

Dr. Richard Noske Brief Survey Report December 2009

My research trip last week (6 – 10 December 2009) was very useful, accomplishing most of the objectives, except exploring the sandstone, which was difficult to organise at the time. However, I have been in communication with a friend who is an NLC officer, and knows the Traditional Owners for the Goomadeer sandstone area, which I saw (but couldn't visit) on the trip in August 2009. I've suggested an expedition in late March/early April 2010 to check out the area, well before Bird Week, so that we can possibly include it in the program.

I spent a day with Stuart from Bawinanga at Gu-panga (Blyth floodplain) but sadly there hadn't been enough rain to attract any of the floodplain migratory waders I was after. Natalee from Bawinanga Rangers has invited me over next month to check it out again, and Stuart mentioned an area that "never dries out" which would be worth checking out if it's not too far out of the way. It might be too late for those migrants, as they seem to move off to the Barkly Tablelands region before/ around new year, once it gets too wet from the onset of monsoonal rains.

I sighted one new bird: Oriental Cuckoo [migrant from China], though I'd left it on the Lodge Bird List, expecting to sight one at this time of the year.

One flock of c. 30 Gouldians on Tomkinson floodplain, chased off by Hobby; but I spent little time in area, so there may have been more flocks around.

I had a good time revisiting the Shrike-tits, following pairs at two of the four Oenpelli Rd sites, one possibly feeding young which I couldn't locate. I managed to call the 2nd pair out, by giving an imitation of the call - and bingo, they responded! Don't know whether Parks & Wildlife have ever tried this, they normally use playback of actual shrike-tits recorded calls.

I also sighted significant number (over 1,000) of Black-tailed Godwits from Siberia on Crab Creek mudflats near Maningrida.

A female Red Goshawk was located at Johnny Estbergs nest tree (Crab Creek Rd) - looking good as an area that sightings of this spectacular goshawk may occur on a regular basis, possibly even in June (Bird Week 2010), before breeding commences.

No sign of Rainbow Pitta's I was hoping to find at Cadell rainforests, nor Blyth floodplain forests, which was bit surprising, but I may have got there too early. There was torrential rain falling when I left Maningrida, (the "Wet" had just arrived!) this may have activated them but I had to return to Darwin that day.