

## Trip Report: Australia – Lord Howe Island, NSW

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UNESCO's World Heritage listing for Lord Howe Island (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/186>) recognizes that it is an outstanding example of an oceanic island of volcanic origin containing a unique biota of plants and animals, as well as being the home of the world's most southerly true coral reef. The main island (about 10km by 2km) is located some 600 km off the east coast of New South Wales in the Tasman Sea and although it is connected by direct 2-hour flights from Sydney on QantasLink's Dash 8 planes, this self-styled 'Last Paradise' is also one of Australia's best-kept secrets - there are only some 350 residents and less than 400 tourists on the island at any given time.

The endemic flora and fauna, several range-restricted bird species and spectacular geography combine with the high level of environmental protection to make the island an excellent bird/nature watching location. Birdwatchers can observe, at close quarters, a large number of seabirds during their breeding seasons on the beautiful beaches and dramatic cliffs of the main island and nearby islets, plus one endangered, island endemic species (Lord Howe Rail, locally called the Lord Howe Woodhen) and three island-endemic subspecies (Pied Currawong, Golden Whistler and Silver-eye). Other popular activities include excellent, hilly bushwalking and scuba diving in the pristine marine environment.



*Red-tailed Tropicbird [Malabar cliffs]*

We spent four fabulous days on the island, enjoying bushwalking, diving, snorkelling and bird watching. In addition to enjoying the lovely coastal scenery, coral reefs and tropical fish, personal highlights included eye-level views of the Red-tailed Tropicbirds that nest at Malabar cliffs, White Terns perched confidently in their nest trees adjacent to the lagoon, Sooty Terns nesting behind Ned's Beach and on the Mt Eliza trail, multiple sightings of island-endemic Lord Howe Rails (and the island's three other endemic subspecies) and watching sea turtles and a bait-ball in the crystal clear waters below the cliffs at Malabar. Without making a pelagic trip to see other species nesting on Ball's Pyramid, we saw 27 bird species, including 8 lifers.

We highly recommend staying, as we did, at Leanda Lei, which is well located and offers quality rooms, manicured lodge grounds with barbeque pavilions, and panoramic views south towards Mt Lidgbird (from rooms 18 and 19 in particular). Brian Busted and his team at Howea Divers provided excellent service and good gear for our boat dives at Malabar, North Rock and Landslide.



*View towards Mt Lidgbird; Lord Howe Rail [lowlands near to airport]*



*Views from the Malabar cliffs: South across the lagoon towards Mt Lidgbird and Mt Gower; North towards the coral reef fringed Admiralty Islands and North Rock (where we made our deepest dive)*





*Views from the dive boat of the 200m high Malabar cliffs and from the Malabar cliff trail down towards the coral reef where we enjoyed dives at 'Malabar' and 'Landslide'*



*Red-tailed Tropicbird [Malabar cliffs]*



*Red-tailed Tropicbird squeezed between ocean and earth [Malabar cliffs]*



*White Tern [near to the lagoon]*



*Buff-banded Rail [Leanda Lei grounds in lowlands]*

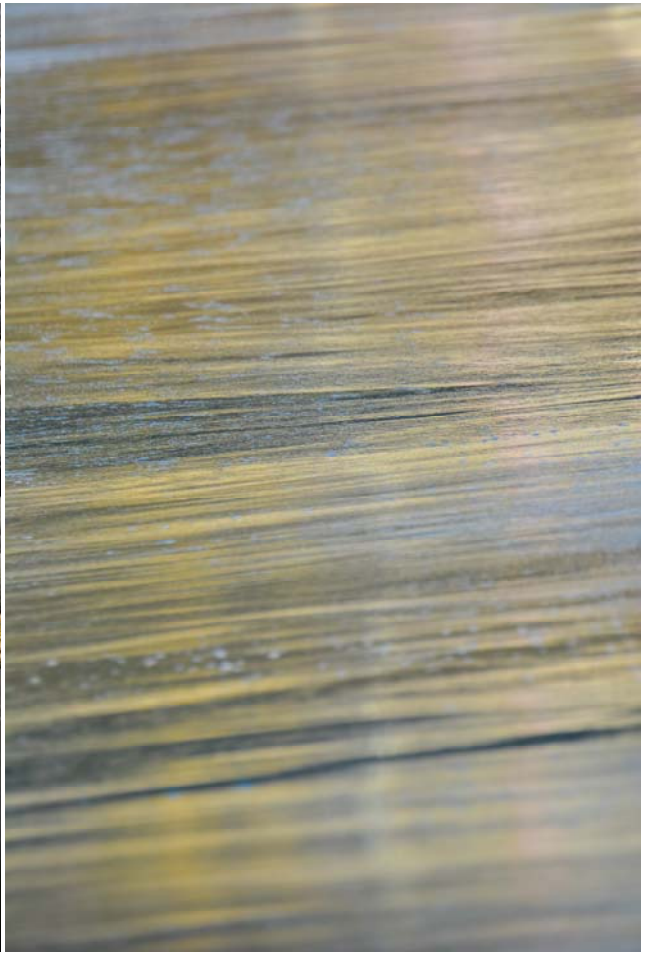




*Sacred Kingfisher [Ned's Beach]*



*Surge Wrasse [Ned's Beach]*



*Old Gulch; Ned's Beach*



*Emerald Dove [in Kentia palm forest near to North Beach]; Silver-eye [Malabar cliffs]*





*Sooty Tern feeding a juvenile [Ned's Beach]*



*Sooty Tern [Mt Eliza trail]*





*Black Noddy [nesting near the lagoon]*



*Sooty Terns and Brown Noddies join sharks attacking a bait ball [from 200m up on the Malabar cliffs]*



# 1. Bird Trip List<sup>1</sup>

Confirmed personal sightings only for DJS – excludes birds heard only unless otherwise indicated. As field guide I used ‘The Field Guide to the Birds of Australia’, by Pizzey & Knight (7th Edition, 2003). Some names have been updated since this guide was published, so birds in my trip list are identified as per ‘The Clements Checklist of Birds of the World’, Cornell, 2007 with updates through December 2010 (online version 6.5).

The weather during this mid-summer visit to Lord Howe Island was warm and mainly sunny, with temperatures rising to around 25°C each afternoon.

## ANATIDAE

**Pacific Black Duck** *Anas superciliosa*: \* Several around the lagoon and the swamp at the end of the runway.

## PROCELLARIIDAE

**Black-winged Petrel** *Pterodroma nigripennis*: Several pairs flying over the cliffs at the southern end of Ned’s beach.

**Flesh-footed Shearwater** *Puffinus carneipes*: \* A large number rafted up near to the Admiralty Islands.

## ARDEIDAE

**White-faced Heron** *Egretta novaehollandiae*: \* Several around the lagoon and the swamp at the end of the runway.

## PHAETHONTIDAE

**Red-tailed Tropicbird** *Phaethon rubricauda*: \* Several dozen flying around the cliffs at Malabar.

## SULIDAE

**Masked Booby** *Sula dactylatra*: \* V-shaped flock flying low below the cliffs at Malabar.

## PHALACROCORACIDAE

**Little Pied Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax melanoleucos*: One perched by the lagoon.

## RALLIDAE

**Lord Howe Rail** *Gallirallus sylvestris*: **E** \* Locally called the Lord Howe Woodhen. During the 19th Century, the population of the flightless Lord Howe Rail was decimated by the introduction of predators and by habitat disturbance caused by settlers arriving on the island. By the mid-1970s, the population teetered on the brink of extinction as the wild population reached a new low of 30 individuals surviving on the island’s mountaintops. Since that time, conservation efforts such as the removal of wild pigs and other feral species, combined with the release of captive-bred birds have helped the rail’s numbers to slowly recover. The wild population is now estimated by the National Parks and Wildlife Foundation that led the survival program in the 1980’s to be a stable and sustainable 250 birds, and the future looks encouraging. (Source: <http://fnpw.org.au>). With the reduced threat of predation, the Lord Howe Rail appears tolerant of a range of habitats including open country in the lowlands, Kentia palm forest and the forested highlands, but remains listed as Endangered on the IUCN Red List. We saw (and heard, thanks to their jangling bird bands) at least six individuals foraging along roadsides in the daytime and in the undergrowth at dusk near to our lodge, including one juvenile together with an adult.

**Buff-banded Rail** *Gallirallus philippensis*: \* Common in open areas and lodge grounds.

**Purple Swamphen** *Porphyrio porphyrio*: Several at the swamp at the end of the runway.

## CHARADRIIDAE

**Pacific Golden Plover** *Pluvialis fulva*: \* Several at the swamp at the end of the runway.

## SCOLOPACIDAE

**Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus*: Several at the swamp at the end of the runway.

**Bar-tailed Godwit** *Limosa lapponica*: \* Several at the swamp at the end of the runway.

**Ruddy Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres*: \* Several at the swamp at the end of the runway.

## LARIDAE

**Sooty Tern** *Onychoprion fuscatus*: \* Hundreds with juveniles at Ned’s Beach, Blinky Beach and Mt Eliza.

**White Tern** *Gygis alba*: \* Dozens of breeding pairs in the trees along the lagoon.

**Gray Noddy** *Procelsterna albivitta*: Small numbers flying below Malabar cliffs and around Admiralty Islands.

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<sup>1</sup> **First sighting ever for DJS**; **E** = Australian endemic species; \* = photo available

**Brown Noddy** *Anous stolidus*: \* A few pairs apparently breeding on the ground at the north end of Ned's Beach. A large flock seen feasting on a bait ball below Malabar cliffs.

**Black Noddy** *Anous minutus*: \* A colony of several breeding pairs in a single Norfolk Pine alongside the lagoon.

#### **COLUMBIDAE**

**Emerald Dove** *Chalcophaps indica*: \* Several pairs in lodge gardens and forest.

#### **ALCEDINIDAE**

**Sacred Kingfisher** *Todiramphus sanctus*: \* One on Ned's Beach.

#### **CRACTICIDAE**

**Pied Currawong** *Strepera graculina crissalis*: **E** Lord Howe endemic sub-species. Individuals in forested areas.

#### **PACHYCEPHALIDAE**

**Golden Whistler** *Pachycephala pectoralis contempta*: Lord Howe endemic sub-species. Adults & juveniles in forest.

#### **MONARCHIDAE**

**Magpie-lark** *Grallina cyanoleuca*: Common in open areas.

#### **HIRUNDINIDAE**

**Welcome Swallow** *Hirundo neoxena*: Small numbers flying across open areas.

#### **ZOSTEROPIDAE**

**Silver-eye** *Zosterops lateralis tephropleurus*: \* Lord Howe endemic sub-species. Common in scrub habitat.

#### **TURDIDAE**

**Eurasian Blackbird** *Turdus merula*: Introduced. Very common across lowland area.

Total 27 confirmed species for the trip, of which 8 were 'lifers' for DJS. This included one Lord Howe Island endemic species and three endemic sub-species. Two of the species seen are Australian endemics...