



## Inala Red Centre tour

### Trip Report

14 – 19 June, 2023

#### Day 1 – 14<sup>th</sup> June, 2023 – Arrive Alice Springs.

To start the trip, we met at the hotel and had a loud, but lovely dinner at a local Italian restaurant. It was an interesting experience, potentially a lot of new staff, which made for a slower evening, but it was a good chance to get to meet everyone!

#### Day 2 – 15<sup>th</sup> June, 2023 – Alice Springs.

To ease ourselves in we had a 7am start and headed out to Santa Teresa Road. The cold morning makes for a quite start to the day despite the sun being up, so with little action on the way we made our way to the tyre on the pole. The road was in good condition with only minor corrugations which is always nice. A few of us had some breakfast on arrival before heading for a closer inspection of a pair of hooded robins getting some early morning sun.



We wandered the area, with the background sounds of the quarry unfortunately disturbing the peace but it wasn't too noisy and we were able to get onto a few targets, budgerigar, black-faced woodswallow, singing honeyeater, and spiny-cheeked honeyeater. As we moved to the more spinifex filled areas, we came across a pair of cinnamon quailthrush moving through the ground cover before flying up onto a rocky ledge. The zebra finches and budgerigars were constants through the morning where the albatross of the desert (wedge-tailed eagle) only showed itself as we were making our way out.

Our next stop was just down the road but in an area of mulga woodland, so although close had a variety of different birds such as rufous whistler, chestnut-rumped thornbill, red-capped robin, and splendid fairywren. The highlight here, other than the orb weaving

spiders was a small group of mulga parrots that did a flyby! Unfortunately, we left a hive of bird activity to follow the mulga parrots only to not find them or any other birds 😞

Lunch in the mall gave us a few birds we hadn't seen in the morning, or at least closer views, Australian ringneck, Australian magpie, crested pigeon, yellow-throated miner, and those black corvid that sound like predator. After lunch we headed to the Alice Springs Treatment Plant, and after donning our high vis we made our way out through the ponds. Grey teal, magpie-lark, willie wagtail, and black-fronted dotterel were abundant and to be honest kind of annoying. They were everywhere you looked, and distracting, but it was nice to be surrounded by birds. White-winged and purple-backed fairywrens were present in the drier scrubby sections and put on quite a show. Orange chat was another great bird to see foraging on the sandy soil that is usually frequented by



spotted crakes. The crake pond was devoid of water so, we had to find them elsewhere, which we did on a small island 😊 Red-necked avocets, Eurasian coot, Australasian pipit, black kite, whistling kite, and welcome swallows were also present in smaller numbers.

A 45 min drive put us north of Alice Springs at Kunoth Bore, a well-known spot to see a great diversity of birds, but mostly notably Burke's parrot. On arrival it seemed fairly quiet at the dam, 100 zebra finches nervously attempting to drink and spiny-cheeked honeyeaters calling, but not a lot else. It didn't take long but as we watched the finches drink a pair of Burke's parrots came and landed in a nearby tree. We waited and watched as one of the birds sat visible debating whether to drink or not. A short time later the pair came down to drink and we all had great views of these pink and blue parrots! After they left, we watched as the first small flock of cockatiels flew overhead, too nervous to land and drink. Again, we waited and then group after group of cockatiels flew through, drinking and banking, circling and flying overhead. The cockatiel show was a great way to end the day!

### Day 3 – 16<sup>th</sup> June, 2023 – Alice Springs.

A nice hot breakfast with coffees made for a great start to the day and prepared everyone for a long day out along the west macs. An hour or so after departing Alice Springs we reached our first stop at Ellery Big Hole. It was cold, as we arrived in the shade of the range, with a cool breeze chilling the air even more. We headed down to the pool as it sounded like painted finches were present...if they were present, they weren't by the time we got to the waters edge. White-plumed honeyeaters were calling from all around us,



zebra finches flutter past on occasion, but it was very quiet. To improve the situation, we walked back into the sunlight where the Australian ringnecks, crested pigeons, and little crow were more active. This included the one-legged individual who has been at the campground for several years. The highlight of the morning was spotted by Luke, a pair of Major Mitchell's cockatoos in the distance on the hill. Unfortunately, they didn't stick around and were quick to fly off. It was a similar situation with the red-tailed black cockatoos 😞 Other birds like weebill and striated pardalote, were a little more willing to be seen whilst foraging in the large eucalyptus along the creek line.

Our second stop was a slight shift from pure birding to look at the ochre pits. We were of course hopping for Dusky Grasswren, but it wasn't to be. Brown honeyeaters and lesser wanderers, not plains wanderers, were watched flitting between the trees and grasses. The ochre pits are quite large and give the opportunity to see a large amount of yellow ochre that is less commonly seen in many artworks as it fades quicker than the red ochres.

Moving on it was time for lunch and some close encounters with spinifex pigeons! The Ormiston Gorge car park was quite busy with day trippers and hikers who were stopping in for a hot meal and a cold drink. However, the main attraction was the spinifex pigeons who were happily running around the dining area in search of crumbs. Cute little things they ran from table to table with crests up, hoping for something to eat. A grey shrikethrush also made an appearance and gave good close-up views, showing everyone who different they are from the east coast subspecies. After lunch we split and half the group climbed up to the ghost gum lookout above the gorge, whilst others went down to the pools in the gorge itself. The walk up the hill was warm but worth it. The view was amazing, and we watched as budgerigars flew under us, a grey-headed honeyeater foraged, and a large group of school children marched their way along the trail. In attempts to avoid the children we headed down the trail to join the others at the pools. Inland thornbill, purple-





backed fairywren, hooded robin, Australian ringnecks, and whistling kites were seen as we walked toward the pools. The whistling kites were nesting and came to sit in the nest as we wandered the creek line.

Our drive home in the afternoon was a good time for a nap until we reached Iparpa road. We detoured slightly in search of a better view of Major Mitchell's cockatoo. There we red-tailed black cockatoo, little corella, and pink galah but not our main target which do frequent the valley, particularly around the camel farms where there is often a free feed.

#### Day 4 – 17<sup>th</sup> June, 2023 – Alice Springs to Ghan.

Heading out while it was still slightly dark meant we were in for a cold start. Fortunately, not as cold as it could have been, though the breeze coming through Jessie Gap wasn't something we want to stand in front of for long. During breakfast the white-plumed honeyeaters were the most vocal bird, and as we looked at the striped rock art the birds were quiet. We walked the trail with one real target, dusky grasswren. Mistletoe birds, grey-headed honeyeater, black-faced woodswallow, were spotted as we slowly walked listening for the sound of the grasswren. It took some time but eventually the very quiet, high-pitched contact call was heard from above the trail. Two birds came down and moved over the rocks, and back into the vegetation like absolute ninjas, even crossing the trail in front of us without being seen!



Our next stop was a larger, sunnier area, Redbank Waterhole, where we could all enjoy being in the sun. It was quiet upon arrival, except for an odd noise that was hard to place. Along the waterway not far from the car we came across the creator of the sound, Major Mitchell's cockatoo. A pair of birds were up in a eucalypt, with one appearing to be opening a hollow in a dead branch. Other than a pair of Australasian grebes, some white-necked herons in a tree and a lone whistling kite it wasn't a very bustling spot, so we headed on to lunch. Our departure was slowed based on the occurrence of a lone juvenile Australian hobby perched in a tree that we stopped to scope.

Lunch at Sturt well, was mostly planned so that we could look for painted finch amongst the hundreds of zebra finches that frequent the area...however, only a single finch was seen, and it wasn't painted 😞

Heading south to the relatively treeless plains we walked in through the gibber-like habitat in the open sun. a nice breeze cooled us, as we wandered a small creek line in search of wildlife. Budgerigars, black-faced woodswallows, and singing honeyeaters continued to be common, and in the distance a chiming wedgebill was calling. As we searched for the wedgebills, there were two, it became apparent that they were extremely capable of moving almost unseen from the top of shrubs in front of us, to somewhere behind us. This made viewing them quite difficult, but we were able spot them eventually. At least we could all enjoy the calls as we were searching. Moving along the creek a little further we chanced upon three Burke's parrots that were quite confiding as they hid from the sun in the trees. The pink belly made them easy to spot and for a few minutes they sat nicely for photos right in front of everyone. Walking back down the opposite side of the creek we came across Leonhardii's ctenotus, and as finished looking at that Luke spotted a large bird of prey whilst scanning the skies. Perfectly timed we were all able to look up and see a black-breasted buzzard fly slowly overhead!

The final stop of the day was to be a quick one as the clouds had rolled in and the light was fading. Stepping out of the car, our main target Banded whiteface was there waiting for us. As we were already there, we kept walking and the birds were going off! A pair of chiming wedgebills perched up for us, white-winged and purple-backed fairywrens moved through the vegetation, crimson chats and white-browed babbler moved quickly past us, cinnamon



quailthrush were calling from the longer grass, and pied honeyeaters were in and out of the Eremophila bushes. We didn't spend long as we'd be back here tomorrow morning, but it was probably the most activity our guide had ever seen here!

### Day 5 – 18<sup>th</sup> June, 2023 – Ghan to Alice Springs.



Our last morning didn't start pre-dawn which I think was a relief to everyone. It did start back where we finished the night before, just north of Erldunda. It started somewhat how it finished with crimson chats, zebra finches, chiming wedgebills, and more zebra finches. We searched the low scrub and gibbery plains for birds and had good numbers of pied honeyeater, including a flock of 16. There were a lot of birds about, but they really wanted to keep a distance from us. We managed to have pretty good looks at all the birds we saw, which included singing honeyeaters, white-browed babbler, a wedge-tailed eagle being harassed by a little crow and both white-winged and purple-backed fairywrens. Unfortunately, we couldn't get onto a banded white-face but it was still a productive morning.

A very short stop at the finchless waterhole at sturts well was the only detour on our way to Simpson's Gap. A final crack at painted finches, wasn't successful on that front but gave us great views of mulga parrots, spiny-cheeked honeyeaters, grey shrikethrush, and white-plumed honeyeaters. The gap was beautifully lit, and the clouds made for an amazingly scenic outlook which could only be appreciated, it's scale most visible while we looked at a single black-flanked rock wallaby in the boulder field.

Our final stop, was optimistic and honestly Angus wasn't very confident in finding our target, grey honeyeater. A mixed feeding flock was hunting in the grass as we pulled up with yellow-rumped thornbill, black-faced woodswallows, and zebra finches all together. We walked through the group to a spot the grey honeyeaters had nested the previous year. It didn't take long and a pair of honeyeaters were around us. We were all vying for a look as the dashed between trees and hid close to the trunks. They didn't make it easy and when a western gerygone was mixed in it became even harder! We all managed to get a look at the small, grey, non-descript honeyeater, the hardest honeyeater to find in Australia! We should have probably stopped there but we had a quick unsuccessful attempt to find a red-browed pardalote down along the creek bed. All in all though, a great way to end the tour!

