

GRAND AUSTRALIA

PART II: QUEENSLAND, VICTORIA & PLAINS-WANDERER

OCTOBER 28–NOVEMBER 14, 2012

TASMANIA EXTENSION

NOVEMBER 14-20, 2012

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These are the second and third sections 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. The tours have been designed 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.

Australia's geographic isolation has resulted in the evolution of a remarkable array of endemic birds and other wildlife. Of the 76 indigenous Australian bird families, eight are endemic to Australia and a further seven are shared only with nearby New Guinea. Approximately 300+ of the recorded 800 species are found nowhere else on our planet. More than 80% of Australia's mammals are endemic and include two of the world's three egg-laying monotremes, the short-beaked echidna and the platypus. There is an extraordinary variety of marsupials including gliders, possums, miniature carnivores, burrow dwelling macropods, huge plains-dwelling red kangaroos, and placentals that comprise some of Australia's least known mammals. Australia also hosts the most diverse reptile fauna in the world. This includes such extraordinary creatures as the thorny devil, frilled dragon, and 24 species of highly predatory goannas (monitor lizards).

In Part II of our grand tour, we travel to O'Reilly's and the very lovely Lamington National Park, located on the border of Queensland and New South Wales. O'Reilly's is world famous, especially among birders in the know. Set in simply gorgeous, cool, upland forests, it is a haven for wildlife and spectacular species such as Australian Brush-turkey, Australian King-Parrot, flocks of Crimson Rosella and Regent Bowerbird—the male is quite fantastic; they all come to feed out of your hand. Further into the woods beckon Albert's Lyrebird, Paradise Riflebird and Noisy Pitta.

We continue to Cairns in the balmy tropics of northeast Queensland. From our tranquil base at Kingfisher Park, we'll range from the azure waters of the Great Barrier Reef to the magnificent rainforests of the Atherton Tableland. We will wander amidst buttressed roots, woody vines and countless epiphytes in search of some of Australia's most desired birds. Imagine seeing a gigantic flightless Cassowary—at a healthy distance; an exquisite male Golden Bowerbird dressing its court

or a pair of weird Chowchillas duetting back and forth. This and so much more awaits the discerning visitor to Australia.

Next we venture to Victoria, in the southeast of Australia. Traveling north, we will cross into New South Wales and reach the attractive township of Deniliquin. This is another bird rich area and here among the native grasslands, saltbush flats, river red gums and billabongs, we will search for a number of localized and difficult to find species: Spotless and Australian Spotted crakes, Black Falcon, beauties such as the Red-rumped and Superb parrots, perhaps the Budgerigar, White-backed Swallow, White-winged Fairywren, the charming Zebra Finch, and Apostlebird. However, above all, Deniliquin is home to the peculiar and endangered Plains-wanderer (the only member of its family). We will spend one evening looking for this and a number of other rarely seen species such as Stubble Quail and Little Buttonquail, all of which we will be able to study literally at arm's length.

From here we will return to Victoria to explore the Little Desert and Hattah Lakes National Parks. These impressively large conservation areas protect some of the finest remaining semi-arid mallee habitat and some super birds and mammals: the Emu, the extraordinary mound-building Malleefowl, Regent Parrot, Major Mitchell's Cockatoo—perhaps the most beautiful member of its genus, Mallee Emuwren—rare and elusive, Southern Scrub-Robin, Gilbert's Whistler, Chestnut Quail-thrush, Shy Heathwren and Gray Currawong.

Tasmania is a beautiful island greened by regular rains and cooled by seas that roar in from the Antarctic far to the south. As a result of its isolation, Tasmania not only supports a number of exciting endemic birds, but it also provides safe haven to a number of species, especially Australia's beleaguered mammals, which have declined or disappeared completely on the nearby mainland. VENT's exploration of this little piece of heaven will begin in Hobart. From here we wind our way northwards to Cradle Mountain National Park—the beauty and serenity of this park has to be experienced to be believed—and eventually on to the charming town of Launceston. Some of the very special birds you can hope to see include Little Penguin; the huge Tasmanian Native-hen; Hooded Plover; Pacific Gull; Swift Parrot; Green Rosella; the exquisite Pink Robin; Dusky Robin; Scrubtit; Tasmanian Thornbill; Yellow Wattlebird; Yellow-throated, Strong-billed, and Black-headed honeyeaters; the rare Forty-spotted Pardalote; Beautiful Firetail; and Black Currawong. Mammals include platypus, short-beaked echidna, spotted-tailed quoll, eastern quoll, Tasmanian devil, common wombat, Tasmanian bettong and red-necked wallaby.

Both sections of Part II can be taken by themselves or, for those desiring a more extensive Australian experience, in combination with Grand Australia Part I: New South Wales & The Northern Territory (October 14-30, 2012).

October 28-30, Days 1-3: Travel to Brisbane. Those participants not continuing from Part I can arrive in Brisbane at any time on October 30 and transfer to the Novotel where a room will be reserved in your name. There are non-stop flights in addition to connections through such cities as Sydney, Melbourne and Auckland which depart Los Angeles, cross the International Dateline and arrive in Brisbane two days later. If you arrive on the morning of October 30, you will have the rest of the day at leisure to rest up from your long journey. Participants continuing from Part I will arrive from Ayers Rock in the evening.

NIGHT (October 30): Novotel, Brisbane

October 31, Day 4: Drive to O'Reilly's, Lamington National Park. Today we continue to O'Reilly's, an incredible lodge located on the Lamington Plateau in the spectacular McPherson Ranges. Lamington National Park is another World Heritage listed area of subtropical rainforest and diverse *Eucalypt* forests. This plateau is

the border between New South Wales and Queensland and is a world famous birders' delight. At the highest altitudes are forests of Antarctic beech (*Nothofagus*) of tremendous age. They are gnarled, moss covered giants which support tremendous epiphytes including staghorns, elkhorns and birdsnest ferns.

The birding will become considerably more challenging here as we attempt to spot birds in a sea of green (after our time in the desert in Part I of Grand Australia).

En route from Brisbane to O'Reilly's, we will make a stop to try and find the koala. This endearing mammal is surprisingly elusive and by no means guaranteed but with luck we may come across one (fingers crossed!). Recent visits have also turned up the scarce Square-tailed Kite, so we may have some compensation if we cannot find our sleepy, button-nosed, big-eared marsupial quarry.

NIGHT: O'Reilly's Guest House, Lamington National Park

November 1, Day 5: O'Reilly's, Lamington National Park. O'Reilly's is famous for the profusion and extraordinary tameness of its bird life. Some of the exciting species we may see include Gray Goshawk, Pacific Baza, Australian Brush-turkey, Wompoo Fruit-Dove, Topknot, White-headed and Wonga pigeon, Brown Cuckoo-Dove, very tame Crimson Rosellas and Australian King-Parrots, Noisy Pitta, Russet-tailed Thrush, White-eared Monarch (rare), Southern Logrunner, Eastern Whipbird, Paradise Riflebird, Green Catbird, the incredible Regent Bowerbirds which will feed from your hands, and Satin Bowerbirds. We will search for regional endemics, especially the elusive Albert's Lyrebird, scarce Glossy Black Cockatoo, Spotted Quail-thrush and Marbled Frogmouth. Spotlighting may reward us with various species of possum, wallabies and hopefully nocturnal birds including Southern Boobook and Australian Owlet-Nightjar. Unfortunately, it is unrealistic to expect to see the near invisible Rufous Scrub-bird during our stay here. During previous tours, a visit into the Lamington valley added several birds not previously recorded on our tour including Striped Honeyeater, Speckled Warbler, Latham's Snipe, Bell Miner and the biggest surprise of all, a koala.

NIGHT: O'Reilly's Guest House, Lamington National Park

November 2, Day 6: O'Reilly's; Afternoon Flight to Cairns. This morning we will be trying to find any birds we have missed. After lunch, we will drive to Brisbane in time for the 2:00 p.m. departure of Qantas Flight 784, which is scheduled to arrive in Cairns at 4:20 p.m. (subject to change). After settling into our hotel we will, depending upon tides and our actual arrival, bird along the Cairns Esplanade. This area is excellent for many birds including Eastern Curlew, Terek Sandpiper, Bar-tailed and Black-tailed godwits, Broad-billed Sandpiper, Asiatic Dowitcher (rare), Varied Honeyeater, Metallic Starling, Australian Swiftlet and Scaly-breasted Lorikeets, to name a few.

NIGHT: Rydges Tradewinds Hotel, Cairns

November 3, Day 7: Cairns to Kingfisher Park; Julatten via Mareeba. This morning we will explore Centenary Lakes in Cairns. At this bird rich site, we can expect to encounter a bunch of tropical honeyeaters like Brown-backed and Yellow, maybe a Black Butcherbird, Double-eyed Fig-Parrot, White-browed Crake, Olive-backed Sunbird, Large-billed Gerygone or Bush Stone-curlew. If time permits, we may visit the Mareeba Wetlands Centre. If we have not had any luck to date, this will give us another chance for the Australian Bustard and Black-necked Stork. It is also an occasional area for Cotton Pygmy-goose and a likely place to find the increasingly rare Black-throated Finch and maybe a Brown Treecreeper. After lunch, we will stop off at Lake Mitchell, Big Mitchell Creek and Mount Molloy to try for a host of rare and not so rare tropical woodland birds including Squatter Pigeon, Apostlebird, Pale-headed Rosella and White-browed Robin (the eastern race was recently split from the form in the dry tropics). We will then arrive at our home for the next three nights—Kingfisher Park, a birders' delight. Here we will let the birds come to us and we should enjoy views of the elusive Red-necked Crake; Macleay's, Yellow-spotted, Graceful and Scarlet honeyeaters; Emerald Dove; Spotted Catbird; Gray-headed and Pale-yellow robin; Spectacled Monarch; and much more coming into and around the feeders. At dusk we will try to see the platypus. It sometimes cooperates and gives us fabulous views of this, perhaps the most unusual mammal in the world.

NIGHT: Kingfisher Park

November 4, Day 8: Kingfisher Park and Mount Lewis. After breakfast we will be heading up to Mount Lewis to try and find all of the high altitude endemic birds this special place has to offer. These include Bower's Shrike-Thrush, Chowchilla, Fernwren, Mountain Thornbill, Atherton Scrubwren, Bridled Honeyeater, the aberrant Toothbill, Victoria's Riflebird and maybe a Blue-faced Parrotfinch. With good fortune, we may encounter the scarce Golden Bowerbird. Lower down we will be looking out for Pied Monarch, Yellow-breasted Boatbill, Barred Cuckoo-shrike, Double-eyed Fig-Parrot, and possibly, the Southern Cassowary or the spectacular Buff-breasted Paradise-Kingfisher that with some luck may have just arrived on migration from New Guinea. This is jungle birding at its finest. At dusk we will again try for the platypus and spotlight for the Lesser Sooty-Owl and maybe a striped possum.

NIGHT: Kingfisher Park

November 5, Day 9: Daintree River Cruise, Kingfisher Park, and Mount Carbine. We begin today with an early morning boat trip on the Daintree River. High on our wish list this morning will be the monolithic Great-billed Heron, the elusive Black Bittern and with local expertise, perhaps a nesting Wompoo Fruit-Dove or Papuan Frogmouth. Upon returning to Kingfisher Park, we will be able to select what we have not seen and pay our full attention to these species. These may include Lovely Fairywren or Superb Fruit-Dove.

NIGHT: Kingfisher Park

November 6, Day 10: Cassowary Guesthouse. We will depart early this morning for our now traditional breakfast at Cassowary Guesthouse, run by birders Phil and Sue Gregory. The star attraction is the Southern Cassowary, which appear unpredictably but regularly. It is sensational to see these rainforest giants at such close quarters. Please do be prepared for a lengthy wait as there is no rhyme or reason for a visit from this most elusive of birds. Other species to be seen from the veranda and gardens include incredible male Victoria's Riflebird often at less than a meter on the feeder, Black Butcherbird, Red-necked Crake, Spotted Catbird and six species of honeyeater. After breakfast we will explore the Atherton Tablelands for flocks of Sarus Cranes with the odd Brolga mixed in and perhaps search for the Golden Bowerbird or Cotton Pygmy-goose (both increasingly difficult) if we have not yet encountered these species.

NIGHT: Rydges Tradewinds Hotel, Cairns

November 7, Day 11: The Great Barrier Reef. Today we will visit the largest and one of the most spectacular and biologically diverse coral reefs in the world. Australia's Great Barrier Reef harbors tens of thousands of tiny coral cays and islets and a wonderful array of marine life. We will take an all day boat trip to visit the outer reef and Michaelmas Cay, where tens of thousands of terns should be nesting in addition to other patrolling tropical seabirds such as Greater and Lesser frigatebirds; Brown and perhaps Masked boobies; Common, Roseate, Bridled, Sooty and Black-naped terns; and Common and possibly Black noddies. There will also be plenty of opportunity for those who wish to snorkel and explore the reef itself.

NIGHT: Rydges Tradewinds Hotel, Cairns

November 8, Day 12: Flight to Melbourne; Drive to Deniliquin. This morning we will transfer to the Cairns Airport in time for the 12:45 p.m. departure of Qantas Flight 703, which is scheduled to arrive in Melbourne at 5:05 p.m. (subject to change). Upon arrival, we will drive north to Deniliquin, located on the broad, flat plains on either side of the Murray River. Please note it is a three hour drive from Melbourne to Deniliquin so this is a lengthy travel day. Encompassing a fascinating mosaic of semi-arid woodland, sand ridges, marshes, salt pans and flooded forests including fine stands of the impressive river red gum, it is home to countless sheep as well as huge red and eastern gray kangaroos. Furthermore, it is also very rich in birds, in particular the peculiar Plains-wanderer.

NIGHT: Deniliquin Country Club Motor Inn, Deniliquin

November 9, Day 13: Deniliquin Area. Today we will visit an area of ponds and marshes in search of such secretive species as Australasian Bittern; Baillon's, Spotless and Australian crakes; Stubble Quail; Black Falcon; Banded Lapwing; Ground Cuckoo-shrike (rare); Clamorous Reed-Warbler; Little Grassbird; Brown Songlark; White-fronted Chat; Apostlebird; Little Raven and, if we are very fortunate, the rare and endangered Freckled Duck. We will also visit areas of flooded stands of river red gum, which host one of Australia's most lovely and localized parrots, the Superb Parrot. Also in this area are a number of other special birds including Little Eagle, Yellow Rosella, White-browed Babbler, Gilbert's Whistler, White-plumed Honeyeater, and the beautiful, but uncommon Diamond Firetail. We will also visit an area of saltbush, a specialized habitat where we can hope to see such species as Red-rumped Parrot, Blue Bonnet, Budgerigar (nomadic), Long-billed Corella, Mallee Ringneck, Cockatiel, White-winged Fairywren, Western Gerygone and Singing, Painted (very scarce), Striped and Spiny-cheeked honeyeaters.

Without doubt, the star attraction of the Deniliquin area is the strange, buttonquail-like Plains-wanderer. The sole representative of an endemic Australian family, it was until recently very poorly known. We will go out at night with Phil Maher, the acknowledged expert on this species, and thus have a very good chance of finding this normally very difficult to find native grassland inhabitant. Other birds we may encounter on this nocturnal foray include Banded Lapwing, Little Buttonquail, Stubble Quail, Australian Pratincole, Singing Bushlark and the Brown Songlark. Our day in Deniliquin is one of the great birding days in the world.

NIGHT: Deniliquin Country Club Motor Inn, Deniliquin

November 10, Day 14: Hattah Lakes National Park. After a bit of a sleep-in following our night of "Plains-wandering," we will drive south and west to the small town of Ouyen. This is the gateway to the Hattah Lakes National Park. This wonderfully serene park with its subtle beauty encompasses approximately 20,000 hectares of pristine mallee bushland. The three major vegetation communities are riverine woodland dominated by river red gum and black box, mallee eucalypts, and spinifex or porcupine grass, named with good reason! Depending on the spring rains, the park can be blanketed with a fabulous variety of flowering plants and shrubs. Hattah is also home to some 220 species of birds and a number of neat mammals and reptiles. One of the area's specialties and one of your leader's favorites is the gorgeous Major Mitchell's Cockatoo. The late afternoon sun warming the subtle pinks of these birds is very special.

There are a large number of very interesting birds here, including a number of really skulky characters. Some of the species we might see include Emu; Brown Falcon; Regent Parrot; Mulga Parrot; Common Bronzewing; Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo; Inland Thornbill; Weebill; Southern Whiteface; Striated Pardalote; Dusky, Masked and White-browed woodswallows; Red-capped Robin; Splendid Fairywren; Chestnut Quail-thrush; Striated Grasswren—very skulking; Mallee Emuwren; Shy Heathwren; Crested Bellbird; White-eared, Brown-headed and White-fronted honeyeaters; Apostlebird; White-winged Chough; and Gray Currawong.

NIGHT: Hilltop Motel, Ouyen

November 11, Day 15: Hattah Lakes National Park. A full morning and afternoon will help us track down some of the most elusive mallee birds and enjoy iconic Australian wildlife with Emus and kangaroos amidst woodlands with a great variety of parrots.

NIGHT: Hilltop Motel, Ouyen

November 12, Day 16: Drive to Little Desert National Park. We will depart early this morning for a very attractive drive with plenty of stops along the way for birding and just to imbibe some of Australia's wonderful backcountry. After lunch we will continue across what was once horizon-to-horizon mallee, now largely converted to agricultural land. Fortunately much of the remaining area of mallee habitat has now been saved. We will visit one of the finest of all the mallee reserves, Little Desert National Park. We should arrive in time for an initial exploration of this attractive area of heathlands dominated by banksia, she-oak and tea-tree.

NIGHT: Little Desert Nature Lodge, Nhill

November 13, Day 17: Drive to Melbourne. Today we will spend a very fulfilling morning in a private nature reserve developed by local expert birder and conservation visionary Whimpey Reicheldt. Whimpey (now retired) has dedicated his life to conservation of the Malleefowl, the unique endangered megapode that is typically very difficult to see. In a fox-proof fenced reserve of mallee-broom bush, we will be able to visit the mounds of the Malleefowl and if all goes according to plan, hopefully see this beautifully patterned turkey-sized bird. This is also an excellent location to see the shy Purple-gaped Honeyeater, Southern Scrub-Robin and the Shy Heathwren. In the nearby sandplain we have a chance to look for the Rufous Fieldwren and rare Slender-billed Thornbill. Occasionally Diamond Firetails come to feed on the lawns and there is a good chance to see the Little Eagle. We will take our leave after the morning and make our way to Melbourne.

NIGHT: Parkroyal Melbourne Airport, Melbourne

November 14, Day 18: Departure for Home or Begin Tasmania Extension. Participants not continuing on the Tasmania Extension can depart at any time today. Qantas Flight 93 is scheduled to depart Melbourne at 11:20 a.m., cross the International Dateline and arrive in Los Angeles on the same day at 6:40 a.m. (subject to change).

TASMANIA EXTENSION

NOVEMBER 14-20, 2012

November 14, Day 1: Travel to Hobart. Those continuing from Grand Australia Part II will transfer to the Melbourne Airport in time for the 8:45 a.m. departure of Qantas Flight 1011, which is scheduled to arrive in Hobart at 10:00 a.m. (subject to change). For the remainder of the day, we will explore some nearby park lands and soon start to encounter many of Tasmania's special birds, including the 12 endemics. We will hope to find Musk Lorikeet, Dusky Robin, Scarlet Robin, Satin Flycatcher, and Beautiful Firetail amongst many others.

NIGHT: Hotel Grand Chancellor, Hobart

November 15, Day 2: Bruny Island. This morning we will drive to Kettering and catch the ferry to Bruny Island. Bruny Island is a place of sweeping beaches pounded by the ocean rollers that storm in from the Antarctic. Here jagged capes and inlets hide all sorts of mysteries, not to mention some fine birds. Lying off the east coast of Tasmania, about 35 km. south of Hobart, Bruny Island is a good place for the increasingly rare, endemic Forty-spotted Pardalote, in addition to a host of other wonderful birds. This is a good opportunity to see Black-faced Cormorant, and Pacific and Kelp gull, if we haven't seen them already. These forests are also home to a good number of other species, including the endangered Swift Parrot; Blue-winged Parrot; Green Rosella; Pallid and Fan-tailed cuckoos; Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike; Scarlet, Flame, Pink and Dusky robin; Golden and Olive whistler; Gray Shrike-Thrush; Satin Flycatcher; Gray Fantail; Superb Fairywren; Brown and Tasmanian thornbills; Yellow Wattlebird; Yellow-throated, Strong-billed, Black-headed, Crescent and New Holland honeyeaters; Eastern Spinebill; Spotted Pardalote; Silvereye; Beautiful Firetail; Dusky Woodswallow; and Black Currawong. Along the beach we may find Pied and Sooty oystercatchers, as well as the beautiful and rare Hooded Plover. Watch out overhead for patrolling White-bellied Sea-Eagles, a fine sight on any day.

NIGHT: Hotel Grand Chancellor, Hobart

November 16, Day 3: Drive to Cradle Mountain. We will drive north towards the World Heritage area of Cradle Mountain via the Great Lakes, stopping for anything of interest on the way. A visit to Orielson Lagoon may reveal the dapper White-fronted Chat, Musk Duck, Great Crested Grebe and the delightful Red-capped Plover. The smaller, rather un-Australian scale of Tasmania, which brings everything within relatively easy reach, coupled with the grandeur of its scenery, makes this island one of the most beautiful on our planet. Furthermore, Tasmania's isolation has protected a number of its mammals from the extinctions that have taken place on the mainland as the result of introduced predators. Here it is still possible to see species such as the strange Tasmanian devil (the

largest of Australia's remaining marsupial carnivores), in addition to a good selection of birds within the Cradle Mountain-Lake St. Clair National Park, our home for the next two nights.

Cradle Mountain National Park encompasses 130,000 hectares of wild alpine country which has been sculpted by enormous glaciers to produce some of the most stunning scenery in Australia. A land of immense contrasts—from magical temperate rainforests to majestic alpine vistas which stretch as far as your eye can see—the opportunities for the birder, naturalist, photographer, and hiker are seemingly endless. Cradle Mountain Lake itself just has to be seen to be believed. It is surely one of the most beautiful lakes on earth. The adjoining ancient forests (many are more than 1,000 years old) are equally exquisite. Here King William pine, celery-top pine, and myrtle beech, many gnarled and dripping with every kind of moss and lichen imaginable, are home to some very special birds and mammals. These include Bassian Thrush, the really lovely Pink Robin, Dusky Robin, Olive Whistler, Tasmanian Thornbill, the endemic and elusive Scrubtit, Strong-billed Honeyeater, Yellow Wattlebird, as well as red-necked wallaby.

In the more open areas, we should find Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo, Green Rosella, Shining Bronze-Cuckoo, Richard's Pipit, Flame Robin, Striated Fieldwren, Crescent Honeyeater, and Forest Raven. The endemic Black Currawong is common around our cabins, and at night a great variety of mammals can be encountered. These include Tasmanian devil, common wombat, brush-tailed possum, and red-bellied pademelon. The photographic opportunities for such unusual marsupials are exceptional. With luck we may encounter nocturnal birds like the Tawny Frogmouth or Southern Boobook.

NIGHT: Cradle Mountain Lodge

November 17, Day 4: Birding the Strahan Area. This morning we will drive to the west coast town of Strahan. Here we will search for the rare Ground Parrot in short heathland. While searching for this most unusual parrot, we may find Blue-winged Parrot, Southern Emuwren, Striated Fieldwren, Beautiful Firetail, Olive Whistler and Tawny-crowned Honeyeater. We will return to Cradle Mountain for a rest and then head out in the late afternoon to visit the town of Burnie. In a protected area at dusk, we will wait for the Little Penguins to come ashore and feed their chicks—a truly unique experience.

NIGHT: Cradle Mountain Lodge

November 18, Day 5: Drive to Mountain Valley. Tonight we will enjoy dinner with the devil—the Tasmanian devil. The proprietors Len and Pat of Mountain Valley Wilderness Resort have spent the last thirty years protecting land and animals and in particular the Tasmanian devil. With dinner served in cabin, you can watch the devils come up the stairs while settled in your room. With this species in dramatic decline from a virus, this is by far our best chance to see this most enigmatic corgi-sized black and white marsupial carnivore and hear the screaming that gave rise to its name.

NIGHT: Mountain Valley Wilderness Resort, Loongana

November 19, Day 6: Drive to Launceston. After our night of devil watching, we will enjoy a relaxed drive back to Launceston. In the afternoon we will visit some remote wetlands on the north coast of Tasmania. Our visit last year turned up Cape Barren Goose, Blue-billed Duck, Fairy Tern and Australasian Bittern—truly astonishing. Here we will have the last chance to find any endemic species participants may have missed. Tonight we will enjoy a farewell dinner in our lovely hotel, ready for departures home tomorrow.

NIGHT: Launceston Country Club, Launceston

November 20, Day 7: Departure for Home. We will transfer to the Launceston Airport in time for the 6:30 a.m. departure of Qantas 2280, which will arrive in Melbourne at 7:40 a.m. This will enable a connection with the 11:20 a.m. departure of Qantas Flight 93 which, after crossing the International Dateline, is scheduled to arrive in Los Angeles on the same day at 6:40 a.m. (subject to change).

TOUR SIZE: Grand Australia Part II will be limited to 10 participants. The Tasmania Extension will be limited to 8 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 Grand Australia Part II is **\$6695** per person in double occupancy from Brisbane (tour ends in Melbourne), which includes all meals from breakfast on Day 4 to breakfast on Day 18, 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 airfare from your home to Brisbane and return from Melbourne, 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 **\$1275**. 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.

Rooms are limited at Kingfisher Park (Days 7, 8 & 9) and you may be asked to share (most likely a 2 bedroom unit with a shared bath & living room). If so, you will be credited appropriately.

The fee for the Tasmania Extension is **\$3145** per person in double occupancy from Hobart (tour ends in Launceston), which includes all meals from lunch on Day 1 to dinner on Day 6, 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 airfare from your home to Hobart and return from Launceston, 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 **\$720**. 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.

Rooms are limited at the Mountain Valley Wilderness Resort (Day 5) and you may be asked to share. If so, you will be credited appropriately.

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 these sections, 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 per section. 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, North Queensland) you can expect warm to hot temperatures from 60-90 °F, sometimes higher especially in Kakadu, Katherine and Victoria River. 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. In the far south such as Tasmania, temperatures rarely exceed 75 °F and are often cold in the morning, particularly if there is a wind blowing. You will not see any snow, with the possible exception of montane areas in Tasmania.

GREAT BARRIER REEF: Our day on the “Seastar” on the Great Barrier Reef offers excellent snorkeling and seabird watching. Since the seas can occasionally be rough, seasickness medication is recommended if you suffer with this condition. Our hotel will provide towels for the day. Sunscreen, hats, sunglasses, swimming suits and sun protective clothing are recommended. The boat prefers if you do not wear shoes on board so as to protect people’s feet from being trodden on. The boat can provide all masks, fins and snorkels with prescription mask available for hire as well as underwater cameras. You can snorkel at both major stops, Michaelmas Cay and Hastings Reef. Our principal birding is at Michaelmas Cay where you can see thousands of tropical terns, boobies and some frigatebirds. We go ashore in a small zodiac. It is a wet landing (i.e. no shoes). We will normally spend some time observing the seabirds and if the tide and weather conditions are suitable we will attempt a zodiac trip around the cay. You can easily bring your camera ashore (plastic bag recommended to protect from salt and sand). While waiting for our zodiac trip, you are welcome to snorkel. At Hastings Reef it is all about snorkeling. Glass bottom boat rides are available.

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. 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 but insects can be a problem if you do not have repellent. However, do bring a warm sweater and jacket, as well as gloves and a windbreaker for cooler areas (especially Tasmania). 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 and essential for snorkeling on the Great Barrier Reef. 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 automatic teller machines that give the best rate and have little or no commission. Visa, Diners Club, MasterCard, Carte Blanche, and American Express are accepted; however, use may be limited in small towns.

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 virtually no risk of malaria. Sanitary conditions are excellent in Australia, and both the water and food are safe. It is recommended to carry a water bottle with you at all times and refill it as required. It is important to keep well hydrated whilst traveling and birding.

Insects can be a problem at times in some localities. We recommend the use of Cutter's and OFF for chiggers (very unlikely on this tour) 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 headnet 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 a good idea to bring the prescription with you in case you misplace your medicine. 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 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.

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
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 books for the Asia-Pacific region at <http://www.andrewisles.com/AndrewIsles/> for 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* Oxford University Press, South Melbourne (latest edition): The concise field guide to Australian mammals we have all been waiting for. Highly recommended.

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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 and light weight.

TIPPING: As noted in our itineraries, tipping (restaurants, porters, drivers, and local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are not expected and are entirely optional.

RESPONSIBILITY: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc. (VENT) and/or its Agents act only as agents for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT and its agents can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. When this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members. No refund will be made for any unused portion of the tour unless arrangements are made in sufficient time to avoid penalties. The prices of the tours are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on January 31, 2012 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change therein. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely. The airlines concerned and their agents and affiliates are not to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time passengers are not on board their aircraft. The passenger ticket in use by said airlines, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the airlines and the purchaser of these tickets and/or passenger. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for these tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airline Reporting Corporation.