Full Detailed Itinerary - Australia: An Introtour to the Land Down-Under

Day 1: Arrival and afternoon birding in Cairns (Northeast Queensland).

The tour starts at 2pm in Cairns, set within the heart of the Wet Tropics of Northeast Queensland. Unlike our Eastern Australia tour, which often heads far south on our first afternoon, we will stay right around Cairns (within 30 minutes' drive of the city at most). This will allow for a gentle, chilled afternoon, following our long inward bound journeys in recent days. Cairns is an extremely birdy city, and we are likely to see species like Magpie-lark, Rainbow Lorikeet, Torresian Imperial Pigeon, Willie-wagtail and Australasian Figbird with minimum effort! The parks in Cairns hold an abundance of weird and wonderful birds, such as Bush Thick-knee, Orange-footed Megapode, Australian Brush-Turkey and Black Butcherbird to name just a few. In the evening, we will take dinner at one of the many local restaurants in the small city of Cairns. Two nights will be spent in Cairns.

Day 2: The Birds and Marine Life of the Great Barrier Reef (Northeast Queensland).

If you are worried the long flight in may still be bugging you, worry not, for we have a very tranquil activity for this day to help you cope with that! We will take a boat out to a small sandy island on the Great Barrier Reef. The island is home to thousands of nesting seabirds in this season, and we are sure to get close ups of birds like Brown Booby, Sooty Tern, and Brown Noddy, and have chances at others like Great Frigatebirds and Lesser Crested Tern too during our landfall on this tiny island. After we have finished on the island, we will take a light lunch on board the boat, then visit Hastings Reef for the snorkelers of the group to enjoy. Snorkeling gear is provided on board the boat, and anyone who want to experience the tropical marine life of the Great Barrier Reef can do so at no extra cost; (if you do not wish to snorkel you can relax on the air-conditioned boat). The boat trip typically wraps up around 3:30-4pm, after which we will return to the hotel and wind down before an evening dinner at one of the many diverse restaurants in Cairns. For those who wish to do so, there will be an option to do some local birding for an hour or so, checking in on what we did not see during our first afternoon in Cairns.

Day 3: Cairns to the Edge of the Outback (Northeast Queensland).

Today, we will start by birding close to Cairns, then cover a myriad sites north and west of Cairns (exact sites to be determined based on local news and tides etc.), ending the day by arriving in the town of Mareeba, set in dry country on the edge of the Outback, where giant termite mounds litter the landscape. A direct drive between Cairns and Mareeba is only two hours, although we will spend the entire day getting there, as there is a wonderful diversity of habitats at our disposal, including mangroves, lowland tropical rainforest, tidal flats, remnants of monsoon forest, and open eucalypt savanna. Some of our targets on this day are mouthwatering, like Buff-breasted Paradise-Kingfisher, Rose-crowned and Wompoo Fruit-Doves, Pied, White-eared, and Australian Spectacled Monarchs, Yellow-breasted Boatbill, and Lovely Fairywren! Two nights will be spent in Mareeba, in close proximity to an excellent pub for food, and a wide variety of birding venues for the following day.

Day 4: Julatten and Mount Carbine (Northeast Queensland).

This will be another day of extremes in habitats. In the morning, we will venture west to the Julatten area to explore remnants of Monsoon Vine Forest and Subtropical and Montane Rainforest on nearby Mount Lewis, but in the afternoon, we will have switched back to Open Eucalypt Savanna on the edge of the Outback. The morning targets will include local species like Bower's Shrike-Thrush, Atherton Scrubwren, and Tooth-billed Bowerbird, as well as more widespread ones, like the gorgeous Golden Whistler. However, the afternoon could not be more different, as we seek Australian Bustard in grassy areas of savanna, and visit a wonderful, bird-friendly caravan park, where Blue-winged Kookaburras, Galahs, Pale-headed Rosellas, and Red-winged Parrots can all count themselves as regulars, as well as Tawny Frogmouths, a bold, cryptic nocturnal bird that can often be seen there in broad daylight. A bower or two of the Great Bowerbird, decorated with silver, gray or red items may also be seen there. We will return to Mareeba for a second night, checking for Eastern Gray Kangaroos on the local golf course or Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos coming into roost within the nearby savanna late in the day.

PLEASE NOTE: In recent years Mount Lewis has been closed for an extended period and little information on when it may open again. If Mount Lewis cannot be visited, we will visit another area of the same habitat instead over the coming days. In the fall of 2025 the lower slopes of Mount Lewis at least were accessible, and more than worthy of visiting.

Day 5: Mount Hypipamee, Hasties Swamp & Yungaburra (Northeast Queensland).

Today, we will head up to the Atherton Tablelands, where multiple habitats await, again! We will start out in something similar to the morning before, Subtropical and Montane Rainforest, although this time we will be hoping for one of the rarer forest birds of the tour, the gorgeous Golden Bowerbird. We will visit a traditional bower site for this species by walking inside the forest. This species constructs a maypole bower and decorates it with fresh pieces of white lichen. While there, we will also have the chance to see White-throated Treecreeper, Gray-headed Robin, and also visit the impressive crater, a short walk from the parking lot. This is a volcanic pipe, which extends to the water's surface 58 meters (190ft) below the viewing platform, and a further 85 meters (280ft) below that!
Once again, we will be in easy reach of other habitats, as next we will visit Hasties Swamp, a Tropical Wetland closer to the town of Atherton (where we will take lunch in one of the excellent cafes in town). Hasties typically hosts species like Plumed and Wandering Whistling-Ducks, Hardheads, Australasian Swamphens, and Australasian Grebes on the swamp itself, while the surrounding vegetation often holds Sacred Kingfisher, Yellow-faced Honeyeater, Red-backed Fairywren, and Chestnut-breasted Munia. Our final stop of the day will be at Peterson's Creek in Yungaburra, where we will search for Platypus in the late afternoon, which is the optimum time of day for them to become active. We will spend the next two nights in Yungaburra, a wonderful town close to the Curtain Fig Tree, and with a wonderful variety of cafes and an historic pub in which to dine in. There will be an option on this night or the next (after dinner), to go out in search of local nightbirds, which include Barking Owl, Large-tailed Nightjar and Australian Owlet-Nightjar. For those who do not wish to do so, they can opt out and have an earlier night!

Day 6: Atherton Tablelands (Northeast Queensland).

This is another day with a diversity of close birding habitats at our disposal, and so it is hard to know which of these we will visit, as this will depend on what we have accrued up until this point. However, we will be targeting Atherton specialties, like Chowchilla, Tooth-billed Bowerbird, Spotted Catbird, and Victoria's

Riflebird. If needed, we can also return to check in on Platypus, should we have missed it the day before (with 3 different days to look for this at the best site in the area, we do have a good chance of seeing one). At some point on this day or the next we will also make a visit to nearby Curtain Fig Tree, more than anything for the dramatic tree itself, although birds can be found there too. If fruits are in abundance fruit doves may be around, and Pied Monarchs are also possible there too, should we not have caught up with one just yet.

Day 7: Return to Cairns via Etty Bay (Northeast Queensland).

For our final birding day in the Wet Tropics, we will head back to Cairns via Etty Bay, a beach which flanks Lowland Tropical Rainforest that is home to several habituated Southern Cassowaries. Let's hope they are around for the time of our afternoon visit. As this is the best time to see the cassowaries, we may not reach Cairns until 6:30-7pm on this night. A single night will be spent at our previous hotel in Cairns.

Day 8: Cairns to Brisbane (Southern Queensland).

In the morning we will travel to Brisbane in Southern Queensland via a 2-hour flight from Cairns. From 2026, we have added this night in Brisbane, to give us extra time to look for Koala within the city and also have chances at other exciting local birds, like Powerful Owls (they are sometimes available at a roost site in the city), Mangrove Honeyeater and Mangrove Gerygone, and possibly too Striped Honeyeater. If we are lucky, there might be an active Square-tailed Kite nest during our visit, and if there is, we will make this a priority on this afternoon. A single night will be spent in Brisbane.

Day 9: Brisbane to O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat (Southern Queensland).

After a morning chasing whatever we still need in the Brisbane area, we will depart for arguably the best birding lodge in Australia, O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat, set within cool subtropical rainforest on a plateau in the Green Mountains sector of Lamington National Park. Most likely in the morning before that, we will visit a superb local wetland, where birds like Brown Quail, Spotless Crake, Variegated Fairywren, Australian Reed-Warbler, Tawny Grassbird, Gray Butcherbird, White-throated Gerygone, and Striped Honeyeater can all count themselves as regulars and are all likely to be new for us.
Lunch will be taken en-route to O'Reilly's, and we will arrive there in the late afternoon, checking a camp of Gray-headed Flying-Foxes (a huge fruit bat), and for Bell Miners and White-naped Honeyeaters on the way up to there. We may arrive in time to see some of the more common and conspicuous O'Reilly's birds, like Crimson Rosella and Australian King-Parrot after arrival.

Day 10-11: O'Reilly's & Lamington National Park (Southern Queensland).

Unlike all of our other Australian tours, we will have TWO full days to explore the wonderful surrounds of O'Reilly's and neighboring Lamington National Park. O'Reilly's is something of an Australian icon when it comes to birds and birding and is well recognized as one of the most productive birding sites in the country. The set of birds it has there are fascinating, and many of them are easy to find without significant effort. The lodge has feeding areas for Regent Bowerbirds, Satin Bowerbirds, Australian King-Parrots, and Crimson Rosellas for starters, and it is not uncommon for other birds to get in on this act, like the barrel-chested Wonga Pigeon, and handsome Red-browed Firetail. Other species, like White-browed and Yellow-throated Scrubwrens, and Eastern Whipbirds can be remarkably tame there too. Aside from these, there is plenty of other avian highlights to look forward to, like Rose Robin, Green Catbird, Albert's Lyrebird, a masterful mimic, as well as the colorful Noisy Pitta. Early in the morning, or late in the day, cute Red-necked Pademelons, a wallaby that appears like a shrunken kangaroo, can be found right around the cabins. It

should also be where we get our first looks at the delightfully abundant Superb Fairywren, which is sure to feature multiple times later on the tour.

As we have three nights at O'Reilly's, there will be time to have an optional night session on one of the final two nights there after dinner together. This may see us run into one of the local mammals, like Mountain Brushtail Possum, or one of the night birds, such as Marbled Frogmouth or Australian Boobook, or if we are lucky, the bright blue Lamington Crayfish, a very local specialty.

Day 12: O'Reilly's to Tasmania.

After a final few hours around O'Reilly's we will return to Brisbane airport and fly south to Tasmania. We will aim to take an afternoon flight to Hobart (that often goes via Melbourne and is not direct). This does mean a late arrival at our Hobart hotel (after 10pm). However, this allows time to chase any further O'Reilly's or Brisbane birds in this final morning, and we will not start until 07:30am on the following day.

Day 13: Hobart & Mount Wellington to Bruny Island (Tasmania).

This day will start late (around 07:30am) right around Hobart visiting two fantastic sites close to Tasmania's laid-back capital. First there will be the Hobart Waterworks Reserve, where mammals like Tasmanian (Rufous-bellied) Pademelon might feature alongside endemic birds like Tasmanian Native-Hen and Black Currawong. Mount Wellington offers spectacular vistas over the city of Hobart, but also some stellar birds like Flame Robin and Crescent Honeyeater within the alpine heathland near the summit. In the afternoon we will travel over to beautiful Bruny Island for a two-night stay, arriving at our hotel in the late afternoon. On one of our nights in Bruny Island, we will head out in search of nocturnal critters. Bruny Island is famed for its nighttime mammals, and hundreds of individuals are often seen, mostly conmprising Bennett's Wallabies and Rufous-bellied Pademelons. However, on Bruny, the rare and local White Wallaby can often be found (an albino of Bennett's Wallaby), and we may also bump into an Eastern Quoll or two. Birdwise there will be but one target in the area, the endemic Tasmanian Boobook, which can usually be found close to our hotel. The nightbirding will be done after dinner and so those who do not wish to do so can further relax at the bar or in their wonderful rooms, with a scenic view over the coast of Bruny Island.

Day 14: Bruny island (Tasmania).

Bruny Island is a magical place, that offers the full crop of the dozen endemic birds of Tasmania, and some very attractive other specialties all within a variety of beautiful landscapes. Clean white beaches, rocky headlands, wet temperate rainforests, wet sclerophyll forests, and lowland heathlands can all be found on the island, and all will hold alluring birds for us. The beaches are home to Pied and Sooty Oystercatchers, hulking Pacific Gulls, and nesting Hooded Plovers. In. the quiet, calm bays that link these togethers, Black Swans are a common sight. The heathland is home to Beautiful Firetails, Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos, sharp-dressed black-and-white New Holland Honeyeaters, Flame Robins, and White-fronted Chats, while the rainforest boasts the pretty Pink Robin and unobtrusive Scrubtit. In groves of distinctive stringybark trees within the wet sclerophyll forest the endemic Strong-billed Honeyeater can be found. We will also visit areas where large White Gums can be found, the lair of the endangered Forty-spotted Pardalote, and we will be on the lookout for white blossoms within the eucalyptus trees lining the beach at Adventure Bay, a favored hangout for migrant Swift Parrots that migrate from mainland Australia to Bruny Island to breed.

Day 15: Bruny Island to Hobart (Tasmania).

After some further time on Bruny Island, we will take the car ferry back to the Tasmanian mainland, where there may be time to sneak in other local sites around Hobart before the day's end to seek birds like Musk Lorikeet, Musk and Freckled Ducks, or even Australian Crake. A final night will be spent back in the same Hobart hotel we used on day 12.

Day 16: Departure from Hobart (Tasmania).

There is no birding planned on this day and you are free to depart Hobart's small international airport at any time that suits you.

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