



## Tasmania (Australia fyi) – a quick missive

### Christmas/New years 2021-2022

After a couple of years of self-imposed isolation Australia suddenly opened up its doors and lo and behold, we get to learn what the 'living with covid' experience that the rest of the world has been dealing with is really like (cue confused government messaging and country-wide panic/disruption). Given, the general uncertainty with overseas travel, i think often self-imposed by our island isolation, we decided on a Christmas trip to Tasmania – in general a great place to see mammals in high volume with perhaps an indication of what the east coast of Australia may once have looked like (a long time ago).

*Overview:* Covid worked its magic and in the Christmas omicron panic Virgin chose to cancel our plane flight on the 27<sup>th</sup> and put us on a flight a day earlier on Boxing Day with two days notice. I mean delayed flights are no big deal but a whole day early was a major annoyance. The trip consisted of 12 days with three nights in Hobart, three nights at Mountain Valley Wilderness Lodge in the north, two nights at Green's Beach on the north coast, and finishing with three nights on Bruny Island.

*Targets:* I had seen most of the larger mammals but it has been a while so this was a photographic trip for me. There were a few birds i missed on my previous visit so these were VERY important to me as well (40 spotted pardalote I was looking at YOU). For my trusty accomplice Kat this was all new so everything was a bonus.

As noted above Tasmania is great for mammals – we had the super-abundant Rufous-bellied Pademelons appearing in the 'yard' of every place we stayed including the outer suburbs of Hobart (the capital). Brushtail Possums (of varying hues) and Red-necked Wallabies are similarly ubiquitous.

*The Guide to Tasmanian Wildlife* by Angus McNab is an excellent guide to all of the vertebrate taxa and includes locations where each species have some potential to be seen. To be fair we trod well worn paths so there aren't too many surprises here so I have just summarised each area below.

#### *Hobart*

Good daytime walks and birding to be had on Mount Wellington. There was actually bits of snow on the summit. Given it's summer in Australia that provides a good indication of how far latitudinally south we were. A side-trip to the MONA art gallery is definitely worth it. You won't like everything,

but you'd have to be an art-hating killjoy to not appreciate something there. The 'wall of vaginas' is still there.

We spent two nights spotlighting in the Waterworks Reserve located at the base of Mount Wellington, north Hobart. Summer spotlighting in Tasmania is hard as the sun doesn't really go down until 9:30 at night. A few nights of this gets wearing. Apart from the aforementioned wallabies, pademelons and Brushtail Possums we got several Eastern Barred Bandicoots and Ringtail Possum. Unfortunately there was no sign of Tasmanian Bettong which I had seen here on my previous trip. We may well have disturbed a Masked Owl (Tassie subspecies) here, given the odd noises we heard flashing up in the trees at one stage. The local small owl - Morepork (recently split from the mainland Boobook) - can only be found in Tasmania as well as New Zealand and a few southern islands. I had not actually seen one (although did hear) on my last trip so was very keen to line this one up. We heard at least two on both nights, one from quite close. Playing the call provided an indifferent response. This theme prevailed throughout the trip (much to my annoyance).



**Eastern Barred Bandicoot – Waterworks Reserve**



**Mammal themed artwork at MONA – quiet self reflection required....**

#### *Mountain Valley Wilderness Lodge (northern Tasmania)*

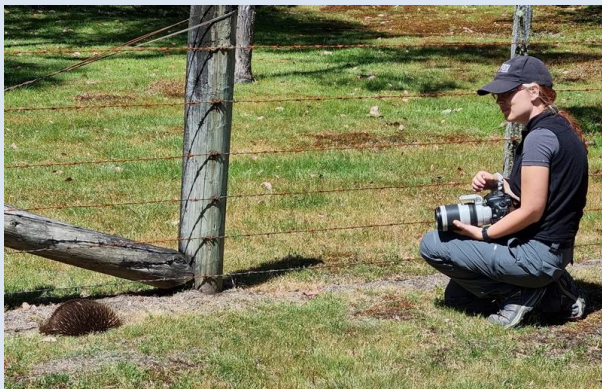
It's about a 4.5 hour journey through the scenic environs of the central plateau to get to the lodge. We picked up a Short-beaked Echidna by the side of the road at one stage. The number of road-killed pademelons give you an indication of just how common they still are (everywhere in fact). I had long wanted to visit this place in order to get up close and hopefully photograph a Tasmanian Devil, having only seen one from a distance on a road previously. My previous booking here coincided with the original onset of covid so got canned as the State closed its borders to all potential microbe carriers.

The owner puts out bits of chicken in front of your cabin at night and you can 'hopefully' watch Spotted-tail Quolls and Tasmanian Devils come in grab a free feed. There's Platypus in the local river but they stayed hidden while we were there by all accounts. We were there for three nights with the final night on new years eve. Our first night the place was only half occupied and we seemed to be the only cabin wanting chicken outside for some reason. The result was great with at least two different quolls turning up and a Tasmanian Devil came in a number of times. Unfortunately for the devil you have to keep the door closed and turn your lights out so it can't see you – they are that

skittish. I had a trail camera out and at least three different devils showed up through the night and I got some fine footage of a devil shitting in front of our cabin! An honour indeed.

The following night brought in a quoll who actually shows up before the meat is even out. The quolls aren't particularly shy at all and don't seem to mind if you're sitting there outside (something the owner didn't really communicate). A devil showed up much later according to the remote camera. The final night the place was full, everyone wanted meat outside and lights were on all over the place so it was pretty hopeless. The quoll did his/her early evening rounds again but no devil showed up at all.

There's a few caveats to be had here. There are six or seven cabins. I think the idea is to try and show up when there may not be many people, otherwise you are at the mercy of how other people behave (lights and noise etc). It is not set up for photography at all which I found quite frustrating i'd have to say. With a bit of patience and readiness the quolls could be quite easily photographed using a flash but not the devils it seems. The idea of trying to take nice photos of 'wild' carnivores beside piles of skinned chicken in a bare grassy area, well, seemed a bit of folly in the end. Pademelons and Brushtails show up as well and some fresh scats in the surrounds indicated the presence of Wombats as well but we never saw one. We went for a walk on the last night and heard Moreporks calling. I tried calling them in again to no avail.



**Kat tries to stare down roadside echidna – intervention required, a 'draw' was called**



**Tasmanian Devil photoed through the window at Mountain Valley Wilderness Lodge**

All in all I can't argue with having got that close to a devil which was great, but three nights was more than enough. I was surprised how much of the lodge property remained cleared of vegetation and in general the place looked like it could do with an 'inspiration injection'. There's a 300 m canyon (Leven Canyon) nearby you can do a couple of scenic walks to which is well worth it.

While there we did a day trip to Cradle Mountain. This is a very popular high mountains park and is absurdly scenic. We managed to see a solitary Wombat relatively close to a track having a bit of a dust bathe near its burrow entrance in the middle of the day. This was quite lucky as it turned out and it was (sadly) our only sighting of the trip. We scored another, rather obliging Echidna as well. It is worth actually staying in the park at night to see more animals I think. If you're a day visitor you have to be out of the park relatively early.



### *Green's Beach*

On the drive here we saw at least two Platypus in the Devonport Arboretum – an almost guaranteed place to see them it seems. I picked this area because it's located on the north coast next to Narawntapu National Park which was reputedly a great place to see lots of Wombats. Unfortunately, my minimal research had totally failed me. The Wombats seem to have been almost extirpated by the effects of the sarcoptic mange mite which I had heard had big impacts on populations on the mainland. Sad story that one. We had a great airb'n'b backing directly on to the coast. Our tiny yard had it's very own pademelon with absurdly small pouch young. A lone Beautiful Firetail showed up in the yard each afternoon which provided my first bird tick of the trip!



**Wombat having a scratch – Cradle Mountain**



**Backyard Pademelon with very young and wobbly juvenile – Green's Beach**

In the national park we got long distance views of Forester's Kangaroo – the local version of the mainland Eastern Grey Kangaroo. Apparently they're smaller but I wasn't really motivated to get a closer look. Spotlighting the roads south of Green's Beach turned up a Tasmanian Devil (probably from a local reintroduction program) which was unexpected and very cool. On the second night we came across a Spotted-tail Quoll sauntering across the forest road. Kat urged me to try 'squeaking' it in (as you might do for birds) to try and photograph, something we had read about it as a working possibility. And worked it did. I squeaked from inside our car (which was still running) and it turned around and walked right up to the car door. I'm not sure what would have happened if i was outside the car. I got out and more squeaking allowed for the photo below. They are truly a great animal to see up close and one of Australia's finest IMHO.

If you wanna do something silly and touristy there's Seahorse World about 15 minutes south of Green's Beach. I bought a fossil trilobite there, which had very little to do with seahorses as far as I could see.



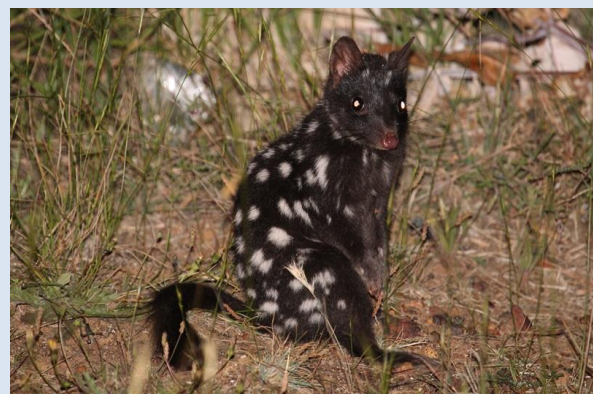
**Spotted-tail Quoll – Green's Beach area**

### *Bruny Island*

We stayed at an airb'n'b on South Bruny Island. There's lots of wildlife to see here. The main (non-oceanic) mammal target is the Eastern Quolls which apparently have been introduced (for some unexplained purpose) and are incredibly abundant on North Bruny Island for some reason. North Bruny is much more cleared of forest than the south but driving the main north-south road we came across 15 one night and 18 on the 2<sup>nd</sup>. I couldn't really work out what there is to eat here to support so many. Although abundant, being difficult to photograph was the common theme. Some of them sort of responded to squeaking but not for long. Still managed a couple of good ones. Scored two decent looks at Long-nosed Potoroo but not long enough to photograph unfortunately. We also saw a single all-white morph of Brushtail Possum which was quite striking looking but again would not allow us to get close enough for a photo.



**Eastern Quoll wearing a bit of 'bling' for a night out on North Bruny**



**Eastern Quoll - dark morph**

An evening visit to the Little Penguin rookery on the Neck (thin stretch of land joining the two islands) is well worth it. In summer Short-tailed Shearwaters also nest there (tick!). The penguins



seem a bit clumsy movement-wise but are undoubtedly purposeful on returning to their nests from the water after dusk. The shearwaters make for some incredibly clumsy landings from the air and at times seem to drop out of the sky right next to you. After a minute or two getting their bearings they take off on foot for the nest burrow. Very entertaining stuff.

We took one of the touristy boat trips out of Adventure Bay which turned out to be excellent despite the choppy swell (our tour guides said the Southern Ocean conditions we experienced were quite benign compared to some trips so we couldn't complain too much). After looking at some impressive coastal rock formations we visited a breeding colony of New Zealand Fur Seal and then an all male seasonal colony of Australian Fur Seal (tick). On the way back we came across two rather unseasonal Humpback Whales feeding with a group of Common Short-beaked Dolphins (another tick). An excellent excursion.



**Little Penguin at the Neck rookery – red lights required in order to not disturb the birds**



**New Zealand Fur Seals doing what they do outside of the water – not much**

Other mammals on the island included another echidna, white morph of the Red-necked Wallaby seen around the back roads of Adventure Bay, and we saw an Antechinus making a dart across an open stretch near housing in Adventure Bay as well. Dusky and Swamp Antechinus may both occur on the island. We didn't get that close to hazard any sort of guess unfortunately.

Other island highlights included a successful search for the 40 Spotted Pardalote (a species pretty much restricted to the island it seems these days), brief views of Swift Parrots flying by (swiftly) and finally ticking Strong-billed Honeyeater literally in the trees outside our lodging (that one had bugged me from my previous trip). We heard Morepork again at night and this tick remains unresolved and we unsuccessfully searched for pygmy possums in the Neck reserve.

That was it. Nineteen native mammals in all including a single road-killed Southern Brown Bandicoot. The lack of pygmy possums or the bettong was slightly annoying but there's always room for next time. I celebrated by buying a local Tasmanian distilled gin at the airport – Forty Spotted brand – not sure if I really cared what it tasted like – it's all in the name.

Cheers

Brett and Kat



**White morph Red-necked (or Bennett's) Wallaby – South Bruny Island**

<b>GENUS/SPECIES</b>	<b>COMMON NAME</b>	<b>Hobart</b>	<b>Wilderness Valley Lodge and surrounds</b>	<b>Green's Beach</b>	<b>Bruny Island</b>
<i>Ornithorhynchus anatinus</i>	Platypus			Devonport Arboretum	
<i>Tachyglossus aculeatus</i>	Short-beaked echidna		Cradle Mountain		Adventure Bay
<i>Antechinus sp.</i>	Antechinus species				Adventure Bay
<i>Dasyurus maculatus maculatus</i>	Spotted-tail quoll (Tasmanian)		Lodge grounds (2 present)	Forest roads to south	
<i>Dasyurus viverrinus</i>	Eastern quoll				Mainly North Bruny – a single road-killed specimen found on south island
<i>Sarcophilus harrisi</i>	Tasmanian devil		Lodge grounds (3 present although only on 1 <sup>st</sup> night)	Forest roads to south	
<i>Isodon obesulus obesulus</i>	Southern brown bandicoot (eastern)			Road-kill specimen in Devonport area	
<i>Perameles gunnii gunnii</i>	Eastern barred bandicoot (Tasmanian)	Several in Waterworks Reserve			
<i>Vombatus ursinus</i>	Common wombat		Scats present at lodge. Cradle Mountain		
<i>Trichosurus vulpecula fuliginosus</i>	Common brushtail possum (Tasmania)	Waterworks Reserve	Lodge grounds		Anywhere
<i>Pseudocheirus peregrinus</i>	Common ringtail possum	Waterworks Reserve			South Bruny Island
<i>Potorous tridactylus</i> unknown subsp.	Long-nosed potoroo (Tasmanian)				North Bruny Island
<i>Macropus giganteus tasmaniensis</i>	Eastern grey kangaroo (Tasmania)			Narawntapu NP	
<i>Macropus rufogriseus</i>	Bennett's (Red-necked) wallaby	Anywhere outside of the CBD	Only at Cradle Mountain (oddly not at lodge)	Forest roads south	Anywhere – white morph easy to see at Adventure Bay
<i>Thylogale billardierii</i>	Rufous-bellied pademelon	Anywhere outside of the CBD	Lodge, Cradle Mountain	Anywhere	Anywhere



<b><i>GENUS/SPECIES</i></b>	<b>COMMON NAME</b>	<b>Hobart</b>	<b>Wilderness Valley Lodge and surrounds</b>	<b>Green's Beach</b>	<b>Bruny Island</b>
<i>Arctocephalus forsteri</i>	New Zealand fur seal				East coast via boat trip
<i>Arctocephalus pusillus</i>	Australian fur seal				East coast via boat trip
<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>	Humpback Whale				East coast via boat trip
<i>Delphinus delphis</i>	Common dolphin				East coast via boat trip