



Manning Great Lakes Birdwatchers Inc

February 2018 Newsletter

Field Outings - are held on the first Thursday and third Saturday of each month (except January and December) and commence at 8am unless shown otherwise

The Annual General Meeting of the Manning Great Lakes Birdwatchers Inc. held on the 15th July 2017 elected the following Office Bearers:

President	Brian McCauley	0431 878 395
Vice President	Shirley Henry	6556 7109
Secretary	Janis Cossill	0405 054 930
Treasurer	Sheila Perrottet	6554 3032
Activities Officer	Brian McCauley	0431 878 395
Records Officer	Ashley Carlson	6557 5393
Publicity Officer	Tony Bennett	6559 2897
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Items for the newsletter can be sent direct to the editor to either

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Post: PO Box 4074 Forster NSW 2428

All other correspondence should be forwarded to the club address: PO Box 281 Forster NSW 2428

From The Editor

Welcome to the New Year and I trust everyone had a wonderful festive period. I also hope that everyone that was able to had a bo-peep at the celebrities (Aleutian Tern) at Farquhar Inlet.

This newsletter acknowledges the passing of one our old members, Joan Bosward.

For those heading off to Lithgow, travel safely and enjoy the birding.

Calendar of Outings

01/03 Celito Beach / Sandbar / Pacific Palms – meet at the corner of The Lakes Way and Sandbar Road

- 17/03 Wallis Lake Cruise - 11:00am departure on the Free Spirit. Meet at the Waterline Boathouse, Little Street Forster (opp. Helen Street)
- 05/04 Mt George / Rocks Crossing / Caffreys Flat – meet at Mt George General Store
- 21/04 Moorool Creek (Nick & Kate Vale's property – 1136 Moorool Creek Road) – meet at intersection of Comboyne and Moorool Creek Roads approximately 5km from Wingham

Killabakh - 18th November 2017

By Yvonne Baker

We gathered outside Judy Homewood's property on a cool, cloudy morning, awaiting the arrival of members. Here we saw Purple Swamphen beside the road ahead, Wood Duck and Magpie near a dam opposite, Olive-backed Oriole and Rainbow Lorriquet high up in a eucalyptus tree. Inside Judy's property, we walked along the wooded perimeter of a paddock and observed Scarlet Honeyeater, Golden Whistler, Silveryeye, Pied Butcherbird and Noisy Miner.

Later we all piled into four-wheeled drive vehicles to drive up a hill to the edge of the forest. Walking along the forest track we were surrounded by birdsong, dominated by the resounding 'e-chong' of the Rufous Whistler. Being overcast meant that we had to listen carefully to identify the birds by their calls which caused amusement when members tried to mimic them. With these conditions and the birds being high up in the canopy, it became very difficult for us to see the birds. So with necks craning, we had to concentrate on the shape of silhouettes which had some members referring to apps on their mobile phones.

Despite these difficult conditions we did manage to observe many species. A juvenile Fan-tailed Cuckoo sat obligingly for a photo. Other cuckoos sighted were the Brush, Horsfield Bronze and a pair of Channel-billed Cuckoo flew overhead calling raucously. King-Parrot, Crimson Rosella, Eastern Rosella, Grey Shrike-Thrush, Leaden Flycatcher, Rufous Fantail, Grey Fantail, White-throated Gerygone, Striped Honeyeater and Sacred Kingfisher are just a few that were seen, plus what Ashley described as the trifecta of Fairy-wrens, the Superb, Variegated and Red-backed.

By mid-morning it began to rain lightly and Judy announced that it would be a good time to return to

her house for morning tea on her verandah. On the way back to the house a Straw Necked Ibis and Pheasant Coucal were sighted. On the verandah, we were treated to home-made chocolate cake, and a delicious apple-berry cake. Thank you Judy, it was most appreciated.

After morning tea, we walked to the creek where we had to seek shelter under trees as it started to rain heavily and it was decided that we would call it a day, as it looked like the rainy weather was going to set in.

It was a most enjoyable day and the forest a magical place for birdwatching. Other things of interest found that day, two wallabies, Bottle-brush Grass Tree in flower and a glorious Cymbidium Suave orchid in full bloom.

Bird List - Pacific Black Duck, Australian Wood Duck, Brown Quail, Brown Cuckoo-Dove, Wonga Pigeon, Bar-shouldered Dove, Pheasant Coucal, Channel-billed Cuckoo, Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo, Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Brush Cuckoo, Purple Swamphen, Masked Lapwing, Cattle Egret, Straw-necked Ibis, Dollarbird, Sacred Kingfisher, Laughing Kookaburra, Galah, Little Corella, Australian King-Parrot, Crimson Rosella, Eastern Rosella, Rainbow Lorikeet, Scaly-breasted Lorikeet, Green Catbird, Satin Bowerbird, White-throated Treecreeper, Variegated Fairy-wren, Superb Fairy-wren, Red-backed Fairy-wren, Scarlet Honeyeater, Striped Honeyeater, Noisy Friarbird, Eastern Spinebill, Lewin's Honeyeater, Little Wattlebird, Yellow-faced Honeyeater, Noisy Miner, Brown Gerygone, White-throated Gerygone, White-browed Scrubwren, Brown Thornbill, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Rufous Whistler, Golden Whistler, Grey Shrike-thrush, Eastern Whipbird, Australasian Figbird, Olive-backed Oriole, Pied Currawong, Australian Magpie, Pied Butcherbird, Grey Butcherbird, Rufous Fantail, Grey Fantail, Torresian Crow, Leaden Flycatcher, Magpie-lark, Eastern Yellow Robin, Red-browed Finch, Tawny Grassbird, Welcome Swallow, Silveryeye

Manning River Cruise - 09th December 2017

By Ashley Carlson

The carpark at the Manning sailing club was busy with powerboats preparing for a morning of racing and our more sedate mode of transport arrived at the wharf ready for us to board. This Christmas cruise was heading upriver towards Wingham, rather than our previous trips which have been downstream to the river mouth.



Enjoying the Christmas Cruise - Photo: A Carlson

It did not take long to motor under the bridge and past Coocumbac Island away from the high octane boats tuning their engines. The river follows a large horseshoe bend past Tinonee and then west Taree before heading generally west past farmland not usually seen from the main roads traversing the area.

Birding from the boat was quite but the conversation was nothing but. We enjoyed a selection of entrees, before the main meal was served and most managed to squeeze a dessert in also. It was a great way to recap the years' event and ponder what is in store for 2018.

Dingo Tops - 19th January 2018

By Ashley Carlson

There was a cast of thousands, well not quite, for our first outing of the year. With such a large convoy we headed straight to the tops, rather than trying to find a place to get so many vehicles off the road. Once we all arrived, we split into two groups with one small party heading onto Rowley's Rock Lookout and the other completing the short loop walk at the picnic area. From the lookout we were about to look down on White-throated Needletail hawking through the valley below. There were also numerous butterflies flitting about the flora, distracting us from the view back to the coast.

Several vehicles departed for home following morning tea, while the rest made a decision to head back down to Potaroo Falls. Parking was at a premium at the falls carpark with numerous groups making the most of the cool pool for swimming. During lunch, distractions included Eastern Yellow Robin, Lewin's Honeyeater and Spectacle Monarch. With another group departing after lunch, six of us ambled towards the falls. Not more than 50m along the track, we spent 15 minutes watching a Pale-yellow Robin flitting between and propping on trees providing numerous photo opportunities. We also recorded a trifecta of scrubwren's during the walk. While noting observations back at the car, preparing to leave, a Noisy Pitta called twice.



Pale-yellow Robin - Photo: N Thompson

Bird List - Australian Wood Duck, Australian Brush-turkey, White-headed Pigeon, Brown Cuckoo-Dove, Wonga Pigeon, Crested Pigeon, Topknot Pigeon, Pheasant Coucal, Fan-tailed Cuckoo, White-throated Needletail, Masked Lapwing, Australian Pelican, Cattle Egret, White-necked Heron, Great Egret, White-faced Heron, Australian White Ibis, Straw-necked Ibis, Laughing Kookaburra, Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo, Galah, Crimson Rosella, Noisy Pitta, Satin Bowerbird, White-throated Treecreeper, Eastern Spinebill, Lewin's Honeyeater,

Yellow-faced Honeyeater, Bell Miner, Noisy Miner, Brown Gerygone, Yellow-throated Scrubwren, White-browed Scrubwren, Large-billed Scrubwren, Brown Thornbill, Golden Whistler, Grey Shrike-thrush, Eastern Whipbird, Olive-backed Oriole, Pied Currawong, Australian Magpie, Pied Butcherbird, Willie Wagtail, Rufous Fantail, Grey Fantail, Leaden Flycatcher, Magpie-lark, Spectacled Monarch, Black-faced Monarch, Eastern Yellow Robin, Pale-yellow Robin, Red-browed Finch, Welcome Swallow, Common Myna, Bassian Thrush

Harrington - 01st February 2018

By Brian McCauley

As indicated by the new meeting site, the Marine Rescue parking lot, the littoral rainforest walk was not on the agenda for today's outing. By 8:08 ten members and one visitor were gathered together and prepared to set out for a walk north along the breakwall to gain access to the beach. It was very windy, overcast with rain threatening and the seas very rough.



Birdwatching in stormy weather - Photo: L McCauley

Across the water, about 150 metres, there were pelican, Bar-tailed Godwit, Pied and Sooty Oystercatchers, cormorants, gull and terns all hunkered down for protection from the strong winds coming off the sea. The tide was well over 2 metres and most of the sand flats were totally covered leaving us with only a limited strip along the beach, however it did mean that a lot of shore birds had congregated on the higher dry areas. Some waves inundated the beach strip causing the birds (and the watchers) to take flight and find dryer land. As we neared the beach Red-Capped Plover scurried about keeping a respectable distance and on close inspection, several Red-necked Stint were observed among them. There was a multitude of Pacific Golden Plover, but none showing any breeding colour, and a good number of Bar-tailed Godwit. The dull light made it very difficult to tell if there were any Black-tailed Godwit among them. Most of the terns were right out on the southern-most tip of the beach, where it narrowed to about 20 metres, with the occasional huge wave pushing its wash completely over the sand. Several members walked right out to get closer and were able to identify Crested, Little and Common Terns. A small flock of about 14 Eastern Curlew kept moving away from us but it was encouraging to see this many of an endangered species. Out to sea was stormy, with visibility so poor that no larger sea birds could be seen.

Making our way back we spotted a Striated Heron crouching on the rocks near the Marine Rescue catching small fish as they were washed through a gap in the sea wall.



Striated Heron - Photo: B McCauley

Morning tea was taken in the picnic area at the back of the Rescue building to the melodious warbling of several Magpie, singing for some supper. After morning tea we moved on to the Sewerage Treatment Plant.

This walk usually has lots of water along the track and adjoining bushland forming dense wetlands, but on this occasion it was bone dry. We were able to walk a long way but to no avail as there were very few birds to be seen. White-throated Needle-tail soared high up and also a White-bellied Sea-Eagle. On the ground several Yellow Thornbill, a couple of pair of Superb Fairy-wren and several White-cheeked Honeyeater were seen and an Eastern Whipbird, Striped and Lewin's Honeyeater and Australian Reed-Warbler were heard. We didn't stay long here, moving on back to the picnic area near the bowling club for lunch and another bird call. During lunch a Brahminy Kite flew past heading across the bay.

After lunch six members went for a look at the harbour and Crowdy Head. On the way we spotted a Dollarbird and 50 or more figbird perched on the power lines. At sea, several shearwater could be seen diving, but too far away for a positive identification. There were no birds to be seen from the lighthouse or at the quarry, so we left to make our separate ways home. Total species 60

Bird List - Australian Wood Duck, White-headed Pigeon, Crested Pigeon, Eastern Koel, White-throated Needle-tail, Purple Swamphen, Dusky Moorhen, Australian Pied Oystercatcher, Sooty Oystercatcher, Pacific Golden Plover, Red-capped Plover, Masked Lapwing, Eastern Curlew, Bar-tailed Godwit, Red-necked Stint, Silver Gull, Little Tern, Common Tern, Crested Tern, Australian Pelican, Striated Heron, White-faced Heron, Australian White Ibis, Straw-necked Ibis, Little Pied Cormorant, Great Cormorant, Little Black Cormorant, Pied Cormorant, Osprey, Black-shouldered Kite, White-bellied Sea-Eagle, Whistling Kite, Brahminy Kite, Rainbow Bee-eater, Laughing Kookaburra, Galah, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Rainbow Lorikeet, Superb Fairy-wren, Striped Honeyeater, White-cheeked Honeyeater, Lewin's Honeyeater, Little Wattlebird, Noisy Miner, Yellow Thornbill, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Eastern Whipbird, Australasian Figbird, Pied Currawong, Australian Magpie, Willie Wagtail,

Grey Fantail, Australian Raven, Magpie-lark, Red-browed Finch, Australasian Pipit, Australian Reed-Warbler, Welcome Swallow, Common Myna

Other Snippets

Vale Joan Bosward

Many of us celebrate the 26th January for Australia Day, but this year's was saddened by the peaceful passing of Joan Bosward aged 96.

Joan, and her late husband Bill, moved to Forster and joined the birdwatchers soon after, in 1989. Not in the club more than a year, Joan was nominated into the position of Secretary which she held for 13 years (1990-2003). For the many years of dedicated service to the club, Joan was awarded life membership in December 2004.

Joan was very much old school with her polite and courteous manner. Her attention to detail during her time with the birdwatchers was reflective of her time nursing. And nursing gave Joan one of her trademark adornments, the nurses watch pinned to her chest.

During outings Joan would endear us with easy social conversation of a time gone by and the affection she had for her family. She reflected the perfect 'nan', with rosy red cheeks, and welcoming smile and a comforting word.

Joan has now joined her soulmate, Bill.



Joan and Bill Bosward Christmas 2007 - Photo: C Tanner

Welcome to Boot Camp Tony and Nicky Stay the Course October / November 2017 By Nicolette (written tongue-in-cheek)

Rehearsal: Kangaroo Island

If you are into scenery and long, bracing walks, this is the place to be. Spectacular coastline, covered in heathland. The scooped out hollow of Admirals Arch and rust-coloured granite of The Remarkables make them understandably famous tourist attractions. The country has rich pastures and one major town,

Kingscote. The more spectacular beaches are hard to get to, attracting board surfers who like the challenge of waves, seals and sharks. This lovely place served as a limbering up exercise to the tour to follow.

Boot Camp: The Great Southern Tour

We drove 1000's of kilometres and walked some hundreds of them! Our course, and habitats for finding birds along the way, from Adelaide north-west to Port Gawler, Thompsons Beach, Botanic Gardens, Port Augusta to Lyndhurst where the tar stops and Strezleki Desert begins. From Lyndhurst Station, we trooped through rock, bush, mountain terrain covering areas such as Copley Dam, Leigh Creek Coal Mine, Farina, the airstrip, Parachilla (fossils), Brachina Gorge, Stokes Hill to Flinders Ranges and into Wilpenna Pound. Onwards to Arkaroo Rock, Ororoo, Jamestown, Morgan, Ramco Lagoon, Berri. Gluepot, Lock 2 on the Murray River, Banrock Station, Berri Basin, Katarapko NP. Cooltong Reserve, Dishers Creek, Martins Bend, Lookout Loxton, Pinaroo Wetlands, Timberoo, Oeyen. Hattah-Kulkyn NP, Swan Hill, Barham, Deniliquin. Gulpah NP, local rubbish dump, water treatment plant, Conargo Road north to Hay. Reed Bed bird hide, Trickies Lane, Chiltern NP, Badgers Weir, Healesville. Toolangi Mt, Shepherds Bush, Geelong, Werribee Treatment Plant, Serendip, Point Roadnight, Anglesea heath, Great Ocean Road, Ayres inlet, She-oak Picnic Ground, Lorne, Point Addis, Melbourne.

Our travel through S.A. country areas, where water is drawn from the mighty Murray, proved that where there is water there is life. We passed acres and acres of verdant vines, line upon line of almond and olive trees. The front gardens of homes displayed bougainvilleas of intense reds and oranges, abundant bushes of blooming white roses, gold splashes of colour on huge silky oak trees, yellow pencil pines. In stark contrast, on the other side of the road parched, dry desert.

Our search for a bird in its preferred habitat covered route marches through heath, spinifex, mallee, eucalypt, sand, rocks, dry woodland, dry rivers and creeks, hills and mountains. From spinifex covered slopes, to mallee and heathland, to Xanthorrhoea grasstrees (Blackboys as we used to call them), velvet potato bush, onion weed, native pine, blue bush, wattle, saltbush, eremophila, to rivers and creeks lined with magnificent Red Gums – you name it, we trooped through it!

The search for a particular bird could take hours. The record was seven. Our success rate 99 - 100%. One particular evening, on the plains of Deniliquin, we began at 5pm and finished at 1.30am. We happy little vegemite's having seen not just one but ten rare Plains Wanderer, several Eastern Barn Owl, one Stubble Quail, one Southern Boobook and one Inland Dotterel. We got to sleep in until 7am the next morning as a reward!

Animals we spotted in the wild included Tammar Wallaby (on Kangaroo Island), Euro, Western Grey and Red Kangaroos, Yellow-footed Rock and Swamp Wallabies, camel, goat, rabbit, hare, horse, Echidna, fox, Brush-tailed Possum, goanna, Tiger Snake, Shingleback, Mallee Military Skink, Fat-tailed Dunnart, NZ Fur Seal,

Bottle-nosed Dolphin, Fairy Penguin, Emu, Ostrich (yes), and of course Koala.

Our accommodation, varied from the original Faulty Towers to dongers, motels, resorts, hotels.

Our nourishment: Cereal am, in remote places, do-it-yourself sandwiches, if travelling, local bakeries, hearty meal at night at either the local pub, club or resort. Water - unlimited.

Our day began at 5am and generally finished about 7pm. Before dinner we went through the birds we saw that day and compared notes. Our kindles never got opened, as we fell into bed each night thoroughly exhausted and sore legged. All the gruelling effort was worth it to see birds of great rarity. How could you not be impressed when they came with these descriptions ... ruddy, masked, elegant, sooty, hooded, red-capped, striated, freckled, banded, collared, breasted, throated, browed, pied, dusky, crested, spotted, superb, black-faced, white-naped, stubble, rufous, button, red-necked, pink-eared, blue-billed, hoary-headed, flesh-footed, white-plumed ... to name but a few.

Our team on the mainland was made up of 3 poms, 2 dutch, 1 quebec, 2 aussies (us), and our leader. Their quest was to find and photograph x amount of birds. They were not interested in the slightest in the landscape, the history, the people. Just THE birds. They did come with amazing knowledge of our birds and were, on the whole, prepared to share this with others. They were not happy with much else.

The features of the trip for me were:

- * The coastal walks on Kangaroo Island and the sheer visual beauty of the place
- * An appreciation of our remote, inland and coastal countryside, including Strezlecki Desert, Flinders Ranges and the Great Ocean Road
- * Getting to see special birds in the most inhospitable places
- * Good sightings of the rare Plains Wanderer, Freckled Duck, Glossy Black Cockatoos, parrots of every variety including the Red-rumped, Blue-bonnet and Mulga, Australian Mallee Ringneck, White-winged Fairy-wren, Singing Honeyeater, Rufous Fieldwren, Orange Chat and Black-faced Woodswallow

Needless to say, the Bennett's are now undergoing a well-deserved furlough ... until the next adventure ...

**Cuba with Birds Caribbean
24-30 January 2018
Text Judi Homewood, Photos Chris Baker**

Cuba is the largest country in the Caribbean, and is on the interface of the temperate and tropical zones. There are records of 371 birds, the majority (70%) are migratory. There are 27 endemics, including the Zapata Rail which has not been reliably seen for many years, and 19 near endemics. Cuba is still under communist rule, but reforms in the Obama presidency have allowed US citizens to visit. More recently, Cubans have been subject to two forces beyond their control,

Cyclone Irma (September 2017) and President Trump. Irma has had an impact on bird populations, particularly in the north-east, but not to the extent of other Caribbean islands. We were on a small group tour organised by Birds Caribbean www.birdscaribbean.org, a not-for-profit group with the mission of protecting the birds of the Caribbean by local action and lobbying decision makers.

Day 1 (Havana to Valle de Viñales) - We departed for the Valle de Viñales, in the western province of Pinar del Rio. Valle de Viñales was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site 1999, because of its distinctive limestone hills, traditional agricultural practices and rich cultural history. En-route we stopped to follow up reports of a Stygian Owl. While not uncommon, it's a hard to see bird especially in the day time. We were quickly rewarded with excellent views of the owl perched in the pine trees. We also recorded the Common Yellowthroat, Palm Warbler, and had the first sightings of the near endemics the Olive-capped Warbler and Loggerheaded Kingbird. Walking back to the bus we saw another near endemic the Cuban Emerald (hummingbird), perched on a wire. We called at a local collective, raising table birds and livestock and were able to see good numbers of the endemic Cuban Grassquit, as well as American Redstarts and Yellow-faced Grassquit. It seems that since bird tours started to visit and have economic input the locals have discouraged capture of Grassquit for the caged bird trade and numbers are steadily increasing. We also had our first good view of three more near endemics, the Cuban Pewee, Greater Antillean Grackle, and West Indian Woodpecker, as well as the endemic Cuban Blackbird. A final roadside stop before Viñales yielded Snowy Egret (very like our Little Egret), Masked Duck and Purple Gallinule. We shared the four lane road with carts pulled by horses, the iconic old American cars and Russian-built cars and trucks which have seen better days. Total birds 31, endemics (E) 2, near endemics (NE) 7

Day 2 (Valle de Viñales) - Overnight rain cleared and by 8:15 we were in the Parque Nacional Viñales. The birds were slow to appear and we had glimpses only of a Peregrine, Scaly-naped Pigeon and White-winged Dove. We decided to bird along the roadside with the occasional distraction of cigar-chewing locals riding horses or using horse-drawn carts. Almost immediately with the improved light we spotted two endemics, the Cuban Green Woodpecker and Cuban Solitaire. Both showed extremely well, the Solitaire singing while in full view. We skirted around a field with a new crop of beans and corn in search of the endemic Cuban Trogon, known locally as Tocaroro, the national bird of Cuba. Trogons are amongst the most colourful birds, and Cuban Trogon has the colours of the Cuban flag, with a blue crown, white throat and chest, red belly as well as a greenish back. We moved to a location adjacent to one of the many mogotes (limestone kasts) and had our first and excellent views of the near endemic Great Lizard Cuckoo, a truly spectacular bird with an orange/red eye, long decurved bill and striking black and white barring on the long tail. Another highlight of the morning was our first view of three more endemics, the diminutive Cuban Tody, the Yellow-

headed Warbler and Cuban Vireo. At Mirador Buena Vista, where we watched near endemic Antillean Palm Swift soaring over the valley, we surveyed a nearby fruiting fig tree, which proved to be rich pickings with the near endemic Western Spindalis, as well as a variety of warblers (Black and White, Tennessee and Yellow-rumped). Not surprisingly, no takers were found in the group for a ride on the rather large saddled bull tethered nearby. Total birds 41, E 8, NE 10



Cuban Trogan

Day 3 (Valle de Viñales to Zapata Swamp) - We left early to fit as much birding as possible on the trip to Zapata Swamp. We headed to Los Portales where the Giant Kingbird has been reported. This large bird (26 cm) is very rare and despite our best efforts we did not manage a sighting. We did have a productive day starting with our next stop at Arroceras, Presa Herradura where the roadside swamp had two Northern Jacana, and Little Blue and Green Herons. We saw a Crested Caracara, with its distinctive red facial skin, hunting over the fields that were being ploughed by men using oxen. Next stop was fish ponds at Los Palacios. As well as 60+ Black-winged Stilt, there were many Snail Kite, Brown Pelican, Snowy Egret and America Coot. Probably the bird of the stop was the West Indian morph of the Osprey, which is much lighter in colour. At Niña Bonita Reservoir there was ample birdlife, although the resting postures made identification difficult. New birds for the trip were hundreds of Lesser Scaup, Ring-necked and Ruddy Ducks and a glimpse of a Tricolor Heron. We did our best to count numbers to submit to the Caribbean Water Bird census. En-route we had a presentation on the ecology of the Ramsar-designated Zapata Swamp

and on expeditions to log the birdlife and other species that are found in what is the third largest wetland in the Americas. Total birds 38, E 2, NE 4

Day 4 (Zapata) - The road passed through large tracts of royal palms and we flushed a Caracara feeding on road kill. It was in the semi-open mixed vegetation habitat we saw six of the endemic Cuban parakeets tucked up in the trees grooming, and the near endemic Red-legged Thrush, as well as Zenaida Dove, Northern Mockingbird, Blue-winged Teal and a Great Blue Heron. Two special birds were seen. The first was the endemic Cuban Pygmy Owl, whose vocalisations indicated its presence. The Cuban Pygmy Owl is small (17 cm), diurnal and a distinguishing feature is "eye spots" on the back of head which frighten predators. The bird we saw was light in colour, so may have been a young bird. The second we saw on a large tree in open country on a rural property was the Fernandina's Flicker, which assuming the Ivory-billed Woodpecker is extinct, is the rarest woodpecker in Cuba. The species is critically endangered due to habitat destruction and capture of nestlings for the cage bird trade and is now patchily distributed. We had excellent views of this bird which is tan-coloured, barred with black. The black moustache-like stripe marked the bird as a male. Although we had seen many American Kestrel, the group noticed a particularly pretty light morph on the power lines. Immediately before lunch we headed to Enigma de las Rocas trail and Cueva de los Peces to see the Cuban's largest underwater salt cave, rock formations and swimming areas. A notable new bird was the Blue-headed Quail Dove, sharing the ground and trees with Curly-tailed Lizard. We called at Los Hondones, a developing eco-village, and visited two extraordinary gardens, with ponds, orange trees, papaya and banana palms inter-planted with bird-attracting shrubs and trees. The gardens was teeming with birds including our first view of the endemic Cuban Oriole and the near endemic La Sagris Flycatcher. Amongst the warblers seen were the Northern Parula, Black and White, Black-throated Blue, Prairie, Palm, and Yellow-headed. Before returning to our accommodation we called at Palpite to visit the garden of a local couple who have encouraged visits by the Bee Hummingbird, which at 5-6 cm and adult weight of 2g, is the world's smallest bird. A large flowering perennial shrub *Pamelia patens*, commonly called firebush or hummingbird bush and several feeders attracted at least six Bee and several Cuban Emerald Hummingbirds. There was also a feeder at which more than a dozen Cuban Oriole, black birds with yellow shoulder patches, rump and undertail, competed for food, some hanging on the underside to wait for an opportunity. We also saw the near endemic Tawny-shouldered Blackbird in the same garden. To top off the great day on the way home we had our first views of near endemic Cuban Parrot.

In the evening some of us wandered up to the crowded town square to enjoy the Saturday night entertainment (and mojitos). A ten-piece band was playing but watching the extraordinary dancing of several local groups was the highlight for some. Total birds 50, E 10, NE 9



Cuban Pygmy Owl showing rear eye spots

Day 5 (Las Salinas and Santo Tomas) - We birded briefly near our accommodation finding a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, a new bird for the trip, in a nearby thicket. By lunch time we'd added another 42 birds to our tally. We set out for Las Salinas, a habitat of low dense forest, including four different types of mangroves (black, button, red, white) abutting marine lagoons. Several wooden viewing platforms have been constructed. To say that the area was teeming with birds is an understatement: we saw hundreds of Greater Flamingo and three Wood Stork, the other large wader of the region. Other new birds were flocks of White Ibis, with their long red decurved bill, and a smaller group of Roseate Spoonbill. The lagoons also held many smaller birds including Killdeer, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, American Wigeon, Stilt Sandpiper, Black-bellied Plover, Black Kimmber and three types of tern (Caspian, Gull-billed and Royal). Not surprising given the potential food supply we also saw two birds of prey, the endemic Cuban Hawk and the Northern Harrier. Other new birds for the trip were the Belted Kingfisher and Reddish Egret. An unusual sighting was the white morph of the Great Blue Heron. The most elusive bird proved to be the Clapper Rail, which despite calling from the mangrove undergrowth, proved very difficult to see. Unfortunately despite being in an ideal location we did not see any West Indian Whistling-Duck. Despite the windy conditions we had excellent views of a mixed flock of Willet (including one with leucism) and Short-billed Dowitcher.

We headed to Sabanas de Sopillar in search of more woodland birds to round out our list of endemics and near endemics. Without too much effort we all had great views of rare, near endemic Grey-fronted Quail Dove, while it walked along a forest track. We also saw the endemic Cuban Nightjar with its cryptic colouration, perched motionless on a branch. With fading light we set out for the bird of the day the endemic Bare-legged Owl, distracted by excellent views of three Fernandina Flicker having a dust bath. We

walked quite a long way into a dense forest, first hearing the bird come nearer in response to Ernesto's (the bird guide) calling, and finally seeing it perch within a couple of metres. Total birds 87, E 11, NE 9



Fernandina Flicker

Day 6 (Santo Tomás to Havana) - Before our departure for Havana we had two more endemics to see: the Zampata Sparrow and the Zampata Wren. After a yet another trip along a dirt road through a forest we arrived at a canal in the heart of the Zapata Swamp, where charcoal making is the local industry. On the way Ernesto spotted a Merlin in a tree overhanging the road and we saw a flock of more than 30 Cuban Parakeet. Almost on arrival we saw the Zampata Sparrow as well as Louisiana and Northern Waterthrushes. Punting along the canals between the overhanging vegetation allowed us to see Common Yellowthroat, American Redstart and Black and White, and Yellow-headed Warblers, and shell middens attesting to the presence of Limpkin. When we arrived at the viewing place we were treated to a ten minute display by a Zapata Wren, perched in the sun on a branch. The song is described by Garrido and Kirkconnell in their Field Guide to the Birds of Cuba as "pleasant, canary-like warbling" with "one to three sweet whistled introductory notes followed by a complex series of grating notes and rattles". It was a pure joy to see the bird, with its yellow gape contrasting the drab plumage, sing its heart out in front of us. The other new bird for the trip was the White-crowned Pigeon.

We headed back to Havana and were fortunate in that Orlando Garrido, Cuba's most distinguished ornithologist, was free to meet the group. He showed us his specimens of endemics and regaled the group with stories of his birding expeditions. Total birds 47, E 11, NE 7.

Total number of birds seen was 125, including 21 endemics.

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Unusual and Interesting Sightings - Compiled by Ashley Carlson

Date	Observer	Species	Location
19/11/17	B Deans	Rose-crowned Fruit Dove	Cape Hawke
20/11/17	B Ralley	Tawny-crowned Honeyeater	Booti Booti NP
26/11/17	E Galvin	Crested Shrike-tit	Blackhead
11/12/17	L Murphy	Aleutian Tern 10x	Mudbishops Point
15/12/17	A Stuart	Jacana 5x, Pallid Cuckoo 2x, Spectacled, Monarch, Black-faced Monarch Sanderling, Doubled-banded Plover, Lesser Sand Plover, Little Tern 80x	Cattai Wetlands Harrington Rainforest
18/12/17	B Ralley	King Quail 5x, Southern Emu-wren 7x	Mudbishops Point
23/12/17	A Carlson	White-throated Needletail 30x, Grey Goshawk	Minimbah
04/01/18	B Ralley	Rose-crowned Fruit Dove	South Forster
10/01/18	S Perrottet	White-throated Needletail 50x	Janies Corner
11/01/18	F Antram	Pale-yellow Robin	Failford
	B Ralley	Square-tailed Kite	Wingham Brush
13/01/18	A Carlson	White-throated Needletail 10x	Cape Hawke
15/01/18	N Thompson	Sooty Owl 3x	Pipers Bay
19/01/18	Various	Black-winged Petrel, Black Petrels, Long-tailed, Arctic and Pomarine Jaegers	Wallingat NP
20/01/18	MGLBW	White-throated Needletail 12x, Noisy Pitta, Black-faced Monarch, Spectacled Monarch	Crowdy Bay pelagic
03/02/18	A Stuart	Aleutian tern 18x, Common Tern 165x, Little Tern 200x, Red-necked Stint 102,	Dingo Tops NP
14/02/18	A Carlson	Beach Stone-curlew, Double-banded Plover 2x Spangled Drongo 2x (1 st return)	Mudbishops Point Pipers Bay



Cuban Peewee - Photo C Baker



Zapata Wren - Photo C Baker



View north from Rowley's Rock Lookout Tapin Tops NP - Photo A Carlson