

KANGAROO LAND 2016

Northern WESTERN AUSTRALIA, NORTHERN TERRITORY and QUEENSLAND

From August 27th to October 28th

This was my 6th trip in Australia and the longest one. I visited first the NORTHERN TERRITORY, then the northern part of WESTERN AUSTRALIA and by the end QUEENSLAND (for me the most interesting state).

To prepare this trip I used Mammalwatching, mostly with the trips reports of Jon Hall and also the reports of Pieter de Groot Boersma and Andrew and Ben Balmford, plus David Andrew book Mammals of Australia. This book is mainly a compilation in which you can find exactly the same phrases written by different authors. But they are also many errors.

I-NORTHERN TERRITORY

First I spent 5 days in KAKADU NP. It was very warm and the most disappointing part of my trip.

I saw only 5 Agile Wallabies (+10 dead along the access road in the northern part of the park), 2 Antelope Wallaroos (at Gunlom Falls where I slept for my last night; I went there specially because Pieter de Groot Boersma mentioned to have seen 2 behind the camping where I saw them), Black Wallaroos (1 pair at Nourlangie Rock; 1 male and at a different place 1 female + 1 young one above the falls), Wilkin's Rock Wallabies (4 near Merl Camping, at least 3 along Bardedjildji Track and 3 at Ubir-including 1 young one which I would have told it was a Nabarlek if I have not known they are not present there), a colony of Black Flying Fox along the Alligator River, 1 Rock Ringtail Possum found by daylight near Merl Campground at the entrance of a rock crevice (observed during more than half an hour by day light and by night) and absolutely nothing else, except the ferals:

-Dingo: 1 by night near Sandy Billabong, 1 at Madrugal campsite by day, 2 at Gunlom Falls in the camping.

-Water Buffalo: 1 at Yellow Water.

- Donkey: 6 near the intersection to Gunlom Falls.

-Horses: 7 near Gunlom Falls.

-Pigs: 11.

After Kakadu I went to Pine Creek expecting to see Ghost Bat at a mine regularly occupied but I even didn't see 1 bat!

On the way to Robyn Falls I got by day 5 Agile Wallabies, 6 Antelopes Wallaroos and a Dingo.

At ROBYN FALLS: 1 shy Wilkin's Rock Wallabies (there was a camp of hippies and some of them hunt all the animals) and Agile Wallabies .

In LITCHFIELD NP I saw 1 Antelope Wallaroo and by night 1 Wilkin's Rock Wallaby and Common Rock Rat at Florence Falls.

South of Darwin I saw also several Agile Wallabies.

II-WESTERN AUSTRALIA

1- THE KIMBERLEY

Arriving late in Broome I slept west of the city where early morning I got 25 Agile Wallabies. The following morning I began driving in the Kimberley expecting to be able to reach the Mitchell Plateau even it had rained several time during this dry season. I stop for 1 night at Windjana Gorge where I couldn't sleep due the noise of people arriving by midnight. The camping was crowded like many caravan parks in Australia. In the evening I spotlighted in the gorge, seeing 1 Short-eared Rock Wallaby, more than 100 Freshwater Crocodiles, 3 Agile Wallabies, huge numbers of Black and Little Red Flying Fox, 1 Common Sheathtail Bat and a Least Blossom Bat. Due to the noise in the camping I left by 5 am. Just outside of the park I saw 1 Antelope Wallaroo. On my way north I got 1 Common Wallaroo. I reached Munuru campsite late afternoon and was told by different persons that the road to the Mitchell Plateau was flooded and very muddy. I spotlighted around the river and saw 3 Freshwater Crocodiles.

The following morning I was on the way to the Mitchell Plateau, seeing 2 Common Wallaroos, but due to the flooding and the mud I got stuck for a while. I managed to drive out but didn't try again to pass. Maybe I was stupid but I couldn't take the risk to be stuck there. I will have to try on a better year. Due to El Nino and La Nina this year there was more rain during the dry season than the wet season.

Disappointed again I left, stopping at different places on my way back to Broome:

-Drysdale Station: 1 Northern Nail Tailed Wallaby close to the campground (quiet!).

-Barnett River Gorge: at least 14 Short-eared Rock Wallabies.

-Mount Hart Station: 4 Short eared Rock Wallabies, 1 Agile Wallaby and 1 Dingo. I wanted to drive to the gorge where Jon Hall saw a Northern Quoll but the manager didn't accept and told me that except Dingo there was no wildlife here! Just outside.

-Broome Bird Observatory: Late afternoon I saw 2 or 3 Australian Snubfin Dolphins and 1 the following morning. Again Agile Wallabies were common (at least 30 seen).

2-DAMPIER-KARRATHA AND THE BURRUP PENINSULA

My aim to come there was to see a Rothschild's Rock Wallaby. Last year when I was in Exmouth I decided to drive back to Perth and to come back. It was too far and too hot (47°C in Exmouth).

My searches for this species on the net gave me several sites: Karijini NP too far, Lewis Island (a local operator asked me 700 euros) too expensive and the Burrup Peninsula.

I bought a flight from Broome to Karratha with Airnorth, but in June they announced me the flight was cancelled and they will not serve anymore this destination. To get a refund, took time. I had to

complain by email and then to call them. At the beginning I expected to spend 3 days in Karratha to look for Rotschild's Rock Wallaby, but finally I have had to fly from Broome to Perth and the following day to Karratha. By the end I had not a full day there, but at least one night. The chance to see this species was meager. They seemed to be unknown in the Burrup Peninsula except in the far north where predators are baited. I knew from the Lonely Planet guide that most of the Burrup Peninsula was not accessible without a 4WD but Karratha Visitor emailed me that this Wallaby was easy to see in Dampier itself (I didn't believe that too much, but hired only a normal car). I didn't get informations from Karratha Parks and Wildlife Service when I contacted them by email. But after arriving in Karratha I rushed to their office. First a lady came to tell me there were no Rotschild's but only Black Footed Rock Wallabies there. Politely I explained the contrary. Then a second ranger, lady again, was called. She was more knowledgeable. She explained me that the best place was Newman (in town) (too far), that there was a group in Dampier harbor not accessible (fenced area) and that except on several islands where they are common the only chance was the northern part of the Burrup Peninsula reachable only with a 4X4. Finally she told me that during the last 6 months 1 or 2 were found dead at the end of the sealed road. She told me exactly " There may be something there, but you will have to be really lucky to see one because we never have seen one there". After the misfortune in the Kimberley, the Airnorth flight cancelled and the fact I had only 1 night there, without a 4X4 the chance seemed to have left me (and I don't tell you that my first car had been damaged in Darwin 1 hour after my arrival as I was in a supermarket; my glasses broke, as my tent as my mattress...). But we never know. By 4 in the afternoon I began to explore the Burrup Peninsula looking for droppings of Wallabies in Deep Gorge but saw only signs of Common Wallaroos. And there were plenty. I saw the first Wallaroo by around 5pm.

Then I went to the end of the sealed road, very next to the harbor. As I began to climb the boulders I found a Feral Cat: not a good sign. Sitting I scanned the piles of rocks and after a while I found a Rotschild's Rock Wallaby sunbathing with the last sun rays. Ouf!!! I rushed to approach it before the night and finally got it less than 20m away. Later I found an Echidna between the boulders. By night I saw 2 more Rotschild's and plenty Common Wallaroos. I slept in my car outside of the park but not too far to be able to come back early morning. And the following morning there was a Wallaby at the same place. I approached it again before heading to the airport.

III-QUEENSLAND

From Karratha I flew to Perth and the following morning to Cairns.

With a pickup hired for 4 days I drove to Artemis Station. The road was good with many sealed parts. Arriving by 4pm, I arranged with Sue Shepherd to go for Golden Mantled Shouldered Parrot the next morning but asked and got permission to look for Cap York Wallaby west of Musgrave. I immediately drove there (following the informations of Jon Hall), climbed the rocks in the forest, but it took me a lot of time to find one place with some wallaby droppings. I look hard until night but saw only several Common Wallaroos. Agile Wallabies were very common.

I camped at Artemis Station, saw the parrots, but I was impatient to look for the rock wallabies. I tried to wait until late afternoon, but by 4 pm I was already climbing rock west of Musgrave. Even this time I had not seen any droppings of them I disturbed a female with baby in the pouch. The female starred at me for a while before disappearing between rocks. After that I look at dusk and night around Musgrave airport where I saw a Northern Nailtail Wallaby.

After another night at Artemis Station I decided to drive to Cooktown and the Black Mountains. First I contacted Charlie Roberts to ask him he could help me to find a Bennet's Wallaby. He accepted, but told he was busy the following day. We took rendez vous 3 days later after I had returned the pickup and got a normal car. Late afternoon I scanned the Black Mountains at the lookout looking for Godman's Rock Wallaby or a Northern Quoll, but I didn't see anything by day and night. Then I tried the Little Hahn River Gorge where I found a lot of wallabies' droppings but didn't see any. I got only several Common Rock Rats. The following morning I was there again and saw one Godman's and 3 Eastern Grey Kangaroos. Agile Wallabies are very common in this area. I slept at Mount Molloy after exploring shortly by night Mount Lewis, seeing 1 Daintree River Ringtail Possum, 1 Giant White Tail Rat, several Red Legged Pademelons and Musky Rat Kangaroos. I saw also my first Northern Bandicoot dead on the road close to Kingfisher Lodge and the ubiquitous Agile Wallabies along the roads.

The day after I was in Cairns changing of car and driving back to Black Mountains stopping in the afternoon at Granite Gorge near Mareeba where I saw more or less 10 Mareeba Rock Wallabies. But it was a sad experience. They are tame, fed by tourists but a lot of them are in bad state (2 Biologists of Cairns that I met later told me the same and thought it is due to artificial food). I generally don't like to see animals as such a place and prefer to see really "wild" animals. In the evening I was again at the Little Hahn River Gorge where I saw 2 Godman's Rock Wallaby: 1 on the opposite side of the river like the first time and 1 close to me. By night again I saw only Fruit Bats and Agile Wallabies. The following morning I saw 1 or 2 Godman's at the Black Mountain lookout before meeting Lewis Roberts by 8am at Shipton Flat. Jon Hall recommended me to meet the 2 Roberts brothers. In only half an hour Lewis found 2 Bennet's Tree Kangaroos. After he took me to a mine near Rossville where there were hundreds of Eastern Horseshoe Bats. He wanted to show me a Diademed Leaf nosed Bat, but didn't see any. As I was very interested to see a Striped Possum Lewis offered me to guide me in the evening to find this apparently common species. We didn't find any in 3 hours of spotlighting but I learnt how to look for them. Lewis explained me and showed me that the best was to look a dead tree trunk in which they dig to find insect larvae that they catch with their very long front 4th finger (something which reminded me the behavior of Aye Aye in Madagascar). The day after I drove to Kingfisher Lodge where I spent the night in the camping. The managers gave me plenty of informations but I didn't see a lot. First they feed Northern Bandicoots, but they were always disturbed by another client walking below the veranda. So I finally left and saw them better outside of the lodge. I saw also Fawn footed Melomys at the feeding place. In the garden there were plenty of Flying Fox (I don't remember which one), 2 Bush Rats, Red legged Pademelons, 1 Giant White Tail Rat and a very cooperative Broad-footed Feathertail Glider, but unfortunately not the expected Striped Possum on a dead tree trunk regularly visited by this species, and even no Green Ringtail Possum or Long nose Bandicoot.

After I spent 6 days in the Atherton Tableland where I got a lot of mammals:

-Wongabel Forest: By day I found a dead tree trunk with signs of Striped Possum. As I slept 5 times there. Each day after my night foray I checked this tree and on the 4th night by midnight I saw one. Red legged Pademelon and Green Ringtail Possum were regular. Three times I saw Lumholz Tree Kangaroo: 1 by night and twice 1 by day (1 in a low bush jumping on the ground when I arrived and one at a different place sunbathing high in a tree early morning).

-The Crater at Mt Hypipamee NP: surely the best place for possums. On my different visits I saw many Coppery Brush Tailed Possums, many Green Ringtail Possums, many Lemuroid Ringtail Possums, only 2 Herbert River Ringtail Possum, 1 Lumholtz's Tree Kangaroo by night and 1 by day at eye level, regularly 1 Northern Brown Bandicoot.

-Curtain Fig Tree: 2 Lumholtz Tree Kangaroo by day alongside the road; by night several Green Rintail Possums and Coppery Brush Tail Possums and 1 Long Nose Bandicoot.

-Yungabura: twice I saw 1 Platypus for a short time (not the best place).

-Tolga Scrub north Atherton: colony of Spectacled Flying Foxes.

-Mareeba Golf Course: I stopped several time by day and night looking for Whiptail Wallaby. I never saw one, but always I got a lot of Eastern Grey Kangaroos (160). I didn't accept to pay just for looking at the kangaroos.

-Nerada Tea Plantation: 2 Lumholtz Tree Kangaroos alongside the road.

-Mareeba Wetland: An expensive place where I didn't stay. I remember the staff at Mareeba Visitor Center telling me: " Why do you want to stay there. It is expensive and you can see all the same species for free elsewhere". I spotlighted twice the access road, seeing 2 (Northern) Greater Gliders and several Agile Wallabies.

Tinaroo dam: After a very long drive from Mareeba along Tinaroo Creek Road (a very bad road) I finally reached Tinaroo Dam where I saw 4 Common Brushtail Possums, 3 Northern Bettongs(1 was just killed on the road) (note that Tinaroo Dam is close to Tinaroo and not from Mareeba along Tinaroo Creek Road as sometimes mentioned), Agile Wallabies and 1 Echidna.

Ravenshoe: I went there because Jon Hall saw several Yellow bellied Glider of the northern subspecies. I got only 2 (Northern) Greater Gliders on the same branch, several Eastern Grey Kangaroos and a Rufous Owl. I couldn't get correct informations where they are.

Then I went to Undara Lava Tubes NP: I saw 9 Whiptail Wallabies, 2 Common Wallaroos, 1 Black- striped Wallaby, 2 Eastern Grey Kangaroos, 2 Rufous Bettongs after 4 hours of spotlighting and 1 Mareeba Rock Wallaby at the crater.

Afraid not to be allowed to go to Mt Claro for Sharman's Rock Wallaby I went to Hidden Valley: There is at least 1 Wallaby leaving near the cabins, but it is not fed. I saw another Sharman's in the hills, plus Agile Wallaby, 5 (Northern) Greater Gliders, 7 Brushtail Possum. I didn't look for Rufous Bettongs which are apparently easy to get.

Jourama Falls: I spent 1 night looking for Mahogany Glider but didn't see anything.

Mount Isa: 2 Purple-neck Rock Wallaby and 10 Common Wallaroos at lake Moondarra; 20 Purple-neck Rock Wallaby and more than 10 Common Wallaroos at the end of Pamela street reservoir.

Conclury: I stopped at the lake and flushed 4 or 5 Allied Rock Wallabies at Chinaman Creek reservoir. I saw 2 Red Kangaroos early morning in the plains.

Bowen Green Bay NP at Alligator campsite: 2 Allied Rock Wallabies, 1 Brush Tail Possum. Plenty of Agile Wallabies on the access road.

I stopped at Inkerman Station near Home Hill to ask if they still had Spectacled hare Wallaby. The person I saw didn't know anything about this species but he was the brother of the owner and was not resident at this place.

Peter Faust Dam near Proserpine: I spent 2 nights there and got a Northern Quoll once and both night Unadorned Rock Wallaby (5 one night and 6 the second) on the wall and Proserpine Rock Wallaby (2 adults and 1 or 2 young ones). Proserpine RW are shy. They come out of the forest on the slope above the road by night. But the area is very disturbed by fishermen by night. Each time I saw a Properpine it was disturbed by a huge car with a boat. Each time I waited nearly half an hour before seeing again a Proserpine and it was the same. There is more activity by fishermen by night even until midnight. I went to Airlie Beach by day but didn't feel like to look for animals in this disturbed area.

Eungella NP: 8 Red legged Pademelons and 4 Platypus seen during 1 hour. I left as they were still visible. Far better than Yungabura to see the last species.

Clermont: I spent 2 nights there looking for Spectacled hare Wallabies without success (I did the same near Mt Isa and Conclury). I got only Eastern Grey Kangaroos (very few) and a Whip tail Wallaby (the later at Peak NP).

Blackdowns Tableland NP: 7 (Central) Greater Gliders the 1st night and 8 the second (thrice 2 on the same branch, so not so solitary as said), 1 Brush Tail Possum but unfortunately no Yellow bellied Glider.

Duaringa: 20 Black-striped Wallabies and 1 Common Brush Tail Possum by night in town.

Tauton NP: I spent 5 days in this scientific park where Bridled Nailtail Wallaby was rediscovered in the 1970s after thought extinct for 35 years. I was a volunteer and enjoyed my stay thanks to Alan Horsup and Leanne Henri who help me to stay there and Peter Mowatt the ranger in charge of the park. Every evening I was allowed to look at the wildlife alone in the park and it was great. There were no other cars to disturb the animals. During my stay I saw Bridle Nailtail Wallaby sometimes by day but mainly by night (generally 25 each day), Black striped Wallaby (very common), Eastern Grey Kangaroo (a few), 5 Rufous Bettongs, 1 Brush Tail Possum twice, 6 Swamp Wallabies, 2 Common Wallaroos and 2 Echidnas. With Sam (a ranger not permanently there) we looked for and found signs of Koalas on the lower parts of tree trunks, but we had not enough time to find them (they had been camera trapped several times near the entrance of the park). Both Peter and Sam were very helpful.

Westwood west of Rockhampton: This is said to be the best place for Herbert's Rock Wallaby. I got permission to look for them but saw only one.

Hervey Bay: 2 Northern Brown Bandicoot, 3 Eastern Grey Kangaroos and 3 Sahul Humpback Dolphins and Agile Wallabies.

Tin Can Bay: 4 Sahul Humpback Dolphins fed early morning like everyday along the shore.

Perseverance dam near Crow Nest: 8 Brush Tail Rock Wallabies at the wall and 1 female Red-necked Wallaby with baby just killed on the road by crazy drivers. 2 Red Deers between this place and Cressbrook dam.

Hampton: by night 1 Koala and a killed Red neck Wallaby.

Ravensbourne NP: 1 Red-necked Wallabies and 15 Red Deers.

I finished my trip at Green Mountain in Lamington NP. There by night I got large numbers of Red necked Pademelons on the lawn at the camping and near O' Reilly Lodge, plenty of Common Ringtail Possum (ssp pulcher), Short-eared Possums (3 to 4 by night including 1 completely black), Northern Brown Bandicoot (twice), Long-nosed Bandicoot (twice), a large marbled Cat (not a Marble Cat!) scaring the pademelons, Grey-headed Flying Fox and Fawn-footed Melomys . I also saw a Sugar Glider along Duck road, a Koala with baby just below the camping in a more open forest, 3 Red-necked Wallaby at the lookout and 2 in the lower hills, also in the lower hills of the access road to the park 9 Whiptail Wallabies (the Whiptails I saw in Undara had a duller clear mark behind the ears and on the face)+ a Common Brushtail Possum. In Canungra I saw a colony of Little Red Flying Fox with 6 Grey headed Flying Fox just near the bridge, and Eastern Grey Kangaroos in the lowlands. By day I saw also a lot of Red legged Pademelons in the upper part of the forest (only once I saw one outside of the forest, but at the border). I didn't like too much O'Reilly lodge with more than a hundred of tourists every day and some of them carrying a plate with food and parrots on the plate, their head and shoulders. It was too much the feeling of a zoo. A bit like Granite Gorge.

I am pretty sure I have forgotten plenty of places where I saw Flying Foxes and Agile Wallabies. I didn't mentionned the many dead animals (specially wallabies and kangaroos) on the road. Nobody takes care of that. Speed is the rule, even in parks. It was ridiculous to see a sign "Take care. Koalas in love" "Fine of 1500 dollar if you injury an animal". But I like this country. Australians are generally very friendly and helpful. The main problem, if you are not careful, it is an expensive country. But if you bushcamp (forbidden) you can save a lot of money. I hate to spend a night in a caravan-park. They are always crowded.

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