

Tasmania

Jan / Feb 2018

A Bird and Mammal
Watching Trip Report
by Ian Merrill

Tasmania: 22nd January to 6th February

Introduction:

Where

Separated from the Australian mainland by the 250km of water which forms the Bass Strait, Tasmania not only possesses a unique avifauna, but also a climate, landscape and character which are far removed from the remainder of the island continent. Once pre-trip research began, it was soon apparent that a full two weeks were required to do justice to this unique environment, and our original plans of incorporating a portion of south east Australia into our trip were abandoned.

The following report summarises a two-week circuit of Tasmania, which was made with the aim of seeing all island endemic and speciality bird species, but with a significant focus on mammal watching and also enjoying the many outstanding open spaces which this unique island destination has to offer. It is not written as a purely ornithological report as I was accompanied by my largely non-birding wife, Victoria, and as such the trip also took in numerous long hikes through some stunning landscapes, several sightseeing forays and devoted ample time to sampling the outstanding food and drink for which the island is rightly famed. It is quite feasible to see all of Tasmania's endemic birds in just a couple of days, however it would be sacrilegious not to spend time savouring some of the finest natural settings in the Antipodes, and enjoying what is arguably some of the most exciting mammal watching on the planet.

Our trip was hugely successful in achieving the above goals, recording all endemic birds, of which personal highlights included Tasmanian Nativehen, Green Rosella, Tasmanian Boobook, four endemic honeyeaters and Forty-spotted Pardalote. The circuit also produced such sought-after specialities as Lewin's Rail, 'Tasmanian' Masked Owl (considered to be full endemic species by various authorities), Eastern Ground Swift, Blue-winged and Orange-bellied Parrots, Pink and Flame Robins. Mammalian highlights included Platypus, Echidna, Tasmanian Devil, Spot-tailed and Eastern Quolls, Southern Bettong, Long-nosed Potoroo, Eastern Striped Bandicoot, Common Wombat, plus the incredible sight of the macropod grazing grounds at Narawntapu, the 'Serengeti of Australia'.

Our itinerary commenced with the unmissable [Par Avion](#) day trip to Melaleuca, in the remote southwest of the island, made from Cambridge Aerodrome, just outside Hobart. Next, we spent three nights on Bruny Island, the fabled 'island off an island off an island'. Bruny Island is reached by car ferry from the mainland, and securing all of Tasmania's endemic bird species is a relatively straightforward exercise here. Our journey to the spectacular Cradle Mountains was made via very enjoyable stops at Derwent Bridge and Strahan, on the west coast, after which we based ourselves at Loongana for a full three nights; here, the nocturnal mammal-watching at [Mountain Valley](#) was simply spellbinding.

After leaving the cool uplands of the Cradle Mountains we plotted a course along the northern coastline, via the charming little town of Stanley and Tasmania's 'Second City' of Launceston. The latter destination gave access to Cataract Gorge, the Tamar Wetlands, Low Head and the wonderful Narawntapu NP, before we struck east, for the Bay of Fires. Following the dramatic coastline south, we spent a night in Bicheno, close to the picturesque Freycinet NP, where we rounded off our circuit, before returning to Hobart and the commencement of our long journey home.



Cradle Mountains, approaching from the north

Cover image: Low Head Lighthouse

Our complete itinerary was as follows:

Day 1: Sat 20th Jan

Departure from London Heathrow, fly to Abu Dhabi, and onwards to Sydney.

Day 2: Sun 21st Jan

Late evening arrival in Sydney, taxi to hotel, then another taxi to Sydney Harbour for drinks set against the iconic backdrop. Accom: [28 Hotel](#), Sydney.

Day 3: Mon 22nd Jan

Taxi to Sydney Airport, then flight to Hobart. Pick up hire car and drive to Waverley Flora Park, then to Hobart for hotel check-in. Hobart waterfront, followed by superb meal at [Blue Eye](#). Late evening spotlighting at Ridgeway Reservoir/Waterworks Reserve. Accom: [Customs House Waterfront Hotel](#), Hobart.

Day 4: Tue 23rd Jan

Cambridge Aerodrome for [Par Avion](#) flight to Melaleuca. Late pm return flight to Cambridge, dinner from [Flippers](#), Hobart. Drive to Port Arthur and surrounds for spotlighting, then back to Hobart. Accom: [Customs House Waterfront Hotel](#), Hobart.

Day 5: Wed 24th Jan

Drive to Wielangta Forest, picnic lunch on return route, then on to Kettering. Car ferry to Bruny Island. Queen Elizabeth Track, check into hotel and meal at Hotel Bruny. Spotlighting on North Bruny. Accom: [Hotel Bruny](#), Alonnah.

Day 6: Thur 25th Jan

First light Adventure Bay and then Mavista Nature Walk. Breakfast at Penguin Café. Birding/drawing South Bruny Lighthouse. Early dinner at [Get Shucked Oyster Bar](#), then birding on Queen Elizabeth Track. Spotlighting on North Bruny. Accom: [Hotel Bruny](#), Alonnah.

Day 7: Fri 26th Jan

First light Adventure Bay and then Mavista Nature Walk. Breakfast procured at excellent Adventure Bay Store. Walk to Sheepwash Bay. Evening birding on Mount Mangana Track, then Lunawanna. Self-catered dinner, then spotlighting on North Bruny. Accom: [Hotel Bruny](#), Alonnah.

Day 8: Sat 27th Jan

Early morning Missionary Road, North Bruny. Self-catered breakfast, then Mavista Nature Walk. Car ferry back to mainland, then drive to Derwent Bridge. Dinner in Wilderness Lodge, then spotlighting Lake St Clair. Accom: [Derwent Bridge Wilderness Hotel](#), Derwent Bridge.

Day 9: Sun 28th Jan

Lake St Clair pre and post Wilderness Lodge breakfast, including a morning hike on the Overland Track. Drive to Strahan. Dinner at [Hamer's Hotel](#), spotlighting at People's Park. Accom: [Strahan Village](#), Strahan.

Day 10: Mon 29th Jan

Dawn birding at Strahan Airfield. Breakfast at The Coffee Shack, Strahan then drive to Loongana, via grocery shop. Evening in grounds of Mountain Valley, self-catered dinner and evening Devil watching. Accom: [Mountain Valley](#), Loongana.

Day 11: Tue 30th Jan

Self-catered breakfast. Drive to Cradle Mountain NP, shuttle bus to Dove Lake for circular hike and afterwards to Ronnie Creek. Evening in grounds of Mountain Valley, self-catered dinner and evening Devil watching. Accom: [Mountain Valley](#), Loongana.

Day 12: Wed 31st Jan

Self-catered breakfast. Morning at Leven Canyon. Evening in grounds of Mountain Valley, self-catered dinner and evening Devil watching. Accom: [Mountain Valley](#), Loongana.

Day 12: Thur 1st Feb

Self-catered breakfast. Morning [Tasmanian Arboretum](#), drive to Stanley. Dinner in [Stanley Hotel Bistro](#). Spotlighting on The Nutt. Accom: [Stanley Seaview Inn](#), Stanley.

Day 13: Fri 2nd Feb

Morning in Stanley, then drive to Fern Glade, Bernie, and on to Mersey Bluff, Devonport. Late pm drive to Launceston. Pizza from [Wise Guise](#) and spotlighting at Cataract Gorge. Accom: [Riverside Hotel](#), Launceston.

Day 14: Sat 3rd Feb

Dawn at Tamar Islands Wetlands Reserve. Breakfast from [Banjo's Bakery](#), Launceston, morning at Cataract Gorge. Drive to Low Head Lighthouse for drawing and picnic. Evening at Narawntapu NR, then spotlighting en route back to Launceston. Accom: [Riverside Hotel](#), Launceston.

Day 15: Sun 4th Feb

Breakfast from [Banjo's Bakery](#), Riverside, then drive to Eddystone Point Lighthouse and Bay of Fires. Afternoon drive to Bicheno. Dinner at Salty Splash, Bicheno and spotlighting for penguins. Accom: [Wintersun Gardens Motel](#), Bicheno.

Day 16: Mon 5th Feb

Self-catered breakfast Bicheno, drive to Freycinet Peninsular for big hike. Drive to Hobart. Dinner at [Flippers](#), Hobart. Evening spotlighting at Waterworks Reserve. Accom: [Customs House Waterfront Hotel](#), Hobart.

Day 17: Tue 6th Feb

Breakfast at Waterfront Hotel, drive to airport for flight back to Sydney, on to Abu Dhabi, then UK.

Day 18: Wed 7th Feb

Arrive UK early am.

Map of Full Route Taken

When

As one of the main driving forces behind the trip was the desire to see the critically endangered Orange-bellied Parrot on their remote breeding grounds, a trip between November and March was required (the species spends the Austral Winter on the mainland); this strategy also aligned with the presence of Swift Parrot, another increasingly scarce migrant breeder in Tasmania. A later trip also gives a greater likelihood of favourable weather, in what can be a very fickle climate, however the flip side of such a slot means that many birds are breeding or have already bred and are hence less vocal and obvious. The systematic bird list serves to illustrate the general paucity of sightings of a number of species during such a late season visit. It should also be considered, however, that diurnal birding largely took a back seat after we left Bruny Island, with late night mammal watching vigils leading to many late morning starts, by which time bird activity had largely ceased in the heat of the Austral Summer days.

How

There are various permutations of long-haul travel to Tasmania, however our UK location meant that a tiring and tedious journey lay in store whichever was chosen. Our [Etihad](#) flight to Sydney allowed for a late-night whistle-stop tour of the iconic Sydney Harbour panorama, followed by a [Jetstar](#) flight to Hobart and a [Virgin Australia](#) return. Be aware of very stringently enforced cabin baggage weight limits on these flights.

The one-hour flight from Cambridge to Melaleuca was booked well in advance of our trip via [Par Avion](#), who hold the monopoly on this route. Although undoubtedly an expensive trip, we considered the flight in a light aircraft, over spectacular scenery and to such a remote location, to be a real highlight of our time in Tasmania. Par Avion were professional, well-organised and very accommodating of individual requirements. The day-trip package includes all food and drink, plus a boat trip along the Melaleuca Inlet. This arrangement worked out perfectly, as Victoria enjoyed her time on the river whilst I spent the day watching Orange-bellied Parrot and the other local specialties for which this area is renowned, all against a backdrop of the most spectacular scenery.

It is worthwhile noting that the weather conditions in the southwest of Tasmania can be very unpredictable and that flights are regularly cancelled at short notice when it becomes unsafe to fly. Although this phenomenon is more prevalent earlier in the season, the Melaleuca flight just four days before ours had to be cancelled. The best means of factoring in potential cancellations is to book a flight early in your itinerary, allowing for other options to travel at a later date when the weather has hopefully improved. Par Avion will re schedule a cancelled trip, but this obviously requires personal flexibility.

We hired an SUV through [Europcar](#), who provided us with a fine, near-new, Mitsubishi ASX. Although a normal saloon car would have coped with all roads we encountered in the course of our 3300km circuit, the unpaved gravel tracks through the Waitanga Forest and in the remote northeast would have been far less comfortable without the luxury of our robust vehicle. It is also worth checking whether insurance to travel to Bruny Island is covered in your terms of rental, as some companies specifically exclude travel to islands, and one should also be mindful of the strictly-enforced speed limits in Tasmania.

Our accommodation at [Mountain Valley](#), Loongana, was also booked way back at the time of our flight reservation. We considered that this was a key element of our tour, and were not disappointed. The cabins are in a very remote location, and as the main action occurs in the evening, self-catering is by far the best option. The cabins contain fridge, microwave, a full electric cooker with oven, grill and hob, plus everything you need to cook any form of culinary delight. There are no local stores of any size, so stock up well in advance; we used the excellent supermarket at Strahan.

In the evening Len and Pam put out grazing supplement (for the herbivores) and a mass of chicken scraps (for the carnivores) on the lawn right outside the cabin. After this, the captivating wait commences; see the systematic mammal list for explicit details, but needless to say, the nights here are totally incredible, if absolutely unpredictable!

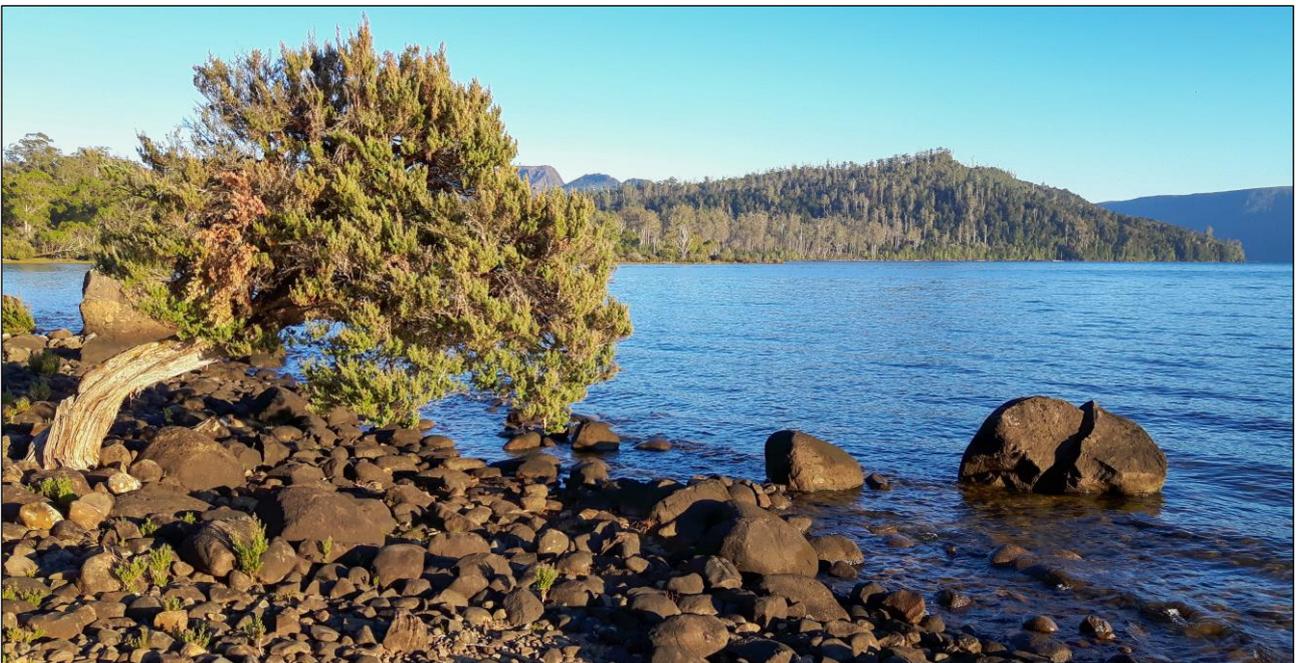
All other accommodation was sourced via [TripAdvisor](#), is referenced elsewhere in the report, and was of a consistently high standard. Particularly worthy of commendation were the [28 Hotel](#) in Sydney, [Customs House Waterfront Hotel](#) in Hobart, [Derwent Bridge Wilderness Hotel](#) and [Stanley Seaview Inn](#). Our top tips in terms of eating out were [Blue Eye](#), [Flippers](#) and [Van Diemen's Land Creamery](#) at Hobart, [Get Shucked Oyster Bar](#) on Bruny Island, [Derwent Bridge Wilderness Hotel](#), [Hamer's Hotel](#) in Strahan and [Stanley Hotel Bistro](#) in Stanley.

One other must-visit location is the [Tasmanian Arboretum](#) at Devonport. It seems that almost everywhere else the Platypus is a crepuscular feeder, however at the Arboretum we found them feeding actively in the heat of the day, giving unparalleled views. The excellent home-made ice cream in the kiosk makes the trip doubly worthwhile!

We had wonderful days out in Lake St Clair NP, Cradle Mountain NP and Freycinet NP, which meant that the purchase of a National Park One Month Pass was more cost effective than several Day Passes. The National Parks are all very efficiently run by well-informed staff and present first-class facilities.

I cannot conclude without mention of the very high costs of eating and drinking encountered through the course of our travels, which should at least serve to let visitors know what lies in store. We enjoyed some world class seafood during the course of our travels, but it comes at a price! By way of comparison, we found that simple (albeit excellent) takeaway fish and chips cost close to AUD20 per head, and a pint of draught beer gave very little change from AUD10; be warned! We began to become increasingly reliant on picnicking during the latter stages of the trip, which is actually a great option in the warm summer weather, given the great range of supermarket fare on offer (plus great value Aussie wine purchased direct from the local bottle store).

As ever, bird information used in the planning of the trip was sourced almost exclusively from the invaluable [eBird](#) online resource, supplemented by a couple of excellent mammal watching trip reports written by Jimmy Lamb and published via Jon Hall's brilliant website, [Mammal Watching](#). Finally, I must extend my personal thanks to Paul Brooks and John Tongue, both of whom offered a great amount of help, advice and encouragement both before and during the trip; I even managed a night of Port Arthur spotlighting in Paul's hugely informative company. Paul, one of Tasmania's most experienced birders, offers a guiding service; this can be booked through [Inala Nature Tours](#).



Lake St Clair, Cradle Mountain National Park

Daily Diary

Sunday 21st January

After around twenty-two hours of air transit we arrive at a pleasantly warm Sydney Airport, late evening. Thirty-minute taxi ride to the excellent [28 Hotel](#) in downtown Sydney. Freshen up then fifteen-minute taxi ride to Sydney Harbour, arriving 22.30. Whistle-stop session of night-time photography around the Harbour Bridge and Opera House, drinks and a bite to eat at the waterside [Opera Bar](#), with the most incredible backdrop. Return taxi to hotel.

Monday 22nd January

Taxi from hotel to Sydney Airport Domestic Terminal for 10.45 Jetstar flight to Hobart. Frantic repacking when we discover stringent enforcement of 7kg weight limit on hand baggage. Breakfast in excellent modern terminal, then one hour fifty-minute flight to Hobart. Another immaculate modern airport awaits, where we collect our Europcar Mitsubishi ASX.

Fifteen-minute drive to Waverly Flora Park, a patch of protected dry forest within the Hobart suburbs. Predictably rather quiet in the afternoon heat, with Little and Yellow Wattlebirds, Forest Raven and the migrant 'Yellow-tipped' form of Striated Pardalote the highlights. The brown, sun-scorched environment confirms the exceptionally dry recent weather conditions.

Thirty minutes further in the car brings us to Hobart Harbour, where we check into the highly-recommended [Customs House Waterfront Hotel](#). After some exploration of the charismatic port town, where a yacht-filled quay is backed by historic stone frontages, we dine at the outstanding [Blue Eye](#) seafood restaurant.

Late evening drive to Ridgeway Reservoir and Waterworks Reserve, where three hours of spotlighting produces Australian Owlet-nightjar, Tasmanian Boobook, Bennett's Wallaby, Tasmanian Pademelon and Common Brushtail Possum. Not a sniff of a Tasmanian Masked Owl, but an abundance of mammals gives an exciting insight to the potential of the next two weeks.



Tasmanian Boobook, Waterworks Reserve; Tasmanian Pademelon, Waterworks Reserve

Tuesday 23rd January

Breakfast at Customs House, then thirty-minute drive to Cambridge Aerodrome and the [Par Avion](#) hanger. Warmly greeted by the very relaxed staff, and introduced to our pilots and fellow travellers for the day-trip to Melaleuca. After a thorough safety briefing we board the two ten-seated Islander aircraft parked on the tarmac beside the airstrip, put on our personal head-sets, and soar up into the clear-blue skies above Hobart.

The views are amazing, as we pass first over Bruny Island, then track a bumpy course over the spectacularly rugged southern coastline, incorporating South East Cape, the most southerly point of Australia. Cloud builds up surprisingly rapidly as we head west, to finally cut inland through a steep-sided valley which leads to Bathurst Harbour. Here, the white stone of the airstrip stands out starkly against the green lowlands, and we are soon bumping to a halt on the dusty runway.



Bathurst Harbour, with the mountains of Southwest National Park as a backdrop

It is actually spotting with rain as we walk to the tiny interpretation centre, where we take our coffee, cheese and biscuits, overlooking the parrot feeding station. At this point, Victoria joins the group destined for a boat trip on the Melaleuca Inlet, whilst I am left to my birding devices.

Within a couple of minutes the first gorgeous Orange-bellied Parrot arrives at the feeding station, installed to offer supplementary grain to this incredibly rare bird. The resident researchers tell me that just seventeen wild birds have made the return crossing from the mainland this season, with just three females amidst their number. Reintroductions at both ends of the migration route continue, but sadly very few introduced birds are surviving the rigours of the long sea crossing. It's a fascinating opportunity to discuss the plight of the birds with the researchers, who highlight the loss of mainland wintering habitat as a key impact.



Eastern Rosella, Melaleuca; Striated Fieldwren, Melaleuca

Three Orange-bellied Parrots frequent the interpretation centre, but the bulkier Green Rosellas continue to drive them away and the researchers point me in the direction of a second hide with better viewing potential. Via an enjoyable stroll in rapidly improving weather, with Yellow-throated Honeyeater and huge yellow-brown *diemenensis* Striated Fieldwrens along the way, I reach a tiny hide where no less than eight Orange-bellied Parrots are feeding in close proximity; it is a photographers' heaven!



Orange-bellied Parrot, Melaleuca

Next goal is to locate an Eastern Ground Parrot, and the next two hours are spent stomping through the button grass plains to the east and south of the airstrip, but all to no avail. Following a rapid picnic-lunch I focus my attentions on the shorter button grass expanse just north of the airstrip, and see three separate Eastern Ground Parrots in half an hour!

The last couple of hours are spent savouring the wonderful landscape and photographing the seven Beautiful Firetails now frequenting the photography hide. Vic returns from the boat trip and has had just as an enjoyable time as I, then we repeat the journey all the way back to our Hobart hotel.

Evening cuisine is via the excellent [Flippers](#) floating fish and chip shop, after which I hit the road for Port Arthur and my pre-arranged rendezvous with Paul Brooks, one of Tasmania's most experienced birders. It takes an-hour-and-a-half to reach Port Arthur, via some superb landscapes and the only Eastern Rosella of the trip. Paul shows me Long-nosed Potoroo soon after my arrival, and although the next three hours of nocturnal debate is hugely informative and entertaining, one very distant call from a Tasmanian Masked Owl and several Common Brushtail Possums are all we have bagged for our efforts.

The return journey is undertaken with due caution, owing to the phenomenal number of mammals at the roadside, the best of which are single Eastern Barred Bandicoot and Common Wombat, which actually go quite some way to console for the lack of a big owl.

Wednesday 24th January

Hotel breakfast and early check-out, then one-and-a-half hour's drive to the vast rolling expanse of the Wielangta Forest. Paul's hot news actually has us heading direct for Three Thumbs State Reserve, where our first stop at a flowering roadside eucalypt instantly gives us a group of four increasingly rare Swift Parrots! A

very pleasant walk up to the viewpoint, with vistas down to the distant ocean, produces Crescent Honeyeater, Black Currawong, the first of many Tasmanian Thornbills, Green Rosella and another single Swift Parrot.

Picnic lunch is procured from Banjo's Bakery in Sorell, plus some gorgeous Tasmanian cherries from a roadside stall, and is consumed beside the turquoise ocean. Drive back to Hobart, then south to Kettering, to await the next ferry across to Bruny Island. We make the 15.30 crossing, and wind our way across the low, dry North Bruny to the Queen Elizabeth Track.

Having walked less than a hundred metres along the track, one of the first species we see is a Blue-winged Parrot! It transpires that a flock of fifteen birds are feeding in the grassy paddock beside the track, regularly alighting on the wires fences to give great looks at another much-wanted target bird. A kilometre further down the track, and I'm watching three Forty-spotted Pardalotes in the eucalypt right above my head. This is perhaps the most range-restricted bird in all Australia, now almost totally confined to Bruny Island, and is the perfect conclusion to the most amazing day of birding.

Check in to [Bruny Hotel](#), Alonnah, South Bruny and allocated a very tidy little cabin with sea view. Evening meal in hotel pretty average pub fare. After darkness we head north, crossing back over The Neck, and a whole different world of nocturnal activity unfolds. Evening totals from my notebook read twenty Common Brushtail Possums, including several of the 'golden' form, ten Bennett's Wallabies and ten Tasmanian Pademelons. Highlight, however, is undoubtedly the three Eastern Quolls seen frantically searching the verges for invertebrates. These stunning little polkadotted carnivorous marsupials are probably now extinct on mainland Australia, making Bruny Island the global stronghold for the enchanting species.



Forty-spotted Pardalote, Bruny Island; Blue-winged Parrot, Bruny Island

Thursday 25th January

Surprise low cloud and drizzle as I take a dawn drive around to Adventure Bay, where obliging Tasmanian Nativehens and Bennett's Wallabies abound, then on to the Mavista Nature Walk. Here, a narrow trail winds through the most beautiful lush valley, around fallen logs, mossy carpets and between groves of arching tree

ferns. It is a truly magical environment, with resident Pink Robins, Tasmanian Scrubwrens, Black Currawong and Green Rosella, though the anticipated Scrubtit fails to materialise.

Returning to Alonnah I pick up Vic, who has been out running on the beach, then we both breakfast at the distinctly over-priced Penguin Café, close by. Late morning we drive to South Bruny Lighthouse, where Vic sketches as I watch Dusky Robin and White-fronted Chat. A mid-afternoon siesta sets us up for an early tea of the most amazing oysters at [Get Shucked](#), north of the neck, before we walk the full length of the Queen Elizabeth Track. The latter stages of the narrow trail meander through Banksia-crowned red sand dunes, leading to a vast expanse of white coral-sand beach, which we have entirely to ourselves. Yellow Wattlebird, Brush Bronzewing and Scarlet Robin are the only birds of note, then we return to base to gear-up for another night drive.

Spending more time on North Bruny, we notch up an incredible thirty Eastern Quolls, which include a succession of these exquisite little marsupials quite literally queueing up to tear lumps from the exposed liver of a recently run-down wallaby. It is an unforgettable and highly photogenic end to another amazing day in Tasmania.



Eastern Quoll, Bruny Island

Friday 26th January

More Tasmanian Nativehens, a pair of Flame Robins and several white morph Bennett's Wallabies slow my early-morning passage through Adventure Bay, en route to the Mavista Nature Walk. This time a pair of Scrubtits are the first birds recorded, followed by Tasmanian Scrubwren, Olive Whistler, Bassian Thrush and Pink Robin.

The well-stocked Adventure Bay Stores provides ample breakfasting opportunities, consumed back at our cabin. A mid-morning walk to Sheepwash Bay delivers a pair of Hooded Plovers on the beach, then we put our heads down through the heat of the day.



Mavista Nature Walk, Bruny Island

An early evening two-hour return hike along the undulating Mount Mangana Track takes us to the highest point on Bruny Island, and although the view from the summit is rather more obscured than we had hoped the only Strong-billed Honeyeater of the entire trip is recorded en route, along with Tasmanian Scrubwren and Crescent Honeyeater.

A brief stop at Lunawanna adds Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo and a surprise pair of Swift Parrots, before a home-made 'Ploughman's Lunch' is consumed at our cabin, with a welcome pint from the Bruny Hotel next door. This evening's night drive reveals ten Eastern Quolls, plus a couple of Little Penguins seen returning to their burrows at The Neck Rookery.



Tasmanian Nativehen, Bruny Island; Bennett's Wallaby, Bruny Island

Saturday 27th January

My final early morning birding on the island is done on the Missionary Road, North Bruny, in a beautiful mosaic landscape of grassland and dry woodland patches, set against the extremely picturesque Duckpond Inlet. Forty-spotted Pardalote again proves easy to locate here, with five birds noted in two separate creek-side woodland blocks. Around ten Black-headed Honeyeaters are also recorded during my walk, plus Striated Pardalote, Grey Shrike-thrush and Green Rosella.



Missionary Road, Bruny Island

Yet another pair of Forty-spotted Pardalotes perform admirably at the traditional Great Bay pull-in site, then it's back to the Bruny Hotel for breakfast and check-out. A final mid-morning pilgrimage is made to the Mavista Nature Walk, where Vic enjoys the glades of tree ferns and I record another pair each of Scrubtits and Tasmanian Scrubwrens.

Final treat is a visit to the [Bruny Island Berry Farm](#), Adventure Bay, for some scrumptious home-made ice cream, then we make tracks for the ferry as the temperature begins to soar. Stocking up on more Tasmanian cherries, we catch the 13.30 boat back to the mainland, then set the satnav for Derwent Bridge.

As we head inland the arable lowlands give way to scorched brown grassland, cloaking rolling hillsides and punctuated by an occasional vineyard. The cleared lands then morph into a continuous tract of native forest, which now covers the low hills for as far as the eye can see. Passing Binney, Bradys and Bronte Lakes in succession, we arrive at the huge rustic façade of the superbly characterful [Derwent Bridge Wilderness Hotel](#), a family-run establishment and another of our firm favourites.

A quick recce is made of Lake St Clair National park, just five minutes away, then it's back to Derwent Bridge for some relaxed beers at the never-ending bar, our entrée to the most delicious curry, cooked by the resident Sri Lankan chef.

An after-dinner spotlighting session around Lake St Clair Visitors' Centre and Campsite is less exciting than hoped, with just Bennett's Wallaby, Tasmanian Pademelon and Common Brushtail Possum noted, but a close up Common Wombat on the drive back to Derwent Bridge makes our efforts worthwhile.

Sunday 28th January

Early morning birding at Lake St Clair adds just Black Currawong to the notebook, though the tranquil waters prove to be most photogenic. Following a memorable buffet breakfast at our hotel we check out and head back to Lake St Clair, where the helpful staff advise on hiking options and issue us with a One Month National Park Pass, the most economic option for the multiple visits we have planned.

Our chosen hike takes us 5km in each direction along the final section of the famous Overland Track, a beautiful route hugging the western shore of the vast lake. The weather is already hotting up, but in the course of our trek we note Black Currawong, Tasmanian Scrubwren, Flame and Dusky Robins, plus some pristine forest habitat.

After an iced coffee reward we set off on the two-hour drive west, to Strahan, through more beautiful and constantly changing landscapes. Strahan, pronounced 'Strawn', is a charming little fishing village and after checking into the [Strahan Village](#) we explore the seafront and settle on the [Hamer's Hotel](#) for our dining. Beers and a very good seafood meal are consumed outside, on the quayside, in the last of the warm sunshine.

The evening would not be complete without a little spotlighting, at the People's Park, and although Tasmanian Pademelon and Common Brushtail Possum are evident, Platypus fails to play ball and a frustrating fault with my trusty 100-400mm Canon lens grows ever more apparent.

Monday 29th January

After a succession of hot and sunny days, low cloud and drizzle at dawn is quite a surprise, but by the time I reach Strahan Airfield the sky is already beginning to brighten above the button grass plains. This is my backup site for Eastern Ground Parrot, but the pressure is off for this star bird after the Melaleuca successes and a very relaxed three hours produces multiple Striated Fieldwrens and Southern Emu-wrens plus, eventually, a single Eastern Ground Parrot.

After breakfasting at The Coffee Shack we set about stocking up for three nights self-catering in the Cradle Mountains, with a visit to the local bottle shop and supermarket, then route the satnav for Loongana, a three-hour drive away. As ever, travel in Tasmania is a pleasure not a burden, with spectacular scenery and two roadside Echidna photographic stops to break up the drive.



Short-beaked Echidna, Cradle Mountains

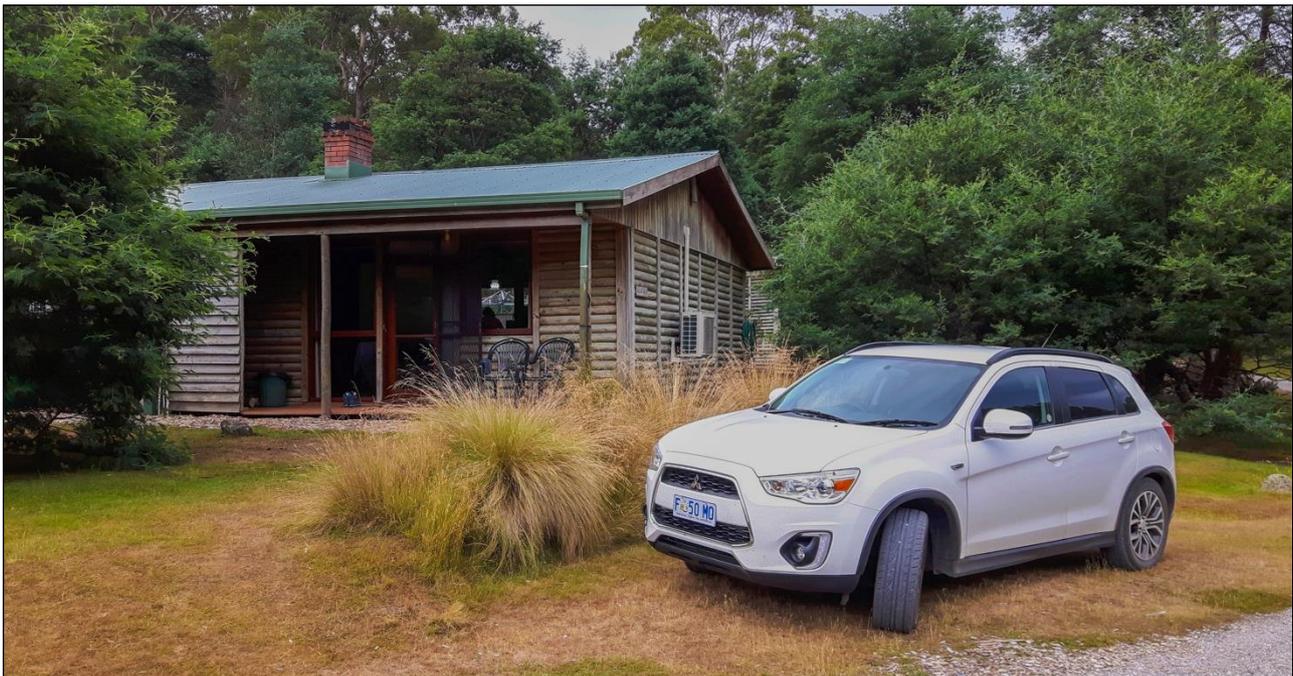
[Mountain Valley](#) lies in a pleasingly remote location and our host, Len, is brimming with facts and information regarding his property and the birds and mammals which inhabit it. We are shown to our spacious and very well-equipped cabin and then whisked off onto a walking tour, incorporating prime Platypus habitat on the adjacent Leven River. Tonight's Platypus experience is rather distant, but this is the entrée and the main course is yet to come, so we return to our cabin to cook dinner in anticipation.

As darkness approaches Len appears with two buckets, one containing grass pellet grazing supplement and the other one pieces of chicken. The contents of both are liberally spread over the small block of short lawn directly outside our cabin and the show commences. Instantly Tasmanian Pademelons bound in from all directions and within a few minutes no less than nineteen of these endearing little forest kangaroos are jostling for the best positions in the very limited area.

We withdraw inside, as instructed, but maintain the use of a full-height glass panel through which to view any night-time visitors, illuminated by our bright veranda light. It's a very comfortable setting, as we can continue to eat and drink inside in the warmth, as the action continues outside. And it only takes until 22.30 for the anticipation to climax, when a stocky, menacing, dark quadruped appears on the edge of the light as the Pademelons scatter. An animal built like a Pitbull trots nimbly towards us, until we can see the clear white crescent stretched across his chest, characteristic bare pinkish skin around his muzzle and a pair of hollow, dull black eyes; we are just metres away from our first Tasmanian Devil. Between 22.30 and 23.10 the first Devil, sadly sporting a rather large facial tumour, visits five times and in the process devours a huge amount of chicken scraps.

The other speciality of Mountain Valley is the Spot-tailed Quoll, and although expecting a visit we are shocked at the size of this amazing dotted beast when the first appearance is made at 23.15, followed by another couple of brief scrap-snatching visits before 01.30. Between 00.45 and 01.45 four more Devils visit, one more with a small tumour but thankfully three animals without.

Later, I open the cabin door and lie on the carpet, savouring every moment of this privileged experience. Devils come and go, some grabbing takeaway meals and disappearing into the darkness, and some dining at the lawn, at which point I can hear them crunching through bone as if it were pork scratchings! It has been one of the most captivating nights of mammals watching ever, but by 02.00 the scraps have all gone, we have a full day tomorrow and the bed is calling.



Our cabin at Mountain Valley, complete with 'Devil Lawn' out front

Tuesday 30th January

Scrambled egg on toast for breakfast, lunch pack-up made and off to Cradle Mountain NP we go. It takes one-and-a-half hours to reach the National Park Visitors' Centre, where we park up and catch a shuttle bus which carries us through the most inspirational landscapes we are yet to see on this island full of surprises. The bus ride ends at Dove Lake, where the tranquil water body nestles at the foot of the spectacular craggy peak of Cradle Mountain.



Dove Lake, Cradle Mountain National Park

A popular circular walk laps Dove Lake, and the circuit on well-maintained paths with impressive boardwalks takes a full two hours, including a picnic with a hand-tame Black Currawong. It makes for a fantastic 6km walk, though few other birds are noted, save the ubiquitous Green Rosellas, Tasmanian Thornbills and Forest Ravens.

Taking the shuttle bus back downhill, next stop is at Ronnie Creek, which the staff have told us is a good spot to search for Common Wombat. A boardwalk snakes along the bottom of a lush grassy valley, where it takes all of two minutes to find our first Wombat and over the next hour we savour views of five different animals which we find can be approached to point-blank range. It really is a unique experience to see them so close and appreciate what voracious grazers they really are, with teeth grinding the coarse grass at a furious pace and noses rarely raising for air!

Very pleased with our Cradle Mountain experience, we make the return visit to Loongana in time for another Platypus viewing on the Leven River, this time with two somewhat closer beasts on show. Next home-cooked dinner and the lawn-baiting visit from Len follow, before we settle in place for the Mountain Valley Show.

And what a difference a night makes. The first Devil appears at the unfeasibly early hour of 21.20, then nothing happens at all until midnight. Between midnight and 01.30 there are just three brief visits from two different Devils and no Quolls at all, yet by dawn next day all of the chicken scraps are predictably gone!

Wednesday 31st January

After a very relaxed cooked breakfast we make the ten-minute drive to Leven Canyon, a seemingly overlooked area of outstanding natural beauty. A circular walk leads through a wonderful shaded, tree fern filled valley and on to some dramatic viewpoints high above a deep cut limestone river gorge. There are even

some good birds here too, with the best views I've had of a pair of Scrubtits, plus Tasmanian Scrubwren, Golden Whistler and Black Currawong.

Another shorter Leven Canyon walk and some Echidna viewing leads us back to Loongana, where a late afternoon stroll in the vicinity of the cabins produces Black-headed and Yellow-throated Honeyeaters, Scarlet Robin, Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo and a certain highlight of a stridulating mole cricket. The latter makes the sound of a loudly shorting electrical fault and as we watch the tussock from which it emanates, a female mole cricket is drawn to the sound; nature is never short of delights and surprises.

Len has promised us a tour of his glow worm cave this evening, and as dusk settles an intrepid group of five follow him into the bush. What he has somehow failed to convey are the demands on physical dexterity required to descend the ten slippery metres into a limestone crevasse, aided by a thin piece of rope tethered to a convenient tree. Vic and I manage with just a couple of slips, but our seventy-something year old compatriots narrowly escape several serious accidents on the route to what is undeniably an enchanting underground setting, as hundreds of glow worms switch on the illuminations.

Back at the cabin, dinner is cooking and the bait is laid. The Devil action commences at 10.50 and for the next half-hour one of our now-familiar friends munches through a hefty portion of chicken pieces. Things then quieten down until 00.50, by which time I have assumed my prone position beside an open door. Between this time and 03.30 a totally captivating succession of visits from another three different Devils leaves me in mammal-watching ecstasy and totally in awe of these spellbinding predators.



Tasmanian Devil, Loongana

The icing on the cake really drops at 03.15, when some paw-pattering on the veranda is a prelude to the appearance of a long brown snout, which reaches through the threshold to within a few centimetres of my face. It is the ultimate Spot-tailed Quoll acquaintance, as the incredible spotty beast sniffs around the veranda for the next five minutes, giving the definitive conclusion to one of the most memorable wildlife experiences ever.

Thursday 1st February

After another fine breakfast and a session of bag-packing we vacate Mountain Valley for the final time, travelling for less than an hour to the [Tasmanian Arboretum](#), close to Devonport. This is a newly developed site, which was farmland just a few years back, but it is not the tree specimens we have come to see. The Platypus Lake is our focus, and within minutes of our arrival we are blessed with unprecedented mid-afternoon views of two Platypus which perform magnificently, right in front of the viewing screen.



Platypus, Tasmanian Arboretum

I don't expect to see many birds in the heat of the day, but Tasmanian Nativehens are here in abundance, an Olive Whistler pops up and a final huge bonus comes in the shape of three Blue-winged Parrots which alight close to the car park. We also indulge in the absolutely superb home-made ice cream from the arboretum kiosk, a must at this unmissable site!

One of my Swift Parrot backup sites is Kelcey Tier NR, which we find to be just ten minutes from the Arboretum, but a very brief search comes up blank, with just a Fan-tailed Cuckoo to show for our efforts. So, the satnav is set for Stanley and we take the coast road west, until the distinctive rocky stack of The Nutt appears on the horizon.

The Nutt is actually the plug of an extinct volcano, now standing up as a rocky headland at who's foot the charming fishing village of Stanley is located. Checking into the excellent [Stanley Seaview Inn](#), we are treated to fine evening views of the unique setting and one of the plushest rooms of our trip.

Our chosen venue for evening dining is the [Stanley Hotel Bistro](#), and they serve us one of the best meals of our travels, with possibly the finest tuna steak I have ever tasted! After dining, and a quick change at the hotel, we first make for the Little Penguin viewing area just to the north of The Nutt and get some great looks at everyone's favourite bird.

Next on the agenda is the steep ascent of The Nutt, passing numerous Tasmanian Pademelons as we go. Reaching the plateau, we are bathed in bright moonlight and can instantly hear a cacophony of calls, made by Short-tailed Shearwaters, returning to their nesting burrows. The night time circuit of The Nutt is an unmissable experience, with shearwaters constantly wheeling overhead, some even silhouetted against the huge, low moon. Occasionally we also come across a bird on the track, giving a rare opportunity to study the complex bill structure of these seafaring specialist feeders.

Friday 2nd February

After a do-it-yourself breakfast on the hotel veranda, overlooking The Nutt, we head for Stanley Town and some drawing opportunities for Vic. Travelling east to a decidedly hot Fern Glade, Bernie, Dusky Robin is the only bird worth mentioning, then we call at Mersey Bluff Lighthouse, Devonport for more sketching time.

Driving on to Launceston we check into the [Riverside Hotel](#), which is actually located in a suburb of Tasmania's second city, south of the Tamar River. We aren't very impressed with Launceston. The town planners seem to have neglected their duties, leaving a jumble of ugly new buildings amongst a few historic enclaves and a town that seems to have no real heart. Our attempts to find food on the newly constructed waterfront area result in a frustrated tour of overpriced, second-rate eateries and in desperation we turn to a takeaway pizza from [Wise Guise](#), which actually proves to be a great option.

Never wanting to miss the opportunity for some spotlighting, the late evening is spent in Cataract Gorge, conveniently close to our hotel. The usual suspects of Bennett's Wallaby, Tasmanian Pademelon and Common Brushtail Possum are all present, and a Tasmanian Boobook causes my heart to miss a beat when it flies in to my Masked Owl recording!

Saturday 3rd February

First light reveals a totally different habitat, the extensive marshland of the Tamar Islands Wetlands Reserve, which is located just five minutes from the Riverside Hotel. A sturdy boardwalk slices through the extensive reedbeds and past huge open expanses of wetlands and pools, where Australasian Swamphen, Chestnut and Grey Teal, Australian Shoveler and Eurasian Coot are all present en masse.

Little Grassbird makes a brief appearance, but the real excitement comes as a distinctive call emanates from the dense reeds. After ten minutes of gentle coaxing with the iPod, a Lewin's Rail pops into full view and my penultimate Tasmanian target bird is secured!

Celebration takes the form of a ride into Launceston for a [Banjo's Bakery](#) takeaway breakfast, a quick visit to the famous Australian National Trust Umbrella Shop for Vic, then onwards to Cataract Gorge. After a cracking breakfast picnic, we hit the trails, taking the Snake Gulley Track up towards Duck Reach, on a beautiful 6km route which winds uphill through the most picturesque dry woodland.

Birds are thin on the ground, with Grey Currawong and Yellow-throated Honeyeater being the only notable sightings, but I now have only one bird left to see on Tasmania and it certainly won't be around in the daytime! Huge eucalypts with artistically peeling bark dot the track, which is largely abandoned by other visitors, then we descend into a steeply cut gorge and cross an elegant suspension bridge to make a return loop on the east side of the South Esk River.

After completing the walk, we call at Woolworths for a big picnic shop, then take a siesta back at the Riverside Hotel. By late afternoon it's time to make the one-hour drive to Low Head Lighthouse, a beautifully tranquil spot on the north side of the Tamar Estuary, for some relaxed drawing time and the most memorable picnic in the shadow of the red-and-white striped tower.

Narawntapu National Park lies to the west of the Tamar River and it takes nearly one-and-a-half hours to reach, via another dramatic patchwork of farmland and forest, all bathed in picturesque late evening light. Arriving at Narawntapu, we position ourselves in a commanding spot overlooking the extensive grazing meadows, open a bottle of Yellowtail Merlot and watch the most incredible scene unfold against the backdrop of a fiery red sunset.

Known as 'The Serengeti of Australia', the grassy plains of Narawntapu are host to the most amazing concentrations of grazing Macropods and as the sun sinks, an endless stream of Tasmanian Pademelons, Bennett's Wallabies and Forester Kangaroos bound from the surrounding bush to join us on the expanse of short grass. Spending the last hour of daylight in such an unforgettable setting certainly rates as yet another highlight of our incredible trip, and it should not be missed from any itinerary.

Next destination is a woodland track on the fringes of the Dalgarth Forest Reserve, where a brief spotlighting foray brings us face-to-face with a couple of wonderful little Southern Bettongs. These dwarf Macropods resemble a hare-sized kangaroo, with the most endearing features, and we are delighted to have finally caught up with another of our most-wanted Tasmanian mammals.

My chances of finding a Tasmanian Masked Owl are now diminishing by the day and I'm keen to try any possible remaining avenues of attack. A single eBird record from a few months previous has us detouring to the Notley Hills, en route back to Launceston. It seems a very long shot, hence I am almost reeling in shock when a random stop in the vague vicinity of the eBird sighting results in the hissing call of a Tyto, heard as soon as I step from the car. A little iPod jousting ensues, until the unmistakable silhouette of a large owl glides into the tall eucalypt right beside me, the spotlight is aimed and my quest is finally over!

For the next thirty minutes I revel in the euphoria of securing the most mouth-watering looks at a pair of the largest Tytos on the planet, and even have the opportunity to fetch Victoria from her Mitsubishi slumbering to enjoy the party. The return to Launceston delivers an eye-level roadside Tawny Frogmouth and the only Common Ring-tailed Possum of the trip, in conclusion to one of the most action-packed and memorable days ever.



Tasmanian Masked Owl, Notley Hills

Sunday 4th February

Check-out and a Riverside [Banjo's Bakery](#) breakfast precedes a two-and-a-half hour drive to Eddystone Point, on the remote northeast coast. Birding largely takes a back seat from this point forth, but a low-level feeding flock of a hundred White-throated Needleetails is well worthy of a prolonged stop. Eddystone Point Lighthouse is sketched by Vic and a beach walk made on the idyllically remote coral sands of The Bay of Fires, before we head slowly south for Bicheno.

The [Wintersun Gardens Hotel](#) is our destination for the one-night stay, a nice enough place, but we really don't care for Bicheno town. Little Wattlebirds and Musk Lorikeets abound, but it proves impossible to find

a decent, sensibly priced eatery. The Salty Splash takeaway is our last resort, where we are taken aback by the cost of takeaway chowder, fish and chips.

A late evening wander to the sea, via Gordon Street, gives us a wonderful Little Penguin experience to bring the end of the day around, as adult birds return from the ocean to feed still-downy youngsters.



Bay of Fires, viewed south from Eddystone Point

Monday 5th February

After a veranda breakfast and check-out we head south for our focus of the day, taking a thirty-minute drive to Freycinet National Park. Our chosen route is a 12km circuit, which first takes us west on the Hazards Beach Track, with amazing views down to Great Oyster Bay and also up to the imposing Hazard Peaks. As ever, birds are rather scarce due to the season and time of day, but Satin Flycatcher is new to the trip and Yellow-throated Honeyeaters are always good to see.

Cutting east on the Isthmus Track we reach Wine Glass Bay and an onslaught of beachgoers, then return to our starting point via a never-ending set of steep steps. It's a great circular walk, with wonderful views at every turn, and is surprisingly free of visitor traffic once away from the Wineglass Bay honeypot.

Very little now remains of our time on this wonderful island, as we set the satnav to take us back to Hobart, our favourite Tasmanian town, and also a return to one of our most favoured hotels. After checking into the [Customs House](#) we freshen up before enjoying our last Tasmanian beers overlooking a sunlit Derwent Estuary, then stroll around for our final Tasmanian seafood, from the excellent [Flippers](#) floating fish and chip shop.

Scrumptious Flake and chips are eaten at the quayside in the company of the local Silver Gulls, then we indulge in a final home-made ice cream from the highly recommended [Van Diemen's Land Creamery](#), moored right next door to Flippers. Feeling it would be rude not to say farewell to the mammalian friends we have made over the last two weeks, the final two hours of our free time on Tasmania are spent spotlighting back at the Waterworks Reserve. Bennett's Wallaby, Tasmanian Pademelon and Common Brushtail Possum all appear in number to see us off, and thereby conclude some of the finest nocturnal mammal watching anywhere on Earth.

Tuesday 6th February

Back to Hobart Airport for the 10.10 Virgin Australia flight to Sydney and hence home via Abu Dhabi, landing at LHR early on Wednesday 7th February. In summary, our Tasmanian adventure has been an overwhelming success in every way, providing enough bird and mammals watching highlights, incredible scenery, fine accommodation and outstanding cuisine to exceed every expectation. I cannot recommend this destination highly enough as it possesses something for everyone, wrapped up in a compact and easily accessible package of warm hospitality and ever-lasting memories.



Bruny Island sunset, viewing towards the mainland from our Alonnah veranda

Notes on Key Target Species and Local Specialities

TE = Tasmanian endemic species

Brown Quail *Coturnix ypsilophora ypsilophora*

Tasmanian endemic race, which has been considered worthy of full species status by some authorities. Five birds seen feeding at the roadside on North Bruny Island on 25/01/18. S43°09'48.4", E147°22'21.0".

Lewin's Rail *Lewinia pectoralis brachipus*

Tasmanian endemic race. One heard calling at Tamar Island Wetlands Reserve, early on 03/02/18, was coaxed to the edge of the dense sedges with playback, standing in full view for a short time beside the first estuary footbridge. S41°23'13.0", E147°04'34.4". Tamar Island is a known site Lewin's Rail and is undoubtedly the best location in Tasmania to search for this rare and elusive bird.

Tasmanian Nativehen *Tribonyx mortierii* TE

A relatively common endemic species, it was recorded on all but two days of our Tasmanian circuit, most often seen from the car, invariably on verges or in roadside fields. The Tasmanian Arboretum, Devonport, was the most prolific site for this rather characterful bird, where around forty were seen in the heat of midday.

Hooded Plover *Thinornis cucullatus*

A pair seen on the beach at Alonnah, South Bruny Island, on 26/01/18. S43°19'13.6", E147°14'32.7".

Green Rosella *Platycercus caledonicus* TE

A widespread endemic species, recorded on all but one day of the Tasmanian circuit. Usually encountered in ones and twos, with no counts greater than ten per day, it seemed content in almost any forested environment.

Blue-winged Parrot *Neophema chrysostoma*

A flock of fifteen birds feeding in the paddocks beside the Queen Elizabeth Track, North Bruny, on the evening 24/01/18 was a very welcome introduction to the island. The flock included many juvenile birds, presumably a gathering of several families of recently fledged individuals S43°13'50.4", E147°22'49.5". Three adults were recorded in trees around the car park of the Tasmanian Arboretum, Devonport, on 01/02/18, in the heat of midday.

Orange-bellied Parrot *Neophema chrysogaster*

Melaleuca is the place to see this very special bird, and the only feasible way to get there is via a Par Avion flight from Cambridge Airfield, Hobart. Flights are prone to cancellation due to adverse weather, however once at Melaleuca seeing an Orange-bellied Parrot is easy. On 23/01/18 we saw three birds at the main interpretation centre feeding station S43°25'14.6", E146°09'52.9", plus another eight at the smaller research hide feeders S43°25'35.1", E146°09'46.3".

As long as the viable wild population continues to hold on, this Critically Endangered species should be present in Tasmania from November to March. Par Avion operate daily flights, though it is worth factoring a cancellation contingency into any itinerary, if at all possible.

Swift Parrot *Lathamus discolor*

Five seen in flowering eucalypts at Three Thumbs State Reserve, Wielangta Forest, on 24/01/18 at S42°36'16.0", E147°53'06.3". A pair seen at Lunawanna, South Bruny Island, on 26/01/18 at S43°21'31.4", E147°14'02.4". This attractive migrant parrot is becoming increasingly rare, hence up-to-date local advice was invaluable in tracking it down.

Eastern Ground Parrot *Pezoporus wallicus wallicus*

Tasmanian endemic race. Tasmania is now the stronghold for this rather enigmatic species, with Melaleuca undoubtedly the best site on the island. On 23/01/18 I saw three different individuals within thirty minutes by walking the low button grass between the track which runs from the airstrip to the accommodation blocks and the jetty on the Melaleuca Inlet S43°25'10.9", E146°09'32.6"; S43°25'07.8", E146°09'39.8"; S43°25'11.9", E146°09'41.9". It is worth noting that I had previously spent two hours searching other areas to the south and east of the airstrip and seen nothing whatsoever. All birds were flushed and flew varying distances before diving back into cover, though some close and prolonged flight views were obtained.

On 29/01/18 it took three hours of walking similar button grass habitat in the vicinity of Strahan Airfield to see just one bird, which suggests that they are much more numerous at Melaleuca. It is worth noting that the area of heath and button grass west of Macquarie Heads Road and south of Ocean Beach Road has been recently burnt and therefore appeared unsuitable habitat. I found my Ground Parrot east of Macquarie Heads Road and north of the private road which runs to the east, at S42°09'59.5", E145°17'32.0".

Tasmanian Masked Owl *Tyto novaehollandiae castanops* (TE)

The endemic Tasmanian race is the largest *Tyto* in the world and is already considered a separate species by some authorities. Until 2016 it was relatively easy to find at Port Arthur, but this is no longer the case. The Waterworks Reserve/Ridgeway Reservoir area, just west of Hobart, also supports a number of historic records, but it seems similarly tricky to pin down at this site.

One was heard to call once, distantly, from a vantage point close to The Commandant's House, Port Arthur, at c22.00 on 23/01/18. Otherwise no contact whatsoever in the southeast, in spite of many hours spent searching in the vicinity of Port Arthur, Waterworks Reserve and Ridgeway Reservoir.

On 03/02/18 a speculative stop was made in Notley Hills, west of Launceston, in the vicinity of a 2017 eBird record. A calling bird was heard close-by as soon as I left the car at around midnight, the birds proved responsive to playback and for the next hour I was treated some incredible views of a pair, as they moved through the tall eucalypts beside the road. Exact location was the junction of Notley Gorge Road and Mitchelsons Road S41°22'05.8", E146°56'15.9".

Tasmanian Boobook *Ninox leucopsis* **TE**

Now considered a Tasmanian endemic species by HBW. One seen and photographed at Waterworks Reserve on 24/01/18 S42°54'24.1", E147°17'44.3". Heard at Port Arthur on 24/01/18; People's Park, Strahan on 28/01/18; Mountain Valley, Loongana on all three nights of our stay. One seen and photographed at Cataract Gorge, Launceston, on 02/02/18 S41°26'29.7", E147°06'54.1".

Australian Owlet-nightjar *Aegotheles cristatus tasmanicus*

Tasmanian endemic race. One heard and subsequently seen at Ridgeway Reservoir on 22/01/18 S42°55'01.7", E147°17'15.8".

Southern Emu-wren *Stipiturus malachurus ittleri*

Tasmanian endemic race. Not recorded at Melaleuca, probably due to strong wind (and my poor hearing!). Three separate pairs of these exquisite little birds were seen just east of Strahan Airfield on 29/01/18.

Crescent Honeyeater *Anas albogularis*

Only noted at Three Thumbs State Reserve, Wielangta Forest, on 24/01/18 and on the Mount Mangana Track, South Bruny Island on 26/01/18.

Strong-billed Honeyeater *Melithreptus validirostris* **TE**

Surprisingly this endemic honeyeater was only seen once, a pale-billed juvenile bird in tall wet forest on the Mount Mangana Track, South Bruny Island on 26/01/18 S43°21'41.5", E147°17'13.3". As mentioned previously, it should be noted that diurnal birding largely took a back seat after we left Bruny Island, and will clearly have influenced this paucity of records on the remainder of the circuit.

Black-headed Honeyeater *Melithreptus affinis* **TE**

Double figures were counted in the patches of dry forest along Missionary Road, North Bruny, on the morning of 27/01/18 and one was seen at Mountain Valley, Loongana, on 31/01/18. The comments made above, regarding the paucity of sightings, also apply to this species.



Strong-billed Honeyeater, Bruny Island (Paul Brooks); Black-headed Honeyeater, Bruny Island

Yellow-throated Honeyeater *Nesoptilotis flavicollis* TE

Undoubtedly the most widespread and frequently encountered of the endemic honeyeaters. Multiple birds were seen at Melaleuca, daily on Bruny Island, Cradle Mountains NP, Loongana, Cataract Gorge and Freycinet NP.

White-fronted Chat *Epthianura albifrons*

One seen at South Bruny Lighthouse on 25/01/18.

Yellow Wattlebird *Anthochaera paradoxa* TE

Another widespread endemic, and Australia's largest honeyeater. Regularly seen and heard on our travels, with records from Waverley Flora Park, Wielangta Forest, throughout Bruny Island, Lake St Clair and Loongana.



Yellow-throated Honeyeater, Bruny Island (Paul Brooks); Yellow Wattlebird, Bruny Island

Little Wattlebird *Anthochaera chrysoptera tasmanica*

Perhaps worthy of mention is the abundance of this species in Tasmania, with records throughout our travels and up to twenty sightings in a day.

Forty-spotted Pardalote *Pardalotus quadragintus* TE

It seems that this Tasmanian endemic is almost extinct on the mainland, though we found it relatively easy to locate at various spots on Bruny Island, which is clearly the stronghold for this highly range-restricted species. Three seen on the Queen Elizabeth Track on the evening of 24/01/18 at S43°14'31.6", E147°23'36.3". On the morning of 27/02/18 a total of seven individuals were seen on Missionary Road and Bruny Island Main Road, at three separate locations S43°08'27.6", E147°21'20.4"; S43°08'14.8", E147°21'31.1" and S43°10'53.8", E147°23'00.7".

Yellow-tipped Pardalote *Pardalotus striatus striatus*

The distinctive migrant race of Striated Pardalote, with yellow tips to the greater coverts, was seen at Waverley Flora Park and on Bruny Island.

Scrubtit *Acanthornis magna* TE

This attractive endemic proved fairly straightforward to find, with pairs seen on the Mavista Trail, South Bruny Island on both 26 and 27/01/18 S43°22'39.4", E147°19'18.0". Another pair was seen at Leven Canyon on 31/01/18 S41°23'56.8", E146°01'36.5".

Striated Fieldwren *Calamanthus fuliginosus diamenensis*

The Tasmanian endemic race is a very distinctive bird and proved easy to see at both Melaleuca on 23/01/18 and Strahan Airfield on 29/01/18, with at least two pairs being recorded at each site. In Tasmania, Striated Fieldwren frequents areas of more dense vegetation amidst button grass planes.

Tasmanian Scrubwren *Sericornis humilis* TE

This large, dark scrubwren was regularly encountered in adequately shady forest environments. Seen daily on Bruny Island, plus Lake St Clair and Cradle Mountains NP.

Tasmanian Thornbill *Acanthiza ewingii* TE

The most widespread and numerous island endemic, my notes show that this tuneful species was seen on twelve days of the trip, with double-figure sightings on a number of these.

Black Currawong *Strepera fuliginosa* TE

Another frequently encountered endemic, more often heard than seen, my notebook shows records on ten days of the trip. Worthy of mention are a total of twelve around Lake St Clair on 28/01/18, where the birds around the visitors' centre car park were particularly fearless, and also a hand-tame bird on the Dove Lake circuit of 30/01/18.

Olive Whistler *Pachycephala olivacea apatetes*

Recorded on the Mavista Trail, South Bruny Island, on two dates and also at the Tasmanian Arboretum, Devonport.

Forest Raven *Corvus tasmanicus*

The only corvid on Tasmania, this species was commonly recorded throughout the island, with counts of up to thirty per day.



Pink Robin, Bruny Island (Paul Brooks); Dusky Robin, Bruny Island

Dusky Robin *Melanodryas vittata* **TE**

This subdued endemic robin was only recorded on three occasions during the trip, with three birds at South Bruny Lighthouse on 25/01/18, plus one each at Lake St Clair on 28/01/18 and Fern Glade Reserve, Burnie, on 01/02/18.

Pink Robin *Petroica rodinogaster rodinogaster*

Tasmanian endemic race. Surprisingly, only recorded on the Mavista Trail, South Bruny Island, where a male was watched feeding three newly fledged young on 25/01/18 and a single male was seen on 26/01/18. The timing of my visit and hours spent in the field at keys times of day will undoubtedly have influenced the paucity of records of this and the other robin species.

Flame Robin *Petroica phoenicea*

Just two records on the trip, a pair at Adventure Bay on 26/01/18 and a female at Lake St Clair on 28/01/18.

Bassian Thrush *Zoothera lunulata*

One brief sighting on the Mavista Trail, South Bruny Island, on 26/01/18.

Beautiful Firetail *Stagonopleura bella*

Seven watched feasting at the Melaleuca parrot feeders on 23/01/18, one on the Queen Elizabeth Track, North Bruny Island on 24/01/18 and one close to Strahan Airfield on 29/01/18.



Black Currawong, Cradle Mountains; Forty-spotted Pardalote, Bruny Island

Mammal Species Recorded:**Short-beaked Echidna** *Tachyglossus aculeatus*

The Tasmanian form of this fascinating monotreme is much hairier than its mainland counterpart and is far more regularly encountered. We saw a total of fifteen individuals, all singularly and invariably at the roadside, spotted from the moving car. All were in the northern and north eastern areas visited, between the Cradle Mountains and Freycinet NP, with the Cradle Mountain/Loongana area producing the majority of the sightings. Light and dark forms of this species were seen in relatively equal measure.

Platypus *Ornithorhynchus anatinus*

First recorded on the Leven River within the Mountain Valley estate, Loongana, with one seen on the evening of 29/01/18 and two at the same site on the evening of 30/01/18. The definitive site for great views of this bizarre wonder of the natural world is at the Platypus Lake in the [Tasmanian Arboretum](#), Devonport. S41°13'40.1", E146°18'15.5". On the 01/02/18 we watched two here at close quarters, from a specially constructed screen, actively feeding in the heat of the early afternoon. Apparently this is the norm at this unmissable site.

Tasmanian Devil *Sarcophilus harrisii* TE

Since the tragic onset of Devil Facial Tumour (DFT) Disease, the likelihood of a chance encounter of this iconic mammal during a tour of Tasmania has reduced to almost nil. Thankfully, however, they are still faring well at Mountain Valley, Loongana, which is why we chose to spend three consecutive nights at this unique location. S41°24'48.8", E145°58'36.6". We were treated to multiple visits by Tasmanian Devils, to the baited lawn of our chalet, on each night of our stay, with details as follows.

29/01/18: 22.30 to 23.10 one animal, with an extensive facial tumour on left hand side of lower jaw, visits five times. 00.45 to 01.45 four more different animals visiting, one with a small tumour on upper right lip and three healthy individuals.

30/01/18: One animal briefly at 21.20. 00.00 to 01.30 three brief visits from two different animals.

31/01/18: 22.50 to 23.15 multiple visits from an animal with extensive facial tumour on left hand side of lower jaw. 00.50 to 03.30 regular visits from three different animals, one with small tumour on lower left jaw and two healthy individuals.

Spot-tailed Quoll *Dasyurus maculatus*

As with the previous species, Mountain Valley, Loongana is the key site for this wonderful creature. Animals were observed on two nights out of three, with details as follows:

29/01/18: 23.15 – 01.30 three brief visits.

30/01/18: no visit

31/01/18: 03.15 – 03.20 one animal on veranda, actually putting head through open cabin door.



Short-beaked Echidna, Cradle Mountains; Spot-tailed Quoll, Loongana

Eastern Quoll *Dasyurus viverrinus* TE

Eastern Quoll is now believed to be extinct on the mainland, making this compellingly tenacious little marsupial a Tasmanian endemic. We only recorded this species on Bruny Island, which is clearly its Tasmanian stronghold, with the more open pasture areas of North Bruny holding a very healthy population.

We drove onto North Bruny after dark on all three nights of our stay and recorded three, thirty and ten individuals on the respective nights, though time spent searching on each night is reflective of the numbers seen.

Eastern Quolls were generally encountered searching the roadside verges for prey, and sadly several road casualties were noted on North Bruny. They generally proved to be rather jumpy and hence difficult to photograph, however the real coup occurred when we came across a fresh roadkill wallaby at which quolls were veraciously feeding upon exposed internal organs. A least four animals were observed to visit, appearing one after another to feed. The ratio of light to dark animals seen was approximately three to one.



Dark and light phase Eastern Quolls at roadkill Bennett's Wallaby, Bruny Island

Eastern Barred Bandicoot *Perameles gunnii*

Sadly, this captivating little creature is almost extirpated on Mainland Australia, and although Tasmania is now its stronghold it seems to be increasingly difficult to find here too. Just a single record in the course of our circuit, a chance roadside encounter on 23/01/18, close to Eaglehawk Neck. S43°01'07.4", E147°55'26.3". Thankfully the animal concerned was very accommodating, allowing close approach as it fed at the edge of the road.

Mersey Bluff, the headland north of Devonport, was our planned site for this species, but as we had already seen it by this stage in the trip a night time visit was deemed unnecessary.



Eastern Barred Bandicoot, Eaglehawk Neck

Common Wombat *Vombatus ursinus*

Two records on the road at night, one close to Forcett on 23/01/18 and one at Lake St Clair on 28/01/18. This species was formerly regular at Narawntapu National Park, but we were told that Mange had decimated this population. The definitive site on Tasmanian is now Ronnie Creek, in Cradle Mountain Nation Park, where we saw five individuals feeding in the wide grassy valley on 30/01/18, some allowing point-blank approach. S34°28'01.8", E118°03'45.9".

Common Brushtail Possum *Trichosurus Vulpecula*

In our experience the most widespread mammal in Tasmania, we recorded Common Brushtail Possum on all but one night of our trip, most often in single figures, but with a maximum of thirty seen in one night in the course of the journey from Port Arthur to Hobart. Encounters of the grey form were slightly more regular than the brown form, and several 'golden' individuals were recorded each night on Bruny Island.

Common Ringtail Possum *Pseudocheirus peregrinus*

Just one record, in a roadside tree between Notley Hills and Launceston on the night of 04/02/18.

Eastern Bettong *Bettongia gaimardi* TE

Another tragic victim of introduced predators, this species is also now extinct on Mainland Australia and hence is an imposed Tasmanian endemic. We saw just two individuals at a known colony, on 03/02/18, on the fringe of Dalgarth Forest Reserve, close to Narawntapu NP S41°13'55.6", E146°36'51.2". Always rather wary, these endearing 'kangaroo-rats' needed a little stealth to secure good views amongst the low branches and conifer brush.

Historically this species has been regularly recorded at Waterworks Reserve, however two prolonged spotlighting sessions at this site produced no sign of Bettongs and, perhaps significantly, two Feral Cats were noted here.

Long-nosed Potoroo *Potorous tridactylus*

Now very rare on the mainland, this is yet another marsupial whose stronghold is Tasmania, although we only encountered it at one site. On 23/01/18 a couple were seen briefly, darting through the undergrowth, and then was spot lit, in forest adjacent to Port Arthur Historic Site. S43°09'02.8", E147°51'02.1".



Long-nosed Potoroo, Port Arthur; Eastern Bettong, Dalgarth Forest Reserve

Eastern Grey (Forester) Kangaroo *Macropus giganteus tasmaniensis*

Tasmanian endemic race. Only recorded at Narawntapu National Park, on the evening of 03/02/18, when c20 animals emerged to join the incredible macropod grazing party.

Red-necked (Bennett's) Wallaby *Macropus rufogriseus rufogriseus*

The Tasmanian race of this macropod, widespread in Eastern Australia, is known as Bennett's Wallaby and was regularly encountered on our travels. Attracted to grassland and lawns, where it grazes by night, Waterworks Reserve, Bruny Island and Narawntapu NP were the sites where it was seen in greatest numbers, with an estimated two hundred gathering at the latter.

The albino animals found on Bruny Island seem to have attracted quite a tourist following and their presence is widely advertised; we only saw two or three white individuals, all off Lockley's Road, Adventure Bay.

Rufous-bellied (Tasmanian) Pademelon *Thylogale billardierii* TE

Perhaps best referred to as Rufous-bellied Pademelon, as it formally had a foothold on Mainland Australia, we encountered this engaging little forest kangaroo on all-but-three nights of our travels. It is now yet another victim of mainland extirpation, though thankfully it appears to have a very healthy population in Tasmania.

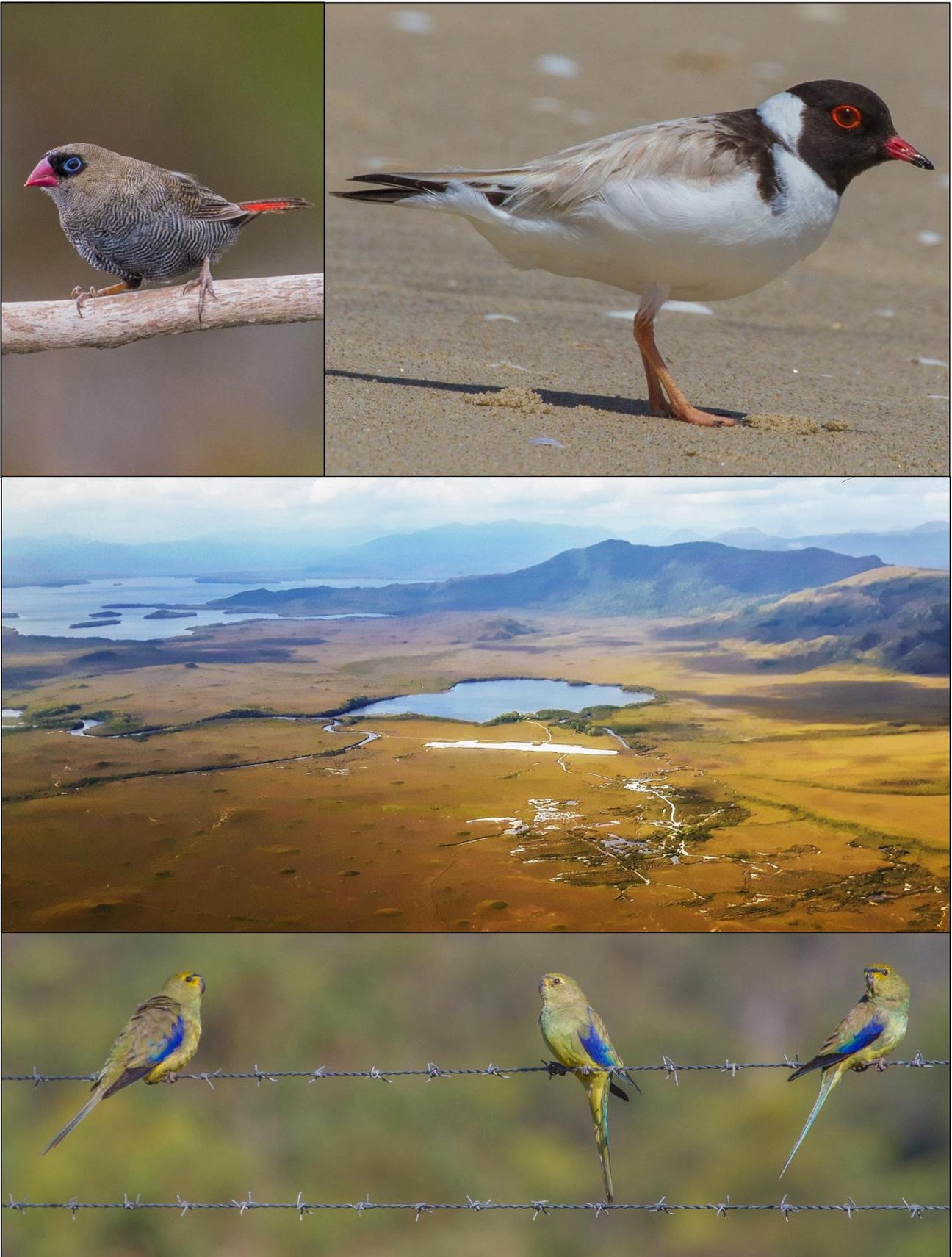
Noteworthy sightings included c20 animals on each visit to Waterworks Reserve, c100 seen during the night time drive from Port Arthur to Hobart, c40 around Stanley Town and The Nutt, and c200 at Narawntapu NP. Most memorable, however, were the group of up to nineteen pademelons which gathered each night on the lawn outside our Mountain Valley cabin, allowing us to enjoying their charismatic vocal squabbling at close range.



Common Wombat, Cradle Mountains; Bennett's Wallaby, Bruny island; Tasmanian Devil, Loongana



Common Brushtail Possum colour variations; Eastern Barred Bandicoot, Eaglehawk Neck



Beautiful Firetail, Melaleuca; Hooded Plover, Bruny Island; Bathurst Harbour from the air, with white gravel landing strip clearly visible; Blue-winged Parrots, Bruny Island

Ian Merrill, Leicestershire, UK. September 2018.

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