

Birds



Yellow throated miner



CREDIT: Corrine Le Gall

Uluru-Kata Tjuṯa National Park has more birds than any other kind of animal. Familiarise yourself with Pitjantjatjara names so you can identify the birds in their natural habitats.

Survival in arid regions

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

The need to drink usually keeps birds within flying distance of water. Insect eating birds (the largest group) and carnivorous species supplement their water intake through moisture from food. To reduce water loss, bird droppings do not contain much liquid. Instead, some birds pass crystals with their faeces. In high temperatures, small birds lose water rapidly through evaporation – with 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 and listen carefully for birds. Anangu identify and name birds by their calls. This way of naming birds is called mnemonic (memory device). Say aloud the names and listen to the birds sound, and you will soon discover how practical this system is. Similar sounding species are given the same general Anangu name.

Puli – rocky areas

Birds soar around Uluru and Kata Tjuṯa, or live among the plants growing at their bases. It is likely you will see at least one species of hawk.

Species to look for include; **Kirkinpa** (brown falcon–Australian kestrel–Peregrine falcon), **Wowo** (Australian hobby), black-breasted kite, **Aralapalpa** (crested pigeon), **Warutjilyarpa** (grey-headed honeyeater), and **Pitiṯjaku-pitiṯjaku** (pied butcherbird).

Watch some types of **Kirkinpa** (Australian kestrels), hover or perch as they search for prey on the ground. Falcons soar high and prey on birds, small mammals, reptiles, and insects killing by severing the neck with one powerful bite.

Patupiri (fairy martin) build bottle-shaped mud-nests in the caves but you are more likely to see them in flight.

Tjalpu-tjalpu, (white-breasted woodswallow, white-browed woodswallow, and black-faced woodswallow) glide for insects high on the cliff faces.

Tjanpi – spinifex

Tjanpi is a specialised habitat on the rocky slopes around Kata Tjuṯa.

This particular spinifex species forms very prickly, fine-needed hummocks that you will be able to spot from various points along the Valley of the Winds circuit.

There are two uncommon species to look for – the **painted fire-tail**, and a kind of **Mirilyirilyi** (dusky grass wren).

Mirilyirilyi bounce over boulders with their tails cocked, but if disturbed, their tails will lower as they run away. Shy by nature, the bird will appear momentarily, calling, singing, and running about the rocks.

Kata Tjuṯa has two uncommon species among the spinifex: the painted fire-tail, and Mirilyirilyi (dusky grass wren)



Budgerigar swarm

CREDIT: Alex Eberli



Splendid fairy wren

CREDIT: Brian Urby



Painted fire-tail

CREDIT: Jim Bendon

Puṯi – woodlands and shrublands

Puṯi habitat is accessible along most major park roads and consists of grevilleas, hakeas, and desert oaks, all of which offer food and shelter for the species; **Tjintir-tjintirpa** (willy wagtail), **Piyar-piyarpa** (galah), **Pititjaku-pititjaku** (pied butcherbird), **Kurpaṯu** (Australian magpie), **Kaḷaya** (emu), **Kaanka** (little and Torresian crows), and **Kirkinpa** (brown goshawk). **Patilpa** (Port Lincoln ringneck) are spotted in desert oaks feeding on seeds. Pairs or flocks of **Tjalpu-tjalpu** (black faced woodswallow) search on the wing for insects, or perch in trees waiting for insects to pass by the roads. Although mostly insect-fed, you may see **Tjalpu-tjalpu** eating nectar and pollen. Divided tongues enable them to reach to the flowers' centre.

Puṯi wanaṯi – mulga

Mulga is a common tree in the park and it grows in stands. You can find good stands next to the roads of Kata Tjuṯa where you may see; **Mirilyirilyi** (dusky grass wren), **mininy-mininypa** (yellow rumped thornbill), **Tjintu-tjintu** (inland thornbill), **Titiraṯa** (spiny-cheeked honeyeater), **Tjintir-tjintirpa** (willy wagtail), **Tjalpu-tjalpu** (black-faced woodswallow), **Watu-watu** (grey shrike-thrush), **Tjuun-tjuunpa** (white-browed babbler), and **Warutjilyarpa** (grey-headed honeyeater).

Tjukurpa (the Anangu creation period) tells how tjintir-tjintirpa hears faint sounds of singing coming from the northeast. Happily, she realises the mala (rufous hare-wallaby people) ceremonies have started. As an expression of her pleasure, she smiles and forms 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.

You might see; **Miititi** (crimson chat), **Mirilyirilyi** (dusky grass wren), **Kakalyalya** (pink cockatoo), **Pirunkura** (singing honeyeater), **Kirkinpa** and **Tjalpu-tjalpu** in the Tali and Pila open grasslands and dune areas.

Get the checklist and app

A bird checklist is available from the Uluru-Kata Tjuṯa Cultural Centre.

Naturally, some birds are more difficult to locate than others. If you find anything unusual or new, please let one of our rangers know – we are interested to hear about it.

The Uluru-Kata Tjuṯa National Park app for bird watching contains great images, sounds of local birdlife, park bird spotting locations and bird names on the audio-guide.



Download the **Uluru-Kata Tjuṯa National Park** app, happy bird watching!

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SEPT • 2023