Full Detailed Itinerary - Australia: Birding with a Camera (BwC)

Day 1: Arrival in Cairns; birding in Cairns (NE Queensland)

After arrival in this small tropical city, we will bird the local area, searching for a swathe of local shorebirds along the scenic seafront like Terek Sandpipers and Far Eastern Curlews if the tide is right, and also check local sites for common Australian species like Torresian Imperial-Pigeons, Laughing Kookaburras, Rainbow Bee-eaters, Rainbow Lorikeets and Helmeted Friarbirds. Perhaps we will also find something scarcer, like Crimson Finch or White-browed Crake too. Make no mistake, even after just a few hours birding at this starting point, not far from our Cairns hotel, you will have got dozens of lifers (and some photos too), with minimal effort involved! A single night will be spent in Cairns. ?

Day 2: Michaelmas Cay (NE Queensland)

Today will be a real treat for our cameras, and also provide a nice relaxing day following long flights into the country, as we spend it out on the Great Barrier Reef, with a visit to the small, sandy island (or ‘cay’) of Michaelmas Cay. This tiny dot on the map is only 90 minutes boat ride from Cairns, but feels a world away, and provides a refuge for thousands of nesting seabirds. The most conspicuous of these will be Brown Noddy, Brown Booby, and Lesser Crested and Sooty Terns, although we will look for less common birds too like frigatebirds, Bridled Tern, Black Noddy, and other terns or gulls that sometimes turn up too. After birding the island, there is also the option to explore the reef further by snorkeling, or by taking a glass-bottomed boat tour, or both! In the late afternoon, we shall arrive back in Cairns, and drive on to nearby Kuranda, a rainforest site just 40-minutes’ drive from the city. The night will be spent in either the town of Kuranda, or at a nearby lodge (the lodge is small, and so space for the entire group is not always available).

Day 3: Black Mountain Road to Daintree via the Outback (NE Queensland)

One of the undoubted beauties of birding in Northeast Queensland, is the sheer variety of habitats in which to bird in. Even by this early point of the tour we will have likely been in mangroves, on a sandy islet in the Great Barrier Reef, and also covered open woods and parkland in Cairns. On this day, we change tack again, by immersing ourselves for the morning into tropical rainforest birding, in the Wet Tropics of northeast Queensland. While this may sound daunting, and indeed the birding can be more challenging than other habitats, Australia can claim some of the easiest forest birding in the World, so this is no major task, even for people without any familiarity with Australian birds. We will visit a lodge where our main hope will be for a Southern Cassowary to wander into the garden and feed on the abundant tropical fruits laid out for them. If one comes in, our cameras will be in for a treat, as they are close, and big, and therefore very easy to photograph! Other feeders on site offer chances to see a bird-of-paradise, Victoria’s Riflebird, as well as Macleay’s Honeyeater (a local species), and the noisy Spotted Catbird, which is actually a bowerbird that makes no effort to build a bower. Other possibilities in the nearby rainforest include, Emerald Dove, Superb Fruit-Dove, Yellow-breasted Boatbill (a family endemic to Australia), Spectacled Monarch, and Helmeted Friarbird. In the afternoon, we shall make our way north to another town in the Wet Tropics, Daintree, from where we will take a boat trip out the following morning. There are several ways to get there, and so this afternoon will be a little flexible, although we are likely to change habitat again, and pass through a section

of the North Queensland Outback, which is starkly drier and more open habitat than the rainforest, and could produce very different birds like Squatter Pigeon, Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo, Red-winged Parrot, Blue-winged Kookaburra, Blue-faced Honeyeater, or even a Great Bowerbird attending its gray-and-silver themed bower in a schoolyard. A single night will be spent in Daintree, at a hotel that understands birders perfectly. We may add other wildlife there during the evening, like Northern Brown Bandicoot scampering across the lawn or an enormous White-lipped Treefrog sitting on the side of the building.

Day 4: Daintree River Cruise to the Outback (NE Queensland)

In the early morning, before the day heats up, we will take a dedicated bird cruise along the wide Daintree River, and its smaller tributaries. The banks of the river are flanked by various habitats, from open agricultural lands, to dense wet rainforest, to giant mangroves, all of which will host interesting species for us. The prize find in this area is the gigantic Great-billed Heron, although some luck is always required for this beast. More widespread birds for which this boat trip is good are Black Bittern, Shining Flycatcher, Large-billed Gerygone, Green Oriole, and sometimes too we get to see the fidgety Double-eyed Fig-Parrot or even a Papuan Frogmouth, the latter sometimes at a roost site in the mangroves. After the cruise, we return to our lodging in Daintree for a hearty late breakfast. Depending on local information at the time, we may bird some nearby rainforest and forest edge for Lovely Fairywren and Noisy Pitta, before heading inland towards the North Queensland Outback. However, before we leave the coast we will check some spots for Beach Thick-knee as we do so. The afternoon plan is flexible, with so many sites on offer, although we are likely to kickstart our birdlist of Atherton Tableland specialties by heading up onto a low mountain, where the slightly higher forests are home to a swathe of specialty birds, like Tooth-billed Bowerbird, Mountain Thornbill, Atherton Scrubwren, and Bridled Honeyeater. The next three nights will be spent in a small town with kangaroos on the golf course, on the edge of the Outback.

Days 5-6: Highland Rainforest, Outback, and Swamps of NE Queensland

As mentioned before, this part of Queensland is sprinkled with so many birding sites, the exact order in which they will be visited on these days is not known, and will be flexible with local bird news at the time. We may cover wetland sites like Lake Mitchell, Mareeba Wetlands and Hasties Swamp, for species like Plumed Whistling-Duck, Cotton Pygmy-Goose (some years only), Magpie-Goose, Black-necked Stork, and White-cheeked Honeyeater; wooded Outback areas like Mount Carbine and Maryfarms for species like Australian Bustard, Pale-headed Rosella, Australia’s tiniest bird, Weebill, Apostlebird, Brown Treecreeper, and the local White-gaped Honeyeater; and highland forest sites like Mount Lewis and areas around Hypipamee NP for specialties like Golden Bowerbird, Fernwren, Bower’s Shrike-Thrush and Wompoo Fruit-Pigeon. Areas around the Curtain Fig Tree will be in our plans too, not only for these dramatic trees, but also for the chance at Pied Monarch, Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove, and Gray-headed Robin. We will also drop into a site to see Platypus by daytime that also often holds the melodic White-throated Gerygone too. While we burn through the many hotspots of this mega birding region, known as the “Atherton Tablelands”, we will also pick up mammals as we do so, like Agile Wallaby, Mareeba Rock Wallaby, and the enormous Eastern Gray Kangaroo. These two nights will also be spent in the town of Mareeba, right on the edge of the Outback.

Day 7: To Cairns (NE Queensland)

We will have a final day to explore any of the sites we need to most for whatever we are still looking for. The precise locations of these will depend on what we are still seeking at this time. On arriving back in Cairns, if we need too, we can spend more time scanning the seafront for shorebirds, like Red-capped Plovers, Sharp-tailed, Broad-billed and Curlew Sandpipers, Red-necked Stints, Greater and Lesser Sand-Plovers, Bar-tailed Godwit, Great Knot, Gray-tailed Tattler, as well as Royal Spoonbill, Pacific Reef Heron, and

Australian Pelican. A final will be spent night in Cairns.

Day 8: Cairns to Brisbane; drive to O’ Reilly’s (SE Queensland)

Early in the morning we will fly out of Northeast Queensland, and head to Brisbane in the southern part of the same state. Our stop in Brisbane will be brief though, with only a short stop in some mangroves for a handful of habitat specialists there, before we head to one of the Australia’s most revered birding sites, O Reilly’s Rainforest Retreat. Although we will have been in rainforest before in northeast Queensland, this will be markedly different, being cooler subtropical rainforest, with a completely different suite of birds. Before the end of the afternoon, we will be enjoying the incredibly tame, but wild, birds around this superb lodge, with Australian King-Parrots, Crimson Rosellas, Australian Brush-Turkey, Regent and Satin Bowerbirds, and Superb Fairywren all likely to be found. At night, we can search for nightbirds like Southern Boobook and Marbled Frogmouth too. Two nights will be spent in the comfortable surrounds of O Reilly’s, which even produces its own, local wines from their nearby vineyard.

Day 9: O’ Reilly’s (SE Queensland)

The lodge we will be staying in is surrounded by excellent rainforest, just seconds walk from the hotel reception; but there is also very different wet sclerophyll forest, a short drive away too. We will visit both habitats on this day, the first will require some trail walking (easy) for interior rainforest birds like Albert’s Lyrebird, Green Catbird, Rose Robin, Australian Logrunner, and Eastern Whipbird. While the drier wooded areas along Duck Creek Road will be searched for Bell Miner, Red-browed Treecreper, Spotted Pardalote, White-naped Honeyeater, and perhaps even a Koala, although lots of luck is required for the latter. At night a second venture can be made for those who wish to do so, to look for birds and mammals, like Mountain Brushtail Possum, and Red-necked Pademelon.

Day 10: O’ Reilly’s to Warwick and Goondiwindi (SE Queensland)

After a short time trying to mop up any missing birds at O’ Reilly’s, we shall make a long, but fascinating journey west into the eastern Rangelands. Our drive might be lengthy, but this will be a birding drive, as on this trip we quickly pass out of rainforest and wet sclerophyll woodlands into drier habitats like closed Eucalypt woodland, open Eucalypt woodland and Brigalow habitats, which are rich in species of a different nature, most notably parrots. In the area around Warwick, we will be on the lookout for Musk, Scaly-breasted and Little Lorikeets, Pale-headed and Eastern Rosellas, Little Corella, and Cockatiel, in addition to some non-parrots like Striated Pardalote, Gray-capped Babbler and Striped Honeyeater. This is also the region of iconic Australian species such as the very vocal Grey Butcherbirds and the graceful and arboreal Black-faced Cuckooshrike. A single night will be spent in a hotel in the town of Goondiwindi.

Day 11: Goondiwindi to Cunnamulla (S Queensland)

We start the day within drier Mulga and Brigalow scrub west of Goondiwindi. Here we search for targets such as Speckled Warbler, Plum-headed Finch, and Greater Bluebonnet. The morning will see us driving and birding our way ever westwards, to the town of Charleville, in the Outback of Southern Queensland. The journey itself is likely to be rewarding as we head ever deeper into Inland Australia, and open up a swathe of new birds. Along the way we will make strategic stops for species like Wedge-tailed Eagle, Red-rumped Parrot, Eastern Shrike-Tit, Varied Sitella, Yellow-throated Miner, and Spotted Bowerbird. In the evening, we will arrive in Cunnamulla, within the Outback, where the species mix will be quite different, and well deserves a full exploration the following day and perhaps also in the late afternoon too. Two nights will be spent in Cunnamulla.

Day 12: Cunnamulla area (S Queensland)

We will have the entire day free to bird the Outback of southern Queensland, where roads dissect excellent habitat that can produce an impressive bird list. Among the lengthy list of species on offer will be Black-breasted Kite, Little Eagle, Brown Quail, Banded Lapwing, Diamond Dove, Australian Ringneck, Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo, Crimson Chat, Crested Bellbird, Restless Flycatcher, Chestnut-crowned Babbler, Red-capped and Hooded Robins, Red-browed Pardalote, White-browed and Masked Woodswallows (sometimes in the same flock together), Southern Whiteface, and Double-barred and Zebra Finches. A second night will be spent in the town of Cunnamulla.

Day 13: Cunnamulla to Lake Cargelligo (New South Wales)

On this day we will bird but mostly drive our way south into the next state down, New South Wales, where will overnight near Mallee habitat, an exciting and unique Eucalypt-dominated habitat type that has a discrete set of specialty birds. Our journey there will be another HUGE drive. This is a travel day plain and simple. We may have a few stops for birds but please be prepared for this day to be spent in a car. Expect to have your bins and cameras ready because we will not know what we are shooting until we are on top of it. The locations where we stop will be dictated by recent rain and seeding or blossoming in the grassland and mallee habitats. This part of NSW is exceeding remote, with almost no human habitation and vast expanses of only slightly modified vegetation. The night will be spent in the small town of Lake Cargelligo.

Day 14: Round Hill to Binya Dam and Leeton (New South Wales)

This habitat does not look much, it is made up of coppice-structured eucalypts, all of which are of a similar height. Although the habitat appears quite uniform and uninteresting, the selection of birds we could see is anything but; Chestnut Quail-Thrush, Southern Scrub-Robin, Shy Heathwren, and Gilbert's Whister are all scarcities that are possible here. In some periods, when there are abundant nectar sources available, there can be an influx of nomadic honeyeater species too, like Black, Pied, White-fronted, and White-eared Honeyeaters. Other birds that occur include the spectacular Splendid Fairywren, Mulga Parrot, Western Gerygone, Inland and Chestnut-rumped Thornbills, Yellow-plumed Honeyeater, and in some years Crimson Chat. After much of the day and a field lunch at this excellent site, we will drive towards the town of Leeton, which is located right next to Five Bough Swamp (that we will visit the following day). A late afternoon/evening visit will be made to Binya Dam before arriving at the hotel, for one very special bird indeed. At this time of day, this small dam can attract birds coming into drink, which we hope will include the stunning Turquoise Parrot, arguably the best looking parrot in Australia that is known as the "Land of Parrots". Two nights will be spent in a hotel in the town of Leeton.

Day 15: Binya State Forest and Five Bough Swamp

This will be a day of two distinct halves, the morning being spent in the mulga and brigalow (scrubby and wooded) habitats of Binya State Forest, while the afternoon will involve a stop at Five Bough Swamp, a superb site for wetland species. Binya holds many special birds, like Black-eared Cuckoo, Crested Bellbird, and our principal target at the site, the striking Painted Honeyeater. Red-capped Robins, Mulga Parrots, Australian Ringnecks, Yellow Thornbills, Speckled Warblers, Striped and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters, White-browed Babblers, and White-winged Choughs can also be found there. If we have not managed to find a Pink (Major Mitchell's) Cockatoo by this point, we can check around the golf course at Griffith, which is a good site too for Red-rumped Parrots, Greater Bluebonnets, and sometimes hosts a nesting Tawny Frogmouth too. In the afternoon, following a lunch in Griffith or Leeton, we shall visit Five Bough Swamp, just outside of where we are staying in Leeton. This is a brilliant wetland, with a long list of possibilities

including Magpie-Goose, Australian Shelduck, Chestnut Teal, Australasian Shoveler, Musk, Blue-billed, White-eyed and Pink-eared Ducks, Hoary-headed and Australasian Grebes, Australasian Darter, Nankeen Night-Heron, Yellow-billed and Royal Spoonbills, Red-necked Avocet, Red-kneed Dotterel, Black-tailed Native-hen, and the chance at some crakes; in good crake years Australian Spotted and Spotless Crakes occur in good numbers, but require some luck to see, depending on local water levels during our visit. Other species possible at Five Bough and in the local area include, Swamp Harrier, Australian Hobby, Australian Kestrel, Australian Kite, Variegated Fairywren, Yellow Thornbill, Australian Reed-Warbler, Little Grassbird, Golden-headed Cisticola and Zebra Finch. Groves of Red Gum trees along riverbanks nearby are also a good spot to try and find 'Yellow' Rosella (a form of Crimson Rosella), and the incredible Superb Parrot. A second night will be spent in Leeton.

Day 16: Leeton to Chiltern (Victoria)

This will be a big day as we make our first visit to the highly touted Chiltern area in the north of Victoria, which is arguably the most celebrated part of the state. We will leave early, so that we can spend most of the day in this exciting area. Undoubtedly, the species for which the Chiltern area is most famed for is the very rare Regent Honeyeater, as this has been the most reliable area for this declining species in recent years. If there is any positive news on recent sightings, we will chase these as a priority, but some luck is still required to see it, even though we will be visiting at a potentially good time. It is simply becoming that rare, sadly. However, even without the honeyeater, this site and area has a massive bird list, which is to be admired and chased after! Among the long list of species are Painted Buttonquail, Turquoise Parrot, (Swift Parrot may or may not still be there when we get there, as this is migration season), Little Lorikeet, White-throated and Brown Treecreepers, Yellow-tufted, White-plumed, Brown-headed, Black-chinned, and Fuscous Honeyeaters, Eastern Shrike-Tit, Scarlet, Rose and Flame Robins, Rufous Songlark, Mistletoebird, and Diamond Firetail. Much of the day will be spent in this park, before departing for nearby Chiltern for a single night's stay.

Day 17: Chiltern area to Yea (Victoria)

After another morning in the Chiltern area, we will drive south to Yea for the night. Still within Victoria, but our journey would have taken us into a different temperate forest type, which will hold some different targets for the following morning than in previous days. For people familiar with the Australia Top to Bottom tour, this day is this tour's equivalent to the days around Sydney and the Capertee Valley.

Day 18: Toolangi State Forest to Melbourne (Victoria)

Our journey south will have brought us into the range of the cool temperate forests just north of Melbourne on the map. There will be a handful of key target species here, most notably the vociferous Superb Lyrebird, one of Australia's most iconic birds, following its camera shutter impersonations featured in the famous BBC wildlife series 'Life of Birds' with David Attenborough. We cannot guarantee they will mimic shutters in this digital age, but we have a good chance of finding one, and hearing a range of more traditional mimicry! Other key species we will seek in the forests are Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo, Gang-gang Cockatoo, Red-browed Treecreeper, Pilotbird, Red Wattlebird, Olive Whistler, Gray Currawong, and Crescent Honeyeater. Other species we may encounter, include Bassian Thrush, Rufous Fantail, Satin Flycatcher and Golden Whistler. From there we depart for Melbourne airport in time for flights out to Hobart, Tasmania for the extension, or for flights home.

The tour rolls into Melbourne in time for evening flights out to Tasmania if joining the extension, or to

connect with international flights out in the evening too. If you prefer to have an extra night in Melbourne before flying out, please contact Tropical Birding and we are happy to help with this. PLEASE CONTACT THE TROPICAL BIRDING OFFICE BEFORE BOOKING YOUR DEPARTURE FLIGHTS.

Tour Extension 1

Day 1 (day 18 of the main tour): Melbourne to Hobart (Tasmania)

In the late afternoon/evening (exact time to be determined) of the final day of the main tour we shall fly out of Melbourne direct to Hobart, the capital of the island and Australian state of Tasmania. Three nights will be spent in a comfortable hotel within the small city of Hobart.

Day 2: Bruny Island (Tasmania)

On this day we will visit what is often one of the most popular sites of the entire tour, Bruny Island, a short drive and car ferry ride from Hobart. It is popular for the beauty of the island, which encompasses scenic rocky coasts, pristine temperate forests, coastal heathlands, and gorgeous beaches on this scantily-populated island. It is also home to all of Tasmania's endemic bird species, and we are sure to make a big dent in this target list. The beaches are home to one of the largest gulls on Earth, the hulking Pacific Gull, as well as Black Oystercatchers and the endangered Hooded Plover. Sometimes too, Blue-winged Parrots can be found wintering just behind these too, or Beautiful Firetails found in nearby coastal heathland. The temperate forests are home to the greatest number of 'Tassie' endemics, and we will try various spots to track down Green Rosella, Tasmania's state bird, Yellow Wattlebird, Strong-billed and Black-headed Honeyeaters, Tasmanian Scrubwren, and the rare Forty-spotted Pardalote. In the more open areas we are likely to find the flightless and tame Tasmanian Native-hen, sometimes with black chicks in toe in this season. Among the other species we will be on the lookout for will be Swift Parrot, if they had already departed the Chiltern area of Victoria by the time of our visit on the main tour, and the gorgeous Pink Robin; Bruny is arguably the very best site for the latter species. At the end of the day, we will return to Hobart for a second night. After dinner, those with any excess energy, can join an optional drive to the local Hobart Waterworks Reserve, where mammals like Tasmanian Pademelon, Bennett's Wallaby, and Common Brushtail Possum are usually easily found. There are a few rarer marsupials possible too, and occasionally Tasmanian Boobook can be found there too. This site is only a 10-minute drive from the hotel.

Day 3: Mount Wellington and Eaglehawk Neck (Tasmania)

While will have had chances at all of the endemics the day before on Bruny Island, it is usual that a few are better looked for elsewhere on mainland Tasmania, which is why this extra day is usually needed to complete the set. Our first stop will be on the thickly-forested, 1200m/4100ft-high Mount Wellington, which at its base is a good place for Black Currawong, while walking tracks into the rainforest will likely be required for Scrubtit and Tasmanian Thornbill. Further up the mountain, there is the opportunity to look for Flame Robin and the endemic Yellow-throated Honeyeater as well as Crescent Honeyeater in the more open heath near the top, and the shy Striated Fieldwren is also found around there too. It would be a sacrilege not to go all the way to the top for the amazing views of the city of Hobart below, and to admire the chief geological feature of this mountain, the 'Organ Pipes', comprised of columnar cliffs of dolerite. We will also check local sites for Brush Bronzewing and Musk Lorikeet if needed, as locations around Hobart are often best for these species.

After lunch, there will be one final, amazing activity to take in; a trip out to Eaglehawk Neck, where the

geological interest is a blowhole, and off of the cliffs seabirds might be seen like Short-tailed Shearwater and Australasian Gannet if the prevailing winds are in our favor. We will also check a regular site for the local Cape Barren Goose too. However, the main attraction will come in the evening, when we will sit on a secluded beach, waiting for the last glimmers of light to fade, which is the time when Little Penguins come ashore from their pelagic feeding grounds and walk up to their beachside burrows alongside us. We will use a red light to see them up close, but without disturbing them, before we drive back to Hobart for one final night. On the return journey we will keep an eye out for mammals crossing the road as quolls have been seen in this area, along with the more abundant possums, pademelons and wallabies. As this last activity ends late in the night, some may choose to sit it out, and for this reason we ensure we return to Hobart for lunch, when that decision can be made. However, if you have not seen a Little Penguin before I would urge people to do it, as it is often considered one of the trip highlights!

Day 4: Departure from Hobart (Tasmania)

On this morning, after breakfast, a transfer to Hobart International Airport will be provided to connect with flights out of Australia (these are usually connected with through Melbourne or Sydney or Brisbane from there).
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