



Southern Birding Services

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Highlights of South Australia

9 – 15 December 2006 Tour report

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Introduction

South Australia is a relatively un-explored state from a birding perspective. Habitats range from the dry red interior to the lush and green Mt Lofty Ranges; wetlands and mangroves; estuaries and floodplains; vast expanses of semi-arid mallee scrub, and outback deserts with spectacular mountain ranges. Some unique bird species including a small number of endemics can be found here. This small group birding tour took in a variety of habitats thereby maximizing the species list – a total of 191 species were seen including some highly sought-after species. The tour started on 9 December in Adelaide and finished there on the 15th. Places visited included the Adelaide Hills and woodlands, River Murray, Birds Australia's Gluepot Reserve, the Flinders Ranges, the Strzelecki outback desert and coastal areas.

Daily account

Day 1: The tour started in the early evening of 9 December with a visit to the St Kilda saltfields near Adelaide. The small group (4 people), some fresh off the plane, were enthralled by the sight of over 3,000 Banded Stilts, a nomadic species that breeds in inland desert lakes that only flood once every few years. A Marsh Harrier caused most of the stilts to temporarily fly up, an amazing sight in the light of the setting sun against the backdrop of the Adelaide city and hills. Among hundreds of over-wintering Sharp-tailed Sandpipers at least three Curlew Sandpipers were found. Other wader species present included Red-necked Stint, the resident Red-capped Plover, Greenshank and Marsh Sandpiper. A small creek between mangroves contained an Australian Spotted Crake and several Black-tailed Native-hens, while in the trees above the creek, Royal Spoonbills were preparing to roost. After this good start and a welcome drink and meal, people retired for an early evening as the next few days would be pretty busy!

Day 2: The morning of 10 December we visited the coastline north of Adelaide, combining shorebird roosting sites with birds of coastal dunes and samphire marshes. The target here was the local *rosinae* race of Slender-billed Thornbill which we had no trouble obtaining good scope views of. In the same area we located a small flock of Elegant Parrots with at least one Blue-winged Parrot. An approaching weather change brought in some Fork-tailed Swifts and White-breasted Woodswallows, flying high over fields and tidal mudflats. Once the tide began to inundate these shallow mudflats, species such as Pacific

Golden Plover, Grey Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit, Red-necked Avocet, and good numbers of Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, Red-necked Stint and Red-capped Plover started congregating. We then headed inland and visited the Adelaide Hills. While most of South Australia's landscapes are arid, the Adelaide Hills are an exception. Tall, dense eucalypt forests provide habitat for many species otherwise only found in Australia's eastern states. A walk around the summit at Mt Lofty produced Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo, plenty of Adelaide Rosellas (often regarded as the *adelaideae* subspecies of Crimson Rosella), and a good introduction to the rich variety of Honeyeater species in the state, with Eastern Spinebill, Yellow-faced, White-naped and Crescent Honeyeater. A very obliging White-throated Treecreeper gave good views as did a beautiful male Golden Whistler. A Southern Brown Bandicoot was seen scurrying through the undergrowth, and to top it off, in the trees near the summit we found no less than three Koalas!

After lunch, a scenic drive through the hills lead us to a small wetland where a Baillon's Crake performed on cue, and we added New Holland and White-plumed to the Honeyeater list. Little Grassbirds and Australian Reed-warblers were singing in the fringing reeds and on the water was a varied assemblage of ducks with Australasian Shoveler, Hardhead, Pacific Black Duck, Pink-eared Duck, Musk Duck, Australian Wood Duck, Australian Shelduck, Grey Teal and Chestnut Teal all present. In the trees surrounding the water colourful Rainbow and Musk Lorikeets were present and amongst these a Long-billed Corella was found. We moved on to Australia's largest river, the Murray. Here we were treated to excellent views of Baillon's Crake while Australian Spotted Crake was also present. The target species, Freckled Duck, took some finding but eventually 8 Freckled Ducks were found roosting on a bank providing good scope views while a few Musk Ducks were foraging on the water nearby. Both Black-fronted and Red-kneed Dotterels were present, as were good numbers of Black-tailed Native-hen; Whiskered Terns were foraging above the wetlands, flying over White-faced Herons, Great and Little Egrets. In the shrubbery a Horsfield's Bronze-cuckoo allowed close views of its plumage, showing its copper-green shine in the sunlight. We subsequently travelled inland, following the Murray river, and started seeing Yellow Rosellas (often regarded as the *flaveolus* subspecies of Crimson Rosella; this resulted in some lively debate about splitting and lumping) and a party of White-winged Choughs on the roadside. The weather change that had announced itself in the morning finally eventuated and over the open plains spectacular cloud formations provided a lightning show with some heavy downpours. Later in the afternoon, near Waikerie, we visited an active Malleefowl mound and had great views of two birds coming in to feed. An added fact of interest was that the mound had been filmed by the BBC for David Attenborough's series 'The Life of Birds'. We spent the night in Waikerie, gateway to Gluepot Reserve.

Day 3: The next morning, 11 December, was an early departure with the aim of arriving at Birds Australia's Gluepot reserve, home of the critically endangered Black-eared Miner, around sunrise. We drove through an area ravaged by recent bushfires but the reserve had fortunately mostly escaped these. Gluepot reserve contains centuries-old mallee eucalypts and sand dunes covered in spinifex grass, and we had no trouble finding highly specialized species such as Gilbert's Whistler, Hooded Robin, Chestnut Quail-thrush, Southern Scrubrobin, Shy Heathwren and White-browed Treecreeper. Over the burnt areas, no less than 15 Major Mitchell Cockatoos were seen flying. Red-lored Whistler was more of a problem as its usual stakeout had been burnt out but after much effort we eventually caught up with one. We found a flock of at least 20 miners, which we spent much time looking at. Many of the birds

fitted the criteria for Black-eared Miner, though many hybrids (with Yellow-throated Miner) were also present. Another lively debate about splitting and lumping ensued! After a brief search through the spiky spinifex grass we had excellent views of several Striated Grasswrens, one of which came to within a few meters of the observers while putting on the 'injured mouse' display in response to pishing. Another good sighting was that of a very obliging Black-eared Cuckoo, an arid area specialist, while parties of Chestnut-crowned and White-fronted Babblers ran around in the undergrowth. After hearing the ever-repeated call of the Crested Bellbird on many occasions we finally had good views of a male. On the old airstrip, where the flowering eremophilas had attracted numerous White-fronted Honeyeaters, brilliantly blue Splendid Fairy-wrens and blue-and-red Variegated Fairy-wrens were playing hide-and-seek in thorny *Acacia* bushes. On the way back, flocks of Masked Woodswallows were seen foraging over the burnt areas, while a few White-breasted Woodswallows were perched on wires.

Day 4: After a more civilized departure time the morning of 12 December we visited a Regent Parrot colony. Here at least 50 of the eastern race *monarchoides* of Regent Parrot were observed. We then set off on the way to the Flinders Ranges, a four hour drive. In a drying wetland near the Murray river many dead Carp, a pest fish species, provided a feast for twenty or more Whistling Kites. More Yellow Rosellas and Regent Parrots were seen. A stop in the open bluebush plains yielded a nice male Redthroat. Finally the scenery started to change as we approached the Flinders Ranges, an impressive range of steep hills and soaring rock formations on the edge of Australia's outback. We arrived at Wilpena Pound Resort early in the evening and after dinner a bit of spotlighting produced an obliging Tawny Frogmouth.

Day 5: The next day, 13 December, was spent exploring the rugged terrain of the Flinders Ranges. Early on, rocky outcrops with scrubby vegetation produced Southern Scrubrobin, Inland Thornbill and a nice perched Brown Falcon. Once the sun started to warm things up a little, we headed to the spinifex-grass covered rolling hills that are home to the endemic Short-tailed Grasswrens. We had no trouble locating this often elusive species and after an hour had found no less than 8, some of which provided great views. Kangaroos were common, with three species present: Euro (Wallaroo), Red Kangaroo and Western Grey Kangaroo. Mid-morning we proceeded along creekbeds and through narrow gorges cut deeply into geological layers that date back 800 million years. Here we found a small colony of the endangered Yellow-footed Rock Wallaby. A Grey-headed Honeyeater was heard calling. Along the way we visited the fossil site of the Ediacaran fauna, which lived a little before the great explosion of multicellular life at the beginning of the Cambrian Period. In the evening we arrived at the outback hamlet of Lyndhurst Hotel, where we made an overnight stay in a typical outback pub.

Day 6: Lyndhurst is famous for the Chestnut-breasted Whiteface. On 14 December we departed around sunrise to visit Mt Lyndhurst Station. We searched the low hills for this species of which we located no less than 10 after about half an hour's search. Unfortunately the flock disappeared before all group members could have a decent view. Other birds found in this area included Thick-billed Grasswren, Rufous Fieldwren, the appropriately named Cinnamon Quail-thrush, Chirruping Wedgebill and the common yet brilliantly coloured White-winged Fairy-wren, of which the male is bright azure blue with white wings. The endless open stony plains of the Strzelecki desert are traversed by mostly dry watercourses. We spent most of the day following the Strzelecki Track across the desert, finding good species: Emus, a bright red male Crimson Chat, 6 Orange Chats, 3 Gibber (Desert) Chats, a Red-backed

Kingfisher, Australian Pipits, a male Pied Honeyeater, and a few majestic Wedge-tailed Eagles. After a few hours we reached a bore overflow which creates a small oasis in the middle of hot, dry, bright white dune fields, and flocks of Zebra Finches gathered here as well as hundreds of very noisy Little Corellas, many of which were sheltering from the heat in the shade of small bushes or even rabbit holes. The numerous sand dunes here were each capped with low, scrubby vegetation. A few White-backed Swallows were flying around. Even an Australian Spotted Crake was present, an amazing thought, here at this small water hole in the middle of the desert. We had lunch by the water and then set off to search for the target of this area: Eyrean Grasswren. The car's thermometer read 41 °C (106 °F) and this heat was not only coming from the sun, but also reflecting off the bright white sand. This made for quite harsh searching conditions and we made a habit of returning to the air-conditioned vehicle for five minutes or so each half hour. After doing this twice we eventually caught up with a nice male Eyrean Grasswren running between two dunes and then standing still at the base of one. Four grasswrens in four days! We returned to Lyndhurst after dark, and the beer and schnitzels that night tasted very well!

Day 7: The Inland Dotterel is a nocturnal species that becomes active around sunset and goes back to roost around sunrise. So early the next morning, 15 December, we visited a disused airfield where after some searching one male Inland Dotterel provided good scope views. We then returned to the site where we had seen Chestnut-breasted Whiteface the previous day, in an attempt to give all group members a chance to properly see this species. Sure enough, after a half hour or so we found a small flock of about 6 quite cooperative birds allowing everyone good scope views. Cinnamon Quail-thrushes were also present again and soon afterwards we returned to Lyndhurst to commence the journey south.

Through the Gammon Ranges, reminiscent of the Flinders Ranges but with rock formations in numerous shades of red, we saw two Ground Cuckoo-shrikes and counted no less than 24 Wedge-tailed Eagles. Along the road south Black and Whisting Kites were common and a lunch break in a dry creekbed with big old Eucalyptus trees produced an obliging Little Eagle and an Elegant Parrot. At Port Augusta we visited the Australian Arid Lands Botanic Gardens where, apart from an amazing array of flowering native plants, we observed another Redthroat as well as Singing and White-fronted Honeyeaters. Road-side birds included Brown Songlark, Red-rumped Parrot, Little Crows in the north, and Little Ravens further south. We arrived in Adelaide late that evening, with tired but very satisfied group members retiring in the knowledge that they had just added a large number of high-quality ticks to their life lists!



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*Southern Birding Services specializes in bird guiding and small group birding tours in South Australia.
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Systematic List (following Clements, 2007 with use of local names in some instances)

6-day *Highlights of South Australia* Tour 10-15 December 2007

S=seen; H=heard only; B=breeding; *=introduced

#	Common Name	Scientific Name	9-Dec	10-Dec	11-Dec	12-Dec	13-Dec	14-Dec	15-Dec
1	Emu	<i>Dromaius novaehollandiae</i>					X	X	
2	Malleefowl	<i>Leipoa ocellata</i>		X					
3	Black Swan	<i>Cygnus atratus</i>	X						
4	Pink-eared Duck	<i>Malachorhynchus membranaceus</i>		X					
5	Freckled Duck	<i>Stictonetta naevosa</i>		X					
6	Australian Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadornoides</i>	X	X					
7	Pacific Black Duck	<i>Anas superciliosa</i>	X	X				X	
8	Australian Wood Duck	<i>Chenonetta jubata</i>	X	X					
9	Australasian Shoveler	<i>Anas rhynchotis</i>		X					
10	Grey Teal	<i>Anas gracilis</i>	X	X		X		X	
11	Chestnut Teal	<i>Anas castanea</i>		X					
12	Hardhead	<i>Aythya australis</i>		X					
13	Musk Duck	<i>Biziura lobata</i>	X	X					
14	Australasian Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus novaehollandiae</i>		X					
15	Hoary-headed Grebe	<i>Poliiocephalus poliocephalus</i>		X					
16	Straw-necked Ibis	<i>Threskiornis spinicollis</i>		X					
17	Australian White Ibis	<i>Threskiornis molucca</i>	X						
18	Royal Spoonbill	<i>Platalea regia</i>	X						
19	Yellow-billed Spoonbill	<i>Platalea flavipes</i>		X					
20	Pied Heron	<i>Ardea picata</i>				X			
21	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	X	X					
22	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	X	X					
23	White-faced Heron	<i>Egretta novaehollandiae</i>	X	X					X
24	Australian Pelican	<i>Pelecanus conspicillatus</i>	X			X			
25	Little Pied Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo melanoleucos</i>		X					
26	Little Black Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax sulcirostris</i>		X					
27	Australian Pied Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax varius</i>	X						X
28	Nankeen Kestrel	<i>Falco cenchroides</i>				X	X	X	X

29	Brown Falcon	Falco berigora			B		x		x
30	Peregrine Falcon	Falco peregrinus						x	
31	Black Kite	Milvus migrans				x	x	x	x
32	Whistling Kite	Haliastur sphenurus		x		x	x		x
33	Swamp Harrier	Circus approximans	x						
34	Black-shouldered Kite	Elanus axillaris				x			
35	Wedge-tailed Eagle	Aquila audax				x	x	x	x
36	Little Eagle	Hieraaetus morphnoides						x	x
37	Buff-banded Rail	Gallirallus philippensis		x					
38	Baillon's Crake	Porzana pusilla		x					
39	Australian Spotted Crake	Porzana fluminea	x	x				x	
40	Purple Swamphen	Porphyrio porphyrio		x					
41	Dusky Moorhen	Tribonyx tenebrosa		x					
42	Black-tailed Native-hen	Tribonyx ventralis	x	x					
43	Eurasian Coot	Fulica atra		x					
44	Pied Oystercatcher	Haematopus longirostris							x
45	Sooty Oystercatcher	Haematopus fuliginosus							x
46	Pied Stilt	Himantopus leucocephalus	x						
47	Banded Stilt	Cladorhynchus leucocephalus	x						
48	Red-necked Avocet	Recurvirostra novaehollandiae	x						
49	Masked Lapwing	Vanellus miles	x	x					
50	Red-kneed Dotterel	Erythronyx cinctus		x					
51	Pacific Golden Plover	Pluvialis fulva	x						
52	Grey Plover	Pluvialis squatarola	x	x					
53	Red-capped Plover	Charadrius ruficapillus	x	x				x	
54	Inland Dotterel	Charadrius australis							x
55	Black-fronted Dotterel	Elseya melanops		x		x			
56	Bar-tailed Godwit	Limosa lapponica		x					
57	Marsh Sandpiper	Tringa stagnatilis	x						
58	Common Greenshank	Tringa nebularia	x	x					
59	Red-necked Stint	Calidris ruficollis	x	x					
60	Long-toed Stint	Calidris subminuta							
61	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	Calidris acuminata	x	x					
62	Curlew Sandpiper	Calidris ferruginea	x						

163	Grey Shrikethrush	Colluricincla harmonica				X				
164	Crested Bellbird	Oreoica gutturalis				X				
165	Willie Wagtail	Rhipidura leucophrys				X				X
166	Magpie-lark	Grallina cyanoleuca		X			X			
167	Little Crow	Corvus bennetti					X		X	
168	Little Raven	Corvus mellori		X						
169	Australian Raven	Corvus coronoides		X			X		X	
170	White-winged Chough	Corcorax melanorhamphos		X		X				
171	Apostlebird	Struthidea cinerea					X			
172	Hooded Robin	Melanodryas cucullata				X				X
173	Jacky Winter	Microeca fascinans				X				
174	Red-capped Robin	Petroica goodenovii				X				
175	Southern Scrub Robin	Drymodes brunneopygia				X			X	
176	White-backed Swallow	Cheramoeca leucosternus								X
177	Welcome Swallow	Hirundo neoxena					X			X
178	Fairy Martin	Hirundo ariel					X			
179	Tree Martin	Hirundo nigricans					X		X	
180	Skylark *	Alauda arvensis	X	X						
181	Little Grassbird	Megalurus gramineus		X						
182	Brown Songlark	Cincloramphus cruralis	X	X						
183	Australian Reed Warbler	Acrocephalis australis		X			X			
184	Silvereye	Zosterops lateralis					X			
185	Common Starling *	Sturnus vulgaris					X			
186	Eurasian Blackbird *	Turdus merula		X			X			
187	House Sparrow *	Passer domesticus					X			
188	Red-browed Finch	Neochmia temporalis		X						
189	Zebra Finch	Taeniopygia guttata								X
190	Australian Pipit	Anthus australis	X				X			X
191	European Goldfinch *	Carduelis carduelis		X						
#	Common Name	Scientific Name	9-Dec	10-Dec	11-Dec	12-Dec	13-Dec	14-Dec	15-Dec	

Photos 9 – 15 December 2006 Southern Birding Services *Highlights of South Australia* tour:

1st row: Chestnut-breasted Whiteface, Gibber Chat, Chestnut Quail-thrush

2nd row: Yellow-footed Rock-wallaby, Strezelecki track

3rd row: Striated Grasswren, Black-eared Miner (© G Chapman), Euro (Wallaroo)

4th row: Banded Stilts.

