

INLAND AUSTRALIA

'An audible gasp was collectively heard as the lights of the bus illuminated our woodland picnic site our first night in Australia. Australian wine with real wine glasses, pate, pesto dips, cheese and tasty breads provided a starter and social time while the main course of Australian sausages and potatoes cooked over the stove was followed by an encore dessert of lemon tart and freshly brewed coffee. This meal foretold of the culinary experiences and adventures to come on this unique birding trip that we were embarking upon. The Milky Way and Southern Cross drew our attention while a rising full moon soon had us staring at the horizon as its brilliance added light to our dinner and provided an indication of the first of many star-filled nights we were to experience in the interior of the country. The conversation quickly turned to 'bird of the day' with Scarlet Robin, Spotted Pardalote in full breeding plumage, Eastern Spinebill and Shining Bronze Cuckoo being some of the highlight species. And, all agreed, we would then have to have a 'bird of the night' following our night-time search. This, of course, ended up being a female Plains Wanderer that posed motionless allowing us to marvel at the uniqueness of this monotypic family species while a Fat-tailed Dunnart took the prize for mammal of the evening!

'Walkabout' - a period of wandering, of variable length, undertaken as a sporadic interruption of routine life. The group who joined this year's Inland Australia tour experienced a birding walkabout that had us travelling over 3000 miles by bus, walking miles in search of birds unique to the habitat zones visited and experiencing the 'other' side of Australia. Our experience left visual memories that will remain forever etched when we hear the words 'back o' Bourke' in the future - the pink haze of Galahs in flight against a sunburnt orange backdrop, lingnum bushes that provided perches for Grey Grasswrens in the late afternoon followed by a spectacular sunset, vast gibber plains where Gibberbirds and Cinnamon Quail-thrushes eke out a living for themselves and their young even in years of drought such as this one, dry river beds lined with ribbons of river red gums filled with woodland birds that left to our imagination the lushness that would be present in a 'good year' that brought rain to the region, fragmented mallee forests holding small populations of Red-lored Whistlers and Malleefowl' and spinifex that provided homes to two of the trip favourites - grasswrens and emu-wrens. Winding our way through parts of 4 states, we experienced a side of Australia known to few travellers or birders - a land where a station may be a million acres with one homestead in the centre here the Dog Fence separates sheep and cattle stations, where you can travel for many miles without any signs of humans - no houses, no cars, no shops - a perfect setting for pure enjoyment of seeking seldom encountered birds.

And, the birding highlights of the trip kept spilling forth as often as the culinary highlights did from Trish's 'grub rover', leaving us sated each day but eager for the next offering. Our initial sighting of Grey Grasswren led to sightings of 4 other grasswren species with the chipmunk-like antics of each - here one minute and there the next (perhaps they really do use rabbit holes for their disappearing acts!) - endearing them to us all. The more common Southern Whiteface was eclipsed by its interior and seldom seen cousins - Banded and Chestnut-breasted. We soon found that the birds and the habitat regions of this country go hand-in-hand and that to find the birds we must have some understanding of the flora of the region. Gibber plains appeared stark and empty at first, daunting us with the task of finding a 5 inch Gibberbird amongst the miles and miles of small stone comprising the plains.

But our sighting of first one Gibberbird, then a family group where one adult seemed intent on protecting its young by a confrontation with the bus and repeated sightings of Inland Dotterels and chats emphasized the importance of the plains to these species. Three species of quail-thrushes provided a serene auditory and visual beauty to the landscape. Experiencing the rarely encountered Bourke's Parrots feeding and drinking at waterholes during the day held our attention each time sighted (as did most of the parrots - so colourful and captivating as are most of the Australian parrots). And, we will always remember one of the last days of the trip as one

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lone Mallee Emu-Wren stared back at us as intently as we were staring at it late one afternoon and a Malleefowl surprised us all as it crossed the track in front of us.

Some species may not have been 'inland' targets but competed for and occasionally won bird of the trip. A last minute pair of Powerful Owls with a fledged youngster, a pair of Barking Owls and Owlet Nightjars were nightbirds immensely enjoyed during the day. The shocking blue of male fairy-wrens stopped us in our tracks each time they were sighted while the reds of Mistletoebirds, robins and Crimson Chats were vivid in the Australian sun. Raptor sightings including Wedge-tailed Eagle, Australian Hobby, Collared Sparrowhawk and Brown Goshawks frequently saw us departing the bus quicker than the spotting of our daily picnic site.

Mammals excited as much as the birds with five species of kangaroo including the localized Yellow-footed Rock-Wallaby and incredible numbers of Red Kangaroos and Euros being seen. The seldom seen Yellow-footed Antechinus, 2 brief sightings of Short-beaked Echidna, and a Fat-tailed Dunnart remain mammal highlights. As the bird activity decreased in the heat of the day, our attention frequently turned to spotting butterflies and reptiles with the tree-climbing Lace Monitor and Painted Dragon being two of the more spectacular reptiles of the trip.

And, no less important than the wildlife sightings was the daily mid-day 'grub rover' sighting always positioned in a shady (and often relatively fly-free) site. Each day, we experienced diverse picnics including fresh salads and deli delights even in the most remote areas of our trip, gourmet cheeses, an Aussie barbeque in a town park that left locals salivating for a taste of the noonday fare, home-cooked bakery treats that never ran out and ice-cold drinks. No matter how strong the resolution each morning not to overindulge, will power always remained in the bus each time we arrived for our buffet picnics.

Our birding walkabout covered enough ground that the flies never had time to settle on our backs for long before we were moving to another site providing us with opportunities to sample all the types of accommodation inland Australia has to offer. From quiet motels in tranquil towns, to dongas and shearers' quarters on cattle and sheep stations to a 4-star hotel, we sampled it all in amazing comfort. The more remote the accommodation, the greater the perks – home-cooked dinners, proximity to our birding sites, a bonding of the group as we socialized in the evenings and always, starlit skies brighter than ever seen under city lights.

For veteran birders of Australia, this was a trip to have more than a chance encounter with some of Australia's more nomadic species, to see birds never seen on a normal Australia tour circuit or to complete some family groups. For two members of the group, this trip had been impressionable enough years ago that they returned for a second inland experience – soon finding the difference climatic conditions can have on the area and its birds. And for all, this was a trip that provided exceptional bird, mammal and reptile sightings (missing only a few of the possible species), unequalled scenery and a chance to see a side of Australia normally only read about in novels and an opportunity to enjoy the next grasswren, the next layer of bakery treats or to sample the next glass of Australian wine or beer to the fullest each day!" Judy Davis

Bird List:

Column A = Number of days this species was seen on the last tour.

Column B = Maximum daily count for this species on the last tour.

H = only heard

(H) = at least one bird seen, most birds only heard

N = nesting evident

	A	B	
Emu	13	34	N <i>Dromaius novaehollandiae</i>

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Malleefowl	1	1		<i>Leipoa ocellata</i>
Stubble Quail	2	1		<i>Coturnix pectoralis</i>
Brown Quail	1	2		<i>Coturnix ypsilophora</i>
Blue-billed Duck	1	3		<i>Oxyura australis</i>
Musk Duck	3	3		<i>Biziura lobata</i>
Freckled Duck	1	1		<i>Stictonetta naevosa</i>
Black Swan	1	100	N	<i>Cygnus atratus</i>
Australian Shelduck	3	25	N	<i>Tadorna tadornoides</i>
Australian Wood Duck	5	100	N	<i>Chenonetta jubata</i>
Pacific Black Duck	12	50	N	<i>Anas superciliosa</i>
Australasian Shoveler	4	70		<i>Anas rhynchotis</i>
Grey Teal	8	100		<i>Anas gracilis</i>
Pink-eared Duck	5	150		<i>Malacorhynchus membranaceus</i>
Hardhead	5	30		<i>Aythya australis</i>
Australasian Grebe	4	25		<i>Tachybaptus novaehollandiae</i>
Hoary-headed Grebe	6	25		<i>Poliocephalus poliocephalus</i>
Darter	5	5		<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>
Little Pied Cormorant	5	4		<i>Phalacrocorax melanoleucos</i>
Pied Cormorant	4	20		<i>Phalacrocorax varius</i>
Little Black Cormorant	3	22		<i>Phalacrocorax sulcirostris</i>
Great Cormorant	5	10		<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
Australian Pelican	7	25		<i>Pelecanus conspicillatus</i>
White-faced Heron	8	3		<i>Egretta novaehollandiae</i>
White-necked Heron	8	2		<i>Ardea pacifica</i>
Great Egret	3	2		<i>Ardea alba</i>
Cattle Egret	1	3		<i>Ardea ibis</i>
Nankeen Night Heron	1	5		<i>Nycticorax caledonicus</i>
Glossy Ibis	2	8		<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>
Australian White Ibis	3	50		<i>Threskiornis molucca</i>
Straw-necked Ibis	5	'00s		<i>Threskiornis spinicollis</i>
Royal Spoonbill	2	1		<i>Platelea regia</i>
Yellow-billed Spoonbill	1	8		<i>Platelea flavipes</i>
Black-shouldered Kite	8	8		<i>Elanus axillaris</i>
Black-breasted Buzzard	2	2	N	<i>Hamirostra melanosternon</i>
Black Kite	14	20	N	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
Whistling Kite	9	7	N	<i>Haliastur sphenurus</i>
Spotted Harrier	6	2		<i>Circus assimilis</i>
Swamp Harrier	1	2		<i>Circus approximans</i>
Brown Goshawk	6	2	N	<i>Accipiter fasciatus</i>
Collared Sparrowhawk	5	1	N	<i>Accipiter cirrhocephalus</i>
Wedge-tailed Eagle	13	7	N	<i>Aquila audax</i>
Little Eagle	3	2		<i>Hieraaetus morphnoides</i>
Brown Falcon	15	12	N	<i>Falco berigora</i>
Australian Hobby	5	3		<i>Falco longipennis</i>
Black Falcon	1	1		<i>Falco subniger</i>
Nankeen Kestrel	14	20	N	<i>Falco cenchroides</i>
Brolga	2	3		<i>Grus rubicunda</i>
Baillon's Crake	1	2		<i>Porzana pusilla</i>
Australian Spotted Crake	2	2		<i>Porzana fluminea</i>
Purple Swamphen	3	3		<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>
Dusky Moorhen	5	30		<i>Gallinula tenebrosa</i>
Black-tailed Native-hen	3	20	N	<i>Gallinula ventralis</i>
Eurasian Coot	7	'00s		<i>Fulica atra</i>
Australian Bustard	1	1		<i>Ardeotis australis</i>
Little Button-quail	1	1		<i>Turnix velox</i>

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Plains-wanderer	1	1		<i>Pedionomus torquatus</i>
Common Greenshank	3	1		<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	1	2		<i>Calidris acuminata</i>
Black-winged (White-headed) Stilt	5	10		<i>Himantopus h. leucocephalus</i>
Red-necked Avocet	1	'00s		<i>Recurvirostra novaehollandiae</i>
Inland Dotterel	3	25	N	<i>Charadrius australis</i>
Black-fronted Dotterel	6	15		<i>Eseyornis melanops</i>
Red-kneed Dotterel	1	10		<i>Erythrogonyx cinctus</i>
Banded Lapwing	10	7	N	<i>Vanellus tricolor</i>
Masked Lapwing	10	20		<i>Vanellus miles</i>
Australian Pratincole	4	10		<i>Stiltia isabella</i>
Silver Gull	3	40		<i>Larus novaehollandiae</i>
Gull-billed Tern	1	1		<i>Sterna nilotica</i>
Caspian Tern	1	1		<i>Sterna caspia</i>
Whiskered Tern	2	6		<i>Chlidonias hybridus</i>
Common Bronzewing	7	4		<i>Phaps chalcoptera</i>
Crested Pigeon	19	100		<i>Ocyphaps lophotes</i>
Diamond Dove	2	5		<i>Geopelia cuneata</i>
Peaceful Dove	11	6		<i>Geopelia striata</i>
Bar-shouldered Dove	1	2		<i>Geopelia humeralis</i>
Red-Tailed Black-Cockatoo	1	5		<i>Calyptorhynchus banksii</i>
Galah	19	'00s		<i>Cacatua roseicapilla</i>
Long-billed Corella	3	100		<i>Cacatua tenuirostris</i>
Little Corella	14	'00s		<i>Cacatua sanguinea</i>
Major Mitchell's Cockatoo	5	10		<i>Cacatua leadbeateri</i>
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	5	'00s		<i>Cacatua galerita</i>
Cockatiel	8	50		<i>Nymphicus hollandicus</i>
Swift Parrot	1	1	H	<i>Lathamus discolor</i>
Musk Lorikeet	2	2		<i>Glossopsitta concinna</i>
Purple-crowned Lorikeet	1	6		<i>Glossopsitta porphyrocephala</i>
Red-winged Parrot	4	12		<i>Aprosmictus erythropterus</i>
Superb Parrot	1	6		<i>Polytelis swainsonii</i>
Regent Parrot	2	8	N	<i>Polytelis anthoepus</i>
Crimson Rosella	2	10		<i>Platycercus elegans</i>
Yellow Rosella	4	25		<i>Platycercus flaveolus</i>
Adelaide Rosella	1	6		<i>Platycercus adelaide</i>
Eastern Rosella	3	4		<i>Platycercus eximius</i>
Australian Ringneck	13	20		<i>Barnardius zonarius</i>
Blue Bonnet	15	15		<i>Northiella haematogaster</i>
Red-rumped Parrot	11	40		<i>Psephotus haematonotus</i>
Mulga Parrot	8	6		<i>Psephotus varius</i>
Budgerigar	6	30		<i>Melopsittacus undulatus</i>
Bourke's Parrot	2	6		<i>Neopsephotus bourkii</i>
Elegant Parrot	2	6		<i>Neophema elegans</i>
Pallid Cuckoo	4	4		<i>Cuculus pallidus</i>
Black-eared Cuckoo	2	1		<i>Chrysococcyx osculans</i>
Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo	5	4		<i>Chrysococcyx basalis</i>
Shining Bronze-Cuckoo	1	1		<i>Chrysococcyx lucidus</i>
Barking Owl	1	2		<i>Ninox connivens</i>
Southern Boobook	1	1	H	<i>Ninox novaeseelandiae</i>
Powerful Owl	1	3	N	<i>Ninox strenua</i>
Barn Owl	1	3		<i>Tyto alba</i>
Tawny Frogmouth	2	1	N	<i>Podargus strigoides</i>
Spotted Nightjar	1	1		<i>Eurostopodus argus</i>
Australian Owlet-nightjar	3	2		<i>Aegotheles cristatus</i>

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Laughing Kookaburra	7	20		<i>Dacelo novaeguineae</i>
Red-backed Kingfisher	7	4		<i>Todiramphus pyrrhopygia</i>
Sacred Kingfisher	4	2		<i>Todiramphus sanctus</i>
Rainbow Bee-eater	5	10		<i>Merops ornatus</i>
White-throated Treecreeper	2	2		<i>Cormobates leucophaeus</i>
White-browed Treecreeper	1	1		<i>Climacteris affinis</i>
Brown Treecreeper	7	12		<i>Climacteris picumnus</i>
Superb Fairy-wren	3	6		<i>Malurus cyaneus</i>
Splendid Fairy-wren	4	6		<i>Malurus splendens</i>
Variiegated Fairy-wren	11	10		<i>Malurus lamberti</i>
White-winged Fairy-wren	6	10		<i>Malurus leucopterus</i>
Mallee Emu-wren	1	2		<i>Stipiturus mallee</i>
Grey Grasswren	1	3		<i>Amytornis barbatus</i>
Striated Grasswren	1	2		<i>Amytornis striatus striatus</i>
Short-tailed Grasswren	1	2		<i>Amytornis s. merrotsyi</i>
Eyrean Grasswren	1	4		<i>Amytornis goyderi</i>
Thick-billed Grasswren	1	3		<i>Amytornis textilis</i>
Spotted Pardalote	3	2		<i>Pardalotus punctatus</i>
Yellow-rumped Pardalote	1	6		<i>P. p. punctatus</i>
Red-browed Pardalote	1	7		<i>Pardalotus rubricatus</i>
Striated Pardalote	7	2		<i>Pardalotus striatus</i>
White-browed Scrubwren	1	2		<i>Sericornis frontalis</i>
Shy Heathwren	2	4		<i>Hylacola cauta</i>
Rufous Fieldwren	1	2		<i>Calamanthus campestris</i>
Redthroat	1	2		<i>Pyrrholaemus brunneus</i>
Speckled Warbler	1	1		<i>Chthonicola sagittata</i>
Weebill	8	4		<i>Smicrornis brevirostris</i>
Western Gerygone	2	3		<i>Gerygone fusca</i>
Brown Thornbill	1	2		<i>Acanthiza pusilla</i>
Inland Thornbill	4	6		<i>Acanthiza apicalis</i>
Chestnut-rumped Thornbill	11	8		<i>Acanthiza uropygialis</i>
Buff-rumped Thornbill	2	5		<i>Acanthiza reguloides</i>
Slender-billed Thornbill	1	5	N	<i>Acanthiza iredalei</i>
Yellow-rumped Thornbill	6	10		<i>Acanthiza chrysorrhoa</i>
Yellow Thornbill	7	10		<i>Acanthiza nana</i>
Striated Thornbill	2	3		<i>Acanthiza lineata</i>
Southern Whiteface	6	5	N	<i>Aphelocephala leucopsis</i>
Chestnut-breasted Whiteface	1	3		<i>Aphelocephala pectoralis</i>
Banded Whiteface	1	3		<i>Aphelocephala nigricincta</i>
Red Wattlebird	5	10		<i>Anthochaera carunculata</i>
Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater	16	20		<i>Acanthagenys rufogularis</i>
Striped Honeyeater	3	6		<i>Plectorhyncha lanceolata</i>
Noisy Friarbird	2	1		<i>Philemon corniculatus</i>
Little Friarbird	7	5		<i>Philemon citreogularis</i>
Blue-faced Honeyeater	6	4		<i>Entomyzon cyanotis</i>
Noisy Miner	6	10		<i>Manorina melanocephala</i>
Yellow-throated Miner	12	30	N	<i>Manorina flavigula</i>
Yellow-faced Honeyeater	2	4		<i>Lichenostomus chrysops</i>
Singing Honeyeater	12	6		<i>Lichenostomus virescens</i>
White-eared Honeyeater	2	10		<i>Lichenostomus leucotis</i>
Yellow-tufted Honeyeater	1	12		<i>Lichenostomus melanops</i>
Purple-gaped Honeyeater	2	6		<i>Lichenostomus cratitius</i>
Yellow-plumed Honeyeater	3	20		<i>Lichenostomus ornatus</i>
Grey-fronted Honeyeater	2	20		<i>Lichenostomus plumulus</i>
Fuscous Honeyeater	1	8		<i>Lichenostomus fuscus</i>

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White-plumed Honeyeater	15	50		<i>Lichenostomus penicillatus</i>
Brown-headed Honeyeater	5	5		<i>Melithreptus brevirostris</i>
White-naped Honeyeater	1	10		<i>Melithreptus lunatus</i>
Brown Honeyeater	4	2		<i>Lichmera indistincta</i>
New Holland Honeyeater	4	10		<i>Phylidonyris novaehollandiae</i>
White-fronted Honeyeater	2	12		<i>Phylidonyris albifrons</i>
Tawny-crowned Honeyeater	1	6		<i>Phylidonyris melanops</i>
Eastern Spinebill	1	2		<i>Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris</i>
Black Honeyeater	3	2		<i>Certhionyx niger</i>
Pied Honeyeater	4	14		<i>Certhionyx variegatus</i>
Crimson Chat	6	20		<i>Epthianura tricolor</i>
Orange Chat	4	25		<i>Epthianura aurifrons</i>
White-fronted Chat	2	4		<i>Epthianura albifrons</i>
Gibberbird	2	5	N	<i>Ashbyia lovensis</i>
Jacky Winter	7	4	N	<i>Microeca fascinans</i>
Scarlet Robin	2	1		<i>Petroica multicolor</i>
Red-capped Robin	10	6	N	<i>Petroica goodenovii</i>
Hooded Robin	1	2		<i>Melanodryas cucullata</i>
Eastern Yellow Robin	1	2		<i>Eopsaltria australis</i>
Southern Scrub-robin	2	2		<i>Drymodes brunneopygia</i>
Grey-crowned Babbler	3	25		<i>Pomatostomus temporalis</i>
White-browed Babbler	6	10		<i>Pomatostomus superciliosus</i>
Hall's Babbler	1	2		<i>Pomatostomus halli</i>
Chestnut-crowned Babbler	9	10		<i>Pomatostomus ruficeps</i>
Chirruping Wedgebill	6	5		<i>Psophodes cristatus</i>
Chestnut Quail-thrush	2	3		<i>Cinclosoma castanotus</i>
Cinnamon Quail-thrush	2	6	N	<i>Cinclosoma cinnamomeum</i>
Chestnut-breasted Quail-thrush	1	2		<i>Cinclosoma castaneothorax</i>
Varied Sittella	2	2		<i>Daphoenositta chrysoptera</i>
Crested Shrike-tit	1	1		<i>Falcunculus frontatus</i>
Crested Bellbird	6	4	(H)	<i>Oreoica gutturalis</i>
Red-lored Whistler	1	2		<i>Pachycephala rufogularis</i>
Gilbert's Whistler	1	1		<i>Pachycephala inornata</i>
Golden Whistler	3	1		<i>Pachycephala pectoralis</i>
Rufous Whistler	9	4		<i>Pachycephala rufiventris</i>
Grey Shrike-thrush	14	3		<i>Colluricincla harmonica</i>
Restless Flycatcher	3	2		<i>Myiagra inquieta</i>
Magpie-lark	19	50		<i>Grallina cyanoleuca</i>
Grey Fantail	2	5		<i>Rhipidura fuliginosa</i>
Willie Wagtail	19	20		<i>Rhipidura leucophrys</i>
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	16	10		<i>Coracina novaehollandiae</i>
Ground Cuckoo-shrike	1	2	N	<i>Coracina maxima</i>
White-winged Triller	7	15	N	<i>Lalage sueurii</i>
White-breasted Woodswallow	8	10	N	<i>Artamus leucorhynchus</i>
Masked Woodswallow	8	100	N	<i>Artamus personatus</i>
White-browed Woodswallow	6	25		<i>Artamus superciliosus</i>
Black-faced Woodswallow	7	50		<i>Artamus cinereus</i>
Dusky Woodswallow	2	5		<i>Artamus cyanopterus</i>
Little Woodswallow	1	6		<i>Artamus minor</i>
Grey Butcherbird	4	3		<i>Cracticus torquatus</i>
Pied Butcherbird	9	2		<i>Cracticus nigrogularis</i>
Australian Magpie	19	'00s		<i>Gymnorhina tibicen</i>
Pied Currawong	1	1		<i>Strepera graculina</i>
Grey Currawong	2	2		<i>Strepera versicolor</i>
Australian Raven	15	25	N	<i>Corvus coronoides</i>

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Little Raven	8	'00s		<i>Corvus mellori</i>
Little Crow	7	25	N	<i>Corvus bennetti</i>
White-winged Chough	10	15		<i>Corcorax melanorhamphos</i>
Apostlebird	8	60		<i>Struthidea cinerea</i>
Spotted Bowerbird	2	6		<i>Chlamydera maculata</i>
Singing Bushlark	1	1		<i>Mirafra javanica</i>
Richard's Pipit	15	10		<i>Anthus novaeseelandiae</i>
Zebra Finch	5	10		<i>Taeniopygia guttata</i>
Double-barred Finch	1	2		<i>Taeniopygia bichenovii</i>
Red-browed Finch	1	5		<i>Neochmia temporalis</i>
Mistletoebird	5	3		<i>Dicaeum hirundinaceum</i>
White-backed Swallow	8	12		<i>Cheramoeca leucosternus</i>
Welcome Swallow	17	50		<i>Hirundo neoxena</i>
Tree Martin	11	75	N	<i>Hirundo nigricans</i>
Fairy Martin	9	'00s	N	<i>Hirundo ariel</i>
Clamorous Reed-Warbler	8	6		<i>Acrocephalus stentoreus</i>
Little Grassbird	4	1		<i>Megalurus gramineus</i>
Rufous Songlark	7	20		<i>Cincloramphus mathewsi</i>
Brown Songlark	6	10		<i>Cincloramphus cruralis</i>
Silvereye	3	4		<i>Zosterops lateralis</i>