

Melbourne, Victoria, February 19-March 2, 2018

VLADIMIR DINETS

This was a work/family trip, so I had very little time for mammalwatching and saw only 29 native species. Before the trip I posted a RFI at Australian Mammal Watching group on Facebook; Tim Bauden replied and offered to show me some sites. Much of the info below was provided by him (thanks a lot!). We stayed in Clayton (an eastern suburb of Melbourne), so most of the sites mentioned are in that area. Avoid any driving in and around Melbourne 7:00-10:00 and 15:30-19:00. **Red fox** and **European rabbit** were present pretty much everywhere.

Monash University Campus in Clayton has a small, fenced-off nature reserve that you can cross by a footbridge (37.909935S 145.141028E). At night, bridgeside trees often have **eastern ringtail** and **common brushtail possums** and **black rats**, while **Australian marsh rats** occur in and around the pond below. At dusk, bats come to drink from the pool; the ones I saw with binoculars were **chocolate wattled bats** and **white-striped mastiff bats**.

Shepherds Bush Park was just 11 minutes away, so I spent a lot of time there, mostly looking for powerful owls that were said to be easy to find (I failed even with a thermal imager). **Eastern ringtail** and **common brushtail possums** and **black rats** were abundant; I also saw one **sugar glider**, a few **grey-headed flying foxes**, and one **house mouse**. There were bat boxes on trees along both forks of the trail that starts at 37.885139S 145.194220E and soon forks; the bats I saw emerging were **Gould's** and **chocolate wattled bats** and some much smaller species, likely **little forest bat**.

Bunyip State Park is a great place for **greater** and **yellow-bellied gliders**, but it took me three trips to see them (5 and 1, respectively, all on the third night). The secret was that they disappeared two-three hours after sunset. Try Mortimer Picnic Ground (used as a campsite on weekends) at 37.984307S 145.594809E. The gliders are very high in trees; bring a good light source and a birding scope. East of the picnic ground turnoff, the main road forks; the fork area (37.983683S 145.610961E) was good for **eastern grey kangaroos** and **fallow deer**, while both forks had many **common wombats**, mostly after 3 am. I also saw a few **swamp wallabies**, a **koala**, a **sugar glider**, three **large forest bats** night-roosting under a sheet of loose eucalyptus bark, and an **Australian bush rat**. Tim has seen **eastern pygmy possums** in the park.

Dandenong Ranges National Park is mostly tall forest. I tried Lyrebird Walk (37.886517S 145.370899E) one night and saw a few **mountain brushtail possums**, a **swamp wallaby**, and one **agile antechinus** at the first stream crossing (37.890192S 145.374823E). **Dusky antechinus** is also said to be present, but is brown rather than grey, and has shorter ears.

St. Kilda Pier is the best place to see **rakali** (formerly **Australian water rat**) at dusk. Watch from the penguin viewing platform (37.864686S 144.964796E). The rats are very tame and behave a lot like Eurasian water shrews. Flash photography is forbidden. I also saw an **austral myotis** that roosted under the side pier and fed low over the water.

Cranbourne Botanic Gardens have **Australian swamp rats** according to Tim. I visited on a hot sunny day and missed them.

Coranderrk Nature Conservation Reserve had lots of **koalas** (try the creek crossing at 37.685728S 145.527711E). There were two **eastern broad-footed bats** (I think) in a bat box at approximately the same coordinates. I also saw old **echidna** tracks, and the lake is said to have **rakali** and **Australian swamp rats**.

Yarra State Forest is a large area of partially logged forest east of Melbourne. Tim took me to Big Creek Rd. east of Powelltown to see **Leadbeater's possums**; we found three and got good looks at one, but Tim said that on some nights you can easily find a lot more. Search the areas with lots of roadside shrubs before and after Starlings Gap Campground (37.814384S 145.800480E). There were lots of **mountain brushtail possums**, a few **eastern ringtail possums**, one **eastern pygmy possum**, a **swamp wallaby**, and two **sambar deer**. Dozens of bats were flying along roads; I've never seen so many in a temperate forest. Tim had a bat detector and recorded **large**, **southern** and **little forest bats**, **Gould's** and possibly **chocolate wattled bats**, **eastern falsistrelle**, **white-striped mastiff bat**, and possibly one species of **long-eared bat**. The falsistrelle is much larger than others; the mastiff bat is the only species in the area with audible light calls, and occasionally you can see the white side stripes if it makes a sharp turn in front of you; the other species are difficult to identify visually in flight. Tim has also seen **greater** and **feathertail gliders** there.

Euroa is a small town in north-central Victoria. Tim instructed me to park near the corner of Drysdale Rd. and Angle Rd. (36.752446S 145.504424E) and spotlight on foot up Angle Rd. I spent four hours there and saw lots of **eastern ringtail possums** (mostly juveniles), a few **common brushtail possums**, two **squirrel gliders**, one **sugar glider**, one **brush-tailed phascogale**, tree **black rats**, one **Norway rat**, and a **lesser long-eared bat** (night-roosting in a hollow tree). There were also lots of **white-striped mastiff bats** flying along the edge of the field, and many interesting birds.

Western Treatment Plant, the best birding site in Australia, reportedly has lots of **fat-tailed dunnarts** in coastal dunes. Day access is easy to arrange (<http://www.birdlifemelbourne.org.au/birdingsites/wtp-birding.html>), but at night you can get to the dunes in just one area (38.027291S 144.564346E) and I didn't see any dunnarts there, only a few **European hares**.

Marine Adventure Experiences (<http://www.dolphin-swims.com.au/tours/seal-dolphin-swims/>) run snorkeling trips from Queenscliff where you can swim with **Burrnan dolphins** and **Australian fur seals**, but for various reasons we couldn't book them until our last day and they were sold out.