

TRIP REPORT: The Wet Tropics, 22-23 July 2017

I was up in northern Queensland for 9 days with the family. Out of these days, 2 could be considered 'mammal watching days'. On these days, I chose where to go and so I tried my luck at seeing as many mammals as I could in the limited time. I also was on the lookout for birds, frogs and reptiles, but those haven't been included here. I also took up spotlighting on a few nights in the Cairns Botanic Gardens. All up, there were 10 mammal species identified, and a couple of unidentified microbats. Not the fanciest species list, but a good try. I hope someday to spend a few good weeks up there in the future to try and find as many species as I can. This is more of a quick guide to the region if you have little time than an actual trip report, showing the best areas to see particular mammals.

THE LAKES RESORT



The entrance to the resort.

Species of interest: None

Mammals: Unidentified microbats

The Lakes Resort was my area of residence. Not much to be interested in, there are some better areas to set up for a wildlife enthusiast, including hotels specially built for people interested in wildlife watching. However, it is privileged in that it is right next to the botanical gardens. The only mammals here were small microbats that flew over one of the pools each night.

For more information visit their website: www.thelakescairns.com.au

CAIRNS BOTANICAL GARDENS



The rainforest boardwalk by night.

Species of interest: Striped Possum

Mammals seen: Fawn-footed Melomys, Northern Brown Bandicoot, Little Red Flying-fox, unidentified microbats

Probably the best place for wildlife watching in Cairns, I was lucky enough that the Lakes Resort was right next door. The main attraction was a chance at sighting a beautiful **Striped Possum**. I've heard the rainforest boardwalk is the best place to look. Although several attempts were made, I sadly missed out on the opportunity of seeing one. In the more open areas amongst clumps of ferns and pandanus, I found a **Fawn-footed Melomys**. On those long, mosquito-infested searches for the Striped Possum along the rainforest boardwalk, I sighted a **Northern Brown Bandicoot** and a **Little Red Flying-fox**. Microbats could also be seen, swooping at insects that are attracted to the streetlights. The place is worth checking out by day as well if you're interested in birding. I hope someone else has better luck at finding the possum than me.

For more information visit their website: <http://www.cairns.qld.gov.au/cbg>

PETERSON'S CREEK WALKING TRAIL



A bridge across the creek.

Species of interest: Platypus, Lumholtz's Tree-kangaroo

Mammals seen: Platypus

Located on the western side of the small town of Yungaburra, Peterson's Creek Walking Trail is well known for its **Platypus**. Trust me, it didn't disappoint. I found 6 different individuals in the space of 30 minutes. They were not at all shy. To a lesser extent, it is also known for **Lumholtz's Tree-kangaroo**. I constantly scanned the trees for them but found none. Best save the search for Malanda.



Just one of many platypuses seen.

MALANDA FALLS CONSERVATION PARK



A stuffed specimen of Malanda's specialty; the Lumholtz's Tree-kangaroo.

Species of interest: Lumholtz's Tree-kangaroo

Mammals seen: Red-legged Pademelon

Malanda Falls Conservation Park is one of the best places in the world to see the rare, endemic **Lumholtz's Tree-kangaroo** in the wild. Feel free to ask the staff at the information centre for any recent sightings; they are happy to help. Unfortunately, in my case, the only recent sighting was the day before, and that was only a single animal. However, not put off, I searched through the canopy, hoping to spy the tail of the macropod drooping down from a sturdy branch. However, despite several times getting worked up over a vine, not a single one was seen. Even here they were still notoriously elusive. A **Red-legged Pademelon**, racing quickly across the path and back out of sight, was all I got in return for my efforts.

For more information visit their website: www.malandafalls.com

CATHEDRAL FIG TREE



My bad camera couldn't handle the gloom of the rainforest, so this was the best shot I got of the Musky Rat-kangaroo.

Species of interest: Musky Rat-kangaroo, Northern Quoll

Mammals seen: Musky Rat-kangaroo

I didn't plan to stop at this special tree for wildlife; it was just as a break from driving. However, I was delighted to find that this beautiful, enormous fig tree attracted large numbers of **Musky Rat-kangaroo**. They were everywhere. This endemic marsupial was probably the highlight of the whole trip. A sign also indicated that the area was a stronghold of the **Northern Quoll**. For anyone who has enough time on their hands, it might be worth checking this place out after dark for a chance to spot one.

CAIRNS ESPLANADE



Sleeping Spectacled Flying-foxes.

Species of interest: Spectacled Flying-fox

Mammals seen: Spectacled Flying-fox

Along the coastal area of Cairns known as the Esplanade, there is a huge camp of **Spectacled Flying-fox**. By day, they sleep, but at dusk, they leave in large numbers, filling the streets with their screeches. There are around 2000-3000 flying-foxes here at any one time, but numbers are known to peak at 10,000 individuals. They are occasionally joined by **Little Red Flying-fox**. The mudflats also contain many waders at certain times of the year.

For more information visit their website: www.cairnsesplanade.com

RUSSEL RIVER ROAD

Species of interest: None

Mammals seen: Long-nosed Bandicoot, several unidentified microbats.

A spotlighting session was carried out here. Beware for crocodiles. I didn't see much, as this was an isolated stop-off in the middle of a highway. I saw several unidentified microbats, and 2 **Long-nosed Bandicoots**.

ETTY BAY



Remember to be Casso-wary at all times!

Species of interest: Southern Cassowary (it's a bird I know but seriously)

Mammals seen: Agile Wallaby

Ok, I know the Southern Cassowary isn't a mammal, and this report is about mammals, but seriously; the cassowary is a must see when in the Wet Tropics. Etty Bay is a good place to look in that the cassowaries come right out of the dense forest and onto the beach, giving unprecedented views. Sadly, none showed itself, to my frustration. As I drove out I saw many **Agile Wallabies**.



I would trade every Agile Wallaby I saw on the way out for a cassowary!

For more information visit the Etty Bay Caravan Park's website:
www.turu.com.au/accommodation/Etty-Bay-Caravan-Park-21497

GRANITE GORGE NATURE PARK



The beautiful scenery was stunning in the late afternoon.

Species of interest: Mareeba Rock-wallaby

Mammals seen: Mareeba Rock-wallaby, Agile Wallaby

Although not technically in the Wet Tropics, being on the other side of the tablelands, Granite Gorge Nature Park is well worth the trip. Here, you have guaranteed viewing of the **Mareeba Rock-wallaby**, which is endemic to the immediate vicinity. Not only that, but they actually hop up to you, expecting you to feed them (if you wish to feed them, get the special wallaby pellets from the visitor centre; DO NOT feed them other food). It is a truly enjoyable experience, being that rock-wallabies are notoriously shy. However, unlike all other locations on this report, it has a cheap admission fee. It is also a great photography opportunity (as you will see). On the way out, **Agile Wallabies** were seen.

For more information visit their website: granitegorge.com.au

Now for rock-wallaby photo time!







SPECIES LIST:

Platypus (*Ornithorhynchus anatinus*)

Northern Brown Bandicoot (*Isodon macrourus*)

Long-nosed Bandicoot (*Permeles nasuta*)

*Musky Rat-kangaroo (*Hypsiprymnodon moschatus*)

Agile Wallaby (*Notamacropus agilis*)

*Mareeba Rock-wallaby (*Petrogale Mareeba*)

Red-legged Pademelon (*Thylogale stigmatica*)

Spectacled Flying-fox (*Pteropus conspicillatus*)

Little Red Flying-fox (*Pteropus scapulatus*)

Fawn-footed Melomys (*Melomys cervinipes*)

(* indicates endemic)