



Bellbird

BIRDING, WILDLIFE & PHOTOGRAPHY TOURS

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Western Specialties and Splits May 2018 tour report

Dates of tour: 29 Apr –5 May 2018 Leader: Peter Waanders



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[Go to next Western Splits tour](#)

[Go to photo gallery of this tour](#)

Naretha Bluebonnets during May 2018 tour © P Waanders

Tour overview

As a result of the recent splits of some of Australia's western specialties, Bellbird Birding Tours ran its second *Western SA Specialties and Splits Tour*. Starting in and returning to Adelaide, this tour traversed much of South Australia's West Coast, the northern Eyre Peninsula and the infamous Nullarbor Plain to focus on the main targets of Copperback and Nullarbor Quail-thrush, Naretha Blue Bonnet, Western Grasswren and White-bellied Whipbird. Other species we targeted during the trip included Blue-breasted Fairywren, Western Yellow Robin, Rufous Treecreeper, Rock Parrot and Slender-billed Thornbill.

The tour was run during the Austral autumn, a great time to go birding in this part of the world. The weather was mild, calm and dry and the birds cooperative. Focusing on quality, not quantity, all targets were seen and a total of 141 species was achieved.

Daily account

Day 1: Mostly a driving day as we headed north from Adelaide, making stops at Pt Wakefield to find Peregrine Falcon, Black Falcon and Black-tailed Native Hens. Following the coastal mudflats and mangroves we had a huge flock of Slender-billed Thornbills, while the Arid Lands Botanical Gardens in Port Augusta yielded Redthroat, Chirruping Wedgebill and White-fronted Honeyeater. We had an enjoyable dinner at the Kimba Hotel.

Day 2: Found us at Lake Gilles Conservation Park at dawn, where Blue-breasted Fairy-wren, Rufous Treecreeper, Western Yellow Robin and the western race of Gilbert's Whistler performed well. Not long after this bird bonanza we laid our eyes on a beautiful pair of Copperback Quail-thrush foraging quietly on the ground. We headed south, crossing the Eyre Peninsula, until we reached the fishing town and sea-food capital of Australia, Port Lincoln.

Day 3: We only had one chance at the very recently split White-bellied Whipbird which inhabits the dense coastal scrub of Port Lincoln National Park. At sunrise, we were at the stake-out for this species, and heard a number of them singing around us in the dense vegetation. Getting views of them was difficult, but our patience paid off after more than 2 hours of peering into dense bushes where a pair was singing at close range...They finally afforded everyone views. High fives all around!

We spent the rest of the morning exploring this magnificent coastal national park with great views of Rock Parrots on multiple occasions, and further sightings of Western Yellow Robin, Blue-breasted Fairy-wren and the brown (*intermedia*) subspecies of Grey Currawong. Other good species seen here included White-bellied Sea-eagle, Black-faced Cormorant and Purple-gaped Honeyeater. We then headed along the west coast to Ceduna and saw a Southern Fiddler Ray from a mangrove boardwalk. An excellent seafood dinner was enjoyed by all in Ceduna.

Day 4: Up very early to try and beat a predicted weather change. We arrived at the Nullarbor Roadhouse at 8am and were soon on to Rufous Fieldwren, White-winged Fairywren, Red-capped

Robin and our target: Nullarbor Quail-thrush. At first a pair was spotted, we then slowly drove the tracks and saw more, counting a total of 10! We then headed to a spot west of Nullarbor and secured Crested Bellbird, Grey Butcherbird, Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo, Mulga Parrot and after some searching we came across a pair of our target Naretha Bluebonnet. They provided extended, photographic views. A celebratory dinner was had back at the Nullarbor roadhouse!

Day 5: The predicted weather change had fizzled out, leaving some rain showers overnight, followed by another beautiful morning. Another drive around the local bush tracks yielded 10 Nullabor Quail-thrushes once again, then we started the return journey. We checked the dramatic scenery of the Head of the Bight but were just a couple of days too early for the annual arrival of Southern Right Whales. Australasian Gannets were seen flying over sea while Sooty Oystercatchers foraged on the rocks below the spectacular cliff-top lookouts. For the night we ended up in the farming township of Minnipa at the base of the Gawler Ranges.

Day 6: Having seen all targets except Western Grasswren at this stage, we decided to explore the Gawler Ranges. A little-known yet beautiful range reminiscent of the Flinders Ranges, we started off with a sunrise visit to the amazing Pildappa rock which rivals Wave Rock in WA, before heading further across the hills and ranges. A short walk to organ-pipe-like rock formations resulted in extraordinarily good views of Shy Heathwrens; the rolling hills and ranges were covered in the first flowering bushes and flushes of green cool-weather growth; Mulga Parrots were observed feeding at close range and the highlight of the day was no doubt multiple sightings of Elegant Parrots. At the end of the day we emerged from the hills and descended down to the coast yet again, to stay at Whyalla. Before we got there, however, we had our first views of our last target: Western Grasswren.

Day 7: A fresh morning greeted us out in the field looking for Western Grasswren. Having had brief views yesterday afternoon, the birds took some time but eventually everyone had had good views at some stage during the search. Other birds we came across included Southern Whiteface, Slender-billed Thornbill, Crested Bellbird, Splendid Fairy-wren (Turquoise race) and Redthroat. A final, scrumptious lunch was had at the Arid Lands Botanical Gardens in Port Augusta, before we headed back to Adelaide, picking up Banded Stilt along the way. All targets seen, and well; and everyone agreed it had been another great Bellbird Birding Tour!



Photos of May 2018 tour © P Waanders:
Nullarbor Quail-thrush, Naretha Blue-bonnet
Shy Heathwren, Western Grasswren
Looking for White-bellied Whipbird



List of species seen during May 2018 Western SA Specialties & Splits tour – Bellbird Birding Tours

Emu	Black Kite	Blue Bonnet
Musk Duck	Spotted Harrier	Naretha Blue Bonnet
Cape Barren Goose	Wedge-tailed Eagle	Red-rumped Parrot
Black Swan	White-bellied Sea-eagle	Mulga Parrot
Australian Shelduck	Nankeen Kestrel	Elegant Parrot
Australian Wood Duck	Brown Falcon	Rock Parrot
Australasian Shoveler	Australian Hobby	Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo
Grey Teal	Black Falcon	Sacred Kingfisher
Chestnut Teal	Australian Spotted Crake	Rufous Treecreeper
Pacific Black Duck	Dusky Moorhen	Blue-breasted Fairy-wren
Hoary-headed Grebe	Eurasian Coot	Splendid Fairy-wren
Great Crested grebe	Australian Pied Oystercatcher	Superb Fairy-wren
Rock Dove ¹	Sooty Oystercatcher	White-winged Fairy-wren
Spotted Dove ¹	Black-winged Stilt	Purple-backed Fairy-wren
Common Bronzewing	Red-necked Avocet	Western Grasswren
Brush Bronzewing	Banded Stilt	Rufous Fieldwren
Crested Pigeon	Red-capped Plover	Spotted Scrubwren
Australasian Gannet	Red-kneed Dotterel	Shy Heathwren
Little Pied Cormorant	Banded Lapwing	Redthroat
Little Black Cormorant	Masked Lapwing	Weebill
Pied Cormorant	Red-necked Stint	Yellow-rumped Thornbill
Black-faced Cormorant	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	Chestnut-rumped Thornbill
Australian Pelican	Crested Tern	Slender-billed Thornbill
Great Egret	Pacific Gull	Brown Thornbill
Cattle Egret	Silver Gull	Inland Thornbill
White-faced Heron	Galah	Southern Whiteface
Australian White Ibis	Little Corella	Spotted Pardalote
Straw-necked Ibis	Rainbow Lorikeet	Striated Pardalote
Royal Spoonbill	Musk Lorikeet	Singing Honeyeater
Black-shouldered Kite	Crimson (Adelaide) Rosella	Purple-gaped Honeyeater
Whistling Kite	Australian (Pt Lincoln) Ringneck	White-eared Honeyeater

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Yellow-plumed Honeyeater
White-plumed Honeyeater
Grey-fronted Honeyeater
White-fronted Honeyeater
Noisy Miner
Yellow-throated Miner
Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater
Red Wattlebird
White-fronted Chat
New Holland Honeyeater
White-browed Babbler
Copperback Quail-thrush
Nullarbor Quail-thrush
Western Whipbird
Chirruping Wedgebill
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike

Golden Whistler
Rufous Whistler
Grey Shrike-thrush
Crested Bellbird
Black-faced Woodswallow
Dusky Woodswallow
Grey Butcherbird
Australian Magpie
Grey Currawong
Grey Fantail
Willie Wagtail
Australian Raven
Little Raven
Little Crow
Restless Flycatcher
Magpie-lark

White-winged Chough
Jacky Winter
Red-capped Robin
Western Yellow Robin
Southern Scrub-robin
Silvereye
Welcome Swallow
Fairy Martin
Tree Martin
Common Blackbird¹
Common Starling¹
Mistletoebird
Zebra Finch
House Sparrow¹
Australasian Pipit