

Guide to finding Birds around Darwin, NT

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We're fortunate enough here in Darwin to have so many amazing places to see wildlife, most within 100 kms of the city, here are just a few.



(Photo left to right - Azure Kingfisher, Leaden Flycatcher (Female), Black-tailed Tree-creeper, Emerald Dove)

DARWIN'S WEATHER

Darwin has a tropical savannah climate with distinct wet and dry seasons and the average maximum temperature is remarkably similar all year round. The dry season runs from about May to September, during which nearly every day is warm and sunny, and afternoon humidity averages around 30%.

There is very little rainfall between May and September. In the coolest months of June and July, the daily minimum temperature may dip as low as 14 °C (57 °F), but very rarely lower.

The wet season is associated with tropical cyclones and monsoon rains. The majority of rainfall occurs between December and March, when thunderstorms are common and afternoon relative humidity averages over 70 percent during the wettest months. It does not rain every day during the wet season, but most days are warm to hot with plentiful cloud cover. Darwin's highest Bureau of Meteorology verified daily rainfall total is 367.6 millimetres (14.47 in), which fell in the Darwin area on 16 February 2011. February 2011 was also Darwin's wettest month ever recorded, with 1,110.2 millimetres (43.71 in) recorded for the month at the airport.

BEST TIME OF YEAR TO SEE BIRDS

By far the best time of year in Darwin to see a lot of birds is between July - November when water is scarce and the birds are reliant on the small watering holes that are remaining. Between September and November is good because most of the birds in the area are breeding which make them easier to locate and photograph, but be warned as it can be VERY humid towards November which we call the build up.

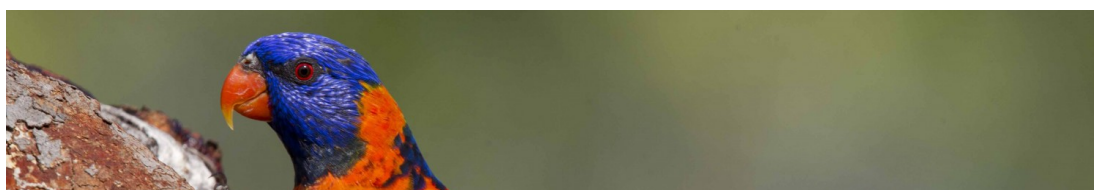


GEORGE BROWN BOTANIC GARDENS - (Photo above - Orange-footed Scrubfowl)

[GPS -12.445345, 130.835863](#)

This is by far your best chance to see Rufous Owl, this massive and very impressive species of owl can sometime be found in the Rainforest walk at the back of the Botanic Gardens. Look in the darkest part of the forest usually between 4 – 10 m off the ground, I usually find him here (**[-12.444154,130.838529](#)**).

Also check around the water feature near the car park for Barking Owl, which can sometimes be found roosting in the trees near by.



DARWIN CITY ESPLANADE - (Photo above - Red-collared Lorikeet)

[GPS -12.466435, 130.841419](#)

The highlight here is a family of Barking Owls, which can usually be found roosting in the trees near the top of the stairs that leads down to the Deckchair Cinema. Look in the dense part of the forest on the right or directly above the stairs



STODDART DRIVE / TIGER BRENNAN MANGROVES - (Photo above - Rainbow Bee-eater)

[GPS -12.439734, 130.852272](#)

There's a concrete path that follows the mangroves on a rock wall, this is a great spot to find Chestnut Rail especially in the little outlets next to the path that run into the mangroves (**[-12.440791, 130.854471](#)**) . Also keep your eye out for Mangrove Robin here as they are seen occasionally.

In the late afternoons you will also see hundreds of Pied Imperial Pigeons flying over your head towards Dinah Beach Boat ramp, this is where they roost every night.



CHARLES DARWIN NATIONAL PARK - (Photo above - Red-headed Honeyeater)

[GPS -12.443327, 130.877420](#)

Charles Darwin National Park is the most accessible National Park to Darwin city being only a 10-minute drive. Its a great place to see a lot of species including Northern Rosella, Varied Lorikeets, Little Friarbirds, Fig Birds, Red-collared Lorikeets, Varied Trillers, Forest Kingfishers and a heap more.

The National Park borders some great mangrove habitat and all of the mangrove species can be seen here, this is also the best spot to see Mangrove Robin in Darwin. Sit at this spot quietly and they should turn up **[-12.449305, 130.876363](#)** just make sure you cover up and wear a LOT of insect repellent as the Midges here are insane!



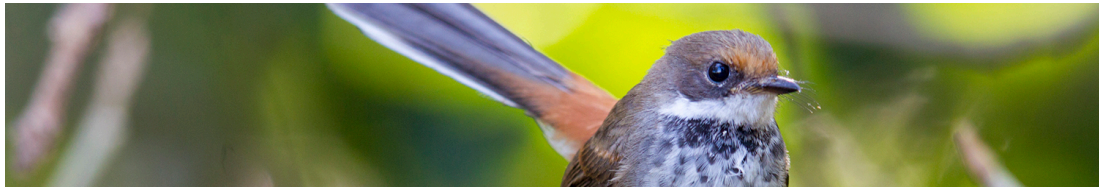
EAST POINT MANGROVE BOARDWALK - (Photo above - Reef Egret)

[GPS -12.412115, 130.830439](#)

The track out to the mangrove boardwalk is great for Lemon-bellied Flycatcher, Brown Goshawk, Double-barred & Crimson Finches, Yellow Orioles and Australasian Figbirds. Once you get close to the mangroves keep an eye out for Black Butcherbird, Reef Egret, Mangrove Grey-gone, Mangrove Grey Fantail, Mangrove Golden Whistler and if you're really lucky then maybe a Mangrove Robin or White-breasted Whistler.

On the Boardwalk itself you have a chance for Collared Kingfisher, Black Butcherbird and both Mangrove Golden Whistler and Mangrove Robin.

The rocks at the end of East Point are worth a look for Shorebirds and Waders, also check the beaches on the drive out for Beach-stone Curlew which I have seen on a few occasions.



EAST POINT MONSOON FOREST WALK - (Photo above - Rufous Fantail)

[GPS -12.411626, 130.823947](#)

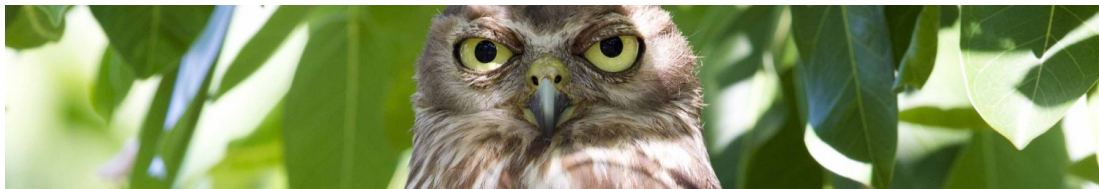
This beautiful track winds in and out of the Monsoon thickets making it great for all sorts of species, keep your eyes peeled for Grey Whistler, Rufous & Northern Fantail, Emerald Dove, Rainbow Bee-eater. This is also one of the best areas to see Rainbow Pitta and Rose-crowned Fruit Dove, listen for their calls early in the morning to help you locate them. I have also seen Rufous Owl here once.



MANGROVES AT THE END OF OSTERMANN ST, NIGHTCLIFF - (Photo above - Yellow White-eye)

[GPS -12.394155, 130.848508](#)

Park at the end of the street and walk out towards the Mangroves, if you turn to your left you can follow a small track along the beach which then veers off into the mangroves and comes right out into Harbour mud flats. This whole area is great for all the mangrove species including Red-headed Honeyeater, Black Butcherbird, Mangrove Grey-gone, Yellow White-eye, Mangrove Golden Whistler, Mangrove Robin, Striated Herons, Osprey and Brahminy Kites.



NIGHTCLIFF FORESHORE - (Photo above - Barking Owl)

[GPS -12.376151, 130.857042](#)

This beautiful esplanade is a great place to visit early in the morning or late afternoon especially the area opposite the Beach Front Hotel and 200m to the west of here, this is a great spot for seeing Grey-crowned Babbler, Rainbow Lorikeets, Blue-faced Honeyeaters, Olive-backed Orioles, Australasian Figbirds and if you're lucky you might discover a family of Barking owls or Tawny Frogmouths which often roost here.

Also Check the end of Aralia Street on a high tide, this is a great spot to see lots of different shore birds (**[GPS -12.3817547,130.8411169](#)**) especially around September - November.



CASUARINA COASTAL RESERVE - (Photo above - Long-tailed Finch)

[GPS -12.354507, 130.872434](#)

Park at the end of Daribah Road in the car park, from here walk right along the coast.

This area is great for Brahminy Kite, Pacific Baza, Long-tailed Finch, Chestnut-breasted Mannikin, Double-barred Finch, Crimson Finch and Dollarbird in the wet season. There is a mangrove boardwalk about 1 km down which leads to the hospital which is a great area for Little Kingfisher, I have even found a nest here.

If you follow the track along the beach a little further it leads you to Sandy Creek **[GPS -12.340225, 130.884520](#)**, on a big spring tide this is a fantastic place to see waders especially between October - December when the migrants start turning up. Look for Eastern Curlew, Greater & Lesser Sandpipers, Common Sandpipers, Black-tailed Godwit, Gray-tailed Tattler, Common Greenshank, Whimbrel, Great Knot, Crested & Gull-billed Terns, Ruddy Turnstone and Pacific Golden Plover.



RAPID CREEK FOOT BRIDGE - (Photo above - Tawny Frogmouth)

[GPS -12.376460, 130.860840](#)

The southern side of the Rapid Creek Foot Bridge is a fantastic place to look for Tawny Frogmouths, which usually roost in the area, check the Casuarina trees around the car park.

The North side of the footbridge in the Casuarina Coastal reserve is a great place to look for Chestnut-breasted Mannikins, Double-barred Finch, Rainbow Bee-eater and maybe even a Yellow Wag-tail. Look near the mangroves for Mangrove Grey-gone, Black Butcherbird, Red-headed Honeyeater and White-gaped Honeyeaters.

At the end of the dry season when the first rains come check the large grass clearing **[GPS -12.374299, 130.860977](#)** North of the shelter for Black-eared, Oriental, Little-bronze and Horsfields Bronze Cuckoos which feed on the caterpillars that are in the green vegetation and yellow flowers that pop up after rain.

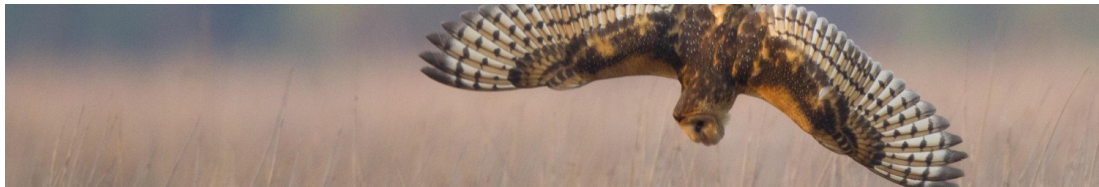


BUFFALO CREEK - (Photo above - Chestnut Rail)

[GPS -12.337740, 130.908090](#)

This is one of the best places to see the Chestnut Rail, if you're patient they walk out into the open mud flats opposite the boat ramp, usually on an outgoing high tide. There is a small track to the right of the boat ramp that winds through the mangroves. This is another great place to see all the mangrove species and up to five species of Kingfishers including, Little, Azure, Forest, Sacred and Collared which I have all seen there.

The sand spit to the left is a great place for all your local shorebirds especially on a big spring tide.



HOLMES JUNGLE NATURE PARK - (Photo above - Eastern Grass Owl)

[GPS -12.396620, 130.934506](#)

There's a really nice drive that takes you down onto some beautiful grasslands which are great for Chestnut-breasted Mannikin, Zitting & Golden-headed Cisticola, Brolga, Australian Pratincole and Red-backed Fairy-wren. Also keep an eye out for Yellow-rumped Mannikin which I have seen here with the large groups of Chestnut-breasted Mannikins.

Towards the end of the dry season look in the long grass out the back of the floodplains for Eastern Grass Owl which can sometimes be found hunting for mice early in the morning.

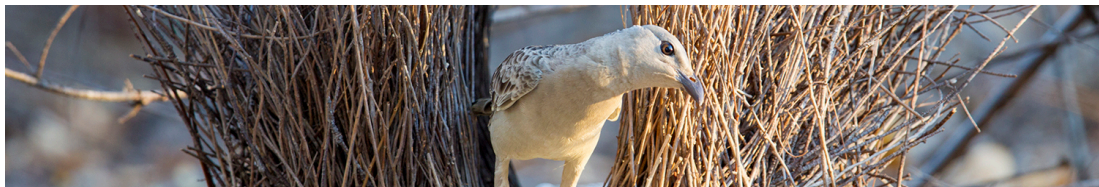
The Monsoon Rain-forest walk is worth a look too for Rose-crowned Fruit-dove, Rainbow Pitta and maybe even a Rufous Owl.



KNUCKEY LAGOONS - (Photo above - Eastern Yellow Wagtail)

Flinders Lane - [GPS -12.428265, 130.946719](#) / Randall Road - [GPS -12.426423, 130.937099](#)

Knuckey Lagoon Conservation reserve is a very important reserve for wildlife in amongst an urban setting. The area protects some important Billabongs used by an array of native wildlife, the best time of year to visit is between September - November when the Billabongs have shrunk to small pools and attract lots of hungry birds looking for a easy meal. Look for Red-kneed Dotterel, Black-fronted Dotterel, Australian Pratincole, White-necked Heron, Wood Sandpipers, Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, Marsh Sandpipers and White-browed Crake. This is also the most reliable place to see the Eastern Yellow Wagtail a very cool energetic little bird.



CHANNEL ISLAND - (Photo above - Great Bowerbird at Bower)

[GPS -12.554035, 130.869977](#)

Before getting to the island, keep an eye out from the Channel Island Bridge for Great-billed Heron, Black-necked Stork and Osprey. Once you are on the island, the car park at the end has a resident Great Bowerbird that has a fantastic bower, which is very photogenic. GPS [-12.557345, 130.863636](#)

Another great spot to explore starts just before the turn off to the boat ramp near the entrance to the Aquaculture Center, park your car here and walk around the gates. The sign states "Restricted Entry" so enter at your own risk but you can tell it's a well-used track. The old track takes you through some beautiful Monsoon forest and Mangrove systems; you could see anything here including Rainbow Pitta, Rose-crowned Fruit Dove, Red-headed Honeyeaters, Lemon-bellied Flycatcher and most of the Mangrove species. I have also seen Grey Goshawk here on a couple of occasions.



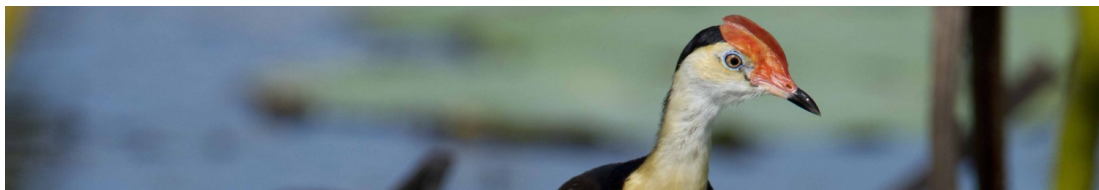
HOWARD SPRINGS NATURE RESERVE - (Photo above - Azure Kingfisher)

[GPS -12.456439, 131.051633](#)

This small park about 30 minutes from Darwin's CBD is a fantastic place for a walk any time of the day, make sure you take a small bag of Pilchards to feed the hungry giant Barramundi in the big pool and look out for the resident Merten's Water Monitor which can usually be found sunning himself on the lawn.

The Monsoon Rain-forest walk is also the best place to see the beautiful Rainbow Pitta, if you listen carefully you should hear them softly jumping around disturbing the dead leaf litter especially on the last 500 m of the track. Other birds to keep an eye out for are Rose-crowned Fruit Dove, Emerald Dove, Little-shrike Thrush, Brush Cuckoo, Spangled Drongo, Shinning Flycatcher, Rainbow Bee-eater and also check the creeks for both Little & Azure Kingfishers.

Make sure you take insect repellent, as the mosquitoes here are vicious.



FOGG DAM CONSERVATION RESERVE - (Photo above - Comb-crested Jakana)

[GPS -12.563892, 131.304187](#)

This is one of Darwin's most famous wildlife watching spots, depending on the time of year you can see thousands of water birds here including Black-necked Stork, Comb Crested Jakana, Magpie Goose, Plumed Whistling Duck, Radjah Shelduck, Green Pygmy Goose, Pacific Black Duck, Australasian Grebe, Australasian Darter, Little Pied Cormorant, Australia Pelican, Great Egret, Striated Heron, Pied Heron, Little Egret, Nankeen Night Heron, Intermediate Egret, Australian White Ibis, Straw-necked Ibis, Royal Spoonbill, White-bellied Sea-Eagle, Purple Swamphen, Buff Banded Rail, White-browed Crake, Spotless Crake and Eurasian Coot.

There are two walks here and both are great for birding but the track on the right starting near the toilets is my favourite and is the best place to see Little and Azure Kingfishers who breed in the area. It is also great for Rainbow Pitta & Rose-crowned Fruit Dove and a number of other species.

From the Dam wall you could also see Crimson Finch, Zitting Cisticola, Restless, Broad-billed, Leaden & Shinning Flycatchers, Willie Wagtails, Northern Fantail, Cicadabird also Little, Azure, Sacred and Forest Kingfishers.

Fogg Dam is also a fantastic place to go spotlighting at night usually producing Southern Boobook, Barking Owls, Tawny Frogmouths, Spotted & Large-tailed Nightjars, Nankeen Night Heron. On the road into Fogg Dam you can often find Eastern Barn Owl on the power lines above the fields looking for dinner. It is also great for reptiles, Water Pythons being the most common also Long-necked Turtle and any number of frog species. I find no moon in the wet season the best!



ADELAIDE RIVER BRIDGE - (Photo above - Zitting Cisticola)

[GPS -12.659476, 131.336348](#)

The Adelaide River crossing is 32 km along the Arnhem Highway toward Kakadu. This sight is one of the best places to see Mangrove Golden Whistler especially on the East side of the bridge where there is a small track about 100m past the bridge on the LHS that leads you back towards the water, this sight is also great for Arafura Fantail. Also check on the West side of the bridge around the Jumping Crocodile Cruise entry, you can also walk under the bridge and explore the patches of Bamboo that run along the river to the North.



MARRAKAI TRACK - (Photo above - Red-headed Gouldian Finch)

[GPS -12.746068, 131.479106](#)

Marrakai Track is a dirt road that links both Arnhem and Stuart Highways, the road is in reasonable condition in the dry season but impassable in the wet. Towards the end of the dry season you could access with a 2wd as long as you take it slowly.

The birding right along the road is fantastic, especially in the dry season just after there has been a fire in the area and when there isn't much water around. I usually find the 10 km - 13 km mark to be the most productive, but also check around

the 30 km mark as this can be fantastic also. Both these areas are great for the famous Gouldian Finch. Other species I have seen here include Masked, Little, White-browed and White-breasted Woodswallows, Black-faced & White-bellied Cuckoo-shrikes, Rufous Songlark, Varied & White-winged Trillers, Little Bronze-Cuckoo, Brush Cuckoo, Black-tailed Tree-creepers, Varied Sittella, Bar-breasted, Dusky, Banded, Brown and White-chinned Honeyeaters, Long-tailed, Masked and Double-barred Finches, Diamond and Peaceful Doves also Red-winged Parrots and on occasion massive family groups of Red-tailed Black Cockatoos.

The area around the 10 km mark (**GPS -12.817044, 131.422959**) just before the road leads you up onto a high point on the ridge is a fantastic place to stop and look around for Chestnut-backed Button Quail which I have seen here on a couple of occasions. Getting a photo is another story!

The Margaret River crossing is worth while (**-12.917175, 131.274390**), I find this the best place to see Buff-sided Robin which can regularly be found within 100m of the crossing usually on the Southern side. Also look for Nankeen Night-heron, Rufous & Northern Fantail, Rufous & Grey Whistler also Leaden & Shining Flycatchers which should be easily found here.

The flood plains west of the Adelaide River crossing are great for White-bellied Sea Eagle, Black-breasted Buzzard, Black-winged Kite, Nankeen Kestrel and also Square-tailed Kite if you're lucky. The Billabong 500 m west of the crossing is worth looking around for Brolgas on the floodplains and other waterbirds in the Billabong itself. Sadly the White-bellied Sea Eagle's nest which was next to the Billabong fell down this year (2015), hopefully they rebuild it.

The whole of the Marrakai track is worth keeping an eye out for Wedge-tailed Eagle & Black-breasted Buzzards which feed on the road-kill wallabies. Also keep your eye peeled for Little Eagle which I have seen here before.



CORROBOREE BILLABONG - (Photo above - Hardhead)

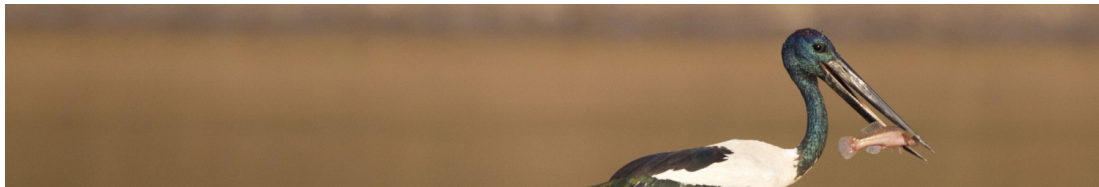
GPS -12.706101, 131.635503

Corroboree Billabong is an extensive Billabong system located about an hour and a half East of Darwin on the Arnhem Highway, you will need a boat to get out onto the water so if you don't own one then there are plenty of options when it comes to hiring one, just google Corroboree Billabong boat hire to find one that suits your budget.

The Billabong is an amazing place to see all sorts of waterbirds including, White-bellied Sea-Eagles, Black-necked Storks, Brolga, Wandering & Plumbed Whistling

Ducks, Hardhead, Radjah Shelduck, Australasian Grebe, Australasian Darter, Black Bittern, Striated Heron, Nankeen Night Heron, Glossy, Australian and Straw-necked Ibis, Royal Spoonbills, Comb-crested Jakana, Australian Pratincole, Little Pied, Little Black and Pied Cormorants, Azure & Little Kingfishers and at some times of year thousands of Magpie Geese.

Corroboree is also a fantastic place to see both Salt and Freshwater Crocodiles, the area has the highest concentration of saltwater crocodiles anywhere in the world so you shouldn't have trouble finding them.



MARY RIVER NATIONAL PARK - (Photo above - Black-necked Stork)

[GPS -12.903110, 131.624933](#)

There's a few spots to explore in this beautiful park the first being the gravel pits which are located around 72km east along the Arnhem Highway, there is a small water hole on the RHS just off the highway. This can be a fantastic spot to sit quietly early in the morning but only at the end of the dry season when there is not much water around, this watering hole might even produce a Gouldian Finch. Also check the small banks next to the road for nesting Striated Pardalote.

The next spot is the road that leads to Bird Billabong, turn off the Arnhem Highway at about the 75 km mark, this is sign posted. The gravel road takes you towards Bird Billabong (**[-12.876240, 131.633951](#)**) it's a great spot for Black-tailed Tree-creeper, Varied Sittella, Masked, White-browed, Little & White-bellied Woodswallows, Gouldian, Double Barred, Crimson, Long-tailed & Masked Finches also Red-winged Parrots and Northern Rosella's.

Bird Billabong itself is a fantastic walk, especially at the end of the dry season when the water in the Billabong is really low and there are usually a lot of water birds around feeding. You might even find a Black-necked Stork fishing for a catfish.

Mary River Wilderness Retreat is a great place to stay (**[-12.906136, 131.647763](#)**), go spotlighting for Barking and Rufous Owl and also keep your eyes peeled for Great Billed Heron along the river in the morning. If you want to get out onto the river you can hire a Boat from the Lodge for around \$120.00 for 4 hours, this will allow you to explore this beautiful river system and have a better chance at seeing birds like the Great-billed Heron and maybe even a White-morph Grey Goshawk.