

Tasmania Take Two - mammal watching trip - further sites Feb 2017

Following the Nov 2015 mammal watching trip to Tasmania I returned to visit some of the sites missed on that trip due to time constraints. Resources used in planning the trip were "Where to see wildlife in Tasmania" Dave Watts, "The complete guide to finding the mammals of Australia" David Andrew, "Burnie wildlife guide" Michelle Foale (Published by Burnie City Council) and of course previous contributors to this website whom I thank. I also contacted the Burnie naturalists club who were generous with their local knowledge.

Visiting sites on this trip I ditched shoes whenever possible and wore a few pairs of old hiking socks. I find this softens foot fall enabling considerably better viewing opportunities.

Launceston - 2 nights (4th/5th Feb)

I flew into Launceston where I based myself for two nights. Both nights I visited Cataract Gorge, an easy trip on foot from Central Launceston. At the First Basin area of the gorge **Bennett's wallaby** and **pademelons** were easy to find, as indeed were **brushtail possums** and most bins had a **brushtail** rummaging through them!

Brushtail possum



During my second night spotlighting I encountered two small rodent sized mammals on the rocks of the gorge wall on the East side of the suspension bridge, but I was unable to get close enough to make a positive identification before they disappeared into rock crevices.

A circular day walk (90mins) up Cataract Gorge to the disused Duck Reach Power Station produced the first **echidna** of the trip sheltering in a log from the light rain. It was sighted on the West side of the gorge which is good **echidna** habitat.

On my last trip to Tasmania I had to miss driving the C832 because I staked the hire car tyre doing a U-turn at Mt William NP, so on the second night in Launceston I finally set out to do this highly regarded mammal spotting road.

I left Launceston mid-afternoon accompanied by heavy showers to have dinner at Bridport. Driving the B82 in an Easterly direction I came across a **spotted-tailed quoll** D.O.R. and a live **Tasmanian devil** crossing the road at 18.15. between Pipers Brook and Bridport.

I left Bridport fed and watered and continued on the B82 as darkness fell, to find the road absolutely covered with both Southern bell frogs (*Litoria raniformis*) and brown tree frogs (*Litoria ewingi*) making the most of the recent afternoon rains, that had fortunately cleared up by this time.

I drove the C832 in a Southerly direction towards Scottsdale and there was no shortage of mammals on the drive. **Pademelons**, **Bennett's wallaby** and **brushtail possums** were abundant. Two **wombats** were also encountered, one of which gave my reflexes a good workout on the brakes and a near coronary as it dashed within inches of the car!

I returned to Launceston via the B81 and here I picked up my first **ringtail possum** of the trip just outside of Scottsdale, there were also plenty of **pademelons** and **brushtails** driving the B81.

It had been a fantastic evening but it was too much to drive from Launceston and back again in an evening, and was I ever to do the C832 again I would overnight at either Scottsdale or Bridport.

Burnie - 4 nights (6th/7th/8th/9th Feb)

I decided to give my tourist dollar to Burnie because of the recent investment in wildlife tourism this former logging town has made. I wanted to visit a few of the sites in Burnie itself, but I also used it as a base to visit other wildlife locations on the North coast of Tasmania.

Warrawee reserve – Latrobe

I stopped for a quick recce mission at Latrobe on the drive from Launceston to Burnie. Tourist information directed me to Warrawee reserve but road works were blocking the road and it was obviously closed to the public, further investigation at the council office gave the following information from the council newsletter and related to the devastating floods that hit Northern Tasmania in the Winter of 2016...

“Post-flood, extensive works conservatively estimated at nearly \$1 million are required if the Warrawee reserve is to be restored. Parks and wildlife have undertaken some works to make the reserve safer but the reality is that it will never again be the grassed open space, picnic tables, boardwalks or toilet facilities that it was previously. There is just too much damage for the past to be replicated”

....which fortunately saved me a long drive and wasted evening!

Fern glade reserve – Burnie

This beautiful and tranquil area of rainforest 10 mins drive from Burnie with its excellent information and facilities is known for **platypus** spotting. During a daytime visit I observed both **platypus** and **pademelons**, returning at night I added **brushtail possums** to the list (the reserve is closed to traffic at night.)

Fern Glade Reserve



Upper Natone Nature Reserve.

A visit to this logging reserve 40 mins inland from Burnie was a morning well spent. I walked the lagoon walk and encountered **pademelons**, an **echidna** and a **platypus**. I was also surprised by a **Tasmanian devil** cantering across the road at midday.

Port Sorell.

It is ironic that on the previous trip I stayed two nights at this pleasant seaside town to visit Narawntapu without realising what a great site it is for mammal watching. The bushland between Hawley beach and Hawley Esplanade is good for both **Eastern barred-bandicoots** and **ringtail possums** despite its small size and proximity to houses. Pitcairn Bushland Reserve is a fantastic reserve right in the middle of town where there were plentiful **pademelons** and **ringtails** and a very industrious **Southern brown bandicoot** foraging in the leaf litter.

Southern brown bandicoot



Narawntapu National Park.

With Warrawee Reserve out of the equation (see above) I had a free night during my time in Burnie so I returned to Narawntapu. The park was teeming with the larger macropods, **Forester kangaroos**, **Bennett's wallaby** and **pademelons** were out well before dusk grazing. I also checked the **Tasmanian bettong** colony in the pine forest (see previous trip report) and found it doing well.

Bennett's wallaby



Eastern grey kangaroos



Mersey Bluff.

This is the best spot for **Eastern barred bandicoots** I have come across. They were everywhere on this headland with approximately ten animals viewed both nights I visited. There are also plenty of rabbits on the headland, which can make identification by eyeshine alone difficult until the animal moves. **Pademelons** were also plentiful and **brushtail possums** were also around in small numbers.

Eastern barred bandicoot



Romaine Reserve – Burnie.

Romaine Reserve



This wonderful reserve in the middle of Burnie is an absolute gem to wander at night. It is such a peaceful spot I often forget I was in a city when I was spotlighting this reserve. **Pademelons** are in good numbers here and there are plenty of **ringtail** and **brushtail possums** in the trees alongside the creek. **Long-nosed potoroos** are also found at Romaine and it was here that I saw my first **potoroo** during my stay in Burnie.

Pademelon



Ringtail possum



Arthur River 2 nights (10th/11th Feb)

I am surprised this first-rate site for mammals doesn't make it into more of the literature, because it at least equals some of the best sites for mammal watching in Tasmania.

Arthur River sunset



I had visited Arthur River way back in 2002 when I was backpacking Tasmania and on that visit I saw a **spotted-tailed quoll** on the Arthur River cruise (red boat) in broad daylight at their lunch site (at the time I had no idea what I was seeing and only years later looking through the photos did I look up what it was!)

This trip I stayed at the fabulous Arthur River cabin park about 1km North of the main town. The owners were incredibly accommodating and when I mentioned my interest in mammals they sourced road kill and staked it out on the corner of their property for both nights of my stay.

The first evening, even before dusk had turned to dark proper, there was activity on the **pademelon** carcass. It was a **spotted-tailed quoll**! At first I was cautious about approaching but I needn't have worried as this tenacious little carnivore must have been ravenous. I sat quietly within a couple of metres of the action for over an hour and watched it feed. The whole time **ringtail possums** were twittering in hedgerow nearby and an eerie glow provided by the full moon cast light on the macabre scene, making truly what has to be one of my best mammal watching experiences to date.

Spotted tailed quoll



Checking the carcass in the morning it was obvious that **Tasmanian devils** visited later that night because the carcass had been completely demolished, it was as if the unfortunate **pademelon** had been a figment of my imagination!

The following morning I walked into town for the cruise on the Arthur River (red boat again) and there were plenty of **Bennett's wallaby** and **pademelons** in the hedgerows bordering the road.

Arthur River cruise



The cruise was as great as I had remembered. First stop was to view the resident sea eagles enticed down from the eucalypts by fish from the boat. Further upriver there was a **wombat** grazing at the water's edge.

White breasted sea eagle



Lunch was at "Turks landing" the permanent picnic site for the cruise where we were educated on the temperate rainforest around us. There was a cheeky **pademelon** loitering with intent while we enjoyed our BBQ lunch but unfortunately no **spotted-tailed quoll** this time. However the staff assured me that at least once a week they were visited by a resident **quoll**.

Walking back to the cabin park there was plenty of birdlife around (novice birder that I am) with Eastern spinebills, European bullfinches and Splendid fairy wrens a few that I could identify.

Eastern spinebill



The second night in Arthur River the Wild West coast of Tasmania lived up to its name as the temperature dropped and a cold front, that was to be the dominant weather feature of the next 3 days moved through. It was far too cold to sit and stakeout the carcass so I briefly walked around the cabin park and surrounding fields and picked up **pademelons**, **brushtail possums** also **Eastern barred-bandicoots**, which are right at the limit of their range here. When I did visit the carcass I disturbed a feeding **Tasmanian devil** who disappeared into the hedgerow never to be seen again.

The following day I drove the unsealed Western Explorer Road, an exhilarating drive especially with the weather still wild. I overnights in Rosebery and called in at the impressive Montezuma falls (at 104m the highest in Tasmania) which were raging after the recent rains.

Lake St Clair 2 nights (13th/14th Feb)

Lake St Clair



The two nights at Lake St Clair I stayed at the Derwent Bridge wilderness hotel 5km from the park entrance on the main highway. There is a book at the park visitors centre where wildlife encounters within the park are recorded by visitors a really excellent idea by parks and wildlife! From this I easily surmised that the campsite was the best place to see the **Eastern quolls** I was after.

Unfortunately the first night the **quolls** were not around, there were however plenty of **brushtails** at the campsite. I found **pademelons** grazing on the grass behind the visitor centre, and between the visitor centre and campsite there were **ringtail possums** in the trees above the path.

I used my full day at Lake St Clair to walk the Mt Rufus track now the weather was finally clearing after the recent cold front. This 5 hour walk to the summit of Mt Rufus (1416m) was a great hike passing through many vegetation types. Although I didn't see any mammals on the walk there was plenty of **wombat** scat lining the track.

As the day progressed and the temperature warmed it turned into a definite reptile day. I saw two white-lipped snakes (*Drysdalia coronoides*) and a jet black tiger snake (*Notechis ater humphreysi*) as well as large numbers of skinks with at least two species represented.

After a much needed nap at the hotel I headed back down to the lake late afternoon and after only thinking what a quiet day it had been for mammals within 15mins I saw a **wombat** grazing at the edge of the lake, followed in quick succession by an **echidna** then a **platypus** feeding in the lake.

Wombat



Echidna



The second night spotlighting produced the same species as the first night but in addition the campsite was jumping with **Eastern quolls** intent on foraging and therefore more easily photographed than usual!

Eastern quoll



An early morning walk at the lake on Wednesday morning I found many **Bennett's wallabies** grazing at the side of the path to the **platypus** hide.

Mt Field 2 nights (15th/16th Feb)

Wednesday was a big day of driving as I went to Mt Field via Hobart airport to pick up Lorenz who was on his first tentative visit to Tasmania (he feels the cold!) We stayed at the lovely National Park hotel just outside the park entrance.

Both nights I found the same species spotlighting the lawn opposite the visitor centre, with all of **pademelons**, **brushtails**, **Eastern quolls** and **Eastern barred-bandicoots** in good numbers and easily viewed.

A morning walk around Lake Dobson gave **Bennett's wallaby** enjoying the sunshine.

Hobart 2 nights (17th/18th Feb)

The days here were spent enjoying the city but at night I checked out a couple of sites near Hobart.

Waterworks reserve

Waterworks reserve a 15 min drive from Hobart city centre is just above the suburb of South Hobart. Although it is closed at night to traffic there is a car park just outside the gates. Walk into the reserve and you pass the first of two reservoirs on your right, continue along to the second reservoir and on your left is a grassed area. This is where I found the most action. I saw three **Tasmanian bettongs** as well as the usual suspects, **brushtails**, **pademelons** and **Bennett's wallaby**.

The **bettongs** were always where the grass borders the eucalypt undergrowth further up the slope and away from the path.

Tasmanian (Southern) bettong



Mt Nelson

I briefly visited this site on the second night and found **bettongs**, **pademelons** and **Bennett's wallaby**.

All of Mt Nelson, Waterworks Reserve, Romaine Reserve and Cataract Gorge are sites (close to big cities) where **bandicoots** have traditionally been recorded and **bandicoots** (both species) I expected to but did not see. I did however see large numbers of cats at these sites which may explain the absence of any **bandicoots**.

Bruny Island 2 nights (19th/20th Feb)

Bruny Island's mammals include some exquisite colour morphs there are **white Bennett's wallaby**, **golden possums** and **black/dark morphs of quolls**, in addition to the regular coloured individuals of these species.

The accommodation we stayed on the island was the fantastic Adventure Bay Retreat at Adventure bay on South Bruny. There were **painted wallabies (white Bennett's wallaby)** on the property. Nicholls road is another good spot for these animals at the Adventure Bay township.

Painted (Bennett's) wallaby - albino



Both nights on Bruny I headed to the North of the island. Driving North from Adventure Bay to the spit the animals that I saw were mostly **pademelons** and **Bennett's wallaby**. **Possums** including the golden morph island species became more common towards the spit but without doubt North Bruny is the best for wildlife.

Golden possum



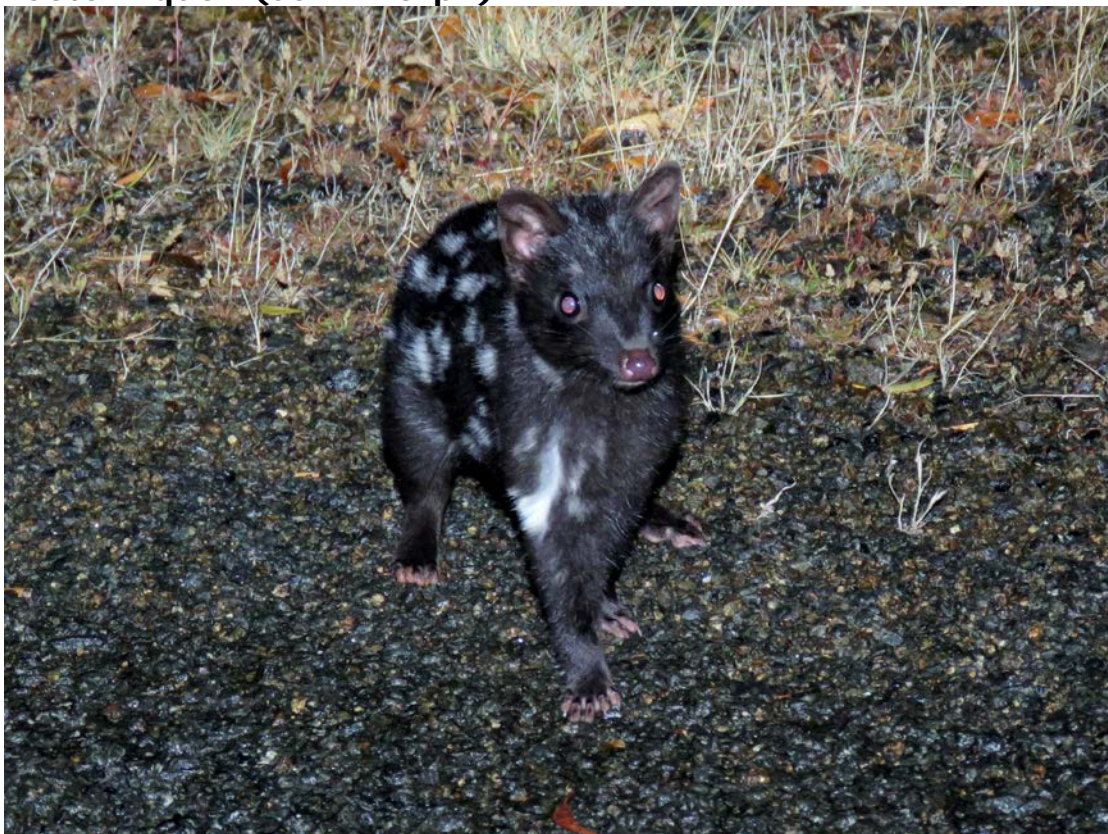
I beelined straight to the junction of Missionary Road with Main Bruny Road because of information provided by the Balmford family (previous trip report) about **long-nosed potoroos** at this location. It proved a hot tip because as soon as I arrived at the junction I saw a **potoroo**. I travelled Main Bruny Road 400m East of this junction by foot and saw a further 5-7 **potoroos**, and many **Eastern quolls** (both morphs) in the vegetation bordering the road and on road itself (there was no traffic at this late hour.)

Long nosed potoroo



Driving back to Adventure bay later that night I got to truly appreciate the high numbers of **Eastern quolls** on the island, and this is undoubtedly the best site in Tasmania to see them.

Eastern quoll (dark morph)



The following day was a day of heavy rain which made a great day to sit in front of the log fire at the retreat. Late afternoon with the showers decreasing we went out for a drive and saw an **echidna** drinking from a puddle.

At dusk at Lorenz's request (any interest he shows in wildlife is to be nurtured!) we visited the spit that joins the two halves of Bruny to see fairy penguins and short-tailed shearwaters (muttonbirds) return to their burrows after a day at sea, which was a really cool experience.

The second night I returned to the junction of Missionary Rd with Main Bruny Rd and was rewarded with good numbers of **potoroos** and **Eastern quolls**, and this time a **golden possum** too.

Eastern quoll (fawn morph)



The future looks bright for the mammals of Bruny with cat control measures being introduced to the island in the immediate future (sterilisation of domestic animals followed by removal of ferals.)

We had another night in Hobart after Bruny Island, but this time no mammal watching, just plenty of beers to toast an enjoyable and successful trip to the Apple Isle.

In conclusion the sheer numbers of mammals in Tasmania fires the imagination of how the Australian mainland must have been before the arrival of the European fox. Tasmania thus remains for me the best spot for mammal watching on the continent.