



SOUTH-WESTERN AUSTRALIA TRIP REPORT NOVEMBER 2015

By Chris Lotz



Galah (photo Andy Walker)

ITINERARY

Date	Location	Overnight
8 Nov 2015	Arrival in Perth	Sullivans Hotel adjacent to King's Park and Botanic Garden, Perth
9 Nov 2015	Perth to Dryandra Woodland	Lions Dryandra Woodlands Village
10 Nov 2015	Dryandra Woodland to Stirling Range	Stirling Range Retreat
11 Nov 2015	Stirling Range to Cheynes Beach	Cheyne's Beach Caravan Park – chalet
12 Nov 2015	Full day at Cheynes Beach	Cheyne's Beach Caravan Park – chalet
13 Nov 2015	Cheyne's Beach to Pemberton	Gloucester Motel, Pemberton
14 Nov 2015	Back to Perth to fly to West Papua	(on flight to West Papua)

OVERVIEW

A couple of us (Bill from Ohio and I from South Africa) wanted a pre-tour somewhere for about a week prior to the November 2015 West Papua birding tour we were participating in. Southwestern Australia made good sense for various reasons. First, how could we resist a first visit to Australia when a number of flights happened to transit through Perth en route to Indonesia/West Papua (from both the USA and South Africa)? Second, this part of Australia lies at a temperate latitude (similar to that of Cape Town, about 34°S), with less overlap with Papua than the more tropical northern parts of Australia, ultimately perhaps meaning a bigger bird list for us at the end of our travels. Third, there are at least (depending on which splits are recognized) 16 bird species endemic to southwestern Australia, which we would not see in the future on the comprehensive eastern Australia and Tasmania trip we're likely to do – the main Australia trip Birding Ecotours usually runs.

Birding Ecotours has done southwestern Australia before, so creating an itinerary was no problem, even though neither of us had actually yet set foot on this island continent before. A bit of study, and armed with "*Finding Australian Birds*" published by CSIRO (<http://www.csiro.au/>) and some very good advice from Bruce Wedderburn, Matt Prophet, Barry Davies, Duan Biggs, and others, we excitedly boarded our respective flights to try to clean up on the strategic birds of this unique part of Australia. It's definitely a very interesting part of the country, with "fynbos" type vegetation – I was in fact surprised just how similar the vegetation was to the famous "Cape flora" of my previous home, Cape Town – *Banksia* species replacing *Protea* species (although both of course in the same family), with honeyeaters replacing sugarbirds and sunbirds. But then there were completely odd additions here on this strange continent, such as all the Eucalypt forests and all the marsupials such as the ever-present western grey kangaroos – all in all it proved quite a surreal experience to land in Australia and experience all this first-hand.

Due to the success of this trip we'll certainly be offering southwestern Australia as an annual extension to our standard 3.5 week eastern Australia and Tasmania birding itinerary.

Day 1, 8 November 2015

Bill arrived in Perth in the early morning and took a taxi to the conveniently-situated (for birders) Sullivans Hotel, and the manager (who was wonderfully helpful) very kindly allowed him to check in early. Bill then started scouting King's Park & Botanic Garden, finding **Red Wattlebird** to be one of the most common and conspicuous species, especially around the flowering *Banksia*. Chris arrived at the airport around lunch time, picked up the rental car and drove through the rather smart-looking city of Perth, and eventually arrived at the hotel, very quickly checked in, and immediately dragged Bill back out birding.

A close-up **Nankeen Night Heron**, stacks of **Pacific Black Ducks**, **Hardhead**, beautiful **Black Swans** (common around Perth), **Maned Duck**, **Little Pied Cormorant**, **Little Black Cormorant**, and a good number of other waterbirds were observed in the lake opposite the hotel. Noisy **Rainbow Lorikeets** (introduced from Eastern Australia) were conspicuous. **Australian Raven** was also prevalent – a remarkably small corvid, especially for something called a “raven” (at least to those of us not from Australia). **Willie Wagtail** was another bird we got pretty accustomed to even after just one afternoon in Australia, as it’s an ever-present bird (not only here but also in parts of Papua again as we would see). After a while we made our way to King’s Park (Bill’s second visit there) and started getting acquainted with **Singing Honeyeater**, **Brown Honeyeater**, **White-cheeked Honeyeater**, **Australian Magpie**, **Silvereye**, and others. Afternoon birding proved a bit quiet, though, so we decided to drive to Herdsman Lake for the rest of the afternoon to try and add some waterbirds to the list (rather planning on the botanic garden birds again for the next morning). This proved an excellent move, and we were rewarded not only with waterbirds but also with our first **Little Corella**, **Long-billed Corella** (these two beautiful cockatoos are full of charisma and allowed close approaches as they fed on the lawns around the lake), our first **Laughing Kookaburra** (a giant kingfisher not directly associated with water), and indeed a plethora of waterbirds, such as the smart-looking **Australian Shelduck**, **Blue-billed Duck**, **Australian Shoveler**, **Grey Teal**, the truly bizarre-looking **Musk Duck**, three different grebe species, **Australian Pelican**, and many others. ‘



Honeyeaters abounded on this trip – **Red Wattlebird** (photo Andy Walker) was one of the most prevalent, but we also found some **Western Wattlebirds**.

Day 2, 9 November 2015

Early morning explorations of King’s Park were highly productive, with **Galah**, **Striated Pardalote**, **Weebill** (Australia’s smallest bird), **Western Gerygone**, **Inland Thornbill**, **Pied Butcherbird**, and many others. After an excellent breakfast we then continued to Serpentine National Park en route to the Dryandra Woodlands, our next overnight stop. Here we found a

further suite of stunning parrots: **Red-tailed Black Cockatoo**, **Red-capped Parrot**, **Australian Ringneck**, and **Western Rosella**. Other goodies in this park included **Rainbow Bee-eater**, **Gilbert's Honeyeater** (and various other honeyeaters – we saw a total of ten honeyeater species today), and **Splendid Fairywren**, followed rather soon by **Red-winged Fairywren** and later by **Blue-breasted Fairywren** at Dryandra – we can safely say that a day with one's first three fairywrens is not a good day, it's a completely and absolutely spectacular day that is impossible to ever forget. We eventually arrived at the fine Dryandra Woodlands and were rewarded with a stack of new birds in the late afternoon – low-feeding (sometimes even on the ground) **Rufous Treecreeper**, **Shy Heathwren**, and a host of others kept us well entertained before we embarked on a night tour at Barnia Mia Animal Sanctuary, where we could get close-up views of captive bilbies and other strange nocturnal marsupials. Here and throughout our trip we encountered a great many western gray kangaroos.

Day 3, 10 November 2015

The Dryandra Woodlands did not disappoint during our morning birding session, and we added short-beaked echidna as well as a good number of new birds to our growing list. Heathland away from the Eucalypt woodlands generated **Western Spinebill** and a disappointingly drab **Golden Whistler** that did, however, whistle very nicely (this happened again the next day, but we finally managed to catch up with a properly-plumaged male a couple of days later at Cheynes Beach). **White-browed Babbler**, **Jacky Winter**, **Restless Flycatcher**, **Grey Shrikethrush**, **Dusky Woodswallow** (which tomorrow at Stirling Range would become all too common), and others kept us entertained within the fine Eucalyptus woodlands that this park is famous for.



Short-beaked echidna in the road at Dryandra - motionless for a few minutes until it decided to “wake up” and slowly walk off into the bush.

Birding between Dryandra and our next overnight stop, Stirling Range Retreat, was equally rewarding, with **Spotted Harrier**, the magnificent **Wedge-tailed Eagle**, **Carnaby's Black Cockatoo**, **Purple-crowned Lorikeet**, **Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo**, **Fan-tailed Cuckoo**, **Grey Currawong**, **Black-faced Woodswallow**, the gorgeous **Red-capped Robin**, and some very nice-looking doves, **Common Bronzewing** and **Brush Bronzewing**.

On arrival at Stirling Range Retreat we enjoyed lots of **Elegant Parrots**, but we had to wait until the following morning to find **Regent Parrot**. **White-winged Triller** was another nice addition here.



“Fynbos”-like vegetation at the picturesque Stirling Range

Days 4, 11 November 2015

Regent Parrot, **Yellow-throated Miner**, and a day-roosting **Australian Owlet-nightjar** kindly shown to us by the manager were three great finds at Stirling Range Retreat. This was a good day for raptors, with **Eastern Osprey**, **White-bellied Sea Eagle**, **Wedge-tailed Eagle**, **Little Eagle**, **Nankeen Kestrel**, and **Brown Falcon** between Stirling Range and Cheynes Beach. **Sacred Kingfisher**, our first **Tawny-crowned Honeyeater** (which proved abundant at Cheynes Beach, though – indeed a bird one has to grow to love while waiting for the “Big 3” skulkers, especially Western Bristlebird – more of that later), two new thornbill species, and many others also kept us busy.

And now, for one of the most extraordinary stories of the entire trip, which unfolded right at the end of the day soon after we had checked in at the Cheynes Beach Caravan Park. We had very limited daylight left and had planned to leave the last hour or two of sunlight for scouting known stakeouts for “the big three” skulkers of Cheynes Beach, namely Noisy Scrubbird, Western Whipbird, and Western Bristlebird. The taxonomically intriguing (and related to lyrebirds), endangered (with recent fires wreaking havoc on its world population, despite successes with translocations and other conservation measures) **Noisy Scrubbird** was one of our main targets. Since this bird is a truly notorious skulker, it was possibly the one bird we were most worried about not managing to get a sighting of. Quoting from the truly

excellent blog at <http://wabirdingblog.blogspot.com.au/2015/05/cheynes-beach-twitching-in-skulkers.html>: “Scrub-birds are devious masters of concealment and you are very unlikely to see a singing bird by pursuing it into the heath - it will always stay unseen a few tantalizing meters ahead of you. Nor are you likely to tempt it out using playback, which is banned in the park anyway. The only reliable technique is to find an area where a territory is transected by a track or road, and patiently follow a calling bird from a distance until it breaks cover to dash across.”

Or you can use our method. Which is to arrive at Cheynes Beach, drive to the track it is meant to run across, realize it's the wrong track but hear a scrubbird anyway, jump noisily out of the car shouting “it's right next to us”, hear it again right at the very edge of the track and then watch it scurry across the road like a rat. Tick it, and then scout the sites for the other two skulkers in preparation for the next day. It's easy, and takes about 1 minute! No patience required, just a bit of luck. Ha ha!

But this piece of extreme luck would not prepare us for the absolute lack of luck the following day. We now had only two of the big three mega-skulkers to see, and we were ahead of ourselves, so we thought we'd be able to clean up. But we only heard Western Whipbirds and Western Bristlebirds – fairly good numbers of them – and failed to get sightings.

Day 5, 12 November 2015

Fortunately, the following morning we were eventually rewarded with brilliant views of a pair of **Western Whipbirds**. But **Western Bristlebird** remained the only one of 17 south-western Australian endemics we actually did not see (although we heard it many times). That same blog stated that it can be considered the easiest of the “Big Three” – but for us it was the only one that frustrated us completely – that's birding for you, and you've got to love it! Quoting again from the blog: “Fortunately bristlebirds are not as shy as scrub-birds, or as obsessed with keeping to cover, making them probably the easiest of the Big Three to see (still with some patience required)”. Nooooooooooot!



It's amazing how the birds manage to hide in this heathland around Cheynes Beach.



Western Spinebills and Tawny-crowned Honeyeaters (both very common at Cheynes Beach) sip a lot of *Banksia* nectar. Dead (burned) *Banksia* plants can be good for Western Whipbird, we found.

We did, however, see some other truly wonderful birds while trying for the three skulkers. We got great views of **Red-eared Firetail** as well as a pair of beautiful, dainty **Southern Emu-wrens**, along with a nice **Collared Sparrowhawk** and various other good birds in this “middle” day without any of the “Big Three” putting in an appearance except the whipbird early in the morning.

White-breasted Robin and western gray kangaroo were confiding species around our accommodation. The big roost of **Carnaby’s Black Cockatoo** near the chalets was always a pleasure to see – and it was also great to see these birds foraging in the low scrublands.

Day 6, 13 November 2015

En route to our final destination for the trip, Pemberton, which is in the midst of the well-known and pretty Australian winelands, we located fantastic **Western Corella**, a single **Emu**, **White-necked Heron**, **Spotted Pardalote**, **Varied Sittella**, and **Magpie-lark**, most of these around Lake Muir Nature Reserve, where we stopped for a little while. Conditions at the lake were extremely dry, so the waterbirds we had hoped for were absent.

After checking in at our hotel, a late afternoon visit to the world’s second largest fire-lookout tree, the Gloucester Tree, set amidst a spectacular karri forest, was a pleasant way to spend the late afternoon, with a handful of new trip birds thrown in.



Bill a very short way up this massive, 72-meter-high tree

Day 7, 14 November 2015

Emu and **White-faced Heron** were enjoyed at stops en route back to Perth to catch our flight home. Birding near Mandurah, 72 kilometers south of Perth, was our last stop before catching our “island-hopping” flight, which would eventually have us arrive in West Papua the next day for some completely different birding! Here we found **Straw-necked Ibis**, **Yellow-billed Spoonbill**, **Pied Oystercatcher**, **White-headed Stilt**, various shorebirds and ducks, and a few other nice final new birds for our list.



White-headed Stilt (photo Andy Walker)

SOUTH-WESTERN AUSTRALIA 2015 BIRD LIST		
(E) - South-western Australian endemic Status: NT = Near-threatened, EN = Endangered		
Common Name (IOC 5.4)	Scientific Name (IOC 5.4)	Trip
	CASUARIIFORMES	
	<u>Dromaiidae</u>	
Emu	<i>Dromaius novaehollandiae</i>	1
	ANSERIFORMES	
	<u>Anatidae</u>	
Maned Duck	<i>Chenonetta jubata</i>	1
Blue-billed Duck - NT	<i>Oxyura australis</i>	1
Black Swan	<i>Cygnus atratus</i>	1
Australian Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadornoides</i>	1
Pacific Black Duck	<i>Anas superciliosa</i>	1

Hardhead	<i>Aythya australis</i>	1
Australasian Shoveler	<i>Anas rhynchotis</i>	1
Grey Teal	<i>Anas gracilis</i>	1
Musk Duck	<i>Biziura lobata</i>	1
	PODICIPEDIFORMES	
	<u>Podicipedidae</u>	
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	1
Hoary-headed Grebe	<i>Poliocephalus poliocephalus</i>	1
Australasian Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus novaehollandiae</i>	1
	PELECANIFORMES	
	<u>Threskiornithidae</u>	
Straw-necked Ibis	<i>Threskiornis spinicollis</i>	1
Australian White Ibis	<i>Threskiornis moluccus</i>	1
Yellow-billed Spoonbill	<i>Platalea flavipes</i>	1
	<u>Ardeidae</u>	
Nankeen Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax caledonicus</i>	1
White-necked Heron	<i>Ardea pacifica</i>	1
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	1
White-faced Heron	<i>Egretta novaehollandiae</i>	1
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	1
	<u>Pelecanidae</u>	
Australian Pelican	<i>Pelecanus conspicillatus</i>	1
	SULIFORMES	
	<u>Anhingidae</u>	
Australasian Darter	<i>Anhinga novaehollandiae</i>	1
	<u>Phalacrocoracidae</u>	
Little Pied Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo melanoleucos</i>	1
Little Black Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax sulcirostris</i>	1
	ACCIPITRIFORMES	
	<u>Pandionidae</u>	
Eastern Osprey	<i>Pandion cristatus</i>	1
	<u>Accipitridae</u>	
Whistling Kite	<i>Haliastur sphenurus</i>	1
White-bellied Sea Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>	1
Spotted Harrier	<i>Circus assimilis</i>	1
Collared Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter cirrocephalus</i>	1
Wedge-tailed Eagle	<i>Aquila audax</i>	1
Little Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus morphnoides</i>	1
	GRUIFORMES	
	<u>Rallidae</u>	
Australasian Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio melanotus</i>	1
Dusky Moorhen	<i>Gallinula tenebrosa</i>	1

Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	1
	CHARADRIIFORMES	
	<u>Haematopodidae</u>	
Pied Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus longirostris</i>	1
	<u>Recurvirostridae</u>	
White-headed Stilt	<i>Himantopus leucocephalus</i>	1
	<u>Charadriidae</u>	
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	1
	<u>Scolopacidae</u>	
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	1
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	1
	<u>Laridae</u>	
Silver Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus novaehollandiae</i>	1
Greater Crested Tern	<i>Thalasseus bergii</i>	1
	COLUMBIFORMES	
	<u>Columbidae</u>	
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	1
Common Bronzewing	<i>Phaps chalcoptera</i>	1
Brush Bronzewing	<i>Phaps elegans</i>	1
	CUCULIFORMES	
	<u>Cuculidae</u>	
Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo	<i>Chrysococcyx basalis</i>	1
Fan-tailed Cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis flabelliformis</i>	1
	CAPRIMULGIFORMES	
	<u>Caprimulgidae</u>	
Spotted Nightjar	<i>Eurostopodus argus</i>	H
	APODIFORMES	
	<u>Aegothelidae</u>	
Australian Owlet-nightjar	<i>Aegotheles cristatus</i>	1
	CORACIIFORMES	
	<u>Alcedinidae</u>	
Laughing Kookaburra	<i>Dacelo novaeguineae</i>	1
Sacred Kingfisher	<i>Todiramphus sanctus</i>	1
	<u>Meropidae</u>	
Rainbow Bee-eater	<i>Merops ornatus</i>	1
	FALCONIFORMES	
	<u>Falconidae</u>	
Nankeen Kestrel	<i>Falco cenchroides</i>	1
Brown Falcon	<i>Falco berigora</i>	1
	PSITTACIFORMES	
	<u>Cacatuidae</u>	
Red-tailed Black Cockatoo	<i>Calyptorhynchus banksii</i>	1

Carnaby's Black Cockatoo (E) - EN	<i>Calyptorhynchus latirostris</i>	1
Baudin's Black Cockatoo (E) - EN	<i>Calyptorhynchus baudinii</i>	1
Galah	<i>Eolophus roseicapilla</i>	1
Long-billed Corella	<i>Cacatua tenuirostris</i>	1
Western Corella (E)	<i>Cacatua pastinator</i>	1
Little Corella	<i>Cacatua sanguinea</i>	1
	<u>Psittaculidae</u>	
Rainbow Lorikeet	<i>Trichoglossus moluccanus</i>	1
Purple-crowned Lorikeet	<i>Parvipsitta porphyrocephala</i>	1
Red-capped Parrot (E)	<i>Purpureicephalus spurius</i>	1
Australian Ringneck	<i>Barnardius zonarius</i>	1
Western Rosella (E)	<i>Platycercus icterotis</i>	1
Elegant Parrot	<i>Neophema elegans</i>	1
Regent Parrot	<i>Polytelis anthopeplus</i>	1
	PASSERIFORMES	
	<u>Atrichornithidae</u>	
Noisy Scrubbird (E) - EN	<i>Atrichornis clamosus</i>	1
	<u>Climacteridae</u>	
Rufous Treecreeper	<i>Climacteris rufus</i>	1
	<u>Maluridae</u>	
Blue-breasted Fairywren	<i>Malurus pulcherrimus</i>	1
Red-winged Fairywren (E)	<i>Malurus elegans</i>	1
Splendid Fairywren	<i>Malurus splendens</i>	1
Southern Emu-wren	<i>Stipiturus malachurus</i>	1
	<u>Meliphagidae</u>	
Yellow-throated Miner	<i>Manorina flavigula</i>	1
Singing Honeyeater	<i>Gavicalis virescens</i>	1
White-eared Honeyeater	<i>Nesoptilotis leucotis</i>	1
Yellow-plumed Honeyeater	<i>Ptilotula ornata</i>	1
White-plumed Honeyeater	<i>Ptilotula penicillata</i>	1
Gilbert's Honeyeater (E)	<i>Melithreptus chloropsis</i>	1
Western Wattlebird (E)	<i>Anthochaera lunulata</i>	1
Red Wattlebird	<i>Anthochaera carunculata</i>	1
Brown Honeyeater	<i>Lichmera indistincta</i>	1
New Holland Honeyeater	<i>Phylidonyris novaehollandiae</i>	1
White-cheeked Honeyeater	<i>Phylidonyris niger</i>	1
Tawny-crowned Honeyeater	<i>Gliciphila melanops</i>	1
Western Spinebill (E)	<i>Acanthorhynchus superciliosus</i>	1
	<u>Dasyornithidae</u>	
Western Bristlebird (E) - EN	<i>Dasyornis longirostris</i>	H
	<u>Pardalotidae</u>	
Spotted Pardalote	<i>Pardalotus punctatus</i>	1

Striated Pardalote	<i>Pardalotus striatus</i>	1
	<u>Acanthizidae</u>	
Shy Heathwren	<i>Calamanthus cautus</i>	1
Western Fieldwren (E)	<i>Calamanthus montanellus</i>	1
White-browed Scrubwren	<i>Sericornis frontalis</i>	1
Weebill	<i>Smicrornis brevirostris</i>	1
Western Gerygone	<i>Gerygone fusca</i>	1
Inland Thornbill	<i>Acanthiza apicalis</i>	1
Yellow-rumped Thornbill	<i>Acanthiza chrysorrhoa</i>	1
Western Thornbill (E)	<i>Acanthiza inornata</i>	1
	<u>Pomatostomidae</u>	
White-browed Babbler	<i>Pomatostomus superciliosus</i>	1
	<u>Psophodidae</u>	
Western Whipbird (E)	<i>Psophodes nigrogularis</i>	1
	<u>Artamidae</u>	
Grey Butcherbird	<i>Cracticus torquatus</i>	1
Pied Butcherbird	<i>Cracticus nigrogularis</i>	1
Australian Magpie	<i>Gymnorhina tibicen</i>	1
Grey Currawong	<i>Strepera versicolor</i>	1
Black-faced Woodswallow	<i>Artamus cinereus</i>	1
Dusky Woodswallow	<i>Artamus cyanopterus</i>	1
	<u>Campephagidae</u>	
Black-faced Cuckooshrike	<i>Coracina novaehollandiae</i>	1
White-winged Triller	<i>Lalage tricolor</i>	1
	<u>Neosittidae</u>	
Varied Sittella	<i>Daphoenositta chrysoptera</i>	1
	<u>Pachycephalidae</u>	
Mangrove Golden Whistler	<i>Pachycephala melanura</i>	1
Grey Shrikethrush	<i>Colluricincla harmonica</i>	1
	<u>Rhipiduridae</u>	
Willie Wagtail	<i>Rhipidura leucophrys</i>	1
Grey Fantail	<i>Rhipidura albiscapa</i>	1
	<u>Monarchidae</u>	
Magpie-lark	<i>Grallina cyanoleuca</i>	1
Restless Flycatcher	<i>Myiagra inquieta</i>	1
	<u>Corvidae</u>	
Australian Raven	<i>Corvus coronoides</i>	1
	<u>Petroicidae</u>	
Western Yellow Robin	<i>Eopsaltria griseogularis</i>	1
White-breasted Robin (E)	<i>Eopsaltria georgiana</i>	1
Jacky Winter	<i>Microeca fascinans</i>	1
Red-capped Robin	<i>Petroica goodenovii</i>	1

	<u>Hirundinidae</u>	
Welcome Swallow	<i>Hirundo neoxena</i>	1
Fairy Martin	<i>Petrochelidon ariel</i>	1
Tree Martin	<i>Petrochelidon nigricans</i>	1
	<u>Zosteropidae</u>	
Silvereye	<i>Zosterops lateralis</i>	1
	<u>Estrildidae</u>	
Red-eared Firetail (E)	<i>Stagonopleura oculata</i>	1
	<u>Motacillidae</u>	
Australian Pipit	<i>Anthus australis</i>	1
TOTAL		124