

## AUSTRALIA JULY 17-AUG 6, 2014

Joe Morlan and I decided to revisit Australia since we had such a wonderful trip in 2005. We arrived on July 17, rented a car and drove to the Penrith area, North West of Sydney. We spent two nights at [Napean River Holiday Village](#).

The morning of the 18<sup>th</sup> we spent birding Emu Green, a lovely, quiet park along the Napean River. All of our birding lists are available on eBird. Joe's photos are online [here](#). Highlights were a flock of about 20 Bell Miners, what the Aussies call "bellbirds." We were delighted by a gorgeous Golden Whistler, a Mistletoebird, New Holland Honeyeaters and White-faced and Pacific Herons.

That afternoon we visited Napean Weir Park, seeing Maned and Pacific Black Ducks, the usual water birds, an Olive-backed Oriole and two fairly tame Laughing Kookaburras being harassed by Noisy Miners among other common species.

On July 19 we drove west to Echo Point in the Blue Mountains but the wind was howling and it was freezing. We only spent an hour and then returned to Sydney Airport for our evening flight to Melbourne. We stayed that night in a Best Western near the airport.

Sunday, July 20 Joe found an eBird hotspot nearby called Mill Park Lakes. We took advantage of a nearby McDonald's for a quick breakfast and free internet. Throughout the trip we relied on McDonald's for WIFI. At the park it was easy for Joe to digiscope Purple Swamphen, Pink-eared, Blue-billed and Freckled Ducks. Red Wattlebirds were new for us as was White-plumed Honeyeater. The weather was pleasant – in the fifties and not windy.

The next two nights we spent in a private home in Port Melbourne. The first evening we went to St. Kilda Pier just before sunset and saw 5 or 6 Little Penguins, including a couple young chicks in their burrow. On July 21 our host drove us to investigate the Western Treatment Plant in Werribee. A permit is required in advance to visit this area. We saw about 60 species, highlights being Black and Brown Falcons, Swamp Harrier, Royal and Yellow-billed Spoonbills and Red-capped Plover. Our host taped in Little Grassbird and Striated Fieldwren as well as Australian Crake. On our way to lunch in Lara, we spotted White-bellied Sea-Eagle, Little Eagle and Wedge-tailed Eagle all flying overhead in the space of ten minutes!

Late that afternoon we stopped at You Yangs and saw a Tawny Frogmouth perched near the headquarters. On our first trip to Australia we had missed seeing a Koala. At You Yangs our host wandered with us through the eucalyptus forest for about 30 minutes until he spotted an adult about 30 feet up in a tree. Success!

The morning of July 22 Joe and I drove to Avalon to see the beach and salt marshes. We saw many Red-necked Avocets and Pied and Banded Stilts. Red-capped Plovers and Red-kneed Dotterels were colorful. A pair of Australian Kestrels kept an eye on the shorebirds. We stopped for lunch at Rod's Bakery in Lara. Across the street was an

amazing restroom that actually talked to you. In the afternoon we spent a few hours at Serendip Sanctuary where Cape Barren and Magpie Geese were abundant. We spotted a pair of Whistling Kites copulating on a snag. Land birds included Crested Shrike-Tit, Black-chinned and New Holland Honeyeaters and Golden Whistler. We had dinner at the Werribee Returned Servicemen's League (RSL). These clubs are located in many Australian cities and we sought them out wherever we went for the inexpensive but good food. We spent the night at the Best Western Werribee and had a chance to do some laundry.

On Wednesday, July 23 we went to Point Cook Park in the morning. Spotted Harrier was a new bird for us and I was able to video one of my favorite species, Superb Fairy-wren on my iPhone. These little birds appeared almost everywhere we visited and they are often very approachable. That afternoon we headed back to the Best Western near Melbourne airport for our early morning flight to Cairns.

We drove directly from the Cairns Airport to Mission Beach as one of the target birds we had missed in 2005 was Southern Cassowary. We arrived at [Boutique Bungalows](#) about 2:30PM and had to come to an abrupt stop at the driveway to avoid running over a cassowary! The bird was quite tame, about 3-4 years old. It stayed in the vicinity for about 20 minutes and Joe and I both got great photos. It's a joy when your target species is found immediately, no pressure.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> it was showery in the morning so we drove the local streets slowly, stopping for a perched Brahminy Kite, White-breasted Wood Swallows and Rainbow Lorikeets. We headed towards town for lunch but pulled off the road to photograph a Gray Goshawk teed up on a snag. When we returned to our cabin in the afternoon, the cassowary was once more in the yard. I walked a path to the beach and encountered a perched immature Pacific Baza, a very handsome hawk.

Saturday morning we saw the cassowary about 8:15 as we were packing the car for the drive to Kingfisher Park in Julatten. I highly recommend Boutique Bungalows as a great place to stay and a fantastic chance to see Southern Cassowary. We stopped in McDonald's in Atherton to take advantage of their WIFI and then visited Hastie's Swamp National Park that afternoon. It's a great venue for water birds including Pink-eared and Freckled Ducks, Australasian Grebe and Magpie Geese. There is a bird blind and a Forest Kingfisher sat quietly in a tree a few feet away for at least 15 minutes. Two gorgeous, blue Ulysses Butterflies flitted about in the sun.

Sunday July 27<sup>th</sup> we looked for birds on the Kingfisher Park grounds and then decided to avoid the intermittent showers by car birding at Maryfarms. In 2005 we had seen Australian Bustards here and, once again, we were rewarded with great views of about 5 of them. Other highlights were 3 young Pied Butcherbirds and a Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike. At about 1PM, acting on a tip from a passing bird guide, we drove to Mt. Carbine Caravan Park. The manager showed us the Great Bowerbird at his bower, rearranging sticks to attract a female. 4 Eastern Rosellas were showy and I was delighted to see a few Blue-faced Honeyeaters, a species I remembered well from our 2005 trip to Queensland.

We then drove north to [Mossman Gorge Bed and Breakfast](#). This was to be our base for two nights. Joe had developed a nasty head cold (which we later learned was swine flu). I headed to the grocery store to stock up on soup we could microwave. Monday morning we had breakfast on the deck overlooking the rainforest while Bridled and Macleay's Honeyeaters enjoyed the homemade jam in the feeders. A couple Laughing Kookaburras came and sat on the railing waiting to be fed scraps of meat. Joe was able to digiscope a beautiful Wompoo Fruit Dove which was perched in a distant eucalyptus. We drove to Mossman Gorge and encountered a Collared Kingfisher but it was rainy so we returned to the covered deck of the B&B.

July 29<sup>th</sup> we drove to Cairns and spent some time birding Centenary Park. Many of the species we had seen in other wet areas were here, including Dusky Moorhens, Straw-necked Ibis and Royal Spoonbill. Radjah Shelducks were life birds for both of us. We arrived at the Cairns Plaza Hotel mid-afternoon. It is right on the Esplanade and a short walk from the Cairns Returned Servicemen's League (RSL) so we had a pleasant dinner there.

Wednesday morning early we flew from Cairns to Darwin and rented a car. We stopped and birded the Darwin Botanic Garden about noon. It was quite hot but breezy. Our best bird there was Torresian Imperial Pigeon, all white with black in the wings. Later we drove to Cullen Bay Resorts, our hotel for the two nights before we headed for Kakadu National Park. Our room overlooked the marina and the weather was sunny and hot. We walked from the hotel to an all-you-can eat seafood restaurant with a great view of the sunset over the Timor Sea. The morning of July 31 Joe joined a small group of local birders doing a shorebird survey census at East Point Reserve. His photos are on his website. It was such a wonderful place we returned together in the afternoon.

At East Point Reserve we enjoyed great views of Pacific Reef and Striated Herons, Lesser and Greater Sand-Plovers, Sacred Kingfisher and Great Knots. Black Kites were abundant and the air was filled with these aerobatic birds. Puzzling out the honeyeaters is always a challenge but we were able to positively identify a Singing Honeyeater. That evening we returned to the seafood restaurant for another great dinner and sunset.

On Friday, August 1<sup>st</sup> we drove a few hours towards Kakadu, stopping at Fogg Dam Conservation Reserve. Water birds here included Comb-crested Jacanas, Green Pygmy-Geese, a couple Whiskered Terns, Pied Herons, egrets and Royal Spoonbill. A pair of Varied Trillers was dapper and it was fun to see Tree Martins hawking insects over the marsh. After getting gas and lunch at Corrobee, we continued on to our studio cabin at Kakadu Lodge in Jabiru. At 5PM two Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos landed in a eucalyptus tree outside the cabin and were eating the fruit. What a great yard bird! Joe was still sick so we took advantage of the small kitchen and microwaved some soup for dinner.

Early Saturday morning we birded the grounds of the lodge. We were amazed to see a couple juvenile Channel-billed Cuckoos begging and being fed by a Torresian Crow! We spent some time working on a Rufous-banded Honeyeater identification and also saw

Dusky and White-gaped Honeyeaters. Magpie Larks were calling and, to us, sounded like the Blue Jays of our childhoods in the eastern US. Later in the morning we visited the lake in the town of Jabiru and were amazed by the thousands of Little Red Flying-foxes roosting in the neighborhood trees. A pair of Blue-winged Kookaburras was a treat. Comb-crested Jacanas had chicks and a White-bellied Sea-Eagle dived for a fish.

Later that afternoon we drove to Cooina for the sunset Yellow Water Billabong cruise. As we waited to board the boat we enjoyed Shining and Broad-billed Flycatchers hawking insects. Once we got underway we were happy to see many water birds such as Plumed Whistling Ducks, Glossy Ibis, a couple pair of Green Pygmy-Geese and multiple species of egrets. A White-bellied Sea-Eagle perched regally on a large snag. The Aborigines call this “matawoodi”, spirit bird. We were charmed by two close Azure Kingfishers. A Black-necked Stork stood quietly in the shallows while its mate attended the distant nest with at least two chicks visible. The sunset was gorgeous and the cruise was definitely worth the cost.

We got an early start on Saturday, August 3 as it was our last full day in Kakadu. As we drove the main road to Nourlangie, we passed a Dingo heading in the other direction. We took a short walk to view the pictographs but bird activity was slow and many tourists were arriving. We decided to explore other options and happened upon Anbangbang Billabong. Here we saw many of the same water birds but a flock of Little Corellas tumbling about on the banks were amusing. We also saw a family of Agile Wallabies. We identified a White-bellied Cuckoo-Shrike but our best bird was a perched Australian Hobby. On the road back to Jabiru, we spotted a Brown Falcon. We stopped at the bakery in Jabiru for lunch. Blue-faced Honeyeaters were picking up scraps at the picnic tables. That afternoon I spent some time at the pool at the lodge; it was great to just relax.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> we headed back to Darwin for our flight to Sydney. As luck would have it, we saw another Dingo. We decided to have lunch at the Palmerston RSL and then we headed to the airport for our flight to Sydney. Joe was feeling a bit better but my throat was sore and head really stuffy. I had hoped to avoid getting sick but it wasn't meant to be.

Joe went birding with a local birder the morning of the 5<sup>th</sup>, seeing Powerful Owl. I stayed at the hotel to rest. On the 6<sup>th</sup> we explored Cahill Park on the Cooks River which was very close to our Mercure Hotel. We enjoyed seeing many of the local birds, including Great Cormorant, White-faced Heron and Gray Butcherbird. We left for the airport about 11AM for our flight home to San Francisco. I tallied 196 species in this, our second trip to Australia; 63 of them life birds.