

Thailand and Australia (Queensland & Victoria)

29th October – 25 November 2023



Summary

This was a trip that Tania and I planned to see Bryde's Whales in the Gulf of Bangkok and Northern Cassowary in Queensland as well as seeing family and friends in Victoria. The opportunity was also taken to look for Spoonbill Sandpiper and a few other commoner birds in Thailand Spectacled flying fox in Queensland and attempt to photograph Wombat and Platypus in Victoria.

Flights and car hire were arranged through Trailfinders in Norwich, accommodation and car hire for Thailand through Booking.com and Cottages in Australia booked through AirBnB. At the time of our visit £1 = 44 Thai Baht = \$1.90 Aus

Guide Books used were:

Helm: **Birds of Australia** by Simpson and Day.

Lynx and Birdlife International Field Guides: **Birds of Thailand** by Treesucon and Limparungpatthanakij.

Excerpts were also taken from: Australian Geographic: **Australia's Birdwatching Megaspots** by Rowland and Farrell and ...

CSIRO Publishing: **Mammal of Australia** by Andrew

Itinerary

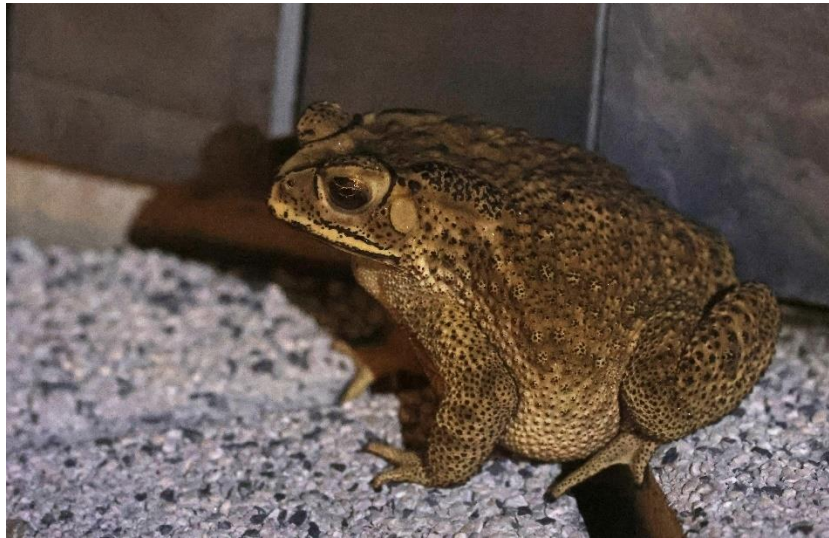
Sunday 29th/Monday 30th October 2023

Our flight from London Heathrow to Bangkok (BKK) Suvarnabhumi was with Thai Airways and took 11.5hrs, we embarked at 20:55 on Sunday 29th October and arrived in Bangkok at 16:30 with a slight delay on departure therefore for much of our time on board the aircraft we were asleep, so the flight passed quickly and without incident. The aircraft was immaculately clean and well serviced as was Bangkok Airport (BKK) Suvarnabhumi. A small hitch was my case had been damaged in transit and the closing zip would not secure the contents. Car hire was arranged through Europcar and we had a Honda BRV, petrol. It was sufficient for what we wanted but we weren't impressed by Europcar service at all. We were unable to hire a SatNav as we were told by Europcar they were unreliable!? However, we had previously downloaded the navigation app 'HERE WeGo' and preloaded our destinations for the entire holiday by latitude/longitude which were obtained from google maps. The app is free at the time of writing and once an initial snag of using it offline had been mastered it was a godsend and very accurate.

Driving in Bangkok is not for the feint hearted. Whole families on a single motorcycle are frequent, traffic is heavy, locals frequently do not observe road rules travelling on the opposite side of the road and ignoring traffic lights. We saw incidents daily and at least one involved an apparent fatality. Tania drove through rush hour traffic in Bangkok the 2hrs to the Neera Retreat Hotel on the opposite side of Bangkok at 1/3, ¼ Moo, Thatalad, Sampran, Nakonpathom 73110 (13.74907, 100.24325) and to say she did a sterling job of driving an unfamiliar vehicle in one of the most crowded cities in the world, in the dark, is an understatement. One toll road was used, and we were charged 25 Thai Bhat (around 5p). Arrival at the hotel could not have been better it was one of the newest upmarket hotels in Thailand in some very wildlife friendly surroundings by the Tha Chin River. The approach road to the hotel was still very much under construction so was waterlogged and bumpy in places.

We had an authentic Thai meal on arrival and my allergies were fully understood despite language difficulties. A note made with the use of Bable Fish of my intolerances in Thai on a mobile phone was very useful.

After dinner we went for a short night walk around the grounds to see if we could relocate a pale green snake circa 1 metre long that was in a bush on the approach track as we were arriving. Unfortunately, we didn't see this again but were able to determine it was a White lipped Pit Viper. We did see a rather large toad species which was photographed and later determined to be a Black spined Toad, and a number of Tokay Gheko's as well as a Ground Skimmer Dragonfly roosting on the hotel wall. We unpacked, showered and retired.



Black Spined Toad in the hotel grounds on our first evening.



The Neera Retreat Hotel looking out into the gardens and the river.

Tuesday 31st October 2023

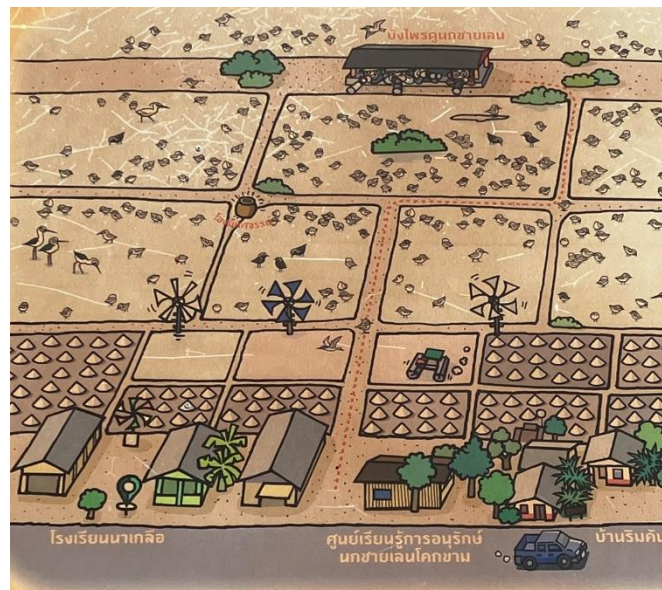
We arose at 6am and had breakfast at 6:45. We could hardly get out of the hotel for watching Swifts, Bee Eaters and other birds around the grounds.



Plaintive Cuckoo from our bedroom balcony

We set off for the Red Bridge Dolphin watching site (13.487497, 100.362713). Although this is reputedly not much good for dolphins there were a good number of waders, egrets and herons. The journey time from the hotel was around an hour and a half and we picked up a picnic lunch from a small local supermarket on the way.

From here we tried the Khok Kham Bird Centre (13.512998, 100.350478) which was quite disappointing with similar birds. We didn't leave the car park. What we should have done is walk out in among the rice paddies which we did on our next visit.



A photo of the map on site explaining how to get to the hide at the far side of the paddies. We didn't see the map upon our first visit.

We then called at the boat trip venue nearby (13.494068, 100.387612). Trips were booked later in the week and we wanted to be sure we knew the way. In the last Km before the venue we saw both an Otter and a Water Monitor cross the road and also the roadside powerlines were heaving with Terns. After a refreshing coke at the restaurant where we would be catching the boat we headed off back to the hotel stopping when we saw something interesting. Again it took us around an hour and a half. Dinner was in the hotel restaurant, and we retired early.



Blue tailed Bee eaters were common on the approach to the Red Bridge viewing platforms.



Plain Tiger Butterfly on the approach to the boat quay.



Painted Storks were seen frequently flying overhead.

Wednesday 1st November 2023

Today we went to the coastal site of Bang Pu Recreation Centre (13.517138, 100.654974). This is a military centre to the Southeast of Bangkok. The area has a pier with mangrove boardwalks which have been poorly maintained, and many were closed or not fully open. The area has restrooms and is marketed as a wildlife area; this is more 'speak' than action. There were many Terns and Brown

headed Gulls from the pier as well as a single Black headed Gull. The area also has an observation tower which we did not find.



Black Capped Kingfisher from the balcony at the hotel



Scaly Breasted Munia again from the balcony at the hotel.

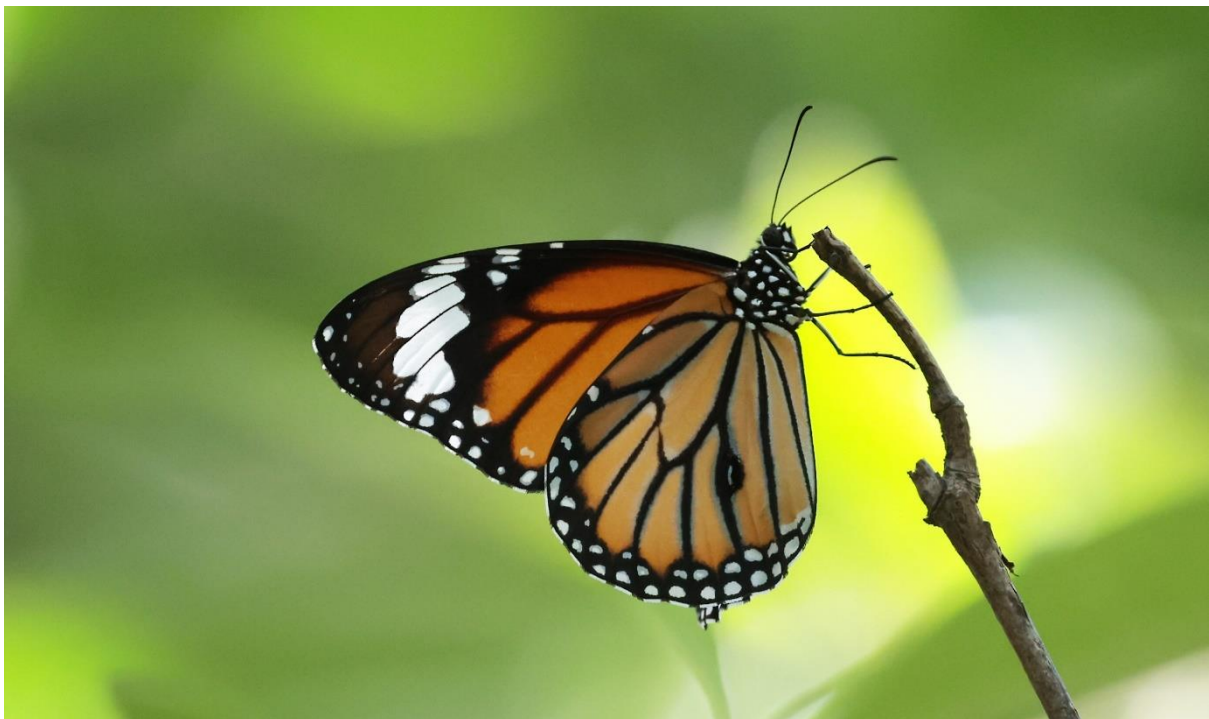
It was around a two-hour drive from our hotel and was not really worth the effort. Had the tide been out it may have been different. The mangrove area had a good number of Fantails and Google-eyed Gobies (Mudskippers) as well as a few butterflies and dragonflies listed in the species list.

The tolls for the round-trip journey were 20Bt and 40Bt (around £1.20 in total)

In the afternoon we called in central Bangkok to visit Lumphini Park (13.732510, 100.539923). Parking was 80Bt for the afternoon. The park is probably the best place in the world to see and photograph Asian Monitor Lizard. There were lots!



Google eyed Gobie – Mudskippers in the mangroves at Bang Pu Recreation Centre.



Common Tiger at Bang Pu.

The area has a large lake with an island. There were a prolific number of Yellow browed Warblers and other common species of bird as well as our first Finlayson's Squirrel.



Brown headed Gull at the pier at Bang Pu.

There were several other bird species in the park including our first good look at a Koel. We also had good views of a small Striated (Green-backed) Heron.



Asian Water Monitor in Bangkok City centre – wildlife was surprisingly comfortable living alongside humans in Bangkok.

The journey back to the hotel should have been around 50 minutes; given the rush hour traffic it took over two hours.

I skipped both lunch and dinner as the VERY hot curry I had the previous night left me with a tummy upset. Tania as usual had her fill in the restaurant!



Striated (Green backed Heron) a single bird seen in the park.



Western Koel – elusive but very very vocal.

Thursday 2nd November 2023

A rest day for us to catch up on sleep. After breakfast and before dinner we sat by the river at the hotel photographing some of the commoner species of Tailorbird, Purple Heron, Prinia, Green billed Malkoha etc

Having had my luggage damaged on the way out we decided to go to a nearby shopping centre and buy a new case as well as fill the car with fuel for tomorrows journey to the Southwest.



Common Tailorbird in the hotel garden



Open billed Stork over the river by the hotel



An amazing Green billed Malkoha viewable from the Hotel



Indochinese Roller on the approach track to the hotel



Plain Prinia in the Hotel Garden



Streak eared Bulbul on the track to the hotel



Yellow Potter Wasp in the hotel garden

Friday 3rd November 2023

An early start at 5:30am for the four-hour drive to Thailand's Krachan National Park (12.811364, 99.524791). However, we arrived after many birds were subdued by the heat and they didn't reappear until mid-afternoon, but there were butterflies aplenty. I saw the best numbers I've ever seen in any part of the world with kilometre after kilometre of thick clouds of butterflies. Innumerable species were represented. We paid 30 Bt per person (foreigner rate) and 40 Bt for the vehicle at checkpoint Sam Yod. We stopped at several places along the way to see butterflies and also to look for birds at wetland areas. The best bird we saw was probably the Green Eared Barbet. We spent some time in the campsite area where we saw Leaf Monkey, Giant Black Squirrel, Taiga Flycatcher and Black Crested Bulbul however the best birding was undoubtedly between the campsite and the first ford further towards the summit. We had something calling in the trees there either a bird or a mammal which on later investigation turned out to be Leaf Monkeys. Cars without four-wheel drive are not allowed to go beyond the ford above the campsite. A couple of species of Dragonfly were also seen at the wetlands. On the way out we stopped at the first small lake we had stopped at on the way in and had both Osprey and Pied Hornbill.



Common Nawab – just one of many species seen.



Dark Blue Tigers – the clouds of butterflies were just incredible.

There is a curfew on day visitors leaving the park after 7pm which we achieved with time to spare and after checking out we made our way back to our hotel. It would have been better to stop on the reserve or at least nearby for the night.



Black Giant Squirrel



Black crowned Bulbul in the campground at Krachan



Duskey Leaf Monkey. Several were heard and seen.



Gatherings of Butterflies of several species were a feature of the visit.



A Malayan White Banded Awl landed on the car.



Green eared Barbet – in the reserve just outside of its normal geographical range.

Saturday 4th November 2023

Two Whale watching trips were organised prior to arrival in Thailand. Emails were exchanged with Jirayu Ekkul brydeiedeni@gmail.com who appeared to be running the business. The cost of the two

trips for us both was 9200 Bt (about £220) Payment of 4100 Bt was made by cash each morning at registration but apparently could have been made by credit card.

We were put on a different boat on the second day. Two boats were used on the second day. Both were adequate but slow. I calculated they travelled around 7mph.

We set off by 5:30am making for an easy drive to the pick-up point for the Whale watching day as traffic was light at that time in the morning. After an initial heavy downpour the rain cleared, and we didn't need additional clothing. Check in for the Whale watch was carried out in the restaurant adjoining the quay at 7am to 7:30am when a traditional inclusive breakfast was served which I avoided but Tania partook. Sailing took place at 8am and lasted some 6 hours. Lunch was served on board the boat in prelabelled canisters. Mine was not what I ordered but I'd taken snacks anyway. There were free chilled bottled soft drinks and water available. After 2 hours of sailing the first Bryde's Whale was seen and subsequently after a further 2 hours we came across a cluster of 6.



Two Bryde's Whales together



Arctic Jaeger



Common Tern (race longipennis)



On return to shore we saw a massive gathering of Egret species

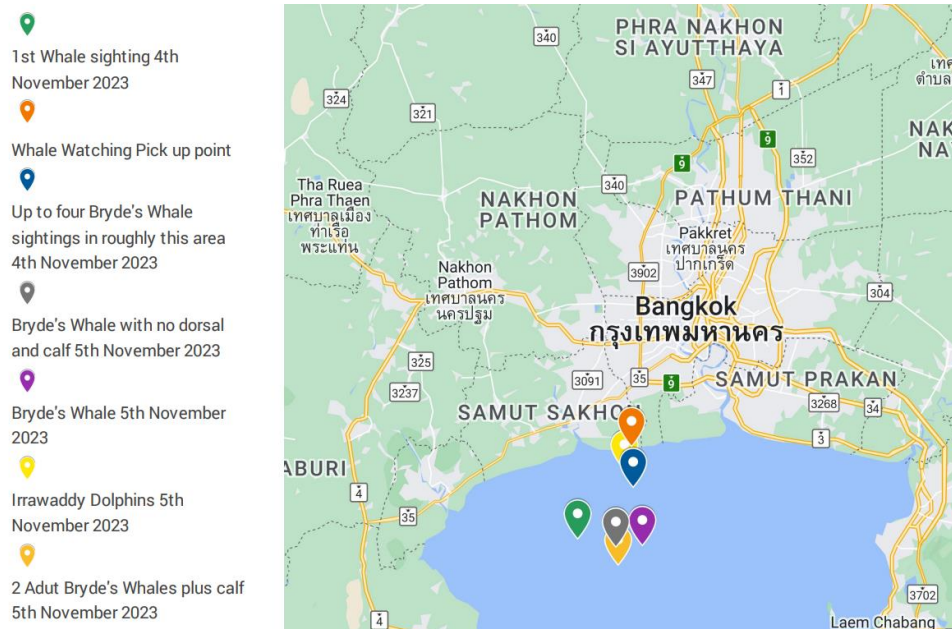
Sunday 5th November 2023

The trip was similar to the previous day except that soon after leaving the quay we had around 20+ Irrawaddy dolphins the sighting being all the better for being told the previous day that they were unlikely at this time of the year to put in an appearance. We had a breaching Bryde's and from the top deck some better photos of the three rostrum ridges that are distinctive to the species.

A large tern morphed into a Bridled and several Great Cormorants were seen.

Upon return to the pier we called at Khok Kham Bird Centre again on the way back to the hotel and viewed the waders to try and find a Spoonbill Sandpiper without any luck. However, there were lots of waders on this visit. We ventured out onto the paddies using the map on the side of the centre as a guide and made it much closer to the roosting and feeding wader flock.

There were thunderstorms on the way back to the hotel which produced heavy rain and much lying water on the roads which made driving difficult and slow.



Location of cetacean sightings over the two days whale watching in the bay.

After reviewing photos it became apparent several whales were undernourished and were showing the shape of vertebrae along the spinal ridge and at least two animals showed a skin condition known as TSD (Tattoo Skin Disease) which manifests itself in markings covering much of the epidermis.



Bryde's Whale showing the distinctive and diagnostic three rostrum ridges.

This disease is caused by pox viruses and may be agitated by pollutants and disturbance. Debris and rubbish was noted to be extensive within inshore waters and Mangroves. On the boat trips it was noticed that floating rubbish extended far out into the Gulf where fishing was being undertaken on an industrial scale.



Breaching Bryde's Whales are scarce, so to see and photograph this was fortunate. Beautiful pink underparts are typical of this species.



This mother and calf (left) Bryde's Whales hung around the boat for some time. The female was suffering from TSD.



The Irrawaddy Dolphins that met the boat as we left the quay were very quick to depart.



The waders at Khok Kham Bird Centre were a delight to be among but sorting out the species present took some time.

Monday 6th November 2023

We drove two hours south of the hotel to Phetchaburi Rice Fields (13.123398, 99.896510) where we searched along the irrigation canals and roads off the main road. We also visited the nearby Radio

Mast (13.16569, 99.90999) and Fish Ponds (13.16998, 99.92214), but we couldn't find a documented raptor watchpoint nearby. We returned early through VERY heavy rain and floods to pack at the hotel. Best birds seen were Black shouldered Kite and Yellow and Cinnamon Bittern.

We paid for our stay at the Neera Retreat the night before leaving given we were setting off early. Accommodation was 27,071 Bt (Around £615) for the week and all meals and drinks were 3565 Bt (Around £80). Exceptionally good value to say this was one of the best-appointed hotels I have stopped in. It was brand new which helped in that respect.



Ashy Woodswallow – just a few birds seen on powerlines



Black necked Lapwing – a species not uncommon around the rice fields



Elusive and hard to see on what was a very hot day – Yellow Bittern

Tuesday 7th November 2023

An early 4am start for the airport to catch a 9am flight to Sydney. We arrived at 9:30pm local time and spent the night locally at the Holiday Inn on the Corner of O'Riordan Street & Bourke Rd, Mascot NSW 2020 and ordered room service to eat.

Wednesday 8th November 2023

Having had a nice restful night's sleep in the luxurious Holiday Inn we got a taxi to Sydney Airport booked for us by reception. We had breakfast at the airport followed by a 3hr flight into beautiful Cairns. After collection of our new VW Tiguan, which was a delight to drive, we found the local laundrymat on the High Street to complete a well needed load of washing. While waiting we surveyed the street where we saw Imperial Pied Pigeon, Brown Honey Eater and Masked Lapwing.

After bidding farewell to our new South Korean Environmental students and Washing DC friends that were also doing their washing, we set off for Coles supermarket at 274 Mulgrave Rd, Westcourt QLD 4870, (-16.934524, 145.753984) to purchase some supplies. While Tania shopped, I stayed outside with the car loaded with all the luggage to photograph the Australian White Ibis in the car park along with Scally Chested Lorikeets and Bush Stone Curlew. By the time she had completed her shop Tania said I had the look of a boy who had just opened his presents first thing Christmas morning having already found the apparently elusive Bush Stone Curlew.

Driving the 30 mins from Cairns to Cassowary House at Black Mountain Road, Kurunda, QLD 4881 (-16.802954, 145.636916) we had sightings of Black Red-tailed Cuckoos and a flock of Magpie Geese. The directions provided by the host for our accommodation were spot on. The drive from Cairns to

Cassowary House is a little torturous on a switchback climb on what is a fast road. The accommodation was down a rough track which was ill maintained. We bottomed the vehicle several times going in and out over the course of our stay. Several people had recommended Cassowary House but since they had stayed it has passed to other persons who are not bird orientated. We stayed in Catbird Cottage which is just about tolerable as self-catering accommodation. The owner had left the key in the door, and we saw ourselves in. The place was unkempt and was nothing more than a bed in a shed. What it did have going for it was that it was on the edge of the rainforest and wildlife surrounded the place (as well as entering it ... who knew Queensland had Scorpions!)

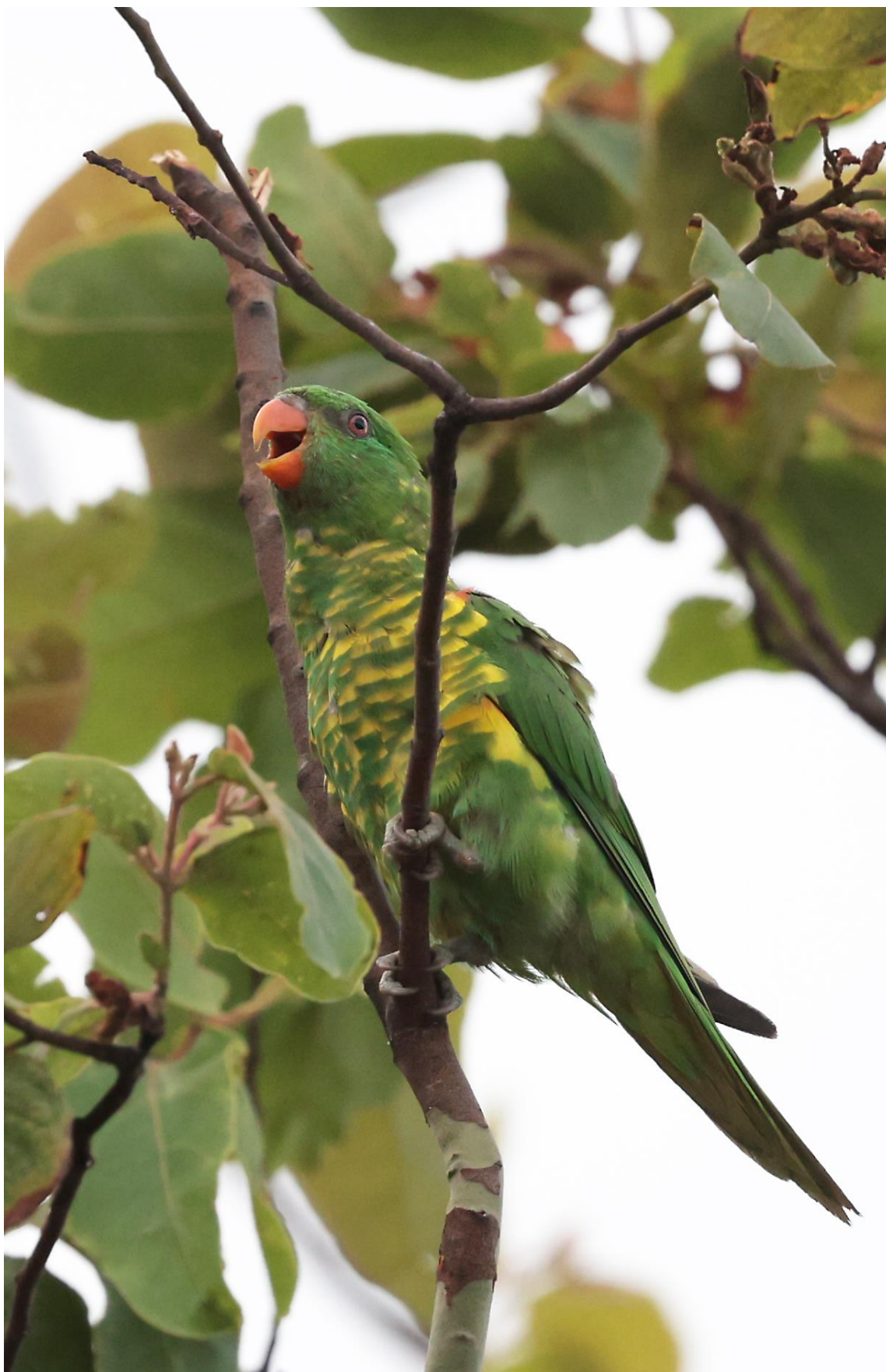
We were told later by others we should be staying at 'Kingfisher Park Birdwatchers Lodge' RN 6 Mount Kooyong Rd, Julatten, Queensland 4871 (-16.59407, 145.33999) which is some distance from Cairns itself.



Brown Honeyeater common around Cairns



The rather commoner than expected Bush Stone Curlew. It was possible to see these birds in practically every open space and shopping centre car park. Bizarre!



Scaly breasted Lorikeet in Coles supermarket car park. It was a big flock but they were the only ones we saw.



The very majestic Torresian Imperial Pigeon once considered conspecific with the now split Pied Imperial Pigeon which has unmarked undertail coverts (as does juv Torresian!). We found them to be exceptionally common around Cairns. These birds migrate to New Guinea during the dry season.



Peaceful Dove – this is exactly the same species as the Zebra Dove in Thailand.

Thursday 9th November 2023

Rain in spats of heavy showers during the morning. Brush Turkeys and Red legged Pademon were outside the cottage, and we found a few birds in fruiting trees up the road nearby.

Later in the morning we drove to Cairns waterfront (-16.909365, 145.767515). Some good waders. Checked the Northern mangrove end and got a pair of nesting Mangrove Flycatchers. Our first Pelican and Black necked Stork offshore. Just a few Far Eastern Curlews, White breasted Woodswallows, several Red-Rumped Swallows passing through and many Welcome Swallows.

Close to the airport we had a site for Metallic Starlings, and it didn't disappoint (-16.885850, 145.749568). The tree was heaving with nesting birds.

We called at Jack Barnes Bicentennial Mangrove board walk (-16.883450, 145.761091) which is again by the airport. We had excellent sightings of Shining Flycatchers but little else. Fantastic habitat though with extensive boardwalks.

We had lots of information regarding potential roosts of Spectacled Flying Foxes kindly supplied to us by Maree (president@batsoc.org.au) the president of the local bat society. Numbers in the roost for the previous week were also given. However, we were warned that numbers and sites can be extremely volatile:

Close to city

Lily Creek, Parramatta Park	-16.9179	145.7645	1062
Henley Street Park, Earlville	-16.9485	145.7372	588
Quail Close, Woree	-16.9722	145.7415	350

Cairns North

Goomboora Park, Brinsmead	-16.9077	145.7051	106
Dunn street, cairns north	-16.9153	145.7629	55
Cairns Potters Club, Cairns North	-16.9147	145.7622	457

Barr Creek Bridge, Machans Beach	-16.8465	145.7442	300
Kamerunga Environmental Park	-16.8742	145.6872	535
Northern Beaches			
Kewarra Resort	-16.7775	145.6821	1270
Southern suburbs Cairns			
Bulimba Crescent, Mount Sheridan	-16.9991	145.7363	280

We called at Kewarra Resort but couldn't get access due to building works, so we went to Kamerunga Environmental Park and unfortunately there was no roost!

We made our way back to the cottage to make a meal and write up notes before retiring.



Australian Brush Turkey; such a striking bird and not at all shy.



Mangrove Robin – a pair were in the South end of the mangroves at Cairns esplanade.



Eastern Koel – easier to hear than see!



Metallic Starling – one of many in a single colony in one tree among Cairn's Airport satellite buildings



Two very elusive Shining Flycatchers were on the Jack Barnes Bicentennial Mangrove Board Walk. One momentarily perched on the ground and fanned its tail; perhaps to cool itself on the mud on what was a very hot day.



Yellow Oriole – consolation for not finding any spectacled bats at Kamerunga Environmental Park

Friday 10th November 2023

A walk locally after breakfast and Figbirds were best of the bunch of birds seen.

A drive to the Cemetery in Cairns (-16.915680, 145.764274) – Bee eaters were everywhere – no Brush Stone Curlews at what is widely accepted as a stake out for them. However, we found them at almost every stop we made over the next few days. This is an area where there is ample roadside parking and a walk through the cemetery with a number of benches to sit on and wait for birds.

We visited the Botanical Gardens (-16.899596, 145.748138) which was great for butterflies but a little short on birds. The area is free to enter.

Nearby is Centenary Lakes (-16.903609, 145.749229) we walked around the Freshwater lake first then the Saltwater lakes. We saw an Osprey and a Murray River Turtle here with several Brush Stone Curlews and a few honeyeater species.



A confiding Black Butcherbird at the Centenary Lakes

We did a little shopping for bits and pieces followed by a visit to Parramatta Park, Lily Creeks for bats – unfortunately nothing.

We then checked the trees outside the Library in Cairns (-16.919863, 145.775286) which had previously been used by Spectacled Flying Foxes but they had been 'moved on' by the local authority. However, I had been told the area was still being used by the bats as a feeding area. Unfortunately there were no bats when we visited but there had been some recently judging by the deposits on the pavement.

We then visited Henley Street Park, Earlville where we had success with maybe 200 Spectacled Flying Foxes and a couple of pigeon species we'd not seen before.



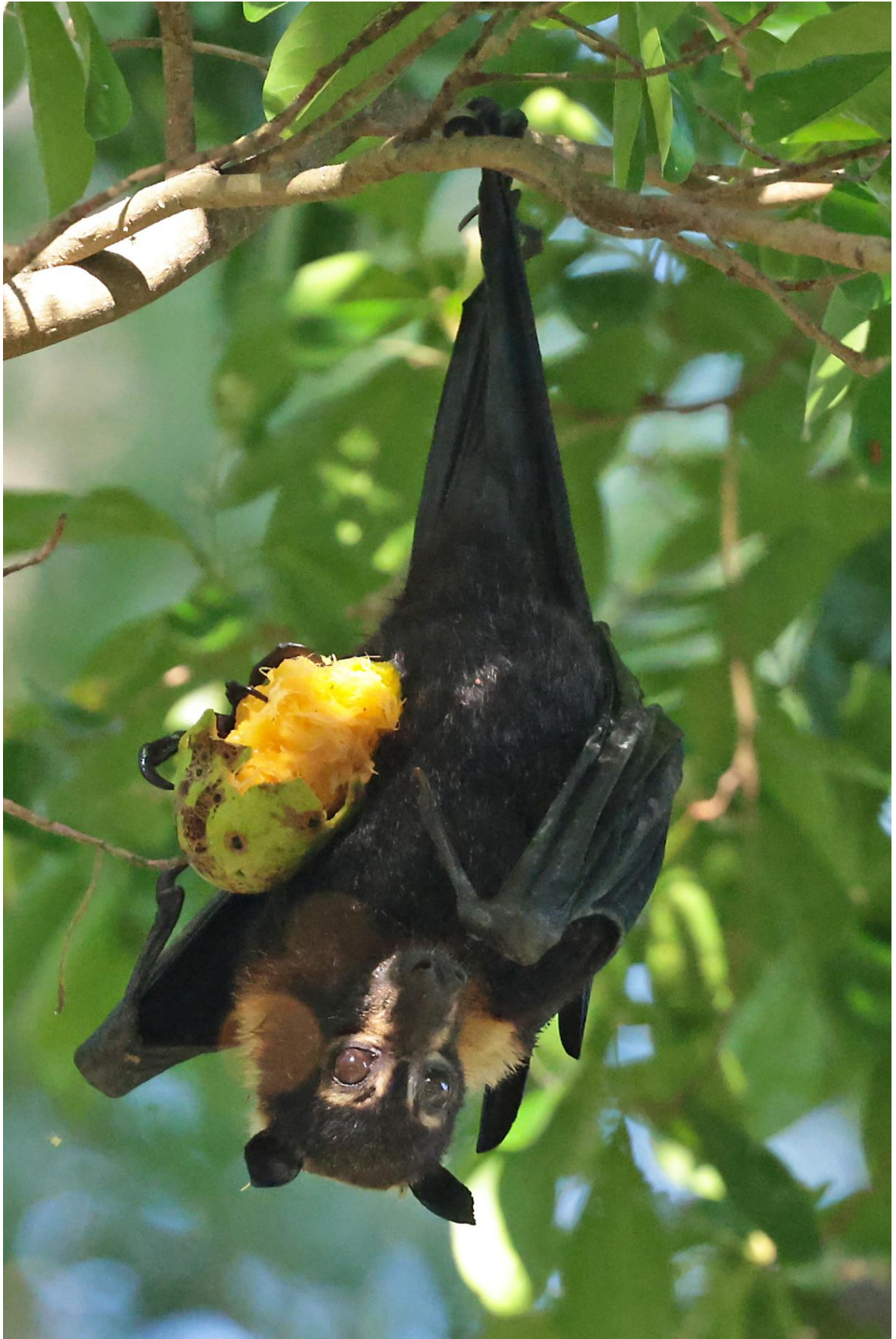
Rainbow Bee Eater – the cemetery in Cairns had good numbers.



Orange Footed Scrubfowl at the Centenary Lakes,



Richmond Birdwing – probably the largest butterfly I’ve ever seen – Cairns Botanical Gardens



Spectacled Flying Fox – we eventually found the colony albeit with some difficulty.



A very large day flying Zodiac Moth at the Cairns Botanical Gardens



Wompoo Fruit Dove in our favourite fruiting tree near Cassowary Cottage

As we finished our food Shopping we saw some Red tailed Black Cockatoos on lampposts by the roadside. (-16.838849, 145.693253) We parked up and I went back to Photograph them in what was

by now extremely poor light. The new camera performed really well. This was followed by dinner back at Cassowary House and a write up of notes for the day.



Three of a small roosting group of Red Tailed Black Cockatoos we saw after finishing an evening shop!

Saturday 11th November 2023

Trip up to Daintree (-16.249877, 145.318306). This is quite a drive.

On route we saw a very large herd of Agile Wallabies from the Captain Cook Highway somewhere just North of Smithfield.



The distinctive white thigh line and face pattern of Agile Wallaby on the road North out of Smithfield.



Helmeted Friarbird from the board walk at Marrdja NP Boardwalk. We also saw and photographed Silver Crowned Friarbird (with the angular rear edge of bare face rather than round) at the same location.



Papuan Frogmouth sat on its nest viewable from the board walk



Olive Backed Sunbird also from the boardwalk.



Orange Bush Brown from the boardwalk.

Overall Daintree was relatively unproductive. It cost \$47 for the River Daintree Ferry which is a five minute ferry ride and takes you and your vehicle over the river and into the rainforest area. It was \$78 for two of us to go on the boardwalk at the interpretation centre which was a complete rip off. Cassowary had been seen in the car park (no entrance fee required) by others but not by us. Best sighting on the boardwalk was a Major Skink a Lizard species that was new to us.

We spent time driving roads looking for Cassowary and we eventually settled on Marrdja NP Boardwalk at Noah Beach. A Cassowary had been seen there the day before and about an hour before we arrived but not when we were there. The bird of the day was a Papuan Frogmouth sat on the nest close to the boardwalk! There was attendant Fig Birds and also a Helmeted Friarbird.

We drove back having dinner at KFC on the way with Brush Stone Curlews sharing my chips.

We had a Bandicoot species in the headlights. Probably Northern Brown Bandicoot.

Sunday 12th November 2023

We headed south with the intention of seeing Platypus. Stopping for a field full of Brolga and Sarus Cranes just East of Atherton (-17.267786, 145.542420) we parked on Jim Chapman bridge and walked back up the highway to view the field to the North where they all were. We then went on to the Yungaburra platypus platform (-17.274432, 145.580743) where we spent a couple of hours without seeing platypus - just a few birds a turtle and a lizard.

We moved on to Lake Barrine (-17.245123, 145.639076) this was a great rainforest walk with superb views of tooth billed bower bird and several other endemics. We also met a couple here 'Lynn and Butch' who gave invaluable information on a Cassowary site we visited the following day.



Sarus Crane ... a field full of them!



Tooth Billed Bowerbird on its arena perch.

On the way back we got closer to the Sarus Cranes on a side road (-17.265300, 145.535032). Many of the Brolga had gone but several Sarus Cranes remained and also had Australian Pipit and Dollar birds plus a few other species.

Fantastic visit to Hasties Swamp with lots of new birds plus microbats roosting in the hide. Cuckoo Pigeon and White bellied Sea Eagle were perhaps the best birds seen.

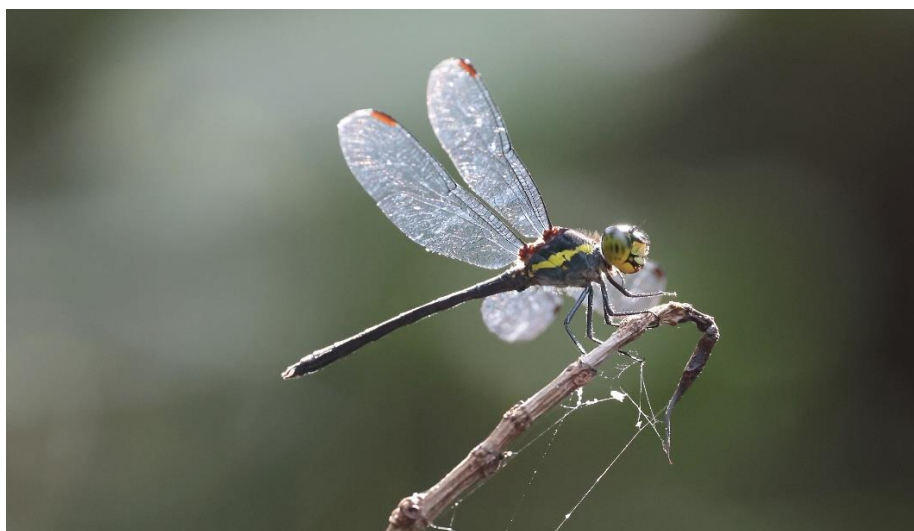
Back to the cottage for tuna salad.



Australian Pipit



Dollarbird: several were seen at the crane site.



Striped Swamp Dragon



Brown Cuckoo Dove at Hasties Swamp from the Tower Hide

Monday 13th November 2023

A drive to Etty Beach South of Cairns for Cassowary. (-17.558061, 146.089766) It wasn't long before we saw a single male along the beach that then went into the rain forest. Absolute magic!



Southern Cassowary – A living dinosaur.



Cattle Egret – Eastern Race (or perhaps species) showing full breeding plumage.



Eastern Curlew with extraordinarily long bill and absence of a pale rump 'V'



There were a few Pacific Golden Plovers but they all hung around inside the mangroves at the Northern end of the beach at Cairns Esplanade.

There was a good sized Metallic Starling colony in a garden on the approach road to Etty Beach and Cattle Egrets in breeding plumage along much of the whole route.

We returned to Cairns to search the beach for waders. We walked the whole length of the esplanade and had a good haul of waders including Tattlers and Terek Sandpipers plus others. We also met an American that gave us some very sound site information.

Home for fried sausage and salad to celebrate!!



Just a single Black Necked Stork (Jaribu). This female (pale iris ... the males have a dark iris) was the only Stork in the whole of the bay all the time we were staying in Queensland.



Wandering Tattler



Grey Tailed Tattler



Terek Sandpiper



Varied Honeyeater coming down onto the mud chasing insects.

Tuesday 14th November 2023

We headed North and drove the roads of East and West Mary Farm. The roads were very very interesting. (-16.577952, 145.188658) We eventually caught up with Australian Bustards and one was very approachable. Another was displaying and we had good views of Bazza as well as Red backed Fairy Wrens.



Pacific Bazza among the Eucalypts



Red Backed Fairy Wren – a small flock moved around us on the Mary Farm Roads



One of many Australian Bustards seen on the Mary Farm Roads

We again went to the Daintree river crossing area but this time booked two places on the Daintree River Solar Whisper boat at \$35 each. This was for the one-hour trip. We wanted the two hour trip which he couldn't run until a few days later. Realising our disappointment he offered us places on the morning tour plus two free tickets for an afternoon one hour cruise which we gratefully accepted. On the two cruises, which were both different due to the different tides, we saw several Saltwater Crocodiles as well as a Common Tree Snake and several common birds plus a White bellied Sea Eagle.



This displaying male Australian Bustard was really strutting his stuff for three nearby females.



Several Saltwater Crocodiles were seen from the 'Whisperer' Electric Boat.



This Water Python was in scrub by the boat ramp at Daintree.

On the way back South we called at Newell Beach (-16.417026, 145.408055). We tried several spots along the sea front but then went as far North as we could, parked the car at the end of a rough track and walked just a little way North to a lagoon area. Here we had a Beach Stone Curlew which I was thrilled to see. We also saw several Radjah Shelduck in this area.



Yellow Oriole at the Nest by the boat ramp on the Daintree.



White Bellied Sea Eagle seen from the boat ride on the Daintree.



Pacific Emerald Dove at Newell Beach.



Beach Stone Curlew at Newell Beach lagoon



Red Legged Pademelon seen in the headlights when going down the track at Cassowary House.

Wednesday 15th November 2023



Forest Kingfisher on wires almost at the entrance to Cassowary House

We tried to enter Mareeba Wetlands (-16.924643, 145.360666) but unfortunately, they have now been privatised and can't be accessed without an appointment. So we birded the approach road. Best birds here were Blue winged Kookaburra, Brown Goshawk and Lewin's Rail.



Brown Goshawk over Mareeba Wetlands



The pale eye and lack off eye mask gave away our first Blue Winged Kookaburra



Blue Faced Honeyeater at Mareeba



Nankeen Kestrel – one or two were hunting over the wetlands at Mareeba

We then made our way to Granite Rocks (-17.042177, 145.351094). A small privately run area that caters for campers as well as day visitors. The google location was somewhat ambiguous and the sat nav tried to take us via a private fruit farm. We eventually found the entrance by following the brown tourist signs from Maareeba Town. The entrance fee was \$15 each plus \$2 for the Wallaby feed. We saw several good birds including Squatter Pigeon as well as 3 Mareeba Rock Wallabies. Identified as a separate species from Brush tailed Rock Wallaby in 1996. Some nice Blue faced Honeyeaters and several other good species.



Squatter Pigeon – Granite Rocks are one of the few places this species can easily be found.



Leaden Flycatcher was one of the many passerines seen at Granite Rocks.



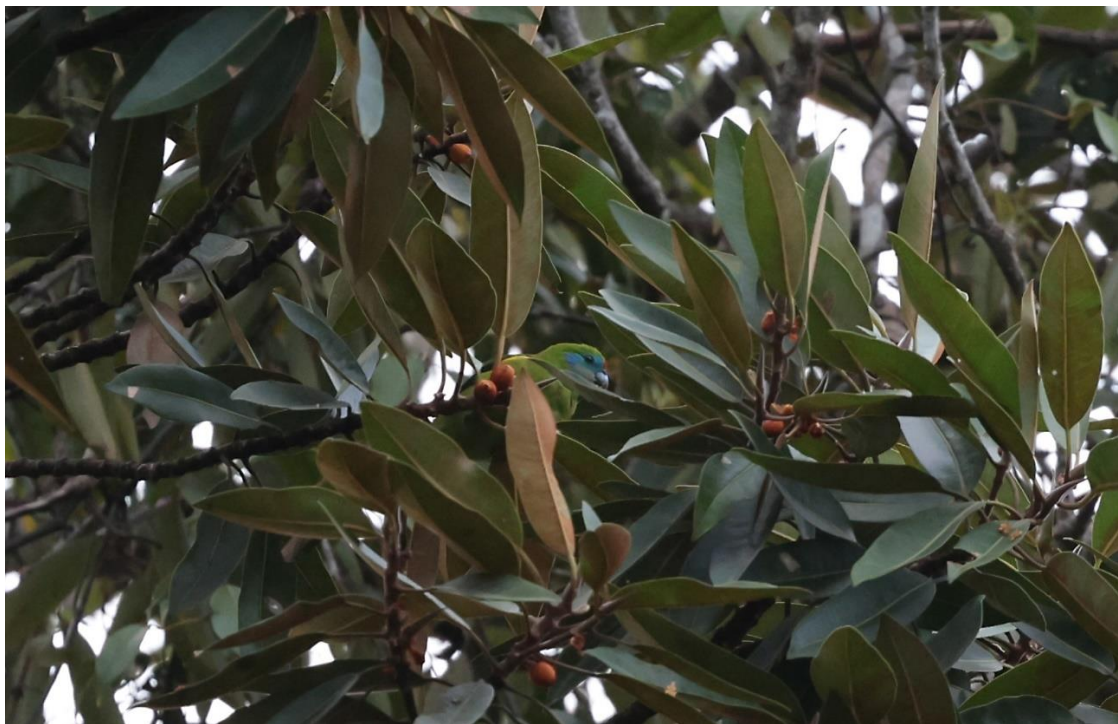
Mareeba Rock Wallaby was one of the recent splits from Rock Wallaby, which now comprises of seven separate species (Cape York, Godman's, Sharman's, Allied Rock, Unadorned, Herbert's and of course Mareeba).



Australian Darter at The Billabong

We finally called at The Billabong near Karunda (-16.842716, 145.604283). It's a camp site but has lodges. Having been invited in to have a look around we had Jacanna, Anhinga and Little Grebe plus a few other bits and pieces.

On return back to Catbird Cottage a walk up the road before dinner to the fruiting tree produced double eyed fig parrot and more honeyeaters of various species.



A couple of Double Eyed Fig Parrots were in our favourite fruiting tree at Karunda although seeing them was difficult let alone getting a sharp photograph.

A night drive uphill on Black Mountain Road for around 10Km produced a single frog, bat, nightjar and owl – all of indeterminate species. If we had more time this area would be worth exploring during the day.

Thursday 16th November 2023

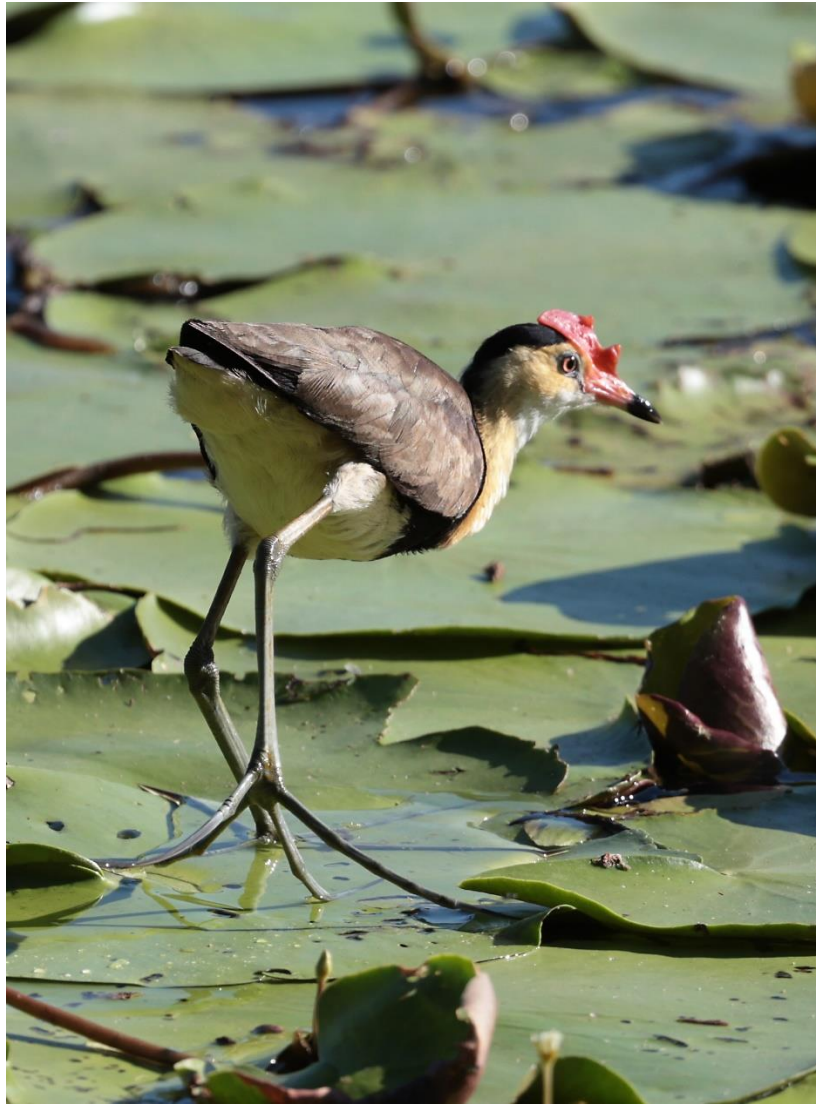
A late rise. We drove down to Cairns to again wash our cloths at the Laundromat. It was closed for repairs but it didn't take us long to find another. One hour later we were on our way to Cairns Botanical Garden once more as Tani wanted to see more butterflies. There were few birds around; Black Butcherbird being the best. Plenty of Ulysses Butterflies but none unfortunately perched. We had a rather overpriced coffee and cake at the gardens before moving on.



Orchard Swallowtail at Cairns Botanical Gardens

After a picnic lunch we drove to Cattana Wetlands (-16.829294, 145.703218) just North of Cairns. Plenty of Green Pygmy Geese and Jacana. Leaden Flycatcher was in the car park. Nice place. Very quiet and well maintained.

Pork Salad for dinner – VERY nice.



Comb Crested Jacana were everywhere on the Cattana Wetlands.



Green Pygmy Geese were also prolific at the Wetlands.



Surprisingly one of the few reptiles we saw at the wetlands which went by the snappy title of 'Closed Litter Rainbow Skink'

Friday 17th November 2023

Away early to the airport to fill with fuel and return the car to Avis. We were a little ahead for our 11:45am flight to Melbourne so we called at the Promenade where it was a high tide and we watched the waders for a while. Eastern Curlew, Whimbrel, Bar tailed Godwits and Great Knots a Collared Kingfisher plus a top knot fruit pigeon heard but not seen. The flight passed quickly. In Melbourne we picked up our hire car from Avis; a Toyota Prada – 'a man's car' as Tania put it - and stayed the night at The Hyatt Place in Essenden Fields. We met family for an evening meal.

The size of the car seemed a little bit over the top but to be honest we certainly did need it on some of the roads we went on during the following days. It wasn't as diesel gobbling as I originally thought it would be.

Saturday 18th November 2023

We had breakfast with friends at Essenden fields near the Hyatt Place. Afterwards we travelled to Pakenham to check into the Mecure Hotel. We then met friends for the afternoon in nearby Berwick and spent the night back at Pakenham.

Sunday 19th November 2023

Having had breakfast at the hotel we did a shop in Pekenham ready to spend a few days at Cornerstone in Yanakee. It's quite a drive South to Yanakee which is just outside the Wilson's Promontory National Park the most southerly point on the Australian mainland. On the way South we called at Surf Parade at Interloch coastal Reserve (-36.646751, 145.696806) where the best find was two Hooded Plover. We then called at Venus Bay Boat Ramp (-38.66032, 145.78376). We had several common species and plenty of Eastern Grey Kangaroos plus a Rabbit! Our first of many. On the next leg to Yanakee a field of 1200 Straw necked Ibis in a roadside field was worthy of a stop and quite a sight.



I got some funny looks and comments as I watched and photographed this Red Wattlebird in a supermarket car park in Pakenham. It was feeding two fledged young.



Always good to see Australian Pelican. This one was at Venus Bay boat ramp.



Pacific Gull at Venus Bay – just look at that bill!



Grey Fantails were common at Venus Bay



Probably one of Australia's smartest heron species – the White Necked Heron. This one was in fields leading to Cornerstone at Yanakee.



Little Wattlebird at Cornerstone.



One of my favourite families of birds. This Shining Bronze Cuckoo was one of several in the grounds of Cornerstone and was very vocal.



This female Rufous Whistler was seen on several occasions at Cornerstone.

The self-catering Cornerstone, 25, Winkarlin Drive, Yanakee (-38.758503, 146.197164) is an isolated well-appointed cottage that sleeps six within a good acreage of land planted with gums and scrub that is ideal for birds. There are three bedrooms and two bathrooms, a couple of decks to sit on and

a bowl to fill with water which was visited by garden birds. The people that run it live nearby and are keen naturalists that are rewilding some of the former gravel pits. It is a 'god's acre' of a place. I would stop there again. In fact I would happily live there!

After unpacking, a walk down the drive gave us lots of local birds including several Shining Bronze Cuckoos and our first (distant) Wombat.



Another fabulous bird at Cornerstone – White Faced Honeyeater

Monday 20th November 2023

After watching garden birds drink and bathe we drove to Wilsons Promontory. There were Swamp Wallabies on the drive at Cornerstone.



Blue Winged Parrots are a scarce bird and Cornerstone is fortunate to have regular visitors.



Eastern Spinebill. Cornerstone had healthy numbers.



Brown Thornbills are common at Cornerstone.



Blue Tongued Lizard on the wildlife walk at Wilson's Prom.



Black Scaped Bull Ant – a ferocious little beast



Little Corella on the campground at Tidal River.



Emu on the Prom Wildlife Walk – several were present.



Crimson Rosella on the campground at Tidal River.



Fan Tailed Cuckoo at Lily Pilly Gully



Swamp Wallaby showing the classic russet crown and ears.



Apparently, Mange is quite common in the population of Wombats. This one on the campground had been treated by the rangers.

Entry to 'the prom' is free. We walked Lilly Pilly Gully (-39.01525, 146.34061). Some excellent birds including Crescent Honeyeater, Fan tailed Cuckoo, Golden Whistler and flyover Ganggang Cockatoos.

We walked the wildlife walk (-38.947807, 146.273590) where we found two Blue Tongued Lizards a Forest Brown Butterfly, Emus and Eastern Grey Kangaroos – part of a survey so they were all wearing lots of plastic jewellery.

We spent quite some time on the Campground at Tidal River (-39.030132, 146.325088) and saw Swamp Wallaby and eventually a Wombat which unfortunately had mange. This is a common problem amongst this population of Wombats. We called again for a brief look at the Wildlife Walk area where Wombats had been seen. One more Wombat availed itself on our drive back to Cornerstone plus lots of Swamp Wallaby. Close to Cornerstone we had a fox cub at the roadside.

Tuesday 21st November 2023

A long drive to Cape Liptrap Lighthouse (-38.89858, 145.92305). Disappointing. There were few seabirds. Fur seals and a few cormorants plus 2 Gannet were all we could find in the few hours we spent at the lighthouse plus Grey Shrike Thrush and a Blue Tongued Lizard. In the light of Cape Liptrap not producing much (no pun intended) we went back to Interloch to see if we could get better photos of Hooded Plover. Success - plus a few Red necked Stints thrown in. Unfortunately the Hooded Plovers are so scarce that all populations are well studied and the one I photographed had a plastic flag on the leg.

We returned to Cornerstone and after coffee we walked to the sandpits within the grounds of Cornerstone – surprisingly very little but that could have been the time of day. A Swamp Wallaby again on the drive and Tani found a Koala and Blue Tongued Lizard in the garden.



Red Necked Stint at Interloch on the tidal lagoon



YJ the Hooded Plover at Interloch – an uncommon and threatened species.



Having heard what I thought was a Koala at Cornerstone Tania went to check and sure enough she found one in the back garden!

Wednesday 22nd November 2023



Australian Spotted Crake at Edithvale Wetlands

A day of business with solicitors in Aspendale. We called at Edithvale Wetlands (-38.033546, 145.123363) a small reserve that was closed. It only appears to be open on a weekend. However there is a public hide outside the confines of the fenced reserve where I saw Australian Spotted Crake, a couple of Nankeen Night Herons, Australian Reed Warblers and Pink eared Ducks.



There were a flock of Crested Terns on the beach at Mordialloc



Olive Whistler back at Cornerstone

A walk later on the beach at Mordialloc (-38.008229, 145.083056) gave very few species but Crested Tern was new for the trip. A few other birds were seen from the car on the 180Km return journey back to Cornerstone.



Grey Butcherbird back at Cornerstone.

Thursday 23rd November 2023

After an early start we saw two Blue winged Parrots on Charles Hall Road just around the corner from Cornerstone. They were on the ground and flew up. I was kicking myself I didn't see them earlier. We called at Millers Landing on Wilson's Prom. (-39.02222, 146.32143) We had hoped for Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo but there was no sign although we did have Yellow tailed Black Cockatoos, Needle tailed Swifts and an obliging Swamp Wallaby. We promised ourselves we would come back later in the day.



White Throated Needletail – a species I always enjoy seeing in Australia

We did the walk at Lilly Pilly Gully again. Walking all the way to the board walk this time and back. Some interesting dragonflies, one of which remains unidentified, and a rather tatty Yellow Admiral were seen but fewer birds than previously. We did however have half decent views of Gangang Cockatoos and a Rufous Whistler. On the walk back high above us was an Australian Hobby having a pop at a Wedge tailed Eagle.



Multi-spotted Darner at Lilly Pilly Gully



We heard Ganggang Cockatoos and saw them flying overhead on the first visit to Lilly Pilly Gully but we had decent perched views on the second visit.

After a late lunch we walked to Cotter's Lake and Beach. The place is heaven on earth with golden sands and blue sea. Few birds but a few dragonflies of as yet an indeterminate species and Growling Grass Frogs in the trackside ditches. We then revisited the road to Millers Landing and I found an obliging Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo and a Black shouldered Kite. A return visit to The Wildlife Walk gave Emu, jewellery bearing Eastern Grey's and 3 very unobliging Wombats.

On the way back to Cornerstone there were lots of Swamp Wallabies – even one on the drive again!



Growling Green Grass Frog in the ditches aside the track to Cotters Lake Beach



Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo was surprisingly difficult to find but eventually one showed well for us at Miller's Landing. The wide eye-stripe and pale 'marbling' on the wing coverts being diagnostic.

Friday 24th November 2023

We were very sorry to leave Cornerstone. I absolutely loved the place. We had a late start followed by a long drive to Historic Woodland Park near Melbourne Airport (-37.631380, 144.851578) which took about 3 hours. The best sighting on route was an Echidna on the roadside.

At the park there were lots of Eastern Greys plus a few red-rumped parrots and a yellow-rumped thornbill. We called at Cousin Wendy's to repack and shower after being caught in the rain during our walk. The 12:15am flight to Bangkok early on the 25th arrived 6am local time; we then had a 6 hour wait until the UK flight so we bought Miracle lounge passes to have food, drinks and a wash and brush up. We could also have had a shower but didn't bother.

The flight back to Heathrow was very 'bouncy' with lots of turbulence. I was amazed how much an aircraft can flex! We landed at 7:45pm and after security then luggage collection and collection of our car the drive home to North Norfolk took us several hours. We arrive home at 1:15am.



Red Rumped Parrots at the Historic Woodlands Park in Melbourne near the airport



Yellow Rumped Thornbill in a rather parched park.



Sulphur Crested Cockatoo – large flocks were in the Historic Woodland Park

32,206 photographs totalling 211 GB were taken and stored on two separate hard drives.

All photographs were taken with a Canon R6ii fitted with a 100-500mm lens.

Of the birds seen 210 species were seen in Australia and 120 in Thailand although some of these were seen in both. Therefore roughly 300+ species were seen in the 27 days we were away.

15 mammals were seen in Australia with 8 in Thailand with no duplication. So 23 in total.

15 species of butterfly were seen in Australia and 34 seen in Thailand however one species the Great Eggfly (*Hypolimnas bolina*) was seen in both countries. So 48 species in total.

13 species of Odonata were seen in Australia with a further 8 in Thailand. One species (*Orthetrum sabina*) was duplicated in both countries. This is called the Green Marsh Hawk in Thailand and the Slender Skimmer in Australia although the Green Marsh Hawk is in fact a separate sub-species. So a total of 20 species in total.

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