



GRAND AUSTRALIA

PART I: NEW SOUTH WALES & THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

SEPTEMBER 28–OCTOBER 14, 2024

©2024

This is the first part of our Grand Australia tour; VENT's comprehensive tour of Australia. We will travel to several of 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 field list from either of these parts to represent close to 50% of the species of Australia, which is half of Australia's regular birds in two weeks of birding. We have designed all sections to allow flexibility 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 by taking all three sections.

Travelling in Australia is a delight; friendly people, excellent roads and hotels, reliable airlines, plenty of fresh produce and tasty food. You can drink the water and eat the salads! On this tour we make a number of two and even three night stays and travel in a vehicle that affords excellent viewing and an abundance of seats.

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 (amongst the richest 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, and the huge plains-dwelling Red Kangaroo. There is also 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 as it is a short distance from the city center 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. The Northern Territory 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 ancient rock paintings and such localized specialties as Black-banded Fruit-Dove, Chestnut-quilled Rock-Pigeon and Sandstone Shrikethrush. Further to the south we will seek out such localized rarities as Hooded Parrots, Purple-crowned Fairywren and with luck, the spectacular but sadly endangered Gouldian Finch.

Next 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 Pink Cockatoos and confiding Western Bowerbirds, 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 12-29, 2024) and Tasmania Extension (October 29-November 4, 2024).

September 28-30, Days 1-3: Travel to Sydney. There are direct flights from various western U.S. cities including Dallas, Honolulu, Los Angeles and San Francisco, which will depart on September 28, cross the International Dateline and arrive in Sydney on the morning of September 30. Upon arrival and clearing customs, please make your way by taxi, Uber or Lyft to the Pullman Sydney Hyde Park where a room will be reserved in your name.

Participants wanting to avoid the risk of misconnecting with the group should consider arriving in Sydney on or before September 29 and spending the night. Upon request, VENT will be happy to assist with these arrangements. The hotel is strategically located and if you arrive early, it is easy to visit the Opera House, Sydney Harbour, Royal Botanic Gardens, Art Gallery of New South Wales and the Australian Museum. Ferries at Circular Quay can take you to Taronga Zoo or Manly Beach.

After time to unpack, rest, and enjoy lunch, we will at last experience our first Australian birds by visiting nearby parklands and forests. Our activities will depend on where the best birding is to be had. It may include Sydney Olympic Park, Centennial Park or even Hyde Park and the Royal Botanic Gardens. Among the many birds we encounter here, we will hope to see the strange Tawny Frogmouth, Laughing Kookaburra, gaudy Rainbow Lorikeet, Pied Currawong, gargantuan Channel-billed Cuckoo, 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 (September 28): Pullman Sydney Hyde Park, Sydney



Variegated Fairywren © Dion Hobcroft

October 1, 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 plants here than in the entire United Kingdom.

We will enjoy being distracted by Satin Bowerbird, Sacred Kingfisher, Laughing Kookaburra and the comical, noisy and boisterous Sulphur-crested Cockatoo. Our first walk will take us along Lady Carrington Drive, where we will search for the incredible Superb Lyrebird, a pheasant-sized passerine with an extraordinary powerful song of complex mimicry. Lyrebird populations in the park have recently declined so we will need to walk into the best areas. Fortunately the trails are level and the lyrebirds reasonably tolerant of people, if somewhat aloof. Undoubtedly we will be distracted by new bird after new bird. We should have good chances 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 Cuckooshrike; Eastern

Whipbird (with its sonic whip-cracking call); Eastern Yellow Robin; Golden and Rufous whistlers; Gray Shrikethrush; 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; Red Wattlebird; Noisy Friarbird; Noisy Miner; Lewin's, Yellow-faced, Scarlet and New Holland honeyeater; Eastern Spinebill; Silveryeye; Spotted Pardalote; Gray Butcherbird; and Green Catbird. With luck and local expert knowledge, we may encounter Rockwarbler.

After a delicious cafe lunch we will explore some coastal heathlands to try for Tawny-crowned Honeyeater, Little Wattlebird, Chestnut-rumped Heathwren, Southern Emu-wren and Beautiful Firetail. These last three 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: Pullman Sydney Hyde Park, Sydney

October 2, 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. In early spring, schools of baitfish attract flocks of shearwaters. There are often lingering albatrosses from winter and a good mix of both warm and cold water oceanic birds. Among the likely possibilities are no less than four species of albatross including Black-browed, Yellow-nosed, White-capped 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 (scarce); Wedge-tailed, Short-tailed, Fluttering, Hutton's and Flesh-footed shearwaters; Southern and Northern giant-petrel; Gray-faced and Providence petrels; Australasian Gannet; White-faced and Wilson's storm-petrel; and Brown Skua. Almost any rarity is possible such as Kermadec Petrel, 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.



Wandering Albatross at sea off Sydney © Dion Hobcroft

NIGHT: Pullman Sydney Hyde Park, Sydney

October 3, Day 6: Drive to Wallerawang via Blue Mountains National Park. Today we will drive west from Sydney to the Blue Mountains with some birding en route. Just on the other side of the ranges, we will visit a nearby wetland, which will give us the chance to see the bizarre Musk Duck among a good diversity of Australian waterfowl. 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. Today we may encounter some of the scarcer cockatoo species, such as Yellow-tailed Black, Glossy-Black, or even Gang-gang Cockatoo.

NIGHT: Black Gold Motel, Wallerawang

October 4, Day 7: Capertee Valley; Transfer to Sydney. This little-known valley tucked away on the west side of the Great Dividing Range is both a superb birding area and very scenic. We will have most of the day to bird the area. Among the many birds we may see are such specialties as Little Eagle; Turquoise Parrot (scarce); Red-rumped Parrot; Little Lorikeet; Black-chinned, Yellow-tufted and the critically endangered Regent honeyeaters—the Capertee Valley was once a stronghold for this emblematic species, but they have declined drastically in recent years; Brown Treecreeper; Jacky Winter; Hooded Robin; Dusky Woodswallow; Plum-headed Finch; and Diamond Firetail. After a field lunch below stunning sandstone cliffs with friendly kangaroos and the odd Common Wombat, we will return to Sydney.

NIGHT: Stamford Airport Hotel, Mascot

October 5, Day 8: Travel to Darwin; Afternoon at East Point Reserve. This morning we will transfer to the airport in time for the 8:15 a.m. departure of Qantas Flight 840 to Darwin, which is scheduled to arrive in Darwin at 12:20 p.m. (subject to change).



Red-collared Lorikeet is a common species around Darwin © Dion Hobcroft

Named after Charles Darwin, Darwin is the capital city of the Northern Territory in the region widely referred to as 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 Pacific Reef-Heron; Brahminy Kite; Beach Thick-knee (rare); Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove; Torresian Imperial-Pigeon; Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo; Red-collared Lorikeet; Little Bronze-Cuckoo; Torresian 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 with some chance for Little Curlew, and hopefully Oriental Plover. Agile Wallabies (a small kangaroo) will be feeding on the edge of the monsoon rainforests.

NIGHT: Adina Vibe Hotel, Darwin

October 6, 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 Cuckooshrike, Shining Flycatcher, Northern Fantail, Gray Whistler, Dusky and Blue-faced honeyeater, and Yellow Oriole. If we have early success, we will explore the mangroves for Australian 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



Rainbow Pitta at Howard Springs © Dion Hobcroft

Pratincole and much more. After lunch we will visit the Darwin Botanic Gardens to try for both Rufous (now elusive) and Barking owls.

NIGHT: Adina Vibe Hotel, Darwin

October 7, 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. After checking in at Coinda, we will do some relaxed afternoon birding in the surrounding tropical woodland.

World Heritage Kakadu National Park 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 Black-banded Fruit-Dove, White-lined Honeyeater and Sandstone Shrikethrush. We also have a chance for two rare kangaroo species—the endemic Black Wallaroo and the tiny, shy, Wilkin's Rock Wallaby.

NIGHT: Gagadju Lodge Coinda (Yellow Waters), Kakadu

October 8, 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 Thick-knee; 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 Shrikethrush and Chestnut-quilled Rock-Pigeon.

NIGHT: Gagadju Lodge Coinda (Yellow Waters), Kakadu

October 9, Day 12: Travel from Kakadu National Park to Katherine. Today after a visit to the Aboriginal Cultural Centre we will drive 250 kilometers 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. In the late afternoon we will try our luck to see some of the Katherine locals like Apostlebird, Northern Rosella and the impressive Great Bowerbird with his impressive bower.

NIGHT: Knotts Crossing Resort, Katherine

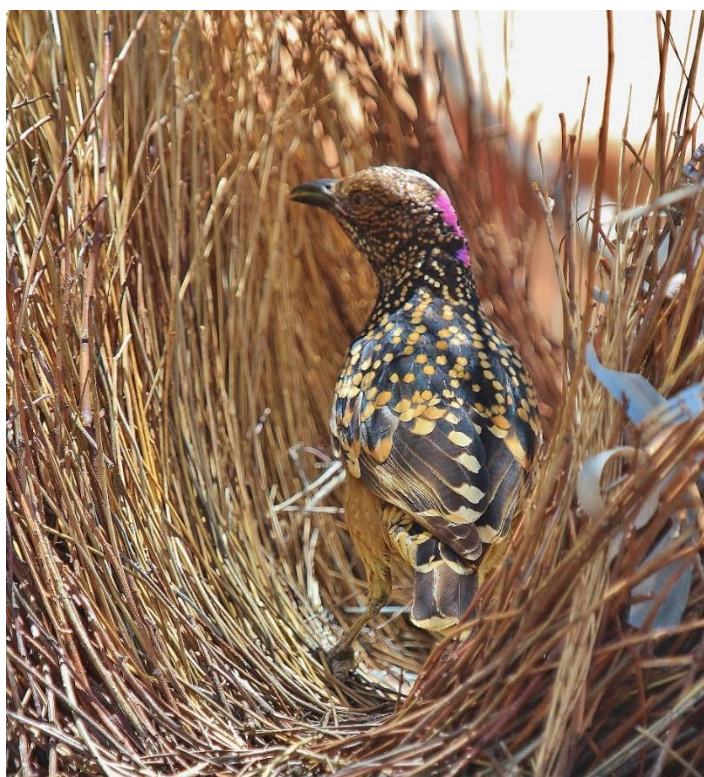
October 10, Day 13: Victoria River Bridge and Timber Creek. We will depart **very** early this morning for the Victoria River in order to be there for dawn. Our target this morning is one of the most beautiful and localized of all Australian birds, the Purple-crowned Fairywren. This species, together 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, Black-breasted Buzzard and with great fortune, perhaps a Gray Falcon or Red Goshawk.

NIGHT: Knotts Crossing Resort, Katherine

October 11, Day 14: Travel to Darwin and Fly to Alice Springs. After some morning birding or a visit to the Aboriginal Cultural Centre, we will transfer to Darwin in time for the 4:05 p.m. departure of Qantas Flight 1960, which is scheduled to arrive in Alice Springs at 6:15 p.m. (subject to change). “The Alice,” capital of the “Red Centre,” lies almost at the geographical center 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



Western Bowerbird working on its bower in Alice Springs
© Dion Hobcroft

October 12, 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 and exactly how we spend our time. 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, Red-capped Robin, Rainbow Bee-eater, Western Gerygone, Little Woodswallow, and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater, to name a few. We will also try and find the endangered Black-flanked 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 here or there may reveal a Red-browed Pardalote, Crested Bellbird and much more.

NIGHT: Alice Springs Resort, Alice Springs

October 13, Day 16: Drive to Uluru (Ayers Rock). This morning we will explore along the Santa Theresa Road to the east of town. Here dense spinifex and patches of dwarf Eucalypts and Mulga

is home to the Mulga Parrot, White-browed Treecreeper, Rufous-crowned Emuwren (scarce), Dusky Grasswren and sometimes Banded Whiteface. We will also have the opportunity for more inland species like White-winged and Purple-backed fairywrens, Crimson Chat, Black-faced Woodswallow and Red-backed Kingfisher.

After an enjoyable morning’s birding, we will begin the drive to the World Heritage Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, with a few stops along the way. The country becomes increasingly arid and red sand dunes and salt lakes make an appearance as we head west. We can hope to see White-backed Swallow and a number of Wedge-tailed Eagles. In the evening we will enjoy sunset at “The Rock,” the spiritual heartland of Australia, complete with a glass of champagne and canapes.

NIGHT: Desert Gardens Hotel, Uluru (Ayers Rock)

October 14, 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. Much depends on the rains; it can either be quiet for birds or if the season has been good, quite outstanding. We will be on the look-out for Black-eared and Horsfield's bronze-cuckoo, Pied Honeyeater, Masked Woodswallow, Redthroat, Australian Ringneck, and Little Crow. Rarities include Banded Whiteface and Striated Grasswren. If the rains have been really good, we may be in for clouds of Budgerigars and some Pink Cockatoos.

We will transfer to the Uluru airport in time for an early afternoon flight to Sydney. Participants continuing on Grand Australia Part II will connect to an evening flight to Brisbane (specific flights and times to be announced).

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 15. Upon request, VENT will be happy to assist with any additional lodging arrangements.

TOUR SIZE: This section will be limited to 10 participants. However, VENT reserves the right to increase the tour limit by one in order to accommodate a couple when only one space is available.

TOUR LEADERS: Scott Baker with a local guide



Scott Baker's interest in wildlife began early on while growing up in the leafy, outer eastern suburbs of Melbourne which, although a highly urbanized environment, retained significant tracts of remnant natural woodland. It was here at the age of 11 that he got his first pair of binoculars and began what was to become a lifetime quest to identify all the birds in an ever-expanding neighborhood. By the age of 15 he was running weekly bird walks and talks and became a founding member of the very successful Yarran Dheran Junior Field Naturalists Club. In 1988 he was named the Nunawading Young Citizen of the Year in recognition of his contribution to natural history and conservation. Pursuing mutual interests in life science and fine art, Scott went on to hold various roles in business, education, and environmental consultancy. This has

facilitated opportunities to explore the wild places and wildlife of Australia and beyond. In 30 plus years he has traveled extensively throughout the continent with a major focus on birds. He loves the rare and sometimes challenging, cryptic varieties but also shorebirds and seabirds, having spent many days at sea. To date he has recorded (and photographed) almost all of the regular and resident land birds and pelagic species likely in the country. Scott has a passion for wildlife, not just birds, and conducts studies and regular surveys for mammals, reptiles, and frogs. His fieldwork will often involve additional nocturnal spotlighting sessions, requiring late nights and early mornings to maximize the "tetrapod" options, when possible. Scott is a well-regarded member of the Australian birding community, a moderator on several birdwatching forums and rare bird committees, and, since 2017, has run birdwatching and nature tours within Australia and parts of southeast Asia. He currently resides in Victoria but frequently interstate or abroad.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for this section is **\$9,845** 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, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, entrance fees to all parks, ground transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. 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 **\$1,680**. 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.

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$1,000** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, the deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. If you would like to pay your deposit by check, money order, or bank transfer, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at www.ventbird.com) should be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

PAYMENTS: All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard or Visa), check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial deposits, second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee is due 150 days (May 1, 2024) 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 & REFUNDS:

Cancellation by Participant:

Refunds, if any, for any cancellation by a participant are made according to the following schedule: If participant cancels 180 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$500** 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 from the date of participant tour cancellation, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made between 179 and 151 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the tour fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 150 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre- and post-tour extensions. **For participants' protection, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance that covers trip cancellation/interruption.**

If participant cancels:

180 days or more before departure date

179 to 151 days before departure date

150 days or less before departure date

Participant's refund will be:

Participant's deposit minus \$500*

No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance of the tour fee will be refunded

No refund available

*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months from the date of participant tour cancellation, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person. To qualify, cancellation must occur 180 days or more before departure date; deposit transfers must be made at the time of cancellation; and one transfer per deposit.

Cancellation by VENT:

If VENT cancels a tour prior to departure without cause or good reason, VENT will provide the participant a full refund, which will constitute full settlement to the participant.

If VENT cancels or delays a tour or any portion of a tour as a result of any Force Majeure event, VENT will use its reasonable best efforts to refund any payments on the balance of the tour fee to participant; provided that, VENT will have no obligation to provide a participant with a refund and will not be liable or responsible to a participant, nor be deemed to have defaulted under or breached any applicable agreement, for any failure or delay in fulfilling or performing any term of such agreement. A “**Force Majeure**” event means any act beyond VENT’s control, including, without limitation, the following: (a) acts of God; (b) flood, fire, earthquake, hurricane, epidemic, pandemic or explosion; (c) war, invasion, hostilities (whether war is declared or not), terrorist threats or acts, riot or other civil unrest; (d) government order, law or actions; (e) embargoes or blockades; (f) national or regional emergency; (g) strikes, labor stoppages, labor slowdowns or other industrial disturbances; (h) shortage of adequate power or transportation facilities; and (i) any other similar events or circumstances beyond the control of VENT.

This VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy does not apply to air tickets purchased through VENT or to any special arrangements, such as additional hotel nights, that fall outside of the services described in the tour itinerary.

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.

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.

TRAVEL INSURANCE: To safeguard against losses due to illness, accident, or other unforeseen circumstances, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance as soon as possible after making a deposit. VENT has partnered with Redpoint Travel Protection as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through Redpoint, we recommend its **Ripcord** plan. Designed for all types of travelers, Ripcord is among the most comprehensive travel protection programs available.

Critical benefits of Ripcord include a completely integrated program with a single contact for emergency services, travel assistance, and insurance claims; **medical evacuation from your point of injury or illness to your hospital of choice**; comprehensive travel insurance for trip cancellation/interruption, medical expense coverage, death of pet, and much more. Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as evacuation coverage in case of a natural disaster or political or security reasons, waiver for pre-existing medical conditions exclusion, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” benefit. Ripcord is available to U.S. and non-U.S. residents.*

For a price quote, or to purchase travel insurance, please visit: <https://ripcordtravelprotection.com/ventbird>; or click the **Ripcord** logo on our website (click Help and Trip Insurance); or call +1-415-481-0600. Pricing is based on age, trip cost, trip length, and level of coverage.

*To be eligible for the pre-existing medical condition exclusion waiver and the optional Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) upgrade, you must purchase your policy within 15 days of making your first trip payment. The CFAR benefit provides reimbursement for 75% of covered costs, and increases the policy premium by approximately 50%. Policies may be purchased either for the full value of the tour fee at the time of deposit or in segments as individual tour payments are made (deposit, mid-payment, final balance, additional arrangements, etc.). The “pay as you go” approach reduces up-front expense and ensures that the amount paid toward your full policy premium is in proportion to the amount paid toward the full tour fee. If you choose to “pay as you go,” you must cover each deposit or payment within 15 days, and insure all non-refundable trip cost in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

In line with the decision made by the federal government (including the CDC), Redpoint considers COVID-19 illness as any other seasonal respiratory illness. Providing only a positive Covid-19 test result will likely not be considered a covered event per the terms and conditions of the company's policy. Redpoint maintains a **Coronavirus FAQ** page on its website that addresses questions and concerns travelers may have regarding COVID-19 and Redpoint's policy. We strongly recommend that you visit the page for an overview of relevant topics.

Please visit the **Coronavirus FAQ** page at the following link: https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid_19_faq/.

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. Per person fees apply for each set of travel arrangements: \$50 domestic; \$75 international.* Many of our travelers choose to make their own air travel arrangements, but we emphasize the benefits to using our services. If you book your air arrangements yourself, Victor Emanuel Travel is unable to provide support in managing any flight delays and/or cancellations that could occur before and during a tour. When you purchase air tickets through Victor Emanuel Travel, our staff has ready access to your air ticket record and can provide assistance as problems arise. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements. **Please be sure to check with the VENT office prior to purchasing your air ticket to confirm that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. VENT cannot be held responsible for any air ticket penalties.**

*An air ticket will be purchased by Victor Emanuel Travel on behalf of the traveler with the traveler's consent. A purchase is considered final upon receipt of payment. If a ticket is subsequently reissued at the behest of the traveler (i.e. voluntary change of plans), the same fee rates apply for the reissue process, in addition to any fees that may be charged by the airline.

Note that there are specific internal commercial Australian flights associated with this tour section, the cost of which is not covered by the tour fee. Due to the complicated nature of these flights, you are strongly encouraged to contact Victor Emanuel Travel for assistance with these arrangements about four months prior to departure.

BAGGAGE: The airlines now strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant. Please consult your airline to find out specific weight restrictions. Due to ever-changing circumstances in the government's attempts to improve airport security we recommend that you check the website of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) for the most updated information: <http://www.tsa.gov/>.

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. Blackheath can be 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 casual.

CURRENCY: Australian Dollar (AUD) 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, 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 an Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA) are required for citizens of most countries including the USA and Canada. Please use the link below to initiate the application process:

<https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/getting-a-visa/visa-listing/electronic-travel-authority-601>

EQUIPMENT: You should pack a pair of binoculars that are in good condition, along with a belt pack or day pack (for carrying books, sunscreen, extra film, etc.). 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. Your leader will have a spotting scope, but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so.

HEALTH: There is no risk of malaria and 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 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.

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.

VENT follows Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for standard travel precautions, which includes vaccination against a variety of preventable diseases. Among these so-called Routine Vaccinations are measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) vaccine, poliovirus vaccine (boosters for adult travelers), and Varicella (Chickenpox). You should also be up-to-date with Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B vaccinations.

If you are taking personal medication, prescription or over-the-counter, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. 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.

COVID-19: We continually emphasize that our number one priority is the health and safety of our customers and employees. Although VENT no longer maintains any of its COVID-era prevention protocols, we strongly recommend best practices for protecting yourself and your fellow travelers against COVID-19 illness. These measures include receiving the primary series vaccinations for those eligible, staying “Up to Date” with COVID-19 booster shots, wearing high filtration N-95 or KN-95 masks when in airports and on airplanes, and avoiding risky social settings in the lead-up to your tour. These recommendations are firmly rooted in CDC guidance regarding recommendations for avoiding COVID-19. Please visit the **Coronavirus Travel Update** page of our website <https://ventbird.com/covid-19> for our official statement regarding COVID-19 and the operation of our tours. Please visit the CDC website for the most up to date information about COVID-19 and associated guidance for proper health and hygiene: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>.

Insect Repellents – There are insect repellents for the skin and an insect repellent used to treat clothing that should not be applied to the skin.

Insect repellents for the skin are commonly available in three forms:

- DEET (N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide): A chemical compound that is marketed under various brand names (OFF!®, Cutter™, Ultrathon™, etc.) and offered in a variety of formulations including sprays, lotions, time-release preparations, and disposable wipes. The formulations will state a percentage of the active ingredient DEET on the packaging. DEET may be applied to exposed skin directly and/or sprayed on clothing. Please be careful when applying DEET as it can damage plastics and lens coatings.
- Picaridin: A synthetic formulation that is derived from piperine, a substance found in plants that produce black pepper.
- Herbal insect repellents: Various mixtures of organic ingredients such as oils from eucalyptus, citronella, cedar, and other herbs. The herbal repellents are more difficult to categorize because of the difference in ingredients from one brand to another. There is considerable variation in their effectiveness.

An insect repellent for clothing is marketed in one approved formulation:

- Permanone® (Permethrin) is an odorless spray-on repellent that may be used for **pre-treatment** of clothing, gear, and tents. It should not be used directly on the skin or sprayed on clothing while it is being worn. The pre-treatment process requires a number of hours to complete and must be done outdoors, so is best completed in advance of travel. Do-it-yourself pre-treatment has to be repeated more often than commercial treatment using Insect Shield® technology. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online.
- Insect Shield® apparel: Clothing pre-treated with Permanone is made by a variety of manufacturers. It is available for purchase from some sporting goods suppliers. The clothing is advertised as retaining its repellency for up to 70 washings.

The US EPA offers a search tool to help choose a repellent that is best for a particular situation. For example, some repellents work for mosquitoes, but not for ticks.

<https://www.epa.gov/insect-repellents/which-insect-repellent-right-you>

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, which operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line (800) CDC-INFO (800-232-4636). You can check the CDC website at <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel>. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health.html> (click on Travel Health).

INTERNET: Expect Wi-Fi to be available at all or most hotels and lodges with the exception of the Gagadju Lodge Coinda.

MISC:

Electricity:	220/240 volts with three-pronged outlets
Adapter:	Type I or AS/NZS 3112
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: A number of traditional booksellers and online stores list excellent inventories of field guides and other natural history resources that will help prepare you for this tour. We recommend www.amazon.com which has a wide selection; www.buteobooks.com and www.nhbs.com which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and www.abebooks.com for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles. We also

recommend Andrew Isles books for the Asia-Pacific region at <http://www.andrewisles.com> 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., 2015. Technical but thorough account of Australian herpetofauna. Too large to be easily carried by travelers.

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. Highly recommended.

Menkhorst, P., Rogers, D., Clarke, R., Davies, J., Marsack, P. and Franklin, K. *The Australian Bird Guide*. CSIRO Publishing, 2017. The best available field guide to Australian birds with fantastic plates and a lot of information. A bit heavy. **Now available in a compact version.**

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.

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

TIPPING: Tipping (restaurant staff, porters, drivers, 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 tips are not expected and are entirely optional. Tips should be given directly to your tour leader; they should not be sent to the VENT office.

RESPONSIBILITY STATEMENT: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc., a Texas corporation, and/or its agents (together, "VENT") act only as agents for the participant 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 participant or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in airfare or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, terrorism, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will be borne by the participant, as tour rates only provide for arrangements for the time stated.

VENT reserves the right (i) to substitute hotels of similar category, or the best reasonable substitution available under the circumstances, for those indicated and (ii) to make any changes in the itinerary that are deemed necessary by VENT or which are caused by third party transportation schedules (i.e. railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, etc.).

VENT reserves the right to substitute leaders or guides on any tour. Where VENT, in its sole discretion, determines such substitution is necessary, it will notify tour participants.

VENT reserves the right to cancel any tour prior to departure. If VENT cancels a tour prior to departure without cause or good reason, VENT will provide the participant a full refund, which will constitute full settlement to the participant. Notwithstanding the foregoing, VENT will not provide any participant with a refund and will not be liable or responsible to any participant, nor be deemed to have defaulted under or breached any applicable agreement, for any failure or delay in fulfilling or performing any term of such agreement, when and to the extent such failure or delay is caused by or results from acts beyond VENT's control, including, without limitation, the following force majeure events: (a) acts of God; (b) flood, fire, earthquake, hurricane, epidemic, pandemic or explosion; (c) war, invasion, hostilities (whether war is declared or not), terrorist threats or acts, riot or other civil unrest; (d) government order, law or actions; (e) embargoes or blockades in effect on or after the date of the scheduled tour; (f) national or regional emergency; (g) strikes, labor stoppages, labor slowdowns or other industrial disturbances; (h) shortage of adequate power or transportation facilities; and (i) any other similar events or circumstances beyond the control of VENT.

If a participant cancels any tour or any portion of a tour, VENT will have no obligation to refund or reimburse any participant for any tour payments or deposits previously paid by any participant (see VENT Registration & Deposit policy and Cancellation & Refunds policy contained in the itinerary). Tour prices are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on February 9, 2024 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change thereto.

VENT reserves the right to decline any participant's Registration Form and/or refuse to allow any participant to participate in a tour as VENT deems reasonably necessary, in its sole discretion. VENT also reserves the right to remove any tour participant from any portion of a tour as VENT deems necessary, in its sole discretion, reasons for such removal include but are not limited to, medical needs, injury, illness, inability to meet physical demands of a tour, personality conflict or situations in which such removal is otherwise in the best interest of the tour, the tour group and/or such participant. If a participant is removed from a tour, such participant will be responsible for any expenses associated with such removal, including but not limited to, transportation, lodging, airfare and meals, and VENT will have no obligation to refund or reimburse any such removed participant for any tour payments or deposits previously paid by such participant.

Baggage is carried at the participant's risk entirely. No airline company, its employees, agents and/or affiliates (the "**Airline**") is to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time participants are not on board the Airline's aircraft. The participant ticket in use by any Airline, when issued, will constitute the sole contract between the Airline and the purchaser of the tickets and/or the participant. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for VENT tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airlines Reporting Corporation.

AUA:20240928
11/22/2023-MB
02/16/2024EL/RS