

Pre-extension Lamington National Park, Australia

Naturetrek Tour Report

28 November - 3 December 2018



Male Fairywren



Crimson Rosella



Water Dragon



Male Satin Bowerbird in Bower

Report and images by Ed Drewitt



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Summary

With the chance to acclimatise to the weather and the time zone, this trip to O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat in Lamington National Park, provided the perfect introduction to Australia's rainforest wildlife. During the few days we had we saw 80 species of bird including Tawny Frogmouth, Paradise Riflebird, Logrunners, and bowerbirds such as Green Catbird, Satin Bowerbird and the stunning Regent Bowerbird. A few of the group were even rewarded with views of a few Albert's Lyrebirds. Beautiful large butterflies flew like birds amongst the canopy while down on the ground skinks, tree frogs and a beautiful evening display of glow worms gave a flavour of what else lives here. The mammal cast was just as exciting with Red-necked Padamelons (and joeys), a few sightings of Black Wallaby and Red-legged Padamelon, possums and a bandicoot. There was even a chance sighting of a koala on the way back to Brisbane.

Day 1

Wednesday 28th November

Flight to Dubai

Leaving a damp and oppressive low cloud in London, five of the group headed off with Ed on an evening flight to Dubai. Flying overnight across Europe, we headed into the Middle East and down the Persian Gulf into Dubai for breakfast time. The group was 10 in total and others joined us in Dubai, Brisbane or at O'Reilly's itself.

Day 2

Thursday 29th November

Flight from Dubai to Brisbane

After a smooth flight to Dubai, the connecting flight was three hours later. Dubai, as to be expected, was bright sunshine and 24°Celsius as we left at 11am. Heading south-west we crossed the southern tip of India, before crossing over Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Indonesia and then across the length of northern Australia, touching down in Brisbane at 6.10am on Friday morning.

Day 3

Friday 30th November

O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat

We arrived on a glorious morning and even at 6am it was 20°C. After a reasonably quick baggage and security check we met our host Luisa for a tour of the city. Luisa talked about the history of the third largest city in Australia, pointed out some of the older architecture from the 1960s onwards and various flowering plants and birds along the way. We visited Mount Coot-tha, named after a tiny, harmless bee, where views were stunning across the city; recent fires in the north had caused some smog to form. Up to half a dozen Sulphur-crested Cockatoos were calling around us, and later spotted in groups of two or three in trees; they are surprisingly hard to see. An Australian Brush-turkey caused some excitement in the nearby bushes and showing its red head and yellow neck line. Shirley and Ed caught a glimpse of a Peregrine glide past. Noisy Miners were also calling nearby and moving around in a small group. After some coffee or ice creams in already searing heat, we drove down to the Botanic Gardens, passing Maned or Wood Duck on the lawn at the entrance. Water Dragon lizards were

common, with striking males basking on the paths and mulch. We pass through the Chinese Garden where dragonflies were flying around. Then into the Bonsai tree zone with specimens tens of years old. Before we headed off we saw the tiny bees, the Coot-tha, coming out of their nest hole in a fallen log. Some of the group also saw Sacred Ibis, Dusky Moorhens and a few Little Pied Cormorants on the lake. Time had run out and we popped by a hotel 15 minutes away to pick up Sara and say goodbye to Luisa. We then headed south for two hours through the suburbs, farmland, scrub and then into the mountains and rainforest to O'Reilly's. Based in Lamington National Park, O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat, a family-run guesthouse, sits on a plateau at 1,000 metres. Along the way we spotted a variety of birdlife including Australian White Ibises, Straw-necked Ibises, Maned Ducks, Cattle Egrets, Little Egrets, Australian Pelican (in a field creek), Magpie Larks, Pied Currawongs, Australian Magpies, Laughing Kookaburra, Sacred Kingfisher and Masked Plovers. Plus a huge colony of flying foxes hanging in Eucalyptus trees by a sports field and the road. We stopped after an hour for refreshments in Canungra where Crested Pigeon on a tv aerial spotted. We continued on, creeping up into higher and higher ground along a narrow road where recent works are helping to make it safe and reduce subsidence. At one point we stopped at traffic works and Janice spotted a stunning yellow and black Regent Bowerbird.

We arrived at 12.45pm and quickly checked in, headed to our rooms and then met at 1.15pm in the café for lunch. We were able to choose activities that we wanted to do the following day which involved an early morning bird walk, a glow worm tour, a bird of prey show, a wildlife encounter or simply enjoy the trails, views, waterfalls and gorges that this beautiful site offers.

During the afternoon everyone was able to get close encounters of many of the habituated birds, particularly the Crimson Rosellas, Australian King Parrots and the brush-turkeys. Kingfisher-blue Superb Fairy Wrens were common out in the open with their long tails cocked. Welcome Swallows were nesting under wooden beams and parking spaces beneath rooms, with young in their nests. Along a boardwalk forest birds were feeding and turning over leaves metres away including Eastern Whipbird, very tame White-browed Scrubwrens, Logrunner, Green Catbird and Eastern Yellow Robin. Grey Shrike-thrush, Pheasant Coucal, Lewin's Honeyeater, a White-throated Needletail and striking Red-browed Finches were also seen. The honeyeaters were perhaps the most vocal of all the birds in the afternoon while the whipbirds had the most distinctive and explosive song. Janice, Shirley, Nicola and Ed had a nice surprise when the locally common (though nationally rare) Albert's Lyrebird made an appearance; at least two in fact, an adult and a juvenile scrubbed away, raking out leaves and even a tile, with their strong pheasant-like feet. With a tip-off they also admired the bower of a blue-black Satin Bowerbird. He was sat nearby and his blue ornaments consisted mainly of plastic rather than anything natural, sadly. Earlier, a small group had seen him impress a female and mate. Red-necked Pademelons (wallabies) had also been spotted, including one with a joey.

We met again at 6.30pm to look for Southern BooBook owls with no luck – however, the sound of the cicadas in the fading light was remarkable. Sally and Ian had just arrived and joined us for a delicious three-course dinner at 7pm, and the chance to meet and catch up with our now group ten on this pre-extension tour.

Day 4

Saturday 1st December

O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat

After a refreshing cool night and the chance to catch up on sleep, the dawn chorus began around 4am with birdsong continuing throughout the morning. Eastern Whipbirds, Satin Bowerbirds, Wonga Pigeons and Grey Shrike-thrushes were all joining in.

We all met together for a bird walk at 6.45am, just before breakfast. Recovered from the long flights, we didn't have to walk far to see some brilliant views of bowerbirds. With the main birdwatching public heading away from us and having left some fruit in feeders, at least three male and two female Regent Bowerbirds showed near O'Reilly's reception. The female, although not black and yellow, was still stunning with a dark cap and scalloped markings. Satin Bowerbirds also showed including a male and several females, while a few Green Catbirds called in the trees above us, although remained largely hidden. In the sunshine a skink basked and allowed us to get very close. Along the board walk a Logrunner showed really well as it dug a deep bowl in the leaf litter; an Eastern Whipbird was nearby and both shared a distinctive white throat, more extensive in the Logrunner. Alongside the very tame White-browed Bushwrens, a Yellow-throated Bushwren - slightly larger with a black mask, yellow throat and pink legs - appeared. The odd Brown Thornbill, Chiff-chaff size birds were feeding amongst the undergrowth. Before we headed out a long-tailed Cuckoo-dove or Brown Pigeons called above us.

Breakfast was a buffet-affair with a huge range of different foods, fresh honey (dripping from the wax) and a good cup of tea or coffee. For the rest of the day different members of the group had a variety of activities planned, and most met after dinner for the glow-worm walk.

After breakfast, Ed took some of the group along the Wishing Tree trail, a 1.2km walk through the sub-tropical rainforest. We then continued on several more kilometres and turned off to visit Morans Fall. Being the middle of spring there was plenty of birdsong, particularly from the Golden Whistlers which had territories all along our trail. We saw several grey females with yellow vents; the males remained elusive until the very end of our walk when the male, looking like a brighter male Great Tit, came out into the open fly-catching. Yellow-throated Scrubwrens also had regular territories along the walk and were relatively easy to see. We turned off to reach Mick's Tower - Susan, Chris, Mike and Dave went 18m up the tower where various interpretation panels gave useful information about the trees, leaves and ferns. Chris was rewarded with a White-throated Treecreeper. Down at the bottom, Ed, Nicola, Janice and Shirley had sketchy glimpses of Green Catbird before one sat out on a branch giving the best views yet. A male Satin Bowerbird was also calling nearby.

We walked across a wooden chain bridge over a gully full of tree ferns and headed to the Wishing Tree, a huge tree with a huge hollow to walk in and under. Pausing, we continued down and followed the stream finding Rufous Fantail and then Grey Fantail. The rainforest changed into more open, even dryer scrub woodland. A larger Russet-tailed Thrush hopped away from the leaf litter and a pair of Logrunners were hanging out together by some rocks.

As the woodland opened out into open grassland and scrub, the temperature rose. We walked up the Red Road back towards O'Reilly's and turned off to Morans Fall, walking another 400 metres to a lookout across to a waterfall. It was a splendid site. Heading towards lunchtime, we slowly to the walk back up hill to our base and arrived back around 1pm. The afternoon was free for everyone to relax, photograph the wildlife and use the

pool. Ian and Sally had spent the mornings exploring the forest; highlights included Australian Raven, Crested Shriketit, Fantail Cuckoo and Large-billed Scrubwren.

We met again at 6pm in good time for the slow-worm walk at 8pm. Meeting Mark, our guide, at 8pm we headed off with others in a bus back down the track we had walked up this morning. Dave spotted a type of bandicoot crossing the road just before we arrived at our stopping point. Along the stream we paused to look at both a young and old (100 years) stinging tree, the older specimen now lacks the potent spines as it's large enough to survive without them. Further along we settled onto benches looking towards the stream and turned our torches off. Suddenly, as our eyes adjusted, there were lots of tiny dots of light scattered across the stream bank, like a constellation of stars. These were the larvae of a fungus gnat lighting themselves up to attract insects to their sticky and nerve-rendering strands of droplets they produce. The brighter lights are those of the hungrier larvae. When they are ready to pupate they eat the strands so they don't become snarled in their own trap! As we admired the show, deep, guttural croaks of a very rare - and once thought extinct - species of frog, the Fleay's Barred Frog. We headed back along the track and before we got back on the bus we turned off our torches again to marvel at the night sky - thousands of stars we simply don't see at home! A few at the front also glimpses a Boobook Owls. We got back at 9.15pm ready for an early start the next morning. Mike and Shirley had stayed and done a nightwalk along the treetop trail, spotting a Brown Antechinus, a Brush-tailed Possum and heard a Boobook Owl.

Day 5

Sunday 2nd December

O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat and return to Brisbane

A beautiful clear morning and dawn chorus from 4am. We gathered outside at 5.30am, watching the rosellas, a few Wonga Pigeons and Red-browed Finches. We headed along the board walk, followed by different Eastern Yellow Robins which perched sideways on trees and sat very close by. At least four Bassian Thrushes were feeding in the leaf litter, always shyer than other birds and quickly hopping away. Brown Thornbills and Brown Gerygones called in the trees, the latter sounding like speeded up Goldfinches. Logrunners were numerous and at one location three or four individuals were really noisy and loud. Brown Cuckoo-doves called overhead and deep, guttural 'coos' were finally revealed as White-headed Pigeons. Back at base small flocks of Topknot Pigeons flew overhead. Along the walk, before we turned back Ian spotted a Black-faced Monarch; it remained elusive and was only seen by a few. We got back to reception at just before 7am and in good time for the fruit that had been put out for the birds. While a Brush Turkey kept being shooed away, King Parrots and Crimson Rosellas came down to feed. A stunning male Regent Bowerbird came down to feed giving very close views; a female joined him. A little later on a Pied Currawong, a huge bird, came down to feed too. Nearby Lewin's Honeyeater fed on the nectar of bird-pollinated flowers.

In lovely warm morning sunshine, breakfast was outside today - the chefs were busy on the BBQ! Some of the group then headed off at 9am onto a minibus excursion. Ian joined Ed for a walk along the Wishing Tree trail. And others relaxed or took their own walks.

Along Ian and Ed's walk one highlight included a stunning male Paradise Riflebird rooting through the bark of the tree ferns. One second he looked black and the next his head, back and central feathers shone a bright, iridescent green. He spent some time moving between the ferns. Green Catbirds, singing Eastern Yellow Robin, singing Golden Whistlers, Brown Gerygones, Brown Thornbills, Eastern Whipbirds, Rufous Fantail, a Brown

Cuckoo-dove, Yellow-throated Scrubwren and Logrunners all featured along the walk to the Wishing Tree and back. Ed also spotted a White-throated Treecreeper. Other wildlife included a Red-legged Padymelon and a large Black Skink.

Those who went out on the minibus trek came back having seen a nesting Tawny Frogmouth (on nearby farmland), Spotted Pardalotes, a pair of Red-winged Parrots, three Black-faced Monarchs, Brown Cuckoo-doves, Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, Noisy Miner, a Carpet Python, a funnel-webbed and a tunnel-web spider, a crayfish, hatching cicadas and tree termites. They had also learnt more about the history and plantlife of the area, plus stunning views of the landscape and the demarcation between the rainforest and the eucalypt forest. The rainforest grows in areas where the clouds form and get most of their water from these rather than rainfall. Mike and Shirley had also seen a Wedge-tailed Eagle soaring in the distance.

We headed back to Brisbane at 3.30pm seeing Galahs, Black-shouldered Kite, Kookaburra, hundreds of Australian White Ibises nesting by a creek (and many more in trees on a roundabout motorway island) and hundreds of roosting flying foxes. We stopped for refreshments in Canungra where a small gang of Noisy Miners were looking for leftovers. Rainbow Lorikeets were noisy gathering nearby. Two particular highlights were three Black Wallabies in the grassy woodland as we headed down the valley from O'Reilly's and a Koala trying to cross the road. Someone had pulled over to stop it from crossing until the road was clear!

We arrived in the city at 6pm, with some time to refresh and meet for dinner at 7.30pm. It had been the hottest day this year in Brisbane, up to 37°C! While it was like an oven outdoors, inside it was cool and more fitting with the Christmas decorations. Our three-course meals were really delicious and happily fed, we headed to bed just after 9.30pm.

Day 6

Monday 3rd December

Airport transfer and flight to Honiara, Solomon Islands

This morning we met for breakfast at 6.30am; it was a bright sunny day in Brisbane and felt really tropical. We headed to the airport at 7.15am, ready for our 10am flight to the Solomon Islands and to meet the rest of the group for the main tour. Chas and Ed met everyone at the gate or plane and had a smooth journey north-east to the Solomon Islands, arriving after 2 hours and 45 minutes, funnily enough circling right over the hotel and park in Brisbane many of us had stayed in.

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Species Lists

Birds (✓=recorded but not counted; H = heard only; E=Endemic, N=Near-endemic I=Introduced)

	Common name	Scientific name	November/December		
			30	1	2
1	Maned Duck - E	<i>Chenonetta jubata</i>	8+		✓
2	Australian Brushturkey - E	<i>Alectura lathamii</i>	✓	✓	✓
3	Australian White Ibis	<i>Threskiornis molucca</i>	✓		✓
4	Straw-necked Ibis	<i>Threskiornis spinicollis</i>	✓		✓
5	Eastern Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus coromandus</i>	3		1
6	White-necked Heron	<i>Ardea pacifica</i>	1		
7	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	2		1
8	Australian Pelican	<i>Pelecanus conspicillatus</i>	1		
9	Little Pied Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo melanoleucos</i>	2		
10	Wedge-tailed Eagle	<i>Aquila audax</i>			1
11	Dusky Moorhen	<i>Gallinula tenebrosa</i>	3		2+
12	Masked Lapwing	<i>Vanellus miles novaehollandiae</i>	8		2+
13	Rock Dove - I	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓		
14	White-headed Dove - E	<i>Columba leucomela</i>			1
15	Spotted Dove - I	<i>Spilopelia chinensis</i>	1		
16	Brown Cuckoo-Dove	<i>Macropygia phasianella</i>		1	1
17	Crested Pigeon - E	<i>Ocyphaps lophotes</i>	1		
18	Wonga Pigeon - E	<i>Leucosarcia melanoleuca</i>	1	2	2
19	Topknot Pigeon - E	<i>Lopholaimus antarcticus</i>		30	12
20	Pheasant Coucal	<i>Centropus phasianinus</i>	1		
21	Fan-tailed Cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis flabelliformis</i>		1	
22	Southern Boobook	<i>Ninox boobook</i>		1	
23	Tawny Frogmouth - E	<i>Podargus strigoides</i>			1
24	White-throated Needletail	<i>Hirundapus caudacutus</i>	1	20+	6+
25	Laughing Kookaburra - E	<i>Dacelo novaeguineae</i>	2		1
29	Sacred Kingfisher	<i>Todiramphus sanctus</i>	1		
30	Nankeen Kestrel	<i>Falco cenchroides</i>	1		
31	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	1		
32	Galah - E	<i>Eolophus roseicapilla</i>	1		6+
33	Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	<i>Cacatua galerita</i>	15+		5
34	Little Corella	<i>Cacatua sanguinea</i>			✓
35	Australian King Parrot - E	<i>Alisterus scapularis</i>	3+	3+	4
36	Red-winged Parrot	<i>Aprosmictus erythropterus</i>			2
37	Crimson Rosella - E	<i>Platycercus elegans elegans</i>	✓	✓	✓
38	Rainbow Lorikeet - E	<i>Trichoglossus moluccanus</i>	2+	1+	✓
39	Albert's Lyrebird - E	<i>Menura alberti</i>	2		
40	Green Catbird - E	<i>Ailuroedus crassirostris</i>	H	2+	3
41	Regent Bowerbird - E	<i>Sericulus chrysocephalus</i>	1	7+	3
42	Satin Bowerbird - E	<i>Ptilonorhynchus violaceus</i>	2+	5+	3+
43	White-throated Treecreeper - E	<i>Cormobates leucophaea metastasis</i>		1	1
44	Superb Fairywren - E	<i>Malurus cyaneus</i>	✓	✓	✓
45	Noisy Miner - E	<i>Manorina melanocephala</i>	✓		1
46	Lewin's Honeyeater - E	<i>Meliphaga lewinii</i>	✓	✓	✓
47	Spotted Pardalotes	<i>Pardalotus punctatus</i>			2
48	White-browed Scrubwren - E	<i>Sericornis frontalis</i>	✓	✓	✓
49	Yellow-throated Scrubwren - E	<i>Sericornis citreogularis</i>	✓	✓	✓
50	Large-billed Scrubwren - E	<i>Sericornis magnirostra</i>		1	

	Common name	Scientific name	November/December		
			30	1	2
51	Brown Gerygone - E	<i>Gerygone mouki</i>		2+	3+
52	White-throated Gerygone	<i>Gerygone olivacea</i>		1	
53	Brown Thornbill - E	<i>Acanthiza pusilla</i>	✓	✓	✓
54	Australian Logrunner - E	<i>Orthonyx temminckii</i>	2	3	8+
55	Eastern Whipbird - E	<i>Psophodes olivaceus</i>	✓	✓	✓
56	Australian Magpie	<i>Gymnorhina tibicen</i>	✓		✓
57	Pied Currawong - E	<i>Strepera graculina graculina</i>	✓	2	1
58	Barred Cuckooshrike	<i>Coracina lineata</i>			1
59	Crested Shriketit - E	<i>Falcunculus frontatus</i>	1		
60	Australian Golden Whistler - E	<i>Pachycephala pectoralis youngi</i>		✓	✓
61	Grey Shrikethrush - E	<i>Colluricincla harmonica</i>	1	1	
62	Willie Wagtail	<i>Rhipidura leucophrys</i>	2+		
63	Grey Fantail	<i>Rhipidura albiscapa</i>	1	1	1
64	Rufous Fantail	<i>Rhipidura rufifrons</i>	1	2	3+
65	Black-faced Monarch	<i>Monarcha melanopsis</i>		1	4+
66	Magpie-lark	<i>Grallina cyanoleuca</i>	✓		
67	Torresian Crow	<i>Corvus orru</i>	✓	✓	✓
68	Australian Raven - E	<i>Corvus coronoides</i>			1
69	Paradise Riflebird - E	<i>Ptiloris paradiseus</i>			1
70	Eastern Yellow Robin - E	<i>Eopsaltria australis</i>	1	2+	5+
71	Welcome Swallow	<i>Hirundo neoxena</i>	✓	✓	✓
72	Fairy Martin	<i>Petrochelidon ariel</i>	✓		
73	Tree Martin	<i>Petrochelidon nigricans</i>			✓
74	Silvereye	<i>Zosterops lateralis</i>			6
75	Common Myna - I	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	1+		
76	Russet-tailed Thrush	<i>Zoothera heinei</i>		1	
77	Bassian Thrush - E	<i>Zoothera lunulata lunulata</i>			5
78	Red-browed Finch - E	<i>Neochmia temporalis</i>	✓	✓	✓

Mammals

1	Short-eared Brush-tailed Possum	<i>Trichosurus caninus</i>	2		
2	Brush -tailed Possum	<i>Trichosurus vulpecula</i>		1	
3	Brown Antechinus	<i>Antechinus stuarti</i>		1	
4	Red-necked Pademelon	<i>Thylogale thetis</i>	2+	2+	3+
5	Red-legged Pademelon	<i>Thylogale stigmatica</i>			1
6	Black Wallaby	<i>Wallabia bicolor</i>	2		3
7	Flying Fox	<i>Pteropus sp.</i>	500+		
8	Bandicoot	Order: <i>Peramelemorphia</i>		1	
9	Koala	<i>Phascolarctos cinereus</i>			1

Reptiles & Amphibians

1	Water Dragon	<i>Physignathus lesueurii howittii</i>	6+		
2	Southern Angle-headed Dragon	<i>Hypsilurus spinipes</i>			
3	Tyron's Skink	<i>Eulamprus tryoni</i>		1	
4	Red-eyed Tree Frog	<i>Litoria chloris</i>		4	
5	Fleay's Barred Frog	<i>Mixophyes fleayi</i>		H	
6	Black Skink	<i>Egernia kingii</i>			2
7	Carpet Python	<i>Morelia spilota</i>			1

	Common name	Scientific name	November/December		
			30	1	2

Other Taxa

1	Lemon Migrant	<i>Catopsila pomana</i>	✓		
2	Dragonfly	<i>Orthetrum caledonicum</i>	✓		
3	Golden Orb-weaver	<i>Nephila sp.</i>	✓		
4	Funnel-web spider	<i>Hadronyche formidabilis</i>			
5	Lamington Spiny Crayfish	<i>Euastacus sulcatus</i>			

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Logrunner



Lewin's Honeyeater



Red-necked Pademelon with joey