



## *The Avicultural Society of New South Wales (ASNSW)*

*(Founded in 1940 as the Parrot & African Lovebird Society of Australia)*

### **Northern Avian 24<sup>th</sup> Conference and Cape York June 2014**

By John McGrath - Copyright remains with the Author

#### **Northern Avian Conference**

Each year the Northern Avian Conference is held in far north Queensland. It is organised/hosted by one of the several avian societies that operate in that region.

This year's Northern Avian Conference was hosted by the Far North Queensland Bird Breeders Club Inc. John Griffith was the President when I initially made contact with him enquiring about the "White" Cockatoos that inhabit far north Queensland; especially those that live on Cape York. It was during one of these phone conversations when he suggested that I may like to come up to attend the Northern Avian 24<sup>th</sup> Conference as a delegate. The Conference was to be held at Yungaburra later in the year, and then afterwards maybe accompany a group up into Cape York after the Convention was complete. I thought about this and soon agreed to do so.

This year the Northern Avian Conference was held on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> June inclusive. I flew into Cairns to be greeted by John Griffith on Friday the 6<sup>th</sup> June. On arrival at Yungaburra we were all presented with a very welcomed refreshment of locally grown fresh mandarins.

That night it was a "pub feed" and a few drinks at the local Yungaburra Pub; the raffles that I will make a point of mentioning later started on this night.

Previously I had arranged accommodation and ended up sharing with three other Queensland gentlemen in what was essentially a shed/garage (man-cave) converted to a small self-contained house complete with bathroom, toilet facilities and kitchen. Other than the wet area the remainder was one room except for the master bedroom in one corner where our senior man Rino camped out of respect. The two southern Queensland aviculturists I have known for many years with Rino being from far north Queensland. Whilst my two southern Queensland aviculturist mates knew him I was to meet him only upon arrival at our allocated accommodation. All was good, with much banter as to who had snored the loudest.

Rino "shouted" the Bundy that night! We were up way later than we should have been, talking about all things birds!

It rained hard on the tin roof that night so it helped us sleep!

Every day of the trip from there was to be out of bed early (pre-dawn nearly 100% of the time) and into bed reasonably early in anticipation of the following day's events. The Northern Avian Conference was held in conjunction with aviary visits each day of the two day event. The aviary visits were conducted prior to the presentations held at the more formal component of the "Conference". The aviary visits were interesting to say the least. Viewing birds in aviaries in a tropical/subtropical environment is very different to the way most southern Australian aviculturists keep their birds. Not too many southern aviculturists have to cyclone proof their flights by anchoring them down to deep concrete footings into the ground. The other interesting facet of these aviary visits was that many, including muggins, got lost in the convoy finding the next aviary. We got lost in fields of sugar cane where due to the "cane" being so tall vision is virtually zero other than if the road happened to be straight, then forward and backward vision was only possible. Besides sugar cane other tropical fruit plantations lined the road, like bananas, paw paws and mangos, etc.

The roads themselves often proved a challenge to the uninitiated; wet "red dirt" tracks that if you were not careful you could easily lose control of your vehicle and then you were sliding off the track into an even wetter table drain. Once you moved away from the lower flatter country and started to rise up to the tablelands then you encountered "miles" of winding tight cornered roads; some of these were sealed but many are still simply red dirt roads. These roads are typical of any ascent off the coastal lowlands to the "peaks" of the Great Dividing Range, so not dissimilar to many such roads that I have encountered in other states including Tasmania, Victoria, NSW, and also when I have been there, the southern sections of Queensland.

Many of the bird species we encounter in southern aviculture were viewed in the northern aviculturists' aviaries. Amongst the odd birds was a white House Sparrow in one collection, actually the first we went to, but often the more atypical tropical species were kept like the northern subspecies of the King Parrot, the northern subspecies of Crimson Rosella along with Blue-cheeked Rosellas and Northern Rosellas, and Golden-shouldered parrots were also kept.

It makes sense to keep tropical species in the climate that they are familiar to.

A few select people kept some of the cockatoos. Both Black and White.

Some aviculturists had native and exotic Lories, also Amazons and Macaws as well as Asiatic Parrots. In one collection there was a male "blue" Plum-headed parrot. Well that's what one of my southern Queensland colleges more attuned to mutation genetics than me informed me it was.

These may or may not be held alongside species like African Lovebirds, Conures including the Crimson-bellied Conure, and finches commonly seen in southern aviaries including many familiar Australians like Double Bars, Zebras, Gouldians, Long-tailed, Black-throats, Masked, Chestnuts and exotic finches including some of the manikins. Housed in some collections were doves like the Bleeding Heart and Spinifex, as well as quail of various species.

The Conference itself was very well run and meals were more than adequate. To finance the cost of all this the Conference organisers continually ran raffles (as started at the local pub that first night), with many excellent prizes being on offer. These raffles again started with the aviary tours each morning and continued throughout the running of the Conference. So if you were to attend a Northern Avian Conference expect to be buying raffle tickets continually.

I "invested" heavily for nil return - but that's the "Luck of the Draw!"

The major raffle was a selection of magnificent prizes collected and donated by one member of one of the other far northern avicultural societies. This donation allows the Society to help keep on top of the cost of much of what goes into running such a wonderful Avian Conference. One of these (special) prizes was won by one of my southern Queensland aviculturist mates. As it was a large prize he had to organise to have it freighted back south.

Interestingly on the first night in far north Queensland and whilst at the pub, a gentleman spotted me during dinner and said "How's John McGrath from Yass?" It was Kevin Devine. Obviously Kevin has a really good long term memory because as far as I am aware I had only frequented Kevin's Bird Dealership in Sydney during the very early 1970s whilst buying finches and, considering that I only went to Sydney on my first ever bird buying spree in 1972, and subsequently parted with all my finches due to work commitments during 1975, he'd remembered me from 40 years past.



Far North Conference in progress.

Presenters at this year's Far Northern Conference were:

- Gary Fitt on his work with Finches;
- Daniel Gowland spoke about the work that is being done at Priam Psittaculture near Canberra;
- Des Borman from Lismore in NSW; and
- a former local of far north Queensland spoke on natural foods in Aviculture.
- Christina Zdenek spoke about her “volunteer” work studying Palm Cockatoos on Cape York; and
- we were also given an insight into Conure species/subspecies in Europe (which many Australians have no access too) by a very knowledgeable Belgian aviculturist, Etienne van der Stricht.

All these presentations along with the aforementioned Kevin Devine who spoke about the days of the mass trapped finches coming onto the bird market in the eastern states (the heady days of the 1960 and 1970s of “finch aviculture”). Luckily with newer finch breeding techniques these wasteful days are behind us for Australian aviculture.

Prior to arriving up at Yungaburra I had met or knew all the Northern Avian Conference presenters and I only needed to meet Gary Fitt. After Gary's excellent presentation on his work with finches, some of which was easily relatable to cockatoo husbandry, I introduced myself to Gary to complement my acquaintances.

## **Cape York**

On Monday the 9<sup>th</sup> June we rose still early as we were to meet up with the other people travelling to Cape York with us, initially at Yungaburra. Then we drove down to Mareeba to shop in anticipation of the camping that we had to look forward to. This done and with discussion amongst the group as to who should supply what, off we went through the supermarket.

Once shopping was complete we went to Maccas at Mareeba for a late breakfast then hit the road north heading for our first stop for lunch at the Palmer River Road House.

From there we reloaded ourselves for the trip to our first camp-out of our Cape York adventure at Artemis Station which is a commercial cattle property. The owners Sue and Tom Sheppard have made a point of locking away a large portion of their property as well as installing “artificial feeding stations” for the Golden-shouldered parrot to help in its struggle for survival.

Much of the restricted range of the Golden-shouldered parrot is Artemis Station.

On our trip north from Mareeba we encountered more rain. By now we as a group were familiar with this rain as it had been with us for several days. Apparently this was unseasonal top end rain, but it had been with us throughout the course of the Far Northern Conference.



Golden-shouldered Parrot feeding station at the Artemis Station.

Along the way I was able to see for my first time ever a flock of Red-tailed Black Cockatoos. Some of our party had been lucky enough to encounter and actually photograph these birds further south whilst on the Far Northern Convention Aviary Tour. I did not get a photo but requested that if a Red-tailed Black flock was seen again could we please pull up.

Prior to departure for Cape York John Griffith had warned us that we would be camping out and that we may be taking “Donkey Showers”. To the uninitiated and not wanting to prove my ignorance of his term I stayed silent. I had visions of maybe standing under a wire slung old square four gallon kerosene drum with a perforated base full of preheated or even cold water for that shower. Simply put the “Donkey Showers” meant that we had to preheat water in what was essentially in a converted large gas bottle by igniting a wood fire to heat the water.

As we were camping out the cooking fire was also a wood fire, nothing new to me in that. There was much “banter” between two of our group as to the quickest way to ignite both fires with one a disciple of using diesel fuel to ignite the wet wood, whilst the other contender in the fire lighting stakes preferred “blasting” the wet wood with a flame thrower arrangement fuelled by a pressure pack can of spray on cooking oil. After watching this demonstration applying the diesel looked the safer option to me!

The “wet area” supplied at Artemis Station camp ground was a well-constructed concreted floor, timber framed structure clad with corrugated iron; it was equipped with two toilets as well as two showers.

There is a small fee charged to stay at this camp ground which is a small price to pay for some of the last “creature comforts” like the shower that was to be the last for some of us for the next few nights. This fee is invested back into the continual upkeep of the facilities.

On arrival at the camp ground we found that we had the company of several road workers who had a more permanent camp set up on the other side of the wet area consisting of several caravans and tents. Due to the inclement weather they were already in camp before our arrival and as it persisted to rain they left the next day. Rain meant that the road surface was unworkable for their machines.

As Artemis Station is a typical outback cattle station we had the accompanying sound of the Station’s power generator until it cut off automatically at what I was told later was 9:30pm to sleep by; that with what I thought was the accompanying sound of its diesel motor echo against the adjacent scrub, but was later informed that the accompanying sound was actually the call of the numerous Cane Toads. These introduced amphibians obviously lived there. I was slowly getting an initiation to the “Cape”. I was amongst those that slept out in a swag that night and whilst extremely comfortable as far as temperature goes, due to the rain we suffered heavy dew throughout the night and I was conscious that I had to make a point of keeping my allocated blanket between me and the swag proper, otherwise I ended up with wet spots on me. Everything was very wet the following morning.

We were awakened predawn that morning by the “loud” familiar singing voice of Slim Dusty coming from the “road workers” camp. Maybe they had “Slim” set as an alarm. Accompanying “Slim” was the chorus of the Blue-winged Kookaburras from the same scrub that the Cane Toads had serenaded us to sleep from the previous evening. The Blue-winged Kookaburra was to be one of the birds that I heard but never actually saw.

First thing that morning we were out of bed early to see what was to be our only “glimpse” of the endangered Golden-shouldered parrots. I was fortunate to be the first to see a small flock of four birds coming into a known feeding ground. I was about to say “there’s four Red-rumps”, when I realised that the Golden-shouldered parrots flight pattern mirrored that of its southern cousin. So that was to be my first wild sighting of these parrots. I was able to get a photo only of an un-sexable bird high in a tree inside a



Inspecting a Golden-shouldered parrot's nest at Artemis Station

paddock - so that for me was Golden-shouldered parrot photography.

Our camp site's host later showed us a used Golden-shouldered parrot's nest and explained the size of it to us (with the aid of a camera-light). This Golden-shouldered parrot's nest entrance was a mere 600mm off the ground and the internal excavated dimensions were approximately 150mm x 200mm. The entrance itself was only two fingers width in diameter! About 40mm!

After the Golden-shouldered nest inspection we headed off to wet lands to see Green Pygmy Geese, a shy species that kept well away from our cameras. In the "hunt" for photos of the Green Pygmy Geese muggings stepped onto what appeared to be solid silt; wrong it was "quick" silt and this fella's flat on his face buried to the knee in the stuff and the laugh of the day. It provided a photo shot for other members of the group with encouragement for me to stay there whilst they took plenty of "happy snaps"!

At Artemis we saw local raptors in the form of Fork-tailed and Black Kites, some honeyeaters and the odd pair of Rainbow Lorikeet, certainly this species wasn't in the proliferation that it occurs further south. During our trek up and back from Cape York we saw various other unidentified raptors as well as the odd Wedged-tailed Eagle.

We returned to camp for breakfast and then turned north looking at some local sites along the way including an old "lockup" at Laura which was not overly sized but held up to 14 aboriginal "inmates" in its tight confines at one time in distance years. I was to learn that the same aboriginal police trackers that were used in this vicinity originally came from Fraser Island and were the same men that were used to track down Ned Kelly in Victoria. Apparently they were duped into believing that they'd share in the "Ned Kelly" reward, but there was to be no monetary gain for any of the aboriginal trackers. It was a very long way to travel to be "duped" of your reward. It's still a long way from Victoria to Cape York; imagine what it must have been like in the late 1800s!

Lunch and fuel were taken at Musgrave Telegraph Station where I got an early sighting and limited photos of the Cape York subspecies of the Sulphur-crested Cockatoo *Queenslandica*. I say limited as one of the group was a Belgian aviculturist and an overly keen photographer, and even with my pleading for him not to he walked straight at the two cockatoos feeding on Grevillia flowers. Australian cockatoos are far more wary of humans than the few remaining birds in Belgium that I saw when I was there last year. These two *Queenslandica* Sulphurs where soon on the wing and gone!



Golden-shouldered parrot's nest excavated in a termite mound.



Laura Lockup at Laura



Musgrave Telegraph Station

## Iron Range

Back on the road again and we headed for Iron Range and our next camp site which had been pre-booked to ensure our space. However on our arrival we found to our disappointment that other campers were in our pre-booked spot. We said nothing and shared the night with them. They disappeared the following day to leave us to ourselves.

On the way into Iron Range we were stopped by the local “constabulary” enquiring as to whether we had any alcohol on board which we did not. The police do regular patrols intercepting all incoming traffic as beyond Iron Range on the coast is a “Dry Aboriginal” Community of Lockhart River. I have had a look on some of the websites for Cape York Dry Communities and the fine for having alcohol anywhere near these areas is horrendous!

Unfortunately the thing that the police did not realise was that members of this “Dry Aboriginal” Community had already bypassed the inspection and had purchased their beers in cans at \$80.00 a case outside the “Dry Area” at the Archer River Road House and had absconded up a side track to enjoy their very expensive beverages.

Also on the way in an Eclectus parrot’s nest was pointed out to us for a photo shoot. This subspecies of uniquely Australian Eclectus is given the scientific name of *Eclectus roratus macgillivrayi*. The Australian subspecies is the largest of the Eclectus parrot subspecies and is now being concentrated on by several Australian aviculturists.

The camp ground was a cleared area just off the road and was equipped with both a female and male ablution block. Water for cooking/boiling, etc., was drawn from a nearby stream; one of the southern Queenslanders got a bit squeamish when the billy can returned complete with a very small local fish in it. The southern Queenslanders simply needed to swallow a “spoonful” of cement and harden up a bit, like a few of the apprentices that I have worked with in the electrical game! What’s a bit of protein in your tea anyway?

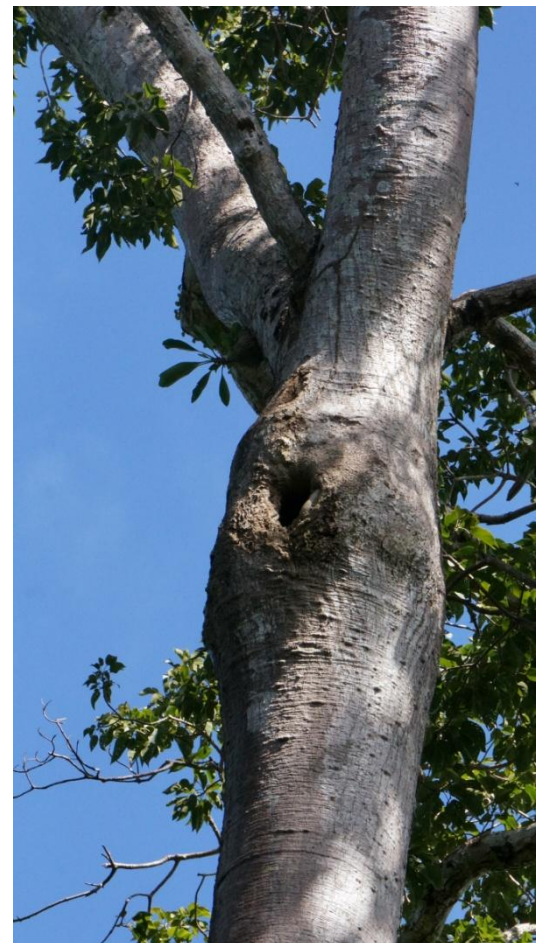
“Billy Tea” is part of life in the bush!

There were several birds calling from the surrounding forest including the Eclectus parrot, calls of Rifle birds could be heard and some of our group were lucky enough to actually photograph this bird. This was to be another Cape York bird I heard but never saw. Apparently there were also small crocodiles at this watering point but again, I was not one to see them. I was able to see where the rainforest floor had been torn up by feral pigs though. An unperturbed visitor into and through our camp was a female Australian Brush Turkey; she seemed oblivious to our presence.

I did see warning signs for Cassowaries for motorists, obviously being in the right area to see these birds but as it seemed to be I was not to see them either.



Iron Range on the coast is a "Dry Aboriginal" Community of Lockhart River.



Eclectus Parrot's nest.



Female Australian Brush Turkey at Iron Range.

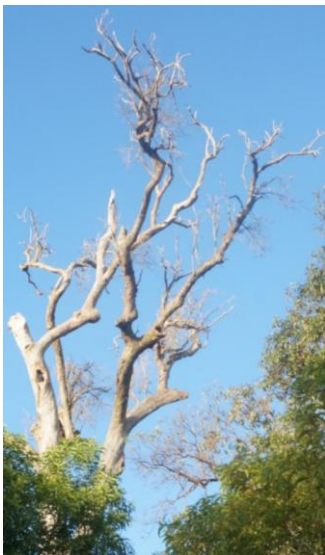
Next morning a pre-dawn breakfast and some of us where off to see a tree known locally as “The Hilton” as it contains not only an *Eclectus* parrot *Eclectus roratus macgillivrayi* nest but also the Sulphur-crested Cockatoo subspecies of *Queenslandica*.

This was to be my first sighting of the *Eclectus* parrot with at least one cock in attendance. We heard several calling from the road side rainforest before one made his brief appearance, landed at the nest entrance, spotted us, and immediately took wing again. Soon he was followed in by a hen; I did manage to get distance photos of her during her brief appearance. She like the cock bird was way too wary to give away the location of her nest. She departed moments after arriving. The rainforest is way too thick for decent pics to be taken due to foliage, branches and the “suspended” moisture which all interferes with clarity of hand held camera shots.

Some of our group were better equipped than I was having bought along tripods for their cameras; and even collapsible chairs to sit and wait on.

It sounded to me that there were *Eclectus* parrot chicks calling from within the hollow thus the concern of the adult birds.

A solitary Sulphur-crested arrived shortly and I did manage some photos of that. This bird did a complete summersault as a display for those gathered; I was able to get a sequence of pics of that display.



The “Hilton Tree”



*Eclectus* hollow in the “Hilton Tree”



Sulphur-crested Parrot  
*Queenslandica*

Near here we also viewed a tree “nicknamed” the “Two Holed Tree” as that’s how nest robbers had left it, with two vertical cuts side by side after apparently removing two subsequent clutches of Palm Cockatoo chicks. As “action” was quiet we decided to go back to camp for lunch. We had previously been split into two roughly equal groups and the other group had gone to another location in the hope of seeing Palm Cockatoos, we were to go to this location that afternoon.



"Two Holed Tree"

So a BBQ lunch taken back at the camp ground and we headed for a look at the Lockhart River Settlement. An eye opener to say the least with an almost pristine beach, only it was “marred” by a large amount of litter lying about; a mix of discarded food refuse, shells and crustacean body parts, as well as a mix of modern day cans, tins and plastic; it seems a shame that the people responsible don’t realise what they have!

## Modern Technology

Earlier that day we had seen the discarded shell and bones of an ocean going turtle; the local people are still allowed to hunt traditional foods like the sea turtles and dugongs, but these days they are armed with firearms rather than the more traditional weapons of years gone by, the spear.

In reading some literature posted at one of the road houses the local aboriginal clans resisted the arrival of early European settlers to the Cape for quite some time, hindering the initial attempts to open communications south with the telegraph. The local people not only speared the telegraph construction workers, they also speared horses, eventually working out that if the grass was burnt the horses had no food and died anyway. They also created mayhem by cutting the new telegraph lines. These people were also possibly one of the first of the aboriginal groups in Australia to take advantage of new technology. That was by utilising the steel that was used in the construction of the telegraph lines to enhance their spear tips. Steel tipped spears proved to be much better than the traditional material for these weapons.

## The Palm Cockatoo

Then after our inspection of the Lockhart River settlement it was onto the Palm Cockatoo viewing area.

We had to do some scrambling through the very tall wet “bladey grass”. I had left the relative serenity of standing on a bush track that morning adjacent to “The Hilton” to venture into the rainforest through the bladey grass to find it quickly envelopes you and soon came up to my chest in height. It would be hard going scrambling through this wet and slippery vegetation for an extended period.

During this trek through the wet scrub at least one local dangerous plant was pointed out to us by our guide John, with warnings of “don’t touch that or you will come out in a rash!”

At this new site we had to leave the “comfort” of the access road, and climb down across a gully and up another hill to get ourselves in position in hope that we may see our first Palm Cockatoos. We heard them and we also heard Eclectus, but we were only able to see the Sulphurs once again. I took some more *Queenslandica* photos.



Palm Cockatoo Nest Hollow

That short “trek” through Cape York’s atypical rainforest was a very hard slog to say the least!

We moved once again and we were rewarded with the visions of several Palm Cockatoos. I was able to gain footage of a cock displaying to a potential mate. However, I was informed by our host

and guide John Griffith that she (the hen) was not impressed by the cock bird's outstretched winged display as she did not "blush" by dropping her cheek patch feathers to expose her reddish cheek patches. The old fellow had to then try harder but to no avail, she was still unimpressed with him. So in disgust the Palm male flew off!

After breakfast the next morning we again returned to the same site with no further real sightings but the Palm's contact call of a familiar quiet "Hello" or "Elro" could be heard coming from the forest.

## Returning South

Back to camp we packed up and we moved back south heading back to our former campsite at Artemis Station prior to returning to Cairns and once again stopping briefly enroute at the tree with Eclectus nest hole. All of the males in our group had not had a shower since leaving Artemis Station a few days before as although there were toilet facilities at the camp ground on Iron Range there were no shower facilities. The ladies in our group were able to shower at a pre-organised place known only to our guide. We blokes survived until we returned to Artemis Station! We were all a bit on the nose, but one in all in!



Green Tree frog - Iron Range ablutions block

Iron Range during the Second World War was a home to a large American troop deployment. From airfields here some of which are still in use, the allies could strike out against the Japanese Imperial Forces into such areas as New Guinea to the north and the battle of the Coral Sea to the east.

John Griffith showed us an old concrete bunker now deep in the rainforest where massive amounts of explosives had been stored during WWII.



World War II Concrete Bunker

John also explained that the large grassy area that we had transversed several times in the last few days was actually not a natural phenomenon but the result of the Americans detonating a very large quantity of explosives in a precursor to the atomic drops on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The trees have never recovered thus it's still today a very large cleared area devoid of foliage other than grass. That's 70 plus years of no regrowth!

Seems typical to me that Australia was a test site for several of these such explosions with the British detonating atomic weapons at Maralinga in South Australia a decade or so later!

After the WWII site inspections we headed south again over the endless "miles" of wet slippery roads, but often as not dry and corrugated to the point of "when's this gunna end?" Real teeth chatters! Roads that can only be referred to as outback - even though we saw several people riding on pushbikes and even a group apparently from Mount Isa on "Postie Bikes" on some sort of a challenge and a challenge it would be. We did 1,400 kilometres in our round trip Mareeba to Cairns so sitting on a "postie" all that way would be hard on the backside.

Combine these “outback roads” with creek/river crossings many of which had only gravel or rock bottoms, some of which even in “the dry” were running at up to a metre deep, driving up the Cape has its challenges so heading up that way in the family sedan may well be a challenge in itself!



Another Creek Crossing

I smirked every time I saw warning signs “Gravel Road” ahead. The people up there don’t know what gravel is, they were virtually only roads constructed from local topsoil atypically the red stuff that the Cape is made of!



Washing vehicles in river on return fro Cape York - part way home  
the police “lay” in wait for obscured number plates on vehicles.

Our first stop heading back was again Archer River Road House for lunch, where a good hamburger cost \$10.00 plus but it’s a “real” hamburger. Next stop south was Musgrave Telegraph Station for diesel fuel which was very much cheaper than the further afield Archer River Road House. Then it was on back to the campsite at Artemis Station and that much appreciated shower and camp outdoors for the last night. Due to issues with food that night many of us “ran” back up the road to Musgrave Telegraph Station for dinner.

**Be warned** it’s worth taking much or all your food supplies with you up the Cape; and it’s definitely worth either carrying your own fuel or at least head off in a vehicle that is equipped with long range tanks, filling up in the south before heading north.

You can expect to pay between, \$1.88 to \$2.55 per litre of diesel whilst on the Cape; it’s a sellers’ market!

## Return to Cairns/Gordonvale

Next morning was a little more leisurely rise and this time we bypassed our first stop coming up, at Palmer River Road House, pulling up at Lakelands for lunch.

Also on the way home those of us that wanted to trekked off road to a place known as “Split Rock” to view some “aboriginal art” which was apparently done by a former local publican in an attempt to attract people to the area. He also used the excuse that as the paint (the acrylic) was fading due to the dust from the adjacent road, he conned the “powers to be” into laying bitumen over this section of road to “reduce” the dust!

Then later moving south again we pulled up for a group photo shot under the traffic warning sign for road closures further north on Cape York (near the turn off to Port Douglas/Mossman). From that point we headed down hill to the coast again through some spectacular rainforest scenery to inspect the tourist resort town of Port Douglas.

Here I for one was in a position to see an Orange Footed Scrub Fowl in the flesh for the first time ever. We went to a local park in Port Douglas itself and I spotted this bird wander out of the nearby foliage and said “There’s a crested Water Hen!” “That’s not a Water Hen, that’s a Scrub Fowl!” someone replied!



Orange Footed Scrub Fowl

I am more familiar with the Purple Swamp Hen and at a distance the Orange Footed Scrub Fowl and the Purple Swamp Hen appeared to be similar in colour, yet the bird I had in my view had a definite crest.

In a Figtree nearby in the park was a large noisy flock of ever moving Figbirds, obviously engaged in devouring the large amount of fruit that this particular tree bore.

We left there to end up back down in Cairns that afternoon. I photographed some birds in a flock on the local power lines and after an enquiry as to what they may have been and showing John Griffith the photo that I had taken; I was informed that I had photographed Metallic Starlings.

We spent the last night of our far northern Queensland break camped on the floor of our benefactor’s garage in Gordonvale. Next morning after breakfast we headed off again in the quest for a sighting of some water fowl in particular, the elusive Green Pygmy Geese. We had more luck this time with a slightly closer viewing of these smallish water fowl at what was essentially a flooded ex-quarry that has been turned into a protected wetlands. In the surrounding trees we also saw some other far north Queensland species, including sightings of some of the local honeyeater subspecies.

Altogether I had limited sightings of some of the local birds, birds we are familiar with in aviaries, sometimes only fleeting glimpses. As mentioned before there was:

- the flock of Red-tailed Blacks;
- the cock Eclectus;
- only saw a few of the local Galahs;
- spotted one Blue Cheeked Rosella left off the side of the road somewhere;
- limited vision of the Golden-shouldered Parrot;
- was able to see Northern Kings and Crimson Wings as flying silhouettes;
- saw where the Double Eyed Fig Parrot had been;
- saw pairs/small parties of local Rainbow Lorikeets.

I missed seeing:

- the local variant of the Crimson Rosella on the Atherton Tablelands;
- I was not able to see any of the local grass finches; and
- there was not enough time to get to the west coast to see the *Normantoni* Short Billed Corellas that I wished to observe.

We had a look at the local wetland reserve and then we again hit Maccas for coffee. Our host John dropped us at the Cairns Airport to prepare for the return flight south. I came home via Sydney back to Canberra to be picked up by my wife. The flight out of Sydney to Canberra was delayed by an hour due to technical problems with the plane. I'd rather have the technical problems sorted prior to departure than find out about them mid-flight Sydney to Canberra. I may be wrong but I believe the plane we were on was a shuttle service... Canberra/Sydney/ Canberra.

I enjoyed my first ever trip up "The Cape" even though it was short. I saw and hopefully have retained much information and memories of birds that until then I only knew from books or images on TV.

If you have the chance and have never been there, make the effort and join the crowd at next year's Northern Avian Convention and maybe do a trip up "The Cape", Cape York is an Aussie Icon!

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