



A [Tropical Birding](#) SET DEPARTURE tour

AUSTRALIA Photo Journey

20 September – 6 October 2013

Tour Leader: Iain Campbell



A male Golden Bowerbird deep in the rainforest understory. Iain Campbell

Introduction:

*This was the third time I had guided this destination as a **photo tour**, although I had done it previously, many times, on birding tours. What made it all the more fun this time was having another Tropical Birding guide, Ecuadorian **Jose Illanes**, along too. After more than ten years of working with Tropical Birding, and continually hearing such great things about our Australian tours, (from both participants and guides), he wanted to see what all the hype was about. The extra set of brilliant eyes came in handy for both seeing and photographing extra species....*

Tour Summary:

We started the tour in Darwin (in the Northern Territory), with an afternoon meet, and a little shooting near this birdy city. Most people arrived into Darwin exhausted, after the long journey to Australia, so we took it easy both with the first afternoon's shooting (keeping this close to our "digs" for the night), and ate at our hotel, so that people could get the much-desired early night. That did not stop us spending time photographing the Ring-tailed Possum hanging around the gardens.



Bush Stone-Curlew from East Point Reserve. Iain Campbell

The next morning we hit **East Point**, (on the outskirts of Darwin), very early, and took breakfast in the field. We had to be there *pre-dawn* so we could get a crack at photographing the local **Large-tailed Nightjars**. The nightjar behaved itself and came in as required. East Point's **Rainbow Pittas** were a major target for many of the group, by virtue of their spectacular plumage, and they started calling right at dawn heightening the expectation. We enjoyed numerous individuals, though none were particularly co-operative. We continued, with the regular monsoon vine

forest species in this area, such as **Green-backed Gerygone** and the beautiful **Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove**. Outside of the more challenging photography within the monsoon forest at East Point, we visited an open area nearby which hosted some very co-operative **Bush Stone-Curlews**.

We then headed off to World famous **Kakadu National Park** for an afternoon boat trip on **Yellow Water Billabong**. We had booked on the boat for the evening session, which offers excellent light for photographers. Most tourists on board just want to see crocodiles, but the boat drivers understand both birder's and photographer's needs too, so we were set. We saw loads of the expected regular birds in the area, like **White-breasted Sea-Eagle**, **Black-necked Stork**, and both **Plumed and Wandering Whistling-Ducks**. While the shooting was predictably excellent, there was, however, a feeling that we had missed some of the real targets of the place; notably, the *kingfishers*. We headed to **Cooinda** for the night.



Azure Kingfisher on Yellow Water, Kakadu National Park. Iain Campbell

The next morning we returned to **Yellow Waters** for the sunrise boat tour, and this time we hit the jackpot, getting opportunities to shoot many of the species we missed the evening before. We photographed **Pied Heron**, **Rufous Night-Heron**, **Australian Pelican** and also had a trifecta of *kingfishers*. Great shooting “opps” lapped up for **Forest**, **Azure** and **Little Kingfishers**. After breakfast, we headed out to **Nourlangie Rock** for the aboriginal rock artwork, and a few avian targets, such as **White-lined Honeyeater**. We missed our only shot at *Black-backed Fruit-Dove*. It was the tradeoff of having another morning boat trip; but everyone agreed that it was well worth it.

We pulled into **Mary River Roadhouse** in the heat of the day, and as expected, the birds were lined up at the sprinklers in this water-deprived region of the country. We enjoyed a short session with both **Great Bowerbird** and **Red-collared Lorikeets**, before heading to **Pine Creek** for our first attempt at the local **Hooded Parrots**. We returned to the roadhouse for the night.



Little Kingfisher. Iain Campbell

The next morning we went to the outcropping conglomerate along scenic **Plum Creek** for **Chestnut-quilled Rock-Pigeon** and then over to nearby **Gunlum Falls** for more monsoon vine forest birds.

After lunch we headed over to the town of **Pine Creek** for another session with the aquamarine **Hooded Parrot**. These are one of the main target birds of the Top End, and they did not fail us. We found them hanging out in large numbers around the sprinklers on the football oval. We were able to approach closely and got many excellent photos of these approachable, and extremely colorful parrots.

The next morning it was time to hang out at a waterhole and wait for *finches* to come in, a well-established birding/photographic technique in this water-depauperate area. We had to wait a while, but eventually **Long-tailed**, **Masked**, and **Double-barred Finches**, and the much desired, ultra-colorful, **Gouldian Finches** all came in to drink within photographic range. Once it became too hot and the activity died, we headed for a stakeout of **Silver-backed Butcherbird**, which appeared to be waiting for our arrival, along with a large group of **Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos**.



Red-collared Lorikeets and a male Hooded Parrot from Pine Creek. Iain Campbell

We then headed to **Buffalo Creek**, where we used local fish as bait to lure in **Whistling, Black and Brahminy Kites** for an array of photo opportunities and angles of these raptors. We also spent some time with *mangrove* species too, such as the dashing **Red-headed Myzomela**, citrine-colored **Yellow White-eye** and **Black Butcherbird**. We hit the sack early, ready for our morning flight to Cairns in northeast Queensland the following day.

We arrived into **Cairns** in the late morning, and after lunch headed over to the **Esplanade** for some shorebirds as well as some rainforest species. We shot **Far Eastern Curlew, Terek and Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, Great Knot** and **Black-fronted Dotterel** as they were forced close inshore by the incoming tide, making for a great shorebird photo shoot. After cleaning up on the local shorebirds we headed over to **Centenary Lakes** where we got great shots of **Brown-backed Honeyeater, Yellow Honeyeater** and **Dusky Myzomela** in this rich town park.



A male Olive-backed Sunbird from Cairns Botanical Gardens. Iain Campbell

The next day we slept in so late it was pure decadence. After a 6:30am breakfast it was back on a boat, but this time out to **The Great Barrier Reef**. Here we visited a tiny sandy cay, or island, where we photographed **Brown Boobies, Sooty Terns, and Lesser Crested Terns**, among a mass of **Brown Noddies**. Then it was a zodiac ride for **White-naped and Bridled Terns**. Some of the group took the opportunity too, to do some snorkeling or go out on the glass bottom boat tour to see the reef at close quarters.

Once back onshore, in the late afternoon, we traveled to, and spent the night at, **Cassowary House** and woke in the morning excited about shooting the feeders here, which can be truly magnetic.



Common Noddy is but one of the many species nesting on Michealmas Cay. Iain Campbell

This time however, it was a dud. The cassowary was away breeding and many of the birds did not come to the feeders as hoped. *Species wise*, it was OK with **Spotted Catbird**, **Victoria's Riflebird** and **Macleay's Honeyeater** all still coming in, but not in the normal high numbers. Frankly, it was a disappointing morning, but that is the way it goes sometimes with Mother Nature. As usual though, the food was amazing, and that *almost* made up for it.



The endangered Mareeba Rock Wallaby is common at Granite Gorge. Iain Campbell

In the afternoon we visited the **Mareeba Rock-Wallaby** site. It is the only regular site for this rare and local species, and while there we spent lots of time with one of the coolest birds in the area too. The very (confiding here) shy **Squatter Pigeon**. In the evening we turned our attention to enormous **Eastern Grey Kangaroos** as they became more active as the day wore on.

The next morning was about rainforest birds and animals again, where we started at the base of **Mt. Lewis** with **Red-legged Padamelons**, **Yellow-breasted Boatbills** and **Spectacled Monarchs**. We then went up the mountain for **Pied** and **Black-fronted Monarchs**. We visited nearby **Abattoir Swamp** for **Yellow-faced**, **White-cheeked** and **Brown-backed Honeyeaters**, along with **Northern Fantail**. After lunch we visited a local school with a very accessible **Great Bowerbird** bower in the playground. Heading to Mareeba Wetlands afterwards, we encountered stately **Australian Bustards** and our first adorable **Red-backed Fairywrens**.



The Grey-headed Robin feed on the ground, but search for prey from very low branches. Iain Campbell

The next morning we visited another famous rainforest site in the Wet Tropics of Northeast Queensland, **Mt. Hypipamee National Park**. Jose went off into the rainforest to search for a male **Golden Bowerbird** that had been giving display calls. He emerged having found not only the bower, but fine pictures of the male. We went in and after a reasonably short wait got this photogenic bird near to its bower. Meanwhile there was also a broken stump, which hosted a male **Victoria's Riflebird** displaying to a female! We then checked **Hasties Swamp**, where we had **Latham's Snipe** close to the water's edge. There were also many **Pink-eared Ducks** along with many other regular Australian waterbirds.



A Spotted Pardalote came in to investigate us on Duck Creek Road. Iain Campbell

Then it was **Platypus** time. We went to a regular spot, and made our way to a pond past a sign that basically stated, “*Be noisy!*” We were doing (just) OK when the owner came over to join us and explain that the Platypus will always know you are there. Quiet people will be treated as suspicious whereas noisy people are fine because they know you are not a threat. It certainly worked out that way; the sightings were improving all the time, the louder we got!

We then headed back to **Cairns**, had dinner, after which a few of us went spotlighting along the Centennial boardwalk. We saw **Northern Bandicoot** and **Striped Possum** a few times, but shooting with tripod there proved too difficult to nail the shots we desired.

We took an early flight to Brisbane (in very different Southern Queensland) the following morning; and stopped off at **Daisy Hill State Forest** for **Red-necked Wallaby**, and open woodland birds. Then we headed to **Lamington National Park**. As usual, **O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat** proved amazing with **Crimson Rosellas**, **Regent Bowerbirds** and **Wonga Pigeons** all coming in to be fed well within range of anyone's lenses. We also had a **Satin Bowerbird** tending to his bower, and superb **Superb Fairy-Wrens** bouncing around the local gardens.



A Golden Whistler from Lamington national Park. Iain Campbell

It may have been cold and wet, but with an **Albert's Lyrebird** in the grounds of the lodge, we hardly noticed! We then hit the canopy boardwalk for a shoot with some local **Green Catbirds**. In the afternoon we went into the open woodlands just outside of the temperate rainforest surrounding the lodge, for **Variegated and Red-backed Fairywrens** and a host of *honeyeaters*. A **Spotted Pardalote** came down to check us out, and getting full frame shots of this small and amazingly beautiful Aussie species was the highlight of the afternoon for many. The group opted to go spotlighting again, I was knackered so Jose took them out with detailed instructions of what to get and where. This worked beyond expectations, as he found both **Marbled Frogmouth** and a **Koala**.

On the last morning in Lamington we packed up before dawn and did a final walk before breakfast. The group all got great looks and photographs of **Southern Logrunner**, **Pale-yellow Robin** and **Eastern Yellow Robin**. On the

way back to Brisbane we rounded off the Lamington wallaby list with a **Pretty-faced Wallaby** on the side of the road. We then flew to **Devonport** in **Tasmania** for the final leg of the tour.

We started the day at **Narawntapu National Park**. We had **Bennett's Wallaby** in the car park and had our first **wombat** a few minutes later. Following this were: roadside **Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos**, **Yellow-throated Honeyeaters** and lots of **Green Rosellas**. At **Lilian's Beach** adult **Little Penguins** were just visible inside the man-made nest chambers. We had to make a change of plans next. We had originally planned to head west to Arthur River and do a night with Tasmanian Devils. The owner though, had sadly died just a week earlier, so we went to another lodge to try for them instead. That night we had dinner and then went spotlighting where a few people got the **Tasmanian Boobook Owl**, though no one photographed it. Although we all waited up in our respective rooms, the devils unfortunately did not pitch up this first night.

The next day we packed up and set off for Cradle Mountain in fairly poor weather, where we had a couple of **Black Currawongs**. We returned to the lodge and pottered around with **Flame Robin** and caught up with the **Rufous Shrike-Thrush** thanks to the owner putting down a little bait to move things along!

The last night of the trip we had a dilemma. One of the guests was not a photographer, but had been very tolerant of her photographer husband and the rest of us. Her only real target for the whole trip was **Little (Fairy) Penguin**, which we had only seen poorly during the day. So, I decided to do the one-hour journey with her down the coast for the penguins, while others waited for possible devils at the lodge. Thankfully, the decision paid off for *both* groups. The people at the lodge got spectacular shots of **Eastern Quoll**, while we saw **Tasmanian Boobook Owl**, **Little Penguin**, **Tawny Frogmouth** and a **Tasmanian Devil** just as we were turning into the lodge.



A Tawny Frogmouth doing what frogmouths do. Waiting for a lizard to cross the road. Iain Campbell

We spent the last hours of the trip at **Devonport Botanical Gardens** getting shots of some of the commoner “Tassie” species. It was time to go for great shots of things that we had seen before. We finished the trip at Devonport airport, though with flowering *eucalypts* in the car park, it was hard to resist getting a few final shots once we had checked in!