

Southern NSW and ACT mammal watching trip 27th Oct – 5th Nov 2017.

The basic plan for the trip was a couple of nights in Sydney, followed by four nights on the beautiful South coast of NSW, then finally three nights in Canberra. I used the David Andrews book "The complete guide to finding the mammals of Australia." Jon's mammal watching site was a bit thin on the ground for reports in these areas, but as always there was brilliant information from Jon himself. The Eurobodalla tourism website has a good section on wildlife of the area, finally, Jayden Walsh from the facebook group helped me plan the night spotlighting in Sydney so a massive thanks to him for his assistance.

Sydney – 2 nights (27th/28th Oct)

Of the two nights in Sydney I spotlighted only the Saturday night. The first site was Warriewood Wetlands (North Narembeen,) an hour from the city centre, the second site West Head Rd in Kuring-Gai Chase NP, approximately a 15 minute drive from the first site.

Despite being in the middle of suburbia Warriewood has good numbers of mammals and is very easy to navigate. I spent around an hour spotlighting here and saw a **Long-nosed Bandicoot**, four **Brushtail Possums**, four **Ringtail Possums** and four **Black Rats**. The **Rats** were all at the Northern end of the reserve near ponds and were mostly sighted climbing in the vegetation.

Ringtail Possum.



On the short drive to West Head Rd I passed a **Swamp Wallaby** grazing at the side of the road. West Head Rd is closed to traffic at night so I parked at the closed gate and walked the road to spotlight.

Almost as soon as I exited the car I came across a **Sugar Glider** feeding in a low tree next to the road, followed almost immediately by a second **Sugar Glider**. Both **Gliders** gave stellar views especially the second which obligingly froze. While I was taking photos, further along the road another camera was flashing.

When I passed the source of the flashing it was a herper with a wicked find! A **Bandy Bandy**!! This was a dream snake for me, and it didn't disappoint, even displaying its alarm posture of holding braced loops of body off the ground.

Bandy Bandy.



Further down the road the night got even better as I spotted a very diminutive mammal climbing a small tree. At first, I thought I had found a Feathertail Glider, but when the animal froze in the spotlight it was clear to see it was an **Eastern Pygmy Possum**. I had finally lost my Pygmy Possum virginity! The herper had also seen this species earlier in the night, so maybe West Head Road is a hotspot for this species.

Eastern Pygmy Possum.



Reluctantly I returned to the car, because the following morning was to be an early start driving South.

North Durras – 2 nights (29th/30th Oct)

North Durras is a small beach side township three and a half hours South of Sydney and 20 minutes North of Batemans Bay entirely within the confines of Murramarang NP. This NP spans 44kms of coastline and is one of the rare spots in Australia where spotted gums grow down to the ocean.

Murramarang NP.



North Durras consists of residential properties and a few caravan parks. The sole shop in town at the Durras Lake North Holiday Park where we stayed was only open at weekends.

There was an abundance of **Eastern Grey Kangaroos** around the caravan park indeed around the whole town. After checking in I drove to nearby Depot Beach and found **Eastern Greys** plentiful there also.

Eastern Grey Kangaroos.



While I was photographing the **Kangaroos**, I turned around to find I was being observed at close quarters by a **Swamp Wallaby**. Depot Beach and the surrounding forests are good for this species and I saw around ten individuals over the following two days.

That night was warm as I set out to see the nocturnal inhabitants of the forest. I spotlight the entrance road to town on a steep descent, to give myself the height advantage amongst what were very tall trees. Over the course of the evening I got eyeshine from six animals, three of which I was able to identify as **Greater Gliders**.

Unfortunately, due to the height of the trees, the views of these wonderful mammals were not the best, although I did see one animal glide a short distance.

Greater Glider.



During the evening there was a rustling from the forest floor and I wasn't surprised to find an **Echidna** on such a warm night.

Back at the campsite I had a quick look around before bed and found lots of **Brushtail Possums** and **Rabbits**.

The following day I drove to Pebbly Beach and walked the Durras Mountain walk. It was on this walk I finally found my first Alberts Lyrebird. The walk passes through typical vegetation for this part of the world, mostly dry eucalypt forest interspersed with patches of rainforest. Nearer the summit the forests give way to bracken and it was here I found both **Eastern Grey Kangaroos** and **Red-necked Wallabies** abundant.

Red-necked Wallaby.



Returning to Pebbly Beach late afternoon there were plenty of **Swamp Wallabies** throughout the forest.

That night Lorenz and I drove into Batemans Bay for a pub meal and afterwards went to the Round Hill site south of Batemans Bay mentioned by Jon Hall.

The turnoff to the site is a few kilometres South of Durras and the turnoff road is called The Ridge Road. Immediately after turning onto this road bear right onto a road referred to as Cpt 138/1 Rd on google maps and ascend steeply.

At the fire tower/communications tower we had a quick spotlight but instead of the **Yellow-bellied Gliders** Jon heard we found a **Sugar Glider**.

Sugar Glider.



Back at Murrumurung NP I had a quick spotlight of the road descending to Pebbly Beach and saw two **Brushtail Possums** high up in the canopy. At the Caravan Park there was sadly a **Fox** prowling around the cabins. Both nights there had been good numbers of **Microbats**.

Tanja Lagoon Camp – 2 nights (31st Oct / 1st Nov)

The next stop a further two hours South was Tanja Lagoon Camp within Mimosa Rocks NP. The reason for visiting this site was the **Yellow-bellied Gliders** resident on the property, although other wildlife is common too, and during our visit there were all of **Eastern Grey Kangaroos, Swamp Wallabies, Brushtail Possums** and an **Echidna** seen at the camp, plus a great suite of birds, frogs and reptiles.

We knew that **Wombats** occurred in the area because we had unfortunately passed roadkill shortly before arriving. One of the owners, Loz, informed us Dr George Mountain Rd to Bega was also good for this species as well as the occasional **Koala**.

The fabulous accommodation was in luxury eco-tents and Loz was keen to pass on information regarding the wildlife on the property, especially the **Gliders**. There are walking tracks the short distance to the coast and Middle Beach, where wildlife is also very accessible.

The first night following advice I spotlighted the patch of rainforest behind the main house. High up in a spotted gum I got red eyeshine the like of which I had never seen before.

Investigating the eyeshine, I picked up a Possum-like mammal sitting on a branch high up in a spotted gum. From where I was standing, I was not able to make a definite identification by sight. However, the description in Menkhorst and Knight of “Dull red eye-shine” was enough to convince me of my first sighting of **Yellow-bellied Gliders** at the camp.

The night air is filled with the calls of these wonderful sounding **Gliders** and it is clear that they fill the forest surrounding the camp. I also saw five **Brushtails** on the first night spotlighting.

The following morning near a pond on the property there was a beautiful **Red-bellied Black Snake** warming itself in the morning sunshine.

Red-bellied Black Snake.



Lorenz and I walked the short track to Middle Beach on the coast the following afternoon, and there at the campground we found an **Echidna** busily foraging along a gravel road. The **Echidna** being Lorenz’s favourite mammal it was mandatory for us to sit and observe this amiable mammal until it eventually disappeared up a stormwater drain.

Echidna.



We spoke with resident campers at the campground, and they informed us of **Wallabies** and **Kangaroos** at the campground late afternoon.

Later in the day we had a drive around the surrounding area and had no trouble seeing **Red-necked Wallabies** on surrounding properties.

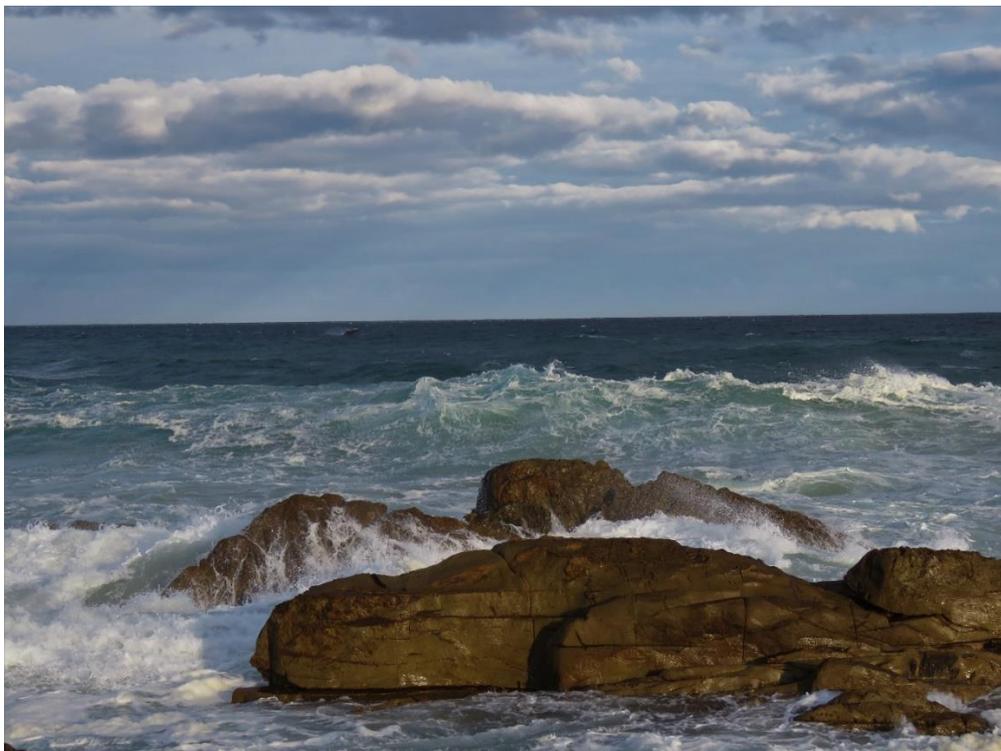
Back at the Middle Beach Campground the **Macropods** were out grazing. There were **Eastern Grey Kangaroos** and **Swamp Wallabies** in good numbers and obviously accustomed to humans.

Swamp Wallaby with Joey.



I wandered down to the beach to take photos in the late afternoon light and was rudely photobombed by a migrating **Humpback Whale**.

Photobombing Humpback Whale. (See the tiny black dot in the distance, no not there, just behind, a little further back, back further, there, that miniscule speck, that's a Humpback Whale!)



The second night we were sitting by the fire outside our tent listening to the superb calls of the **Yellow-bellied Gliders** in the surrounding forest when there was a call from very nearby. When I investigated there was a **Yellow-bellied Glider** sitting on a branch 6m above the ground not 70m from our tent!

Disturbed by my spotlight, the **Glider** scurried up to the top of the tree and then performed an impressive glide 40m into another tree, which it also scurried up before peering down at us far below. What a cool sighting! **Brushtail Possums** and **Microbats** were also in good numbers that night as per the previous night.

Canberra – 3 nights (2nd,3rd,4th Nov)

The drive from Tanja to Canberra was a lovely one through the highlands and we managed to spot an **Echidna** and **Swamp Wallaby** on the way. A long-time friend Barry, an expert on Oxford Street Bears, had flown down from Sydney and we rented an Airbnb apartment near Commonwealth Park in Canberra.

I hoped to see **Rakali** whilst in Canberra and on the first evening Barry and I made the short walk to Nerang Pool at Commonwealth Park to look for them and any **Platypus** that might have been around. We got neither but there was a colony of **Grey-Headed Flying Foxes** easily found to the West of Nerang pool next to Stage 88.

Two of the three mornings I was in Canberra I visited the beautiful Jerrabomberra Wetlands at the Eastern end of Lake Burley Griffin. I had no trouble finding **Eastern Grey Kangaroos** there both mornings, but again a distinct lack of **Rakali / Platypus**. The birds were great though and Latham Snipe were present during my visit, kindly pointed out by a birder.

The third morning I visited both the Eco Pond at Norgrave Park and Sullivans Creek where it empties into Lake Burley Griffin but again there were no **Rakali / Platypus**. **Rabbits** however, were in plague proportions at the University Campus, where I parked the car to visit Sullivans Creek.

One afternoon we made the 24km drive from Canberra out to Tidbinbilla NR. Tidbinbilla is a mix of both wild and captive mammals, annotated (w) and (c) for this article. **Eastern Grey Kangaroos (w/c)** **Red-necked Wallabies (w)** and **Swamp Wallabies (w/c)** were easily found throughout the park.

We explored the “Eucalypt Forest” enclosure where there are plenty of captive **Swamp Wallabies, Koalas** and **Long-nosed Potoroos** and unexpectedly a **Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby (c)** (this species is supposedly housed in another enclosure.)

The “Eucalypt Forest” is a big enclosure and the 1.8km “Peppermint Trail” entirely within this enclosure is the best place to spot the **Potoroos**. Although these are captive animals, the large size and natural habitat within the compound made viewing the **Potoroos** an authentic experience, and there were very high numbers of this species during our late afternoon visit.

The boys were keen to see **Platypus** and I was still after my **Rakali** so we stopped off at “The Sanctuary.” This series of connected ponds along with a weir and dam contain **Platypus** (w) and **Rakali** (w) as well as **Brush-tailed Rock Wallabies** (c.)

Our visit was late in the day and as the sun dipped below the Brindabella Range a **Platypus** broke the surface of Pond 4. This was followed by a second animal shortly after and then as we headed for the exit we spotted a third **Platypus** at pond 2. The boys were delighted but I had to face the fact that my dip on the ACT **Rakali** was complete!

Platypus.



I had a spotlight two of the nights I was in Canberra, both on Mt Ainslie. It was easy to see **Red-necked Wallabies** on the access road both nights. The area around the summit was fairly productive with an **Eastern Grey**, **Brushtail Possum** and **Sugar Glider** spotted but I found the most action on the Lower Beacon Track which starts half way down the mountain.

The first night I spotlighted the track after visiting the summit, and within only 300m return I saw two **Ringtail Possums** and two **Sugar Gliders** all providing excellent views.

Sugar Glider.



The second night I spotlighted the Lower Beacon Track I ventured further and saw five **Ringtails**, two **Brushtails** and a **Sugar Glider**.

Brushtail Possum.



The holiday finished with a drive back to Sydney and the long flight back to Perth.

The area covered in this report is not especially well renowned for its mammals, all of which can be seen elsewhere, but when you consider the good number and diversity of species seen in this short trip, and that the South Coast of NSW is especially good for marine mammals not covered in this report, it seems a visit to this area for anyone mammal watching would make good sense.