

The Pilbara birding tour
North West Western Australia
22 — 31 August 2019

The remote Pilbara area is the jewel in the crown of Western Australia. It sits just north of the Tropic of Capricorn and comprises tropical semi-desert, boasting a wealth of biodiversity and some of the most glorious landscapes to be seen in Australia. From a birding perspective the Pilbara contains four distinctive subspecies of Australian birds. These are **striated grasswren** (ssp. *whitei*), **black-tailed treecreeper** (ssp. *wellsi*), **spinifex pigeon** (ssp. *ferruginea*) and **blue-winged kookaburra** (ssp. *cliftoni*). It is not stretching the imagination too much to believe that some of these subspecies will gain species status at some point — if their readily identifiable differences are anything to go by. Other than these four, we'll be looking for, among others, **rufous-crowned emu-wren**, **spinifexbird**, **painted finch**, **western bowerbird**, **star finch** and **grey and pied honeyeaters**.

In the mangroves around the coast we'll seek the near-endemic subspecies **southern dusky gerygone** *Gerygone tenebrosa christophori*, and **Pilbara white-breasted whistler** *Pachycephala lanioides carnarvoni*, **mangrove golden whistler** *Pachycephala melanura melanura* and **western mangrove robin** *Peneothello pulverulenta cinereiceps*. The rare **grey falcon** is also a good possibility about the rocky hills and along the creek lines.

Pre-tour day

Thursday 22 August 2019.

Participants should arrive today or have previously arrived in Karratha. There are daily flights from Perth.

Overnight: Karratha

Day 1

Friday 23 August

Karratha area

This morning we will take a boat out to West Lewis Island, primarily for **Rothschild's rock-wallaby** but we may also see **bottle-nosed** and **Australian humpback**¹ *Sousa sahalensis* **dolphins** and maybe even score a **dugong**. We could also see some seabirds such as **Wilson's storm-petrel**, **lesser frigatebird** and **roseate** and **crested terns**.

The Dampier Archipelago boasts the highest concentration of rock engravings (petroglyphs) in the world. We'll visit some of these sites in Murujuga National Park on the Burrup Peninsula in the afternoon. Keeping an eye out for birds, we may see the **Pilbara spinifex pigeon**.

Overnight: Karratha

Day 2

Saturday 24 August

Karratha to Port Hedland

Heading north today to Port Hedland, we'll stop to explore the mangroves at Point Samson for **dusky gerygone**, **Pilbara white-breasted whistler** *Pachycephala lanioides carnarvoni*

¹ Formerly Indo Pacific dolphin

and **mangrove golden whistler** *Pachycephala melanura melanura*, **yellow white-eye**²

Zosterops luteus balstoni and we'll see what waders are about out on the mudflats. We'll venture on after lunch, watching out for **Pilbara blue-winged kookaburra** and again **Pilbara spinifex pigeon**.

Overnight: Port Hedland

Day 3

Sunday 25 August

Port Hedland to Karijini National Park (formerly Hamersley Range)

First thing this morning we will head east to the De Grey River, some eighty kilometres from Port Hedland. Along the De Grey River we'll be searching for the **Pilbara blue-winged kookaburra** and the **Pilbara black-tailed treecreeper**. After lunch, we'll head to Karijini National Park in the heart of the Pilbara where we will spend two nights. We'll be on the lookout for **grey falcon** as we head to Karijini.

We glamp for two nights in the deluxe (en suited) eco-tents in the national park. Karijini is Western Australia's second largest national park at 6,200 square kilometres and, arguably, the most beautiful area in WA.

Overnight: Karijini National Park

Day 4

Monday 26 August

Today we'll search the snappy gum and spinifex-covered hills for **spinifexbird** and **rufous-crowned emu-wren**. Other species around the park could include **black**, **pied** and **white-fronted honeyeaters**, **red-browed pardalote**, **painted finch**, **crimson chat**, **spinifex pigeon** and **little woodswallow**. Mammals might include the attractive rufous form of **common wallaroo** (aka euro).

We continue to explore this national park full of beautiful gorges, waterfalls and crystal clear rock pools.

Overnight: Karijini National Park

² Now canary white-eye

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Day 5

Tuesday 27 August

Karrijini to Newman 254 km (3.5 hrs)

Leaving Karrijini, we'll explore some of the mulga country around Karrijini before moving on to the mining town of Newman. Target birds include **grey** and **piebald honeyeaters**, **chestnut-rumped** and **slaty-backed thornbills**, **western gerygone**, **Bourke's parrot**, **grey falcon** and **budgerigars**.

Overnight: Newman

Day 6

Wednesday 28 August

Newman area

Key bird today is the **Pilbara grasswren** *Amytornis striatus whitei*, which resides in the hills around Newman. Success being ours, we'll venture forth for other species in the surrounding countryside.

Overnight Newman

Day 7

Thursday 29 August

Newman to Tom Price (277 km, 3 hr)

We'll have another go for the grasswren if we were not successful yesterday. Otherwise, we'll continue birding en route to Tom Price, travelling back through Karrijini NP, looking for any species we've missed.

Overnight: Tom Price

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Day 8

Friday 30 August

Tom Price to Karratha via Rio Tinto private road (334 km^{*3})

We depart Tom Price early and spend time in Millstream-Chichester National Park. Again, the diversity of habitat in this park is remarkable. Like Karijini, there are spinifex hills rolling across the landscape; a great variety of trees and grasses, tree-lined water courses, pools festooned with water lilies and tranquil swimming holes. Many species of dragonflies, damselflies and frogs have been recorded in the Millstream wetlands. We're also hoping for a **grey falcon** today.

We'll arrive back at our accommodation in Karratha in the evening.

Overnight: Karratha

Day 9 Saturday 31 August 2019

This tour finishes after breakfast.

Info

Approximate mean maximum temperature in the Pilbara in August is 28° C, mean minimum about 14°C, and rainfall averages approximately 4 mm. Escape the southern winter!

Tour leaders: Philip Maher & Patricia Maher and another guide

Vehicles: 3 x 4WD

Cost: \$ 5,800.00 AUD twin share

Single supplement: \$860.00 AUD

Deposit: \$600.00 per person

Cost includes accommodation from the 22 August to 30 August 2019; all meals from dinner on 22 August until breakfast on 31 August 2019; guiding, land transport and park entry fees.

Philip's 2012 trip report to the Pilbara
<http://www.philipmaher.com/Pilbaratripreport.html>

³

Ignore Google Map's assessment of time it takes to travel Tom Price to Karratha. The Tourist Office at Tom Price assures us it takes three and a half hours if we were not stopping along the way.