

Tropical North Queensland mammal watching holiday July/Aug 2016

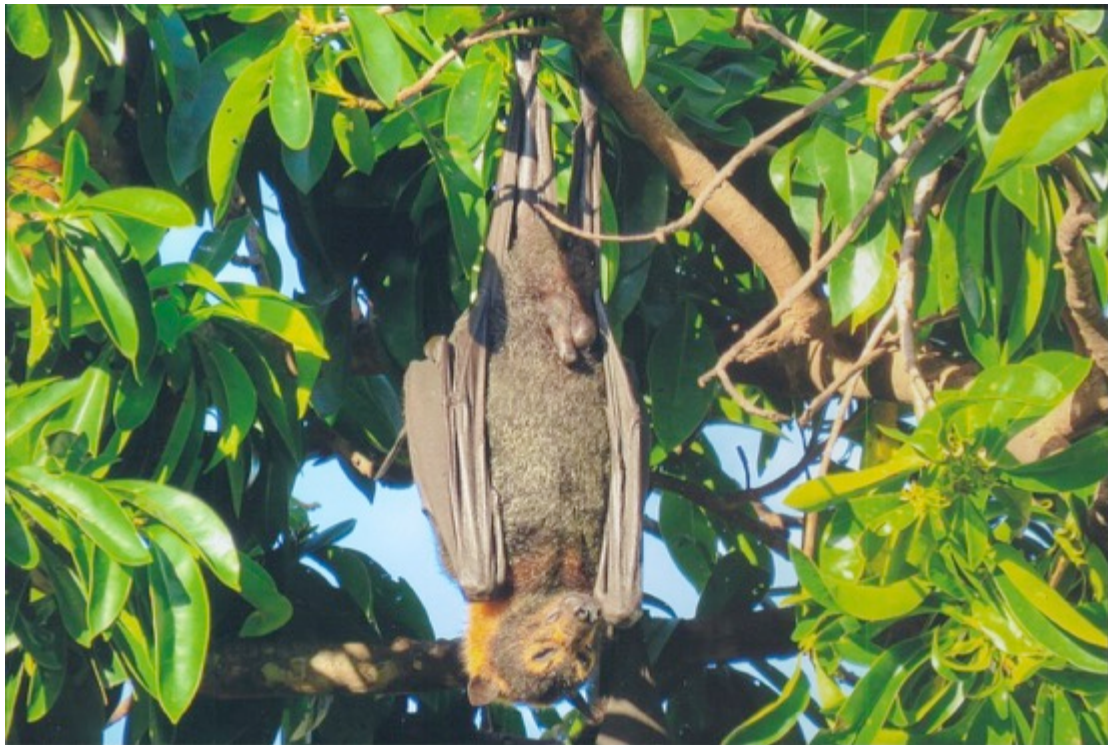
Having spent time mammal watching in Western Australia and Tasmania a visit to tropical North Queensland was long overdue. This was my third time to North Queensland but my first for the purpose of mammal watching. Preparation for the trip included reading David Andrews book "The complete guide to finding the mammals of Australia" and the previous contributors to the Queensland section of this website whom I should thank.

Two things were apparent before departure. First was that viewing animals in the dense canopy of the rainforest was going to be harder than the open forests I was used to in Southern Australia and secondly my non-existent bat knowledge was going to need some serious work.

Cairns Sat 23rd Sun 24th July

A series of flights to Cairns from Perth via Brisbane saw my partner Lorenz and I landing Saturday evening a little late to get any mammal watching in that night. Sunday morning however I wandered over to the city library on the corner of Abbott and Asplin streets to take in the beautiful sight of a roosting spectacled flying fox colony in the early sunlight right in the middle of the city

Spectacled flying fox



During the afternoon we visited the Flecker botanical gardens (a 40 minute walk North from central Cairns) and after dark walked the rainforest boardwalk that begins near the visitor centre on Collins avenue. My second megabat of the day was hanging obligingly in the low canopy and was later identified as an Eastern tubenose bat. Northern brown bandicoots were around the Collins avenue end of the boardwalk. The final mammal of the night was a giant white tailed rat in the creek immediately West of the visitor center.

Eastern tubenose bat



Granite gorge Mon 25th July (day visit)

Just outside Mareeba is this site where there are great photo opportunities of the definitely cute and sometimes bold Mareeba rock wallabies that inhabit the granite boulders of the area.

Mareeba rock wallabies



Mareeba wetlands (Jabiru safari lodge) Mon 25th Tues 26th July

Clancy's lagoon



I loved the savannah feel of the Mareeba wetlands that has a much drier climate than the coastal strip of tropical North Queensland. Accommodation was in

luxurious eco-tents, the hospitality was wonderful and the home cooked food out of this world. This was a place definitely worth a visit even before the mammal watching began.

Late afternoon a birdwatching safari is conducted by vehicle through the property, mammals spotted on the safari included numerous agile wallaby and Eastern grey kangaroos.

Agile wallaby



Although we didn't see any on our safari euros (common wallaroos) are a possibility on the rocky ridges throughout the wetlands.

During pre dinner drinks at the lodge we were joined by agile wallaby grazing the grass at the edge of the lagoon and after dinner rufous bettong were easily spotted in the main carpark. Spotlighting the entrance drive to the wetland we saw brush tailed possum both nights.

Rufous bettong



During the day I visited the golf course at the nearby town of Mareeba. I had read about possible wallabies on the course but after paying my \$5 “insurance fee” I discovered only Eastern grey kangaroos but in huge numbers.

Eastern grey kangaroos



To be fair I was there mid morning so maybe a visit at dusk would have produced different species.

Cape Tribulation Wed 27th Thurs 28th July

We stayed at PK's jungle village for this leg of the trip, a backpacker hub I had visited years ago. Northern brown bandicoots were around the accommodation, indeed they were prolific around the whole Cape Tribulation village. Unfortunately the infamous bat house was closed for renovation when we were there but flying foxes were common flying around after dark.

The first night I had booked a jungle adventures night walk and although it quickly became apparent mammals were going to be an outside chance with 10 people crashing through the bush we did see lots of interesting reptiles, amphibians and insects.

The owner of the jungle adventures tours however has Bennetts tree kangaroos on the property

After the walk I headed to the Dubiji loop boardwalk (1.2km) where I did a quick spotlight and saw an unidentified rat.

The second night we went to the Kulki boardwalk (350m return) at actual Cape Tribulation itself, a kilometre or so North of the village. The spotlight was very productive with unidentified rats and mice, an unidentified marsupial, red legged pademelons and two giant white tailed rats at the base of the cliff on the left of the path as the walk leads up to the viewing platform.

Giant white-tailed rat



Port Douglas Fri 29th Sat 30th July

This was a rest and relaxation part of the holiday but we did go to the cave described in David Andrews book to find the coastal sheathtail bat colony in the cave South of Port Douglas.

Coastal sheathtail bat



Julatten (Kingfisher lodge) Sun 31st July Mon 1st Aug

This property is primarily a birdwatching site (one birder mentioned he had seen 50 species that day) but don't be fooled Kingfisher lodge has a great mammal list and Carol and Andrew are very keen to pass on great tips to ensure you view the maximum number of species during your stay.

Bushey creek at the far end of the property has a resident platypus best viewed at dawn and dusk (although I did see it at 11am one day) and as a bonus there were water rats foraging around dusk at the creek.

Outside the main accommodation block there are five logs that house fawn footed melomys enticed out after dark with seed. This area is also foraging ground for a Northern brown bandicoot that appears later in the evening and is often given away by the sound of crunching seeds.

Northern brown bandicoot



The incredibly interesting tropical orchard on the property gives the best chance to view mammals. There are 30-40 trees in the orchard helpfully recorded in a mud map in the main office of the lodge. While I was there I found three trees of particular interest.

Firstly the kedondong tree attracts spectacled flying foxes in good numbers and the fallen fruit provides food for red-legged pademelons. Secondly the guava tree was a magnet for Eastern tubenose bats reliably seen feeding on the fruit. Lastly the South American sapote tree was a hub for a number of mammals. Eastern blossom bats are in high numbers feeding on the flowers that blossom directly off the trunk. Feathertail gliders can be seen high up in the canopy and I was delighted to see one of these thumb sized marsupials glide from the sapote tree to an adjacent tree then quick as a flash scurry up the trunk. Later in the evening fawn footed melomys were common feeding in the lower branches.

South American sapote tree



Fawn-footed melomys



Red-legged pademelon



Other mammals I encountered at Kingfisher lodge included a yellow footed antechinus, agile wallaby and numerous long-nosed bandicoots as well as bush rats, one of which was resident in the roots of a tree opposite the accommodation. During a 3am spotlight I encountered eye shine from the roots of that tree, but the eyes weren't moving which struck me as unusual for a small mammal. On closer inspection the pair of eyes belonged to an amethystine python in strike position ready for the bush rat!

On the day of departure Carol was kind enough to call her neighbor who had bats roosting in the carport so I called over briefly to discover both a hoary wattled bat and numerous little broad nosed bats in the rafters of the carport, a great end to the two days at Kingfisher lodge. I cannot recommend a stay here enough as it really is a top spot for all sorts of exotic wildlife with amazing hospitality.

Hoary wattled bat



Little broad nosed bats



Chambers wildlife lodge and the Southern Atherton tablelands Tues 2nd Wed 3rd Thurs 4th Aug

Leaving Julatten for the hour drive to the Southern tablelands it was a beautiful sunny day and I hoped just the day to view Lumholtz tree kangaroos at Nerada tea estate South of Malanda. This indeed proved to be the case with a mother and juvenile easily spotted in the narrow strip of rainforest at the entrance to the estate.

Lumholtz tree kangaroo



Chambers wildlife lodge is set in rainforest in close proximity to Lake Eacham, a freshwater volcanic lake 5km from the town of Yungaburra. Mammals are easily viewed here at night at a viewing platform in front of which honey is placed on trees to attract marsupials. The first night I had to give this a miss as I had a previous appointment spotlighting for possums with Alan Gillanders at Mt Hypipamee 30 minutes drive away.

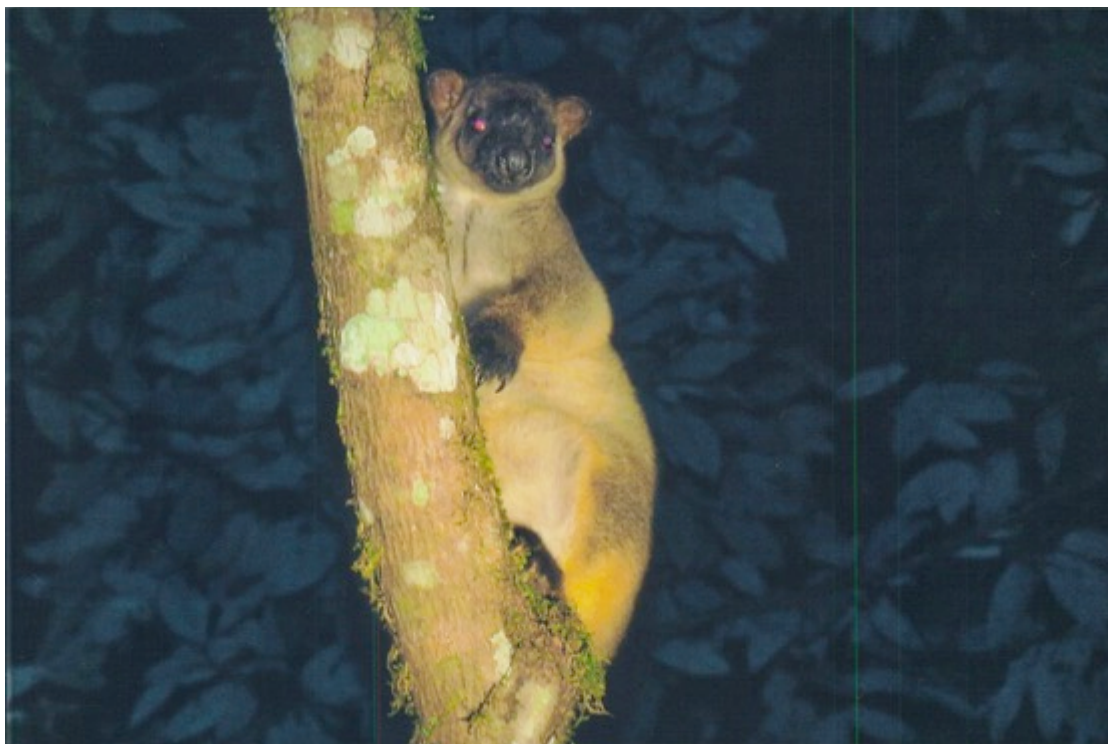
The drive to Mt Hypipamee yielded two Northern brown bandicoots surely a good sign for the night. The first site at Hypipamee with Alan was a scientific site where we were looking for gliders. The first species we saw was a yellow-bellied glider quickly followed by a sugar glider.

Yellow-bellied glider



Mt Hypipamee entrance drive was our second site of the evening and here we spotlighted for rainforest possums, and over the course of the night we saw 5 species, a green possum followed by a Lumholtz tree kangaroo, then a few lemuroid possums a Herbert River possum and finally a coppery brushtail possum.

Lumholtz tree kangaroo



Lemuroid possum



The following morning I set out for walk around Lake Eacham hoping to see a musky rat kangaroo. The place I spotted one was the long vehicle bay just near the day use area at the lake. In fact over the following days I saw this easily recognized bare bottomed animal a further three times.

Musky rat kangaroo



Peterson creek at nearby Yungaburra was a great spot for platypus and Lorenz was determined after missing out at Julatten that he wanted to see one. Luckily within 2 minutes of walking the creek trail at 3pm we had unbelievable views of a platypus diving and surfacing. Returning the next morning at 11am there were a further three platypus in the creek all giving extensive views.

Platypus



The second night at Chambers I sat down to watch the events at the viewing platform unfold. Honey is brushed onto the trees at 7.15pm but I would recommend arriving at 7pm when the sugar gliders are most active gliding between trees in search of the soon to arrive honey. Feeding started as soon as the honey was in place. There were at least four sugar gliders at the trees during the evening with a few vigorous fights taking place. Around 8.45pm a long-nosed bandicoot arrived to make the most of the honey which had by this time run to the bottom of the tree within its reach. Finally the climax of the night was the arrival of a beautiful striped possum after 9pm. All the while red-legged pademelons were around feeding on the lawns outside the main complex.

Sugar gliders



Long-nosed bandicoot



Striped possum



Later on that night we spotlighted around the area. First visit was Curtin fig NP the far side of Yungaburra and within 20 minutes we had great views of a green possum, a spectacled flying fox, a long-nosed bandicoot and three coppery brushtails. Next it was onto Malanda falls where another long-nosed bandicoot was added to the bag. Finally driving around Lake Eacham it turned out to be a long-nosed bandicoot night with another two animals sighted, also on the road was a rather dazed bush rat but with no evidence of any injuries which was hastily removed to a safer spot.

Green possum



Coppery brushtail



Other sites in the Southern tablelands visited were:

Wongabel state forest – a day walk produced numerous pademelons.

Herberton – unfortunately the colony of little red flying foxes here have moved on / been moved on.

Lake Barrine – the adjacent volcanic lake to Eacham was a brilliant place to view musky rat kangaroos. During a 5km walk on the trail around the lake I saw ten musky rat kangaroos (and a pademelon) in an hour (7.30-8.30am)

For the final two days of the vacation it was back to Cairns for a few days relaxing before heading back to the cold of Perth in August.