

A Big Day in/around Adelaide

Ian Reid and Paul Coddington, 15/11/15



Back in early May Paul Coddington participated in the ebird Global Big Day. This was of course timed for prime viewing season in the Northern Hemisphere, and the season, light and weather were all against him here in South Australia – it was a difficult and disappointing day. However chatting before the event we agreed it would also be good to do something in the Austral spring when hopefully the weather would be better, migrants back, birds in song, and importantly the days much longer.

On 1st Nov Paul goes out solo, restricting himself to the Adelaide metro area. He does well, scoring a ton by working from south to north. I cannot get out that day but we have pencilled in the Sunday of 15th Nov to do some birding together so we put in place a plan for a slightly more ambitious Big Day, still based from Adelaide, but no longer restricting ourselves to the metro area.

Planning an ideal route involves lots of compromises. You can only have dawn at one place. High tide happens only twice (and in our case on 15th coincides with dawn and dusk). List padding shite like conspicuous Noisy Miner or Goldfinch count the same as a White-winged Fairy-wren or White-back Swallow or Bassian Thrush, so quality has to make way for quantity. Birding between 11am and 3pm in late spring and early summer can be hot and fruitless, especially in the bush. So you visit a wetland. Or travel. Or often on bird tours, during these quiet hours, leaders will use playback to find a feeding flock or just excite the locals. But standard rules of Big Days prohibit playback. Though we are not participating in any competition, we decide to adhere by these standard rules: no playback; more than half the team – or in our team of two, both of us – must both see or hear and identify the bird; one calendar day, 00:00 until 23:59.

Paul looked in detail at our options, we discussed various possibilities, and as the opportunities presented over the preceding weeks we did some scouting. Our initial plan went something like this: start in the remnant “nearby” mallee down at Monarto, work our way into the Adelaide Hills via Laratinga Wetland in Mt Barker, get a few easy city birds then head north to the Greenfields and/or Whites Rd Wetlands, and Port Gawler before finishing

with some owling on the Adelaide plains. In the end we were not far from this plan, changing our last few sites at the last minute.

3:30 Alarm set; 4:15 Head off; 5:05 Monarto Conservation Park; 7:00 Ferries MacDonal Conservation Park; 7:50 Browns Rd, Monarto; 10:10 Laratinga Wetlands; 12:00 Mt Lofty; 14:00 Adelaide City; 15:15 Greenfields Wetlands, Magazine Rd North; 16:55 St Kilda; 18:05 Pengilly Scrub; 19:35 Thompson Beach; 20:50 Dublin-Mallala; 22:00 Knock off; 23:00 Home.

3:30am: 0 species

The day starts with my alarm going off at 3:30, a mere 3 hours since I got to bed after an awesome Saturday with the family at Handpicked Festival down in Langhorne Creek. Paul arrives on schedule at 4:15. I drive just 200m down the road before pulling over, shining my torch into a tree hollow I spied earlier in the week, and ticking off a pair of sleeping **Eastern Rosella**. These beautiful birds (introduced to Adelaide) are usually easy in the city, but Paul's metro area dry run missed them so this is a simple and valuable start.

We drive in the dark along the freeway and the first sign of light is appearing in the west as we pull up into the small carpark at Monarto Conservation Park. We head along the perimeter track with torches hoping to tick off a few night birds on call, and with dreams of stumbling on a Mallefowl, but we miss a key target here: Owlet Nightjar. Under standard rules, no playback is allowed, so we can do nothing but wave the torches around and hope for a plaintiff *Cheeo* from an Owlet Nightjar. The "usual" pre-dawn suspects are singing away with **Blackbird**, **Magpie** and **Willie Wagtail** the most conspicuous, with contributions from **New Holland** and **Singing Honeyeater**. All are identified on voice (though we will see lots of each throughout the day) while a **Common Bronzewing** booms away in the background. A snatch of Skylark song is not enough for either of us to make a 100% confident tick so we hope to hear or see one later. Likewise, Fairy-wrens are singing, but we are not confident to identify Variegated from Superb. A **Golden Whistler** sings its distinctive *wi-whit* and later I get a lovely view of a different bird.

We want to walk the loop trail straight after dawn so we head back along the perimeter with enough light that our torches are superfluous. Common stuff is quick to fall: **Grey Currawong**, **Little Raven**, **Rainbow Lorikeet**. **Crested Pigeons** flush loudly. A flock of 8 **Straw-necked Ibis** swoop barely metres above our heads and land in the golden wheat field to the north. A pair of **Red-rumped Parrots**, soon followed by many more, settle on the fence and in a tree up ahead. A **Southern Scrub-robin** is calling from dense cover – Paul nails the ID then plays me the third vocalisation on the app. We agree that the heard-only ID is unequivocal. A **Brown Falcon** powers its way across the field, stunning in the oblique morning light and not for the last time I think "if only I had my camera". We are already one up on Paul's raptor count from two weeks previous.

Just inside the dense scrub to my right I see something scurry on the ground with a cocked tail. I call Paul over and we grill the gaps either side of the bush it seems to be using as cover. Another small bird dives in from behind me and although half obscured I can see the striped throat, cocked tail and rufous rump of a **Shy Heathwren**. It shoots off before Paul can get on it, but fortunately we are able to claw this back later as one sings while we walk the loop trail.

In spite of the incredible amount (and beauty) of mallee in blossom, and the cool, calm morning, it's ominously quiet on the loop trail. In the area where we usually get **Tawny-crowned Honeyeater** we hear and see nothing, but then finally we get one phrase of song, so we can relax on that front. It would be nice to stay to get a visual, but needs must. **Grey Shrike-thrush** are vocal and beautiful songsters so we have already got them in the bag, but it is nice to see one as well. A small group of **Brown-headed Honeyeaters** chatters in a flowering mallee.

Back at the car-park we are resigned to dipping on Purple-gaped H-E, so we invoke Paul's back-up plan and drive a few km south to Ferries MacDonald C.P. I pull over in a hurry when I spy two larger parrots in a roadside tree just in time to see a pair of **Mallee Ringneck** fly off over the road. With only a few hours in the mallee this morning, this bright and usually easy bird is one we could easily miss.

Down at Ferries Mac we walk a couple of hundred metres along the sandy trail at Paul's stake-out for Purple-gaped. We hear more Scrub-robin, but after 20min adding nothing new we walk back to the car, resigned to dipping, and mindful that minutes here are minutes that we will not have later in the day. Then, barely 20m from the car, Paul hears a **Purple-gaped**. I too have heard it but have not learnt the song, so I am gratified when a chunky olive, grey and yellow honeyeater lands briefly on a branch overhanging the track.

We make a slight diversion down Mountain View Rd, picking up an **Australian Pipit** on the fence, and at the T-junction where we turn around a **Skylark** is singing. It is now 7am and time to head to our next mallee destination, Browns Rd.

8am: 28 species (62km)

As we walk into the area of relict mallee that is the Browns Rd block, we are greeted with a fast twittering and lock onto a pair of small birds. Are these thornbills? No, they are **Southern Whiteface** a bird that is regularly missed here and so not one we had banked on getting. We walk the small block, checking out the old Owlet Nightjar roost, now broken and (unsurprisingly) no longer in use. A **Masked Woodswallow** waves its tail at us in agitation and is gratefully scribed onto the list. **Adelaide Rosellas** make their first appearance on the list, and quickly some of the usual residents join them: **White-browed Babbler**, **White-winged Chough**, **Red Wattlebird**, **Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater**, **Weebill** and **White-plumed Honeyeater**. A small bird flies over and is probably a **Striated Pardalote** so I ignore it – we have already heard its monotonous, disyllabic song, a sound that is characteristic of Australian Bush. Some **Musk Lorikeets** zoom over, but do we hear the lower-pitched buzz of Purple-crowned? Not well enough to be sure.

We wander over to the little feeding station somewhat hidden off the track and immediately a group of small passerines flush before we can get anything on them. This is annoying, but pretty soon I have landed bins on a small bird in front of us. Amazingly this is not the expected finch but a fabulous female **Variegated Fairy-wren**. Though female fairy-wrens can in general be tricky, her long tail and dark lores make the ID instant and unequivocal. Next up we do score the bird I expected to be here, a **Diamond Firetail**.

Twittering from nearby native conifers alerts us to the presence of Thornbills. We scan the fast moving flock and find both **Yellow** and **Yellow-rumped**. Paul sees another small job, a **Silvereye**, but I don't. We are sure we'll see more so don't stress at this stage – in

retrospect, a schoolboy error. **Grey Fantails** are singing so get ticked off. We'll see them conspicuously during the heat of the day in the hills, when, as is often the case, they are the only bird active. A **Peaceful Dove** beats out its repetitive *hula-hoop* song as we walk west along the main track until Paul hears a **Rufous Whistler**. We decide to go off-piste to look for robins and thornbills, and are rewarded with great views of Whistler that sings away to its neighbour, continuously picking various bits of its repertoire; at times just *ee-chong*, at others its complex warble. A Golden Whistler joins in the act (but we are blazé – GW is already in the bag).

A small bird flits up from the ground and I remember we are on the lookout for robins. The jizz looks good and when I lock on with bins it's confirmed as a female **Red-capped Robin**. Later we hear the song and see a stunning male.

Our target list is reducing rapidly but we still have not seen a few common mallee species for which Browns Rd will be our last chance – Brown Treecreeper, Hooded Robin and Chestnut-rumped Thornbill. We work hard checking our every flock of fast moving little jobs.

Eventually, as I try to track down a **Restless Flycatcher** (we both hear the little buzzing raspberry contact call, but never see it), we find another set of small jobs and lock onto a pair of **Chestnut-rumped Thornbill**.

Paul's sharp ears pick up a cuckoo nearby – a fast, rising note that means it is **Shining Bronze-cuckoo**. Suddenly Paul has found it and directs me to a dead branch about 10m away where the gorgeous little emerald thing literally glistens and shines. Since this is the first in SA for both of us, it immediately makes it onto the shortlist for bird-of-the-day.

Time is running out for us if we are to keep to the schedule Paul has drawn up so we bash our way through the bush back towards the road, not picking up anything new. I scan the fence line and trees across the road since I've had Hooded Robin here too, but it's not to be today.

We decide on the Old Princes Hwy back to Mt Barker rather than the freeway and are glad we do. We stop in Dawseley where Paul heard Purple-crowned Lorikeets a couple of weeks earlier. There are **Little Corellas** here, as well as a sighting of Peaceful Dove on electricity wires. A **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike** flies over and lands on a television aerial, a fortuitous encounter since this will be our only sighting for the day. Despite some attractive looking flowering gums, there are no P-C Lorikeets here though. We resign ourselves to missing this species today. Another dip ☹. The day is not a disaster yet, but we're missing a few gettable targets.

10:00: 51 species (92km)

Laratinga Wetlands brings new habitats, and therefore a range of new species and we quickly rack up the numbers. **Dusky Moorhen** are the first bird noted here and ducks are "easy" on the big ponds: **Pacific Black Duck, Grey Teal, Chestnut Teal, Wood Duck, Hardhead, Shoveler** are sharing the water with lots of **Hoary-headed Grebes. Welcome Swallow** and **Tree Martin** hawk over ponds 1 and 2 where a single **Yellow-billed Spoonbill** and a few **White Ibis** feed. A Reed Warbler clacks away and before long we have also seen this common resident. I remark that we are not hearing any **Little Grassbirds**, but once one starts to sing about 30 mins later, loads chime in and their monotonous song becomes a background for the last part of our visit.

The water levels look good for crakes so we scan the muddy reedy edges. As usual there are lots of **Purple Swamphen**, **Coots** and the resident waders **Black-fronted Dotterel**, **Red-kneed Dotterel** and the larger **Masked Lapwing** are all conspicuous today. It takes a while before we get one of the “missable” targets – Paul comes up trumps when we have walked about halfway around pond 2, finding an **Australian Spotted Crake**.

We are sure we must have seen **Magpie Lark**, **Galah** and **Starling** already but failed to note them so when we see them at Laratinga we make sure they go on the list.

Laratinga must be one of the best places in the whole country for **Freckled Duck**. I have been here regularly since arriving in Adelaide in late 2012 and never failed to see this spectacular and rare duck – today there are at least 10 present, most roosting on pond 2 behind the blind but with a couple scattered in different parts of the area. We hope for Darter or Rufous Night-heron but only **Little Pied Cormorants** inhabit the dead trees over hanging the ponds. We are also keeping a watchful eye and “listenful ear” out for bush birds but all we turn up are **Splendid Fairy-wrens** and **White-plumed Honeyeaters**.

A **Sulphur Crested Cockatoo** screeches. I turn and see white bird in the middle of the pond doing a passable impression of a Silver Gull, and realise with bins that it is a **Silver Gull**. Two ticks for the price of one in this big day malarkey! A single **Royal Spoonbill** flies over – we are confident of getting this at Greenfields but this one will potentially save us some time and angst later on.

At the reedy, grassy neck we pause and lament the lack of water when a cheeping call comes from the grass. I try to triangulate it and all of a sudden a **Buff-banded Rail** chick emerges, cheeps again, the runs back into cover, but not before Paul is also onto it.

We try hard for a Spotless Crake checking out various places we've had them before. Some places are dry but others look ideal. Without recourse playback we either have to be lucky, or be very patient. We are neither! The wetland does have some bonuses left for us yet, though. As we round the last of the bigger ponds I scan in vain for a crake, but then spy something streaked bobbing up and down feeding behind some reeds. As it emerges we see the stripey head of a **Latham's Snipe**. I had commented earlier to Paul that the water level looked great and if I were a snipe this is where I'd be, but we had still marked it down as a 1-in-5 chance on our pre-trip list so a real bonus.

From here we walk quickly along the bike track before cutting through to clamber up the slope of the treatment plant. Through the wire mesh we can see at least 200 **Pink-eared Duck** on the water and roosting on the sides of the pan. As I scan across one sleeping bird looks all dark with a pointy tail. We debate the ID for a while, settling on **Blue-billed Duck**. As Paul takes a minute to look at the field-guide, it pops its head up revealing a large, wide blue bill and our assessment is confirmed. Scanning further we find another, giving us a near clean-sweep of the possible ducks today.

12:00: 84 species (122km)

We now enter the phase of the day that we have been most concerned about. We have to work in birds of the hills forests at some point, but geography and logistics mean that our only way to fit this in is at the most difficult time of day. We head for Mt Lofty Botanical Gardens. Although not the best site, it is close and will undoubtedly throw up some of our

targets easily – and there's an outside chance of Bassian Thrush which we have both seen here in the past. Hah!

Eastern Spinebill are common, seen within metres of the car park. Other new birds we have to work much harder for. Still close to the carpark I spy a small passerine at the base of a tree. Beauty, it's a Red-browed Finch. As I struggle to give adequate directions to Paul it jumps deeper into the shade and out of sight, then bombs over our heads, an untickable small shape. Paul is unhappy with his own id – he saw the small finch-like shape in the shadows but got nothing on it before it disappeared. It will go into the notes as a “*starred” bird – only half the team has seen it.

It all rather un-birdy – not unexpectedly for the time of day and year – though at least it's not as bad as it might be if the temperature were not a balmy 24 degrees. On the track below the toilet block we finally find some birds. First I locate a pair of **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters**, one of our key honeyeater targets for the hills. Then a group of thornbills causes an identification conundrum. Remembering the calls, songs and plumage differences of this family of small, fast-moving passerines is not my forte. At first we think we've had both Brown and **Striated Thornbill**, but eventually strike the former off having had neither unequivocal visual nor audio evidence. We have, however had good views of one Striated and the calls coming from the trees and bushes in front of us match the buzzing of Striated with no sign of the more bubbly, bursty notes of Brown.

We descend the gullies, scanning for an elusive Thrush and listening for our remaining targets. Eventually the loud piping and gradually descending notes of a **White-throated Treecreeper** are heard, and a few minutes later I find one on creeping up a tree trunk (funny that). Paul's ears pick up another Shining Bronze-cuckoo, making it two of this more difficult Bronze-cuckoo and none of the more common Horsfield's. Sadly that 2-0 scoreline is how the day will end.

Finally we find some more thornbills, and these ones are clean white underneath with no yellow, and bubbling their song – this pair of **Brown Thornbill** actually gives very nice views. A piercing, plaintive wail seems a little too long and tuneful for a Grey Currawong and we both mentally process this before Paul points out what should have been obvious – it's a **Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo**, and we see a pair flapping their long wings lazily above the treetops.

Time is marching on and we give up on White-browed Scrub-wren and Crescent Honeyeater, hoping for these at Mt Lofty summit which is just a couple of km up the road. We park and walk the Heysen Trail for a short while, but it's all extremely quiet. We hear a Striated Pardalote and nothing else. We consider a trip to Belair, but it is in the wrong direction and cannot guarantee us anything new. I suggest that rather than going back to the freeway, we drive slowly down past Cleland Wildlife park and into town down via Greenhill Rd with the windows open, just in case. Paul agrees and our tactic pays immediate dividends as we pull out of the car-park and a single note arrests us – **Crescent Honeyeater**! We stop to try for a visual but can't locate it and it doesn't call again. Is this too stringy? Could we have misheard the single note call of a Rosella, of which there were several around? We debate it as we descend but the facts are that (a) we both called it immediately; and (b) it was a perfect match for Crescent on our app; so by the time we are

down amongst the plain-dwellers, Crescent is on the list. It is joined by **Fan-tailed Cuckoo**, another addition thanks to the windows-down approach.

We drive a few streets in the Eastern suburbs including past my house hoping for Little Wattlebird – I saw 4 or 5 on my cycle home from work on Friday – but of course we see only Red Wattlebirds, **Noisy Miners** and **Spotted Doves**. We pick up pies at Dulwich Bakery and head up Fullerton Rd to the Botanic Gardens. I had a Hobby here on Friday morning roosting in one of the large Araucaria pines, but there's nothing here today and we decide our time is better spent in the wetlands to the north rather than scouring more treetops. We make one more stop in town, spending a few minutes at Torrens Weir where we hope for Great Cormorant or Darter but dip on both. We do enjoy a slightly surreal moment as I clamber up next to the railway line to try to get a view down on the structure that supports the sluice gates where I am sure I can hear a raptor – probably a Peregrine – calling. I can see nothing and then Paul realises this is a recording to keep pigeons away!

15:00 96 species (149km)

We arrive Magazine Rd (north) and immediately start racking up new species, cracking the century in the process. **Pelican** and **Little Black Cormorant** are our first additions to the list, and then we set up the scope to scan a small wader roost from the entrance road, adding **Sharp-tailed** and **Wood Sandpiper**. A single **Great Cormorant** flushes from under the bank for decent flight views.

We walk fairly quickly up to the hide, noting **Australasian Grebe**, **Black-necked Stilt** and **Whiskered Tern** as new birds for the day. As I look north a large raptor crests the treeline and I immediately call **Swamp Harrier**. It drops out of sight but within a few seconds has reappeared and Paul has it now too. I have only ever seen them here once or twice, so this is a very timely appearance and we get even better views half an hour later as we walk the loop trail and it flushes from under the bank just in front of us.

In the hide I set up the scope again and scan the wader flock. There are lots of Sharpies here with the usual Stilts, and a couple of Lapwings. On the far edge of the drying pan I scan across and find a **Red-capped Plover**. After Paul ticks this off through the scope I continue to scan and note in total 14 before the scope comes to rest at the edge of the loose group on a white bird with a bold black chest-band: **White-fronted Chat!** This is the first time I have seen one here even though I have looked regularly.

Outside the hide we see some Welcome Swallows resting on the electricity wires. One looks a little different and Paul points out that we have lucked onto a **Fairy Martin**. We are still missing the Glossy Ibis that has been here fairly regularly over the last week or two so we walk the loop trail, adding a few species for the site such as Royal Spoonbill, but fail to find anything new for the day.

16:30 113 species (150km)

Rather than go back onto the highway we drive to the locked gate that leads into Barker Inlet wetlands and walk. A few **Banded Stilt** are down on the first deep pond (there are many more on the next one along), and we carry on walking to the little bridge that has produced Baillon's Crake for Paul twice in two recent visits. A **Little Egret** is roosting at the spot that Paul points out is exactly his Baillon's stake-out. We wait for a while but see nothing so Paul

wanders a bit further over to scan north. After a while of still seeing nothing I join him where he has found a few roosting **Red-necked Avocet** in amongst various species we have already seen over in Magazine Rd.

We have either scored or given up on everything we hoped for here, and we are just about slightly ahead of schedule, so Paul suggests we head under the highway and try for Darter which is now a big hole in our list. In the end, however, we decide that the time this would use up could be more valuable elsewhere so we walk back to the car. As we cross the bridge I have one more scan of the muddy fringe but see nothing so carry on walking. I'm about 10m on when suddenly Paul announces "It's there!" His final scan from the bridge has produced the goods. I rush back and through my bins I see a small shape picking its way along a muddy spit – exactly the spot Paul has seen it previously – but I need to set the scope up for an unequivocal identification. With that ID now in the bag it turns and walks back out of sight. What a great result, and the circumstances of this mean that the **Baillon's Crane** joins Shining Bronze-Cuckoo on my bird-of-the-day short-list.

Our original plan from here was a short trip north to Whites Rd where White-winged Fairywren should be easy, and we can scan for raptors. I had a probable Black Falcon here on a scouting trip earlier in the week and this is one of the few lifers on offer today for Paul. We decide, however, that the time taken for the Fairy-wren, with no other guaranteed ticks available, is not worth it and create a new plan on the fly: we will go to St Kilda beach, Pengilly Scrub briefly for some more dry bush birds, and finish the daylight at Thompson Beach.

16:55: 117 species (167km)

We arrive at St Kilda and the wind has picked up and the tide is still way out. First we scan the salt field to the north where in the last weeks we have each had in excess of a 1000 Banded Stilts. Today it is very quiet, the stilts presumably somewhere that is more sheltered. Fortunately for us we already have them in the bag, and a bird that we do need – **Australian Shelduck** – is roosting obviously in the middle. We head to the beach and then to the breakwater, hearing the fluid tinkling of a **European Goldfinch** between the sites near the tramline. We are grateful for my scope here as we brace against the wind and heroically scan for more ticks. To mitigate effect of the wind I retract the legs and sit in the lee of the only bush anywhere near the breakwater. This seems inspired until Paul realises he is covered in ants. Fortunately by this stage we have already found a couple of distant **Sooty Oystercatchers** amongst 100s of Black Swans and various herons and egrets and gulls (which include a bonus of a couple of imm. **Pacific Gulls**).

17:30: 121 species (203km)

We now head inland for another crack at bush birds, reasoning that this is a better use of time than waiting around for the tide. It is less than half an hour up the northern expressway til we are pulling into Roseworthy for an outside shot at a cheeky tick. Craig Greer has tipped me off about a Peregrine on the silos. I have previously dipped twice in recent trips, but a diversion of a couple of minutes is surely worth it. We quickly scan obvious roosting points and I'm on the verge of concluding we'll dip again when the familiar sleek form of nature's fastest creature cruises into view from behind one of the silos; **Peregrine Falcon**

onto the list. Minutes later as we drive the few km north on Horrock's Hwy I spy another small raptor and we nail **Nankeen Kestrel** without breaking stride.

18:05 123 species (208km)

At Pengilly it is not long before we hear the distinctive trills of **Rainbow Bee-eater**, and we enjoy nice looks at several over the course of our short stay. We remember that we missed **Brown Treecreeper** in the mallee and that they are quite common in this isolated patch of amazingly rich scrub-land surrounded by wheat-fields as far as the eye can see. As if on cue a pair appears. It takes a while but as expected we connect with **Elegant Parrots**. The other day when I visited they refused to sit in good light, but now in the early evening all the ones we see are sitting in full sunshine, safe in the knowledge that my camera is back in the car.

I was banking on Woodswallows here, which I'd had easily in good numbers on my two most recent visits. But today it is very quiet. Eventually I pick up a pair hawking high over the scrub. Nailing down an ID is tricky in the bright light but we note the dark body, and dark, white-tipped tail which a dark centre, features that make these **Dusky Woodswallows**. Then a much paler bird flies over with an unbroken white terminal band and we have a female **White-browed Woodswallow**. A minute later – perhaps because we stumble unwittingly close to a nest – a pair of stunning White-browed Woodswallow are perched in front of us wagging their tails side-to-side in an agitated fashion.

Satisfied with our bag from Pengilly and that we have made the right call in terms of our itinerary, we are making our way back to the entrance when a flock of about 15 or more **Budgerigar** bursts from a low bush in front of us. It would be nice to track these guys down – after all, Budgie was a lifer for me only last month – but if we are not careful we will run out of time at our final stop, Thompson Beach where we will arrive shortly after 7pm.

As we drive to our final birding site of the day we are on high alert for Black-shouldered Kite which we imagined was our highest probability raptor, usually easily picked up hovering over fields from the car. In fact it is the similarly-named but much larger **Black Kite** that we find: it and a Brown Falcon are having a scrap over a field outside Mallala. It takes about 35 minutes to get to Dublin, and once there we head west to the beach, about another 10 minutes' drive.

19:10 130 species (262km)

The weather conditions have been deteriorating steadily from about 4pm, with the wind picking up to a strong 30-40km/h or more at times. This didn't hurt us too much in the scrub, but our expectation of being able to add much new at the beach is fairly low as the sea breeze whips across the water and sand, making viewing through bins difficult and through the scope even harder. I have never been here before but Paul has been a few times and directs me to the very first pull-in by the beach. The beach is largely deserted and our prospects seem bleak because of the 30km/h westerly.

At the northern car park we fair better: a flock of **Ruddy Turnstone** sit between the water and piles of dead seagrass. Coping as best I can with the jittery image in the scope caused by the gusty wind, I scan through the Turnstone flock finding a few Sharpies when another bird catches my eye: shorter-bill and slightly larger than the turnstones I am sure this is

Pacific Golden Plover. We are concerned about misinterpreting the golden colour in the setting sun, but all other indicators are good. I go back to the car to get my camera, thinking that I might be able to get a record shot of PGP, but the flock has flushed by the time I return and we cannot relocate the plover. My trip for the camera is not entirely wasted though – as I emerge onto the beach three large black-and-white cormorants are flying past. I fire off a couple of record shots just to make absolutely certain of the ID of **Pied Cormorant**. Closer inspection of the photos the next day reveals a tick-gone-begging – one of the three is in fact a **Black-faced Cormorant**. Neither of us actually knows the official rules of big days, but we are both pretty confident that identification after the 24 hours has elapsed surely doesn't count.

We scope the dry pans behind the beach in the hope that there are waders sheltering from the wind, but find nothing so we head to the southern-most carpark, arriving after the sun has set. Even these few minutes prove valuable. As we pull up into the small parking area we immediately see a dozen or so **Pied Oystercatchers** through the windscreen. A lone **Grey Plover** sits on the beach, curiously still showing dark underparts of summer plumage that give it its American name of Black-bellied Plover. A couple of **Caspian Tern** cruise past nudging our total along further. As the light fades we see two large flocks of terns a few hundred metres offshore. They appear very dark, and though it would seem unusual to have marsh terns over the gulf, surely these are Whiskered Tern, and not (sadly) Crested, which would be another tick. Likewise a flock of 40 or more herons, mostly Great Egret, cruises over the water at 500m range. Two of the birds are much darker and my first instinct is dark morph Reef Egret, but later reference to field guides suggests that dark is rare, so a much more likely interpretation is that they were White-faced Heron.

We finally concede that the light is too poor for any further additions to the list so we head inland to the Dublin pub for dinner. The hugely disappointing news from the pub, though, is that they stopped serving food at 8pm. Our only option if we want a proper meal is to drive to Port Wakefield or back to Gawler. After a long day I am keen on neither, so we stock up on coffee and chips at the servo and head slowly along back roads with windows down and torches at the ready, eventually winding up at Mallala. Our owling has not been an unmitigated success, but we have added **Barn Owl** as the final bird of the day.

22:00 135 species (305km)

Although we have two more hours of our day left with which to get a potential 3 further night birds and if *really* lucky some quail, the wind is still blowing wildly, the temperature has dropped, and I am utterly exhausted and running on empty. We decide to call it a night, and fortunately Paul is still alert enough to be able to take the wheel and drive us back to Adelaide. I briefly consider suggesting a slight diversion down Wakefield Rd to listen out for the eastern parklands Boobook, but the pull of a warm bed is now too much and I bite my lip.

23:00 135 species (365km)

It has been a great – if tiring – day. Best birds for me were Shining Bronze-Cuckoo, Baillon's Crake, Budgerigar and Pacific Golden Plover. Worst dips: Little Wattlebird, Darter, Laughing Kookaburra and Black-shouldered Kite. I guess a Big Day is a bit like a round of golf – there is always some moment you can look back on and say "if only".

	SPECIES	SITE
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1	Eastern Rosella	Toorak Gardens
2	Australian Magpie	Monarto C.P.
3	Eurasian Blackbird	
4	New Holland Honeyeater	
5	Singing Honeyeater	
6	Willie Wagtail	
7	Common Bronzewing	
8	Grey Currawong	
9	Golden Whistler	
10	Crested Pigeon	
11	Little Raven	
12	Rainbow Lorikeet	
13	Southern Scrub-robin	
14	Straw-necked Ibis	
15	Red-rumped Parrot	
16	Brown Falcon	
17	Shy Heathwren	
18	Tawny-crowned Honeyeater	
19	Grey Shrike-thrush	
20	Brown-headed Honeyeater	
21	Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater	
22	Mallee Ringneck	
23	Purple-gaped Honeyeater	
24	Spotted Pardalote	
25	Australasian Pipit	Mountain View Rd
26	House Sparrow	
27	Skylark	
28	Galah	
29	Southern Whiteface	Browns Rd
30	Masked Woodswallow	
31	Crimson Rosella (Adelaide)	
32	White-browed Babbler	
33	White-winged Chough	
34	Red Wattlebird	
35	Weebill	
36	Striated Pardalote	
37	Silvereye (*)	
38	Yellow-rumped Thornbill	
39	Yellow Thornbill	
40	Musk Lorikeet	
41	Peaceful Dove	
42	Variegated Fairy-wren	
43	Diamond Firetail	
44	Grey Fantail	

45	Rufous Whistler	
46	Red-capped Robin	
47	Restless Flycatcher	
48	Chestnut-rumped Thornbill	
49	Shining Bronze-cuckoo	
50	Little Corella	Dawseley
51	Black-faced Cuckoo Shrike	
52	Dusky Moorhen	Laratinga
53	Pacific Black Duck	
54	Grey Teal	
55	Chestnut Teal	
56	Maned Duck	
57	White-eyed Duck	
58	Australian Shoveler	
59	Hoary-headed Grebe	
60	Yellow-billed Spoonbill	
61	Australian Reed Warbler	
62	Australian White Ibis	
63	Welcome Swallow	
64	Tree Martin	
65	Australian Spotted Crake	
66	Australasian Swamphen	
67	Eurasian Coot	
68	Red-kneed Dotterel	
69	Black-fronted Dotterel	
70	Masked Lapwing	
71	Magpie Lark	
72	European Starling	
73	Freckled Duck	
74	Little Pied Cormorant	
75	Superb Fairy-wren	
76	White-plumed Honeyeater	
77	Buff-banded Rail	
78	Sulphur Crested Cockatoo	
79	Silver Gull	
80	Little Grassbird	
81	Royal Spoonbill	
82	Latham's Snipe	
83	Pink-eared Duck	
84	Blue-billed Duck	
85	Eastern Spinebill	Mt Lofty Botanical Gardens
86	Red-browed Finch (**)	
87	Yellow-faced Honeyeater	
88	Striated Thornbill	
89	White-throated Treecreeper	

90	Brown Thornbill	
91	Yellow-tailed Black-cockatoo	
92	Crescent Honeyeater	Mt Lofty Summit
93	Fan-tailed Cuckoo	
94	Spotted Dove	
95	Noisy Miner	
96	Rock Dove	
97	Australian Pelican	Magazine Rd
98	Little Black Cormorant	
99	Great Egret	
100	White-faced Heron	
101	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	
102	Wood Sandpiper	
103	Great Cormorant	
104	Pied (Black-necked) Stilt	
105	Whiskered Tern	
106	Australian Grebe	
107	Black Swan	
108	Swamp Harrier	
109	Red-capped Plover	
110	White-fronted Chat	
111	Common Greenshank	
112	Black-tailed Native-hen	
113	Fairy Martin	
114	Banded Stilt	Barker Inlet
115	Little Egret	
116	Red-necked Avocet	
117	Baillon's Crake	
118	Australian Shelduck	St Kilda
119	Sooty Oystercatcher	
120	Pacific Gull	
121	European Goldfinch	
122	Peregrine Falcon	Roseworthy
123	Australian (Nankeen) Kestrel	
124	Rainbow Bee-eater	Pengilly
125	Brown Treecreeper	
126	Elegant Parrot	
127	Dusky Woodswallow	
128	White-browed Woodswallow	
129	Budgerigar	
130	Black Kite	
131	Pied Oystercatcher	Thompson Beach
132	Ruddy Turnstone	
133	Pacific Golden Plover	
134	Pied Cormorant	

135	Black-faced Cormorant (***)	
136	Caspian Tern	
137	Black-bellied (Grey) Plover	
138	Barn Owl	Dublin

* Ian only

** Paul only

*** Photo ID the next day