

Australia- June 22-July 9, 2026

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Part I: Sydney and Kangaroo Valley

Our journey started in Sydney and we spent our first morning exploring Royal Botanic Gardens to find our first Australian birds. Before we even arrived, it was obvious Australian ibis are ubiquitous in this metro area- just as much as rock pigeons are in the United States. Once we started walking around in the gardens we were delighted by the sounds and colors of the local species, many which we found out were very common throughout our trip. Highlights included two playful kookaburras, a large and noisy flock of sulphur-crested cockatoos, rainbow lorikeets, little pied cormorant, masked lapwings and white-faced heron. Additionally, the views of the harbor and the Opera House from the gardens are outstanding.

At 10 am, we boarded the bus downtown to start our journey to Kangaroo Valley. We booked a kangaroo and wombat tour through Perfect Day Sydney (<https://www.perfectdaysydney.com.au/wild-wombat-and-kangaroo-tour>). Our guide Dave was fantastic and very personable with keen knowledge of Australia's wildlife and how to find it. Our first stop was Sublime Point Lookout, where we not only found a beautiful look out at the coast but also a surprise sighting of two peregrine falcons (a lifer.) We also found grey butcherbird, superb fairywren and red wattlebird.

While driving to our next stop, we entered forest habitat and got a fleeting glimpse at a superb lyrebird. We also discovered our love for Tim-Tams (the Australian equivalent of oreos.) After stopping at a delicious pie shop, we took a walk around Fitzroy Falls and found our first crimson rosella and beautiful views of the area's largest waterfall. As the landscape turned to grassland, we began to see our first mobs of **eastern grey kangaroos**. With twilight coming soon, it was time to head to Bendeela camping grounds and have the first proper mammal watching of the trip.



When driving into Bendeela campsite, we encountered a mob of kangaroos including one with a joey. We discovered wild kangaroos behave like deer- they stare at you then hop away. Once we

parked, we found our first of dozens of **bare-nosed wombats**, who had recently come out of their burrows and started grazing. Wombats are fascinating behaviorally as they are very social in their burrows but relatively solitary once outside. At Bendeela, they are super habituated and allowed us to get very close (although we made a point to always stay 6 meters away.) Walking around we found a **swamp wallaby**, a few **red-necked wallabies**, more kangaroos and kookaburras. Highlights included having a wombat walk towards us and seeing another with a joey. On our way back to the city, we ate at a local pub and stargazed.



I cannot recommend Dave and Perfect Day Sydney enough and Bendeela is a must for anyone coming to Australia. As far as I know, it is hands down the best place to see wombats in mainland Australia and on par with the viewing in Tasmania. Here you are guaranteed amazing sightings of this often-elusive animal as well as plenty of macropods. The only disappointment of the tour was we learned we would have certainly seen echidna if we had come during the summer but sightings are few and far between this time of year. Only more reason to come back!

While large marsupials are absent in the city, we managed to find plenty of wildlife specials during our three days in Sydney. For the next two mornings, I spent a few hours birding in Centennial Park. During the first outing, I found black swan, long-billed corella, Australian swamphen, Eurasian coot, Australasian darter and the park's famous colony of **grey-headed flying fox** in addition to many of the species seen in the Royal Botanic Gardens. The second day

was even more special with sightings including tawny frogmouth, royal spoonbill, Australian pelican and crested pigeon.



When walking around the Taronga Zoo, we found an abundance of Australian brushturkey and we got a distant view of a white-bellied sea eagle soaring over the harbor when we left. An after dark visit to Hyde Park found a very habituated **brushtail possum** (looking more like a bushbaby than an American opossum.) A late morning visit to the Chinese Garden delivered a handful of Australian water dragons basking in the sun (some of the very few reptiles of the trip as they tend to hide away during the winter.) Last but not least, after a few failed attempts found Benny, a local celebrity **long-nosed fur seal** who often hauls out on the steps of the Sydney Opera House. Next up- our cruise which took us to three different ports in Queensland.

Part II: Queensland

Our first port in Queensland was Airlie Beach, where we immediately began the rocky two hour boat ride to our vessel to snorkel in the Great Barrier Reef. The only living thing that can be seen from space, it is a sight to behold. While I will admit the color palette of the coral is browner than Finding Nemo makes you believe, the amount of biodiversity is stunning and the water was perfectly warm even in winter.

We started with a guided snorkeling tour where we found among others several species of butterflyfish/parrotfish/damselfish, six-banded angelfish, Napoleon wrasse, leopard coral grouper, giant clams, feather star and a wide variety of coral. When snorkeling on our own, we found an

even wider variety of fish as well as a close encounter with a green sea turtle. After a lot of effort, I was able to find two clownfish in an anemone deep in the water.

I highly recommend any serious wildlife watchers do guided snorkeling when coming to the reef as otherwise the biodiversity is overwhelming and you'll feel you're missing half of what's around you. This was a truly special day we'll never forget.



Our next port was Cairns, where we embarked on a day tour of the Atherton Tablelands. We were very keen to see the rare iconic animals endemic to the region or that we were highly unlikely to see down south: platypus, tree kangaroo, cassowary, and pademelon. However, since many mammals are nocturnal and we had to be back to the boat by 5, we knew it would be a challenge.

Upon arriving in Cairns, we found some new birds: Australasian figbird and a Sahul brush cuckoo. Our first stop at White Rock got us up close to a mob of **agile wallaby** grazing in a vacant plot. Above us, flocks of rainbow lorikeet and double-eyed fig parrot whizzed by, while masked lapwing, willie wagtail and bush thick-knee patrolled the ground. We tried our luck for cassowary at the top of the Gillies Range, to no avail, and as rain set in at Lake Barrine we narrowly missed a musky-rat kangaroo. We did get a great view of a wompoo fruit-dove nesting in the mid-story, and a solitary Australasian grebe on the lake.

Next up we headed to Nerada Tea House to look for tree kangaroos. Rain kept the tree kangaroos away, but we were fortunate enough to find a sleeping **green ringtail possum** which, on closer inspection, had a joey on her back. The rain continued through Malanda Falls, and only began to ease once we reached Yungaburra.



Shortly after making our way to the big bend, we spotted our first target: a pair of **platypus**. They surfaced at various points as we worked down the creek, emerging briefly before scurrying up into a burrow (my wife got a great view of it waddling on land.) They are much smaller than imagined and relatively quick in their movements. While the platypus did not necessarily pose for great pictures, being able to observe their behavior was amazing and we got a decent look at the face. Yungaburra along with Eungella in Queensland are the best places to find platypus in mainland Australia as they tend to be more diurnal and habituated here.



Along the way we also had good views of forest kingfisher, spectacled monarch, pied monarch, pale-yellow robin and orange-footed megapode. On the way back, a side track took us to a

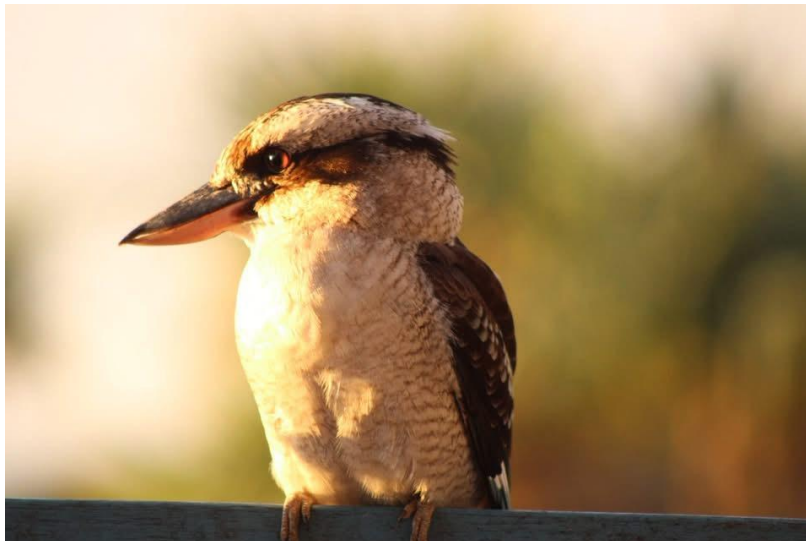
red-legged pademelon, which bounded briefly across the path and behind a big tree. Another target achieved, and time to move on for lunch.

We found a large colony of endangered **spectacled flying foxes** in a roost along the Barron River, giving us great views of another of the region's mammals. We drove up Black Mountain Road for one more try to find cassowary, but with time running short we began our descent back to Cairns. We could have reliably seen cassowary if we made it down to Etty Bay or Mission Beach but this would have cannibalized all the time looking for other species.

With a little time remaining, we stopped at the famous Cairns Esplanade, which never disappoints. Straight away we had wonderful views of sacred kingfisher, varied honeyeater, little heron and eurasian whimbrel.

We highly recommend Kingfisher Birding as we found the guiding to be strong and they put in great effort in finding us our target species. We were disappointed to miss cassowary and tree kangaroo but understand we would have needed more time and look forward to returning to the Tablelands in the future. It is a must see for any serious wildlife/birdwatchers as there are so many endemic species in the region not found in other parts of Australia.

We finished off the Queensland trifecta of ports with Moreton Island, located on the shore of Moreton Bay outside of Brisbane. When we came to the pier, we found a few cownose rays in the sand below and an abundance of bush stone-curlews and pied cormorants. Moreton Island feels like an Australian version of Hawaii and has a great tropical vibe. Later in the day, we found Australian pelican, whistling kite, noisy friarbird and some very habituated kookaburras.



During a glass bottom boat ride of the wrecks, we had close encounters with two green sea turtles as well as a variety of fish and sea stars. There is a resident male dugong in the area but

we did not see it (most of the population nests on sea grass in the inaccessible southern shores of the island.)

The highlight of the day was going on a whale-watching tour. Around 46,000 **humpback whales** come off the shores of Moreton Island every winter from Antarctica to give birth. While we have done several whale watching tours in the United States, we have never seen such an abundance or gotten so close. A juvenile whale even mugged our boat, swimming under it and surfacing on the side multiple times. We got an amazing view of the face and could even look them in the eye. Additionally, we found a pod of **Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphins** and another green sea turtle.



Part 3: Victoria

After docking in Sydney, we took a short flight down to Melbourne to start the Victoria part of our trip. The first morning I birded in Yarra Bend National Park, where I found an enormous colony of flying foxes and the first Eastern rosellas and red-rumped parrots of the trip among others. The next day we headed out to Healesville, seeing several mobs of eastern gray kangaroos in the fields on the train.



We started a day in Healesville hiking through dense forest at Badger Weir Park, hoping to find lyrebirds. We only found sounds but did find crimson rosellas, a red-browed treecreeper and an Eastern yellow robin. This was the most hardcore and muddy physical activity of the trip. While touring Healesville Sanctuary, we found plenty of birds including more galahs, rainbow lorikeets, swamphens and common bronzewing. Afterwards we went over to a friend's house and found plenty of Eastern gray kangaroos, rosellas, gallahs, little and red wattlebirds and straw-necked ibis in their yard.

After dark, we went spotlighting and found two **ring-tailed possums** at close range. Like the green ringtails we already saw, they have a stark resemblance to lemurs. Then we went to Badger Weir and spotlighted on the road, finding six **greater gliders**. It was too dark to get good pictures but still really cool to see this endangered species.

One of the absolute highlights of the entire trip was the French/Phillip Islands tour booked with Sightseeing Tours Australia-
https://sightseeingtoursaustralia.com.au/tours/phillip-island-french-island-adventure/?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=23761633080&gbraid=0AAAAADsk3XTQXGkmBgMjBWPYg6ySJWMhl&gclid=Cj0KCQjwguLSBhDLARIsAH-yPrFuFuZkm0H5HsQqbtfpQKmbPR1Suzix2yFNzPGq2VIwuOK0QRekawQaAnD8EALw_wcB. This is a must do for anyone coming to Victoria as it guarantees amazing sightings of some of the area's most iconic animals. We boarded the bus in Sydney and then got on the ferry in Stony Point to go to French Island. French Island is home to only around 100 people but over 10,000 wild **koalas**. Within moments we found our first one and spotted almost two dozen during our few hours there. We were very fortunate to get up close

to a few individuals who were awake and active (at least as far as koalas go.) They were very habituated and did not seem bothered by our presence at all. The island is true wilderness- only dirt roads and very few amenities.



In addition to the koalas, we found an abundance of Cape barren geese, a barn owl, a few introduced peacocks, wedge tailed eagles, whistling kites and little eagles. Unfortunately, invasive **European rabbits** are everywhere especially as there are no predators on the island to keep their population in check. In mid afternoon, we took the ferry over to Phillip Island. While driving around the island, we saw more Cape barren geese and swamp wallabies. Our first stop was the Nobbies Boardwalk, where we found several little penguins peeking out of their burrows right next to the boardwalk. During the day, these adorable birds either go out at sea or spend time in burrows to protect themselves from birds of prey. We also got a distant glimpse of the **brown fur seal** colony on Seal Island off shore.



For the grand finale of the evening, we headed over to the Penguin Parade. Fortunately we had paid extra for Penguin Plus which gets special, quieter seating right next to where the majority of the penguins come to shore. Before sunset, we saw a few more wallabies and geese as well as some more penguins. To avoid confusing or distressing the penguins photography of any kind is strictly prohibited after sunset so I have no pictures of the parade or anything after it. Almost immediately after sunset, a handful of penguins came out of their burrows to greet their friends about to come back to the burrows. Moments later, over 300 penguins in waves came to shore. While seating was required for the first ten minutes, afterwards we got to explore the boardwalk and be only glass away from the birds waddling to their burrows for an hour. Additionally, a brushtail possum was digging in the trash can and I was very lucky to see an **Eastern barred bandicoot** scurry on the shore.

It is worth saying this is the only part of the trip that felt very touristy. However, the staff interpretation of the event is well done and the experience is so amazing it is a small price to pay. After our hour, we headed on the bus back to Melbourne.

For our last full day in Australia, we headed out to Werribee to tour the world-class Werribee Open Range Zoo and do some birding. While at the zoo, we found two tawny frogmouth (including one awake) roosting in the parking lot as well as buff-banded rail, magpie-goose, red wattlebird and tons of dusky moorhens. After a wonderful half-day at the zoo, we headed first to Serendip Sanctuary to try to find the small population of emus that live there. While our search was initially slow and we almost gave up, we spotted some Eastern grey kangaroos in a field next to the parking lot on the way out and then noticed two emus at a distance nearby. What a great clutch sighting and very cool to see these ratites! Other Serendip highlights included lifers such as purple-crowned lorikeet, white-plumed honeyeater, weebill and white-winged clough.



For our last stop we headed to the Western Treatment Plant, a birding hotspot in Victoria. Our visit started out strong with great views of a beautiful flock of brolga cranes on the way in. We even got good views of them vocalizing and dancing. Then we drove around the treatment plant and found a wide variety of birds including new species such as musk duck, yellow-billed spoonbill, hoary-headed grebe, chestnut teal and pied oystercatcher. Much to the dismay of locals, European cottontails are everywhere here too. The grand finale of the drive was finding a flock of critically endangered orange-bellied parrots. Only just over 100 of these birds live in the wild and we were told in mammal terms seeing them is much rarer than finding a pangolin. We then headed back to Melbourne and flew home the next day feeling very satisfied.



I highly recommend Australia as the wildlife is completely unique from anywhere else in the world. It is a very different safari experience from Africa and Asia. For one thing, there is not the same market for multi-day wildlife focused tours so it's best to do a variety of half/full day tours and travel on your own to see target species. Also, it does not have quite the same feeling of being immersed in wilderness and being in a completely different culture. That being said, this comes to a benefit as wildlife destinations are often accessible to get to. Lastly, most of the animals are small and many are nocturnal so finding them can take more effort. However, the birding is superb and the mammals are unique and you can often get quite close to them so it is different in a good way. Since Australia is underrepresented on this site, happy to answer questions and correspond with anyone interested in going down under.

Species List

*= Lifer, I= Introduced

Mammals

Eastern Grey Kangaroo*- abundant in Kangaroo Valley and Healesville, a few in Serendip

Bare-Nosed Wombat*- abundant at Bendeela Campsite in Kangaroo Valley

Swamp Wallaby*- one at Bendeela Campsite in Kangaroo Valley, a handful in Phillip Island

Red-Necked Wallaby*- three individuals in Kangaroo Valley

Grey-Headed Flying Fox*- massive colonies at Centennial Park in Sydney and Yarra Bend in Melbourne

Brushtail Possum*- one individual at Hyde Park in Sydney and another at Phillip Island Penguin Parade

Agile Wallaby*- a large mob on the outskirts of Cairns

Green Ringtail Possum*- two individuals at Nerada Tree Plantation

Platypus*- two individuals seen well at Peterson Creek in Yungaburra

Red-Legged Pademelon*- briefly seen hopping n Yungaburra

Spectacled Flying Fox*- large colony in route from Atherton Tablelands to Cairns

Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphin*- small pod in Moreton Bay

Humpback Whale- several individuals seen outside Moreton Bay

Long-Nosed Fur Seal*- Sydney Harbor on steps of Opera House

Eastern Ring-Tailed Possum*- two individuals found spotlighting at private residence in Healesville

Greater Glider*- six individuals found spotlighting in Healesville at Badger Weir

Koala*- abundant on French Island

Brown Seal*- colony seen from a distance at Phillip Island Nobbies Boardwalk

Eastern Barred Bandicoot*- one individual at Penguin Parade

European Rabbit- I- abundant throughout Victoria

Birds

Little Penguin*

Emu*

Laughing Kookaburra*

Rainbow Lorikeet*

Sulphur-Crested Cockatoo*

Australian Ibis*

Noisy Miner*

White-Faced Heron*

Masked Lapwing*

Australian Magpie*

Pied Currawong*

Dusky Moorhen*

Maned Duck*

Little Black Cormorant*

Little Pied Cormorant*

Silver Gull*

Rock Pigeon- I

Common Myna- I

Peregrine Falcon*

Red Wattlebird*

Grey Butcherbird*

Crimson Rosella*

Galah*

Superb Fairywren*

Australian Raven*

Black Swan*

Long-Billed Corella*

Magpie-Lark*

Australian Swamphen*

Pacific Black Duck*

Eurasian Coot*

Willie Wagtail*

Australian Brushturkey*

White-Bellied Sea Eagle

Tawny Frogmouth*

Crested Pigeon*

Australian Pelican*

Royal Spoonbill*

Australasian Darter*

Hardhead*

Welcome Swallow*

Small Shearwater*

Australasian Figbird*

Sahul Brush Cuckoo*

Double-Eyed Fig Parrot*

Bush Stone-Curlew*

Australian Straw-Neck Ibis*

Wompoo Fruit Dove*

Brown Gerygone*

Australasian Grebe*

Forest Kingfisher*

Black Kite*

Satin Bowerbird*

Pale Yellow Robin*

White-Breasted Wood Swallow*

Peaceful Dove*

Sacred Kingfisher*

Varied Honeyeater*

Mackley's Honeyeater*

Pied Monarch*

Little Egret

Pied Stilt*

Red-Browed Finch*

Brown Booby*

Australian Pied Cormorant*

Eurasian Whimbrel*

Reef Heron*

Whistling Kite*

Brahminy Kite

Sooty Tern*

Great Crested Tern*

Noisy Friarbird*

Torresian Crow*

Australian Crow*

Spotted Dove- I

Eastern Rosella*

Red-Rumped Parrot*

Little Corella*

Little Raven*

Eastern Yellow Robin*

Red-Browed Treecreeper*

Superb Lyrebird* (just a glimpse and calls)

Common Bronzewing*

Brown Thornhill*

Little Wattlebird*

White-Browed Scrubwren*

Australian Shelduck*

Cape Barren Goose*

Eastern Barn Owl*

Swamp Harrier*

Wedge-Tailed Eagle*

Little Eagle*

Yellow-Faced Honeyeater*

Indian Peafowl- I

House Sparrow- I

Magpie-Goose*

Purple-Crowned Lorikeet*

White-Plumed Honeyeater*

Red-Browed Finch*

Weebill*

White-Winged Chough*

Buff-Banded Rail*

Brolga*

Black-Shouldered Kite*

Hoary-Headed Grebe*

Yellow-Billed Spoonbill*

Chestnut Teal*

Pied Oystercatcher*

Great Egret

Musk Duck*

Orange-Bellied Parrot*

Orange-Footed Megapode*

Spectacled Monarch*

Reptiles

Australian Water Dragon*

Green Sea Turtle

Irwin's Snapping Turtle*

Eastern Short-Necked Turtle*

Fish

Napoleon Wrasse*

Lemon Damsel*

Sixband Parrotfish*

Stephead Parrotfish*

Angelfish*

Black Spotted Butterflyfish*

Lined Butterflyfish*

Barred Rabbitfish*

Coral Trout*

Yellowtail Fusillier*

Zebrafish*

Green Sergeant*

Giant Trevally*

Clark's Anomefish*

Yellow Surgeonfish*

Foxface*

Rainford's Butterflyfish*

Swarthy Parrotfish*

Lesser Queenfish*

Convict Bleeny*

Bigeye Trevally*

Bleekers Parrotfish*

Cleaner Wrasse*

Pacific Bullethead Parrotfish*

White belly Damsel*

Whitney's Seargent*

Surf Parrotfish*

Bumphead Parrotfish*

Blue-Green Chromis*

Australian Cownose Stingray*

Leopard Coralgrouper*

Spangled Emperor*

Yellowfin Bream*

Graphic Turkfish*

Delicate Round Herring*