Phil has been interested in birds since the demise of the steam trains when he was about 11. Born in Southampton, England he first came to Australia in 1977, but got sidetracked, and spent the next twenty years living and birding in Nigeria, Zambia, the Falkland Islands and Papua New Guinea. He is currently working on a field guide to the Birds of New Guinea and the Bismarck Archipelago. He has also written species and family accounts for three volumes of the Handbook of the Birds of the World covering monarchs, bristle birds, the Acanthizidae and berrypeckers and longbills, and is involved as an advisor with the IOC and their World Checklist and Recommended English Names of Birds projects. He is the editor of Muruk, the journal of the Papua New Guinea Ornithological Society and is the author, amongst other things, of The Birds of the Ok Tedi Region and various notes and papers on Papua New Guinean birds. He is a well-known tour leader, working for Field Guides Inc. and Sicklebill Safaris, and is one of Australia's foremost birders. He is also one of the most experienced New Guinea guides with over 40 tours led there since 1998.

Special interests include field identification, vocalisation, taxonomy and distribution. He has been guiding occasionally since his African days, and became full time in 1998 when he sidestepped the joys of being an international school principal which he found was seriously impeding his birding. He now leads several tours a year throughout the Pacific Region and has recently resumed his tour leading in Africa.