

# Notes on a birdwatching trip to the Northern Territories

## June 16<sup>th</sup> – July 8<sup>th</sup> 2012

### INTRODUCTION

After three previous trips to Australia, covering:

- Broome and the Kimberleys (3 weeks)
- Eastern Australia - Queensland and NSW, inland and coast (12 weeks)
- Western and Southern Australia (7 weeks) and Tasmania (10 days)

we had managed to amass a reasonable bird list and covered a great deal of the country.

This left us with a big gap in the middle – we had not been to Alice, Uluru or Darwin and were missing some key Northern Territory birds. So we planned a 3 week campervan tour to cover both the north and south of the Territory and designed an itinerary to enable us to go to interesting places such as Uluru, the West and East MacDonnells and Kakadu, and at the same time pick up as many as possible of the following species: Chestnut Rail, Pacific Baza, Red Goshawk, Chestnut-quilled Rock Pigeon, Banded Fruit-Dove, Hooded Parrot, Rainbow Pitta, Arafura Fantail, Mangrove Golden Whistler, Mangrove Robin, Grey-headed Honeyeater, White-lined Honeyeater, Rufous-banded Honeyeater, Dusky Grasswren, White-throated Grasswren, Rufous-crowned Emu-wren and Western Bowerbird. (I did not include Grey Honeyeater on the list as I thought we had almost no chance of seeing it and indeed did not search for it.) We were also keen to see Gouldian Finches again as although we had seen them in the Kimberleys it was a poor view.

### GENERAL NOTES

We flew into Alice Springs via Melbourne with Qantas (seems a rather strange way to get to Alice but it was the cheapest route and had the best connections) where we stayed in the Aurora Hotel (very nice and good restaurant).

We picked up a 4WD van from Apollo and used this to explore and bird around Alice then to drive a south-westerly loop comprising the West MacDonnells, the Mereenie Loop Road, Kings Canyon, Uluru, Kata Tjuta then back to Alice calling in at Rainbow Springs and Trephina Gorge. Then northwards on the Stuart Highway to Mataranka and Edith Falls. Then into Kakadu visiting Gunlom Falls, Nourlangie, Nawurlandja, Yellow Waters, the Border Store area and Mamukala Wetlands. Then to the Mary River area, Bird Billabong, the Adelaide River Bridge and Fogg Dam. Then into Darwin where we birded at the following sites: Buffalo Creek, Stoddart Drive mangroves, Dripstone Cliffs/Casuarina Coastal Reserve, the Botanic Garden and Howard Springs. We then returned the van in Darwin.

The weather was exceptionally cold at night in the south (sometimes -3°C). Daytime temperatures were OK if the sun came out, pretty cold if it didn't. As we progressed north the weather got much warmer – it was a lovely temperature in the Darwin area.

Everything felt very expensive – this was a combination of the dreadful exchange rate (1.5 \$AUS to the £) and the fact that NT is generally expensive. We paid up to \$6.50 for a coffee. A main meal – say Barramundi and chips – would be \$25 - \$35 and it was \$8 - \$13 for a pud.

Although there were plenty of the commoner (and often colourful and spectacular) birds to be seen, most of our key birds were harder to find than we expected. The “sandstone” species were not at all easy to locate in Kakadu (we found none of these species at Nourlangie despite two visits) and we struggled to find any decent numbers of honeyeaters - there were just tiny flocks of the same few species all the time. Finches in the north were very few and far between. We failed to find Chestnut Rail despite trying quite hard at the right tide heights. Drinking pools did not seem to be attracting birds at all, even in apparently dry areas. We found some fruiting trees but they did not have birds – we sat under one fig tree where the fruits were just dropping off of their own accord - we were convinced there must have been pigeons up there but there weren't! In short, we struggled to find birds and we still don't know where they had all gone! But we should note that June-July is outside the breeding season for most birds and is really not a good time to look for birds here – it just happens to have the most comfortable climate for humans. (An exception seemed to be Brown Honeyeater which was nest-building and defending territories)

Having said that, the birds which we expected to be difficult – Dusky Grasswren and Rufous-crowned Emu-wren – were actually pretty easy.

We used McCrie & Watson “Finding Birds in Kakadu and the Top End” extensively in the Darwin area. Birding-Aus (email list and archives) provided much other information about birding sites, also Chris Watson's blog was useful. Many trip reports on [www.birdtours.co.uk](http://www.birdtours.co.uk) and [www.travellingbirder.com](http://www.travellingbirder.com) were pored through at length. Denise Goodfellow's book on Top End birds was also referenced plus also her advice on Birding-Aus.

Although it was mid-winter in NT, it is the start of tourist season and also school holidays in some of the southern states, so some campsites were quite full – e.g. Ormiston Gorge – despite the cold nights. In Darwin all the

campsites were bursting at the seams – no-one seemed to know why it was so busy. There were three full boats on the early morning cruise at Yellow Waters (which incidentally seemed very expensive at \$98)

In Kakadu, although most of the roads and campsites were now open after the rains, the trails which went close to water were often closed – they were either actually under water or went very close to potential crocodile habitat. We did indeed see a very large crocodile quite close to the track on the extension trail to the Bardedjilidji Sandstone walk where it crosses several small creeks.

The definite highlight of the trip was the Ormiston Pound walk. We had reluctantly decided not to do this as a notice warned that you had to swim across a freezing pool to complete the circuit. However the ranger told us that in fact you could wade and the water would be about waist height, so we went. We started off in below zero temperatures wearing gloves, then eventually out into the sunshine where we picked up good birds in the form of Grey-headed Honeyeaters and Painted Finches. There were also plentiful Hooded Robins, one of which swooped down to catch a blue butterfly I was just photographing! I could hear Grasswrens high in the bluffs up to our left but could not see them. Then once over the rim we walked across the pound itself and then down into the gorge where we had fantastic views of the Dusky Grasswrens. The “crossing” was extremely cold – ankle-numbing after only a few steps – but it was bearable. Trouble was it was hard to get warm as the gorge was in deep shade so after a change of knickers/underpants and getting dressed we climbed up the path to the Ghost Gum walk and out into the welcome warmth. We had really good views of dingoes along the gorge bottom too.

## **BIRDS**

In the event we saw all the target birds except Chestnut Rail and White-throated Grasswren, and we did not see any Gouldians. As noted above, many of the birds were surprisingly difficult. Here are some notes on the sightings:

**Chestnut Rail** – we staked out Buffalo Creek at the correct state of the tide one day and Stoddart Drive mangroves the next day, but although we heard them cackling we did not see any sign of them at all.

**Pacific Baza** – we had fantastic views of a bird perched over the track on the Bamboo walk at Mary River Resort (we had unaccountably never found this species on previous trips)

**Red Goshawk** – on arriving at the Mataranka Cabins and Campsite we were given all the gen. and went to look for the birds in the mid-afternoon. Nothing. The gate on the property was open, so we went in to ask for the latest information – the lady said that she hadn't seen them for three days, maybe because the weather had been so cold, and they seem to have stopped nest-building. Oh no – just our luck!. We looked again in the evening, to no avail. However, the weather warmed up that night – it was positively balmy – and we had another look early in the morning. And there, apparently just waking up, was the (rather scruffy) female Red Goshawk perched up on a dead tree by the side of the road! We watched her for ages, as she saw off a Whistling Kite then landed close to the nest tree. We later saw the male as well – he was significantly smaller than the female.

**Chestnut-quilled Rock Pigeon** – two birds were seen on top of a small outcrop at Gunlom Falls, then several pairs were seen feeding on the ground in the mid-afternoon at the Bardedjilidji Sandstone trail. These are the only places we saw them.

**Banded Fruit-dove** – this really gave us the run-around. No sign at all at Nourlangie (two occasions) or Nuwarlandja. Eventually we got very distant views of one right up against the sandstone cliffs on the Gubara Pools trail.

**Hooded Parrot** – I was keen to see this bird out in the country and not in an urban setting in Pine Creek so we arrived very early one morning at the little creek 5 kms along the Edith Falls Road where Hooded Parrots and Gouldians are “regularly” seen. We stayed there for about 3 hours and saw surprisingly little – but we did see 3 Hooded Parrots (1 male, 2 females), which flew in to a dead tree for about 2 minutes. These were the only ones we saw.

**Rainbow Pitta** – the first ones we saw were at the Manngarre Rainforest Walk in northern Kakadu (we did not go along the “Women Only” section), then we saw and heard more on the Jimmy Creek Walk at Point Stuart Wilderness Park. Then more again at Howard Springs.

**Arafura Fantail** – we only saw this species at one place – the Manngarre Rainforest Walk.

**Mangrove Golden Whistler** – eventually, at the second attempt, at the Jumping Croc, Adelaide River Bridge

**Mangrove Robin** - these are not meant to be hard but we struggled to find one. We thought we'd run into one while Chestnut Rail hunting, but although one whistled back to me at Stoddart Drive mangroves it did not come out. We eventually ran one down in the faint track/river bed which heads off into the mangroves just before the bend at Buffalo Creek (track 9 in McCrie & Watson) (in amongst the very old specimens of burnt out trucks)

**Grey-headed Honeyeater** – we failed to find these during our first few days in Alice – no sign of them at the Desert Park or Serpentine Gorge – but we eventually tracked them down on the first part of the Ormiston Gorge walk, and then in several other places.

**White-lined Honeyeater** – in the eucalyptus trees at the base of Gunlom Falls and at the Ubirr car park. Not seen at Nourlangie.

**Rufous-banded Honeyeater** – we only found this supposedly common honeyeater once, feeding on mistletoes behind the toilets at Dripstone Cliffs in Darwin. Where had they all gone?

**Dusky Grasswren** – this bird turned out to be easy – we first saw them on the cliffs at the top of Mount Gillen, near Alice. Then in the top part of Ormiston Gorge (though I had heard it in several places before that) where we had

truly excellent views of birds running over sloping slabs of rock – we have even got some good video footage. Then lastly, 3 birds preening after bathing by the low level track at Kings Canyon.

**White-throated Grasswren** – as expected, no sign at all of this species at Gunlom Falls.

**Rufous-crowned Emu-wren** - at the “tyre in the pole” site on the Santa Theresa Road. We first tried looking north of the road, but there was no spinifex there at all – it must have been burnt. We then tried south of the road, first along a track almost opposite the “tyre”, then carrying straight on along the ridge when the track bent to the right - we eventually heard and saw some distant birds below us. We tried the same general area again a bit later, a bit left of the track, and immediately within 20 metres of the road we heard a calling bird – we followed the calls and had absolutely stunning views of a male calling from small bush. We were probably only about 70 metres from the “tyre” at the time.

**Western Bowerbird** – we had really good views of this species at the car park at the Olive Pink Botanical Gardens, with several birds in the vicinity of a bower. But we only saw it once again – a fairly brief view at the Ormiston Gorge campsite.

#### **Other notable sightings:**

**Sandstone Shrike Thrush** – just one sighting – at the Bardedjilidji Sandstone walk.

**Great-billed Heron** seen in flight at Stoddart Drive mangroves.

**Painted Finches** seen on the Ormiston Pound walk

**Major Mitchell’s Cockatoos** – seen several times by the side of the road eating the small roadside melons – on one occasion, on the road to Rainbow Valley, we had amazing views as they flew down the ground to get a melon, raising their crests as they landed, squabbled a bit, then back up to a bush to eat their melon.

**Northern Rosella** – we only saw this once, I think it was on the Gubara Pools walk

**Black-breasted Buzzard** – fantastic views of a bird near to Kata Tjuta, as it patrolled the road looking for roadkill.

**Buff-banded Rails** – a pair at Trepkina Gorge near the Bluff campsite seemed like an unusual location for them.

**Banded Whiteface** – two birds were seen by the Santa Theresa road about half-way to the “tyre”

**Crimson Chats** were seen quite frequently in the Alice area.

A **Black Falcon** and a **Hobby** with Brown Falcons plus Black and Whistling Kites were at a pool/rubbish dump by the Barrow Creek Roadhouse on the Stuart Highway.

**Grey Goshawk** We had good views of two Grey Goshawks – a grey one at Mataranka and a white one above Gunlom Falls, perched in a tree with Sulphur-crested Cockatoos and looking rather small!

**Black-tailed Treecreepers, Red-tailed Black Cockatoos** and **Varied Lorikeets** were seen well in the excellent woodland on the Gum Garden walk near the Mardugal campsite in Kakadu.

**Jabiru** - one was standing in the river right by Cahill’s crossing near Kakadu and another one was in Beatrice Lagoons by the Arnhem Highway.

**Barking Owls** were heard but not seen at Point Stuart Wilderness Retreat.

**Ground Cuckoo-shrike** – a small group were seen by the Lasseter Highway.

**Bush Stone-curlew** – heard at most camp sites and two seen sleeping out the day next to the fence around the water tank at Edith Falls campsite, then feeding in the half-light.

**Spotted Nightjar** - two flushed from the rocky ridge at the “Tyre in the Pole” site.

**Budgerigars** – lots and lots in the dry areas – lovely!

**Woodswallows** - White-breasted Woodswallows were numerous around Mataranka where they roosted on bare branches huddled up close together in a long line. Some trees had almost every branch clothed with Woodswallows. Black-faced Woodswallows were common around Alice.

**White-backed Swallow** – two brief fly-bys – we have never had decent views of this bird!

**Honeyeaters** seen (apart from those mentioned above) were Brown, Dusky, Blue-eared, Singing, White-plumed, Spiny-cheeked, White-throated, White-gaped, Blue-faced, Red-headed and Bar-breasted.

**Finches** were in very short supply – apart from the 3 Painted Finches and abundant Zebra Finches around Alice, we saw only 6 Double-banded, 4 Long-tailed, 2 Chestnut-breasted Mannikins and a few small groups of Crimson.

**Waterbirds** were in short supply at Yellow Waters when we were there at the end of June – they had not arrived yet as there was still plenty of water in the surrounding area. No Brolgas, Spoonbills, few herons etc. We did later see 3 Brolgas at Mamukala.

We could have reasonably expected to see the following birds but didn’t: **Partridge Pigeon, Spinifex Pigeon, Owlet-Nightjar, Rose-crowned Fruit Dove, Gouldian Finch, either Spoonbill, Square-tailed Kite, cuckoos of any kind, Little Kingfisher, Yellow-tinted HE, Rufous-throated HE, Banded HE, Varied Sitella, Black and Grey Butcherbirds.** (Partridge Pigeons are described as common by the roadside and in campsites in McCrie & Watson – where have they all gone?)

#### **LOCATIONS**

Here are the locations we visited:

**Alice Springs, Olive Pink Botanical Gardens.** An easy way to get back into Oz birding (quite a good selection of birds) plus excellent views of Western Bowerbirds at a bower.

**Alice Springs Desert Park.** Good nocturnal display and aviaries but we didn’t see many birds in the grounds.

**Mount Gillen.** It was Sunday and rather busy when we walked up Mt Gillen. The path is very degraded towards the top. However, we did see Dusky Grasswrens on the bluff just above the “group of pine trees”. There was also a

Wedge-tailed Eagle about. The flat area around the approach track was quite birdy – budgies etc and there were Singing and Spiny-Cheeked HEs feeding on an interesting Grevillea with curly greenish flowers.

**Sounds of Starlight Theatre** – no birds but the Didgeridoo show is highly recommended!

**Santa Theresa Road** - like many others I suspect, we had often wondered how you could get a tyre INTO a pole – well all becomes clear when you realise that the poles are made of two halves with a gap between! The road out to this site, where there were trees and bushes, was heaving with birds as the sun came up – budgies, woodswallows, zebra finches, brown falcons etc and we also found 2 Banded Whiteface. At the “TIP” site (which was approx. 30km from the last roundabout) the area NE of the road seemed to have been burnt, though plants were re-colonising – no Spinifex though. The area SW of the road had plenty of Spinifex and this is where we found the Emu-wrens. (The “TIP” is actually almost on top of ridge, which drops off sharply about 50 metres further on, and the Emu-wrens appear to be on this ridge.) We also saw groups of White-winged Fairy-wrens and Crimson Chats and we flushed two Spotted Nightjars.

**Serpentine Gorge** – quite a few birds such Bellbird and Mistletoebird in good moist forest but not our target Grey-headed Honeyeater.

**Ormiston Gorge** – the campsite area was quite good for birds (Western Bowerbird, babblers etc) and dingoes (which trotted past at night only feet from where we sat drinking our (freezing cold) red wine). The Ormiston Pound walk is covered above. In short we loved it here and were reluctant to leave.

**Finke 2 mile campground** – the turning to this dirt track (4WD recommended) is almost opposite the turning to Glen Helen. It is a free camping area in a super position by some big pools in the Finke River. We went there at dawn and picked up some waterbirds plus butcherbirds etc. (It is supposed to be a good site for Major Mitchells Cockatoos) Probably worth more time than we spent there.

*(From this point on and back to Alice there were no new birds to see so this next bit in italics was more in the nature of general tourism and general birding (though there was always the possibility of fly-over Princess Parrots!)):*

**Kings Canyon** Peter did the Canyon Rim walk which took him much less time than expected but not seeing any notable birds (and also ignoring the “one litre per hour” drinking water signs which are quite ridiculous). Rosemary did the low level creek walk seeing Grasswrens again. We camped at **Kings Creek Station** - spacious, well laid out and friendly, with camels – we were shown to our campsite by a young Liverpudlian in a hoody driving an ATV.

**Uluru** It was cool, windy, cloudy and drizzly here – no sunset viewing and not many birds. But we did not come for the birds so that was OK!

**Kata Tjuta** Good views of Black Breasted Buzzard

**Rainbow Valley** Fantastic views of Major Mitchells Cockatoos on the way in and the rocks were pretty impressive at sunset. Well worth the diversion to camp here.

**Trephina Gorge/Bluff campsite** Did various walks here seeing plenty of Black-fronted Dotterels and a pair of Buff-banded Rails in the river bed, plus a Brown Snake in the tussocky grass. Very scenic.)

**Mataranka** The “Mataranka Cabins and Campsite” was very good for birds – we parked the van down near the paperbark swamp and generated a decent “one day pitch list” of 25 species which included Grey Goshawk, Collared Sparrowhawk, Straw-necked Ibis, Lemon-bellied Flycatcher and Shining Flycatcher. Out on the road we saw 11 more species including, of course, Red Goshawk. It really was a very birdy spot – there were big noisy flocks of woodswallows and bee-eaters, various parrots, Red-backed Fairy-wren etc. Also plenty of Agile Wallabies.

**Elsey National Park – Botanic Walk.** Good views of Buff-sided Robin plus about a quarter of a million fruit bats!

**Edith Falls Road and Edith Falls campsite** The main targets here were Hooded Parrot and Gouldian Finch, both of which have been reported regularly and recently from this area. We stopped on the Edith Falls Road at the 5km creek (4.04 in McCrie & Watson - though I think they have the scale wrong as the site is actually quite small – note that it is also used as an informal camping area) It looked lovely for birds but there was nothing there at all apart from the ubiquitous Willie Wagtail! So we went on to the main campsite, which was full of birds – good views especially of noisy Great Bowerbirds at a bower and Bush Stone-curlews. Lots of pardalotes too. The Lelyn walk was interesting but not very birdy, though it is supposed to be Gouldian Finch habitat. We went back to the 5km creek at dawn and stayed for 3 hours – it was rather disappointing as we saw only small numbers of common things, though a short visit from 3 Hooded Parrots made it all worthwhile! The only birds drinking were 5 Peaceful Doves and 8 finches of 3 species. There was no sign of Gouldians at all.

**Gunlom Falls** The campsite was quite good for honeyeaters (7 species including Bar-breasted) as there were a few gum trees flowering with lovely orange flowers (Salmon Gums?). We also had good views of Hobbies along the Alligator River walk. We dutifully trekked up the path by the falls in the early morning (a steepish climb but not “a scramble” as sometimes described). Once at the top Peter scrambled (this was a scramble!) up several rocky bluffs and found Chestnut-quilled Rock Pigeons but no White-throated Grasswren during the 3 hours or so we spent there. The pool further up the valley, surrounded by a small border of rainforest, was extremely picturesque but unfortunately pretty birdless.

**Yellow Waters Cruise** Probably barely worth doing at this time of the year (June) unless you are new to Australian birds as there are relatively few of the more exotic birds present – no Spoonbills, Jabirus, Brolgas, Great Billed Herons etc. We did have good views of crocs. and good close views of fairly common things like kingfishers (forest, azure and sacred), Jacanas, Green Pygmy Geese, White-bellied Sea Eagle, Anhinga, Plumed Whistling-duck etc. Amazing that hardly anyone on the boat had binoculars. *(A tip: sit at the back as there is lots of space behind you to stand, move around and even use a telescope)*

**Gum Garden Walk** (or Gun-gardun) at **Mardugal Campground**. Very good mature eucalyptus forest with lots of birds in the late afternoon especially Black-tailed Treecreepers, Varied Lorikeets and Red-Tailed Black Cockatoos feeding low down on berries.

**Nourlangie** We went here twice – once in the late morning, once in the early morning, spending several hours there each time, covering all the relevant areas, and on both occasions we failed to find any birds of note. On both occasions there was just one small mixed flock of Rufous Whistlers, Dusky HEs, Silver Crowned Friarbirds, Northern Fantails, Leaden Flycatchers and Varied Trillers. Our dedicated searching for Banded Fruit-doves led to us finding a perched juvenile Tawny Frogmouth high up in a tree. We also thought the rock art was rather disappointing – there is very little of it.

**Nawurlandja** – we could see the forest where the Banded Fruit-doves should be – unfortunately they weren't there. (Neither were White-lined Honeyeater or Chestnut-quilled Rock Pigeon)

**Gubara pools walk** – interesting walk, first through dry forest then into rainforest by the escarpment. Here we found Banded Fruit-dove at last, though at some distance - the white head was unmistakable. Also good views of Collared Sparrowhawk. The pools were interesting – many species of fish, some, very large.

**Bardedjilidji Sandstone walk** Very interesting walk though contorted bluffs of rock. In the mid afternoon we saw two pairs and one single Chestnut-quilled Rock Pigeon feeding on the ground, also our only Sandstone Shrike-thrush of the trip.

**Mannarre Forest Walk** A Jabiru in the river, then 2 Rainbow Pittas, a pair of mound-tending Scrubfowl, plus an Arafura Fantail in the forest. But hardly any other birds!

**Ubirr** Quite interesting rock art (better than Nourlangie?) and our best view of White-lined Honeyeater.

**Mamukala Wetlands** 3 Brolgas flew in as we arrived, the only ones of the trip. The viewing hide was exceptionally cold and windy but there was a good selection of waterfowl on view.

**Point Stuart Wilderness Park** Really a fishing camp but a nice camp site and there were Rainbow Pittas on the **Jimmy Creek Walk**. Also Barking Owls and lots of wallabies.

**Mary River Resort** We tried the Bamboo walk, looking for Rufous-banded Honeyeater (supposed to be a good place for flowering trees – obviously the wrong time of the year) Virtually the only bird we saw was a cracking Pacific Baza right over the path.

**Bird Billabong** Encouraged by reports of Gouldians in the approach road area, we scanned the long dry grass to no avail. Only common honeyeaters and doves to be seen.

**Adelaide River Bridge/Jumping Crocs** Our first visit to the Jumping Crocodile place at Adelaide River Bridge drew a blank – it was very busy with noisy teenagers, there were continuous heavy trucks thundering over the bridge and the area on the far side of the bridge was all locked up. However we persevered in these unprepossessing surroundings and did manage to see a Broad-billed Flycatcher. We went back a few days later and once the clients had all got on to the 11:00 boat it was a bit quieter and we sat at one of the outside tables with a coffee, not really expecting to see anything. But we did – the male Mangrove Golden Whistler flew on to an open branch just above the gate leading to the boat jetty – we had gob-smacking views for about 20 seconds, then he was gone never to be seen again. Amazing!

**Fogg Dam** This was a beautiful place but we didn't stay long as there were not really any new species here for us. Pratincoles on the dam road were a new trip bird.

**Stoddart Drive mangroves** (1.02 in McCrie & Watson) Two visits here resulted in calling Chestnut Rails and a calling Mangrove Robin but no sightings of either. We did see a fly-by Great Billed Heron.

**Buffalo Creek** We spent a lot of time here, watching for Chestnut Rail in turns and also looking for Mangrove Robin and Rufous-Banded Honeyeater, both of which were still eluding us. We did find Red-headed Honeyeater, Mangrove, Large-billed and Green-backed Gerygones, Mangrove Fantail, Grey Whistler and at last, Mangrove Robin. Also various terns and waders, Reef Egret, Brahminy Kite and Pelicans. We spent a very pleasant hour on the sandy spit watching the sun set as the tide came in displacing the various waders and pelicans from their sand bars on to the spit.

**Casuarina Coastal Reserve/Dripstone Point** This was quite a birdy place. A small stream ran over the end of the beach and this attracted some finches and honeyeaters to drink – we at last thought we saw a couple of Rufous-banded here. There were reasonable mixed flocks in the trees along the road/car park (an acacia-type tree was in flower) and a lot of fly-over Red-tailed Black Cockatoos. Eventually, the next day, we had good views of the Rufous-banded Honeyeater behind the toilets feeding on mistletoe.

**Botanic Gardens** Disappointing – we could not find the Rufous Owl, though we did not try very hard. No other birds except common honeyeaters and numerous Scrubfowl.

**Howard Springs** There seems to be a lot of works happening on the far side of the lake – is this to provide some kind of swimming facility? It was very cold when we arrived in the early morning – it took a while for both us and the birds to warm up! Good views of Rainbow Pitta and Little Shrike Thrush on the Rainforest Walk.

## FOOTNOTE

Our Australian adventures have now come to an end so our Australia list, which is now 582, is unlikely to grow any further. We have no plans to go to Cape York as we have now seen most of the birds there on a trip to PNG. Also, a few species which we previously missed in Queensland, such as Barred Cuckoo-shrike, Double-eyed Fig Parrot, Sooty Owl and Superb Fruit-dove, we have also caught up with in PNG.

We are still missing a few grasswrens and rare parrots such as Scarlet-chested, Princess and Orange-bellied. Other birds which we have just never connected with (not for lack of trying!) are: White-throated Nightjar, Purple-gaped Honeyeater, Pied Honeyeater, Chestnut-breasted Quail-thrush, Freckled Duck, Lewins Rail, Spotless Crake, Gibberbird and several Buttonquail. On the other hand, we have had cracking views of many brilliant and difficult-to-see birds including Noisy Scrub-bird, Rufous Bristlebird, all three emu-wrens, various grasswrens, Letter Winged Kite, Chestnut-breasted Whiteface, Ground Parrot, Rock Parrot, Albert's Lyrebird, Rufous Owl, Turquoise Parrot, Regent Honeyeater, Golden Bowerbird – the list goes on. So we are more than happy.

We have enjoyed virtually every moment of our 7 months of travelling and birding in Australia, and we are really sorry that it has come to an end. We have many great memories, and a lot of photos and videos to enable us to relive the experience. Perhaps, who knows, we will be able to think of an excuse to go back!.

Rosemary and Peter Royle, Wales, UK

PS My favourite Australian bird is Major Mitchell's Cockatoo closely followed by the Gang-gang Cockatoo and Splendid Fairy-wren. Peter's say his favourite is "all the big black cockatoos".