

Of Emus and Fairy-wrens: Photographing Australia's Endemic Birds

Monthly Newsletter

March 2007

March was a bit different than any other month I have had here in Australia. Mostly that was because I spent nearly the first three weeks traveling with my parents. This time was fantastic on several different levels. First, I can't begin to explain how great it was to be able to not only see my parents but to show them around a few of the places that I have been this year. Secondly, it gave me a chance to see the Cairns area during the Wet Season which I would have missed otherwise. This allowed me to see the huge difference between the Wet and Dry but it also allowed me to pick up a few new birds that I had missed!

The last newsletter I sent out was written while on my way back to the mainland from Tasmania aboard the *Spirit of Tasmania*. From Melbourne, I then flew to Sydney where I spent several days birding with my friend from home who had met me in Tasmania and flew back to Sydney directly. After a couple days of rather productive birding, Sean headed back to China where he teaches, and my parents arrived. From here, we had a whirlwind two weeks hopping around the country seeing as much as we could.

My parents and I had a wonderful five or six days in Sydney where they were able to not only see the city and a bit of the surrounding country but meet a couple of my friends. From Sydney we flew to Cairns with a side trip to Uluru for one night. Of course this wasn't near enough time to see everything that Uluru offers, but time was limited. They really wanted to see Uluru and didn't want to spend too much time in the March heat of the Center so it worked out pretty well in the end. I will be returning to the Center in June and July so it was nice to get just a taste before I return for several weeks.

In Cairns we spent several nights in the Daintree area. This spectacular rainforest proved its name as we arrived in an absolute downpour late one night. However, after that we had decent weather except for the boat trip on the Mossman River where we had light rain the whole time. I had missed this area due to time constraints when I was up there in October so I was glad to be able to see the Daintree. From there we headed to Kingfisher Park and the Atherton Tableland so I could show my parents an area that is quite possibly my favorite area that I have visited so far. We had a wonderful time at Kingfisher where I was able to get a single photo of a Buff-breasted Paradise-Kingfisher, a wet season migrant that hadn't arrived when I was there. On the Tableland, we did some spotlighting with Alan Gillanders which was fantastic even though we missed the tree-kangaroos.

To continue our whirlwind adventure, we departed Cairns after nearly missing our flight to see a Little Kingfisher in the botanical gardens across the street. We then headed to Melbourne where I had left my car. In Melbourne, we met up with some close family friends from home who also happened to be in Melbourne on business. It was great to see them as well and a bit surreal for all of us to be in Australia, not something we would have ever predicted. After that, we headed out for a couple days on Great Ocean Road and the Grampians before we returned to Melbourne and I put my parents on a plane back home.

Seeing my parents off was bittersweet. On one hand it was a wonderful couple of weeks, better than I had ever imagined in fact. On the other hand, I was back on my own and I must confess, I had a bit of an itch to take some more pictures. After all, I had only gotten the camera out once or twice during the last three weeks. It was time to head west into new territory!

I left Melbourne and headed to Little Desert National Park. I had two goals there: one, to get organized after traveling and two, to photograph the Slender-billed Thornbills. The first objective was completed easily enough but the thornbills and weather didn't cooperate. From there, I continued west into South Australia and new territory for me. My main focus in eastern South Australia was the

mallee country and in particular the old growth mallee at the Gluepot Reserve run by Birds Australia. This reserve is well known as the only place to see the endangered Black-eared Miner as well as a good place to see another handful of species. I spent five days at the reserve and had to work really hard to see the birds. In fact, I missed out on most of my target species, but I did manage to see a flock of Black-eared Miners my last morning just before I departed the reserve. Photographically speaking, I got some great photos of a Striated Grasswren and decent stuff of a Yellow-plumed Honeyeater, but that was all I had to show for my time there.

I left Gluepot a bit disappointed and headed to a small reserve in the area where Scarlet-chested Parrots had been seen recently. These parrots are fairly rare and very difficult to see without an expedition into the desert, something that I am not comfortable doing on my own. Over the next few days I worked hard to see these parrots but unfortunately came away empty. However, while I didn't see the parrots, I did manage to photograph several birds in the process that I was quite pleased to have photographed.

After finally giving up on the parrots, I continued on my trek west. This brought me to the area just south of Adelaide. A night at the Coorong National Park produced a pair of Purple-gaped Honeyeaters that posed quite well for me. After that, a couple days along Lake Alexandrina at the mouth of the River Murray produced Cape Barren Geese among other species. After these successes I headed back north to Adelaide at the start of April to continue my exploration of South Australia and eventually continue west across the Nullarbor Plain into Western Australia.

As I mentioned earlier, this month was a bit different than the others so far. I had a great little vacation with my parents and then a mix of success and frustrating misses after they departed. All in all, it is great to be back exploring new territory as I haven't done that in a couple months. I am extremely excited about entering Western Australia and making my way up the west coast. It is hard to believe I only have four months left of this experience but I am looking forward to every bit of all of them.

Website Announcements

My weblog is up to date through the end of the month though I didn't update it while my parents were here. I also have added some new photos to the galleries and will continue to do some throughout April. Enjoy.

The Photos



Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher – Kingfisher Park, Julatten, Queensland

This is the bird from which Kingfisher Park derives its name. It was the one bird that I wanted to photograph during my travels with my parents. The kingfishers migrate from New Guinea to breed and are only in Far North Queensland for a few months from November through April or May. They breed on site at Kingfisher Park in the numerous termite mounds around the grounds. They really are spectacularly colored birds.



Crested Bellbird at Dawn – Bookmark Biosphere Preserve, South Australia

Crested Bellbirds are very wary and I have yet to get anywhere near one in order to photograph it. Their song is a common sound of the mallee country at dawn and dusk but forget trying to get close. When I spotted this individual singing just at dawn I took the opportunity to silhouette the bird against the eastern sky and was quite pleased with the result.



Hooded Robin – Bookmark Biosphere Preserve, South Australia

The Hooded Robin is another bird that I have seen numerous times this year but up until this month had no opportunities to photograph. In fact, I was quite disappointed and frustrated with myself because I hadn't been able to photograph these little black and white birds. Finally, this month I found a family group that was willing to let me get close enough to photograph while they hunted for insects.



Papuan Frogmoth – Kingfisher Park, Julatten, Queensland

Frogmouths are such strange looking birds and the Papuan Frogmouth is no exception. I had seen these birds at Kingfisher Park before, but during my previous visits they were always roosting in a spot that didn't lend itself to photography. To my great delight, I found this bird sitting on an open perch this trip and was able to take some nice portraits of the bird.



Purple-gaped Honeyeater – Salt Creek, Coorong National Park, South Australia

Purple-gaped Honeyeater proved to be a bit of a difficult bird for me to find until I got to the Coorong. Here, I walked into a small forest and almost immediately found a pair. Unfortunately, it was late in the day and overcast so there wasn't enough light to photograph but the pair was still in the area the following morning and I was pleased with this image.



Striated Grasswren – Gluepot Reserve, South Australia

The Striated Grasswren was my only great success during my time at Gluepot. I must say I was disappointed overall but it is hard to be disappointed with this shot. I love the bird, the light, and especially the background. All in all, a good shot of a somewhat shy bird and it was a new bird for me as well.



Varied Sittellas (female, male) – Bookmark Biosphere Preserve, South Australia

I have seen Varied Sittellas on a couple occasions but not very regularly. They are quite cool birds, very similar to the nuthatches of North America and Europe. Their name comes from the varying plumage patterns exhibited by the different subspecies found around the continent. I was very pleased to have a flock feeding in a low tree and fairly willing to have their photos taken.

Until next month be sure to check out the website as it has just been fully updated!

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