

TRIP REPORT  
**IRON RANGE FIFO (Fly In – Fly Out)**  
25<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> November 2021



Palm Cockatoo (*Probosciger aterrimus*)

**CLIENTS:** Brian & Lyn Reid

**GUIDE:** Phil Gregory

This was our 10<sup>th</sup> *Sicklebill Safaris* Cape York trip this year, targeting particularly the parrots but also the Far North Queensland and Cape York endemics plus other northern specials. The covid situation with the state borders made planning highly uncertain, but happily it all came together very nicely. The weather was kind, being hot and not too windy, quite dry and humid with relatively little rain, and that mostly at night. *Iron Range Cabins* has good air-conditioning and also wifi, and was very convenient for the rainforest habitat and the airport. The forest was damaged in 2019 by a cyclone, and thousands of trees were blown down, but regrowth is well under way. The main Portland Road was in good condition, (unlike back in January when many areas were damaged or washed out) though many forest trails remain impassable. We primarily birded in the Portland Road forest from the road or large side tracks, exploring the Claudie River road as well as the Portland Roads area, with the cooler early morning from 0600 to about 1000 the key time.

Some memorable sightings of a fun trip were the wonderful male **Palm Cockatoo** perched by the road for some 20 minutes and calling to nearby birds, then nibbling branches before breaking bits off and using it to drum, complete with the noisy bowing display with wings outstretched. Lyn also said that she had bad luck with this species, so I tempted providence by saying I'd never missed it, and 30 seconds later we had one perched up by the road to Lockhart, a very nice segue! **Eclectus** and **Red-cheeked Parrot** were quite vocal and we got good perched views of both, but **Double-eyed (Marshall's) Fig-Parrot** was only heard this time, I wonder where they go? A male **Magnificent Riflebird** was perched in good view and good light, calling at times to a nearby rival, **Yellow-billed Kingfisher** was very vocal but took a bit of work to get a good look, though we eventually saw 2. **Northern Scrub-robin** had been utterly silent, but an overnight rain on Nov 27<sup>th</sup> sparked them up and we got fantastic looks a duetting pair of what is usually a very shy skulking species, as well as being a CY endemic. We got lucky with **Black-winged Monarch** too, with one giving a fragment of call which was enough for me to know it was there and lure it in, but it was the only one of the trip, they seem to come late from wherever it is they come from. **Black-eared Catbird** actually showed several times too, and **Marbled Frogmouth** was also very obliging. Other exciting Iron Range birds were **White-browed Robin**, **Brown Falcon** and **Spotted Whistling Ducks**. Surprising absentees were **Peaceful Dove**, **Chestnut-breasted Cuckoo**, **Willie-wagtail**, **Figbird**, **Maggie-lark** and **Brown Honeyeater**, and there were no **Rainbow Bee-eaters**. Overall it was as ever a fun trip with some great sightings and we had some outstanding sightings and saw most of the endemics, though Papuan Pitta and White-streaked Honeyeater seemed to be absent at this time this year. Thanks to Brian and Lyn for their good humour, help with the catering and enjoyment of what we saw, and to Sue and Rowan for setting it all up. Hannah at *Iron Range Cabins* was a helpful host and we enjoyed our last night dinner at the *Out of the Blue Café* at Portland Roads. Skytrans were also excellent, and we even got a ride to the baggage area in Cairns!

## Itinerary

### Day 1 - Thursday November 25<sup>th</sup>

Skytrans to Lockhart River, depart Cairns 1400, arriving 1600.

Checked in at Iron Range Cabins, then Lockhart River settlement for shopping, then Quintell Beach and sewage ponds.

### Day 2 - Friday Nov 26<sup>th</sup>

Portland Road forest, Rainforest Camp ground, Cook's Hut area and Gordon Creek; pm Tozer's Gap and Claudie River Road forest

### Day 3 - Saturday Nov 27<sup>th</sup>

Portland Road rainforest areas and Gordon Creek; pm Claudie River rainforest with creeks rising, so back to Portland Road forest

### Day 4 - Sunday Nov 28<sup>th</sup>

Lockhart River beach, Portland Road forest, Rainforest Camp, Cook's Hut and Gordon Creek area; pm visited a very crowded Chilli Beach 1515-1530, full of boaties from Weipa, before heading to Portland Roads via Packer Creek. We had a very good dinner courtesy of Sheree and Greg at the *Out of the Blue Café* then spotlighting near Rainforest Campground before returning to *Iron Range Cabins* by 2130.

**Day 5 - Monday Nov 29<sup>th</sup>**

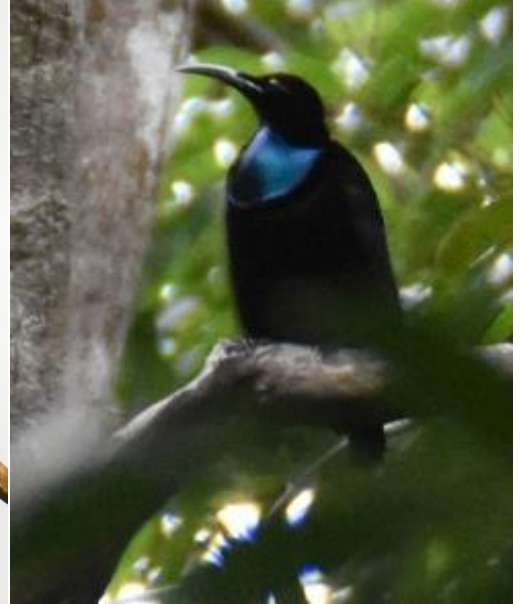
0700-0815 Mango Farm Dam, with a brief heavy shower. Departed 1015 Skytrans to Cairns via Northern Peninsula Airport (Bamaga) and Horn Island.



*Paradise Kingfisher*



*Eclectus Parrots*



*Magnificent Riflebird*



*Tropical Scrubwren*



*Palm Cockatoo*

SPECIES LIST

**Australian or Queensland endemics** in bold, red denotes a Cape York endemic

\* denotes a near-endemic

Magpie-goose *Anseranas semipalmata*  
7 at Mango Farm Dam on Nov 29<sup>th</sup>.

Spotted Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna guttata*  
6 at Mango Farm Dam on our last morning Nov 29 gave very good views with the big flock of Wandering Whistlers.

Wandering Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna*  
140 at Mango Farm Dam Nov 29 was large flock

Radjah Shelduck *Tadorna radjah*  
5 at the sewage ponds Nov 25<sup>th</sup>

Green Pygmy-Goose *Nettapus pulchellus*  
11 at Mango Farm Dam Nov 29.

Pacific Black Duck *Anas superciliosa*  
One at the sewage ponds on arrival day, then 11 at Mango Farm Dam.

**Australian Brush-turkey** *Alectura lathami purpureicollis*  
Up to 10 in day in the rainforest areas, this taxon has a purplish collar, not yellow like the southern birds.

Orange-footed Scrubfowl *Megapodius freycinet*  
A few were seen in the rainforest areas.

**Brown Cuckoo-Dove** *Macropygia phasianella*  
A few sightings from the forest areas.

Pacific Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps (indica) longirostris*  
Heard daily, and a couple seen along the road.

Bar-shouldered Dove *Geopelia humeralis*  
Widespread in the eucalypt and open country areas as well as along the forest roads, this is one of the commonest birds. Peaceful Dove was absent.

Wompoo Fruit-Dove *Megaloprepia magnificus*  
Several sightings from the rainforest areas, with some calling too.

Superb Fruit Dove *Ptilinopus superbus*  
Calling each day and one or two seen or glimpsed most days.

\* Rose-crowned Fruit Dove *Ptilinopus regina (H)*  
Heard in riparian at Packers Creek, and heard again at Portland Roads.

Torresian Imperial-Pigeon *Ducula spilorrhoa*

Small flocks flying over in the coastal areas, but not in the rainforest, we were seeing 40+ every day.

\* Marbled Frogmouth *Podargus ocellatus marmoratus*

We did well en route back from Portland Roads on Nov 28<sup>th</sup>, getting a pair calling close to the road, seen very well when we went in, with the male perched higher up and not at such a good viewing angle. This race is endemic to Cape York.

Large-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus macrurus (H)*

Heard at Portland Roads on Nov 28<sup>th</sup>.

**Australian Swiftlet** *Collocalia terraereginae*

Seen on 3 days with 10 the most.

White-throated Needletail *Hirundapus caudacutus*

Brian thought he saw one on Nov 27<sup>th</sup>.

Pheasant Coucal *Centropus phasianinus*

Heard most days and seen near Lockhart River.

Little Bronze-Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx minutillus*

A nice view of a male of Little Bronze-Cuckoo (presumably race *russatus*, Gould's Bronze) in forest along Portland Road, and heard most days

Australasian Grebe *Tachybaptus novaehollandiae*

3 at the sewage ponds and one at Mango Farm Dam.

Bush Stone-curlew *Burhinus grallarius (H)*

Heard at night near Iron Range cabins on Nov 27<sup>th</sup>, I suspect feral dogs have a bad impact on them here as they seem scarce.

Masked Lapwing *Vanellus novaehollandiae miles*

A few seen near Iron Range cabins.

Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*

Seen daily at the airstrip and by the cabins, with 5 the most. Also one at Quintel Beach, 2 at Chilli Beach and one at Portland Roads

Grey-tailed Tattler *Heteroscelus brevipes (H)*

One heard at Chilli Beach.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

One seen at Portland Roads.

Comb-crested Jacana *Irrediparra gallinacea*

One seen at the sewage ponds.

Silver Gull *Larus novaehollandiae*

7 at Quintel Beach.

Australasian Darter *Anhinga novaehollandiae*  
One at Mango Farm Dam Nov 29<sup>th</sup>.

Little Pied Cormorant *Microcarbo melanoleuca*  
One at Mango Farm Dam Nov 29<sup>th</sup>.

Australian White Ibis *Threskiornis molucca*  
2 at Mango Farm Dam.

Royal Spoonbill *Platalea regia*  
One at Mango Farm Dam Nov 29<sup>th</sup>.

Great Egret *Egretta alba modesta*  
2 seen at Mango Farm Dam.

Intermediate Egret *Egretta intermedia*  
One at the airstrip Nov 29<sup>th</sup> with 9 Cattle Egrets, chased off by staff before the plane arrived.

Eastern Cattle Egret *Bubulcus coromanda*  
9 at the airstrip were chased off before the plane arrived, a regular occurrence it seems! One was coming into the orange breeding dress.

Pied Heron *Egretta picata*  
One at the sewage ponds Nov 25<sup>th</sup>.

Pacific Baza *Aviceda cristata*  
A pair perched up along Claudie River Road gave very nice views.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*  
7 near Lockhart, and singles near the beach and around the sewage ponds.

Whistling Kite *Haliastur sphenurus*  
A couple of single sightings near Lockhart River.

Buff-breasted Paradise-Kingfisher *Tanysiptera sylvia*  
Heard daily in the rainforest and one or 2 seen well each day, plus also flying across the road.

Blue-winged Kookaburra *Dacelo leachii*  
Vocal and seen near Iron Range Cabins this trip despite the burned woodlands.

Forest Kingfisher *Todiramphus macleayi*  
Several regularly perched on wires near Iron Range Cabins.

\* **Yellow-billed Kingfisher** *Syma torotoro*  
Two were seen nicely along Portland Road, and small numbers heard every day. One at Mango Farm Dam on the last morning too, perched quite low down.

Little Kingfisher *Ceyx pusillus*

One at Mango Farm Dam was very unobliging.

Azure Kingfisher *Ceyx azureus*

One flashed by at Portland Roads mangroves.

Brown Falcon *Falco berigora*

One perched up near Lockhart River on Nov 26<sup>th</sup>. Unusual here.

\* **Palm Cockatoo** *Probosciger aterrimus macgillivrayi*

One of the first good birds we saw as we headed to Lockhart supermarket to buy lunch provisions, a good omen as we did well for them this trip. The highlight was the male perched up by the road and displaying to some others out of sight nearby, but calling occasionally in response to his whistles. He did wing stretches, nibbling and dropping bits of dry stick, banging short sticks against the branch, and bowing forward with wings held out, crest erect and tail raised, calling several different notes including the cat-like whistle which I was very pleased to be able to record. We spent at least 20 minutes watching, he was aware of us but not bothered as we stayed at a respectable distance. I have posted videos on eBird and our Facebook page.

Sulphur-crested Cockatoo *Cacatua galerita*

Seen most days in small numbers, even in the rainforest, where one drove off some perched Eclectus one day! Also seen on Horn Island, one of 3 species logged there.

Rainbow Lorikeet *Trichoglossus haematodus*

Just 2 near the airport this trip.

\* **Red-cheeked Parrot** *Geoffroyus geoffroyus*

Vocal and quite widespread, the best being near the start of the forest where we had perched views including a nice orange-billed immature bird.

\* **Eclectus Parrot** *Eclectus roratus*

Quite vocal but wary, we saw them in flight daily, and had lovely views of 3 perched males and a female on Nov 26<sup>th</sup>. Several likely nest sites were located.

\* **Double-eyed Fig-Parrot** *Cyclopsitta diophthalma marshalli* (H)

Heard at Gordon Creek on Nov 26<sup>th</sup> but no others, this is the distinctive race *marshalli*. Surprisingly hard to find here and seems uncommon, I was surprised BirdLife did not split the species up like they did with other fig-parrots in New Guinea.

Noisy Pitta *Pitta versicolor*

Heard daily in small numbers, but no sign as yet of Papuan Pitta.

\* **Black-eared Catbird** *Ailuroedus melanotis joanae*

I reckon this to be the hardest of all the Iron Range specials, a Double Black Diamond bird to borrow a skiing term, being very shy and elusive and not calling much. It is a split from the Australian endemic Spotted Catbird, with this Iron Range taxon *joanae* now part of the New Guinea complex of Black-eared Catbird, which it resembles in its very shy behaviour. We heard them along Portland Road at two spots, and we glimpsed one on Nov 27<sup>th</sup>, another Nov 28<sup>th</sup> and then 2 quite responsive birds at Rainforest Camp the same day. Dire photos were obtained.....'

\* **Fawn-breasted Bowerbird** *Chlamydera cerviniventris*

One seen flying overhead and heard at Packer's Creek where it obviously has a bower back in the thickets, it is odd how this bird is so elusive here as so much suitable habitat exists.

\* **Graceful Honeyeater** *Microptilotis gracilis gracilis*

One of the commonest honeyeaters, vocal and frequent in the rainforest and also at Mango Farm Dam. This is now monotypic, occurring here and in S. PNG, but birds from Cooktown south, which were formerly Graceful Honeyeater race *imitatrix*, are now split as Cryptic Honeyeater, so the Cairns, Cassowary House and coastal birds belong to this new species.

**Yellow-spotted Honeyeater** *Meliphaga notata notata*

Vocal and quite frequent in the rainforest but hard to see well. This race sounds a bit different to the subspecies *mixta* around Cairns/Kuranda too.

**Tawny-breasted Honeyeater** *Xanthotis flaviventer filiger*

Surprisingly common and vocal in the forests, we saw it well each day; this race is endemic to the Cape.

**Green-backed Honeyeater** *Glycichaera fallax*

Seen well along the forest road and at Rainforest Camp. It is an elusive low-density species that only occurs here in Australia, and is by no means easy to find in New Guinea either. Once you know the call however it becomes much easier.

White-throated Honeyeater *Melithreptus albogularis*

A few at Mango Farm Dam and heard near the cabins.

**Hornbill (Helmeted) Friarbird** *Philemon buceroides yorki*

The common friarbird here, this taxon *yorki* is split by the IOC as Hornbill Friarbird, though the recent Australian Bird Guide treats it as Helmeted Friarbird despite supposedly following IOC taxonomy!

\* **Brown-backed Honeyeater** *Ramsayornis modestus*

2 seen along the road to Claudie River.

Dusky Honeyeater *Myzomela obscura*

Quite common in the forest, one of the most frequent birds.

\* **Tropical Scrubwren** *Sericornis beccarii*

This proved elusive, we heard it and saw 3 at Gordon Creek, then seen by Brian at Cook's Hut next day.

Large-billed Gerygone *Gerygone magnirostris (H)*

Heard at Portland Roads mangroves.

Fairy Gerygone *Gerygone palpebrosa personata*

Heard daily, and seen on the Claudie River road, this is the black-throated *personata* race.

Yellow-breasted Boatbill *Machaerirhynchus flaviventer*



Common by voice, and after being initially troublesome it was seen several times

**Black Butcherbird** *Cracticus quoyi jardini*

Heard daily and seen a couple of times in the rainforest.

**White-breasted Woodswallow** *Artamus leucorhynchus*

Frequent around the airport and cabins, also at Lockhart River in small numbers

**White-bellied Cuckooshrike** *Coracina papuensis*

Just a couple of singles this trip, in the drier country.

**Varied Triller** *Lalage leucomela*

One or two seen most days.

**Grey Whistler** *Pachycephala simplex peninsulae*

Seen well at Portland Road forest on several days, and very vocal this trip.

**Rufous Whistler** *Pachycephala rufiventris* (H)

Heard at Mango Farm Dam.

**Rufous Shrike-thrush** *Colluricincla megarhyncha*

The former (Not so) Little Shrike-thrush was seen well at Portland Road forest on several days, the species now being split into 8 species, with 2 (Arafura and Rufous) in Australia.

**Grey Shrike-thrush** *Colluricincla harmonica* (H)

Seen en route to Lockhart River.

**Green (Yellow) Oriole** *Oriolus flavocinctus*

Very common and noisy in the rainforest areas, and Green oriole is a far more appropriate name than the old one, which is preoccupied by some South American icterid anyway.

**Spangled Drongo** *Dicrurus bracteatus*

Small numbers in the various woodlands.

**Black-winged Monarch** *Monarcha frater canescens*

This Cape York wet season special showed well just once at Rainforest Camp on Nov 27<sup>th</sup>, they seem to arrive quite late. It is much paler and more silvery than Black-faced Monarch, with black wings and tail, but the voice is very similar to that of Black-faced Monarch. During the writing of my *Lynx New Guinea Field Guide*, I realised there seem to be no records of this form *canescens* from that island despite many books saying it winters there. So, does it winter in remote parts of the Cape, or somewhere in New Guinea? I also don't think it belongs with Black-winged Monarch which is a hill forest species with very different voice, this may be a Cape York race of Black-faced or just possibly an endemic in its own right.

**Spectacled Monarch** *Symposiachrus trivirgatus albiventris*

The race here has a sharp cut-off between the orange throat and white underparts, rather different to the southerly taxa. We heard them daily but sightings were few and far between.

**White-eared Monarch** *Carterornis leucotis*

A pleasing find was this elusive canopy bird, it is uncommon and difficult to locate at the tops of the trees, and the call here is unlike the tablelands disyllabic version.

**Frill-necked Monarch** *Arses lorealis*

Seen daily in the rainforest, creeping along trunks and branches like Pied Monarch does. It is endemic to Cape York Peninsula.

Leaden Flycatcher *Myiagra rubecula*

Heard near Iron Range cabins and one female near Chilli Beach

Shining Flycatcher *Myiagra alecto*

Heard in the forest on Nov 26<sup>h</sup>, and a male at Packer's Creek on Nov 28<sup>th</sup>.

\* **Trumpet Manucode** *Phonygammus keraudreni gouldii*

This one is always a challenge, and was not calling very much, but one was seen briefly at Claudie River, and it was heard and called in very nicely on Nov 28<sup>th</sup>, when it called and spread the wings very nicely as it did so. This is another complex that surely consists of several species, and I would not be surprised to see this split as an endemic Cape York Manucode at some point. *Manucode* means bird of the gods in Malay, though quite why it is applied to this black plumaged species assemblage I have no idea!

\* **Magnificent (Cape York) Riflebird** *Ptiloris magnificus alberti*

Terrific views of a wonderful male at Cook's Hut on morning, sat out nicely in good light as it responded to the much less visible male calling nearby. This is another potential split too as the voice is different to the New Guinea birds, and more resembles the western Magnificent Riflebird than the geographically much closer Growling Riflebird.

Lemon-bellied Flyrobin *Microeca flavigaster*

A fine bird singing in the savanna on the Claudie River Road on Nov 27<sup>th</sup>.

White-browed Robin *Poecilodryas superciliosa*

Two birds seen at Packers Creek near Portland Roads, flighty and wary but we eventually got quite good views, though sadly no photos.

**White-faced Robin** *Tregellasia leucops albigularis*

Quite vocal in the rainforest, and seen nicely several times, this race is endemic to the Cape, and the complex of races in New Guinea is due to be split into several species.

**Northern Scrub-Robin** *Drymodes superciliaris*

Another elusive and very local Cape York endemic special, silent until overnight rain on Nov 27-28<sup>th</sup>. We got great view of a pair next day when they were calling well. Now split from Papuan Scrub-Robin as quite distinct in voice and behaviour.

Silvereye *Zosterops lateralis*

Just a few seen along Portland Road in the forest, this is about as far north as they go in Queensland.

**Metallic Starling *Aplonis metallica***

Common in the rainforest with a large colonial nest colony seen

**\* Mistletoebird *Dicaeum hirundinaceum***

Our only flowerpecker gave good views several times in the forest areas. I heard it on Horn Island, one of our 3 species there in the heat of the day

**Olive-backed Sunbird *Nectarinia jugularis frenatus***

A few sightings away from the forest areas, also seen on Horn Island, one of 3 species recorded there.

**Red-browed Finch *Neochmia temporalis***

Just 2 along Portland Road in grass on the forest edges.

**Mammals****Agile Wallaby *Macropus agilis***

A couple near Iron Range Cabins.

**Northern Brown Bandicoot *Isodon macrourus***

One dead in the road near Lockhart River

**Spotted Cuscus *Spilocuscus maculatus***

A lovely view of a greyish individual feeding on figs in the forest along Portland Road.

**Reptiles**

Just one snake this trip, a diamond patterned slender creature over a metre long with a distinctly separate head, otherwise just a few skinks.

**Amphibians**

Cane toads were very common, and there were some lovely White-lipped green tree frogs at Iron Range cabins

**Butterflies**

New Guinea Birdwing, Ulysses Swallowtail, Green-spotted Triangle, Black-banded Plane, Hamadryad, Chocolate Argus, Dingy Bush-brown, Blue-banded Eggfly, Leafwing, Broad-margined Grass-yellow, Shining Oak-blue.

**Plants****Cape York Pitcher-plant *Nepenthes mirabilis***

I was able to find one flowering plant out on the white sand in the heath at Tozer's Gap, much to Brian's delight. We also saw some fine very small sundews *Drosera* sp. by the lookout.

Phil Gregory Nov 2021 [info@s2travel.com.au](mailto:info@s2travel.com.au) [www.birder.travel](http://www.birder.travel)