

Some notes on mammal watching in SW Western Australia

Oct-Nov 2016

Rohan Clarke (rohan@wildlifeimages.com)

Here's a summary of the wild/free ranging mammals seen during a recent trip to SW WA. The trip was broken into two parts: 1) arrival via the Nullabor from South Australia with three nights in WA (Cocklebidgy, Jilbadgi Nature Reserve, outskirts of Perth). This was done with Tim Bawden and he has posted a great trip report (including coverage of the SA leg) on his blog (<http://gobirding.com.au/nullabor-adventure-part-2/>). This was followed by a break up north, before returning to do a longer loop around SW WA with family as a camping holiday. This second leg included 3 nights based in Fremantle, a day trip to Rottnest Island, 4 nights at Contos Campground, Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park, 4 nights at the Warren Campground, Warren National Park near Pemberton, 2 nights at Dryandra, 4 nights at Cheynes Beach Caravan Park, 3 nights at Lucky Bay, Cape Le Grand National Park and 2 nights in Cape Arid National Park before a final night near Eucla. Being a family holiday with two young kids, mammal watching during the day was generally passive, but we did lots of exploring so there were a few daylight encounters. Once the kids were in bed I got out at night as often as I could, tallying about 16 nights of spotlighting. I used a thermal camera extensively and carried an Anabat Walkabout to record bat calls. Most observations were with a headlamp that has the capacity to switch between red and white light. Most species were photographed with a Canon 1Dx and either a 100-400 mm or a 500 mm lens. Nocturnal shots with at least 2 off camera flashes, sometimes 3 but that gets hard to juggle in the field. More images of all of these species can be found in my mammal image gallery at: http://www.pbase.com/wildlifeimages/australian_mammals

Annotated list with photos follows:

1. Short-beaked Echidna (*Tachyglossus aculeatus*): Just two at Dryandra and both at night.
2. Yellow-footed Antechinus (*Antechinus flavipes*): One found with the aid of a thermal camera at Cheynes Beach (within the township).
3. Red-tailed Phascogale (*Phascogale calura*): 1 with thermal camera at Dryandra (see map). They frequent Allocasaurina woodland so best to scope this out in the day then return at night. They are small, fast, light shy and arboreal when eluding people so can be tough to pin down.



4. Brush-tailed Phascogale (*Phascogale tapoatafa*): Two different animals at Conto's Campsite. One bouncing through our campsite whilst we ate dinner so that the whole family got to watch, and another much later that night found whilst spotlighting in woodland on the sealed entrance road just near the intersection with Lake Cave Rd.



5. [Grey-bellied Dunnart (*Sminthopsis fuliginosus*): This one got away. Using a thermal camera, I found, then followed a dunnart at Cheynes Beach for about 10 minutes but it was always obscured by vegetation on the ground. I got glimpses but never enough to satisfy me of the ID. Location was about 1 km back out of town adjacent to the sealed main road.]
6. Numbat (*Myrmecobius fasciatus*): One seen very well with the whole family in tow on the Wandoo Walk a few hundred meters from the Dryandra Village in the mid-morning.



7. Southern Brown Bandicoot (*Isodon obesulus*): One crossing the Hwy about 10 km west of Walpole well after dark. One whilst spotlighting at Dryandra towards the top of Gura Road.
8. Southern Hairy-nosed Wombat (*Lasiorhinus latifrons*): Crossing the Nullarbor, one heard in its burrow (scuffling as it bolted further down the burrow) in the late afternoon and a few other active burrows on the track to Rawlinna north of Cocklebidy. Just to the east of here on the way home we saw a roadkill on the Hwy. We had good but distant views of one sunning itself in the late afternoon just to the north of the Nullarbor Roadhouse on the SA side of the state border prior to these observations so it wasn't really a species we were chasing at this point in time.



9. Western Pygmy-possum (*Cercartetus concinnus*): Two at Conto's Campground with the aid of a thermal camera. Both adjacent to the sealed access road and both in larger flowering banksia. Another three at Dryandra again with a thermal camera (see map but I reckon they are probably just random in terms of occurrence at Dryandra).



10. Western Ring-tailed Possum (*Pseudocheirus occidentalis*): Just one at Conto's campground, spotlit late at night in the campground area proper. Lots of evidence of Western Ring-tailed Possums in the foreshore reserve at Dunsborough. If you walk through Centennial Park adjacent to Geographe Bay Rd and about opposite with its intersection with Chester Way there are a number of nest boxes for ringtails in the weeping peppermints. We saw a few with their little noses poking out of the boxes so this is probably an easy way to get them in the day.
11. Honey Possum (*Tarsipes rostratus*): A dream animal that turned out to be very common. All found with a thermal camera. 10-20 a night for the first two nights at Cheynes Beach (windy and overcast) then detection rates dropped off in calm conditions on the next two nights. Perhaps they were hearing my footfall and dropping to cover before I could detect them on these later nights? A short walk on the road above the campground at Lucky Bay, Cape Le Grand produced about 10 after dark and a drive the next night produced 5+. At Cape Arid I had 5+ on each night that I was out.



13. Common Brush-tailed Possum (*Trichosurus vulpecula*): Generally common. Abundant at Dryandra.



14. Brush-tailed Bettong (*Bettongia penicillata*): About 10 at Dryandra. Mostly spotlighting from a moving vehicle. Highest density along Gura Road.



15. Black-footed Rock-wallaby (*Petrogale lateralis*): 10-20 at Mt Caroline Nature Reserve accessed from the SW corner of the reserve.



16. Western Grey Kangaroo (*Macropus fuliginosus*): Abundant and seen just about everywhere there was open woodland or grasslands with nearby cover.



17. Red Kangaroo (*Osphranter rufus*): Common on the Nullarbor, mostly as roadkill, but plenty on the dirt track up to Rawlinna.



18. Tammar Wallaby (*Notamacropus eugenii*): Two or three at Dryandra whilst spotlighting.
19. Quokka (*Setonix brachyurus*): Abundant on Rottnest Island (hopping under the tables and chairs in the village). On the mainland one about 1 km north of Cheynes Beach was a nice record.



20. Water Rat (*Hydromys chrysogaster*): One sitting on the river bank, then swimming across the Warren River (after dark) near Pemberton.
21. [Mitchell's Hopping-mouse (*Notomys mitchellii*): An also-ran, we had a bunch of strong signals on the thermal camera that we couldn't get in the light at Jilbadgi Nature Reserve. We checked the area the next morning and found several hopping mouse burrows so this is probably what they were].
22. Ash-grey Mouse (*Pseudomys albocinereus*): One with thermal camera at Cape Le Grand (east of Lucky Bay) and another two with thermal camera at Cape Arid National Park.
23. Bush Rat (*Rattus fuscipes*): One with a thermal camera at Cape Le Grande National Park.
24. European Rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*): A couple – I can't remember where but they were pleasingly uncommon.
25. White-striped Free-tailed Bat (*Austronomus australis*): Common. Being audible makes it easy – I heard them at just about every location we visited after dark.
26. Western Free-tailed Bat (*Ozimops kitcheneri*): One with a bat detector at Warren River near Pemberton.
27. Long-eared bat spp (*Nyctophilus spp*). Good views (but not enough to nail ID) of one perch hunting and engaged in fluttery flight in dense Allocasaurina woodland at Dryandra.
28. Gould's Wattled Bat (*Chalinolobus gouldii*): Pretty common and the 'usual' bat to be found with the bat detector.
29. Chocolate Wattle Bat (*Chalinolobus morio*): Common – one or two at most sites where I used the bat detector.
30. Western Falsistrelle (*Falsistrellus mackenziei*): Very good views and recordings with the bat detector as one flew up and down the road (Maiden Bush Trail). They're big! This was in Karri Forest near the Warren River.
31. Southern Forest-bat (*Vespadelus regulus*): Pretty common and easily identified on the bat detector given it is the only *Vespadelus* in sw WA.
32. Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*): Pleasingly rare. Just one live animal in farmland near the Stirling Ranges. It was a large cub that had clearly been burnt in a small bushfire (10+ ha) that had started during the wheat harvest the previous day. The small roadside reserve was still smouldering and the cub (with short fur and no brush) bolted from the car. Other than that a couple of roadkills in agricultural land. The Western Shield Program and its capacity to suppress fox numbers is truly impressive.
33. Domestic Cat (*Felis catus*): Probably averaged one every other night when out spotlighting.
34. Australian Sea-lion (*Neophoca cinerea*): A single off the beach at Hamelin Bay.
35. Humpback Whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*): Perhaps 5+ off Cape Naturaliste, 2+ off Cape Leeuwin and two more off Sugarloaf Rock.
36. Indo-Pacific Bottle-nosed Dolphin (*Tursiops aduncus*): Distant views of the resident pods at Bunbury
37. Common Bottle-nosed Dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*): A pod of about five in Thistle Cove at Cape Le Grand National Park.

