

Full Detailed Itinerary - Australia Photo Tour

Day 1: Arrival day, Cairns Esplanade

We will start the trip at 2pm, after lunch. We will visit the Botanical Gardens for our first rainforest species, and the Esplanade for shorebird shoots. The order which we visit these locations will depend on the tides at the Esplanade, which is a tidal flat right beside the main tourist district of Cairns. For those who have been lucky enough to bird the Texas Coast in the US, you can imagine the Esplanade as a combination of Bolivar Flats and Venice Beach. Masses of shorebirds so close at times it seems surreal, and lines of scantily-clad joggers with their Frappuccino's running past our tripods and cameras and giving us strange looks. When the tides are right, we will be going crazy shooting Great Knots, Bar-tailed Godwits, Lesser Sandplovers and Curlew Sandpipers. The Botanic Gardens offer probably the easiest rainforest photography in the Australian tropics. We'll spend two nights in Cairns.

Day 2: The Great Barrier Reef

Today is the latest start of the tour when we jump onto a boat out to the Great Barrier Reef at 7.30am. The usually very calm trip out to Michaelmas Cay takes about an hour and a half, and when we get there we will be confronted with a small sandy isle jam packed with seabirds. We will photograph the thousands of Sooty Tern, Brown Noddy and Great Crested Tern, sometimes using a macro! The other birds out there we are looking for include Brown Booby, Lesser-crested, Bridled and Black-naped Terns, Black Noddy, and Greater and Lesser Frigatebirds. We have a few hours here, and some people enjoy the snorkeling, but after lunch the boat heads to a submerged reef called Hastings Reef, where the snorkeling, diving and glass bottom boat tour is just superb. The boat gets back around 4:30 pm and we return to Cairns for another night.

Day 3: Cairns to Daintree

Cairns boasts superb birding and photography in lowland tropical rainforest right in the city. We'll spend the morning searching for target species such as Double-eyed Fig-Parrot, Victoria's Riflebird, and Yellow-breasted Boatbill. After lunch we head north towards the Mareeba, where we get to the edge of the vast tropical grassland savannas that extend from here 1500 miles right across to the western coast. This may be our first contact with Magpie Goose, Black-necked Stork, and Green Pygmy-Goose. We continue to Red Mill House in Daintree for the night, where the hospitality is legendary. We expect the daylight to end with us tracking down fairy-wrens or finches on the grass-lined rainforest roads.

Day 4: Daintree River Cruise to the Outback

We take a boat into some narrow mangrove and rainforest-fringed creeks where we'll search for Shining Flycatcher, Wompoo Pigeon, and if we are lucky, a roosting Papuan Frogmouth or two. The boats here are small flat bottomed jobs with very quiet motors, so you can approach very closely to many species. We prefer to go hand-held with the 500mm lens, but you can use a tripod or handhold with a smaller lens. Now although there are a few targets such as the Great-billed Heron, Azure and Little Kingfishers, this trip is more about the unbelievably relaxing feel of being in this creek getting some magical shots, than it is about boosting a massive list. We return to Red Mill House for a late breakfast, shoot whatever is hanging around their wonderful garden and head off to the drier habitat of Mareeba on the Atherton Tablelands, where we

base ourselves for the next two nights.

Day 5: Rainforest and the outback

We start the day in a small patch of rainforest where we will likely have cracking looks at the splendid little Noisy Pitta bouncing along the forest edge. We then turn our attention to the Yellow-breasted Boatbill, which is a small flycatcher like bird with a stunning mix of black, white and yellow. Barely a few miles from the lush rainforests, we'll visit the edge of the outback and bird grassland savanna, as we head out to Mt. Carbine. In these wooded savannas and open woodlands with grass understory, the first target is the Australian Bustard, and we may find the proud male strutting his stuff on the edge of the road. After we have had great looks and taken a load of photos of the bustard, we head a little farther west where we shall be on the lookout for species all things red such as Red-winged Parrot, Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo and Red-browed Pardalote. Depending on the weather and how we are going, we may head another 50 miles or so and get into an area that is great for the northern, much darker, race of the Brown Treecreeper, Banded Honeyeater and Black-throated Finch. On the way back to Mareeba, we will stop off at Lake Mitchell for Australian Pelican, Black-necked Stork, Green Pygmy-Goose and a load of other waterbirds.

Day 6: Hotspots around Hypipamee NP to Cairns

We'll start the day in hotspots around the high rainforests of Hypipamee National Park where as well as Bridled Honeyeaters and our first of thousands of Pied Currawongs, we have a chance of tree-kangaroos, which just have to be seen to be believed. If there is an animal in Australia that looks as though it evolved along the wrong path, it is this baby. A lumbering wallaby which is anything but graceful sitting on the end of a branch with the look of "how did I get here" and "I am afraid of heights". Around mid morning we will visit a bower of the Golden Bowerbird. This stunning little one builds a massive structure of sticks which he decorates with flowers and moss, and when not feeding, spends all of his free time sitting near the bower waiting for potential mates to come and take a look at his building. Later we go to one of the few places where the predominantly nocturnal Platypus is easy to photograph in the daytime. We then visit Hastings Swamp, where we can get photos of hundreds of Plumed and Wandering Whistling-Ducks. We then return to Cairns where we take another hit at the shorebirds along the esplanade as well as checking a few nearby spots for Crimson Finch and Chestnut-breasted Munia. The afternoon will be spent much as the first in Cairns, visiting mangroves, botanic gardens and the Esplanade depending on tides and lighting conditions.

Day 7: Cairns to Goondiwindi

In the morning we will take a flight from Cairns to Brisbane. We start our time in southern Queensland near the airport where we search for Mangrove Honeyeaters, Mangrove Gerygones, and Chestnut Teal. If there has been recent rains we will stop off at Daisy Hill, an area of parkland just outside Brisbane for a photogenic reptile, that is abundant after rains, the Pink-tongued Skink. If there has been no recent rains we will head straight for Goondiwindi. First we will stop off to pick up a Bell Miner or seven, then towards the rangelands town of Warwick, where we will have lunch looking for parrots, like Little and Musk Lorikeets, and Eastern Rosella. This is an interesting zone where the Pale-headed and Eastern Rosellas can be found together. On the way west we hope for one of them, and on the way east we go for the other rosella. After lunch we continue west through the wheat fields towards the very cool town of Goondiwindi. It may be a stop off for just one night, but there is some very good birding nearby where we may find Speckled Warbler, Varied Sittella and Eastern Shrike-Tit, among others.

Day 8: To the Southern Outback

Today we will be striking deep into the heart of our destination, Southwestern Queensland, and we can expect to start seeing our first real “inland” birds. An early start will ensure that we make the most of the cool morning temperatures, possibly encountering our first flocks of Budgerigars, Cockatiels, and if we’re lucky, some of the more difficult inland birds like Red-backed Kingfisher. We will arrive in the Charleville area in the afternoon, and spend some time birding the roads that cut through the Outback there for species like Galahs, Pink Cockatoos, Chestnut-breasted Quail-Thrush, and White-browed Treecreeper. Any wet local areas could also produce Yellow-billed Spoonbills, and Red-kneed and Black-fronted Dotterels, as well as parrots coming into drink in the late afternoon. The next two nights will be spent in the Outback town of Cunnamulla.

Day 9: The Southern Outback

We will be up early in order to take advantage of the best light in the Outback. Expect full frame shots of Red and Western Gray Kangaroos, while wallaroos and Swamp Wallabies, may be a tad shier, but still photographable. We will search for any birds we missed the previous afternoon. We will keep our eyes peeled for Bourke’s Parrot, as well as a wide selection of honeyeaters, finches, woodswallows and thornbills. Even the common birds here are spectacular, like Red-capped Robin and the azure jewel of the inland, Splendid Fairywren. Southwestern Queensland is also the heart of raptor country, so wherever we are, we will be keeping our eyes on the skies for Black-breasted Kites, Spotted Harriers and the very rare Gray Falcon.

Day 10: Outback to the Western Plains

We have another morning within the Outback of Southern Queensland near Charleville, and much depends on what we have shot before as to what we do. We will target any missing species or just try for better shots of spectacular species such as White-winged Fairywren, Mulga Parrot or Red-browed Pardalote. We spend the night in Dalby.

Day 11: Rangelands to Areas around Lamington National Park

We start around a dam four or so hours west of Lamington, then head over the range to O’Reilly’s, set within the lush rainforests and woodlands around Lamington National Park. On arrival at O Reilly’s Rainforest Retreat the tame birds will have us straining at the doors to burst out of the van and take in the many friendly birds hopping, bouncing, and perching all around their grounds. Two nights will be spent at O’Reilly’s.

Day 12: Hotspots around Lamington National Park

O’Reilly’s, in Lamington, is world famous for the unrivalled views you can get of often shy rainforest creatures right around their cabins, restaurants and reception areas. We will wake in the morning to Crimson Rosella creeping around on our balconies looking for the first handout of the day, while shimmering male Satin Bowerbirds clamber around on the lodge roofs. A quick check of the grounds will see us run into a multitude of tame, wild O’Reilly’s residents. The first sign of any grain and an Australian King-Parrot will drop in, or lurk impatiently on the bushes nearby. Gray Shrike-Thrushes use the early hours of the morning to hop around in front of reception, or even enter into reception on some of their bolder days! The constant “whooping” calls of Wonga Pigeons will reach our ears, although rather than try and stalk them on the dark rainforest floor we’ll simply walk the roads and check the feeding areas, where these strikingly marked blue-and-white doves are remarkably approachable. However, the bird that will stand out the most is O’Reilly’s flagship species, the black-and-gold Regent Bowerbird that adorns their logos, and is stamped across all of

their giftware. If we did not get them five minutes after arriving yesterday, dawn should see the trees around reception loaded with expectant regents, waiting for the day's first official feeding. If these views are still not good enough, get some grain in the palm of your hand and let them crawl all over you! Other friendly inhabitants of the grounds include the impossibly cute Superb Fairywrens, which regularly bound across the parking lots behind the cabins. Not to be outdone in the cute department, O'Reilly's also has some adorable mammals too, that like the birds offer rare, up close views at this very special spot. In the early hours of the morning fluffy Red-necked Pademelons munch grass on the cabin lawns, and over dinner at the lavish restaurant we can eat, and drink locally produced wine, while Mountain Brushtail Possums wolf down fruits at the tableside feeders. The top of the plateau at O'Reilly's is cloaked in lush rainforest, and we will walk some of the tracks in order to track down some of the shyer rainforest inhabitants. The loud mimicry of Albert's Lyrebirds are regularly heard along the park trails, and with luck we might find one stalking quietly through the forest. Indeed, some of the rainforest interior birds are like the birds right around the lodge: astoundingly approachable. Nowhere in Australia can it be easier to get photos of the whip-cracking Eastern Whipbird, whose distinctive calls haunt many sites on the tour, and an assortment of scrubwrens and Eastern Yellow Robins often hop on and off the tracks. The early hours of the morning are often the best time to catch sight of one of Lamington's most comical residents, the Australian Logrunner, that readily bounds across the leaf litter and, appropriately, along the logs, close to the lodge; you will need flash to get them, but they are not shy, so this is not an issue. Strangled, cat-like calls should lead us to our first Green Catbirds, and the loud rasping calls of Paradise Riflebirds echo through the forest, a magnificent bird-of-paradise, that should turn up some time during the day. Other possibilities in the rich rainforest on the summit include Bassian and Russet-tailed Thrushes, the beautiful Rose Robin, and the dashing Rufous Fantail. Some time will also be spent in the markedly different habitat below the plateau, where dense green rainforest gives way to dry sclerophyll woodland, dominated by pale gum trees, bringing a much more open nature to the birding. These drier woods are also home to the scarce Koala, and the prettiest of the wallabies, the well-named Pretty-faced Wallaby, that are often seen bounding through the grassy understory. At night we'll check some regular rainforest spots for Southern Boobook and Marbled Frogmouth.

Day 13: Areas around Lamington NP to Tasmania

After a final morning to mop any missing Lamington species, or just take more photos of the very tame birds here we start our drive to the airport and catch an afternoon flight to Tasmania. The next three nights will be spent in the relaxed city of Hobart. You will be tired, but we will get some good shooting in early and then cover a load of miles to get us to the final leg of the trip.

Day 14: Bruny Island

Dawn will find us at a tiny reserve at the edge of Hobart, where unfamiliar sounds will greet us for the first time: Yellow Wattlebirds should grace the eucalypts around the edge of a small dam, and Tasmanian Native-Hens will be seen scurrying across the park lawns. However, our short trip here will be for Tassie's rarest resident, the cute and endangered Forty-spotted Pardalote. A short time and (hopefully) a pardalote later, we will head south to Kettering where we will pick up a Black-faced Cormorant or two at the docks and board the short ferry to Bruny. In our day on the island we'll be looking to track down the endemic Dusky Robin, and also the dreamy Pink and Scarlet Robins too. Visiting the island's state forest we will search for a trio of endemic honeyeaters: Strong-billed, Black-headed, and Yellow-throated all occurring there, in addition to less flashy endemics like Tasmanian Scrubwrens and Tasmanian Thornbills. After a lunch stop by one of the many deserted white sandy beaches that border Bruny we'll walk the beach for Hooded Plovers, and check the rocky headlands for loafing Pacific Gulls. After a full day on Bruny we will head back to Hobart for the night.

Day 15: Mount Wellington and the Tasman Peninsula

Today we will focus on any missing endemics and specialties from the day before. After a short trip into the temperate rainforest on the lower slopes of Mount Wellington for Olive Whistler and the endemic Scrubtit, we will venture up to the heath that cloaks the summit of the same mountain. As we drive up, the road will be our best bet for currawongs, both the endemic Black Currawong and Gray Currawong occurring on Wellington's forested slopes. Up on the heath Crescent Honeyeaters occur in good numbers and we will try to tempt a Striated Fieldwren into the open or encourage a fantastic Flame Robin up onto an open snag. After dinner we head to a nearby Little Penguin colony where we can watch the come ashore to their nesting burrows. Please note that no flash photography is permitted here so you are unlikely to get any keeper shots of these birds. They are just great to see, even if it is the beam of a red flashlight. Well after dark, we will return to Hobart for a final night.

Day 16: Departure from Hobart

In the morning you will be transferred to Hobart airport on Tasmania to connect with international flights out.

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