



THE CAIRNS FROGMOUTH

*All correspondence to: cairnsbirders@yahoo.com.au
or connect with us on [Facebook](#).*

As we take our next step, let us remember the first people to walk this land.

Cairns Birders is a group of people who share common interests. We are not a club. There is no leader. Those joining in any outings/activities are expected to follow the 'common space' expectations and do so at their own risk. NO trespassing on habitat or private property.

EVENTS:

Sunday 24th May	8:00am Rifle Creek then Abattoir Swamp
Sunday 31st May	TBA - I'll try to negotiate with the Barra Farm
ECOFIESTA	21st June 10 - 4pm Munro Martin Parkland - vollies needed!
Cairns Birders' Festival	Friday 28th August - Saturday 5th September 30th August - Michaelmas Cay - book now - see below
Starry starry night	12 September - Tablelands - more info to come ...
Cairns Birders' Epic Excursion	October 2026 TANZANIA FULL

ONLINE SHOP

Cairns Birders merchandise

Look out for sales

All designs are available as car stickers, caps, T-shirts, cushions, aprons, telephone covers and many many other options.

All profits from sales of images displaying "Cairns Birders"

go to Cairns Birders for miscellaneous expenses. [Redbubble Store](#) Or log into [redbubble.com](https://www.redbubble.com) and search for "Cairns Birders"

Art by Yorz Trooley



"It's a dangerous business, Frodo, going out of your door. You step into the road, and if you don't keep your feet, there's no knowing where you might be swept off to." - Bilbo

"I'm going to Artemis Station to check out the **Golden-shouldered Parrot** ... all welcome ..."



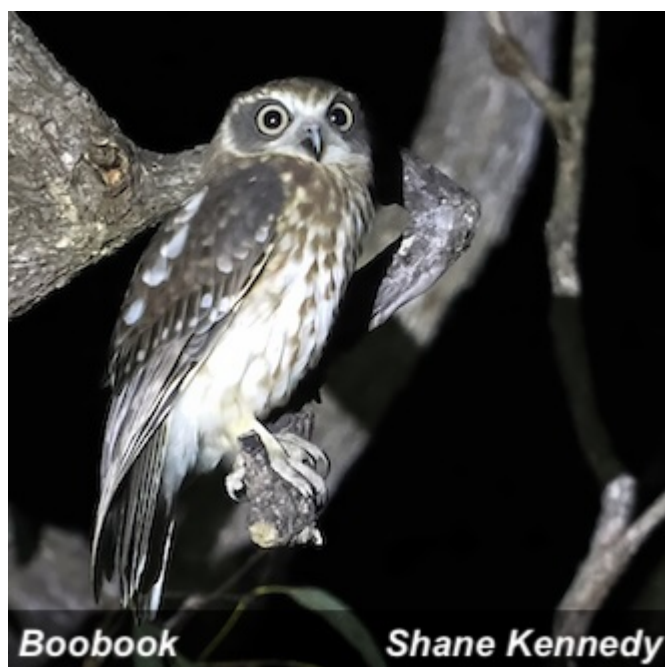
What was I thinking!? Well, I'll tell you what I was thinking: we've been cooped up too long with fuel prices skyrocketing, and it's about time we got on the road again! Why Artemis? Well, it's a comfortable day's journey, there's a campground, and we'd be leaving the Wet Tropics Bioregion and

entering the Cape York Peninsula Bioregion. Here, the landscape opens up into drier tropical wooded savannahs and monsoonal wetlands, complete with their own endemic species and some real humdingers!

Gen and Mary came up on the Wednesday and set up in a central position with a shelter and fireplace. With each passing day more arrived, so that by Friday we had over 25 friendly birders spread out in an array of tents and campervans over the spacious field.



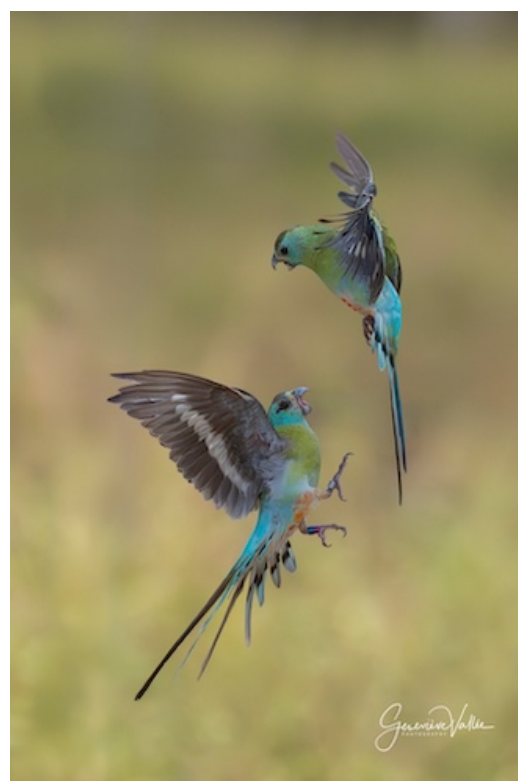
Gen and Mary's fireplace became our evening ritual, a place where we relaxed, talked about the stars, constellations, satellites, birds of the day, and plans for the morrow. Kerri worked her woodland, elvish wonders by sprinkling moon-dust into the flames so they burned in blues and greens, giving the fire a benevolence hitherto unseen. Bruce 'from California' set up a bar - the best this side of the Hann River. This was no sham saloon; this was top-shelf, help-yourself extravagance. Thank you, Bruce!



The big drawcard here, of course, is the **Golden-shouldered Parrot**. Artemis has been at the forefront of conservation work to protect this endangered bird, with owners Sue and Tom Shephard working together with [Conservation Partners](#) to maximise breeding outcomes. Sue, Pat and Hein took us to a recently used nest site and gave us a fabulous explanation of what it entails, which Stella tells us more about in another article. Near the campsite, there are feeders for these parrots, and a good deal of our time was spent waiting and watching as a few birds swung by.



That Friday night, as we chatted and planned for the morrow, I saw a bird flash past, its pale underside catching a little of the ambient light. Rapid torchlight followed, catching it as it settled into a tree behind Michael and Lois' tent. This **Southern Boobook** owl spoiled us with good views, and even came back on Sunday night too.



There are plenty of other endemic birds here too, such as the **Black-backed Butcherbird** and **Silver-crowned Friarbird**. A host of other birds kept us entertained around camp, including an abundance of **Galaks, Little Friarbirds, Pied Butcherbirds, Great Bowerbirds, Grey-crowned Babbler,** and **Blue-faced Honeyeaters.**

There was a large dam nearby with colourful lilies harbouring **Comb-crested Jacanas, Plumed Whistling-Ducks, Green Pygmy-Geese,** and a **Black Bittern**. The roads gave access to flowering melaleucas and the orange bloomed *Grevillea pteridifolia*, that attracted lots of birds, including some beauties such as the **Bar-breasted Honeyeater, Banded Honeyeater,** and Gen even got a **Rufous-banded Honeyeater**. Sean and I found a couple of **Shining Bronze-Cuckoos** in the trees near the camp, while higher up were **White-throated Gerygones** with their piping calls and **Red-browed Pardalotes** with their distinctive notes.



Red-browed Pardalote Shane Kennedy



White-throated Gerygone Shane Kennedy



Aust'n Hobby Scott Ritchie

Raptors were a bit of a feature of the trip. We had almost everything from **Nankeen Kestrels** to **Wedge-tailed Eagles!** This included the **Spotted Harrier, Whistling and Black Kites, Peregrine Falcon** and **Australian Hobby**. Sean and I even spotted a **Black-breasted Buzzard** on the drive home.



Red Goshawk Doug Herrington

This full-day excursion took us onto the Marina Plains. Think **Brolgas**, **Australian Bustards**, **Australian Pipits (subspecies *rogersi*)**, and a huge **Yellow-spotted Goanna** standing up on its hind legs in the long grass. At one spot, among the tropical vines, were dozens of **Cooktown Orchids** in bloom. It was magical, but there used to be many, many more before the orchid hunters came. They are now rare and endangered in the wild. Nearby,



Cooktown Orchid + Shane Kennedy

We spent Sunday in a convoy, following Doug, with our target species being the **Red Goshawk**. We found the pair, as hoped, busy building their nest. These birds, 'Australia's rarest raptor', have used the same site for some years and are remarkably relaxed, even when the road is being graded. The ultimate test came during our visit when a passing helicopter came down and almost landed to check out the scene—perhaps they thought there had been an accident. The birds weren't visible at the time, but were seen the next day carrying on, business as usual.



Black-throated Finch Geneviève Vallée

Doug spotted a few **Black-throated Finches**, while overhead, unexpectedly, circled several **Great Frigatebirds**! We ended the day at the Musgrave Roadhouse, where the group shouted Doug (& family), Sean and me to our evening meal. Many thanks, everyone!

This was a superb outing with most of our group getting "lifers", and all enjoying the experience and each other's company. We must do this again!

88 species on the trip report - here's the [LINK](#)

Back in the early 1990s, when I was working at Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, I got to know Stephen Garnett on one of his trips to Cairns from Cape York's Artemis Station, where he and his wife Gabriel Crowley were researching Golden-shouldered Parrots. Once widespread across Cape York Peninsula, their range and numbers had shrunk considerably. In 1995, along with my husband, Denis Walls, and our two sons, I visited Stephen and Gabriel at Artemis and encountered these gorgeous parrots for the first time. We helped Stephen search for nest sites, and I was rather chuffed to discover a new one.

Last weekend, we revisited Artemis Station with Cairns Birders and got to see how the parrots were faring 31 years later. And they are doing well! Stephen has long ago moved on, but the station owner, Sue Shepherd, has maintained a close relationship with the parrots, putting in countless hours of surveying and care. She is currently helped by Patrick Webster of Conservation Partnerships who, after searching in vain for the Buff-breasted Buttonquail, has spent seven years at Artemis focussing on the parrots. He was kind enough to escort our group to one of the nests, from which the young had fledged, to explain the latest conservation efforts.



Patrick with light for examining nest hole



Patrick Webster at a G-s P nest

D Walls

Golden-shouldered Parrots nest in burrows which they dig into termite mounds, principally the conical 'witches hat' type but occasionally using magnetic or boulder mounds. The female lays about six eggs. After she has produced three she is committed to the site and will not desert as her supporters prepare the defences against predators. Nearby trees are felled, grass whipper-snipped and an electronic barricade erected. A perimeter wire discourages trampling stock. Closer to the mound a low fence of wires serves to keep goannas away while a surrounding mesh was added after a sneaky Brown

Tree-snake managed to loop through the wires. Twenty nesting mounds are being protected in this way and, happily, the survival rate of the parrots has increased from about 35% to about 70%.

Other predators, notably goshawks, butcherbirds and kookaburras, are also blamed for the decline. They tend to attack the parrots outside the nest and have greatly benefitted from 'woody thickening' of the habitat, the result of pastoralists abandoning traditional burning regimes in favour of cattle grazing. Hot, late dry season fires which kill tree saplings have given way to lower intensity, early dry season burning, which allows sapling survival. More recently, carbon offset subsidies have benefitted landowners who burn early. By contrast, the Shepherds tended to burn late, a factor thought responsible for the good numbers of parrots on their property. Why? Well, trees provide perches and cover for predators such as butcherbirds.



Nevertheless, despite efforts to control them (poisoning is tricky and deep roots allow those chopped to resprout) tree cover has been increasing around the termite mounds. This has led to an unfortunate local decline in numbers of an important character in the story. Black-faced Woodswallows can function as vital sentinels. At the beginning of the wet season the parrots, including the fledged young, have to forage on the ground for seeds. At this time the woodswallows are nesting, choosing open areas where they can swoop on insects and keep watch for predators. Higher in the trees, they are the first to spot

predatory birds and at once sound the alarm upon which the parrots dash for cover. However, due to the woody thickening, Patrick told us that the woodswallows have disappeared.

Patrick also told us about the tiny moths which share the nest. The adult lays eggs at the same time as the parrot, the youngsters of both species hatching simultaneously. The caterpillars then feed on the nestlings' droppings (as well as any that die) keeping the nest clean. They even spin a type of web on which the young parrots can stand. Without the caterpillars, the young parrots might be unable to leave the nest if their legs are too clogged with droppings. The caterpillars eventually pupate near the opening to the nest and emerge in time for the following nesting season. This moth species lives only in Golden-shouldered Parrot nests and without them would become extinct – as happened to the moth which nested with the now extinct Paradise Parrot. A third moth depends entirely on the third mound-nesting species, the Northern Territory's Hooded Parrot. We didn't see any of the parrots at the nesting site but were treated to views each day at the feeding stations set up around Artemis. These stations can attract as many as 30 parrots at the beginning of the wet season when native grass seeds are too wet but germinating plants have not yet set seed. While not so numerous during our visit we were delighted to be able to watch a good number of these gorgeous parrots, including a healthy number of presumed juveniles. We were also happy to contribute to the ongoing efforts to save them.

Cairns Botanic Gardens - Tuesday's Guided Bird Walk: Scott Ritchie

*This walk is free and open to all. It is part of the Friends of the Botanic Gardens program of activities.
7:30 Tuesday mornings. [Meet near the 'Friends' office, near the Conservatory.](#)*



Rainbow Bee-eater Scott Ritchie



Little Kingfisher Scott Ritchie

The resident **Australasian Darter** was hanging out-to-dry on the peninsula. It worked up an appetite and dived in for a feed. Soon enough, the snake head plunged up with a delicately lanced tilapia on its bill. This bird has learned from its mistakes. Rather than tossing the fish up in the

Around 20 intrepid birders attended the weekly Cairns Botanic Garden bird walk on Tuesday. And after months of windy, wet weather, Cairns delivered the dry season goods. Sunny, light winds, with pleasurable temperatures in the low to mid-20s. Everyone was keen and enthusiastic. We walked through the boardwalk, not seeing much. Eventually, we emerged onto Freshwater Lake where we were greeted by **Moriarty**, the dumped Mallard/Muscovy duck. A beautiful backlit **Plumed Egret** showed off its nom de plume. We continued around the lake and we were greeted by **Rainbow Bee-eaters** hawking for insects. One had fun tenderising a good sized dragonfly.

Significant numbers of **Australasian swiftlets** streamed over the lake. And the latest duck family, the **Pacific Black Duck** with ducklings, cruised across the lake. Down to only five ducklings now. But where was the **Little Kingfisher**? Well soon enough we arrived at Bittern Island and the call was made. "Stop! There's the **Little Kingfisher**". Perching low in the branches, tricky views were had.



Black Butcherbird Leah Drummond

air while swimming, it climbed back onto the grass where it promptly fumbled the fish. The fish was flopping around on the grass, the darter was darting around, trying to catch it. Slapstick at the lake! The darter snagged the fish for a second time, dropped it again, but eventually secured him. We all got shots of him playing catch-the-fish. Overhead, we had brief views of an Osprey flying to its Telecom nest with a fish. And then someone said '**Black Bittern**'. Yes, the resident bittern was briefly seen flying over to the other side of the lake. We thought we would get him, but he never surfaced again. But it was certainly a ticked bird for the day.



We wandered around to the Chinese Pagoda. A haggard old man of a **Hercules Moth** took tickets at the gate. The **Plumed Egret** strove for attention again, showing nicely in reflection with the lily pads. At the 'pink orchid' tree, **Sahul Sunbirds** and a **Dusky Honeyeater** were seen working the flowers. We went around to the sushi train where the **Little Heron** showed us that the café was still open, catching a nice, small prawn.

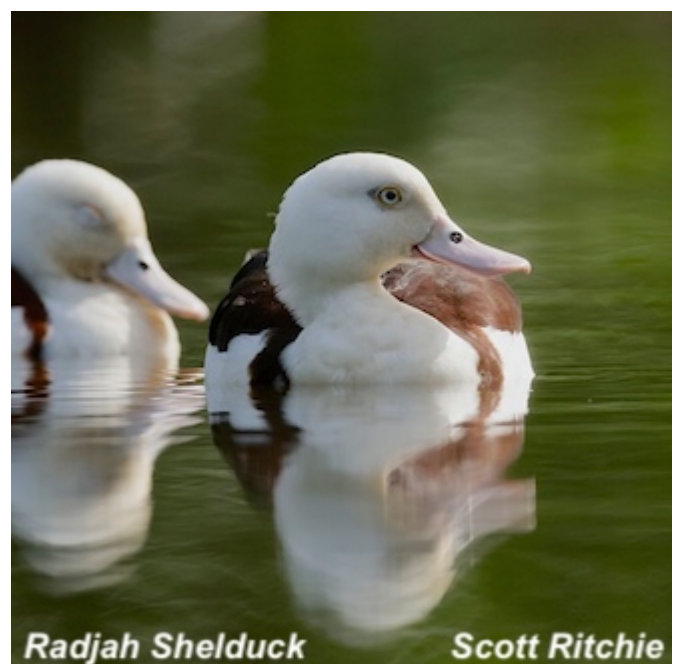
Then, we went back around to the Ant Plant tree at Saltwater Creek. The figs were ripe on the fig tree. A sudden trembling was seen in the leaves. **Australasian Figbirds** were working the figs, but soon took off. But the trembling continued. In amongst the greenery a male and female **Double-eyed Fig-Parrot** quietly macerated the figs. We got great views of these little gems. The tourists were very happy. We continued on the track toward Saltwater Lake where the resident **Radjah Shelducks** chilled on the water at close range.





The list: Australasian Darter. Australasian Figbird, Australian Brushturkey, Australian Swiftlet, Australian White Ibis, Black Bittern, Black Butcherbird, Brown Honeyeater, Bush Thick-knee. Common Myna, Double-eyed Fig-Parrot. Dusky Honeyeater, Grey Fantail, Helmeted Friarbird, Large-billed Gerygone, Leaden Flycatcher, Little Bronze-Cuckoo, Little Kingfisher, Magpie-lark, Masked Lapwing, Metallic Starling, Mistletoebird, Muscovy/Hybrid Duck (Canardius Discardius), Orange-footed Scrubfowl, Osprey, , Pacific Baza, Pacific Black Duck, Peaceful Dove, Plumed Egret, Radjah Shelduck, Rainbow Bee-eater, Rainbow Lorikeet, Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo, Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon), Sahul Cicadabird, Sahul Sunbird, Scaly-breasted Munia, Spangled Drongo, Spotted Dove, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Torresian Kingfisher, Varied Triller, Welcome Swallow, White-bellied Cuckooshrike, White-breasted Woodswallow, White-throated Honeyeater, Willie Wagtail, Yellow Honeyeater, Yellow/Green Oriole. (49)

We are really blessed to have so many birds that are at ease with humans - at least humans with bins and camera lenses! Over at lerp corner, we could hear **White-throated Honeyeaters** in the tree, while a winter visitor, the **Grey Fantail**, hawked insects from a melaleuca. Time for a coffee! In the end, 49 species were seen and or heard, which is a pretty good tally considering we didn't even see a kookaburra.



After Etosha NP we headed east towards the Caprivi Strip, that political and geographical anomaly, belonging to Namibia, that lies between Angola to the north and Botswana to the south. It was a dangerous road to travel along until the early 2000s due to internecine regional conflict. We stopped a couple of times to bird but didn't feel 100% safe especially when children ran on to the road to try to block the car. This used to be a tactic employed by roadside gangs lying in wait for the vehicle to stop before robbing the passengers. I think the kids were just playing chicken, albeit they nearly got plucked.



There were a number of highlights along the way. For the first time **Purple Roller** was more common than that African favourite, the Lilac-breasted Roller.. A rather tired joke in South Africa goes like this. "Most people think that the Lilac-breasted Roller is the most photographed bird from Southern Africa but they're wrong". Mugsty birder from Australia then asks: "Oh, what's beaten it?" (not really believing that anything could beat the L-b R). Answer: "Charlize Theron" (she's a South



African actress for those who don't keep up with the flicks).

White-throated Bee-eaters were plentiful by their river nests. It's a stunner and definitely in the top five beauties in its large family group. A rare **Melanistic Gabar Goshawk** was patient enough for Andrew, but not me, to take a photograph. A **Black Heron** did its amazing self-erecting feather parasol to pursue its prey in shadow. Small groups of delightful **Green Wood-Hoopoe** flitted across the road and in our camp by the Okavango River in Botswana we met the astounding **Pel's Fishing Owl** again



following our previous encounter in South Africa last year. That is one mighty bird you never get tired of



seeing.

African Green Pigeons gorged themselves on a fruiting tree and **Southern Lesser Galago (Bushbabies)** stuck their cute little heads out of nest boxes then danced above us after dusk having finally plucked up the courage to escape the security of their daytime roost. This was both a blissful and thrilling experience as these gorgeous little primates lingered long enough to look down, curiously, on their more evolved cousins (that's supposed to be us by the way although, at times, it's a moot point!)

Next week: final instalment - Zimbabwe.





ECOFIESTA 21st June 2026 @ Munro Martin Parklands, Cairns

Ecofiesta is a one-day festival celebrating the natural environment and the practical steps we can all take to leave a lighter footprint on the planet. [Link to CRC Events page](#)

BIRDLIFE North Queensland has long had a stall at this annual event and we are looking to our local community for volunteers to engage with stall visitors.

ECOFIESTA			
Set up 8:30 - 10:00	Shane 'n' Paul Fisk	Vishy	Denis Moeser
10:00 - 12:00	Peter Manins		
12:00 - 14:00	Scott Ritchie		
14:00 - 16:00	Denis Walls		
Packing up 15:30 -	Denis Walls	Shane Kennedy	

As usual, Denis Moeser is setting up a nestbox display on an additional table. So you can ask him any questions.

Entry is free so even if you are not volunteering grab your mates and come down to Munro Martin Parklands for a day of fun, friendship and eco-inspiration, popping in to say hello, of course .

Mikey Kudo, the usual organiser, is in Japan so contact Denis W on 0434 279 552 for more info.

Festival: Michaelmas Cay Cruise Sunday 30th August

Seastar is hosting another Birders Only Michaelmas Cay cruise. Must book and pay before Sunday, July 26. As we cater for a small group of 36 passengers we do recommend to book ahead to save disappointment.

Full Day at Michaelmas - Included in your day is:

- Unlimited island time
- Island circumnavigation depends on weather and tides.
- Morning and afternoon tea, Lunch
- Glass Bottom boat tour
- Snorkel equipment
- Guided snorkel tour

All for the special price of \$228 per person.

We are seeking expressions of interest of any who would like to travel. To book please phone us with payment by Visa or MasterCard on (07) 4041 6218.

We require Full Names, Email Address and phone number of all passengers.

Rowdy's Ramblings:

Bird song and music: [Throwback - Between You and the Birds and the Bees and Cupid](#)

Cairns Birders' Archives are now available for a mere \$5 each including postage. The flash-drive contains more than **830 newsletters** and related articles going back some **27 years** and you can update it yourself as each new newsletter appears. Simply SMS your postal address to Rowdy B on 0406 068 295 and promise to buy him a beer someday. Remember, if you want to contribute to Cairns Birders funds, consider taking your cans and bottles to a recycling point near you and direct the funds to the account below. Alternatively, meet us on our **'first outing of the month' Centenary Lakes or Cattana Wetlands** and **hand over your empties to Rowdy**. CAIRNS BIRDERS Containers for Change Account C10211514.

Letters:

Local Birder/guide wanted!

Claire Williams from Adelaide is looking for a local birder/guide for a half/full day birding in or around Cairns. Dates 28 July-3 August. She is expecting to pay, as she normally does on trips up here. Please contact her directly on claire-williams@bigpond.com

Photography - the post production ...

Many of us take lovely photographs of our birds, bugs and butterflies but what next? What do we do with them? How do we make them look terrific and store them in some sort of order?

I'm interested to hear from someone who knows about processing these pictures on our computers and can explain the various programs available. How they work, the pros and cons of the different options, how much they cost and which provide best value for techno-cretins like myself.

Lightroom Classic looks interesting, and affordable, but how easy is it to learn and use?

Perhaps a short thesis on the subject in our wonderful newsletter will benefit many birders,

RowdyB.

Why does the sun lighten our hair, but darkens our skin?

Louise's Trivia Quiz from the BLNQ AGM - part 6

- Which Woodswallow has white on its wings – Dusky or Little;
- Do Ospreys have reversible outer toes – YES or NO;
- Are Brush-turkey chicks altricial or precocial
- Nordmans Greenshank when breeding – do they nest in trees or on the ground;
- What is Australia's rarest raptor;

Answer to last week's quiz;

What colour irises does a female Galah have; **Pink**

What colour bill does a female Red-tailed Black-cockatoo have; White-ish

What's the widest wingspan of a Fairywren; **21cm**

Norty Corner

