

GRAND AUSTRALIA

PART I: NEW SOUTH WALES & THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

OCTOBER 14-30, 2012

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This is the first section of our three-part Grand Australia tour; VENT's finest, most comprehensive tour of Australia; a grand Australian tour de force. We will travel to the most important bird areas on the continent, searching out birds, mammals and wildflowers from the common to the rare and most elusive. We expect the trip list from these tours to represent over 80% of the species of Australia. We have designed the tours to allow flexibility into the itinerary for those who may have already enjoyed a birding trip to Australia, but missed some of the key sites. It also caters to those who have never visited Australia and wish to experience the whole spectrum of this diverse country.

Australia's geographic isolation has resulted in the evolution of a remarkable array of endemic birds and other wildlife. More than 300 species and eight families are endemic (more than any country in the world). Colorful parrots, fairywrens, finches and honeyeaters light up the environment while giant Cassowary and Emu, peculiar bowerbirds and birds-of-paradise make their home down under. It is a place to encounter fascinating mammals such as the egg-laying monotremes, the short-beaked echidna and the platypus. There is an extraordinary variety of marsupials, including gliders, possums, miniature carnivores, the huge plains-dwelling red kangaroo, and a diverse array of marine mammals, bats and obscure native rodents. Australia also hosts the most diverse reptile fauna in the world. This includes such extraordinary creatures as the thorny devil, frilled dragon, giant monitor lizards and crocodiles.

We begin in Sydney, considered by many to be one of the finest cities in the world. Sydney is special to birders because it is just a hop, skip and a jump from the city centre to subtropical rainforests, coastal heaths and sandy beaches teeming with birdlife. We will make a pelagic trip to the Tasman Sea and explore the threatened box woodlands just west of the Blue Mountains. From Australia's east coast we wing our way north-westwards across the heart of this sun-burnt land to the Northern Territory. Darwin is enormously rich in birds and aboriginal art and we will see the best of these in Kakadu National Park. This will include waterbirds (Magpie Geese, Black-necked Storks and Brolgas), gigantic saltwater crocodiles and a host of neat "macropods" including the agile wallaby and euro. The Arnhem Land escarpment is one of the great natural wonders of the world, highlighted by exquisite prehistoric rock paintings and such localized specialties as Banded Fruit-Dove, Chestnut-quilled Rock-Pigeon and Sandstone Shrike-Thrush. Further to the south we will seek out such localized rarities as Hooded Parrots, Purple-crowned Fairywren and the spectacular but sadly endangered Gouldian Finch.

We continue to Australia's "Red Centre" and "The Alice" (Alice Springs). Amidst starkly beautiful, red sandstone gorges, hidden waterholes, mulga woodland, and spinifex plains, we will search for

some of Australia's true "Outback" birds: gorgeous Major Mitchell's Cockatoos and confiding Spinifex Pigeons, elusive mice-like Dusky Grasswrens, and a host of nifty parrots and honeyeaters. Our last day will be spent in and around Uluru (Ayers Rock), where in addition to viewing this huge, red rock monolith at sunset, we will have the opportunity to see yet more of Australia's elusive desert dwellers.

Grand Australia Part I can be taken by itself or, for those desiring a more extensive Australian experience, in combination with Grand Australia Part II: Queensland, Victoria and the Plains-wanderer (October 28-November 14, 2012) and/or Grand Australia: Tasmania Extension (November 14-20, 2012).

October 14-16, Days 1-3: Travel to Sydney. There are direct flights from various western U.S. cities including Los Angeles, San Francisco and Honolulu, which will depart on October 14, cross the International Dateline and arrive in Sydney on the morning of October 16. Upon arrival and clearing customs, please make your way by taxi to the Marriott Sydney Hotel (College Street location) where a room will be reserved in your name.

After time to unpack, rest, and enjoy lunch, we will at long last experience our first Australian birds by visiting the attractive, nearby Centennial Park. Among the many birds we encounter here, we will hope to see the strange Tawny Frogmouth, the aptly named Superb Fairywren and hyperactive Yellow Thornbill. As well as many new and unfamiliar species, this first excursion on the "Great South Continent" will probably produce three new families of birds for first time visitors to Australia; just a quick example of how very different the "Island Continent" really is.

NIGHT (October 16): Marriott Sydney Hotel College Street, Sydney

October 17, Day 4: Royal National Park. This morning we will drive south from Sydney to the Royal National Park—a very diverse national park (one of the first declared in the world) with pockets of subtropical rainforest, wet and dry *Eucalyptus* forests, woodlands and plant rich sandy heathlands. There are more species of flowering plant here than in the entire United Kingdom.

We will enjoy a picnic breakfast while being distracted by Satin Bowerbirds, Laughing Kookaburras and the comical, noisy and boisterous Sulphur-crested Cockatoos. Our first walk will take us along Lady Carrington Drive, where we will search for the incredible Superb Lyrebird. We should have an excellent chance of encountering Wonga Pigeon; Brown Cuckoo-Dove; Topknot Pigeon (a bizarre rainforest fruit pigeon); Eastern Rosella; Crimson Rosella; Australian King-Parrot (all of these are knockout birds); Shining Bronze-Cuckoo; Fan-tailed Cuckoo; Azure Kingfisher; Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike; Eastern Yellow Robin; Golden and Rufous whistler; Gray Shrike-Thrush; Black-faced Monarch; Gray and Rufous fantails; Variegated Fairywrens (a real gem); Yellow-throated, Large-billed and White-browed scrubwren; Brown Gerygone; Striated and Brown thornbill; Brush Wattlebird; Noisy Friarbird; Noisy Miner; Lewin's, Yellow-faced and New Holland honeyeater; Eastern Spinebill; Silvereye; Spotted Pardalote; Pied Currawong; and Green Catbird. With luck and local expert knowledge, we may encounter Rock Warbler.

After a picnic lunch we will explore some coastal heathlands to try for Tawny-crowned Honeyeater, Brush Bronzewing, Chestnut-rumped Heathwren, Southern Emuwren and Beautiful Firetail. These last four species are tough. Walking trails are all level and the pace will be relaxed as we try and take in all of these birds.

NIGHT: Marriott Sydney Hotel College Street, Sydney

October 18, Day 5: Sydney Pelagic Boat Trip. The rich marine waters off the coast of Sydney regularly produce some of the most spectacular pelagic birding in the southern hemisphere. Imagine standing on the back of a boat whilst huge albatrosses float aloft effortlessly and almost at arm's reach, and shearwaters switch through troughs providing an endless challenge to identify. *Pterodroma* petrels swing back and forth before

dashing away; and storm-petrels provide tantalizing glimpses as they flutter and forage nearby. Among the likely possibilities are no less than four species of albatross including Black-browed, Yellow-nosed, Shy and the unbelievably huge Wandering. These, without doubt, are some of the most beautiful of all seabirds. Other species we may encounter include Little Penguin; Wedge-tailed, Short-tailed, Fluttering, Hutton's and Flesh-footed shearwaters; Great-winged and Providence petrels; Australasian Gannet; White-faced and Wilson's storm-petrel; and Southern Skua. Almost any rarity is possible such as Gould's and White-necked petrels, Red-tailed Tropicbird, and perhaps Buller's or Royal albatross. We have an excellent chance to encounter humpback whales and a variety of dolphins also.

NIGHT: Marriott Sydney Hotel College Street, Sydney

October 19, Day 6: Drive to the Capertee Valley via Blue Mountains National Park. This little known valley tucked away on the west side of the dividing range is both a superb birding area and very scenic. We will have most of the afternoon and following morning to bird the area. Among the many birds we may see are such specialties as Little Eagle; Turquoise Parrot (scarce); Little Lorikeet; Black-chinned, Yellow-tufted and the threatened Regent honeyeaters—Glen Davis is one of the few places one can reasonably hope to see this most critically endangered of honeyeaters; Brown Treecreeper; Hooded Robin; Plum-headed Finch; and Diamond Firetail. A nearby wetland will give us the chance to see the bizarre Musk Duck. With a bit of luck we may see native mammals including the impressive euro as well as eastern gray kangaroo, red-necked wallaby and maybe a swamp wallaby.

NIGHT: Colonial Motor Inn, Lithgow

October 20, Day 7: Capertee Valley. We can spend a morning exploring the Capertee Valley looking for scarce endemics before returning to Sydney in the mid-afternoon to rest & repack before we continue our journey.

NIGHT: Stamford Airport Hotel, Sydney

October 21, Day 8: Travel to Darwin; Afternoon at East Point Reserve. This morning we will transfer to the airport in time for the 10:25 a.m. departure of Qantas Flight 842 to Darwin, which is scheduled to arrive in Darwin at 1:35 p.m. (subject to change).

Named after Charles Darwin, Darwin is the capital city of the Northern Territory in the region widely referred to as the "The Top End." We have now entered the tropics, as will be apparent with high temperature and humidity. Here we will be observing a very different array of birds and animals. Our exploration of this area begins with a visit to a nearby area of mudflats, mangroves and monsoon woodland. Birds we may see include Eastern Reef Heron; Brahminy Kite; Beach Stone-curlew (rare); Rose-crowned Fruit-dove; Torresian Imperial-Pigeon; Red-tailed Black Cockatoo; Little Bronze-Cuckoo; Collared Kingfisher; Rainbow Bee-eater; Green-backed Gerygone; and White-gaped, Brown, Rufous-banded and Red-headed honeyeater. Shorebirds should be excellent with the chance to see rarer species including Great Knot, Terek Sandpiper, Little Curlew and hopefully Oriental Plover. Agile wallabies (a small kangaroo) will be feeding on the edge of the monsoon rainforests.

NIGHT: Novotel Atrium, Darwin

October 22, Day 9: Birding the Darwin Area. In the morning we will explore Howard Springs Nature Park, a delightful area of monsoon vine forest and home to our target bird, the beautiful Rainbow Pitta. At this time of the year they should be quite vocal, which will increase our chances considerably of finding it. There will be nonstop birding action in the morning as we will also try to seek out Brush Cuckoo, Varied Triller, White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike, Shining Flycatcher, Northern Fantail, Gray Whistler, Dusky and Bar-breasted honeyeater, and Yellow Oriole. If we have early success, we will explore the mangroves for Yellow White-eye, Mangrove Gerygone and, if the tides are good, hopefully the rarely encountered Chestnut Rail. Before our midday siesta we will visit Knuckey Lagoon, which will provide our first taste of the incredible abundance of

wetland birds in the Top End. We will find huge numbers of Magpie Geese and in amongst them Radjah Shelducks, Brolga, Black-necked Stork, Whiskered Terns, Australian Pratincole and much more. After lunch we will visit the Darwin Botanic Gardens to try for both Rufous (now elusive) and Barking owls.

NIGHT: Novotel Atrium, Darwin

October 23, Day 10: Darwin to Kakadu National Park. From Darwin we will travel south and then west via the towns of Humpty Doo and the Fogg Dam to the World Heritage Kakadu National Park. Kakadu encompasses some 13,000 square kilometers (about 8,000 square miles) of flood plains, paperbark swamps, savannah woodlands and extraordinary sandstone escarpments. The park is home to several of Australia's most localized birds. It also harbors cave galleries of superb Aboriginal rock art. This afternoon we will focus our attention on the area around Nourlangie Rock and the very best of the aboriginal cave paintings we are allowed to see. By a fortunate coincidence, most of the Arnhemland specialty birds can be found here, including Banded Fruit-Dove, White-lined Honeyeater and Sandstone Shrike-Thrush. We also have a chance for two rare kangaroo species—the endemic black wallaroo and the tiny, shy, short-eared rock wallaby.

NIGHT: Gagadju Lodge Coinda (Yellow Waters), Kakadu

October 24, Day 11: Kakadu National Park. We have the entire day to explore Kakadu National Park. We will begin with a dawn cruise along Yellow Waters billabong. The diversity and tameness of birds along this exquisitely beautiful waterway has to be seen, to be believed. While exploring from a very comfortable canopied boat, we will glide to within a few meters of many species, including Azure Kingfisher (and hopefully Little Kingfisher), Black-fronted Dotterel, Whistling Kite and White-bellied Sea-Eagle. We should have some incredible photographic and video opportunities and great binocular viewing. We should also see several giant saltwater crocodiles, which represent the top of the food chain in this part of the world. Eventually we will leave this piece of paradise and go off in search of elusive woodland birds.

Species we will be searching for include Chestnut-backed Buttonquail (scarce); Partridge Pigeon (also tough); Bush Stone-curlew; Northern Rosella; Varied Lorikeet; Barking Owl; Spotted Nightjar; Forest Kingfisher; Blue-winged Kookaburra; Buff-sided Robin; Leaden Flycatcher; Gray-crowned Babbler; Red-backed Fairywren; Black-tailed Treecreeper; Double-barred, Masked and Long-tailed finch; Black-faced Woodswallow; Pied Butcherbird; and Great Bowerbird. This is a great location to look for two endemics, both of which are quite elusive—the Sandstone Shrike-Thrush and Chestnut-quilled Rock-Pigeon.

NIGHT: Gagadju Lodge Coinda (Yellow Waters), Kakadu

October 25, Day 12: Travel from Kakadu National Park to Katherine. Today we will drive 250 kilometres south to the township of Katherine. This is finch and parrot country and we will be making an effort to locate special birds like the Masked and Long-tailed finch plus the luminous Red-winged Parrot. We will try and find one of the Top End's most sought after and difficult birds, the Hooded Parrot. This scarce parrot is very unusual in that it nests in the giant termite mounds, which are such a feature of this area. If time permits, we may continue south to Mataranka. This small community has been home to one of Australia's rarest birds in recent years. The Red Goshawk has an estimated population of only 600 individuals. It is a powerful parrot hunting specialist that seems especially partial to lorikeets and black-cockatoos. We will have advance notice if the regular pair is present this year.

NIGHT: Knotts Crossing Resort, Katherine

October 26, Day 13: Victoria River Bridge and Timber Creek. We will depart very early this morning for the Victoria River in order to be there for dawn. Our target this morning is one of the most beautiful and localized of all Australian birds, the Purple-crowned Fairywren. This species, together with Yellow-rumped and Chestnut-breasted munias, and Crimson and Star finch inhabit the tall grass bordering the river and provide our only opportunity of the entire tour to see at least four of these species. The incredibly beautiful and endangered Gouldian Finch has also been recorded in the area; VENT tour groups have regularly been successful in finding

this rarest of Top End birds. If we are lucky, we may find a freshwater crocodile basking on the rocks. There will be many other local and scarce birds to look for including Australian Bustard, Spinifex Pigeon, Black-breasted Buzzard and with great fortune, perhaps a Gray Falcon.

NIGHT: Knotts Crossing Resort, Katherine

October 27, Day 14: Travel to Darwin and Fly to Alice Springs. Today we will drive to Darwin in time for the 2:25 p.m. departure of Qantas Flight 1939, which is scheduled to arrive in Alice Springs at 4:25 p.m. (subject to change). “The Alice,” capital of the “Red Centre,” lies almost at the geographical centre of Australia. Surrounded by classic, albeit somewhat stark desert country, it is home to some very special birds. The scenery and plants are very different to anything we will have seen on our journey so far.

NIGHT: Alice Springs Resort, Alice Springs

October 28, Day 15: Alice Springs. Bird density in the desert is often low and with many species being nomadic, the amount of rain which has fallen recently may dictate how we find the birds. The West McDonnell Ranges, which we will explore today, have permanent water and that is the key to success in finding the birds here. We will start off at Simpson’s Gap to find Splendid Fairywren, Western Gerygone, Little Woodswallow, and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater, to name a few. We will also try and find the endangered black-footed rock wallaby. If conditions are appropriate, we will continue on to Ormiston Gorge, to be joined by hopefully a few Spinifex Pigeons and a Western Bowerbird. We will roadside bird back and a stop at the Ochre Pits may reveal a Red-browed Pardalote, Crested Bellbird and much more. In the afternoon we will explore Kunoth Bore to the north. Here dense mulga woodland is home to the scarce Slaty-backed Thornbill and Bourke’s Parrot, with chances for elusive species like Major Mitchell’s Cockatoo, Banded Lapwing and with great luck the Gray Honeyeater.

NIGHT: Alice Springs Resort, Alice Springs

October 29, Day 16: Drive to Uluru (Ayers Rock). We will spend the day birding from the roadside as we drive to the World Heritage Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park. A morning detour will give us the chance to access suitable habitat for Rufous-crowned Emuwren, Dusky Grasswren, Spinifexbird and Gray-fronted Honeyeater. There will be much to see, including one of my favorite stops, which is identified by the only pair of trees for many miles. In the past this stop has revealed Bourke’s Parrots, Cinnamon Quail-thrush, Chiming Wedgebill, Orange Chat and a Little Buttonquail that tried to unsuccessfully out fly a Brown Falcon. As ever, much will depend on recent rains and it can be bereft of birdlife if a prolonged dry spell has set in. We will search for Red-capped Robins, Mulga Parrots, Spotted Harrier, Major Mitchell’s Cockatoo and Ground Cuckoo-shrike. In the evening we will enjoy sunset at “The Rock,” complete with a glass of champagne and canapes.

NIGHT: Desert Gardens Hotel, Ayers Rock

October 30, Day 17: Morning at Uluru and Kata Tjuta; Departure for Home or Travel to Brisbane to Begin Part II. Uluru is THE classic site of Australia and we will have the morning to explore it and its equally impressive neighbor, Kata Tjuta (The Olgas). Although we are now in the heart of Australia’s largest desert, it supports remarkably rich vegetation comprising over 300 species of flowering plants. On the plains and dunes, the vegetation community is dominated by spinifex (*Triodia*), with scattered trees and shrubs including desert oak, mulga, witchetty bush, desert poplar and desert, honey and rattlepod grevilleas. Small waterholes can be found at the base of the rock monoliths and are good birding sites. We will be on the lookout for Black-eared and Horsfield’s bronze-cuckoo, Pied Honeyeater, Masked Woodswallow, Redthroat, White-backed Swallow, Australian Ringneck, and Little Crow. Rarities include Banded Whiteface and Striated Grasswren. If the rains have been good, we may be in for clouds of Budgerigars and some Major Mitchell’s Cockatoos.

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We will transfer to the Ayers Rock airport in time for the 12:40 p.m. departure of Qantas Flight 729, which is scheduled to arrive in Sydney at 5:15 p.m. Participants continuing on Grand Australia Part II will connect with Qantas Flight 544 which is scheduled to depart at 6:05 p.m. and arrive in Brisbane at 6:35 p.m. (flights and times are subject to change).

For participants not continuing on Grand Australia Part II, we suggest spending the night in an airport-area hotel and departing for home on a morning flight on October 31. Upon request, VENT will be happy to assist with any additional lodging arrangements.

TOUR SIZE: This section will be limited to 10 participants.

TOUR LEADER: Dion Hobcroft

Dion Hobcroft has been working for VENT since 2001. He has led tours to Australia, New Guinea, New Zealand, Bhutan, India, Southwest Pacific, Cambodia, Thailand, China, Japan, Russia, Alaska, Tanzania and the Antarctic. In 2007 alone Dion showed more than 2,000 species of birds to VENT clients. His informative, relaxed, and educational nature, combined with sharp eyes and ears, has established Dion as a favorite of many tour participants. His fieldwork for over 30 years on birds and other terrestrial vertebrates has allowed him to amass an extraordinary knowledge of the biodiversity in the Asia-Pacific region. Born in Tasmania and based in Sydney, Dion has traveled widely throughout Australia listing over 770 species, placing him in the top echelons of Australian birders. He is very tuned-in to the songs of bird species in the Asia-Pacific region, and specializes in rare and elusive species. He is delighted to show these skulking rarities to his travel companions. Dion has published several papers on field ornithology, served on national and state rare bird committees, managed *Birdline NSW*, run introduction to ornithology courses for Sydney University, and, before he traveled so continuously, was a popular speaker with various natural history societies. Dion has worked for many research and government agencies ranging from the Antarctic Division, Department of Environment NSW, Agriculture Protection WA, Taronga Zoo, Australian Museum, and the Queensland Department of Primary Industry. Dion lives in Sydney with his wife Lise, and two young children, Grace (age 11), and Daniel (age 7).

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for this section is **\$7945** per person in double occupancy from Sydney (tour ends in Ayers Rock) including all meals from lunch on Day 3 to lunch on Day 17. Each tour fee includes accommodations as stated in the itinerary, entrance fees to all parks, ground transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leader. Fees do not include international airfare from your home to Sydney and return from Ayers Rock, internal commercial Australian flights (see AIR INFORMATION below), airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement for this section is **\$1725**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

AIR INFORMATION: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your international air arrangements.

Note that there are several specific internal commercial Australian flights associated with this section, the cost of which is not covered by the tour fee. Due to the complicated nature and limited availability of these flights, you are strongly encouraged to confirm reservations with Victor Emanuel Travel as early as possible.

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$500** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit by check, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. If you prefer to pay your

deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. The VENT registration form should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date.

EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES: In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Cancellation penalties and refunds are based on the following schedule: if cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$250** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made fewer than 120 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions. *We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance for your protection.*

<u>If you cancel:</u>	<u>Your refund will be:</u>
120 days or more before departure date	Your deposit minus \$250*
Fewer than 120 days before departure date	No refund available

*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person.

FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES: In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE: A brochure and application form for optional coverage for baggage, illness, and trip cancellation can be obtained through the VENT office. **We strongly recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance as soon as possible to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. VENT recommends Travel Insured International as our preferred insurance provider.** Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available; however, stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering.** Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as work-related cancellation, medical upgrade, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” clause among others. **Contact Travel Insured International prior to registration for details.** Not all insurance providers provide the same levels of coverage. If you purchase insurance through a company other than Travel Insured International, please be advised that rules and stipulations may be different.

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.

CLIMATE: You will be visiting Australia during spring. In the tropical north (Northern Territory) you can expect warm to hot temperatures from 60-90 °F, sometimes higher, especially in Kakadu, Katherine and Victoria River where temperatures may exceed 100 °F. Humidity can also be high in these regions. In the “Red Centre,” humidity is lower and morning temperatures often cooler, but the middle of the day can be hot. In southern Australia in spring, the temperatures fluctuate between the influence of the Southern Ocean and the hot inland. Typically the

temperature range is 40-90 °F, but at times it can exceed 100 °F in the inland locations on occasions. At Lithgow and Glen Davis, it can be very cold at night, so warm clothing is important.

DRIVING: Depending on group size, we will use either a 19-seat Toyota or Mitsubishi Coaster bus or a 12-passenger van. These vehicles are comfortable, air conditioned and enable every participant to have their own window seat. Australia is an enormous country and we will be doing some lengthy drives to get ourselves into the correct habitat for many localized and scarce birds (this is especially the case in the Katherine area). Participants are welcome to take a morning or afternoon off in locations where we spend two or more days.

CLOTHING: In the warmer areas, lightweight field clothing is adequate. Please wear dull-colored clothing, shades of brown and/or green being desirable. Shorts can be particularly useful in warmer sites. However, do bring a warm sweater and jacket, as well as gloves and a windbreaker for cooler areas. Sound footwear and a broad-brimmed hat are recommended, as are a rain jacket and slip-on waterproof “overpants.” A swimsuit will be useful at times. Dress will be generally casual.

CURRENCY: Australian Dollar (A\$) exchange facilities are available for all incoming and outgoing flights at all international airports. It is recommended that you change money at the airport or at city banks. Visa, Diners Club, MasterCard, and American Express are accepted; however, use may be limited in small towns and “Outback” areas. The best exchange is always from automatic teller machines as opposed to changing at dealers.

DOCUMENTS: In order to visit Australia, a passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure and a TOURIST VISA are required for citizens of most countries including the USA and Canada.

Upon your request, this visa will be issued for you electronically by the VENT office at no extra charge. You need only to send us a legible copy of the picture page of your passport at least a month prior to the tour’s departure. Non-U.S. & non-Canadian citizens should check with your local Australian consulate/embassy for instructions.

EQUIPMENT: You should pack a pair of binoculars that are in good condition, along with a belt or day pack (You will find this very useful for carrying books, sunscreen, extra digital storage media, etc.). Your leader will have a spotting scope, but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so. Other items to bring should include a flashlight or headlamp, water bottle or canteen, alarm clock, and sunscreen. As a precaution, it is a good idea to pack your binoculars, a change of clothing, toiletry items, medications, and travel documents in your airline carry-on bag.

HEALTH: Although no vaccinations are required, it is a good idea to be sure your tetanus protection is up to date. There is no risk of malaria. Sanitary conditions are excellent in Australia, and both the water and food are safe. If a pelagic trip is part of the tour you are taking, medication to prevent seasickness may prove very useful.

Insects can be a problem at times in some localities. We recommend the use of Cutter’s and OFF for chiggers (virtually absent in Australia) and mosquitoes. The Australian bush fly, a non-biting, nuisance insect similar to the house fly, can be quite troublesome in certain seasons. Repellents are ineffective; a lightweight head net will prove very useful at these times.

If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. It is also a good idea to bring along the prescription in case of misplacing any medications. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your international airline for procedures for packing medication (especially liquids).

As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against Hepatitis types A and B.

Drinking water is fine throughout Australia. Water served in restaurants and hotels is always safe. It is recommended to always carry a water bottle with you that can be re-filled at all times.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line 800-CDC-INFO (232-4636) or you can check their website at www.cdc.gov/travel. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html (click on travel health).

MISC: Electricity: 220/240 volts with three-pronged outlets
Language: English and aboriginal languages
Time: Western Australia, 14 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time
Central Australia, 15½ hours ahead of EST
East Coast, 16 hours ahead of EST

SUGGESTED READING: Our website at www.ventbird.com offers an affiliated online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from the store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You might also want to visit such other online stores as www.amazon.com, and for those out-of-print and hard-to-find titles, www.abebooks.com or www.buteobooks.com, which specializes in ornithology books. We also recommend Andrew Isles bookstore for the Asia-Pacific region at <http://www.andrewisles.com/AndrewIsles/>. Andrew can also often obtain difficult to find and out of print books for Australia.

This list includes some basic field guides and reference volumes of use to the visitor. A great deal has been written about all aspects of Australia's natural history. You will find a variety of selections in any library. Browse around a little and you will discover many resources not listed here.

Cogger, Harold G. *Reptiles and Amphibians of Australia*. AH & AW Reed Pty. Ltd., 1986. Technical but thorough account of Australian herpetofauna. Too large to be easily carried by travelers.

Wilson, Steve and Gerry Swan. *A Complete Guide to Reptiles of Australia*. Reed New Holland Pty. Ltd., 2003. A superb and very usable publication.

Menkhorst, P. and Knight, F. *A Field Guide to the Mammals of Australia* South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, (latest edition). The concise field guide to Australian mammals we have all been waiting for. Highly recommended.

Pizzey, Graham and Knight, Frank. *A Field Guide to the Birds of Australia*. Angus and Robertson, (latest edition) A thorough text with excellent information about song, range, and behavior combined with very good plates make this field guide recommended for all participants.

Simpson, Ken, and Nicolas Day. *Field Guide to the Birds of Australia*. New York: Viking Penguin, Inc. (latest edition). Outstanding plates, maps, with up-to-the-minute information. The handbook section in the back contains very valuable information. Recommended for all participants.

Slater, Peter, Pat Slater and Raoul Slater. *The Slater Field Guide to Australian Birds*. Dee Why West, N.S.W.: Rigby Publishers, (latest edition). Excellent plates, maps, text and portrait organized similarly to the National Geographic guide to U.S. birds. Recommended for all participants.

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