A rare breed of mammal is winging around the Territory this week, keeping a keen eye out for the living wonders that hover within the Top End’s trees. They are artists, birders and the more fanatical, twitchers — all fans of the feathered creatures fluttering above us — and all gearing up for the biggest week of their calendar.

**STORY** TAMARA HOWE **PICTURES** KATRINA BRIDGEFORD

**ROWING** up near the orchards on the Mornington Peninsula, a young Ian Hance would see his peers tormenting black birds to death. It was a time when wedged-tailed eagles were strung up on fences and farmers shot crimson rosellas on sight so they didn’t eat their profits. All the while, Hance sat on the periphery as a bird lover. “Birds down there had a tough time,” he said. “I was a bird nerd and I was an artist, which was even worse.”

That love for birds never went away, and for more than a decade he volunteered to organise bird surveys, travelled up to the Territory to count the Gouldian finches in Katherine, and always chased the buzz of spotting a rare, fleeting feature find. “It’s absolute exhilaration and joy,” he said. “It’s one of things that really stimulates me.”

“You’re often granted just the briefest glimpse, which is really tantalising.”

You’re given just a second view, just enough to say ‘yes that’s it!’ “I think that’s what drives a lot of people — that moment — that very brief vision that stays in your mind forever.” Hance said that feeling was also achieved in his paintings — that moment when it all came together. “It doesn’t have to be a bird painting. It can be any creative act,” he said.

“You can strive for that magical moment when it all goes click-click-click into position. ‘It really is exhilarating.’ Hance’s work is featured among a diverse collection of work on show at Framed Gallery, showing the relationship between artists and life in the trees. This exhibition is one of several exhibitions celebrating birdslife across the NT, and ties in with National Bird Week this coming week.

**CHARLES** Darwin University Art Gallery curator Joanna Barkman rediscovered a fascination with birds when she returned to the Territory a few years ago to hear their song wake her each morning. “I think it’s something about the fact birds are ever-present — we can hear them although sometimes we can’t see them,” she said.

“‘There’s something very poignant about birds, in that we see them in the sky making journeys and darting among the trees. ‘There’s something very ephemeral about birds and I think, in a way, that’s something humans relate to, because although we don’t think it, our existence is very ephemeral.”

**THE exhibition also coincides with research being undertaken at the university in conservation. Artist Chips Mackinlo has donated a digital print of his work **At any place you feel at home** to CDU Art Gallery.** We know that hardly anybody wants to lose more birds — and keep what we’ve inherited and pass them on to our children.” And it’s not just bird watchers or conservationists — it’s all sorts of people.”

**T** he exhibition also coincides with research being undertaken at the university in conservation. Artist Chips Mackinlo has donated a digital print of his work “At any place you feel at home” to CDU Art Gallery. **The Backyard Bird Count is a major national initiative which encourages people to document the birds they can see from their backyard, down at a park, or even from the office.**

“If you register for the bird count and become part the project at ausbirdcount.org.au.”

**For more information on Bird Week activities visit birdlife.org.au.**

![Rare yellow chat bird](image)

![CDU Art Gallery](image)

**For The Birds at Framed Gallery until October 29. Our Feathered Friends fly into CDU Art Gallery until February 25, 2017. For more information on Bird Week activities visit birdlife.org.au.**

**Magpie goose at Emerald Lakes Wetlands**

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