In mid Oct Iian and I went to Peru for 18 days. After the long flight we spent the first couple of hours of our first day birding in a small park and on the cliffs near the hotel in Lima before hearing off to a wetland 10km away. We saw 52 species for the day before meeting our fellow tour participants for dinner – 4 Americans, 2 Poms and an Ecuadorian guide. The 17-day tour started by flying to Cusco, birding a large lake there, heading over high Andean passes before spending 6 days in the Amazon basin – where every trip involved a boat! Then from the heat of the jungle in a few hours to a 3800m pass with cold rain – and higher still the next day. Then a visit by train to Machu Picchu and a final coastal boat trip looking for (and finding) the local penguin.

The birding was good, with a list of around 590, including more than 40 hummingbirds (my favourite being the Rufous-crested Coquette), the bizarre/punk Hoatzin, the stunning display of the Cock-of-the-rock, the supremely aquatic Torrent Duck, the magnificently moustached Inca Tern and lots of small brown birds whose name included the word “ant” and who skulked on the forest floor.

Iian now has a bigger list in Peru than Australia!

Mammals were not neglected with 7 species of monkey (including 2 species of Capuchins – neither of which made coffee) and a Tapir.
Sunday 14th - the 9 Wagtails, 2 spouses and friend of Ginny’s who joined us for the day met at Glen-rowan for lunch and then moved to the Warby Ranges where we walked a trail at Wenham Camp. The birding was excellent – Turquoise Parrot, both Western and White-throated Gerygones, Sacred Kingfisher, Red-capped and Scarlet Robins, Speckled Warbler and Varied Sittella. After that we drove to Chiltern for 3 nights.

On Monday we started our day at Mt Pleasant Rd, as there had been reports of Painted Honeyeater in the area - however whilst Christine had a glimpse of the bird it was driven off by Noisy Miners and the rest of us did not see it. After that we visited the Number 1 and Number 2 dams (such imaginative names!) where the bird life was fairly scarce - lots of water in other places reduces the attraction of such places. We did however see a snake swimming across the first of these. Lunch at Frogs Hollow - rumoured by Brian to be swarming with snakes, but we saw none - and then to the delightfully named Honeyeater Picnic Ground. I guess this is a triumph of marketing – most birders know it as Cyanide Dam (after the gold processing that was done here) and it is still on Cyanide Rd! No spectacular birds but we still saw nearly 90 species for the day, including such birds as Olive-backed Oriole, Sacred Kingfisher, White-breasted and White-browed Woodswallows and Peaceful Dove. And then in the late afternoon we returned to the Honeyeater Dam and at dusk - after seeing a few bats - we had good views of at least 2 White-throated Nightjars.

Tuesday dawned dull and grey, with rain forecast. We spent most of the day looking in vain for Regent and Painted Honeyeaters - although some areas of the forest were alive with birds, we failed to find either of our target birds. We did see good numbers of Mistletoebirds to brighten up the day and heard what might have been Painted Button-quail and a tantalising call like the Painted Honeyeater’s.

We had heavy rain and thunder in the evening - good job we got the Nightjar last night.

Black Swan
Australian Shelduck
Australian Wood Duck
Grey Teal
Pacific Black Duck
Hardhead
Australasian Grebe
Hoary-headed Grebe
Spotted Dove
Crested pigeon
Common Bronze-wing
Peaceful Dove
White-throated Nightjar
Australasian Darter
Little Pied Cormorant
Great Cormorant
Little Black Cormorant
Australian Pelican
White Necked Heron
Eastern Great Egret
White Faced Heron
Nankeen Night Heron
Australian white Ibis
Straw-necked Ibis
Whistling kite
Black Kite
Collared Sparrowhawk
Swamp Harrier
Wedge-tailed Eagle
Little Eagle
Nankeen Kestrel
Brown Falcon
Peregrine Falcon
Purple Swamphen
Spotless Crane
Dusky Moorhen
Eurasian Coot
Black-fronted dotterel
Silver Gull
Galah
Little Corella
Sulphur-crested cockatoo
Rainbow lorikeet
Little Lorikeet
Purple-crowned Lorikeet
Australian King Parrot
Crimson Rosella
Eastern Rosella
Red-rumped parrot
Turquoise Parrot
Shining Bronze Cuckoo
Fan-tailed Cuckoo
Kookaburra
Sacred Kingfisher
White-throated Treecreeper
Brown Treecreeper
Superb Fairywren
Weebill
Western Gerygone
White Throated Gerygone
Yellow Thornbill
Yellow-rumped thornbill
Buff-rumped Thornbill
Brown thornbill
Spotted Pardalote
Striated Pardalote
Eastern Spinebill
White-eared Honeyeater
Yellow-tuffed Honeyeater
Fuscous Honeyeater
White plumed honeyeater
Noisy miner
Red Wattle bird
White-fronted Chat
Black-chinned honeyeater
Brown-headed honeyeater
Blue-faced Honeyeater
Noisy Friarbird
Little Friarbird
Painted Honeyeater
White-browed Babbler
Varied Sittella
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
White-winged Triller
Grey Shrike Thrush
Olive-backed Oriole
White-breasted woodswallow
White-browed Woodswallow
Dusky Woodswallow
Australian Magpie
Pied Currawong
Grey fantail
Willie Wagtail
Restless Flycatcher
Magpie-lark
White-winged Chough
Jacky Winter

Scarlet Robin
Red-capped Robin
Golden-headed Cisticola
Australian Reed-Warbler
Little Grassbird
Silvereye
Welcome Swallow
Fairy Martin
Tree martin
Common Blackbird
Common Starling
Mistletoebird
Red-browed Finch
House Sparrow
European Goldfinch
Common Greenfinch
The White-throated Night-jar

"The plan for tonight... Iian paused and conversation died... “Is to leave here at 6-30. We’ll get to Cyanide dam easily by 7-0pm. I think we should re-name it Night-jar Dam!

Without any further instructions except to say we’d barbeque our dinner on return to the caravan park, he left us to ourselves. No “bring a torch”.

We drove there and walked a short distance to the dam, a relic from gold mining days, on a narrow track above the water. Having arrived just before us those in the know had arranged their armchair views: the four of us without chairs squeezed by and found our places; Flo on a small folding seat, Brian, Ingrid and I on a log and Elizabeth on the damp clay edge, her legs dangling down into the reeds. Too far from the others to chat, I noted Iian now wore a powerful -looking head torch. We peered into the bush surrounding us. Canopies of the Box-Iron bark trees towered over the elliptical dam, its deep water still and brown. Afternoon light had dimmed now, the water rippled when a yabby popped a bubble up and when a leaf fluttered onto the We peered into the bush surrounding us. Canopies of the Box-Iron bark trees towered over the elliptical dam, its deep water still and brown. Afternoon light had dimmed now, the bright light at the horizon glowed eastward through the dense bush and was filtered to a sombre grey green. The reflected shadows of the trees black in the water were edged by the shimmering evening sky. Conversation became muted as each of us became lost in the drama of the quiet bush. “Gork, Gork, Gork” “Gork, Gork.”

Frogs sounded like the introduction of ‘Macca on a Sunday Morning’.

Gradually silence and shadow deepened. Was that a dark figure? Were the ancestors of the Dhudhuroa people here in the bush? There are rock paintings of a Thylacine, a goanna and a snake at Mt Pilot. Their spirits were here.

Legs cramping, I scrambled to my feet. Elizabeth turned and whispered, “I have to stand up!” Brian and Ingrid continued to balance on their log. I took Elizabeth’s place precariously; it was a long way down. We waited and waited like Mick Jagger might appear or we’d hear the opening bars of the prelude to Wagner’s Ring Cycle. We all wished this was over and we’d go home to our dinner. This is a fizzer!

Then, at last, a very quick glimpse of a magpie sized bird reflected in the silvery shadowy water. “There it is!” a muffled shout Iian’s head torch was a spotlight, his binoculars followed the pale underside of the little owl as it flew across the dark tree canopy. “There’s another one!” “Oh! Oh! There they are again” Two pale birds flew above us along the length of the water turned, twice more. Magic.

Then it was over. Subdued, hungry and cold we walked out by torchlight back to the hubbub of a barbeque dinner. For me the highlight was those mysterious birds that evening.

Ginny October 2012
November Outing...Western Treatment Plant

The Melbourne Cup Day bus trip to the Treatment Plant has become part of the Wagtails ritual, so there was some concern when our application to go in was initially turned down. However, thankfully Shirley managed to negotiate her way round the hurdles and so we were able to go, on what proved to be a pretty perfect day weather-wise, despite the forecasts. First stop was the Western Lagoons where we found a few waders as well as Great and Little Egrets and a Yellow-billed Spoonbill. Then down to the Explosives Depot gate, where Iian spotted a pair of very distant Brolgas - which turned into a pair plus their nearly grown up offspring. Attempts to get into the T-Section were foiled by a “difficult” lock so off to the Beach Rd gate and then meandered our way along for morning tea - with Ceri’s pumpkin scones - at the Bird Hide, where we saw the elusive Little Grassbird. Suitably refreshed we continued on our way across the Little River ford towards the Borrow Pits, stopping briefly at Paradise Rd to see Banded Stilts amongst a flock of Red-necked Avocet. On the way we saw a magnificent White-bellied Sea-eagle on a post, and watched a Fairy Martins building their mud nests under a culvert. After a quick diversion to “Cormorant Jetty” (which did not live up to its name) we arrived at the Borrow Pits in time for lunch, seeing a small flock of Native Hens as we arrived. After lunch it was back to the Beach Rd gate, stopping for birds such as Striated Fieldwren as we went. It was a pity that there were a number of people digging for bait and walking one rocks, which may well have reduced the number of birds we saw. We heard several Spotted Crakes but could not persuade them to show themselves. We finished up with bird call at the Paradise Rd gate after the running of the Cup - 83 species was a good number for a bus trip! Chris - a guest of Flo’s - came closest to this total, but of our regulars Gwen was closest, so hopefully one of them will bring chocolates next month!