

Uluru–Kata Tjuṯa National Park Notes

Birds

You will see more birds than any other kind of animal in Uluru-Kata Tjuṯa National Park. Their songs and colours are part of the arid landscape. This Park Note is designed to help you to find the birds in their natural habitats and to provide Anangu information about them.

Survival in arid regions

Water dictates the survival of birds in the arid region. Many are either nomadic or migratory, and after periods of good rain will move into the park in great numbers.

The need to drink usually keeps birds within flying distance of water. Insect eaters, the largest group, and carnivorous species supplement their water intake through moisture from food. To reduce water loss birds lose little in their droppings, passing crystals with their faeces.

In high temperatures small birds lose water rapidly through evaporation and most of it is lost from panting, not sweating, as birds have no sweat glands.

Finding birds

While some birds range over all habitats, others live in only one. Look for birds and listen carefully. Anangu identify and name birds by their calls, this way of naming birds is called mnemonic (memory device). Spend a little time saying the names and listening to the birds, and you will soon discover how practical this system is. Often Anangu call similar sounding species by the same general name.

Pulji - rocky areas

Birds soar around Uluru and Kata Tjuṯa, or live among the plants growing at their bases. You will probably see at least one species of hawk. Species to look for include *kirkinpa* (brown falcon, Australian kestrel, peregrine falcon, Australian hobby, black-breasted kite), *araḷapaḷpa* (crested pigeon), *warutjilyarpa* (black-faced cuckoo-shrike, grey-headed honeyeater), *pitiṯjaku-pitiṯjaku* (pied butcherbird), *paṯupiri* (fairy martin), and *tjalpu-tjalpu* (little woodswallow).

Kirkinpa, Australian kestrels hover or perch as they search for prey on the ground. Falcons soar higher and prey on birds, small mammals, reptiles and insects, killing by severing the neck with one powerful bite.

Paṯupiri build bottle-shaped mud-nests in the caves but you are more likely to see them in flight. *Tjalpu-tjalpu* glide for insects high on the cliff faces.



Left to right - *kirkinpa* (brown falcon) is a common species in the arid zone, the singing honeyeater is found in open grasslands and dune areas, the black buzzard is identified by the two white spots on the underwing, and is one of the main predator species found in the park

Tjanpi – spinifex

This is a specialised habitat on the rocky slopes around Kata Tjuṯa. This particular spinifex species forms a very prickly, fine-needed hummock and you will find it just off the track at points along the Valley of the Winds circuit. There are two uncommon species to look for, the painted fire-tail and *mirilyirilyi* (dusky grass wren). *Mirilyirilyi* are one of the larger wrens and bounce over boulders with their tails cocked. When disturbed they dash away, running with their tails lowered. They are very shy but are known to appear momentarily, calling, singing and running about the rocks.



Puti – woodlands and shrublands

This habitat is accessible along most major roads in the park and consists of grevilleas, hakeas and desert oaks, all of which offer food and shelter for the following species *patilpa* (Port Lincoln ringneck), *tjalpu-tjalpu*, *tjintir-tjintirpa* (willy wagtail) *piyar-piyarpa* (galah), *pititjaku-pititjaku* (pied butcherbird), *kurparu* (Australian magpie), *kałaya* (emu), *kaaṅka* (little and Torresian crows) and *kirkinpa* (brown goshawk).

Patilpa are often seen in desert oaks feeding on seeds. Pairs or flocks of *tjalpu-tjalpu* search on the wing for insects or perch waiting for insects to pass. You will see many in trees beside the road. Although they feed mainly on insects, you may see them taking nectar and pollen. They have divided tongues which enable them reach into the centre of flowers.

Puti wanari – mulga

Mulga is a common tree in the park and grows in stands. There are good stands next to the road to Kata Tjuṯa and you may find *mirilyirilyi*, *mininy-mininypa* (chestnut-rumped thornbill), *tjintu-tjintu* (inland thornbill), *tjitirara* (spiny-cheeked honeyeater), *tjintir-tjintirpa*, *tjalpu-tjalpu*, *watu-watu* (grey shrike-thrush), *tjuun-tjuunpa* (white-browed babbler), and *warutjilyarpa*.

Tjukurpa tells how *tjintir-tjintirpa* hears faint sounds of singing coming from the northeast. Happily she realises that the *mala* (rufous hare wallaby people) ceremonies have started. As an expression of her pleasure, she smiles and forms the *ikari*, a cave near Muṯitjulu at the base of Uluru.

The *Tjukurpa* associated with *nyii nyii* tells of the travels of these bird ancestors and there is an *inma* (ceremony) for *nyii-nyii* which is an important part of ceremonial life.

Tali and pila – open grasslands and dune areas

Tali and *pila* are the two most widespread habitats and they are also the first areas to show the effect of drought. The dunes are particularly fragile so please minimise your disturbance to as little as possible. You might see *miititi* (crimson chat), *mirilyirilyi*, *kakalyalya* (pink cockatoo), *pirunkura* (singing honeyeater), *kirkinpa*, and *tjalpu-tjalpu*.

How you can help?

A bird checklist to accompany this park note is available from the Cultural Centre. Naturally some birds are more difficult to locate than others. Should you find anything unusual or new, we would be interested in hearing about it.

Meanwhile, happy bird watching!

This male splendid fairy wren (below) can be found in *puti wanari* and mulga country

Tjintir-tjintirpa (below) is one of the ancestral animals of *Tjukurpa*



Piyar-piyarpa (above) is mostly seen in large flocks and feeds mainly on seeds



Budgerigars (above) tend to be seen in large flocks and eat seeds and insects



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