

South East Queensland Mammal Watching Trip - 6th Oct – 15th Oct 2017.

The South East of Queensland is well regarded as a mammal watching hotspot and has been high on my list of sites to visit for some time. Inspiration for the vacation came from the excellent trip reports of Mike Hoit and Tim Bawden, which I used extensively in planning the trip.

The plan was to visit Perseverance Dam and it's **Brush-tailed Rock Wallabies**, then to pick up some rainforest species at O'Reilly's for three nights followed by two nights at Guestwick Eco-lodge in Northern NSW, and finally a night at Branell Homestead for **Whip-tailed Wallabies**.

After confirming all accommodation 6 months prior to departure, it was disappointing the itinerary had to be tweaked in the month running up to the vacation because I could not contact anyone at Guestwick Eco-lodge, so I'm not sure if this means that this venue has now closed.

The flight from Perth to Brisbane arrived at 22.45, too late to seriously consider any mammal watching on the Friday night, but Saturday morning I walked to the Brisbane Botanic Gardens to see the **Black Flying-foxes** resident in the NW corner of the gardens. There were around fifty bats present during my visit.

I was pleasantly surprised to find the tremendous **Eastern Water Dragon** extremely common around the ponds within the botanic gardens.

Eastern Water Dragon.



Toowoomba Sat 7th – Sun 8th Oct.

Buzzing from this fabulous herp I picked up the hire car and drove two hours West to the town of Toowoomba in the Great Dividing Range. My motel (Comfort Inn) was fortunately close to the Kearney Historical Springs Park, where there is a colony of **Flying Foxes** I wanted to investigate.

The signs at the park explain up to three species of **Flying Fox** roost at the park. The **Black** and **Grey-headed** are resident all year round while the **Little Reds** are seasonal. All three species were present during my visit with **Black** and **Grey-headed** prevalent but also the occasional **Little Red**.

Black Flying-fox.



Little Red Flying-fox.



After checking into the motel, I drove 43km North to Perseverance Dam. Conditions deteriorated on approach with low cloud and heavy rain falling. When I arrived at the dam, I parked at the Southern end of the spillway in the designated parking area. I walked across the spillway to an rock island between the spillway and main dam wall. The dam wall is huge and I figured the best view of the **Rock Wallabies** would be from the valley floor.

Perseverance Dam Wall (I sat bottom right of dam wall.)



A goat track descends to the valley floor on the rock island between the spillway and main dam wall. Approaching the dam wall from the valley floor I disturbed a number of **Rock Wallabies** despite the rain. It was early in the afternoon so perhaps the overcast conditions were going to work in my favour.

The rain by now was heavy and persistent so I had no choice but to seek shelter. I climbed onto the rocks to the bottom right of the dam wall and found a small overhang that provided partial shelter. Cramped in this tiny space with water dripping down my left side and a jagged rock wedged firmly up my trumpet I had plenty of time to consider what other people do for relaxation on vacation!

Despite the rain, a number of **Rock Wallabies** surfaced from cracks between boulders in the dam wall and I had great close up views. Then when the rain stopped, **Rock Wallabies** appeared from everywhere. I saw around fifteen individuals over the course of the hour I was in my shelter, and though they definitely sensed I was there, because I had been immobile for so long they didn't seem overly threatened by my presence.

Brush-tailed Rock Wallabies.



When the next heavy shower started I decided to quit while I was ahead and return to Toowoomba and my dry motel room.

The following morning, I walked down to Kearney Historical Springs for another look at the bats. Observing these delightful mammals, I decided it is never wise to stand below the bat that changes position to hang by its hands!

Wandering around I disturbed two **Hares** grazing near the ponds. My interest is in Australian mammals so I don't usually pay much attention to introduced species but this was an exception. I had never seen a **Hare** in my home country, despite spending lots of time in the Welsh countryside, so I was really delighted to finally see this species, and the irony of seeing it on the other side of the world was not lost on me.

Hare.



O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat Sun 8th – Thurs 12th Oct

I broke up the 3 hour drive from Toowoomba to O'Reilly's with a coffee break at Canungra. This rustic little town is located at the base of the mountain on which O'Reilly's is situated. A bonus of stopping in Canungra was the **Flying Fox** roost situated near the road bridge over Canungra Creek, only a 2 minute walk from the town.

The road from Canungra up to O'Reilly's is a great drive with amazing views but requires a fair bit of concentration. It passes first through farmland then eucalypt woodland and finally at higher altitudes rainforest. Currently the road is undergoing major repairs after rains from Cyclone Debbie caused significant washouts. (Check O'Reilly's website for closures.)

When I finally reached O'Reilly's I was a bit unsure at first about what I found. It was VERY busy almost overwhelmingly so. A wedding was being set up on the lawn area immediately outside reception and the entrance drive resembled the pit stop at the Melbourne Grand Prix.

The above said it is a wonderful place that grew on me over the days with some fabulous attributes and abundant wildlife. There was a wonderful sense of isolation in the mountaintop location enhanced by breathtaking views.

Sunset from the viewing platform O'Reilly's



The mammal most easily seen around O'Reilly's is the **Red-necked Pademelon**. These small endearing **Wallabies** are particularly prevalent on the grassy slopes behind the accommodation with early morning and late afternoon of course being the best time.

Red-necked Pademelon.



Another species commonly encountered on the rainforest walks around the retreat is the **Red-legged Pademelon**, although this species is usually only seen briefly as when disturbed it darts into the shelter of the forest.

I was pleasantly surprised to find an exception to this rule on the (free for guests) morning guided bird walk along the Booyong Boardwalk. Here there was a **Red-legged Pademelon** emboldened by the scraps fed to the scrub wrens and robins by bird guides.

Red-legged Pademelon.



The only other species observed during the day at O'Reilly's was a **Ringtail Possum** moving through the canopy on the Morans Falls track, all other mammal species were spotlighted.

The intention of the first night's spotlight was to stay around the resort after what had been a big day. There were many **Ringtail Possums** on the Booyong Boardwalk, and in the vegetation around the resort itself, and I saw around twenty animals during the course of the evening including one possum that pissed on me. The animals here are quite rufous compared to the **Ringtail Possums** I have been used to seeing in Tasmania.

Ringtail Possum.



During the course of the evening I also spotted a couple of **Short-eared Brushtail Possums**, the first near the carpark and the second on the Wishing Tree Track. Despite searching the bird feeding area and the lawns around the guesthouse I could find no **Bandicoots** of either species or any other small little critters and I was beginning to wonder whether O'Reilly's was going to meet my high expectations.

To finish the night off I drove down to the Python Rock Track where there were further **Ringtails** and also **Red-legged Pademelons** crashing off into the forest. I did find my new favourite frog a **Great Barred Frog** sitting nonchalantly on the track.

Great Barred Frog.



The following day I did a recce mission and walked Duck Creek Rd down to where the rainforest borders the eucalypt forest, an area Mike Hoit had found productive for **Glid**ers. I estimate the distance to be about two and a half kilometres from the main road. The road itself was potholed which in itself wouldn't have prevented a 2WD making the trip but the large pools of water/mud at the time of my visit would have resulted in my 2WD hire car getting bogged.

Afterwards I drove to Canungra to search for **Whip-tailed Wallabies** later in the afternoon, when they come out to graze on the fields around the town. This was the mammal I was most keen to see on this trip, so I made this diversion as insurance in case things didn't go to plan at Branell Homestead.

While down in Canungra I went to visit the **Flying Fox** roost at Canungra Creek. The first creek residents I encountered on what was by now a warm day were abundant **Eastern Water Dragons** sunning themselves on the creek banks.

At the creek, there were both **Black** and **Grey-headed Flying-foxes** roosting at the time of my visit, fanning themselves to keep cool. Happy and with a crick in my neck I returned to the car.

Grey-headed Flying-fox.



Driving from Canungra back to O'Reilly's the first few kilometres out of town were particularly productive for **Whip-tailed Wallabies**. I found fifteen grazing on a private property adjacent to the road and so asked permission to take pictures on the property.

Back at O'Reilly's the **Orange-eyed Tree Frogs** were making a beautiful chorus outside the bar area on what was a warm and humid night. The plan for the night was to spotlight the Campground and Booyong Boardwalk and then head down to Duck Creek Rd.

At the campground, there were a number of **Short-eared Brushtail Possums**, then later at the Booyong Boardwalk the **Possum** numbers from the previous night had been completely reversed with very few **Ringtails** seen on this night, but an abundance of **Short-eared Brushtails**, often given away by their very distinctive throaty calls.

Short-eared Brushtail Possum (All Black Form.)



As I spotlit the Booyong Boardwalk I began to understand why O'Reilly's is so special with the rainforest species slowly revealing themselves. First was a **Long-nosed Bandicoot** foraging among the leaf litter, then as I walked along the path connecting the Booyong Boardwalk with the Border Track a movement caught my eye in a log to the side of the track, a **Brown Antechinus**. It darted into a log before peeping out a couple of times then scampering off into the bush.

Brown Antechinus.



I Returned to the resort via the border track and came across my next mammal, a **Fawn-footed Melomys** in a vine thicket, that obligingly froze for photos, as this species is apt to do.

It was getting quite late, so I abandoned my quest to spotlight Duck Creek Road and concentrated on the area already spotlighted that had been so productive. I saw additional **Short-eared Brushtails** and managed to find a second **Fawn-footed Melomys** in a vine thicket closer to the track which also froze. Happy with the mammal count for the night, and that nothing had pissed on me, I turned in bleary-eyed.

Fawn-footed Melomys.



Finally, on the third night I could put off the Duck Creek Rd spotlight no longer. Firstly through, I checked the Booyong Boardwalk but found it disappointingly quiet. I then had a quick spotlight in the picnic area opposite O'Reilly's and couldn't believe it when I found a **Dingo** sitting at the edge of the path! As it moved off rapidly into the bush it disturbed a **Long-nosed Bandicoot** that legged it towards me sneezing in alarm making me laugh out loud. Wow this was beginning to look like good night.

At Duck Creek Road I parked the car and immediately picked up a **Short-eared Brushtail**, **Ringtail Possum** and **Bush Rat** in the vicinity of the car! As I walked down the road I was definitely making quite a racket as my shoes hit the stone but I still managed great views of two **Long-nosed Bandicoots**, a **Fawn-footed Melomys**, again in a vine thicket, and both **Ringtail** and **Short-eared Brushtail Possums**.

As I approached the ecotone between habitats the bank to left of the track falls away sharply giving the height advantage. I could hear thumps and I was unsure whether this sound was large gliders hitting tree trunks or whether it was just **Red-legged Pademelons** stamping their foot in alarm.

I got movement in my spotlight and watching a **Glider** perform a glide landing on the trunk of a tree, which with the height advantage I had I was able to get a photo.

Sugar Glider.



As I passed into eucalypt woodland I got eye shine from a large animal in a low tree and was surprised to find it belonged to a **Koala**, not a species I had considered that night.

Koala.



It felt like a long return trip to the car but mammal numbers remained good and I picked up a further two **Sugar Gliders**, another **Long-nosed Bandicoot**, a further two **Bush Rats** and finally a **Brown Antechinus** back at the junction with Lamington NP Road.

After my forced itinerary re-shuffle, I decided on a fourth night at O'Reilly's. The final night of spotlighting gave a **Bush Rat** and **Long-nosed Bandicoot** on the Booyong, then when I had a spotlight on the first 500m of Duck Reach Rd to the end of the farmers field I saw two **Long-nosed Bandicoots** and two **Bush Rats**. Finally spotlighting Morans Falls walk I added a **Sugar Glider**.

A common rainforest inhabitant spotlighted every night was the cool the **Leaf-tailed Gecko**, also every night at O'Reilly's, on every spotlight, there were microbats on the wing.

Leaf-tailed Gecko on tree trunk.



O'Reilly's after my initial reservations had revealed itself as a fabulous place to spend time wildlife watching. Not only is there a good suite of mammals but the birds, frogs and reptiles were legendary too. However, if I was to visit O'Reilly's again I would avoid busier weekends.

Branell Homestead Thurs 12th – Friday 13th Oct

My next destination was marvellous Branell Homestead near the town of Laidley in the Lockyer Valley, a venue pioneered by Mike Hoit on his trip to Queensland. I was interested in this location primarily for its **Whip-tailed Wallabies**, although I was to discover Branell had much more to offer.

The property was incredibly scenic and the accommodation out of this world, perched on top of a steep hill with superlative views. The accommodation was modern and immaculate.

What a view! Branell Homestead – Lockyer Valley.



On arrival, I got a personal run down of the place, then when I explained I was there to see wildlife I was told of recent sightings on the property, which included a **Koala** and an unknown species of **Bandicoot** on Paroz Road. The property also contains a mango orchard and these would definitely be great for **Flying-foxes** in season (I was a little early.)

The property contains not only open field but also an area of eucalypt woodland behind the homestead that I couldn't wait to explore. It proved a hotspot for **Wallabies** with **Whip-tailed Wallabies**, **Red-necked Wallabies** and **Swamp Wallaby**. The **Whip-tailed** and **Red-necked Wallabies** come out of the woodland to graze around the homestead late afternoon and it is easy to see how the **Whiptails** acquired their other name of **Pretty-faced Wallaby**.

Whip-tailed (Pretty Faced) Wallaby.



That night I decided it was to be brief spotlight after four long nights spotlighting at O'Reilly's. I was going to toast a good vacation and the incredible view in front of me with a six-pack of beer on this warm night. I sat down to write up some notes and when I looked up there was the most incredible sunset.

Sunset Branell Homestead.



There were lots of **Brushtails** around the homestead and up to the junction of Paroz Rd with Norfolk Rd during my short spotlight including the animal below that would have an interesting story to tell.

Pirate Brushtail Possum.



The following morning, a little dusty, I returned to the woodland behind the homestead to get a photo of a **Swamp Wallaby**, after two epic fails the previous afternoon.

I disturbed my third **Hare** of the trip as I walked across the property. I crept along the stony ridge behind the homestead and kept my eyes peeled but still managed to miss three of these **Wallabies** sat camouflaged right in front of me before they fled off, AArrrggghh!

Fortunately, further into the woodland I came across another individual and managed over half an hour to slowly creep up closer for a photo only moving when the animal put its head down to browse. I still managed to miss the second wallaby behind the first until I was very close, and how it had not seen me I'll never know but finally I was close enough to fire off a couple of shots.

Swamp Wallaby.



That morning after I checked-out I drove the roads in the hills behind the homestead looking for **Koalas**. Instead I got this fabulous and very large **Bearded Dragon** basking on the road tail held high. There were also many, many **Whip-tailed Wallabies** in surrounding properties even on what had turned into a 30C morning.

Bearded Dragon.



I returned to Brisbane to pick up Lorenz, who was over for a long weekend in the Queensland capital, but despite my best intentions to get out and spotlight a few sites in Brisbane I never quite made it. Nonetheless it had been a great mammal watching in a great location.