Australia

Kakadu National Park & the Top End

26th August to 10th September 2024 (16 days)

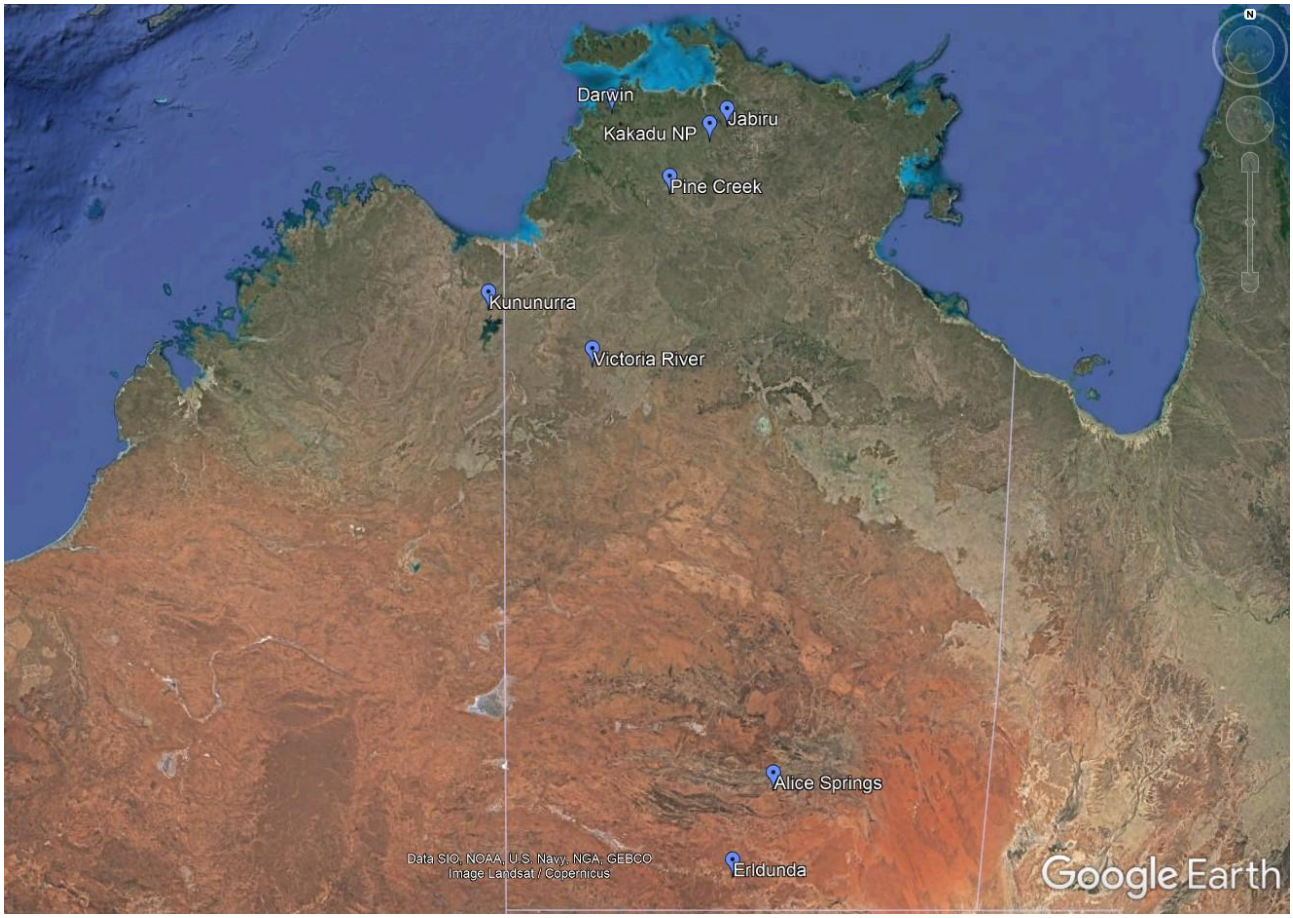


Gouldian Finch by Jonathan Rossouw

Australia is a land of scenic beauty and stark, contrasting habitats, only eclipsed by its remarkable diversity of endemic mammals and brilliantly-coloured and elaborately-patterned endemic birds. This epic birding adventure across northern Australia takes in the Northern Territory's best birding and wildlife localities on a quest for a number of the continent's most range-restricted and seldom-seen endemics! The scenery is spectacular with vast areas of seemingly endless plains, extensive wetlands, and rugged, rocky mountains. We will explore the arid interior around Alice Springs for legendary Australian dry-country endemics such as Dusky Grasswren, Rufous-crowned Emu-wren, Orange Chat, Bourke's Parrot, Spinifexbird, Spinifex Pigeon, Pied Honeyeater, Western Bowerbird, Banded White-face, Chiming Wedgebill, Inland Dotterel, Cinnamon Quail-Thrush and the magnificent Major Mitchell's Cockatoo. Thereafter, we journey up to the Darwin area and the tall woodlands and extensive, seasonal marshlands of Kakadu where highlights include Chestnut Rail, Rainbow Pitta, Chestnut-quilled Rock Pigeon, Banded Fruit Dove, Black-tailed Treecreeper, Hooded Parrot, Square-tailed Kite and Banded Honeyeater. Finally, we end in the remote Kimberley area where we hope to encounter mouth-watering rarities such as White-quilled Rock Pigeon, Yellow Chat, Pictorella Mannikin, the immaculate Masked, Long-tailed and Star Finches, the splendid Purple-crowned Fairywren, Brolga, Sandstone Shrike-Thrush and the rare and outrageously colourful Gouldian Finch. We will also, no doubt, be treated to a range of exciting mammals that should include an amazing selection of unique and varied kangaroos, wallabies and wallaroos while taking in our awe-inspiring and near-pristine surrounds.

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival in Alice Springs**
Days 2 & 3	**Alice Springs area**
Day 4	**Alice Springs to Erldunda**
Day 5	**Erldunda to Alice Springs**
Day 6	**Alice Springs and fly to Darwin**
Day 7	**Darwin and surrounds**
Day 8	**Darwin to Jabiru (Kakadu National Park)**
Day 9	**Jabiru to Cooinda (Kakadu National Park)**
Day 10	**Cooinda to Pine Creek**
Day 11	**Pine Creek area**
Day 12	**Pine Creek to Timber Creek**
Day 13	**Timber Creek area**
Day 14	**Timber Creek to Kununurra**
Day 15	**Kununurra area**
Day 16	**Kununurra and depart**



Birding sites in detail



Dusky Grasswren by Jonathan Rossouw

Alice Springs area. The Alice Springs area offers a fabulous array of outback specialities in this unique landscape and habitat. This area is an excellent base from which to access a wonderful diversity of birds typical of Australia's arid interior. A large number of dry-country endemics occur in this area and in the days to come we will endeavour to track down as many of these specialities as possible.

Our birding excursions will take us into the unique spinifex habitat that occurs through much of the area and this endemic habitat is home to several sought-after endemics that include the skulking Dusky Grasswren. Grasswrens are endemic to Australia and are notoriously difficult to find but we do stand an excellent chance of seeing this target species along with the lovely Rufous-crowned Emu-wren that occupies the same habitat.

Spectacular White-winged and Splendid Fairywrens also occur here and we will also search for the nomadic but gorgeous Orange and Crimson Chats, as well as White-fronted Honeyeater, White-browed and Grey-crowned Babblers and the beautiful Red-capped Robin. In the heat of the day, we will return to Alice Springs to visit the famous Alice Springs Sewage Works, a veritable magnet for waterbirds in this thirsty landscape. Red-necked Avocet, Yellow-billed and Royal Spoonbills, Pink-eared Duck and Black-fronted Dotterel may be seen along with more retiring species like Baillon's Crake and with a lot of luck, the secretive Australian Spotted Crake. We'll also spend time birding in woodland areas near Alice looking for typical Australian interior species like Crested Bellbird and Hooded Robin and we may even encounter the very rare and elusive Grey Honeyeater. In the late afternoon, we will visit a nearby waterhole that will afford us views of common but no-less-lovely species such as the gaudy Galah and Common Bronzewing. These species will be watched coming in to drink but our main target here will be one of the "outback's" star birds: the rare, localised and partially crepuscular Bourke's Parrot.



Major Mitchell's Cockatoo by Glen Valentine

The scenic MacDonnell Range, west of Alice Springs is an ancient landscape of rugged mountains and cool, scenic gorges harbouring a number of magnificent avian treasures. We will visit Simpsons Gap and Ormiston Gorge; both stunning locations that exhibit an interesting range of birds and mammals, as well as being scenically spectacular. The delightful Black-footed Rock-wallaby, a small and highly agile macropod with a very long tail, may be seen this morning as might the Common Wallaroo.

Notable endemic birds that we hope to find include the secretive Spinifexbird, robin-like Redthroat, the handsome Spinifex Pigeon, Western Bowerbird, and the rare and nomadic Pied and Black Honeyeaters. More widespread species include the vivid Mulga Parrot, Southern Whiteface,



Pink-eared Ducks by Jonathan Rossouw

Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater, immaculate Zebra Finch, Red-backed Kingfisher, Brown Falcon and Australian Hobby and if we are very lucky, we may even encounter the very rare Painted Finch.

Gibber Plains. The stony expanses are known as the 'gibber plains' after the Aboriginal word for stone. These sparse and barren plains might look 'empty' but they are home to some very interesting bird species including Cinnamon Quail-Thrush, Flock Bronzewing, Chiming Wedgebill and the amazing Inland Dotterel. Two mega-rare and ultra-elusive raptors that are possible in this area are the Grey Falcon and Letter-winged Kite but we would have to be immensely fortunate to see either of these Outback rarities.

Hugh River. This productive area is usually home to a few patches of water and these, along with the fabled red river gums, attract a range of striking species. This is an excellent area for Cockatoos and parrots and we may well see the eye-catching Major Mitchell's Cockatoo, Little Corella, gaudy Galah, Cockatiel and the familiar but rather nomadic and erratic Budgerigar! If we encounter a mixed feeding flock in this woodland, we may also find White-plumed and Grey-fronted Honeyeaters and Western Gerygone. We will also keep a lookout for the scarce and nomadic White-backed Swallow along the way and as we near Alice Springs we might encounter several of the area's more regular species such as Western Bowerbird, Diamond and Peaceful Doves, Yellow-throated Miner, Singing Honeyeater, the attractive Crested Pigeon, Black-shouldered and Whistling Kites and Nankeen Kestrel.



Forest Kingfisher by Jonathan Rossouw

Darwin Botanical Gardens. The gardens will no doubt treat us to a marvellous suite of wonderful birds and unique and beautiful flora that occurs in this part of northern Australia.



Budgerigar by Jonathan Rossouw

Possibilities include Red-collared Lorikeet, Orange-footed Scrubfowl, Rose-crowned Fruit Dove, Little Bronze Cuckoo, White-breasted Woodswallow, Magpie Goose, Torresian Imperial Pigeon, Rainbow Bee-eater, Sacred Kingfisher and Brown Myzomela (Honeyeater).

Mulga near Erldunda. We'll make short stops in search of White-browed Treecreeper, Grey Honeyeater and a variety of thornbills including Slaty-backed, Inland and Chestnut-rumped Thornbill.

Darwin area. Darwin is surrounded by a fantastic diversity of habitat types and we will spend most of a day exploring an area of mangrove and monsoon forest for an impressive range of possible highlights. In the coastal mangroves, we will concentrate on finding the elusive Chestnut Rail, hyper-active Red-headed Myzomela, the furtive Mangrove Robin, the scarce White-breasted Whistler, Mangrove Fantail and Mangrove Gerygone; while in the monsoon forest and adjacent woodland, we hope to find Orange-footed Scrub-fowl (a kind of megapode), the gorgeous Rose-crowned Fruit Dove, the striking Rainbow Pitta, Forest Kingfisher, the uncommon Pacific Baza, Olive-backed and Green Orioles, Little Shrikethrush, Black Butcherbird, Green-backed Gerygone, Rufous-banded Honeyeater, Northern Fantail, Spangled Drongo, the loud and obtrusive Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, impressive Blue-winged Kookaburra with their amazing vocalisations, Great Bowerbird, Pheasant Coucal, musical Pied and Silver-backed Butcherbirds, Bar-shouldered and Pacific Emerald Doves and the lovely Red-collared Lorikeet (a recent split of the more widespread Rainbow Lorikeet).



Great Bowerbird by Jonathan Rossouw

Two very rare raptors that we may be extremely fortunate to find in this area and during the next week include the impressive Black-breasted Buzzard and the mega Red Goshawk. Little Red Flying-fox and Agile Wallaby are two of the possible mammal species that we may encounter during time in this faunal-rich area.



Long-tailed Finch by Jonathan Rossouw

Fogg Dam. This well-known site is an excellent area for waterbirds such as the monotypic Magpie Goose, Green Pygmy Goose, Hardhead, Grey Teal, Pacific Black Duck, Australasian Grebe, White-necked, White-faced and Pied Herons, Glossy, Straw-necked and Australian White Ibises, the stately Brolga, White-browed Crake and the quirky Comb-crested Jacana.

Adelaide River. A short stop at this site might produce Mangrove Golden Whistler and a variety of flycatchers, including Shining, Leaden, Restless and Broad-billed.

Mamukala Wetlands. If conditions are right, we can enjoy the spectacle of thousands of birds represented by many different species. Plumed and Wandering Whistling Ducks, Raja Shelduck and Black-necked Stork are possible highlights.

Kakadu National Park. Kakadu is undoubtedly the Northern Territory's most well-known protected area and at almost 20,000 square kilometres (around 7600 square miles), it is a massive area that protects vast tracts of woodland and seasonal wetlands that harbour a wealth of magnificent creatures. An optional spotlighting excursion for nocturnal species might reveal Barking Owl, Southern Boobook, Tawny Frogmouth, Large-tailed Nightjar and Australian Owlet-nightjar.

Ubirr. This area of rock outcrops in Kakadu that is home to some impressive Aboriginal rock art, much of which is many thousands of years old. The art depicts creation ancestors and animals of the area, including several fish and turtle species, wallabies and possums. If we are lucky, we may see the localised Short-eared Rock Wallaby around their day-time rock shelters. Other birding highlights that we may find during some short stops today include Sandstone Shrike-Thrush, Chestnut-quilled Rock Pigeon, Partridge Pigeon (red-eyed form) and Rufous-throated Honeyeater.

Yellow Waters Billabong. This is Kakadu's best-known wetland. The impressive wetland of channels, swamps and floodplains is a delight to explore and is home to crocodiles a-plenty and a variety of waterbirds, including Nankeen Night Heron, Black-necked Stork, Black Swan, Australasian Darter, Little Pied and Little Black Cormorants, the impressive Australian Pelican, the minuscule Little Kingfisher, White-bellied Sea Eagle and Australasian Swamphen. The stately Great-billed Heron and Black Bittern may also be seen, as might the rare Black Falcon. In the early evening, we will check into our accommodation.

Nourlangie Rock. We hope to find several of the area's most sought-after specialities here. Species like the very attractive Banded Fruit Dove, White-lined Honeyeater, Little Woodswallow, Black-tailed Treecreeper and the strange Helmeted Friarbird. We also have a reasonable chance of seeing the range-restricted Black Wallaroo in this area.



Australian Owlet-nightjar by Glen Valentine



Purple-crowned Fairywren by Alfred Schulte

Copperfield Dam. The grasslands support Chestnut-backed Buttonquail and possibly Brown Quail; while the surrounding dry woodland supports the superb Hooded Parrot, Varied Lorikeet and Buff-sided Robin and we may also encounter Silver-backed Butcherbird and Blue-winged Kookaburra during our forays

Water Gardens and the Old Cemetery. Possible species here include Red-winged Parrot, the noisy Red-tailed Black Cockatoo, the sought-after Hooded Parrot, Northern Rosella, the scarce and migratory Red-backed Kingfisher, the delightful Red-backed Fairywren, Australian Figbird, Striated Pardalote, the stately Great Bowerbird and brilliant Masked, Long-tailed and Double-barred Finches.

Pine Creek area. Sites that we may visit include Edith Falls in Nitmiluk National Park for the now-rare and absolutely sensational Gouldian Finch, as well as Umbrawarra Gorge for Chestnut-backed Buttonquail, Black-tailed Treecreeper, Great Bowerbird and Partridge Pigeon should we have missed them earlier in the trip. Other specialities that we hope to encounter in this bird-rich area include Grey Goshawk, Jacky Winter, Black-faced Woodswallow, Varied Sittella, Yellow-tinted Honeyeater, the vociferous Grey Shrikethrush, White-bellied Cuckooshrike, the minute Weebill, the boldly-patterned Bar-breasted Honeyeater, tiny Mistletoebird (a type of flowerpecker) and the rather elusive and unpredictable Square-tailed Kite.

Gregory National Park. One of the unique, target habitats that we will explore today will be the tracts of cane-grass on the fringes of the Victoria River. This localised and endangered habitat is the favoured habitat for the superb Purple-crowned Fairywren and Yellow-rumped Mannikin. Freshwater Crocodiles are common here and, unlike their saltwater cousins, subsist mostly on fish, and thus pose little threat to large mammals (humans included!). In the surrounding rocky and wooded areas, we stand a good chance of seeing White-quilled Rock-Pigeon and Sandstone Shrike-thrush, amongst other more widespread and regular species.

Timber Creek. This site is visited primarily for Gouldian Finch should we have missed it earlier in the trip. The area is also home to a rich diversity of species and there will be plenty to keep us entertained while we search for our quarry. Highlights may include the Spinifex Pigeon, Long-tailed, Masked and Star Finches, Chestnut-breasted and Yellow-rumped Mannikins and Yellow-tinted Honeyeater, as well as further chances to locate White-gaped Honeyeater, Purple-crowned Fairywren, Silver-crowned and Little Friarbirds, Little Woodswallow, Crimson Finch, White-throated Gerygone and Pheasant Coucal should we have missed them earlier in the trip.

Timber Creek to Kununurra. As we cross the Western Australia border, we will be on the lookout for the very rare Pictorella Mannikin during the drive, as well as a selection of raptors that could include Collared



Cinnamon Quail-Thrush by Jonathan Rossouw



White-quilled Rock Pigeon by Alfred Schulte

Sparrowhawk, Brown Goshawk, Spotted and Swamp Harriers, Little Eagle and the magnificent Wedge-tailed Eagle, as well as the rare and erratic Square-tailed Kite. While today is mostly a travel day, we will be passing through spectacular countryside and making regular stops to stretch our legs and enjoy any birding highlights.

Kununurra. Today we have a full day to explore the riches of Kimberly in the Kununurra area. A certain highlight is bound to be the boat trip on Lake Argyle, where we will enjoy a wonderful variety of waterbirds, as well as search for two very special avian gems: the highly sought-after, incredibly localised and low-density Yellow Chat and the range-restricted White-quilled Rock Pigeon. Other highlights that we are likely to encounter during the trip include Australian Reed Warbler, White-browed Crake and Pheasant Coucal that reside in the dense vegetation at the lake-edge. Local conditions will determine where we spend the rest of the day, with additional possible birding highlights including Brolga, the gorgeous Northern Rosella, Silver-crowned Friarbird, the spectacular Blue-faced Honeyeater, Bar-breasted and Banded Honeyeaters, and Sandstone Shrikethrush. Noteworthy mammal possibilities include Short-eared Rock Wallaby and the bizarre Northern Nail-tail Wallaby.

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		Moderate. Endemic and target focussed trip. Not suitable for dedicated photographers; inexperienced birders; or anyone with mobility or health challenges.
Birding Ease		Moderate. Most species provide decent visuals in open conditions. But some skulkers and low-density targets.
Accommodation		Comfortable.
Walking / Trails		Easy to moderate walking. A few longer walks possible.
Vehicles / Roads		A number of drives, some long. Comfortable vehicle. Roads vary, from sealed to dirt, but are mostly good and well maintained.
Photography		Good to good+. Some species distant, and bright light can be challenging. No dedicated hides.
Annoyances		Hot to very hot, very bright. Nights and early mornings can be cool to cold.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 16;
- All lodgings;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- All reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes made need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- To ensure your comfort and that of your companions, please limit yourself to one medium-sized suitcase or duffel bag (20 kg / 44 lb) and one carry-on bag, as space in the vehicles is limited.
- Temperatures in northern Australia can reach as high as 37˚C (98˚F).

Arrival and Departure Details

The tour begins with a welcome dinner on the evening of day 1. As this is an arrival day, you are free to arrive at any time. The tour will conclude after breakfast of day 16 at the East Kimberley Airport.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Sydney International Airport, Sydney (IATA: SYD) is the main port of entry for international flights in Australia, and is well serviced by all of the world's major airlines. Regular flights linking Australia's major cities are also available.

Alice Springs Airport (IATA: ASP) and East Kimberley Regional Airport (IATA: KNX), Kununurra are both well connected through Sydney International Airport.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements. The following website provides detailed information about visa eligibility and assistance with online applications options where viable: Visa HQ for Travel

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.