

TRIP REPORT

Wet Tropics: Atherton Tablelands & Cairns area

27th September – 3rd October 2020



One specialty birds seen was a female Southern Cassowary (Casuarius casuarius) Photograph by Phil Gregory.

Itinerary

Sept 27 “*Ocean Spirit*” to Michaelmas Cay.

Sept 28 Cairns area- Machan’s Beach/ Cairns Esplanade/ Centenary Park/ Cattana Wetlands/ Cassowary House.

Sept 29 Black Mountain Road/ Granite Gorge/ Mareeba Golf Course/ Emerald Creek Ice Creamery

Sept 30 Black Mountain Road/ Wondecla area/ Mt. Hypipamee/ Chambers Rainforest Lodge

Oct 1 Chambers Lodge/ Cathedral fig/ Lake Barrine/ Hastie’s Swamp. Spotlighting at Curtain Fig and Chambers Lodge.

Oct 2 Chambers Lodge/ Curtain Fig/ M Nerada Tea Estate/ Old Boonjie Road at Topaz/ Platypus Park at Tarzali/ Cairns / Novotel.

Oct 3 Depart Cairns 0430 for Daintree Boatman River trip 0630-0845/ Mt Carbine/ Lunch at Mt Molloy/ Return to Cairns.

This was a private trip for Airlie, aiming to see many of the highlights of the Wet Tropics area, and we were very lucky with the weather throughout.

Detailed Itinerary for Wet Tropics

Sept 27

The reef trip day was luckily calm and not too hot, pleasant conditions and ideal for snorkelling and with some nice sightings at the sand cay-150 **Brown Noddy**, about 70 **Sooty Tern**, 40 **Crested** and 30 **Lesser Crested Tern**, 2 enormous **Great Frigatebirds**, 3 migrant **Turnstone** and 170 **Brown Booby** with one very fat and, large demanding white downed juvenile still with the hapless parents and right at the very end of the breeding season. Also nice to see the large black and white **Torresian Imperial Pigeons** by the *Mantra Hotel*.



Sooty Terns (*Onychoprion fuscatus*)



Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster*)

Sept 28

We visited various sites around Cairns, with a trip out to Machan's Beach giving us **Lovely Fairywren**, **Fairy Gerygone** and **Olive-backed Sunbird** in the dry woodland of Redden Island, but a high tide meaning no shorebirds. **Mangrove Robin** and **Varied Honeyeater** showed nicely on the N. Esplanade though, two special birds of this area. Centenary Park gave **Magpie Goose**, **Rajah Shelduck**, **Bush Stone-curlew**, Cattana Wetlands was a nice shady walk, but with again no sign of the elusive **Tube-nosed Bat** Phil was hoping to find and just **Black Butcherbird**, a smart **Green Oriole**, a couple of **Orange-footed Scrubfowl** and **Comb-crested Jacana** otherwise. We then headed up into the rainforest of the Kuranda Range and Phil's former home at *Cassowary House*, with slight chances of **Cassowary** these days.

Sept 29

Victoria's Riflebird showed up on his song post, and **Spotted Catbird** showed well, and we got to grips with **Yellow-spotted Honeyeater**, **Barred Cuckooshrike**, **Metallic Starling** and **Yellow-breasted Boatbill** plus two **Pacific Black Ducks** flying over that may have been Phil's first record from here! There was also a hard to get onto female plumage **Satin Flycatcher**, which is scarce migrant here at this time of the year. The local **Figbirds** are the northern race, which has bright yellow underparts, very different to the grey-green ones around Brisbane. Phil then got a call about a **Cassowary** that had been seen at Perry's rainforest property nearby, so we made a dash over there with no sign of the male and his chicks near the house as we had hoped. However, as we drove slowly out we encountered a beautiful large female right by the track, and were able to get out and admire her at very close range, a wonderful encounter and one of the top priority species for Airlie.

Granite Gorge near Mareeba came next, with lovely close encounters with **Mareeba Rock Wallabies**, tame **Squatter Pigeons**, **Pale-headed Rosella** and a nice large bower of **Great Bowerbird** with the bird seen nearby. **Red-tailed Black Cockatoos** also showed well here. Mareeba Golf Course gave **Eastern Grey Kangaroo**, and we finished up at Emerald Creek Ice

Creamery for very fine ice-creams/milk shake and a gorgeous male **Red-winged Parrot**, all vivid apple green and scarlet and posing very well.



Red-winged Parrot (*Aprosmictus erythropterus*)

Sept 30 We did some birding along Black Mountain Road, seeing **Wompoo Fruit Dove** and **Double-eyed Fig-Parrot**, paid a quick visit to Kuranda for coffee, then headed out to the higher tablelands where Springvale Road at Wondecla was our first stop, in the drier habitat there. The Fuscous-type honeyeaters showed well and finding **Dusky Woodswallow** was pleasing as this is scarce here, whilst a **Little Lorikeet** shot over and an **Eastern Shrike-Tit** called close by but did not give proper views. **Two Green Pygmy-Goose** on the lake there were the only ones of the tour.

Our stop at Mt Hypipamee gave a very fine male **Golden Bowerbird** by his bower after about 45 minutes wait, a tour highlight for sure, tame **Grey-headed Robins** by the car park and we almost saw another **Cassowary**, missing it by moments. **White-throated Treecreeper** of the small northern race *minor* also showed nicely here. The scenic volcanic blowhole of the Crater itself is worth a look too. Bromfield Swamp held a few **Brolga** and **Sarus Crane**, then we finished up at *Chambers Rainforest Lodge* at Lake Eacham, with nice early dinner at *Nick's Restaurant* at Yungaburra.



Golden Bowerbird (*Prionodura newtoniana*)

Oct 1

Saw us birding around Chambers Lodge, where a fruiting tree held **Brown Cuckoo-Dove**, **Tooth-billed Bowerbird**, **Barred Cuckooshrike** and **Victoria's Riflebird**. The Cathedral Fig was huge and spectacular but with no **Chowchillas**, but happily our walk at Lake Barrine gave us a lovely pair right by the start of the track, followed by a great **Tooth-billed Bowerbird** singing

above his oval stage of silvery underside leaves (*Neolitizia* sp. Bollygum) on the forest floor-the older name was the very appropriate Stagemaker. The lake held **Little Black**, **Little Pied** and the scarce **Great Cormorant** plus a few **Great-crested Grebe**. A foray over to Hastie's Swamp and the lovely hide there produced a very high count of 200 **Hardhead** and 6 of the locally very uncommon **Maned Duck**, with a roosting **Nankeen Night Heron** right by the hide, but the only shorebirds were a few **Pied Stilt** and 2 **Black-fronted Dotterel**.

That night my son Rowan joined us and we went spotlighting at the Curtain Fig, where his keen eyes soon got us **Green Ringtail** and **Coppery Brushtail** Possum, and back at Chambers the **Sugar Gliders** showed beautifully and Airlie got to see the spectacular **Striped Possum** just after we left.

Oct 2

Saw us do another walk at Chambers, with great views of **Topknot Pigeon**, male **Golden Whistler**, **Black-faced Monarch** newly back from New Guinea and resplendent in grey and rust, and **Pied Monarch** hanging on to the sides of trunks, then a visit to see the wonderfully strange Curtain Fig in daylight, complete with **Wompoo Fruit Dove** nest right above the boardwalk. Nerada Tea Estate was the next stop, and a search of about 20 minutes yielded a fine female **Lumholtz's Tree-Kangaroo** with a joey, which drew a small crowd very quickly and was a very fine mammal to see on the tour. A trip to Phil and Sue's new home at Old Boonjie Road at Topaz gave us nice looks at **Lewin's** and **Macleay's Honeyeater**, **Hornbill Friarbird**, **Pied Currawongs**, **Satin Bowerbird** and **Victoria's Riflebird** as we enjoyed mid-morning coffee. We stayed with the mammal theme and had great looks at **Duck-billed Platypus** swimming about in broad daylight at Tarzali Lakes Platypus Park; this really is one of the best places to see this iconic and bizarre creature. Then it was back down the scenic but winding Gillie's Range to the *Novotel* in Cairns. The tide was better at the Esplanade late pm, and we had an enjoyable shorebird session with good views of **Great Knot**, **Bar-tailed Godwit**, **Black-tailed Godwit**, **Whimbrel**, **Far Eastern Curlew**, **Grey-tailed Tattler** and **Lesser Sand Plover** and a nice dinner at the Turkish restaurant on the sea front, followed by early bed ready for the dawn Daintree boat trip next day.



Hornbill Friarbird (*Philemon yorki*)

Oct 3

Left at 0430 for the Daintree River boat trip with Muzza the Daintree Boatman from 0630-0845. A very high tide coupled with strong winds made this more challenging than normal, but a terrific pair of **Papuan Frogmouth** showed really well and both **Azure** and **Sacred Kingfisher** showed nicely along with **Large-billed Gerygone** and its nest which is cleverly camouflaged as it mimics flood debris hanging down from branches above the water. **Shining Flycatcher**, **White-bellied Sea Eagle** and the only **Brahminy Kite** of the tour were other good sightings, along with **Striated Heron** and some **Australian Swiftlets**. Breakfast at the Daintree café was welcome, then we forayed out to Mt Carbine in the dry country and located a fine **Australian**

Bustard that gave exemplary views from the car. Lunch was at the little café in Mt Molloy then back down to Cairns and the *Novotel* ready for the flight home next day.

My thanks to Airlie for the chance to do the tour, it was fun and we had some terrific sightings in this beautiful region, all at a relaxed pace and with some nice little forays for local cafés and restaurants. I enjoyed travelling with you and hearing about life in the forest near Canungra, and my tree identification was somewhat improved thank you. Thanks also to Sue Gregory of Cassowary Tours for setting it up, Tony Matheson of Helloworld Travel for the booking, and to Rowan Gregory for his spotlighting expertise. Good birding and have a safe rest of 2020, the most bizarre year of modern times