

PEREGRINE BIRD TOURS

CHRISTMAS AND COCOS (KEELING) ISLANDS

28th November - 12th December 2017

TOUR REPORT

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Australia's Indian Ocean territories of Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands are situated a little south of the equator, 360 and 1,080 kilometres respectively, due south of the Indonesian archipelago. Christmas Island has seven endemic birds, which occur nowhere else on earth; Abbot's Booby, Christmas Island Frigatebird, Christmas Island Goshawk, Christmas Island Imperial-Pigeon, Christmas Island Hawk-Owl, Christmas Island Swiftlet and Christmas Island White-eye, reason enough, for a birder to visit the island. The Cocos Keeling Islands, have no endemic birds, but they do have three species of birds that occur nowhere else on Australian soil: Western Reef-Egret, Green Junglefowl and Saunder's Tern.

To the north of these isolated islands, lies the great landmass of the Palearctic, the eastern Palearctic alone encompasses 14 million square kilometres, and supports a staggering 9 thousand million birds. During the winter months, in the northern half of this area, temperatures drop to 30 degrees Celsius, below zero. This area then becomes totally unsuitable for all insectivorous, omnivorous and predatory species. These birds have only one option; they must leave this area every autumn, and migrate to much warmer wintering grounds, thousands of kilometres to the south, mainly in Southeast Asia and the Indonesian archipelago.

These migration patterns have only evolved since the last ice age, yet despite their newness in evolutionary terms, these patterns appear highly structured, the birds arrive at, and leave, predictable places, at predictable times. However, during their southward migration, small numbers of the many millions of birds on migration, 'overshoot' their normal wintering grounds, and find themselves flying over the vastness of the Indian Ocean. They then seek refuge on the next landmass they encounter, which may well be Christmas Island or the Cocos Keeling Islands. So a visit to these islands during the months of October to April, is an attractive proposition for Australian birders, who have an excellent opportunity of encountering birds which are rarely seen elsewhere in Australasia, and there is even the possibility, of finding a new bird for Australasia.

On Christmas and the Cocos Keeling Islands the northwest monsoon blows from December through to February, bringing frequent torrential downpours and cyclonic storms. On the 27-28th November, a low-pressure trough from the northwest, moved steadily closer to Christmas Island, bringing with it heavy downpours of rain and strong winds; completely closing down the airport and delaying our arrival on the island until the 2nd December. Late in the afternoon of the 29th November, Cyclone '*Dahlia*' formed south of the Indonesian island of Java. On the 30th November the storm intensified and was positioned just north of Christmas Island, the monsoonal rain storm, dropping 100 mm of rain on the island, in 24 hours. On the 1st December, cyclone *Dahlia* intensified into a Category 2 tropical cyclone, it maintained its intensity for several hours. On the

2nd December, a high-pressure system moved across the island, the cyclone moved south-eastwards and began to weaken; the airport reopened, just in time for our arrival, and during the next three days spent on Christmas Island, the high-pressure system prevailed, and we enjoyed bright sunny days and light winds. During the next seven days on the Cocos Keeling Islands a high-pressure system enveloped the islands, providing us with bright sunny conditions, and moderate, predominantly, south-easterly winds.

The cyclonic conditions at Christmas Island, at the end of November and early December, had cost us four days of birding on the Island, and we now found ourselves stranded in Perth, Western Australia. However, there are worse places you could be; we had only one option, we went birding, in and around the Perth area, of Western Australia.

We began by spending the first day birding at Lake Monger, in the suburbs of Perth. Here we observed Australian Pelican, Little Black and Little Pied Cormorants, Silver Gull, Black-fronted Dotterel, Common Sandpiper, Black Swan, Pink-eared, Pacific Black, Musk and Blue-billed Ducks, Australian Wood Duck, Australian Shelduck, Australasian Shoveler, Grey Teal, Hardhead, Great Crested, Hoary-headed and Australasian Grebes, Great Egret, Rufous Night-Heron, Australian White and Straw-necked Ibis, the uncommon Spotless Crake, Australasian Swamphen, Eurasian Coot, Dusky Moorhen, Galah, Long-billed and Little Corellas, Rainbow Lorikeet, Laughing and Spotted Doves, Welcome Swallow, Tree Martin, Striated Pardalote, Singing, Brown and New Holland Honeyeaters, Red Wattlebird, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Australian Magpie, Australian Raven, Magpie-lark, Willie Wagtail, Silvereye, Little Grassbird and Australian Reed-Warbler.

The following morning, as we were driving southeast, through the suburbs of Perth, we saw an Australian Hobby, and on reaching the town of Armadale, we added White-faced Heron. We then went birding at Wungong Dam, where new birds included the very uncommon Square-tailed Kite, Brown Goshawk, Red-capped Parrot, Australian Ringneck, Western Rosella, Common Bronzewing, Weebill, Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Western Gerygone, Splendid Fairywren, Grey Butcherbird, Grey Fantail and Western Whistler. We finished off the day, in Bungendore Park, where we added Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo, White-cheeked Honeyeater and Western Spinebill. As we were driving through Armadale, on our way back to Perth, we saw two introduced species, Feral Pigeon and Laughing Kookaburra. Just before reaching our hotel in Perth, we also saw an Australian Kestrel.

We spent the following morning birding northwards, along the coast, at the seaside resort of Lancelin. New birds here came thick and fast, and included Pied Cormorant, Pacific Gull, Caspian, Crested and Bridled Terns, Brown Noddy, Pied Oystercatcher, Whimbrel, Eastern Osprey, Crested Pigeon, Australian Pipit and Black-faced Woodswallow.

From the beach we scoped the Edward Island Nature Reserve, which lies approximately 100 metres offshore, from the beach at Lancelin. There is a small breeding colony of Roseate Terns on the island, and we enjoyed our observations of this uncommon species. There was also an Australian Darter present on the island. Then Gail pointed out a White Tern, standing amongst the nesting Roseate Terns. This was a great surprise, as this sighting is the first sighting of this species, from mainland Western Australia. We had been watching the White Tern in the scope for a while, when suddenly, all the Feral Pigeons on the island, took flight, and flew along the beach right next to us; and amongst them, was the White Tern. It flew along the beach with the pigeons, then it flew directly over our heads, and disappeared out to sea.

In the afternoon, we did some birding in Yanchep National Park, where new birds included Pacific Heron, Yellow-billed Spoonbill, Black-tailed Native-hen, White-headed Stilt, Wood Sandpiper,

Sacred Kingfisher, White-browed Scrubwren, Inland Thornbill, Scarlet Robin and Rufous Whistler. During the drive back to Perth, a little to the south of the township of Seabird, a beautiful adult Spotted Harrier, flew across the road, in front of our vehicle.

The next morning we had a very early flight to Christmas Island, via the Cocos Keeling Islands. We were hopeful that the cyclonic weather, of the last few days, would have brought in a small number of rare migrants to both Christmas and the Cocos Islands, (fortunately for us, that is exactly what had happened) and now, it was up to us, to find them!

On our arrival at Christmas Island, we were greeted by a single Great Egret and an Oriental Pratincole, who were waiting for us, on the airstrip. We then picked up our rental vehicle at the airport and began the drive to our very comfortable apartments, at the Settlement, for our now much reduced, three night stay. Not far from the airport, an Abbott's Booby flew across the road, in front of our vehicle. Once we had settled in at our lodge, we did a little birding around the Settlement, which produced most of the birds that can be found on Christmas Island. They included White-tailed Tropicbird, most of which bore the golden apricot suffusion of birds known as 'Golden Bosunbirds', which are a colour morph of the White-tailed Tropicbird, and only occur on Christmas Island. Birding along the beach produced good close looks at Red-footed and Brown Boobies, both Christmas Island and Great Frigatebirds constantly circled overhead, we saw a few Australian Kestrels, several introduced Red Junglefowl, Christmas Island Imperial-Pigeons proved to be plentiful and Eurasian Tree Sparrows were commonplace, around the settlement. We then drove to nearby Flying Fish Cove, where we picked out a Lesser Frigatebird, amongst the other frigatebirds. This species is very uncommon on Christmas Island. There were plenty of Christmas Island Swiftlets flitting overhead, and we saw a few Island Thrushes. We rounded the day off, with a visit to the Chinese Cemetery, where we saw a rather tame Grey-capped Emerald-Dove and lots of Christmas Island White-eyes.

On our second day on Christmas Island, we spent some of our time birding from the lookout point at Margaret Knoll, where a magnificent adult Christmas Island Goshawk, suddenly appeared from nowhere, and flew right by us. A few minutes later, it flew back in the opposite direction, and promptly disappeared from sight. We then drove to the Buddhist Temple at South Point, and on the way, we spotted a White-breasted Waterhen, in grassland, along the edge of the road. The reason for visiting this area, was to search for a Eurasian Hobby, an extremely rare vagrant to Christmas Island, which had been reported from this area. As we approached the temple, we observed the hobby flying directly in front of our vehicle; I have never seen a vehicle empty so quickly in all my life. The bird appeared almost motionless, hanging aloft in mid air, riding on an updraught; then it was off again, dashing this way, and then suddenly dashing off in the opposite direction. Nearby, in a flooded field, we found a small flock of three Intermediate Egrets, who did not care for our company, and flew away, landing some distance away from us. Following dinner, we did a little spotlighting with Lisa, the resident birder on the island. It took a while, but at our third site, an adult and a young Christmas Island Hawk-Owl, showed fairly well. We also saw a good number of Christmas Island Flying Foxes, flying above our heads.

On our last full day on the island, we spent the morning birding around the casino complex and at the small cove beyond the casino. In the cove, we enjoyed watching, both pale and dark morph Eastern Reef-Egrets, a Common Sandpiper, and a handful of nesting Brown Noddies. As we were walking back to our vehicle, a pond-heron, flushed from dense cover, and alighted in a nearby tree. Fortunately, we were able to enjoy good close looks at the bird, and take some photographs of it. The bird was an adult Chinese Pond-Heron, in non-breeding plumage. This species is a rare vagrant to Christmas Island. In the afternoon, we did a little birding around the airport, where we could not

avoid experiencing the remarkable mass migration of Red Crabs, the most amazing crab spectacle on earth. This also produced some rather erratic driving, as we weaved our way in and out of the crabs in the road! Unfortunately, some of the locals are not as careful drivers as we were, and many Red Crabs are killed during their annual migration. The squashed crabs did not go to waste, we watched many live Red Crabs feeding on them, along with all the Red Junglefowl on the island. At the disused quarry, near the airport we found a small flock of five White-headed Stilts, which are an uncommon visitor to the island.

The following day we enjoyed watching a pair of Red-tailed Tropicbirds flying overhead, close to Rocky Point, then it was time to drive to the airport, for our flight to the Cocos Keeling Islands. This all went very smoothly, and upon our arrival on West Island, in the Cocos Islands, we settled into our resort complex, looking forward, to a very pleasant seven night stay.

The Cocos Keeling Islands are a tropical paradise, but for us, they were so much more. Here we would be searching for three species of birds that occur nowhere else on Australian soil. Western Reef-Egret, the introduced Green Junglefowl and Saunder's Tern. We spent the first day birding on West Island, new birds for the tour included large numbers of Rufous Night-Herons, up to a dozen Pacific Black Ducks and large numbers of Green Junglefowl, our first of the three target species on the Cocos Islands. Other new birds for the tour, included two Pacific Golden-Plovers and small numbers of very attractive White Terns, which were nesting in trees on the island.

The following morning we took the ferry to nearby Home Island, where the descendants of the native Malaysians, who were brought over to provide the labour force on the islands, now reside. Late in the morning, as we were heading back to the ferry, with no new birds having been found, I decided that I would have a quick look at the cemetery. Immediately upon my arrival, an adult Yellow Bittern flew in off the sea, and circled the cemetery, before flying out to sea again, in a slightly different direction. Yet another vagrant to Australasia.

Following lunch on West Island, we checked out the tidal lagoons and bays on the island, and we found, the second, of the islands special birds, a few immature Western Reef-Egrets, were observed amongst the many Eastern Reef-Egrets, on the island. We then received a tip-off, that an adult Javan Pond-Heron, was wintering in the 'Goat Paddock' on the island, and in no time at all, we were watching this very rare visitor on Australian soil.

We had seen two of the three specialities of the Cocos Keeling Islands, and today, we set about finding the remaining species. We all enjoyed a wonderful day messing around in boats. We divided ourselves amongst three modern outrigger canoes with outboard motors on them. It was great fun; we travelled from West Island to South Island, crossing a large lagoon of clear blue water. On reaching South Island, we continued on foot to some nearby sandbanks where a good number and variety of waders were feeding. New waders for the tour included a couple of Grey Plovers, 30 or so Greater Sandplovers, half a dozen Bar-tailed Godwits, up to 90 Whimbrels, 10 Grey-tailed Tattlers, 30 Ruddy Turnstones, and a solitary Red-necked Stint. Within the flock, there was also one very rare vagrant, a solitary Eurasian Curlew, which we all greatly admired, and appreciated. On a small, isolated sandbank we then found our main quarry, the diminutive Saunder's Tern. There were 10 birds together, most were roosting on the sandbank but some were actively fishing. The Saunders' Tern is a little known and very uncommon species. Numbers of this species are largely unknown, given the considerable difficulties in identifying this species from the Little Tern. They breed mainly along the coast of the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf and winter mainly along the coast of the Red Sea and East Africa. There is a small, isolated wintering population along the coast of peninsular Malaysia. The Saunder's Tern has only recently been discovered wintering on the

Cocos Keeling Islands, so it was a great treat to find them.

We spent the following day, birding on West Island, the largest, and also the commercial centre of the Island group. The only new bird of the day, was a spectacular one, a stunning Barau's Petrel, which bizarrely, was dive-bombing a small aircraft on the airstrip, we enjoyed super, very close looks at this particularly attractive *Pterodroma*, which may very well be attempting to breed on the island. Later in the day, while attempting to observe, a reported Pallas's Grasshopper-Warbler, which was skulking around in incredibly dense scrub, we enjoyed very close looks at a couple of introduced Brown Rats!

Once again we spent the following day, birding on West Island, where we added two more species, to our ever growing trip list. The first, was a Terek Sandpiper, which we saw well in the scope, it is also another very uncommon visitor, to these islands. Later in the day, we were shown a Common Kingfisher, by Geoff, the local birder on the island, this is yet another rare vagrant to Australasia.

With all three Cocos Keeling specialities in the bag, and all of the resident birds seen well, we decided to spend another day, looking for vagrants on Home Island. We spent much of the day walking around the island, looking for anything of interest. Fortunately, we were not to be disappointed; the first new species we found, was a wintering flock of 10 Barn Swallows, all perched in the same bare tree, and this was quickly followed by a Striated Heron, which we observed along the coastline. Tom then told us that he had found a Brown Shrike, yet another rare vagrant, close to the 'Chicken-run', try as we may, we were unable to relocate it, but while attempting to do so, Gail and myself glimpsed an Asian Koel, another vagrant, to these islands. It had been a very good day on Home Island.

Our final day, was spent on West Island, mainly peering into dense undergrowth, attempting to see the small passerine that moved around and frequently sang from the dense scrub. By the end of the day, most of us had some sort of sighting of a Pallas's Grasshopper-Warbler, an extremely rare vagrant anywhere in Australasia.

SYSTAMATIC LIST

PETRELS AND SHEARWATERS

Barau's Petrel *Pterodroma barau* It was truly bizarre, to watch a tiny Barau's Petrel, attempting to chase Pacific Black Ducks, Rufous Night-Herons, and large aircraft off the airstrip! We enjoyed wonderful, close looks at a single individual, on two consecutive days, on West Island, in the Cocos Keeling Islands. The only known breeding colonies of this species, are high in the mountains of Reunion Island, in the Indian Ocean. **Armand Barau** (1921-1989) was an agronomist, landowner and amateur ornithologist, from Reunion. He was co-author with Nicolas Barre and Christian H. Jouanin of *Oiseaux de la Runion* (1982), the first serious study of the birds of Reunion. This species is classified as '**Endangered**' by Birdlife International. The population is estimated to be between 30,000 – 40,000 individuals and decreasing. The main threat to this species is predation by rats and feral cats, which unfortunately, are present in all of their breeding colonies.

TROPICBIRDS

Red-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon rubricauda* By far the least common of the two species of tropicbirds that occur on Christmas Island. We only saw a few pairs of this attractive species. All sightings occurred not far from our lodge, at Rocky Point. This species mainly occurs in the northeast part of Christmas Island, where it nest on the sea cliffs.

White-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon lepturus* This stunningly beautiful species was commonly encountered on Christmas Island and we observed a few birds on Home Island, in the Cocos Keeling Islands. The intensity of the golden-apricot suffusion, which only occurs on birds from Christmas Island, varies from bird to bird, and gives the bird their local name on Christmas Island, of 'Golden Bosunbird'.

GANNETS AND BOOBIES

Abbott's Booby *Sula abbotti* Endemic to Christmas Island, it is by far the least common of the three species of boobies which occur on the island. The birds nest in tall trees scattered throughout the central plateau. We observed birds flying over mature forests, throughout the island, on several occasions. This species is classified as '**Endangered**' in Threatened Birds of the World. It has an estimated population of 6,000 birds and the population is considered to be stable. This species only breeds on Christmas Island which is a relatively small island with limited available habitat. During 1965-1987, phosphate extraction resulted in the destruction of approximately one third of all nesting habitat. This species is also susceptible to cyclones; in 1988, a cyclone destroyed a third of all fledglings and nest-sites. **William Louis Abbott** (1860-1936) was a naturalist and collector. He qualified as a physician at the University of Pennsylvania and worked as a surgeon at Guy's Hospital in London, he decided not to pursue medicine but used his private wealth to engage in scientific exploration. He studied the wildlife of the Indo-Malayan region in 1891, using his Singapore-based ship *Terrapin*, and made large collections of mammals from Southeast Asia for the United States National Museum in Washington DC. He moved to Thailand in 1897 and spent 10 years exploring and collecting in and around the China Sea. Amongst other taxa two mammals and two reptiles are named after him.

Red-footed Booby *Sula sula* On Christmas Island it is common and conspicuous throughout the entire island, much breeding was in evidence during our stay. Good numbers were observed feeding offshore in the Cocos Keeling Islands.

Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster* Common and widespread throughout both Christmas Island and Cocos Keeling Islands, it appears to be more common in areas with rocky coastlines.

FRIGATEBIRDS

- Christmas Island Frigatebird** *Fregata andrewsi* Endemic to Christmas Island, where it is common and widespread throughout the island, particularly so in the northeast. It was an amazing spectacle to watch large numbers of both Christmas Island and Great Frigatebirds swooping down to the ground and drinking freshwater from a large puddle of water, which had been recently created, by heavy rain. This species is classified as '**Critically Endangered**' in Threatened Birds of the World. It has an estimated world population of approximately 2,400 – 4,800 birds, and is unfortunately declining. Approximately two thirds of all nests are located in a single colony, this makes this species extremely vulnerable to cyclones and forest-fires.
- Great Frigatebird** *Fregata minor* Large numbers of this species were present throughout Christmas Island, where we observed many breeding pairs. A single bird was observed on South Island, in the Cocos Keeling Islands.
- Lesser Frigatebird** *Fregata ariel* Small numbers of this species were observed on Christmas Island and in the Cocos Keeling Islands.

HERONS, EGRETS AND BITTERNs

- Great Egret** *Ardea alba* A single bird was observed on the airstrip at Christmas Island.
- Intermediate Egret** *Mesophoyx intermedia* Three birds were observed together, close to South Point, on all three days we were on Christmas Island. Up to half a dozen birds were present on the airstrip, throughout our time in the Cocos Keeling Islands.
- Western Reef-Egret** *Egretta gularis* Small numbers were present amongst the much commoner Pacific Reef-Herons on West Island, in the Cocos Keeling Islands. Most of the birds were immatures; however, we did see one adult.
- Eastern Reef-Egret** *Egretta sacra* Small numbers of both colour morphs were observed on Christmas Island, with larger numbers of both colour morphs present on the Cocos Keeling Islands.
- Chinese Pond-Heron** *Ardeola bacchus* We enjoyed very good looks at an adult bird in non-breeding plumage, at the Casino Complex, on Christmas Island. This species is a rare vagrant to Christmas Island.
- Javan Pond-Heron** *Ardeola speciosa* We also enjoyed very good looks at an adult bird, which was just beginning to moult into breeding plumage, in the 'Goat Paddock', on West Island, in the Cocos Keeling Islands, where this bird is a rare vagrant.
- Striated Heron** *Butorides striata* We observed a single bird along the coast of Home Island, in the Cocos Keeling Islands, where this species is a rare visitor.
- Rufous Night-Heron** *Nycticorax caledonicus* This is a very common breeding species, on West Island, in the Cocos Keeling Islands.
- Yellow Bittern** *Ixobrychus sinensis* I observed a single bird, which came in off the sea and circled around the cemetery, on Home Island, before flying out to sea again. This species is a rare vagrant to the Cocos Keeling Islands.

SWANS, GEESE AND DUCKS

- Pacific Black Duck** *Anas superciliosa* Small numbers were present on West Island, in the Cocos Keeling Islands.

KITES, HAWKS AND EAGLES

Christmas Island Goshawk *Accipiter natalis* While birding from the lookout at Margaret Knoll, an adult bird flew directly below us, first in one direction, and then in the other. This species has been split off from the Variable Goshawk, and is endemic to Christmas Island. It is listed as '**Endangered**' by Birdlife International. The estimated population is just less than 100 adult birds, and the population appears stable. The main threat to this species is the expected expansion of phosphate mining on the island. The nestlings are also vulnerable to attacks from Yellow Crazy Ants, which have been accidentally introduced to the island.

CARACARAS AND FALCONS

Australian Kestrel *Falco cenchroides* This is a very common species on Christmas Island, which we observed on numerous occasions.

Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo* We were very fortunate to observe one of these birds in flight, very close to the Buddhist Temple, at South Point. This species is a very rare vagrant to Christmas Island.

PARTRIDGES AND PHEASANTS

Red Junglefowl *Gallus gallus* Commonly encountered on Christmas Island; these birds are the descendants of feral chickens, however, some of the birds resemble the Red Junglefowl, which is the ancestral form of all feral chickens.

Green Junglefowl *Gallus varius* Introduced to the Cocos Keeling Islands by the Clunies-Ross family, over a century ago. They normally only occur in Asia. There is now a very large population present on West Island.

RAILS, GALLINULES AND COOTS

White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus* We observed four individuals on Christmas Island, and then it became incredibly common on West and Home Islands, in the Cocos Keeling Islands.

STILTS AND AVOCETS

White-headed Stilt *Himantopus leucocephalus* We observed a flock of four adult birds, feeding in the old quarry, next to the airstrip, on Christmas Island. This species is a vagrant to Christmas Island.

PRATINCOLES AND COURSERS

Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum* This species is an uncommon visitor to both Christmas Island and the Cocos Keeling Islands. We observed two individuals on Christmas Island and a flock of seven individuals on the airstrip, on the Cocos Keeling Islands.

LAPWINGS AND PLOVERS

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* Two birds were present at the high-tide roost on South Island, in the Cocos Keeling Islands.

Pacific Golden-Plover *Pluvialis fulva* Two birds were present on the airstrip, for a period of three days, in the Cocos Keeling Islands.

Greater Sandplover *Charadrius leschenaultii* Thirty or so birds were wintering at the high-tide roost on South Island, in the Cocos Keeling Islands.

SANDPIPERS AND ALLIES

Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* We scoped a single bird along the edge of the bay, on West Island. We were very fortunate, as this species is a rare vagrant to the Cocos Keeling Islands.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* A single bird was observed very well in the cove beyond the Casino Complex, on Christmas Island. We saw a second single bird along the coast of Home Island, in the Cocos Keeling Islands. This species is a regular summer visitor to the islands.

Grey-tailed Tattler *Tringa brevipes* A flock of 10 birds was observed at the high-tide roost on South Island, this was followed by a sighting of a single bird, along the edge of the bay, on West Island, on Cocos Keeling Island. This species is also a regular summer visitor to the Cocos Keeling Islands.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* Approximately 90 birds were present at the high-tide roost on South Island. This species is a fairly regular winter visitor to the Cocos Keeling Islands.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* A single bird was present at the high-tide roost on South Island. This was very fortunate, as this species is a rare vagrant to Australia and both Christmas and the Cocos Keeling Islands.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica* A total of six birds were noted at the high-tide roost on South Island, where this species is a fairly common summer visitor.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* Approximately 30 birds of this species, were present at the high-tide roost on South Island, where it is a regular summer visitor.

Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis* A single bird was present at the high-tide roost on South Island, where it is a fairly regular summer visitor.

TERNs

Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus* Half a dozen or so birds were nesting at the cove, beyond the Casino Complex, on Christmas Island. We also observed a few birds along the coast of South Island, in the Cocos Keeling Islands.

White Tern *Gygis alba* This very beautiful species proved to be a common breeding bird throughout the Cocos Keeling Islands.

Saunders's Tern *Sternula saundersi* This small species of tern has only recently been added to the Australian birdlist. It is now known that a small number of birds winter on South Island, in the Cocos Keeling Islands and nowhere else on Australian soil. One of the highlights of the tour was to observe 10 birds of this species roosting on sandbanks, on South Island, in the Cocos Keeling Islands. Just getting to South Island was half the fun!

PIGEONS AND DOVES

Grey-capped Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica* A common and unusually tame bird throughout forested areas of Christmas Island.

Christmas Island Imperial-Pigeon *Ducula whartoni* Endemic to Christmas Island, where it is a very common bird, which we saw particularly well on many occasions. This species is classified as '**Near Threatened**' by Birdlife International. It has an estimated population of approximately 5,000 birds and the population is thought to be stable.

CUCKOOS

Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopaceus* A single bird was observed by some members of the group on Home Island. This species is now an annual visitor to the Cocos Keeling Islands, in very small numbers. It is a very rare vagrant in Australia and Christmas Island.

OWLS

Christmas Island Hawk-Owl *Ninox natalis* Following a great deal of searching, we managed to find an adult bird, together with a young bird, at the golf course, on Christmas Island. This was without doubt one of the highlights of the tour. This species is classified as '**Vulnerable**' by Birdlife International. It is estimated that the population is approximately 1,000 birds and thought to be stable. The main threat to this species is forest clearance, for proposed new phosphate mining sites. This species would be extremely vulnerable to any new mining ventures because it is restricted in distribution to just one small island.

SWIFTS

Christmas Island Swiftlet *Collocalia natalis* This species is fairly common and widespread throughout the whole of Christmas Island. This species is classified as '**Near Threatened**' by Birdlife International. Its population is estimated to be approximately 100,000 individuals, and its population is thought to be stable.

KINGFISHERS

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* We observed a single individual at Tranni Beach, on West Island, in the Cocos Keeling Islands. Over the last decade, one or two individuals have been found wintering annually on the Cocos Keeling Islands. There are no records from mainland Australia.

SWALLOWS

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* A flock of 10 birds were present on Home Island, in the Cocos Keeling Islands, where this species is a fairly regular winter visitor.

THRUSHES AND ALLIES

Island Thrush *Turdus poliocephalus* A very common resident of forested areas, throughout Christmas Island, which we observed on a daily basis.

OLD WORLD WARBLERS

Pallas's Grasshopper-Warbler *Locustella certhiola* This species is an extremely rare vagrant, anywhere in Australia, or on any of its offshore territories. We were indeed fortunate, to observe one of these birds in dense scrub, on West Island, in the Cocos Keeling Islands.

WHITE-EYES

Christmas Island White-eye *Zosterops natalis* This Christmas Island endemic, is an abundant bird throughout the entire island. It is classified as '**Near Threatened**' by Birdlife International, mainly because it only occurs on one small island. It is estimated that the population is approximately 20,000 birds and the population is currently considered to be stable.

SHRIKES

Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus* Tom saw one of these birds, on Home Island, in the Cocos Keeling Islands. It is a fairly common vagrant, to the islands.

OLD WORLD SPARROWS

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* This species was a ship assisted, self introduction, to Christmas Island in the early 1980's. It is now a familiar bird on the island, occurring in large flocks around the Settlement.

MAMMALS

Brown Rat *Rattus norvegicus* Unfortunately, we observed a few of these introduced pests, while staring into dense scrub, on West Island, while looking for the Pallas's Grasshopper-Warbler.

Christmas Island Flying-Fox *Pteropus natalis* This species is endemic to Christmas Island, where it is abundant. We saw it very well, on several occasions.