldest hotel on the Tableland, the Royal. Fuelled and a little cooler, we headed out to Wondecla for a total change of species. As we enjoyed some afternoon tea by a little creek, we watched a procession of bathers and visitors which included Leaden Flycatcher, Rufous Whistler, Eastern Yellow Robin and Red-backed Fairywren. The Yellow-tinted Honeyeaters finally allowed us views, feeding on insects beside pretty Dusky Woodswallows.

With more places and birds to see, we tore ourselves away and, in a short time, were back into rainforest, this time at Mt Hypipamee. The star bird there was a Golden Bowerbird but Fernwrens and Spotted Catbirds were the noisy ones. Having gazed into the cauldron of the Crater, we returned to the carpark for our picnic dinner. As darkness fell the cicadas became painfully loud but mercifully only for a short time, allowing us then to listen as we walked and spotlit for possums. Strangely the only species which put in an appearance out of all the possibilities was, repeatedly, Lemuroid Possum. Happy enough with those, we headed back to Yungaburra.

Day 4

Tuesday 3rd November

Yungaburra to Julatten

Barbara joined me for an early visit to Lake Eacham which rewarded us with nice views of Wompoo Fruit Dove, Barred Cuckooshrike, Pied Monarch and a displaying male Victoria's Riflebird before breakfast back at the Lodge. Checking out, we visited Hasties Swamp again and were rewarded with views we'd missed before of Yellow-billed Spoonbill, Buff-banded Rail and Pink-eared Duck as well as White-winged Triller and White-cheeked Honeyeater. From Hasties we passed through Atherton township and onward to the dry environment

of Granite Gorge. Large fig trees cling onto the huge granite boulders with their roots stretching down into the creek bed where a Saw-shelled Turtle was a surprise sighting for us. Very tame Mareeba Rock Wallabies and Squatter Pigeons were the main attractions for us, as well as morning tea. Then it was onward to Mareeba for a little shopping and some lazy Eastern Grey Kangaroos before continuing north. At the turnoff to Mareeba Wetlands, we encountered two ex-Wetlands Emus under a lone tree, then a White-faced Heron in the irrigation ditch. We had lunch at the visitor centre with the Welcome Swallows and numerous waterbirds on Clancy's Lagoon. Large-footed Myotis fishing bats were roosting in between the roof beams and a (brown) White-lipped Green Tree Frog was hunkered down on a beam of his own. On our way out we spotted a Brown Treecreeper (race *melanota*) then met a bathing party at the causeway that included Brown-backed and White-throated Honeyeaters. A male and female Koel were lovely to see and our second Nankeen Night Heron was a nice surprise.

With the afternoon cooling a little, we drove on north through dry savannah woodlands, much of it recently burnt. With the drought, Lake Mitchell was at a low ebb but the causeway track was still rewarding, with close views of Green and Cotton Pygmy Geese as well as three Grey-crowned Babblers and a Whiskered Tern, as well as being peaceful and beautiful. With the sun lowering, we left the lake and passed through tiny Mt Molloy town en route to Kingfisher Park Birdwatchers Lodge, in time to stroll down to the Crake Pool where we were rewarded with clear views of a pair of Red-necked Crakes passing the pool in front of us, giving us time to go and spot a Platypus in the creek too before dinner on the deck as the Bush Rats, Fawn-footed Melomys and Northern Brown Bandicoots had their dinner at the feeder nearby.

Day 5

Wednesday 4th November

Julatten

Beginning with a leisurely breakfast on the verandah with birds such as Red-browed Finch, Macleay's and Graceful Honeyeater, we took a walk around the grounds of Kingfisher Park and added Metallic Starling and Grey Whistler. After a cold drink we headed to a local dam to see Cotton and Green Pygmy Geese, Comb-crested Jacana, and Glossy Ibis, before finding Yellow-breasted Boatbill and Northern Fantail as well as a Pied Monarch for Adrian. A Black-necked Stork was a nice surprise.

Then we headed up Mt Lewis Rd in search of more of the Wet Tropics endemics which included Victoria's Riflebird on a perch (to even the score for Adrian), Mountain Thornbill over morning coffee, Bower's Shrikethrush and a Tooth-billed Bowerbird on his court of ginger leaves. Andrew had lunch ready for us when we got back to Kingfisher Park where we could watch the Peaceful, Bar-shouldered and Emerald Doves, then we headed out towards the "dry country". First stop was Abattoir Swamp which provided views of several honeyeater species including Yellow, White-throated and Banded. Then Mount Molloy, as well as having Red-winged Parrots, had a beautiful opal necklace in the Opal Bar shop with Barbara's name on it.... Moving on towards Mount Carbine we were able to add Tawny Frogmouth, Pied Butcherbird, Pale-headed Rosella, Galah and Apostlebird to the list, finishing off with a Pallid Cuckoo, flocks of Diamond Doves and a spectacular displaying male Australian Bustard. Then it was back to Kingfisher Park where Andrew provided dinner al fresco again.

Day 6

Thursday 5th November

Julatten to Daintree Village

After breakfasting on the verandah, we made our departure from Kingfisher Park and did a circuit which added Lovely and Red-backed Fairywren, Australian Pipit and Horsfield's Bushlark to the list, before we began our descent down the Dividing Range to Mossman. We had a packed lunch with us which we ate at Newell Beach, but not before checking out the birds at the boat ramp, seeing Brahminy Kite, Little Egret and a Whimbrel.

Having been invited to join Ian "Sauce" Worcester on his boat for an afternoon trip, we continued along the coast to Daintree village and our accommodation at Riverview Lodge to check in before a relaxing cruise on the Daintree River. Birds for the trip included Papuan Frogmouth and Shining Flycatcher, while two snakes joined the list in the form of Australian Scrub (Amethystine) Python and Common (Green) Tree Snake. We returned as Cattle Egrets flocked in to roost opposite the jetty. Dinner was only a short stroll across the road at the General Store where it was movie night, so we elected after eating to do our bird list on Riverview's expansive verandah.

Day 7

Friday 6th November

Daintree

This morning all of us managed the early start and walked down to the boat ramp below for our 6am cruise with Sauce on the Daintree River. This trip we had a lovely close-up of an Azure Kingfisher, as well as friendly Australasian Grebes, a Pheasant Coucal and Striated Heron, finishing off with Blue-winged Kookaburras near the boat ramp - and all before breakfast.

At 10am we headed for the ferry but not before we'd had VERY close looks at Metallic Starlings nest-building at car-window height on the roadside! After crossing the Daintree River we stopped at Alexandra Lookout where Pacific Baza was displaying high up. Having noted how busy the Discovery Centre was, we elected to return there later and continued north instead, via Thornton's Beach to Marrja boardwalk where the tide was so low the crabs were scuttling everywhere. Electing not to go on to Cape Tribulation, we returned to sit under the palm trees on Thornton's Beach for our picnic lunch, where Bridled Terns were nesting on the offshore island and a couple of Whimbrels were poking along the shoreline.

The Daintree Ice Cream factory was our next stop, to sample a selection including Wattle Seed. With all the tour buses long gone, we returned to enjoy the Discovery Centre and nearby Jindalba boardwalk. At the Centre a Metallic Starling colony provided the constant noise backdrop, while at Jindalba we were entertained by the Wompoo Fruit Doves and Spotted Catbirds calling and had good views of two of each, along with a gorgeous male Superb Fruit Dove. Sadly, no Cassowary appeared as a grand finale so we took the ferry and headed for dinner at the Store again since we'd all enjoyed the food there.

Day 8

Saturday 7th November

Daintree to Cairns

After our early start yesterday, 7am was deemed early enough to have a walk in nearby rainforest in hopes of a Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher but, although monarchs, pittas and fairywrens were calling, no kingfisher was

heard. So we headed back for breakfast in order to check out for 10am and start towards Cairns. A brief stop at a fish farm gave us Gull-billed Terns, Black-fronted Dotterel and lots of Sharp-tailed Sandpipers as well as an Eastern Osprey. Stops along the way failed to produce the hoped-for Beach Stone-curlew but a big surprise was a Noddy just flying easily along the shoreline to land on a rock. The Black and Common being hard to separate, it was lucky that a few days later the undoubtedly same bird was photographed and appeared to be a Common Noddy. Time allowed us then a brief stop at a garden pond with no new birds but close Hardheads. Agile Wallabies were our last mammals, seen from the highway, before a lunchtime return to the Bay Village Resort and sad goodbyes. The weather had been sunny, not too hot, not humid and relatively calm for the tour and this last day was no exception. Time for a coldie by the pool perhaps, while the guide heads for home

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Species Lists per Day (Courtesy of Adrian & Barbara Sumner)

Cairns, Queensland, Australia: 28th October 2015

Esplanade and marina

Australian Pelican	<i>Pelecanus conspicillatus</i> : several
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i> : 1
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i> : many
Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i> : 1
Eastern Curlew	<i>Numenius madagascariensis</i> : 2
Great Knot	<i>Calidris tenuirostris</i> : several
Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i> : 1
Black-fronted Dotterel	<i>Elsayornis melanops</i> : 2
Silver Gull	<i>Larus novaehollandiae</i> : common
Gull-billed Tern	<i>Sterna nilotica</i> : 2
Caspian Tern	<i>Sterna caspia</i> : 2
Crested Tern	<i>Sterna bergii</i> : 2 immature
Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i> : common
Bar-shouldered Dove	<i>Geopelia humeralis</i>
Spotted Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i> : 1
Peaceful Dove	<i>Geopelia striata</i> : quite common
Pied Imperial Pigeon	<i>Ducula bicolor</i> : 2
Fairy Martin	<i>Hirundo ariel</i> : 2 (at marina)
Magpie Lark	<i>Grallina cyanoleuca</i> : a few
Willie Wagtail	<i>Rhipidura leucophrys</i> : 1
Figbird	<i>Sphecotheres viridis</i> : 1 pair
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i> : fairly common
Nutmeg Mannikin	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i> : 4 on grass
Common Mynah	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i> : common
Spectacled Flying Fox	<i>Pteropus conspicillatus</i> : many in town centre

Cairns Botanic Gardens & Centenary Lakes, 29th October 2015

Orange-footed Scrubfowl	<i>Megapodius reinwardt</i> : several
Australian Brush-Turkey,	<i>Alectura lathamii</i> : 2
Magpie Goose	<i>Anseranas semipalmata</i> : several
Radjah Shelduck	<i>Tadorna radjah</i> : several
Pacific Black Duck	<i>Anas superciliosa</i> : several
Little Black Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax sulcirostris</i> : several

Australian Pelican	<i>Pelecanus conspicillatus</i> : several
Australian White Ibis	<i>Threskiornis molucca</i> : several
Royal Spoonbill	<i>Platalea regia</i> : 1
Black-necked Stork (Jabiru)	<i>Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus</i> : 1 female
Pied Imperial Pigeon	<i>Ducula bicolor</i> : 3
Rainbow Lorikeet	<i>Trichoglossus haematodus</i> : several
Laughing Kookaburra	<i>Dacelo novaeguineae</i> : heard
Rainbow Bee-eater	<i>Merops ornatus</i> : several
Fairy Martin	<i>Hirundo ariel</i> : 1
Magpie Lark	<i>Grallina cyanoleuca</i> : 2
Willie Wagtail	<i>Rhipidura leucophrys</i> : 2
Yellow Oriole	<i>Oriolus flavocinctus</i> : several calling; 1 seen
Black Butcherbird	<i>Cracticus quoyi</i> : 1

Turtle sp.: 1

Ulysses Butterfly *Papilio ulysseus*: a few

Orange Cluster Bug

Fiddler Crab: many in Saltwater Creek

Golden Orb-weaver Spider (or similar): several

Cairns (town centre), Queensland, Australia: 29th October 2015

Pied Imperial Pigeon *Ducula bicolor*: a few

Spectacled Flying Fox *Pteropus conspicillatus*: many

Cairns, Queensland, Australia: 30th October 2015

Eastern Reef Heron *Egretta sacra*: 1 flying over marina

Masked Lapwing *Vanellus miles*: 1

Pied Imperial Pigeon *Ducula bicolor*: a few

Rainbow Lorikeet *Trichoglossus haematodus*: many going to roost in town centre

Welcome Swallow *Hirundo neoxena*: 1

Willie Wagtail *Rhipidura leucophrys*: 1

Common Mynah *Acridotheres tristis*: several

Spectacled Flying Fox *Pteropus conspicillatus*: many in town centre

Michaelmas Cay, Queensland, Australia: 30th October 2015

Brown Booby	<i>Sula leucogaster</i> : a few
Lesser Frigate Bird	<i>Fregata ariel</i> : 3
Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i> : a few
Silver Gull	<i>Larus novaehollandiae</i> : several
Crested Tern	<i>Sterna bergii</i> : many
Lesser Crested Tern	<i>Sterna bengalensis</i> : a few
Black-naped Tern	<i>Sterna sumatrana</i> : a few
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i> : 1
Sooty Tern	<i>Sterna fuscata</i> : many
Common Noddy	<i>Anous stolidus</i> : many
Black Noddy	<i>Anous minutus</i> : 1
Turtle sp.: 3	
Giant Clam	<i>Tridacna</i> sp.: a few (also at Hastings Reef)
Cowrie spp.: a few on beach	<i>Spirula spirula</i> : several shells on beach

Daintree Village, Queensland, 7th November 2015

Masked Lapwing *Vanellus miles*

Stick insect

Locust sp.

Stewart Creek, Daintree, Queensland, 7th November 2015

Little Pied Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax melanoleucos</i>
Cattle Egret	<i>Ardea ibis</i>
Bar-shouldered Dove	<i>Geopelia humeralis</i>
Wompoo Fruit-Dove	<i>Ptilinopus magnificus</i> : heard
Pied Imperial Pigeon	<i>Ducula bicolor</i>
Laughing Kookaburra	<i>Dacelo novaeguineae</i>
Noisy Pitta	<i>Pitta versicolor</i> : heard
Welcome Swallow	<i>Hirundo neoxena</i>
Fairy Gerygone	<i>Gerygone palpebrosa</i>
Helmeted Friarbird	<i>Philemon buceroides</i>
Grey Whistler, <i>Pachycephala simplex</i>	
Little Shrike-Thrush	<i>Colluricincla megarhyncha</i>
Spectacled Monarch	<i>Monarcha trivirgatus</i> : Not seen by me

Pied Monarch	<i>Arses kaupi</i>
Spangled Drongo	<i>Dicrurus bracteatus</i>
Varied Triller	<i>Lalage leucomela</i>
Yellow Oriole	<i>Oriolus flavocinctus</i> : heard
Figbird	<i>Sphecothebes viridis</i>
White-breasted Woodswallow	<i>Artamus leucorhynchus</i>
Australasian Pipit	<i>Anthus novaeseelandiae</i>
Metallic Starling	<i>Aplonis metallica</i>

Fish Farm, nr Daintree, Queensland, 7th November 2015

Australian White Ibis	<i>Threskiornis molucca</i>
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	<i>Calidris acuminata</i>
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
Black-fronted Dotterel	<i>Euseyornis melanops</i>
Gull-billed Tern	<i>Sterna nilotica</i>

Wonga, Queensland, 7th November 2015

Australian White Ibis	<i>Threskiornis molucca</i>
Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliastur Indus</i>
Bush Stone-Curlew	<i>Burhinus grallarius</i>
Masked Lapwing	<i>Vanellus miles</i>
Spotted Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>
Rainbow Bee-eater	<i>Merops ornatus</i>
Helmeted [Horn-billed] Friarbird	<i>Philemon buceroides</i>
Figbird	<i>Sphecothebes viridis</i>

Wonga to Newell Beach, Queensland, 7th November 2015

Straw-necked Ibis	<i>Threskiornis spinicollis</i>
Silver Gull	<i>Larus novaehollandiae</i>
Black Noddy	<i>Anous minutus</i> : 1
Magpie Lark	<i>Grallina cyanoleuca</i>

Newell Beach, Queensland, 7th November 2015

Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
Intermediate Egret	<i>Ardea intermedia</i>

Mossman, Queensland, 7th November 2015

Common Mynah *Acridotheres tristis*

Mossman to Cairns, Queensland, 7th November 2015

Australian Grebe *Tachybaptus novaehollandiae*

Magpie Goose *Anseranas semipalmata*

Pacific Black Duck *Anas superciliosa*

Hardhead *Aythya australis*

Coot *Fulica atra*

Masked Lapwing *Vanellus miles*

Agile Wallaby *Macropus agilis*

Queensland (no specific location), 7th November 2015

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

Eastern Curlew *Numenius madagascarensis*

Rainbow Lorikeet *Trichoglossus haematodus*

Pheasant Coucal *Centropus phasianinus*: heard

Australian Swiftlet *aerodramus terraereginae*

Willie Wagtail *Rhipidura leucobryis*

Spectacled Flying Fox *Pteropus conspicillatus*

Ulysses Butterfly *Papilio Ulysses*

Blue Triangle Butterfly *Graphium sarpedon*