

Of Emus and Fairy-wrens: Photographing Australia's Endemic Birds

Monthly Newsletter

July 2007

Well, my year is now over and this is coming to you several month's late from my new home in Texas. It's been a whirlwind couple of months since I have returned to the US and I just haven't had the chance to put this last newsletter together until now. I had planned to write it during the flight back to the United States but I will confess I ended up reading the entirety of the final book in the *Harry Potter* series. So without any further distractions, I will take you through my final month.

At the end of June, I found myself leaving the East MacDonnell ranges and traveling into Alice Springs. I arrived about a week after the school holidays in Victoria started so there was a wave of people from Melbourne and elsewhere in Victoria headed to the Kimberleys and the Top End through the Centre so it was quite a busy time in the region. Campgrounds were often full and there were people everywhere but it was a beautiful area so I didn't mind all that much.

While in the Alice, I spent some time seeing the sites. I would like to mention two specific places, the Desert Park and the Botanical Gardens. The Desert Park is fabulous for people interested in learning more about the different habitats and life in the Red Centre. While visiting the park, you meander along paths through the four major habitats viewing exhibits, informational displays, and numerous aviaries full of local birds. The Birds of Prey show is also extremely popular. The Botanical Gardens is worth a visit just to see the Western Bowerbirds that have built a bower in the garden near the carpark. Their often comical antics are fun to watch as the males maintain their bowers in the hopes of attracting a mate.

From Alice, I headed west into the West MacDonnell Ranges. This rugged range has some truly spectacular scenery such as Ormiston Pound and numerous other gorges. At this point I did a bit of birding, specifically looking for Dusky Grasswrens, Rufous-crowned Emuwrens, and Spinifexbirds but I came up empty every time. I will confess that I was fairly burned out and wasn't working very hard at it and finally gave up altogether. For the last few weeks of my travels, I was going to play the part of the tourist and put my big lens away for the most part.

I spent most of my time in the MacDonnells hiking and either not carrying the camera or taking my landscape gear with me. You'll notice that most of the images below are landscapes, something unique to this newsletter. The time I spent was very enjoyable and I met some wonderful people on the trail.

After leaving the West Macs, I had two stops left before I had to head back to Sydney to get on a plane. Kings Canyon was my first stop for a few days before I headed on to Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park. Both are huge tourist destinations and rightly so as they are spectacular areas. Kings Canyon is a deep gorge filled with lush vegetation that seems way out place for the surrounding semi-arid environment. The rim walk is the most popular hike in the area and I spent a long morning enjoying the walk around and through the canyon.

I thought it was fitting to visit Australia's most iconic natural landform as my very last stop of my travels. Starting at the Sydney Opera House and finishing at Uluru was quite nice and there was sure a long way in between. Anyway, Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park is spectacular and I had a wonderful few days exploring the area. I watched sunrise and sunset at Uluru, sunset at Kata Tjuta and did both Uluru's base walk and the Valley of the Winds at Kata Tjuta. I took lots of photographs, mostly film though and therefore can't include them here quite yet. It really was a great place to finish up.

On July 11th, I left the Center and started my trek back to Sydney. I planned about ten days to get back and the drive went quite smoothly. On the way I stopped in quickly at Lake Eyre, crossed the Strzelecki Desert once again, and made it all the way back to Sydney. The only difficulty along the

way was my second broken windscreen but that sort of thing happens. Upon my arrival in Sydney, I visited some friends one last time, packed all my gear back into suitcases, sold my vehicle, and on July 26th got on a plane back to the United States.

I have now been back in the States for a couple months and I am already missing Australia. Granted, it is nice to have a real bed and not be in a new place every couple nights, but I do miss the wildness and freedom that I experienced this past year. I likely will never have the freedom that I had this past year again and I hope I took full advantage of that. I don't know where life will lead me now but I am looking forward to new projects and finding new places to explore.

This will be my last regularly updated newsletter. However, in the next few months, I will be updating my website to reflect that the trip is over and in the process will combine the two different mailing lists I maintained this year. This new list will be used to send out occasional updates about what I am doing with the photos and my experiences in Australia. I have a few ideas and I think many of you will be interested in the outcome.

Thank you all for taking the time to share my journey with me and I hope you have found it as enjoyable as I did. Each month, many of you responded to my newsletters and it was always nice to hear your opinions on my work and your encouragement. Thank you all.

Website Announcements

The website has been updated completely from my travels. The weblog has been completed. All the newsletters are posted and the galleries are up to date. I will be posting some landscape photos once I get into the process of scanning the film that I used during the year. Hopefully that will be completed by the end of the year. I have had numerous requests to leave my weblogs and newsletters online as they provide a resource for others traveling to Australia and I can assure you that they will remain archived and online for some time to come.

The Photos



Gray-crowned Babbler – Olive Pink Botanical Gardens, Alice Springs, Northern Territory

I saw a ton of Gray-crowned Babbler over the past year but it wasn't until the beginning of this month that I could finally get some photos of one. At first, I didn't like this image because it had some much vegetation and was a busy image but it is quickly growing on me.



Western Bowerbird – Olive Pink Botanical Garden, Alice Springs, Northern Territory

The Western Bowerbirds at the Olive Pink Botanical Gardens in Alice Springs have become quite popular with birders in recent years. A group of male birds have set up a series of bowers right by the carpark in the garden and it is entertaining to watch the antics of the subordinate males as they cause problems for the dominant male. They are a lot of fun to sit and watch as they build and maintain their bowers.



Red-browed Pardalote – Olive Pink Botanical Gardens, Alice Springs, Northern Territory

There are four species of pardalotes in the world and they are all found in Australia. I had photographed all but the Red-browed Pardalote, a bird of the outback regions. Finally, I was able to get close to a pair of these little jewels for only a few seconds but I did manage to get this frame, completing the set.



Cycads – Palm Valley, Finke River National Park, Northern Territory

Cycads are a tropical plant and quite out of place in the semi-arid Centre. Despite that they do grow in several canyons and gorges throughout the Red Centre. They are ancient plants and quite beautiful to see on the sides of the red rock canyons.



King's Canyon National Park, Northern Territory

This scene was taken along the side of the road in King's Canyon National Park. King's Canyon itself cuts into this ridge farther to the south. The mountain ranges in Central Australia are mind boggling as they seem to erupt out of the surrounding plain with no foothills or any other transitions.



Uluru – Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park

Uluru has to be one of the most photographed places in Australia so I decided to try and capture some different views of the rock. This image was taken on the base walk and I think shows a bit different view emphasizing the texture and wonderful forms the rock takes.



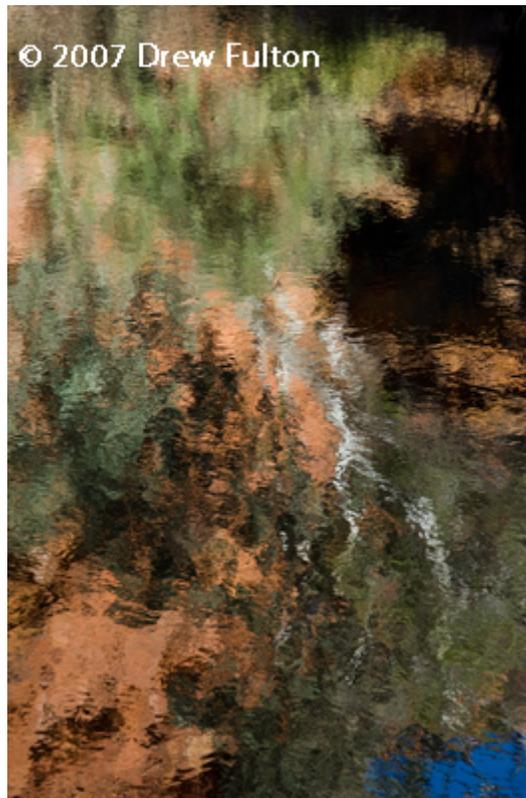
Kata Tjuta (The Olgas) – Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, Northern Territory

This is the view of Kata Tjuta from the traditional sunset carpark. The rock really shows up orange at sunset. The spot can also get quite crowded but nothing like sunrise at Uluru. The sheer numbers of people are almost as impressive as the actual sunrise.



Red Kangaroo – Northern Territory

This Red Kangaroo was hanging out along the Innaminka Track and was one of the only times I got close enough to get a photograph of one. The speed at which these massive kangaroos can move always surprises me.



Garden of Eden – Kings Canyon National Park, Northern Territory

The reflection of this ghost gum in a pool in the Garden of Eden in King's Canyon really caught my eye. I love the colors and texture.

Thanks for allowing me to share my year with you!

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