

Kakadu & Top End Birdwatching & Nature Special: Jul 30 - Aug 12, 2017

This is not a typical birdwatching tour. Please read these notes carefully so that you can decide whether or not you are one of the people for whom this is a wonderful experience like no other tour on the market.

This is a special birdwatching, nature and bushwalking tour using the birdwatching expertise of Don Butcher, our number one expert on birds. It combines day walks and overnight accommodation with extended walks to try and find birds which cannot be spotted near the roads. We will see a variety of the relatively common birds that inhabit the area and, with luck, will spot some of the rare ones like the White Throated Grasswren. Darwin and the Top End is a hotspot for birds with more than 350 species recorded, six endemic to the region and many Australian endemics. It is such a great place to go birding as there is a high diversity of habitats in a small area and many birds that are difficult to find elsewhere, can be more easily found here.

The first two days of the trip are a relatively easy introduction to birding in the Top End. This gives you some time to acclimatise as well as giving you



Rainbow pitta

the opportunity to see some of the special birds around Darwin. These include Chestnut Rail, Little Kingfisher, Rainbow Pitta, Large Tailed Nightjar and Rufous Owl to name a few (see the Top End bird list attached). In the morning, Don picks you up from your accommodation and takes you to a variety of good birdwatching spots close to town. In the evening, you return to your hotel.



Rufous owl

Places we will visit include Darwin Botanical Gardens (Rufous Owl), Casuarina Coastal reserve (Little Kingfisher, Forest Kingfisher, finches, quail, Arafura Fantail), Lee Point (Rainbow Pitta), Buffalo Creek (Chestnut Rail, Large tailed Nightjar, Rose Crowned Fruit Dove), Holmes Jungle Nature Reserve (good area for quail and forest birds) and Howard Springs Nature Reserve (Rainbow Pitta, Little Kingfisher, Little Shrike Thrush). The birds listed after each location are the ones we consider to be the most significant. There are of course, many other species available at these locations including the mangrove specialists such as Mangrove Robin, White-breasted Whistler, Mangrove Grey Fantail and Broad Billed Flycatcher for example.



Rainbow bee eater



Hooded parrot

On the third day, you are picked up early and head bush for the main part of the trip, driving south along the Stuart Highway toward Pine Creek where you will spend some time looking for the hooded parrot before heading toward Kakadu, stopping along the way at any place that looks as if it might be good for birds as yet unseen. You spend that night in the budget accommodation at Goymarr, just outside the park boundary.

Early the next morning you head toward Gunlom to begin the major walk. On the way, you stop at the Yurmikmik area. Possibilities there include the White-throated Grasswren, Red Goshawk, sandstone escarpment specialists and finches including Gouldians late in dry season. We can't guarantee what you will see but this time of year gives you an excellent chance. Our first night's campsite is only a short walk from the top of Gunlom, so we have

plenty of time.

While this is primarily a birdwatching trip, it is also a nature trip and a bushwalking trip.



Waterfall Creek campsite

You will carry a full pack for a week on the main walk. This is the only way we can get you to some of the areas where the birds are most likely to be found. If you are uninterested in looking at the rest of the environment and doing a lot more than tick off a list of species, this trip is **not** for you.

Our main walk is a seven night loop walk up Waterfall Creek. Depending on the wishes of the group, we may simply do an up and back with a lot of base camping or we may cross over the top of the escarpment to the Barramundi Creek valley, down the creek



Swim stop, Barramundi

and through a pass which takes you back to Waterfall Creek. In either case, you have a good chance of spotting the white-throated grasswren which is known to inhabit the area. Due to excessive burning, the traditional area to see this bird at the top of the falls at Gunlom no longer provides suitable habitat for the bird which

requires old spinifex and rocks.

There are some very special birds in this section with the possibility of Hooded Parrot, Gouldian Finch and Red Goshawk.



Magpie geese flying over Yellow Waters

robin (riverine vegetation)

After a final look at whatever may be nearby on the final morning, you return to the vehicle and head for Cooina, stopping at Bukbukluk along the way. This is a good location for Black Tailed Treecreeper, Banded Fruit Dove and Rose Crowned Fruit Dove. Grey Goshawk is also a possibility. Possibility of woodland birds such as Northern Rosella, Hooded Parrot, Common Bronzewing and Hooded Robin.

Cooinda is home to the famous Yellow Waters Cruise. One of our clients counted more than 40 different species on one cruise alone. We plan to maximise your chances by doing both the



High view, Barramundi valley



Barramundi campsite



White-throated grasswren

Along with the Letter Winged Kite, the Red Goshawk is Australia's rarest and most difficult to see bird of prey. With the different habitats through which we will be passing, there are opportunities to see specialist birds such as White Lined Honeyeater and Chestnut Quilled Rock Pigeon, Sandstone Shrike Thrush (escarpment), Banded Fruit Dove and Rose Crowned Fruit Pigeon (fig trees and monsoon forest) and little kingfisher, azure kingfisher, shining flycatcher and buff sided

afternoon and early morning cruises, the two best ones for spotting birds. This trip is the best way to get close to many birds such as Green Pygmy Geese and Comb Crested Jacana and, of course, safely close to salt water crocodiles. The Little Kingfisher is also a possibility.

Our plan to do two cruises is based on the special deal offered in 2010 and early 2011. If that deal is no longer available, we will substitute a short walk with an Aboriginal guide for the afternoon cruise.



Comb crested jacana

After the morning cruise, we drive to Gubara and follow the 3 km walking track to a dense patch of monsoon forest where we spend the rest of the day relaxing and looking for forest birds like the banded fruit dove. We also have the option of going to Nourlangie and Nanguluwurr rock art sites. These are two exceptional and interesting rock art sites.

Even though we will be starting our return to Darwin the trip is not winding down with a Mary River boat cruise and some target birds still to come such as Mangrove Golden Whistler and White Browed Crake. We will be stopping at wetlands along the way including the well known Fogg Dam for some good birding.

If people, have target species that are not mentioned please email guide Don Butcher at don.butcher@bigpond.com and he will try and fit good locations for these species into our itinerary or we can allocate extra effort into finding them at the locations we are going already.

Notes

The **minimum level of fitness** required for this trip is to be able to comfortably walk ten kilometres in 2½ hours on level ground while carrying a day pack containing lunch and a one litre water bottle. You will not have to walk this fast on the trip but your ability to do so is a good indicator of your ability to walk over the rougher ground you will encounter on the walks.

A day pack is essential.

All park admission fees are included in the cost of the trip.

You will have to carry only what you need on the main walk. Additional clothing, food, etc can be left in the vehicle during the walk.

Make sure you keep some money, a water bottle, lunch and a day pack with you during the drives.

Your accommodation in Darwin on the first two nights is not included in the price of the trip.

While we have seen every bird whose photo is in these notes on our trips, some of the photos are from other trips.

Click the link below to see a [Northern Territory bird list](#).

www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/pdf/nt_bird_list.pdf

And a spreadsheet of birds seen on our 2013 trip.

www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/pdf/NT_Willis_2013_Aug_bird_list.xls

Terrain and Difficulty

Overall	Level 3.
Climate	Level 3. The average maximum temperature is 32-33°C. And the average nightly minimum is about 16-17°C. It is, however, not uncommon for the temperature to drop as low as 10°C (50°F). Occasionally it goes lower still. Sleeping bags are essential. Rain is highly unlikely.
Terrain	<p>Level 3. The terrain ranges from open woodland to narrow rainforest gorges. Parts are flat and easy. Other parts require scrambling over river stones of a variety of sizes. There are a few steep, but short climbs. You walk through almost every type of terrain that it is possible to find in Kakadu.</p> <p>Little or none of the walking is on a marked trail. If you have never done any off-track walking through moderately rough terrain, nothing we can say can adequately describe the experience. The photos on our website, www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au, can give you a partial picture, but they cannot substitute for the real thing. Most of those who have not had any off-track walking experience find it more difficult than those who have done it before.</p> <p>Anyone who does not regularly (average twice a month) go bushwalking carrying a full pack would benefit from doing some pre-trip training. Do this and you will almost certainly enjoy the trip more than if you do not. The relatively easy nature of sections one and two and the gradual build up of bushwalking fitness that comes with them means that section three would be rated as only level three for those who have already done the first two sections.</p>
Vegetation	Level 2-3. Much of the walking is through relatively flat, open woodland with a grassy understorey. Some short sections of grass may hide a broken rocky surface where you will have to be particularly careful. There may be some slow sections where you will have to pass through thick scrub. The vegetation can vary from year to year depending on when last burnt. At this time of year, the spear grass has finished seeding and dried out. There will be some sections of monsoon forest but little of this will be with full packs.
Hours	With packs, generally 4-6 hours. A few days might be longer, some shorter. This trip is designed to maximise the time you have to sit and watch the birds.
Packs	Pack weight - level 2. You need to carry 7 days food. This will include about 2-3 kg of the evening meals. You need a sleeping bag but are unlikely to need a tent.
Art	We visit a number of Aboriginal rock art sites.
Campsites	Mix of sand and rock ledges. One site may be on a pebble beach. Most sites are excellent. You are unlikely to see anyone else at most of the campsites.
Swims	Swimming is excellent in most areas but may not be possible at one of the camp sites.
Lowlights	Possibly one less than perfect camp site. Hearing birds you can't see.
Highlights	Great birding in a natural environment.
Wildlife	Birds, birds and more birds. The Yellow Waters cruise is excellent for birds, many of which you are unlikely to see on the other parts of the trip. It also gives you a good chance to see large estuarine crocodiles.
Fishing	Not permitted on this walk.

Itinerary: Kakadu & Top End Birdwatching & Nature Special

Note 1 Day 0 is the day before departure.

Note 2 This itinerary is subject to change.

- Day 0** **Pre-trip meeting, 6.30 p.m., Pool Side Bar & Restaurant, Double Tree Hilton, 122 The Esplanade.** There are two Double Tree Hiltons next door to each other. The correct one is closer to Daly Street, the taller of the two. **This meeting is important.** If you cannot make the meeting, please advise us well in advance. Both Double Tree hotels were Holiday Inns until early 2013.
- Day 1-2** Acclimatisation days. Early pick up from your accommodation. Birdwatching during the day, return to your accommodation in the evening.
- Day 3** Drive to Pine Creek and on to Goymarr, looking for birds along the way.
- Day 4** Drive to Yurmikmik and look for birds. Continue to Gunlom, put on packs and begin the walk.
- Day 5-10** Gunlom-Barramundi walk carrying full packs. The walk should be at a slow enough pace to allow you to stop and look for birds in many spots along the way as well as at camp sites.
- Day 11** Finish the walk and drive to Cooina. Look for birds at Bukbukluk and along the way. Late afternoon Yellow Waters cruise. Overnight in budget accommodation.
- Day 12** Early morning Yellow Waters Cruise. Drive to Gubara, walk about 3 km to the monsoon forest patch near the springs and spend the rest of the day looking for birds in that area. And/or visiting the art sites at Nourlangie. Overnight at Lakeview in Jabiru.
- Day 13** Drive to Mary River and do the cruise there stopping at the South Alligator River flood plain and the Mamukala bird hide along the way. Overnight in campground or accommodation.
- Day 14** Return to Darwin, stopping at the Adelaide River flood plain and Fogg Dam along the way. Drop off at your accommodation.