

## South west Western Australia : March 2023 : a mammal watching report and species list

With a flight credit from Qantas that had to be used before April, I booked this trip some months ago, with four distinct must-sees in mind : Quokka, Numbat, Orca and Honey Possum.

Sun 5<sup>th</sup>

Flying across the continent east -> west, I had the advantage of three extra hours of daylight after landing so picked up the rental car (Mercedes-Benz!!!) at Perth Airport and drove the half hour to Bibra Lake on the eastern outskirts of Fremantle to look for my first target : the Quenda (aka Southern Brown Bandicoot). Patrolled around the tracks of the reserve, buoyed by the many signs warning drivers of bandicoots crossing local roads. Lots of good views of Forest Red-tailed Black Cockatoo calling in the trees, but only a quick scampering in the undergrowth in the dusk mammal-wise. After a quick dinner I was back out walking along the lake foreshore when I saw a **Quenda** beneath the wooden platform I was standing on, digging into the soil looking for his own dinner.



Quenda at Bibra Lake foreshore

Mon 6<sup>th</sup>

This was always going to be an easy score. Ferry ride over to Rottnest Island to see the habituated Quokka. Public Holiday Monday so there were lots of other day-trippers heading over as well. Not quite inundated by friendly selfie-seeking quokka as soon as I stepped off the boat but just outside the town centre along Digby Drive there was a small clump of fig trees with two **Quokka** happily munching on fallen figs. They seemed unperturbed to have me sit nearby and watch them tuck in.



Further wanderings around the eastern portion of the island found more quokka under the trees along Geordie Bay Rd. (past the golf course), at the café at Geordie Bay, and along the shore of Garden Lake.

Also saw Caspian Tern, Australian Shelduck and Grey Teal at Herschel Lake while walking along Geordie Bay Rd.

Tue 7<sup>th</sup> – Thurs 9<sup>th</sup>

The next three nights were based at Dryandra Woodland National Park. I stayed in the smallest cottage at the Lions Woodland Village which was excellent value. I was greeted by a mob of **Western Grey Kangaroo** lazing around behind the village in the lunchtime heat, and attractive Australian Ringneck Parrots torpedoing across the sky between the gum trees.

I've read on other reports that the best way to spot numbats is to slowly drive the 2WD-accessible dirt tracks watching for movement and if you flush a numbat, watch closely which fallen tree they hide in, and wait patiently near that log until they reappear. In general terms this is very good advice but despite several hours of driving, the only numbats I saw was when I actually walked the trails instead : one **Numbat** along the sandy track on the Wandoo walk extension, and another on the trail behind Magpie Cottage leading away from the village beside the open grassy meadow.



Numbat

Also visible at dusk was **the Short-beaked Echidna** (the subspecies *T. aculeatus acanthion*, which has a shorter snout than other varieties), and during night walks, **Common Brushtail Possum** (some with the white tail tip that their eastern cousins don't have), and **Brush-tailed Bettongs (Woylie)** – more on them later. I was invited on a drive with the village caretakers to look for numbats which was unsuccessful although we did get a very quick glance of a **Yellow-footed Antechinus (Mardo)** before it disappeared into a tree hollow. The forest here also has **Black-gloved Wallaby** and **Red-tailed Phascogale**, both of which I wanted to see but missed this time.

On the Wednesday night I had booked into the night time visit to the nearby Barna Mia Sanctuary to see the very endangered species being kept in 2 predator-secure 4 hectare enclosures. At the time of my visit they had **Woylie, Mala (Rufous Hare Wallaby)** and **Boodie (Burrowing Bettong)** as well as **Quenda**. The residents quickly came scurrying up to us as they are fed by the staff on visitor nights (the Sanctuary is only open certain nights in the week), so it didn't feel wild at all, but gave me a good look at the Woylies which I could only get distant views in the forest at night. There are also **Bilby** at Barna Mia but they were too shy to approach us.

I also had a good look at two Quenda while sharing a drink with the village caretakers on their lawn earlier that evening.



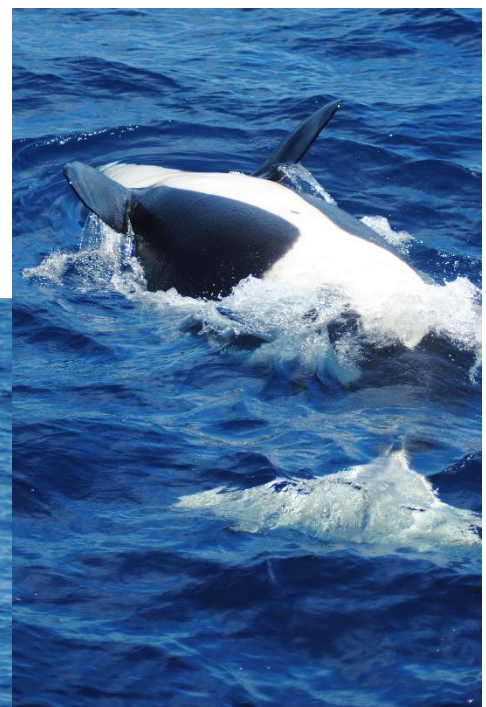
Sat 11<sup>th</sup>

Drove down to Bremer Bay on the Friday ready for my booked boat trip out to the continental shelf drop-off to look for Orca with Naturaliste Charters. At this time of year it seems Orca are almost guaranteed (and you will get a second trip if no Orca are seen). It is also possible to see some pelagic seabirds and often an extra guest star Cetacean species. Later trips that week scored **Sperm Whales** and **Long-finned Pilot Whales**, as well as a Mako shark.

Our trip was not even past the headland when a whale spout was seen. Initially assumed to be a very early Humpback Whale, once binoculars were focused it turned out to be a Pygmy **Blue Whale**! We couldn't get too close but I got enough of a view and some photos to feel justified in adding it to my lifelist (although I will certainly be hoping to see them again)



Further out, we finally got to see a small pod of 6 **Orca**, slowly cruising about our boat. They demonstrated tail slapping, spy-hopping and one came under the boat and rolled on her back at our bow, showing us her extended belly – looks like an addition to the pod is on its way!



Heading back to shore after a very successful day, we were escorted some of the way by a pod of **Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphins** (smaller and paler than the Common Bottlenose Dolphin) and then spied on some **Australian Sea Lions** lazing on the rock of Glasse Island as we cruised back to port. Also seen were Flesh footed Shearwater skimming their wingtips along the water surface, and Wandering Albatross floating peacefully on the waves.



Sun 12<sup>th</sup> - Tue 14<sup>th</sup>

Across the coast a little to Cheynes Beach for two nights at the local Caravan Park where the adjacent Alpenteur Nature Reserve is a hotspot for Honey Possum (Noolbenger). 2 minutes' walk from my cabin next morning and I was surrounded by headhigh *Banksia baxteri* bushes laden with full blooms. I did spy a few **Honey Possums** among the leaves on the first morning between 6 and 8 am, but the second morning was even more successful with a good half-dozen easily visible, including at least two on the same bush. Quite a size difference from the Blue Whale!



Cheynes Beach is also known for the three 'skulkers' : the holy grail of Australian bird watchers, all found in this area : the Noisy Scrub-bird, the Western Bristlebird and the Western Whipbird. I did not knowingly see any of these but I did see lots of New Holland Honeyeaters on the banksias and occasionally divebombing the Honey Possums.



I was less successful at Two Peoples' Bay in between, trying unsuccessfully for **Gilbert's Potoroo**. I knew this was always a long shot but no try, no pie; and besides it was a beautiful bay with an interesting place in history. I did see a Western Ringtail Possum near the visitor centre as I left but it was too far away from the track to see clearly in torchlight. Knowing I would have other chances of this one, I moved on.

Wed 15<sup>th</sup>

A couple of nights around the Tone and Perup forests near Manjimup looking particularly for Brush-tailed (or Black-Gloved) Wallabies, but they still eluded me. Lake Muir looked completely dry, and despite thorough searching around the scrub during the day and along the roads at night, I failed to turn up any wallabies. There were **Western Grey Kangaroos, Common Brushtail and Western Ringtail Possums, Woylies, Southern Brown Bandicoots, an Echidna, European Rabbits, and a Red Fox**, but no wallabies 😞

Thur 16<sup>th</sup>

Over to Busselton on the west coast. A morning spent on the 1.6 km Busselton pier and the Underwater Observatory at the far end of the pier where I walked down three small flights of stairs to look out at a wealth of marine invertebrates and fish living on and around the pier footings in 11m of clear blue water.

That night I went out to the Tuart Forest to walk the promisingly named Possum Spotlighting Trail (I kid you not) where I successfully found three **Western Ringtail Possum**, who froze so still when the light hit them I was initially in doubt they were actually alive 😊. Also some low flying microbats (probably **White-striped Freetail Bats**) near the car park.



Western Ringtail Possum

Fri 17<sup>th</sup>

A final night with thermal scope and spotlight at Nanga Mill campground south of Dwellingup for **Western Quoll** (Chudditch). But the campground is very popular with weekend campers from Perth who obviously felt they simply had to fill the night with loud music so this was unsuccessful except for some more microbats.

So in summary, for mammals I managed 8 lifers, along with another 7 definite species and 2 probables which I won't count for myself just yet. Satisfyingly, my four most wanted species were all found

### **Mammals found**

Southern Brown Bandicoot (Quenda)  
Quokka  
Western Grey Kangaroo  
Brush-tailed Bettong (Woylie)  
Short-beaked Echidna  
Numbat  
Common Brushtail Possum  
Yellow-footer Antechinus (Mardo) (*probably*)  
Blue Whale (Pygmy subspecies)  
Orca  
Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphin  
Australian Sea Lions  
Honey Possum (Noolbenger)  
Western Ringtail Possum  
European Rabbit  
Red Fox  
White-striped Freetail Bat (*probably*)

*Additional mammals seen at Barna Mia Sanctuary*

*Mala*

*Burrowing Bettong (Boodie)*

### **Mammals missed included**

Brush-tailed Wallaby (aka Black Gloved Wallaby)  
Red-tailed Phascogale  
Western Quoll (Chudditch)

### **Birds that vied for attention while I was looking for mammals**

Australian Raven  
Forest Red-tailed Black Cockatoo (Bibra Lake)  
Silver Gull  
Caspian Tern (Rottnest Island)  
Australian Shelduck (Rottnest Island)  
Grey Teal (Rottnest Island)  
Australian Ringneck Parrot (Dryandra, Cheynes)  
Grey Currawong (Dryandra)  
Flesh Footed Shearwater  
Wandering Albatross  
New Holland Honeyeater (Cheynes)  
Common Bronzewing (Cheynes)

### **Herps that made a shy appearance**

Common Garden Skink (Cheynes)