



“OFF WITH THE BIRDS” VICTORIA TOUR

20th to 29th Nov 2017

Features of the Victorian “Off with the Birds” Birding and Nature Tour. Only guided by locals. Visit key birding hotspots targeting rare and iconic birds and animals across all the major habitat types. Victoria has an incredible diversity of birdlife and wildlife within a relatively small area, enabling us to maximize birding time and minimize driving time. This tour gives us the opportunity to spend quality time in the region’s varied landscapes, allowing for better views and a greater chance of connecting with rare and cryptic birds and animals. This tour is run as a serious birding tour, however having fun along the way is non-negotiable!

This predominately bird watching tour will also include a focus on other aspects of natural history, including time spent spotlighting to look for some of Australia's unique animals as well as observation of native plants and reptiles.



Tour Information:

Departs from Melbourne on the morning of Monday 20th November 2017

Concludes in Melbourne on the evening of Wed 29th Nov 2017



Leader: Simon Starr and local guides as required.

Group Size: Minimum four participants, maximum eight.

Costs: 10 Day Victorian tour Aus\$3,950.00 per person on a twin share basis (\$360.00 single room supplement)

Cost includes guides, transportation, nine night's accommodation and all meals (excluding breakfast day one and dinner on the last day). Prices based on a double or twin share occupancy. Single room supplement \$360. Accommodation is usually in standard motel style rooms, 3 or 4 star and adjacent to birding opportunities wherever possible.

What to bring: Binoculars, hat, sunscreen, insect repellent, and a personal drinking bottle.

What to wear: Come prepared for all weather. Recommended are long lightweight pants, comfortable and sturdy walking shoes/boots, and a lightweight long sleeved shirt. Wind proof and warm over clothes can then be put on as extra when required.

Physical Requirements: This tour involves some walking in a variety of terrains. A moderate level of fitness is all that is necessary. There are no overly strenuous activities. The days will start early, and highway travel time is normally 3 hours maximum each day. Your guide will be available for birding dawn until dusk, with spotlighting opportunities on some evenings also (see detailed itinerary).

EXPECTED ITINERARY: Please note this itinerary may change due to altered conditions at the time of the tour

Day 1: Mon 20th Nov -- Melbourne and surrounds

After an early morning pickup in Melbourne we shall spend some time in the eastern suburbs close to the Yarra River where perhaps a roosting Powerful Owl or Tawny Frogmouth may be found. Once clear of the city we will spend some time this morning exploring the Dandenong Ranges National Park for our first taste of the majestic towering Mountain Ash forests. A nice selection of forest birds may be encountered, with the Superb Lyrebird being high on the target list.

After lunch we will drive further east into the wilder mountains surrounding Healesville and Warburton. Here we will get a taste of various sections of the Yarra Ranges National Park where



we will witness tremendous views, mighty Mountain Ash forests and cool temperate rainforests of Myrtle Beech. Good for a range of localized cool wet mountain bird species such as Olive Whistler, Pilotbird, Pink Robin and Superb Lyrebird as well as an array of Parrots and Cockatoos



Returning to the suburbs later in the afternoon, and after dinner we will visit a Little Penguin colony on the shores of Port Phillip Bay to view them as they become active on dusk.

Accommodation in Melbourne's Eastern suburbs.

Day 2: Tues 21st Nov – Melbourne to East Gippsland

Today we leave Greater Melbourne, driving east into the wild and beautiful Gippsland region.

Habitats include foothill forests and woodlands, open grasslands, wetlands and beaches. Some key species today will include Hooded Plover, Pacific Gull, White-bellied Sea-Eagle, Latham's Snipe, Superb Lyrebird, Satin Bowerbird, Brown Gerygone, Little Lorikeet, Spotted Quail-thrush and Little Wattlebird .

Accommodation: Marlo/Orbost



Day 3: Wed 22nd Nov – East Gippsland

A full day today exploring the wonders of Cape Conran coastal park and nearby areas such as the Cabbage Tree Palms reserve. Coastal banksia forests, dunes and beaches, warm temperate rainforest patches and heathlands will provide us with a multitude of birding possibilities. Some key species will include Southern Emu-wren, Beautiful Firetail, Pilotbird, Turquoise Parrot, Glossy Black Cockatoo, Wonga Pigeon, Scarlet Honeyeater, Superb Lyrebird, seabirds and possible Humpback Whales plus waders and terns on the Snowy river Estuary.



After an early dinner, we will have saved plenty of energy for an extended night time exploration of nearby forests and heaths where we have the chance of any of the large forest Owls (Sooty, Masked or Powerful), potential White-throated Nightjar, Tawny Frogmouth, and a range of mammals with the rare Long-nosed Bandicoot a possibility.

Accommodation Marlo/Orbost

Day 4: Thurs 23rd Nov – East Gippsland to Chiltern

Today involves a reasonably long drive over the mountains of the Great Dividing range to the woodlands of north-eastern Victoria near Chiltern. On the way we will encounter a variety of Parrots, both Pied and Grey Currawongs, as well as the beautiful Flame Robin which breeds in the alpine high country in summer.

Arriving in the more open habitat type of north-eastern Victoria later in the afternoon a new range of species will see us rapidly adding to our species list.



Flowering trees attract Honeyeaters and Lorikeets whilst the open shrubby and grassy understorey of these woodlands are good for various Thornbills, Robins and the Speckled Warbler. These quality woodland will yield many birds such as Orioles, Cuckoo-Shrikes, Shrike-tits and Friarbirds. The birding will be lively, and the rare Turquoise Parrot will be a particular target species. Accommodation Chiltern/Wangaratta



Day 5: Fri 24th Nov – Chiltern to Deniliquin

A big day's birding today. The morning there will be time to continue exploring the excellent woodlands of the Chiltern forest and the nearby Warby Ranges. The Turquoise Parrot will be high on the agenda if not already seen the day before, as well as a wide range of bushland gems such as Diamond Firetail, Red-capped Robin, White-throated Gerygone, Crested Shrike-tit and Speckled Warbler.



Later in the day, travelling west we will go through flatter and rich agricultural regions, the start of the Victorian Riverina. A smattering of woodlands, wetlands and sand hills will add to the species list as we head for the Murray River and its extensive River Red Gum forests. We will target a number of birds only found in this north-eastern part of Victoria such as Western and White-throated Gerygones, Little and Noisy Friarbirds and the Dollarbird, but our main target for the afternoon is the stunning Superb Parrot, which breeds in the area before dispersing inland later in the summer.

By mid-afternoon we will arrive in Deniliquin, in southern NSW where after a rest, we will head out onto the Hay Plain, a vast flat and treeless area which is home to some unique wildlife. This evening will involve some birding late afternoon, a picnic dinner out in the wilds and a search for the unique endemic and now endangered Plains Wanderer. Other highlights may include Inland Dotterel, Australian Pratincole, White-winged Fairy-wren, Emus and Red Kangaroos.

Day 6: Sat 25th Nov – Deniliquin to the Mallee

After a slightly later start this morning, a huge birding day today will take us all the way from the relative lushness of the Murray River environs to the semi-arid mallee scrub of north-western Victoria. We will be birding at some quality wetlands near Kerang depending on seasonal conditions, where environmental watering creates perfect habitat for a wide range of waterbirds. As the day progresses, roughly following the Murray river north-west we will visit a variety of wetlands, woodlands and open grassland areas, where a healthy species total can be expected for the day. We shall search around some salt lakes for the amazing White-winged Fairy-wren and equally dazzling Orange Chat. Stands of Emu-bush in the region regularly attract the rare Black Honeyeater and as we venture further into the drier north-west Blue Bonnets and Cockatiels will start to appear along roadsides. Raptors will feature strongly today with up to 12 species possible in the area.



After driving through “endless” wheat fields into the extensive semi-arid mallee country of north-west Victoria, short stops will see us connect with a few of this regions special birds, before we have dinner and an early night. Accomodation in Ouyen.

Day 7: Sun 26th Nov – Mallee country based from Ouyen

Today the vast mallee national parks and specialist mallee birds of north-western Victoria will be our mission. We will target the rare and tricky birds of the region such as the Mallee Emu-wren and Striated Grasswren, the Malleefowl and the Chestnut Quail-thrush, as well as connecting with a range of dry country woodland birds unlikely to be seen elsewhere during the trip.



Birding in quiet, remote locations this is a day to unwind and adjust to the pace of the outback. A variety of reptiles may be encountered, as well as the great diversity of colourful parrots which brighten the landscape. Mulga Parrot, Mallee Ringneck, Regent Parrot, Blue Bonnet, Yellow Rosella, Red-rumped Parrot, Pink Cockatoo and Little Corella may all be seen. With luck we may also see more of the Red Kangaroo, Australia's largest marsupial amongst the commoner Western Grey Kangaroos. Emus should also be seen, to complete the "megafauna" in this ancient landscape.

After dinner the option exists to drive out to look for the Spotted Nightjar at dusk.

Day 8: Mon 27th Nov – Ouyen to Central Victoria

Today we will have the opportunity to mop up on those species we may have missed on our travels so far in the northern and north-western parts of the state. Starting the day in Wyperfeld National park where the White-browed Treecreeper will be new, and continuing on to the woodlands, scrub, and grasslands around Wedderburn and Inglewood back in central Victoria we can look for Major Mitchells Cockatoo, Striped Honeyeater, Malleefowl, Variegated Fairy-wren, Tawny-crowned Honeyeater, Southern Scrub Robin, Shy Heathwren, Painted Honeyeater, Diamond Firetails and Gilbert's Whistler amongst others. An early night tonight ready for an early start tomorrow.



Day 9: Tues 28th Nov -- Central Victoria to The Surf Coast

After a pre breakfast birding walk we will hit the road and head south towards the Surf Coast at the start of the Great Ocean Road. Through the afternoon we can explore a variety of



woodlands, heathlands, wetlands and coastal environments.



Key target birds for this area today and tomorrow include the endemic and localized Rufous Bristlebird, Southern Emu-wren, Hooded Dotterel, Gang Gang Cockatoo, Australian King Parrot, Satin Bowerbird, Blue-winged Parrot, Olive Whistler, Tawny-crowned Honeyeater, Crescent Honeyeater, Striated Fieldwren, and Chestnut-rumped Heathwren.

Gazing out to sea should give us some sightings of Australasian Gannet, Greater Crested Tern and Shy Albatross, and perhaps some other seabirds.

The rocky coastline will be another chance to connect with Pacific Gulls, Sooty Oystercatchers and Black-faced Cormorant, and Koala is likely to be seen in the Manna Gum forests hugging the coastline. Accommodation Lorne.

Day 10: Wed 29th Nov -- The Surf Coast to Melbourne

The last day of the tour will take us back along the coast to Melbourne.

Whilst still on the Great Ocean road we can revisit some coastal heathlands in search of the trickier birds therein. Rufous Bristlebird, Crescent Honeyeater, Southern Emu-wren and



Chestnut-rumped Heathwren are all tricky birds to observe in the wild so some more time may well be useful.

Closer to lunchtime and closer to Melbourne we can spend some time around the plains, grasslands and wetlands near Lara. The Cape Barren Goose is a key species here, and we also have chances for Latham's Snipe, Australian Crake and Purple-crowned Lorikeets amongst others. From there in the afternoon we can access some of the world class birding sites on Port Phillip bay. The area includes extensive areas of freshwater wetlands, coastal saltmarsh and grasslands. A wide variety of shorebirds, terns, duck, spoonbills, rails, crakes, raptors and grassland birds occur here and the afternoon will undoubtedly bring some new species for the trip.



Sunset on Paradise road