

Sydney & Newcastle

Australia

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Introduction. The aim of this report is hardly to provide details for a dedicated trip to this part of Australia but rather to give an idea on what is possible to pick up during a limited visit to the Sydney area in August. I attended a conference in Darling Harbour and had a few days (13-17 August) afterwards to make day visits to a few good birding spots including a pelagic trip to see some sea birds and cetaceans. This was my first visit to Australia and therefore most birds were new to me and I virtually did not know any calls prior to arrival, which made things a little harder.

The temperature was around 20°C during the days and down to 10°C during the nights. Conditions had been very dry for some time and except a few clouds every now and then, the weather was sunny and stable. August is still winter and most of the migrants are not supposed to arrive for yet another month or so. Some trees were flowering, but generally they were not.

Sites visited. *Sydney Royal Botanical Gardens.* A nice botanical garden and a good place to get close-ups of many of the native urban/suburban species. In the ponds there are a few ducks and cormorants and the “rainforest” section behind the ponds holds several Buff-breasted Rails which are fairly tame and easily seen during an early morning visit.

Ashton Park. Reached by taking the ferry from Circular Quay to Torronga Zoo. A few 100 meters ahead on the paved road east of the ferry jetty there is a walking track taking you around the peninsula which constitutes most of this protected forest/scrub area. Not too exciting, but good views of Variegated Fairy-wren and Red-browed Firetail.

Centennial Park. I spent one morning around the lakes at this large recreation area not far from the Sydney centre. The park was surprisingly rewarding and a good place to see many of the common species, especially waterbirds. I found it much better than the Botanical gardens which held very few passerines at the time of my visit.

Pelagic trip. The day was spent around Brown's Mountain (22.5NM ESE of Sydney Heads) on the boat Halicat which departs the second Saturday of every month. For more information go to Tony Palliser website <http://users.bigpond.net.au/palliser/pelagic/>. It was a sunny day with only little wind and a fairly calm sea. August is unfortunately a low season month for Humpback Whales (southern migration is Sept-Nov), and consequently we did not see any.

Royal National Park. The best way to see this park is to go there by car since you will hardly be able to visit more than one habitat in one day and you need to do a lot of walking to get there from the train stations. I took an early



Northern Giant Petrel at the Pelagic trip.



Waterbirds at the Centennial Park, Sydney. Australian Pelican, Little Black Cormorant, Royal Spoonbill, Darter and Little Pied Cormorant.

train to Loftus station only to realise that I had to walk 45 min to reach the Park Headquarters. This included crossing and walking along a heavily trafficked highway which was rather unpleasant. The alternative would be to go here a Wednesday or a Sunday when there is a tram from Loftus station to the park entrance. From the headquarters there is another 20 min walk on the “Honeymoon walk” until you reach Audley and the northern entrance to Lady Carringtons Road. I birded along this road for a couple of kilometres/hours before having to go back. Along this stretch, the forest was rather dry with many sandstone cliffs (good spots for Rock Warbler) and possibly there is more rainforest further south. Birding around the café at Audley was also quite rewarding during the morning hours. Things slowed down markedly towards noon. Royal NP is the best and most varied place to bird near Sydney and would definitely be well worth while spending several days in, also at this time of the year.

Blue Mountains. I went here together with my colleagues on a day tour bus trip. The only birding was done around Echo Point where you go to see the view of the famous “Three sisters”. The rainforest in the valley below was quite nice although of course a bit too crowded unless visited early in the morning. However, I did see my only Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos and a male Satin Bowerbird. King Parrots and Crimson Rosellas are also very tame around this place.

Newcastle/Hunter area. One day was spent north of Sydney together with a local guide, Richard Baxter (see also birdingtours.com.au), in the Watagan mountains and a few places around Newcastle - Wyee Point (Eucalypt woodland), Blacks Neds Bay and Caves beach (Mangroves, grassland and marshland), Glenrock SR Area (Eucalypt woodland), Newcastle Wetlands Centre, Shortland (wetlands and adjacent woodland), Ash Island (marsh, grassland and Mangrove) and Black Hill Estate, Minmi (suburbia).

Specific species notes

Australian Grebe, *Tachybaptus novahollandiae*. 6+ Centennial Park, several Newcastle Wetlands Centre. Various degrees of breeding plumage.

Wandering Albatross, *Diomedea exulans*. 8-10 pelagic trip. All juveniles or various degrees of immatures. According to the more experienced on the boat both *exulans* and *gibsoni*.

Shy Albatross, *Diomedea cauta*. 7+ pelagic trip. Adults and immatures. Race *cauta*.

Black-browed Albatross, *Diomedea melanophris*. 10+ pelagic trip. Both adults and immatures of race *melanophris* except one adult “Campbell Island” *impavida* (pale iris).

Yellow-nosed Albatross, *Diomedea chlorohychnos*. 40+ pelagic trip. Both adults and immatures.



Four species of Albatross are fairly common off the Sydney coastline in August. Wandering, Shy, Black-browed and Yellow-nosed Albatrosses.

Northern (Hall's) Giant Petrel, *Macronectes halli*. 4+ juveniles pelagic trip. A few too far out for certain identification. No definite "southerns" which normally are supposed to be more common in these waters.

Cape Petrel, *Daption capense*. 6-8 pelagic trip.

Providence Petrel, *Pterodroma solandri*. 5+ pelagic trip. Surprisingly uniformly dark (except underwings) compared to the field guide. Unfortunately we did not see any Great-winged Petrels for comparison.

Fluttering Shearwater, *Puffinus gavius*. 20+ pelagic trip. A few closer inshore. Only a handful came close enough for certain identification.

Hutton's Shearwater, *Puffinus huttoni*. 2 birds inshore came close enough for certain identification (dark underwings) on pelagic trip.

Prion sp. 1 too far from the boat was surprisingly the only prion of the trip. Fairy Prion, *Pachyptila turtur*, would be the most likely species in these waters.

Wedge-tailed Shearwater, *Puffinus pacificus*. 2 birds pelagic trip. A little unexpected as most birds return later during the season.

Australian Gannet, *Morus serrator*. 35+ inshore on pelagic trip. All ages.

Little Pied Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax melanoleucos*. A pair Botanical garden ponds. Common Centennial Park and recorded at Newcastle Wetlands Centre.

Little Black Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax sulcirostris*. Common. 3 Botanical garden ponds, several Centennial Park. Also seen Royal NP and around Newcastle.

Great Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax carbo*. 3-4 Centennial Park. Race *carboides*.

Pied Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax varius*. 1 Centennial Park. 3 offshore Ashton Park and several Sydney Harbour during pelagic trip.

Darter, *Anhinga melanogaster*. 3 Centennial Park. 1 Sydney Harbour.

Australian Pelican, *Pelicanus conspicillatus* . 40+ Centennial Park. Fairly common around Sydney Harbour and in Newcastle area.

Magpie Goose, *Anseranas semipalmata*. 40+ Newcastle Wetlands Centre. This colony is part of a local re-introduction program.

Black Swan, *Cygnus atratus*. 50+ Centennial park, several Newcastle wetlands centre and also recorded on Ash Island.

Australian Wood Duck, *Chenocretta jubata*. Common in small numbers at all places visited. Also urban lawns.

Pacific Black Duck, *Anas superciliosa*. Common, although never numerous, at all places with fresh water.

Australian Shoveller, *Anas rhynchotis*. 25+ Newcastle Wetlands Centre.

Grey Teal, *Anas gracilis*. 3 Centennial Park, 10+ Newcastle Wetlands Centre.

Chestnut Teal, *Anas castanea*. 5+ Centennial Park. 1 female at Botanical gardens ponds. 50+ Newcastle Wetlands Centre.

Hardhead, *Athya australis*. 1 Botanical garden ponds, 500+ Centennial Park (by far the most common duck here). 25+ Newcastle Wetlands Centre.

White-faced Heron, *Egretta novahollandiae*. 1 Sydney Harbour, 1 Royal NP. 100+ Ash Island (often in groups).

Little Egret, *Egretta garzetta*. A few near Blacks Neds Bay.

White-necked Heron, *Ardea pacifica*. 1 Ash Island.

Great Egret, *Egretta alba*. Recorded in low numbers on Ash Island and Blacks Neds Bay.

Intermediate Egret, *Egretta intermedia*. 1 Blacks Neds Bay (possibly overlooked).

Cattle Egret, *Ardea ibis*. 10+ Black hill estate, Minmi.

Australian White Ibis, *Threskiornis molucca*. Common to abundant everywhere. Urban.

Straw-necked Ibis, *Threskiornis spinicollis*. Common in Newcastle area. Found also close to human settlements although not by far as urban as the previous species.

Royal spoonbill, *Platalea regia*. 1 Centennial Park.

Black-shouldered Kite, *Elanus axillaries*. 1 pair Ash Island.

Whistling Kite, *Haliastur sphenurus*. 1 Ash Island.

White-bellied Sea Eagle, *Haliaeetus leucogaster*. 1 Royal NP, 2 Ash Island.

Collared Sparrowhawk, *Accipiter cirrhocephalus*. 1 immature male in flight Royal NP. Identification based on the small size (compared to Brown Goshawk).

Brown Falcon, *Falco berigora*. 1-2 individuals of brown morph Ash Island.

Nankeen Kestrel, *Falco cenchroides*. 1 male Newcastle Wetland Centre.



Buff-Banded Rail (Sydney Botanical Garden), Whistling Kite (Ash Island) and Tawny Frogmouth (Centennial Park).

Buff-banded rail, *Gallirallus philippensis*. 3-4 along the "rainforest" trails, Botanical gardens. 1 Lachlan swamp, Centennial Park.

Purple swamphen, *Porphyrio porphyrio*. Abundant Centennial Park. Generally present near fresh water.

Dusky moorhen, *Gallinula tenebrosa*. Common Centennial Park and around Botanical garden ponds. Seen at all fresh water places visited.

Eurasian coot, *Fulica atra*. Fairly common Centennial Park and several around Botanical garden ponds. Very common Newcastle Wetlands Centre.

Black-winged stilt, *Himantopus himantopus*. 1 Centennial Park. 2 seen from the road Parramatta. Race *leucocephalus* sometimes treated as a separate species.

Red-capped Plover, *Charadrius ruficapillus*. 6-7 Ash Island. Breeding plumage.

Black-fronted dotterel, *Charadrius melanops*. 1+3 Centennial Park. 10+ Ash Island. Breeding plumage.

Masked lapwing, *Vanellus miles*. Common in open areas and suburban lawns including central Sydney.

Silver gull, *Larus novahollandiae*. Common around Darling Harbour and along the coast. Also seen further inland in small numbers.

Greater Crested Tern, *Sterna bergii*. 30+ on the continental shelf. 2 Rose Bay.

Feral pigeon, *Columba livia* (Introduced). Common around human settlements.

Spotted turtle dove, *Streptopelia chinensis* (Introduced), Common Centennial Park and recorded along suburban roads.

Crested pigeon, *ocyphaps lophotes*. The only common native pigeon recorded in small numbers at all sites including the Botanical gardens and Centennial Park.

Topknot Pigeon, *Lopholaimus antarcticus*. 2 in flight by the road near Newcastle Wetlands Centre.

Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo, *Calyptorhynchus lathami*. 2 seen perched in the rainforest below Echo Point, Blue Mountain.

Galah, *Eolophus roseicapillus*. Several in Blue Mountains and around Newcastle. Not recorded around Sydney.

Long-billed corella, *Cacatua tenuirostris*. A 10+ group feeding on a lawn in Centennial Park. Introduced in this part of NSW.

Little Corella, *Cacatua sanguinea*. 2 feeding on a lawn Audley, Royal NP. Introduced in coastal NSW?

Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, *Cacatua galerita*. Common in small numbers everywhere. 50+ recorded in Botanical gardens and Centennial Park, respectively.

Rainbow Lorikeet, *Trichoglossus haematodus*. Abundant everywhere. Urban.

Australian King Parrot, *Alisterus scapularis*. 1 pair Audley, Royal NP. 2 in the rainforest below Echo Point, Blue Mountains and 6-7 around feeders Echo Point.

Crimson Rosella, *Platycercus elegans*. Several Royal NP. Common around Echo Point, Blue Mountains. Appeared to be more of a forest species than Eastern Rosella.

Eastern Rosella, *Platycercus eximus*. Several seen in many woodland/suburban habitats around Newcastle.

Fan-tailed Cuckoo, *Cacomantis flabelliformis*. 1 Royal NP, 1 Wye Point, Newcastle.

Tawny frogmouth, *Podargus strigoides*. 2 roosting in a tree near the white wooden bridge over the Lily pond in Lachlan swamp, Centennial Park.

Laughing kookaburra, *Dacelo novaeguineae*. Common in small numbers, mostly in pairs, at most places visited including the Centennial Park.

White-throated Treecreeper, *Cormobates leucophaeus*. Several seen and commonly heard Royal NP and Watagan mountains.



Superb Fairy wren, Centennial Park and Variegated Fairy Wren, Ashton Park.

Superb Lyrebird, *Menura novahollandiae*. 1 male seen slowly crossing the road Watagan Mountains.

Satin Bowerbird, *Ptilonorhynchus violaceus*. A loose group of at least 2 males and 3 females Audley, Royal NP. 1 male Echo Point rainforest.

Superb Fairy Wren, *Malurus cyaneus*. Common in most open areas including the Centennial Park.

Variegated Fairy Wren, *Malurus lamberti*. A group of 2 males and 2 females + 1 female Ashton Park. 10+ Royal NP.

Southern Emu Wren, *Stipiturus malachurus*. 4 birds in the grassland at Blacks Neds Bay.

White-browed Scrubwren, *Sericornis frontalis*. 10+ in Ashton Park and generally common in forested areas e.g. Royal NP. Mostly seen in pairs.

Large-billed Scrubwren, *Sericornis magnirostris*. 2-3 Royal NP.

Brown Gerygone, *Gerygone mouki*. Several Royal NP and Watagan mountains.

Mangrove Gerygone, *Gerygone levigaster*. 1 singing in the mangrove vegetation at Blacks Neds Bay. In my eyes very similar to the previous species and identified by the song only.

Brown Thornbill, *Acanthiza pusilla*. Common Royal NP.

Yellow-rumped Thornbill, *Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*. A 5+ group feeding in pines in Centennial Park.

Yellow Thornbill, *Acanthiza nana*. 6+ around Centennial Park.

Striated Thornbill, *Acanthiza lineate*. Common in forested areas such as Royal NP and Blue Mountains.

Bell Miner, *Manorina melanophrys*. 50+ in the forest at Glenrock SR area. Insectlike “bell” call diagnostic.

Noisy Miner, *Manorina melanocephala*. Abundant to common everywhere. Urban.

Lewin’s Honeyeater, *Meliphaga lewinii*. Several Royal NP.

Yellow-faced Honeyeater, *Lichenostomus chrysops*. Several Royal NP and recorded around Echo point, Blue Mountains.

Brown Honeyeater, *Lichmera indistincta*. 2 in mangrove Blacks Neds Bay and several seen Ash Island.

New Holland Honeyeater, *Phylidonyris novahollandiae*. 8+ Centennial Park. Generally common in scrub and forested areas at most places visited.

White-cheeked Honeyeater, *Phylodornis nigra*. Fairly common around the Newcastle area.



Bell Miner, Glenrock SR, Newcastle and New Holland Honeyeater, Centennial Park, Sydney.

Eastern Spinebill, *Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris*. Characteristic of Royal NP and Blue Mountains. Several Watagan mountains.

Red Wattlebird, *Anthochaera carunculata*. 1 Centennial Park, several Echo point, Blue Mountains and around the Newcastle area.

Little Wattlebird, *Anthochaera chrysoptera*. 1 in scrub south of Manly beach and fairly common in suitable habitat around Newcastle.

Eastern Yellow Robin, *Eopsaltria australis*. Common Royal NP.

Varied Sitella, *Daphoenositta chrysoptera*. A group of 4-5 birds Audley, Royal NP.

Golden Whistler, *Pachycephala pectoralis*. Several males and 1 female Royal NP. 1 female Blacks Neds Bay.

Grey Shrike-thrush, *Colluricincla harmonica*. 2+ Royal NP. 1 Blacks Neds Bay. 1 Echo point.

Eastern Shrike-tit, *falcunculus frontatus*. 2 together Royal NP.

Grey-crowned Babbler, *Pomatostomus temporalis*. A group of 10+ birds feeding in a garden at Black Hill Estate, Minmi.

Eastern Whipbird, *Psophodes olivaceus*. Common Royal NP, Watagan mountains, Blue Mountains and at several places visited around Newcastle. Keeps to dense understorey and require some effort to get good views of. Mostly heard (diagnostic “whip”).

Spotted Quail-thrush, *Cinclosoma punctatum*. Nice views of a female first flushed from the roadside, Watagan mountains.

Grey Fantail, *Rhipidura albiscapa*. Several Royal NP and around Newcastle.

Willie wagtail, *Rhipidura leucophrys*. Common in open areas everywhere including Centennial Park.

Spangled Drongo, *Dicrurus bracteatus*. 1 Newcastle Wetlands centre.

Australian Raven, *Corvus coronoides*. Common everywhere. Urban.

Grey Butcherbird, *Cracticus torquatus*. 1 Wyeec point, Newcastle.

Pied Butcherbird, *Cracticus nigrogularis*. Several seen around Newcastle.

Australian magpie, *Gymnorhina tibicen*. Common everywhere. Urban.

Pied currawong, *Strepera graculina*. Never numerous, but seen frequently at all sites.

Magpie-lark, *Grallina cyanoleuca*. Common in low numbers in open areas at most places visited. Also central Sydney.

Olive-backed Oriole, *Oriolus sagittatus*. 1 female/immature Blacks Neds Bay.



Grey-crowned Babbler, Minmi, Newcastle and a Grey-headed Flying Fox in the Sydney Botanical Garden.

Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, *Coracina novahollandiae*. Fairly common and recorded at most places visited including the Centennial Park.

Australian Pipit, *Anthus australis*. 2-3 Ash Island. Often considered a race of Richard's pipit, *A. richardi*.

European starling, *Sturnus vulgaris* (Introduced). Several Botanical gardens and at Centennial Park. Also recorded in small numbers around Newcastle.

Common myna, *Acridotheres tristis* (Introduced). Abundant to common everywhere. Urban.

Welcome swallow, *Hirundo neoxena*. Abundant to common everywhere.

Tree martin, *Hirundo nigricans*. 15+ Centennial Park.

Silver-eye, *Zosterops lateralis*. Common everywhere including the Centennial Park. Groups of 25+ birds recorded in Blue Mountains and in Ashton Park, Sydney Harbour.

Little Grassbird, *Megalurus gramineus*. 4-5 birds heard and seen briefly in grassland on Ash Island.

House sparrow, *Passer domesticus* (Introduced). Seen in few numbers around Darling Harbour and in towns in Blue Mountains.

Red-browed firetail, *Neochima temporalis*. 2+ Ashton Park, a few Blacks Neds Bay.

Four species of mammals were also seen during the trip.

Eastern Grey Kangaroo, *Macropus giganteus*. 5 very tame individuals near Glenbrook, Blue Mountains.

Red-legged Pademelon, *Thylogale stigmatica*. 1 Watagan Mountains.

Common Dolphin, *Delphinus delphis*. Several dozens, probably many more, following the boat at the Pelagic trip.

Grey-headed Flying Fox, *Pteropus policephalus*. More than 200 roosting in the Royal Botanical Gardens in Sydney.