

Trip Report: Australia (July 9th – 13th 2016)
Alice Springs and the Red Centre, Northern Territory



This wintertime trip, encompassing a variety of sites within ~140km of Alice Springs, promised access to a whole spectrum of Australian birdlife different from that encountered in our usual east coast haunts, plus bush walks in the awesome MacDonnell Ranges. My timing was fortuitous, with rains in recent months having left the arid landscape relatively green, the dramatic colour contrasts enhanced and water in the gorges.



Central Australian habitats: Mulga woodland, Ormiston Gorge, Gibber plain, and Spinifex covered slopes

My excellent guide, Mark Carter (see <http://www.birdingandwildlife.com>), delivered a fantastic Central Australian birding experience. Highlights included point black views of three key Spinifex species - Dusky Grasswren (highly territorial and well seen at several sites), Spinifex-bird (heard at a couple of sites, but seen only once, after some effort) and Rufous-crowned Emuwren (encountered only once, after much greater effort and amidst gradually diminishing hope, as we walked across cold and windswept Spinifex-clad slopes).



Spinifex-bird



Rufous-crowned Emuwren

Several Mulga and open woodland locations outside of Alice delivered White-browed Treecreepers, multiple Thornbill and Parrot species, a large flock of Budgerigars and a lovely Red-capped Robin. A long drive to the nearest gibber plain secured Cinnamon Quail-Thrush (highly responsive - to a different quail-thrush species' song), several Inland Dotterel (well camouflaged and wary) and small flocks of subtly coloured Bourke's Parrots. Point-blank views of Dusky Grasswrens and raucous Black-chinned Honeyeaters (the stunning 'Golden-backed' race) were highlights at Standley Chasm, whilst the stunning Ormiston Gorge delivered spectacular scenery, eye-level views of Pink Cockatoos feeding only a few meters away, many confiding Spinifex Pigeons and three Black-flanked Rock-Wallabies perched midway up a cliff. The Olive Pink Botanic Garden in Alice afforded excellent views of a Western Bowerbird tending to his well maintained bower and, although the Sewage Works were cold and windswept during our brief visit, a further eight lifers were seen there. My final trip list (see end of this report) included 101 bird species, of which 55 were lifers.



Dusky Grasswren [Standley Chasm]



Pink Cockatoo [Ormiston Gorge]



Black-chinned ('Golden-backed') Honeyeater [Standley Chasm]



Black Honeyeater



Port Lincoln Parrot [Alice Springs]; Spinifex Pigeon [Ormiston Gorge]



Western Bowerbird [Olive Pink Botanic Garden]



Pink Cockatoo [Ormiston Gorge]



Budgerigars (females)



Bourke's Parrots



Red-capped Robin



Mistletoebird [Ormiston Gorge]



Crimson Chat



White-browed Treecreeper; Splendid Fairywren



Western Bowerbird at his bower [Olive Pink Botanic Garden, Alice Springs]



Cinnamon Quail-Thrush



Spinifex Pigeon [Ormiston Gorge]



Black-faced Woodswallows



Hooded Robin [Ormiston Gorge]



Grey-headed Honeyeater [Standley Chasm]



The dry bed of the Todd River, Alice Springs



Ghost gum above Ormiston Gorge



Sunrise over the south-eastern outskirts of Alice Springs

1. Bird Trip List¹

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 winter weather in Alice Springs was highly variable – maximum temperatures reached 25 to 30°C during the afternoon of the first two days when sunshine prevailed, but after a front came through the maximum temperature on the final, overcast day was only some 10°C. Wind conditions are critical to birding in the Red Centre, and we enjoyed mild to moderate winds that did not have a material negative impact on the success of our birding efforts but were certainly pretty chilling on the cooler mornings.

Locations where species were seen, in order of travel:

AS = Alice Springs, including eucalypt woodland along the Todd River and in downtown parks (afternoon of July 9th).

OP = Olive Pink Botanic Garden (afternoon of July 9th).

S = Spinifex covered limestone habitat outside Alice Springs (early-morning of July 10th and 13th).

M = Mulga and associated open eucalypt woodland outside Alice Springs (mid-morning through late-afternoon of July 10th and early morning of July 13th). This was also the predominant roadside habitat.

G = Gibber plain and associated open woodland outside Alice Springs (morning of July 11th).

SC = Standley Chasm, including a bird hide located at the base of Spinifex covered hillsides (late-afternoon of July 11th).

OG = Ormiston Gorge, including tracks along the Finke river tributary, through Spinifex and woodland, and around the well appointed visitor centre that provided some tasty food (early-morning through mid-afternoon of July 12th).

ASSW = Alice Springs Sewage Works (late-afternoon of July 12th).

DUCKS, GEESE AND WATERFOWL: Anatidae

Black Swan *Cygnus atratus* **E** [ASSW]:

Maned Duck (Australian Wood-Duck) *Chenonetta jubata* **E** [ASSW]:

Gray Teal *Anas gracilis* [ASSW]:

Chestnut Teal *Anas castanea* **E** [ASSW]:

Pink-eared Duck *Malacorhynchus membranaceus* **E** [ASSW]:

White-eyed Duck (Hardhead) *Aythya australis* [ASSW]:

GREBES: Podicipedidae

Australasian Grebe *Tachybaptus novaehollandiae* [ASSW]:

Hoary-headed Grebe *Poliiocephalus poliocephalus* [ASSW]:

HERONS, EGRETS AND BITTERNs: Ardeidae

White-faced Heron *Egretta novaehollandiae* [ASSW]:

HAWKS, EAGLES AND KITES: Accipitridae

Black-breasted Kite (Buzzard) *Hamirostra melanosternon* **E** [M]:

Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus* **E** [M]:

Black Kite *Milvus migrans* [AS; M]:

Whistling Kite *Haliastur sphenurus* [AS; M]:

Brown Goshawk *Accipiter fasciatus* [M]:

Wedge-tailed Eagle *Aquila audax* [AS; M]:

FALCONS AND CARACARAS: Falconidae

Australian (Nankeen) Kestrel *Falco cenchroides* [M]:

Brown Falcon *Falco berigora* [M; S]:

¹ First sighting ever for DJS; **E** = Australian endemic species; * = photo available

RAILS, GALLINULES AND COOTS: Rallidae

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra* [ASSW]:

PLOVERS AND LAPWINGS: Charadriidae

Masked Lapwing *Vanellus miles* [ASSW]:

Red-kneed Dotterel *Erythrogonys cinctus* E [ASSW]:

Red-capped Plover *Charadrius ruficapillus* [ASSW]:

Black-fronted Dotterel *Elseyaornis melanops* [ASSW]:

Inland Dotterel *Peltohyas australis* E [G] *:

STILTS AND AVOCETS: Recurvirostridae

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* [ASSW]:

Red-necked Avocet *Recurvirostra novaehollandiae* E [ASSW]:

BUTTONQUAIL: Turnicidae

Little Buttonquail *Turnix velox* E [M]:

PIGEONS AND DOVES: Columbidae

Spotted (Turtle-) Dove *Streptopelia chinensis* [OP]:

Common Bronzewing *Phaps chalcoptera* E [M]:

Crested Pigeon *Ocyphaps lophotes* E [OP; M; OG] *:

Spinifex Pigeon *Geophaps plumifera* E [OG] *:

Diamond Dove *Geopelia cuneata* E [M]:

Peaceful Dove *Geopelia placida* [OG]:

COCKATOOS: Cacatuidae

Pink (Major Mitchell's) Cockatoo *Lophochroa leadbeateri* E [OG] *:

Galah *Eolophus roseicapilla* E [OP; AS; M; OG]:

Long-billed Corella *Cacatua tenuirostris* E [ASSW]:

Little Corella *Cacatua sanguinea* [ASSW]:

Cockatiel *Nymphicus hollandicus* E [M]:

PARROTS: Psittacidae

Rainbow Lorikeet *Trichoglossus haematodus* [AS]:

Port Lincoln Parrot (Australian Ringneck) *Barnardius zonarius* E [OP; AS; M; OG] *:

Mulga Parrot *Psephotus varius* E [M]:

Bourke's Parrot *Neophema bourkii* E [G] *:

Budgerigar *Melopsittacus undulates* E [M; OG] *:

CUCKOOS: Cuculidae

Pallid Cuckoo *Cacomantis pallidus* [M]:

Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx basalis* [S; M; OG] *:

KINGFISHERS: Alcedinidae

Red-backed Kingfisher *Todiramphus pyrrhopygius* E [S]:

BOWERBIRDS: Ptilonorhynchidae

Western Bowerbird *Chlamydera guttata* E [OP] *:

AUSTRALASIAN TREECREEPERS: Climacteridae

White-browed Treecreeper *Climacteris affinis* E [M] *:

FAIRYWRENS: Maluridae

White-winged Fairywren *Malurus leucopterus* E [S; G]:

Splendid Fairywren *Malurus splendens* E [M] *:

Variiegated Fairywren *Malurus lamberti* E [ASSW]:

Rufous-crowned Emuwren *Stipiturus ruficeps* E [S] *:

Dusky Grasswren *Amytornis purnelli* E [S; SC; OG] *:

HONEYEATERS: Meliphagidae

Pied Honeyeater *Certhionyx variegates* E [G]:

Singing Honeyeater *Lichenostomus virescens* E [M; OG] *:

Gray-headed Honeyeater *Lichenostomus keartlandi* E [SC; OG] *:

Gray-fronted Honeyeater *Lichenostomus plumulus* E [M]:

White-plumed Honeyeater *Lichenostomus penicillatus* E [AS; OP; M; OG]:

Yellow-throated Miner *Manorina flavigula* E [OP; M] *:

Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater *Acanthagenys rufogularis* E [M; OG]:

Crimson Chat *Epthianura tricolor* E [S; M; G] *:

Black Honeyeater *Sugomel niger* E [S] *:

Brown Honeyeater *Lichmera indistincta* [M]:

Black-chinned (Golden-backed) Honeyeater *Melithreptus gularis laetior* E [SC; OG] *:

PARDALOTES: Pardalotidae

Red-browed Pardalote *Pardalotus rubricatus* E [OG]:

Striated Pardalote *Pardalotus striatus* E [AS]:

THORNBILLS AND ALLIES: Acanthizidae

Inland Thornbill *Acanthiza apicalis* E [M]:

Yellow-rumped Thornbill *Acanthiza chrysorrhoa* E [M]:

Chestnut-rumped Thornbill *Acanthiza uropygialis* E [M]:

Slaty-backed Thornbill *Acanthiza robustirostris* E [M] *:

Western Gerygone *Gerygone fusca* E [M]:

Southern Whiteface *Aphelocephala leucopsis* E [M] *:

Banded Whiteface *Aphelocephala nigrincincta* E [G] *:

PSEUDO-BABBLEDERS: Pomatostomidae

Gray-crowned Babbler *Pomatostomus temporalis* [OP; M] *:

White-browed Babbler *Pomatostomus superciliosus* E [M]:

WHIPBIRDS AND WEDGEBILLS: Psophodidae

Chiming Wedgebill *Psophodes occidentalis* E [M]:

QUAIL-THRUSHES AND JEWEL-BABBLEDERS: Cinclosomatidae

Cinnamon Quail-Thrush *Cinclosoma cinnamomeum* E [G] *:

WOODSWALLOWS: Artamidae

Black-faced Woodswallow *Artamus cinereus* [M; G] *:

BELLMAGPIES AND ALLIES: Cracticidae

Gray Butcherbird *Cracticus torquatus* E [M; OG]:

Australasian Magpie *Gymnorhina tibicen* [AS]:

CUCKOO-SHRIKES: Campephagidae

Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina novaehollandiae* [M; G]:

White-winged Triller *Lalage sueurii* [M; SC]:

WHISTLERS AND ALLIES: Pachycephalidae

Crested Bellbird *Oreoica gutturalis* E [M; G] *:

Rufous Whistler *Pachycephala rufiventris* [M; G]:

Gray Shrike-Thrush *Colluricincla harmonica* [M; OG]:

FANTAILS: Rhipiduridae

Willie-wagtail *Rhipidura leucophrys* [AS; OP; M; OG]:

MONARCH FLYCATCHERS: Monarchidae

Magpie-lark *Grallina cyanoleuca* [AS; OP; M; OG] *:

CROWS, JAYS AND MAGPIES: Corvidae

Torresian Crow *Corvus orru* [OP; M; SC; OG] *:

AUSTRALASIAN ROBINS: Petroicidae

Red-capped Robin *Petroica goodenovii* E [M] *:

Hooded Robin *Melanodryas cucullata* E [M; G; SC] *:

SWALLOWS: Hirundinidae

Fairy Martin *Petrochelidon ariel* [ASSW]:

Tree Martin *Petrochelidon nigricans* [ASSW]:

White-backed Swallow *Cheramoeca leucosterna* E [ASSW]:

GRASSBIRDS AND ALLIES: Megaluridae

Little Grassbird *Megalurus gramineus* [ASSW]:

Brown Songlark *Cincloramphus cruralis* E [S; M]:

Rufous Songlark *Cincloramphus mathewsi* E [S; M]:

Spinifex-bird *Eremiornis carteri* E [S] *:

REED-WARBLERS AND ALLIES: Acrocephalidae

Australian (Clamorous) Reed- Warbler *Acrocephalus australis* E **heard only** [ASSW]:

FLOWERPECKERS: Dicaeidae

Mistletoebird *Dicaeum hirundinaceum* [M; OG] *:

WAGTAILS AND PIPITS: Motacillidae

Australasian (Richard's) Pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae* [M; G]:

WAXBILLS AND ALLIES: Estrildidae

Painted Firetail *Emblema pictum* E [OG]:

Zebra Finch *Taeniopygia guttata* [OP; AS; M; SC; OG]:

Total 101 confirmed species for the trip (including 62 Australian endemics as per <http://avibase.bsc-eoc.org>), of which 55 were 'lifers' for DJS.

2. Mammal Trip List

Black-flanked Rock-Wallaby (*Petrogale lateralis*) E [OG] *: