



THE CAIRNS FROGMOUTH

All correspondence to: info@cairnsbirders.com
or connect with us on [Facebook](#) or Cairnsbirders.com

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 2nd August	7:30	Cattana Wetlands Meet in the carpark
Sunday 9th August	7:30	Gordonvale (details next week)
Cairns Birders' Festival	Friday 28th August - Saturday 5th September 30th August - Michaelmas Cay - book now - see below 1st September - Daintree evening cruise - FULL 2nd September - Daintree morning cruise - FULL	
Starry starry night	12 September	Tablelands - see below for details
Cairns Birders' Epic Excursion	October 2026	TANZANIA FULL

ONLINE SHOP

Cairns Birders merchandise

Look 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](#)

Art by Yorz Trooley



Thirty-one brave souls ventured to Lake Barrine on Sunday. With Shane and Sean taking a much deserved break we were under Louise's guidance, with me allocated the important task of scribing for the day.

The souls were brave as the morning was cold, dull, grey and decidedly damp. Constant drizzle meant raincoats and umbrellas were essential for keeping beanies, scarves and overcoats reasonably dry. Despite the weather, our gathering in the car park at 8.00 am produced the greatest concentration of birds at the first location of the day. Here the trees and undergrowth were busy with **Large-billed Scrubwrens**, **Silvereyes** and a couple of mewing **Spotted Catbirds**. The calls of both a **Sahul Brush Cuckoo** and a **Fan-tailed Cuckoo** floated through the damp forest. Three **Australian Brushturkeys** in the car park looked rather crestfallen, their wet plumage bedraggled and their tails lowered. The iconic calls of **Eastern Whipbirds** and a couple of **Victoria's Riflebirds** soon lifted our spirits. Some of the early arrivals were also fortunate enough to observe **Wompoo Fruit-Doves** and **Tooth-billed Bowerbirds**.

We carefully made our way down to the crater lake, negotiating the slippery conditions. **Great Crested Grebes** and **Australasian Grebes** could just be seen through the mist and rain. After some discussion, we agreed to tackle the short 600-metre forest walk looping back to the car park. Beneath the dense canopy, it was remarkably dark. With the birds keeping a low profile, there was plenty of camaraderie and social chatter among the group.

Even the familiar mechanical calls of the **Tooth-billed Bowerbirds**, normally heard along this section of the walk, were absent. Toward the end of the circuit, two pairs of **Chowchillas** called nearby but remained hidden. An **Australian Spectacled Monarch** was also heard churring close to the track but declined to make an appearance.

Despite the gloomy weather, we recorded an impressive 27 species in just over an hour.

Our next stop was Thomas Road, where 19 birders regrouped. The remainder of the group continued directly to our third destination, Hasties Swamp, in search of a drier experience. A short walk along Thomas Road produced 15 species, including a pair of **Torresian Crows**, **Eastern Cattle Egrets** enjoying a spot of bareback riding, and the always delightful—but frustratingly photo-shy—**Australian Rufous Fantail**. The persistent rain prevented us from exploring more of this usually productive area.

Our reunited troop gathered at the Hastie's Swamp Bird Hide, where conditions were considerably drier, apart from the occasional brief shower. This allowed for some much more active birding. We were delighted to meet Alan Gillanders, who generously shared some of his remarkable knowledge and expertise.

At the beginning of Koci Road, we were greeted by around 1,000 noisy **Maggie Geese** and grazing **Australasian Swampheens**. From the hide, we observed **Plumed Whistling-Ducks**, **Australasian Grebes**, **Pacific Black Ducks**, **Hardheads** and a couple of **Grey Teal**.



Recent reports of a good variety of bush birds encouraged the group to explore the length of Koci Road. Our sharper-eyed members located **Golden Whistlers**, **Grey Whistlers**, **Red-browed Finches**, **Red-backed Fairywrens** and a delightful female **Yellow-breasted Boatbill**. Honeyeaters were also well represented, although many were difficult to see as they busily searched for nectar, lerps and other insects among the crowns of the taller trees. **Lewin's**, **Yellow-faced**, **White-cheeked** and **Dusky**

Honeyeaters were all observed, along with an **Eastern Spinebill**. Good views were enjoyed of **Australian Reed Warblers** and a **Forest Kingfisher** along the shoreline. Jake also recorded a speedy **Little Kingfisher** flashing past the water's edge.

Steve, Mary Brook and I discovered a dead Rakali, or water-rat, in the ditch opposite the car park. It was suggested that it may have been prey dropped by a raptor, possibly a **White-bellied Sea-Eagle**. Another mammalian interaction occurred when an unwell



Eastern Spinebill Miles Michaud

Bent-winged Bat (*Miniopterus schreibersii*) was spotted on the landing of the second floor of the bird hide. Alan Gillanders referred the bat to the Tolga Bat Hospital who have taken it into care. Fingers crossed on a recovery for this beautiful creature whose species has become Near Threatened in recent years.

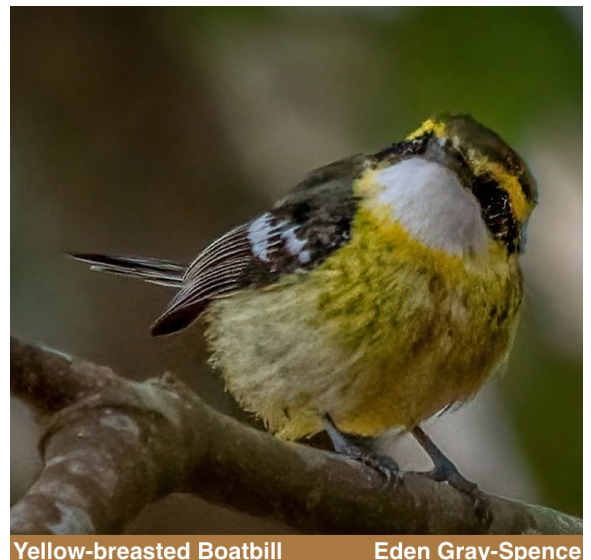
Alan Sweet gave us an engaging introduction to a friendly group of **Willie Wagtails** and **Eastern Yellow Robins**. He

explained that these

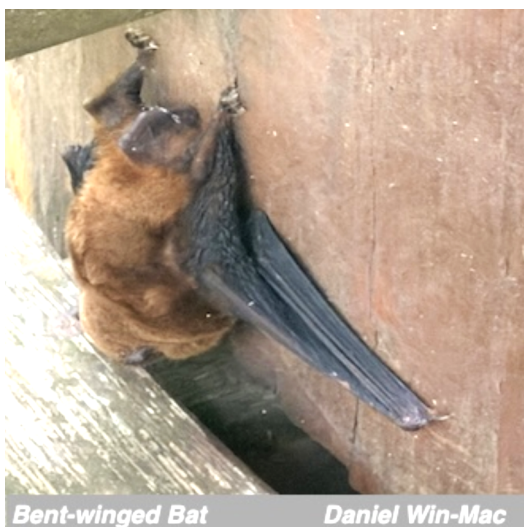
approachable birds provide an excellent introduction to birding for school students, helping young people appreciate the beauty and importance of Australia's birdlife.

The day ended on another high note when the ever-observant Jake drew our attention to a pair of **Satin Bowerbirds** churring and buzzing in the trees beside the car park.

Despite temperatures below 20°C and the persistent wet weather, Cairns Birders enjoyed another wonderful day of companionship, learning and lively bird talk. A very respectable total of 67 species was recorded - proof that even the dampest days can deliver plenty of memorable birding.



Yellow-breasted Boatbill Eden Gray-Spence



Bent-winged Bat Daniel Win-Mac

Cairns Botanic Gardens - Tuesday's Guided Bird Walk: Denis Walls

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.



Sahul Sunbird

Jon Westaway

What has happened to our so-called dry season? The rule of thumb was, always, no more rain after the July Cairns Show. Anyway, the dreich weather continued this morning which did not deter 25 birding enthusiasts from all the airts and pairts (*a traditional Scottish phrase meaning "from all directions," "from every quarter," or "from all parts and places."*). From overseas we had Nafisa (UK), Sally and Mark (Netherlands), Suzanne and Fallyn (NZ). From Oz, elsewhere, there was Dagmar, Angelo, Stephanie (Adelaide); Terry, Pen, Lynette, Philip, Jean and Ian (Victoria); Mark, Maree and Jenny (NSW). So the Victorians win as usual! Does that say something about their winter weather? Locals were Jake, Leah, Lois, Peter, Kazu, Jon, Sonia, Miguel and Tina.

I had to preambule the walk by honouring Bill Oddie who has died at the age of 85. After the Goodies ended in the early 1980s, Bill popularised birdwatching as a hobby and presented on the BBC show 'Springwatch' for many years, drawing in a whole new generation of bird loving enthusiasts. Although he didn't coin the term twitcher for an obsessive birdwatcher, Bill is credited with popularising the word through his 1980 bestseller '*Bill Oddie's Little Black Bird Book*'. Vale Bill. May the angels be playing the dawn chorus.

We set off purposefully along the Centenary Boardwalk. It was very quiet but atmospheric with the dank drip of sodden vegetation. Anticipation was high as some had heard of the likelihood of a Little Kingfisher sighting. Alas, today was the day that the LKs stayed hidden from the prying eyes of birders and their giant lenses. The **Australasian Grebe**, **Comb-crested Jacana**, **Pied Cormorant**, **Darter** and, belatedly, **Radjah Shelducks** made sure we wouldn't be disappointed, although **Rainbow Bee-eaters** and other insect eaters kept their distance and their energies for more propitious weather.



Comb-crested Jacana (immature) Leah Drummond



Large-billed Gerygone

Jon Westaway



Black Bittern

Leah Drummond

It wasn't until we reached the Ant Plant lecture arena over the bridge that things started to kick off. As I was doing my 'rough' and 'smooth walls' stand in for that consummate professional, Shane, a cry went up, "heron in the mangroves". I finished my tale. The newbies were enjoying it. There was no hurry. The Little (aka Striated) Heron could wait. And still the bird sat, semi-obscured in the background. Many a pic was taken. After checking their photos Jake and Leah then declared, "it ain't no heron, it's a **Black Bittern**". And so it was. That made up for the missing Little Kingfisher!

We headed round the bend to the Three Majestic Melaleucas, home to multiple common and rare species. Gee, I love those trees. The bridge across the Saltwater Lake returned **Nankeen Night Heron** and **Large-billed Gerygone** before Jon bellowed, "quick, **Shining Flycatchers**". We shimmied along the adjacent path as the pair darted in and out of the mangroves. Beaut! How dimorphic can you get?



Shining Flycatcher (female) Leah Drummond



Shining Flycatcher (male) Jon Westaway

What Shane calls *Lerp Lane*, but I refer to as *The Ecotone*, was extraordinarily quiet as the drizzle came on quelling any possible resurgent, insect-hawking birds. But maybe the **Double-eyed Fig-Parrots** would be home on the dead tree over the creek? And they were, having seemingly, finally, decided on which of their self-made burrows to commence nesting. Such was the poor visibility that we had to show some of the visiting birders, on our phones, what the birds actually look like close up. Imagination can do the rest.



I came back via the Rainbow Gum whose bark was looking like Joseph's many-coloured coat in the dripping rain. You know, this is the surprising thing, we saw or heard 45 species despite it being a rain-restricted, slow birding day. The company was great, my shoes were saturated, the hot coffee afterwards much needed and the accompanying blarney as interesting and varied as always.



Radjah Shelduck, Pacific Black Duck, Moriarty, Orange-footed Scrubfowl, Rock Dove, Spotted Dove, Bar-shouldered Dove, Australian Swiftlet, Pale-vented Bush-hen, Bush Thick-knee, Masked Lapwing, Comb-crested Jacana, Australasian Grebe, Darter, Little Pied Cormorant, Black Bittern, Nankeen Night Heron, Great Egret, Osprey, Rainbow Bee-eater, Laughing Kookaburra, Sacred Kingfisher, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Double-eyed Fig-Parrot, Rainbow Lorikeet, Yellow-spotted Honeyeater, Yellow Honeyeater, Helmeted Friarbird, Large-billed Gerygone, Varied Triller, Sahul Cicadabird, Green aka Yellow Oriole, Australasian Figbird, Black Butcherbird, Willie Wagtail, Magpie-lark, Leaden Flycatcher, Shining Flycatcher, Welcome Swallow, Metallic Starling, Common Myna, Mistletoebird, Sahul Sunbird.



Rowdy's Ramblings:

Bird song and music: - [Eastern Rosellas - Miles Phillips and dad](#)

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.

The Bird Quiz

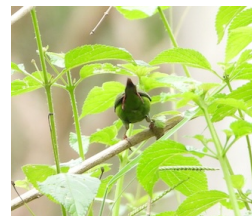
Louise Baume

What is this ?



Last week's quiz: What is this?

Blue-faced Parrot-Finch



Walking through the dry country the other day, I stumbled upon a magnificent fruiting **Boat-Lipped Orchid** (*Cymbidium madidum*), and, as orchids often do, it set my mind wandering.



Boat-lipped Orchid Clayton Smith

The word *orchid* comes from the ancient Greek *orchis*, meaning "testicle", though it isn't the fruit that inspired the name. Instead, it refers to the paired underground tubers found in many terrestrial orchid species. Medieval Europeans took this resemblance rather seriously. Believing the tubers could cure ailments of the male reproductive system, they prescribed them accordingly, and in Middle English these plants acquired the wonderfully memorable name **Bollockworts**. Have fun with the fact.

As the seed pods ripen, they split open to release hundreds of thousands, sometimes millions of seeds. Each is little more than a speck of dust, among the smallest seeds in the plant kingdom. So light are they that the faintest breeze can carry them everywhere. But such extraordinary dispersal comes at a cost. These tiny seeds contain almost no food reserves, making them entirely dependent on an invisible partner beneath the forest floor.

To begin life, every seed must find a compatible microscopic mycorrhizal fungus. The fungus nourishes the embryo through its earliest stages until the young orchid can produce its own sugars through photosynthesis. In many species those sugars are later shared with the fungus. Traditionally this has been viewed as a beautiful example of mutualism, although some botanists now suggest the balance of power may favour the orchid far more than its fungal partner.

Australia is home to around 1,700 native orchid species or roughly six percent of the world's estimated 28,000 species and the Wet Tropics shelters around 500 of them, making it one of the richest orchid landscapes on Earth. The **Boat-Lipped Orchid** is one of only three native *Cymbidium* species found in Australia, and we are fortunate that all three occur within our region.

There are countless treasures awaiting those who look a little closer. Among them is *Apostasia wallichii*, the **Yellow Grass Orchid**, representing one of the earliest-diverging branches of the orchid family tree. The majestic **King Orchid** (*Dendrobium speciosum*) clings to rocky outcrops and ancient trees, while the delicate and threatened **Velvet Jewel Orchid** (*Rhomboda polygonoides*) quietly inhabits the rainforest floor. Then there is the world-renowned **Cooktown Orchid** (*Dendrobium bigibbum*), Queensland's floral emblem, flowering from the tip of Cape York south to the cliffs around Wangetti.



Velvet Jewel Orchid Clayton Smith

More than sixty percent of Australia's orchids grow from the ground rather than upon trees, and many are so small they are easily overlooked. One of the most remarkable is the **Leafless Nodding Orchid, or Ghost Orchid** (*Epipogium roseum*). It spends its entire life drawing nourishment from fungi and never produces a single leaf. After the first tropical rains, its delicate flowering stem appears almost overnight, blooms for only a fleeting moment, then vanishes again as though it had never been there. I have even had them emerge beside potted plants, a quiet reminder that an unseen world is always at work beneath our feet.

High above, another curiosity awaits. On the great trees of Fitzroy Island grows the bizarre **White Starfish Orchid** (*Chiloschista phyllorhiza*). Dispensing with leaves altogether, it performs photosynthesis through its emerald-green roots, proving once again that orchids seem determined to rewrite the rules of plant life.

So next time you find yourself gazing into the rainforest canopy, pause for a moment and look a little closer. Hidden among bark, leaf litter and branches are some of nature's most extraordinary creations, each carrying millions of years of evolutionary ingenuity in a flower that may bloom for only a few precious days.



King Orchid Clayton Smith

Table 1

CAIRNS BIRDING FESTIVAL 2026			
Friday, 28 August 2026	PHOTO COMP		Doug
	1800	Stratford Library - Nest box success	Denis Moser
Saturday, 29 August 2026	730	Cattana Wetlands	Bird Photography with OM Rep - Luke
	1600	Centenary Lakes	Bird Photography with OM Rep - Luke
Sunday, 30 August 2026	700	Cruise: Michaelmas Cay	
	1600	Centenary Lakes	
Monday, 31 August 2026	800	Lake Morris/Copperload Dam	BYO morning tea
	1600	Centenary Lakes	
	1800	Stratford Library - Habitats of Australia	Iain Campbell
Tuesday, 1 September 2026	730	Botanical Gardens walk	Shane
	1600	Cruise: Daintree River Cruise	Shane n Murray
Wednesday, 2 September 2026	700	Cruise: Daintree River Cruise	Shane n Murray
	1500	Esplanade across from the RSL	
Thursday, 3 September 2026	730	Lake Barine then Thomas Rd – BYO chairs, morning tea	Louise
	1600	Esplanade northern end	
	1830	Spot-lighting tour - TBA	Mikey
Friday, 4 September 2026	730	Behana Gorge – BYO chairs, morning tea	
	Tide ?	Esplanade across from the RSL	
	1800	Stratford Library	Scott Ritchie
Saturday, 5 September 2026	630	East Trinity - BYO morning tea	Denis
	1400 - 1600	Welcome the Waders: Esplanade	Mikey
Sunday, 6 September 2026	700	Cattana Wetlands - Morning tea. Catered RSVP.	Various various!

Festival: Daintree River Boatman 1st AND 2nd September
Daintree River Boatman

- 1st September 4pm evening cruise - 9 people (Fully Booked - try the waitlist)
- 2nd September 7am dawn cruise - 9 people (Fully Booked - try the waitlist)
- **Book Direct - text or email - 0417 651 929 - <https://www.daintreerivertours.com.au/>**
- Cairns Birders special price of \$60/person is extended to all other cruises during the festival, just mention "Cairns Birders Festival" when booking.

Festival: Michaelmas Cay Cruise Sunday 30th August

Must book and pay before Sunday, July 26. (34 of 36 already booked)

- 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.

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.

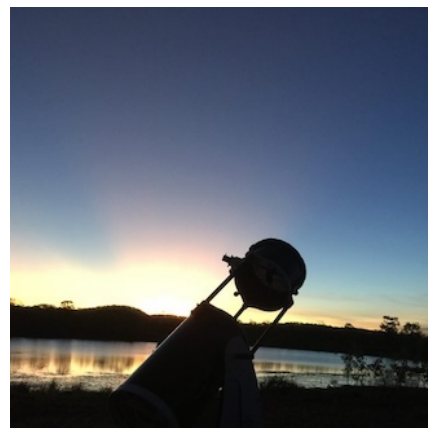
SPECIAL OUTING: **Starry Starry Night** limited to 14
12 September - up on the Tablelands (near Kay Rd)
5 places left;

Includes:

- an evening meal,
- discussion about the night sky with access to a telescope,
- then stories around the campfire.
- there is a campground nearby

Doug is organising this to celebrate Carolyn's birthday and thought, rather than joining a group of 12 randoms, wouldn't be nice to do it with folk he knows.

So if you want to help Doug and Carolyn celebrate then book here [STARRY STARRY NIGHT](#) and use the discount code **FNQastro** for 20% off. This is a regular NightSky event but this date is set aside just for us birders. - limited to 12 people.



Locals on the Loose

Lost at Sea

Sean and Shane



The weather's been great, sunny days, little wind and hence the ocean was calm, albeit with large swells. Note to self; the experts advise that whales are generally more active when the seas are rough! The good news, though, it was a calm sea and this boat only had a quarter of its carrying capacity, so there was plenty of room at the rails.

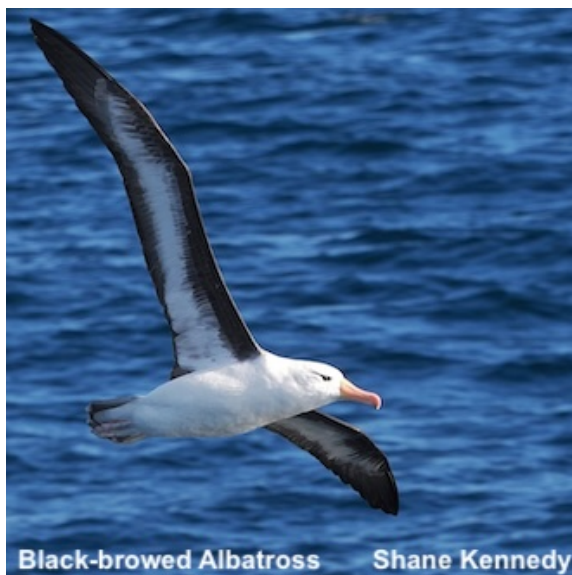
Tall tales and true were shared at a recent luncheon and for a time we were trying to outdo each other with our whale encounters. Within hours we were on a plane to Sydney, our old home town. A pre-planned trip for some tale telling of our own with family and friends. But all this talk got me thinking, and so, when we arrived, I booked passage.



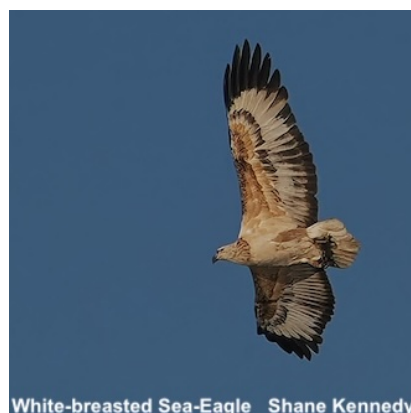
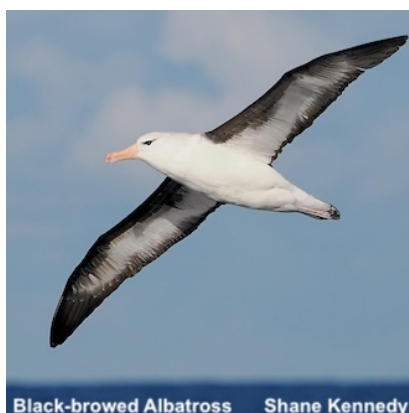
Before leaving the harbour we encountered a pod of **Bottlenose Dolphins**. These hitched a ride on our bow-wave and we enjoyed their company for at least ten minutes. Passing through the Heads into deep water, a posse of bull-necked **Australian Fur Seals** paused to check us out on their way back into the harbour. They looked like lads returning from a night out.



We spent a little time with several pods of **Humpback Whales**. They were heading north, up for a couple of breaths and out of sight for 7 minutes or so. It was a business trip, no time to wave to the tourists or breaching.



Some may have been a little disappointed, but we had a secondary interest, the chance of a pelagic or two. We weren't very far out to sea but none-the-less we got a few good birds including **Australian Gannet, Fluttering Shearwater, and Albatrosses - Black-browed, Shy and Indian Yellow-nosed**. Two lifers in that lot, so you could say we had a whale of a time!



It's a wrap! The week with ebird 20 - 26th July 2026 David Lyons

What's About: Cairns & Tablelands Birding, 20 - 26 July 2026

27/07/2026 (Mon) · 3 min read · By David Lyons

[Part of What's About, our weekly birding wrap - see all editions](#)

A big week in the field, and the numbers show it. Both regions ran well ahead of their recent average as the dry-season peak brought birders out in force. The Tablelands logged 95 observers over the week and more than 500 checklists, up sharply on the week before; Cairns and the coast topped 130 observers and nearly 450 checklists. Winter is prime time up here, and it shows.

The season is turning: first migrants are back

The stand-out story this week was the first stirrings of the returning migration. A Latham's Snipe turned up at the northern beaches, one of the earliest of the Northern Hemisphere breeders to filter back to our wetlands. On the Cairns Esplanade the shorebird build-up is underway, with Black-tailed Godwit, Red Knot, Curlew Sandpiper and Double-banded Plover all logged along the mudflats. A Cotton Pygmy-Goose on the northern wetlands and a scatter of fresh arrivals rounded out a week that felt like the calendar shifting gear.

Around the Tablelands the woodlands were busy too, with a Pallid Cuckoo out towards Mount Garnet, a Restless Flycatcher on the western dams, a Noisy Pitta at Julatten.

Where everyone was

Lake Barrine was the busiest single site on the Tablelands, with Hasties Swamp and the Julatten patch close behind. On the coast the Cairns Esplanade did the heavy lifting as always, backed by Cattana Wetlands and the Daintree cruises. The visitor influx is clearly building as the season peaks, with a healthy number of birders new to the local feed appearing at the marquee sites, a reliable sign that the dry-season crowd has arrived.

Rarities on the radar

A handful of records were flagged by eBird's review system this week. As always, these are provisional, and we treat them as such until they are confirmed:

- Ashy-bellied White-eye - reported from Green Island, off Cairns.
- Satin Flycatcher - a single report from the Tablelands.
- Latham's Snipe - at the northern beaches, better read as an early returning migrant than a true rarity (see above).
- Chestnut-breasted Cuckoo - a report from the Tablelands, and an intriguing one. This is really a bird of New Guinea and Cape York that reaches its Australian limit up around the Cooktown district, well to the north of us. A Tablelands bird would be a long way out of range, and it has a close local lookalike in the Fan-tailed Cuckoo, so it is one to watch rather than one to bank. We are not calling it either way,

Rarity records are flagged by eBird's review process and may be reviewed, corrected or withdrawn after publication. We re-check each one against eBird before posting, but a flagged sighting is provisional until it is confirmed, and we would rather note that plainly than pretend otherwise.

That was the week around Cairns and the Tablelands. The migration is only going to build from here, so it is a fine time to be out.

Extra Extra! Read all about it ...

HUGE win for migratory birds in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway!

The UNESCO World Heritage Committee has expanded the Getbol, Korean Tidal Flats World Heritage Site! This decision will help to protect four new areas of tidal flats in South Korea and the thousands of birds that use these coastal wetlands to eat and rest while on their long migratory journeys.

[LINK HERE](#)

Norty Corner

