

Mammal Watching Report – NT, WA, SA, NSW & Vic

July 2019 – December 2019

89 mammal species across 5 months

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The following is an outline of my mammal watching (and other wildlife!) exploits from a family holiday around Australia during the second half of 2019. I was lucky enough to be cashing in my accrued long-service leave, and in combination with a change in jobs, it meant we had a 6 month period to travel the countryside. It's an age-old line from many a wildlife enthusiast; by no means was this strictly a mammal or birding trip, but I sure managed to tailor an outstanding itinerary and 58 nights out spotlighting while on the journey.

We were travelling as a family of three; myself, my wife and our 1 year old son (crazy, yes – amazing, absolutely!), towing a caravan behind our 4WD. Our itinerary was really constructed around the amazing sights of the Northern Territory's Top End and exploring as much of Western Australia as we could fit in. By virtue, this took us through some outstanding natural wilderness areas and plenty of special mammal watching sites. The amount of time we had meant that we also ended up exploring the coastline of South Australia, southern New South Wales and few sites in eastern Victoria before we headed home to our livelihood on Victoria's Surf Coast.

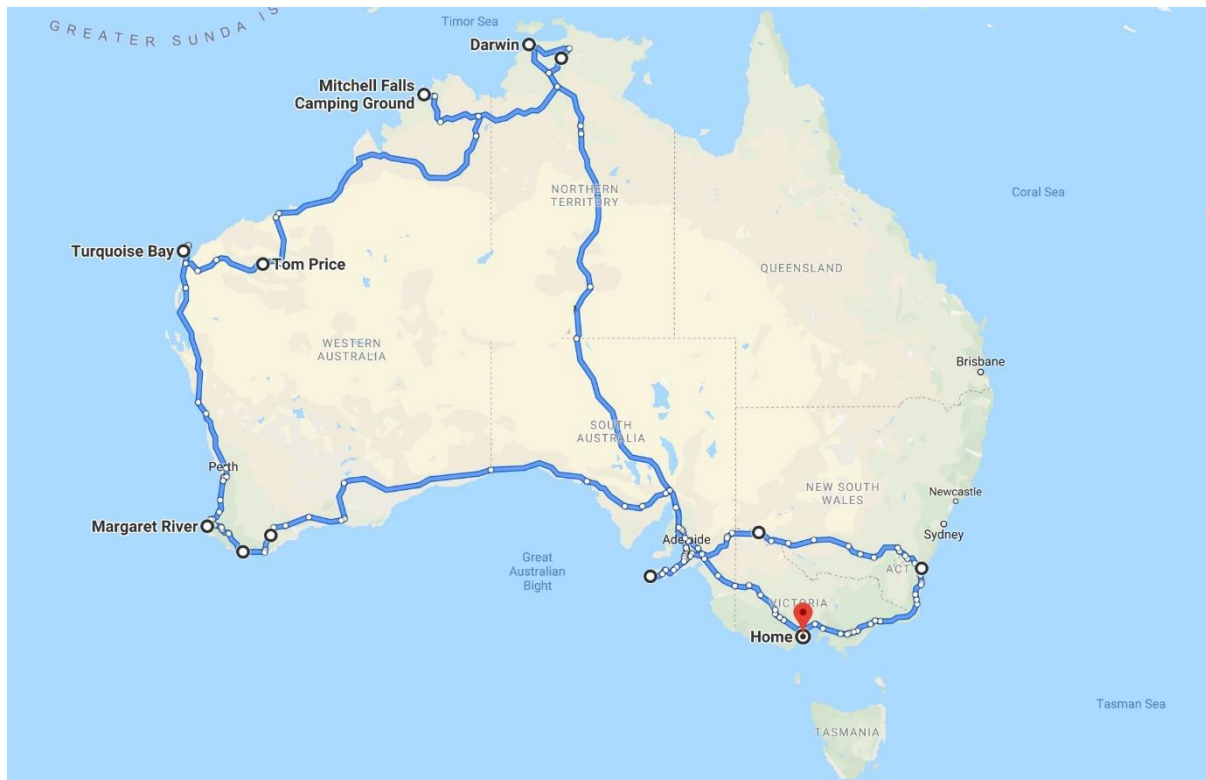


Image: the trip route – from home (Torquay, Vic), through the NT Top End, northwest WA, western coast, southwest WA, across the Nullarbor, South Australia including Kangaroo Island, over to the NSW east coast and back along the Victoria coast.

Gear: Everywhere we went I lugged around my standard arsenal; Olympus OMD-EM1 camera, Zeiss binoculars, LedLenser head torch and 4x pairs of spare rechargeable batteries. I had also recently invested in an Echo Meter Touch 2 bat detector, it allowed me an outstanding insight into the world of microbat ID as we travelled. I couldn't recommend a device such as this any higher for any mammal watchers keen to unlock the key to microbat ID.

On top of the gear there was a car full of reference guides to keep me busy – mammal wise the following were on high rotation; *A Field Guide to the Mammals of Australia* (Menkhorst & Knight), *The Complete Guide to Finding Mammals of Australia* (David Andrew), and *Australian Bats* (Sue Churchill). In addition, there was a list of research papers that were invaluable insight to ID and analysis of microbat echolocation frequency.

We wanted to make the most of spending our holiday in destinations furthest away from home, so the first leg of the trip was an exercise to cover ground and rack up km's in an effort to get from one side of the country to the other. A week in the car, driving non-stop with a newly turned one-year old, didn't sound like the perfect introduction to our trip so we decided that my wife and son would fly up to join me in Darwin. My Dad joined me for the first part of the trip where we were left from home base in Victoria and traversed the Stuart Hwy through Central Australia.

There wasn't much of a concerted effort to look for things over the first week. Most sightings were miscellaneous roadside encounters with a reasonable portion of travel after dark; **Red Fox** was the first mammal on the list within 20min of leaving home, a couple of **Western Grey Kangaroo** through the Adelaide Hills, and **Red Kangaroo** were prevalent through most of the interior. Surprisingly only 2 **European Rabbit's** in total for this leg of the journey. A group of 9 **Dromedary Camel's** were encountered around 100km north of Coober Pedy – a feral introduced animal to Australia, it's hard to believe they've established to be considered the largest population of these one-humped camel's in the world.



Image: feral Dromedary Camel north of Coober Pedy, SA

We entered the tropical savannah region of northern Australia to the north of Elliot, from here the roadside scenery became vast stretches of monsoonal open forest – **Agile Wallabies** were regularly seen from here on. At night there were often Flying-fox's flying in front of the headlights, hard to ID conclusively and I only ever confirmed **Little Red Flying-fox**.

After reconvening with the rest of the family in Darwin our trip really started, at a much slower pace. The following is a summary of mammals seen and the main sites I explored. Some records from inadvertent sightings, some (most) from serious exploration, often late at night.

Northern Territory (2 July 2019 – 31 July 2019)

Darwin and surrounds:

Berry Springs – we based ourselves out of the Tumbling Waters Caravan Park, I didn't head to any sites in the area to look for particular mammals, but instead familiarised myself with the bat detector and common microbats (considering the warm ambient night temperature there was plenty of action, a common theme throughout northern Australia). **Yellow-bellied Sheath-tail Bat** with lower frequency echolocation could be audibly heard of

night time and occasionally spotlit hawking above forest canopy. Many smaller bats with a frequency around 38khz were encountered; at this range it could be Hoary Wattled Bat or Little Broad-nosed Bat, both common through the Top End and not differentiable via flight style/jizz. It was a birding highlight at this location; Large-tailed Nightjar's were calling every dusk, a lifer for me.

Buffalo Creek – we explored Darwin from Lee Point in the northern suburbs, this gave great access to the creek-lined mangrove system and mudflats of Buffalo Creek. Most of my time was spent here during daylight on birding ventures where I was finally successful with Chestnut Rail, but I also had a couple of nights spotlighting here. The northern subspecies of **Common Brushtail Possum** was regularly encountered, but the highlight was opportunity for bat detecting along the creek banks (not too close to the waters edge, or too deep in the mangroves – Estuarine Crocodiles here!). Once again, the typical small evening bats *Vespertilionidae* genus) at 37-38khz was regular, but there were some other exciting extras:

- **Mangrove Pipistrelle** (3+), a tiny microbat with similar echolocation frequency to a Bentwing, but obviously ID'd on much smaller size. Akin to their name, they were easily found around mangrove areas;
- **Large-footed Myotis** (1), spotlit and diagnostic echolocation while it was cruising along the creek.

Botanic Gardens – the George Brown Botanic Gardens are renown for wildlife opportunities after dark, particularly for the Rufous Owl's that are known to roost there. I had one visit late at night; plentiful Brushtail's again, but nothing else extra. Admittedly I didn't hang around long, this was one of the few places for the trip where I felt uneasy out at night.

Kakadu National Park:

An absolutely phenomenal destination, my favourite area for the trip. So much wildlife diversity, such incredible scenery, beautiful weather, terrific cultural experience and everything else. We spent almost 2 weeks in the National Park splitting our base from Jabiru to explore the northern section and Coinda for the south. I could go on about many amazing places through the area, but I'll keep it concise to the mammal records.

Nourlangie Rock – Nourlangie is one of the famous rock art treasures of Kakadu, impressive indeed, and I had an outstanding night spotlighting here. A couple of **Sugar (Savannah) Glider's** were feeding on profuse eucalypt blossom around the carpark. Latest taxonomic studies suggest this will be regarded as a separate species, the Savannah Glider, in comparison to its east coast compatriots. **Black Flying-fox** were often disturbed as I walked along, also enjoying the blossom. Considering the amount of flowering flora, I was really keeping my eyes out for the chance at a Blossum Bat. I wasn't really sure how I would manage to ID one even if I did catch a glimpse, but when I got the spotlight on a rotund small bat that was buzzing around the flowering canopy, the obvious bright eyeshine was a giveaway for **Northern Blossum Bat**. I followed the loop track through the rock art galleries and therefore around the base of the massive sandstone outcrop. My heart skipped a beat when I glimpsed a rodent as it was disturbed in a cave, hoping for a Rock-rat, I was fairly disappointed when I got better views and saw a long tail confirming **Black Rat** instead. Throughout the cave and rocky crevice network there were often tiny little microbats that fluttered around. After some extremely close 'flutter-bys' and some time watching them I concluded an ID for **Dusky Leaf-nosed Bat**; a *Hipposideros* sp. based on appearance and flight style, I settled a definitive ID because of their very small, pale-bellied appearance, but particularly because I could never pick up an echolocation call on the bat detector. My detector has an upper range for detection of around 120khz – Dusky Leaf-nosed have a characteristic frequency around 160khz which would not be recognisable/detectable. The other ID contender would be Northern Leaf-nosed Bat which has a comparable characteristic frequency around 90-100khz and should be recognisable on the detector especially considering the very close proximity I had to them. Habitat area is also typical for Dusky Leaf-nosed Bat. I'm confident with the ID conclusion on this one and it's sitting on my list, but I think I'd definitely like to see one in the hand one day just as a nice cleanser.

Seemingly with most sites through the Top End, there was once again plenty of the small Hoary Wattled Bat/Little Broad-nosed Bat winging around the night.

Nourlangie is a known area where Black Wallaroo may be slightly more accustomed to human presence, considering the high tourist traffic at this site, unfortunately I didn't get lucky with a sighting. My visit was well after dark though, a late afternoon/dusk search may prove more successful for this species. The roadside habitat between Nourlangie and Jabiru supports Antilopine Wallaroo, they're known as a frequent traffic danger from dusk to dawn. A surprise for many unsuspecting tourists, I could not find a roadside surprise for myself even though the roads were driven at all times of the night while we were there.

Ubirr – unfortunately I didn't get time to spend a night spotlighting here. The sunset viewing area is known for its extremely tourist friendly Wilkin's Rock-wallaby's, one of our caravan site neighbours proudly showed me a photo of their kids standing right next to one from the night beforehand. Nearby Ubirr there is a small sandstone outcrop bordering grassy floodplain; the Bardedjilidji Sandstone Walk traverses a loop around the outcrop and this walk is known for some terrific mammal opportunities. I only walked it during the day, but have heard plenty of reports of species such as Black Wallaroo, Sandstone False Antechinus, Grassland Melomys and Arnhem Rock-rat being somewhat often encountered.

Cooinda/Yellow Water – a massive tourist mecca of Kakadu NP, and completely understandably so. The lodge at Cooinda is setup to cater for all, and even though the Yellow Water cruises are loaded with passengers, they're very enjoyable for any nature lover. I would recommend jumping on an early morning cruise to maximise wildlife encounters. Aside from some outstanding birdlife and plenty of crocs, this is the place to find a few of Australia's introduced livestock that can be considered wild, free ranging and self-sustaining populations. The cruise takes you out into the Yellow Water billabong and adjacent flood plain, which in turn are enormous grazing grounds during the dry. Mammals included:

- **Water Buffalo** (2), a couple of big animals loafing on the riverbank
- **Brumby** (4), regularly encountered on the floodplain.
- **Wild Cattle** (8), while I cannot vouch for the genetic uniformity for these animals, the cattle present throughout Kakadu are certainly wild and self-sustaining. They are a descendent population from livestock farmers in the area before Kakadu was declared a national park in the 1970's. The cattle were abandoned and still survive in reasonable numbers.



Image: Water Buffalo, Yellow Water (Kakadu NP), NT

Mardugal – so awesome! I had some super success here, so a real highlight of the trip. Mardugal is only ~15min from Cooinda, is a National Park Campground complete with running water, toilets and showers, and is managed by volunteer hosts. The campground sits on the banks of the Jim Jim Creek which ultimately feeds Yellow Water shortly downstream. The campground area is surrounded by open savannah woodland and a loop track exists that circumnavigates the two campgrounds. I had some tantalising 'almost' sightings on my first visit and ended up

spending 4 nights out here. Over this time I explored the general campground area and particularly the bordering forest around the loop track (north of the campgrounds). An unreal selection of mammals as follows:

- **Agile Wallaby** (3)
- **Dingo** (1); not at Mardugal, further south down the Hwy, rough at the Maguk turnoff
- **Black Flying-fox** (8), often heard, sometime seen in flowering eucs.
- **Sugar (Savannah) Glider** (5)
- **Northern Common Brushtail** (4)
- **Fawn Antechinus** (2); Mardugal is a known site for occurrence of Fawn Antechinus, sometimes encountered through the campsite area, or around the toilet blocks. I thought sightings would only be via good fortune. On my first night though, I was trying to slowly stake out a small rustling sound in the undergrowth before I disturbed a small marsupial, quickly hopping away and under cover... that was all it gave me. Fairly certain it was a Fawn Antechinus, but who knows. Continuing the search over subsequent nights, I finally had some awesome success, standing silently still for what seemed like hours (probably 10mins) in darkness before I turned the light on a nearby rustle in the undergrowth, and there it was! Somewhat confiding in the end, I watched it peeping through its hollow log shelter before it ultimately allowed me a couple of record snaps. Very chuffed with this one.
- **Black-footed Tree-rat** (1)
- **Yellow-bellied Sheath-tail Bat** (8); often audibly heard and easily picked up on the bat detector, occasionally you would get an OK view in the spotlight as the cruised high over the canopy.
- **Orange Leaf-nosed Bat** (1); a real forest dweller, I noticed a medium-large sized microbat zipping past me along the forest track. Luckily it kept making return visits and once I got the light on it, its unmistakable bright orange colour left no confusion with the ID.



Image: Black-footed Tree-rat, Mardugal (Kakadu NP), NT



Image: Fawn Antechinus, Mardugal (Kakadu NP), NT

From a reptile perspective, I also had a cool encounter with a pair of mating Marble-headed Whipsnake's late one night – I had heard some rustling in the undergrowth and was investigating in the hope of a small mammal and actually got a big surprise when I found the two snakes intertwined around each other. I was disappointed they decided to move on quickly, so no photos..

Jim Jim Creek/Plateau – an incredible destination to be enjoyed not just for mammal watching. This is a 4WD-only accessible location though. We enjoyed Jim Jim Falls and the swimming in the cold(!) creek/pools at the bottom of the falls (only a trickle this year), but all mammal activity was at the top of the plateau. Here I had arranged camping permits to spend some time along the Jim Jim Creek on the upper plateau. Please note, this is strictly by permit and National Park's approval only. Being such an isolated location, I didn't deviate too far from the creek during the night, there was also hot action on the bat front with many different sp. feeding over the open water:

- **Euro** (4)
- **Dingo** (2); howling at night
- **Hoary Wattled Bat/Little Broad-nosed Bat** (lots)
- **Northern Bentwing Bat** (4+ each night)
- **Arnhem Sheathtail Bat** (1-2 each night); an uncommonly encountered species, I had ripping views and echolocation recordings as it moved along the creek. Aside from the bat detector ID, the diagnostic white underwing stripes were obviously present and seen.
- **Pygmy Long-eared Bat** (3-4)
- **Nyctophilus sp.** (1); Long-eared Bat sp., unable to ID on call.
- **Yellow-bellied Sheathtail Bat** (5+)

Katherine area:

Katherine – miscellaneous driving around the area at night hoping for some roadside encounters finally eventuated in my first **Antilopine Wallaroo**. Two seen in total, one circa 20km south of Katherine along the Stuart Hwy. This area is also known for occurrence of Spectacled Hare-wallaby. I didn't see any, but roadside around Cutta Cutta Caves and Napier Rd is reputedly a chance. I did however see a **Ghost Bat** fly overhead while searching this area. The second **Antilopine Wallaroo** was seen to the north of Katherine, approx. 10km from town, again along the Stuart Hwy. Also in this area was a driving encounter of **Northern Brown Bandicoot**, and probably hundreds of **Agile Wallaby** on the north/western outskirts of Katherine.

A **Wild Donkey** population seems very well established on the western outskirts of Katherine near Chinaman Creek. I visited this area a lot of times while searching for Chestnut-backed Button-quail (eventually successful!), and every time there were loud, abrasive donkey calls. Skittish animals too.

Timber Creek – one of the largest known **Ghost Bat** roost sites is found near Timber Creek. By no means a secretive site, but I'll spare making the details public on here – feel free to contact me if you're really keen to go there yourself. Before sunset I situated myself in a discrete location near the cave entrance and waited, hoping for a spectacular dusk exit. Surprisingly nothing happened for a long time, evening bats came and went. In the evening light I saw and ID'd (with the help of the detector of course) **Northern Bentwing Bat**, heaps of the **Hoary Wattled Bat/Little Broad-nosed Bat** again, **Pygmy Long-eared Bat**, **Common Sheathtail Bat** (this would've been a lifer, but I could only get a recording and never saw it), **Nyctophilus sp.** and **Black Flying-fox**. I kept the spotlight off and didn't move during this whole time to make sure I was no disturbance for potential Ghosties. Over an hour passed, and it wasn't until it was completely pitch black that the calls of **Ghost Bat's** started to be heard. Over the following 20mins or so, I estimate 150+ of these unreal creatures filled the air, exiting their cave. They flew right past my head, a couple even brushing into my arms, it was a fantastic experience! Ghost Bats have an audible call which is a great way of detecting their presence.

Umbrawarra Gorge – thinking that I had missed my chance to see a few of the sandstone escarpment specialty mammals that the Top End is known for, I planned a night to Umbrawarra Gorge on our last night in the Top End. A great idea! A wander through the Gorge started off slow, before I came across some really exciting mammals:

- **Sugar Glider** (4)
- **Dingo** (1); howling
- **Rock Ringtail Possum** (4); I had been crossing my fingers for this one and was stoked when I found one climbing up a fig next to the creek. You can imagine my delight when it turned into a family group of four – two larger adults, one slightly smaller animal and an obvious young/immature that was much smaller. The photo tells the story.
- **Wilkin's Rock-wallaby** (2); I hadn't seen these yet, so thrilled to come across a couple along the creek.



Image: Rock Ringtail Possum, Umbrawarra Gorge, NT

Western Australia (31 July 2019 – 3 November 2019)

Kununurra:

No significant sightings around the township, **Agile Wallaby** the only mammal seen. I spent one evening driving around the canefields north of town hoping to chance a Long-haired Rat – there is an isolated, somewhat sedentary population, that have established considering ongoing suitable conditions that are a by-product of the Lake Argyle irrigation scheme which feeds Kununurra's agricultural land.

Mirima National Park on the outskirts of Kununurra has a great little walk track and typical sandstone outcrop habitat. (Western) Short-eared Rock-wallaby can be found here, and it would be good habitat for a few other things, but I didn't visit.

Gibb River Road (Eastern end):

Mitchell Plateau – the Mitchell Plateau is one of the most remote destinations in Australia, a destination I had dreamed of visiting for many years since I was a kid. It is located just off the northwest coastline of the Kimberley, roughly half way along the Gibb River Road, which means a minimum of two full days driving along the renowned bone-jarring, corrugated, dusty and beaten up Gibb River Rd. I had managed to convince the family it was a great idea to unhook the caravan in Kununurra and make a week long return trip along the Gibb to the Mitchell Plateau. A great idea at the time, but travelling thousands of km's along rough terrain with nothing but tents, some food and a one year old was a very challenging task. It's an incredible memory now that we've done it, but some big kudos goes to my wife my tolerating that grandiose idea of mine.

Our visit here was really motivated by a desire to chase a couple of Australia's special range-restricted birds, Black Grasswren and Kimberley Honeyeater, that are not known from anywhere else other than the remote rocky plateau of the Kimberley. Very satisfyingly I managed to track both these species down.



Image: Black Grasswren, Mitchell Plateau, WA

But the reason we're here is for the mammals and, aside from the birds, I also allowed myself plenty of mammal searching. Highlights included:

- **Black Flying-fox** (20+)

- **Monjon** (4); the smallest of the Rock-wallaby's, these guys were fairly common and easy to find around Little Mertens Falls. I even disturbed them on a couple of occasions during the day.
- **Common Rock-rat** (1); while walking the track towards Little Mertens Falls after dark I 'flushed' a little rodent from the side of the track. It wasn't terribly agile in getting away and in its attempt to hide it really just gave me some cracking views to confirm ID; dark-tipped sandy fur, rounded roman nose and short, hairless tail.
- **Kimberley Rock-rat** (1); at the base of Little Mertens Falls I came across one scampering about its business under the rock platforms. Quite larger comparative to the Common Rock-rat I had just seen.
- **Sugar Glider** (3); around the campground
- **Ghost Bat** (1); flying around the campground, presence detected after hearing its buzzing call.
- Dusky/Northern Leaf-nosed Bat (3); Flight style and size indicated one of these species, but not sure on ultimate ID, they were quite high amongst the canopy.
- **Euro** (1); disturbed during day near Little Mertens Falls



Image: Monjon, Mitchell Plateau, WA

I missed a few things out here; Golden-backed Tree-rat I had hoped was realistic, Scaly-tailed Possum also, and a few further fetched targets like Golden Bandicoot or perhaps one of the native rodents. But I was quite surprised not to catch even a glimpse of Northern Quoll. Historically this area had terrific density and population of Quoll's, but it seems they've taken a hit since the Cane Toad invasion. Talking to the Ranger, he mentioned they had completed some comprehensive Cane Toad aversion baiting around 6 months ago. The Quoll population had taken a big hit from this without any seen over the last 3 months or so, but it is considered this is the best chance to fast-track Quoll's long-term survival alongside the invasive Toad's.

The road to the Mitchell Plateau is around 250kms from the Gibb River Rd. **Antilopine Wallaroo** were encountered on a couple of occasions in the open grassland along this section, my notes recall 42km south of Drysdale River Station. While at Drysdale River Station as well, it is also reputed that Northern Nailtail Wallaby can be seen around the airfield, the best time being dusk. I didn't realise this until talking to someone a week or so after we were there so never looked.

Ellenbrae Station – this place was a little oasis in the middle of the expansive rugged outback. We loved it and ended up staying an extra couple of nights, it was probably the delicious scones with jam & cream that the owners bribed us with. A small creekline runs adjacent the station, which of an evening time, became an absolute highway

for bat fauna. There was so much action the bat detector almost blew up.. maybe not quite that drastic, but it was busy! Total list of sightings here:

- **Northern Freetail Bat** (3); while milling around on the riverbank in early dusk, a very early departing microbat came flying along the creek, it was still near full daylight. Unusually I had full binocular vision of it flying past; a larger bat, almost flying at treetop level. Surprisingly while watching it, I heard the alarm calls of nearby honeyeater's, and then a Brown Goshawk swooped in and just grabbed it straight out of the air! Amazing. I'm not conclusive of the ID for this bat during the day, but recordings later indicated Northern Freetail's regularly flying along the creek.
- **Black Flying-fox** (25); a small roost in pandanus along the creek.
- Hoary Wattled Bat/Little Broad-nosed Bat (5+)
- **Gould's Wattled Bat** (4)
- **Large-footed Myotis** (1); great views as it swept along the creek just above water level.
- **Northern Bentwing Bat** (2)
- Nyctophilus sp. (2)

Emma Gorge – after returning from our Gibb River Rd journey and catching up on sleep back in Kununurra, I decided for one last night spotlighting in the eastern Kimberley. I knew there was an isolated population of **Wyulda (Scaly-tailed Possum)** that had somewhat recently been discovered in Emma Gorge. This visit proved to be an outstanding success, walking the main walking track resulted in **Western Short-eared Rock-wallaby**, and shortly after a **Scaly-tailed Possum** in a fig tree just nearby. Detecting these shy possums can be tricky, but they have a habitat of sticking to fruiting fig trees. I checked every one as I was walking along, a tactic that worked well. A **Euro** was also seen near the main carpark area.

Purnululu National Park (Bungle Bungles)

The Bungle Bungle Caravan Park is located at the entrance road to the Bungle Bungles. We had a day trip out in the National Park and on return during late afternoon encountered a lot of **Euro's** in typical rocky, mountainous habitat. The caravan park must be somewhat of a hotspot for **Antilopine Wallaroo**, there were a number of very tame animals around the grounds at night. Then Driving along the Hwy the next day we came across 15+ roadkill Antilopine's within half an hour of the caravan park. **Feral Cats** were seen a couple of times as we drove along the Savannah Way, along with occasional singles or small groups of **Brumby**.

Gibb River Road (Western end):

Tunnel Creek National Park – Tunnel Creek is an underground cave, or tunnel network that has been formed as water has carved out a path through the underground limestone reef. Wandering through this tunnel system in knee-deep water was a really outstanding experience. Even though there is a lot of tourist traffic here, it was a really great opportunity to see cave roosting bats. **Common Sheathtail Bat** is the species most commonly encountered and I found 12 individuals spaced through the cave. One smaller *Vespadelus* sp. was found; Northern Cave Bat *V. caurinus* is by far the most likely here whereas the other contender, Inland Cave Bat *V. finlaysoni* is at the very extent of their range (Yellow-lipped Bat *V. douglasorum* ruled out based on colour). I can't be conclusive on this individual based on the photo (see below), but the presence of **Northern Cave Bat** was confirmed later that night by calls ID'd on the bat detector. Interestingly, **Black Flying-fox** were also roosting in the cave.



Image: Common Sheathtail Bat (left) & probable Northern Cave Bat (right), Tunnel Creek, WA

The real highlight of wandering through this cave system was when I came across a small colony of **Ghost Bat**; they're known to occasionally roost here, but I thought it wouldn't be too likely with the amount of public foot traffic. They were high up and I only detected them because of their calls. I put the light on them for a quick photo and left them be.



Image: Ghost Bat, Tunnel Creek, WA

Windjana Gorge National Park – the roadside between Tunnel Creek and Windjana Gorge also had one **Antilopine Wallaroo** and a few **Agile Wallabies**. Spotlighting in the gorge during the evening resulted in massive numbers of **Agile Wallaby**, I also had at least 6 **Western Short-eared Rock-wallaby**. Freshwater Crocodiles are in high densities through the water holes here, at night you can see them all with a very bright eyeshine. I counted 98! There wasn't a lot happening here from a bat perspective, but I did get onto:

- **Black Flying-fox** (2)
- **Common Sheathtail Bat** (2)
- **Northern Bentwing Bat** (1)
- **Northern Cave Bat** (1)

Derby – this wasn't really a place where I could go wandering around at night, so not much except ubiquitous **Agile Wallaby**. I had heard the Derby Wharf has roosting **Northern Freetail Bat** beneath the jetty; I didn't manage to see any, but got plenty of echolocation recordings of them, so they were definitely around.

Broome:

We based ourselves out of a caravan park in Cable Beach for a couple of weeks, our first taste of the metropolitan world for a while. **Little Red Flying-fox** were common throughout the town, easily heard and found amongst flowering trees during the evening. Broome is somewhat of a mecca for birding as well, the nearby Broome Bird Observatory (BBO) is a sensational place to base yourself with outstanding opportunity to experience the diversity and richness of Roebuck Bay, the adjacent open plains, pindan forest and mangrove systems. I spent plenty of time around the grounds scanning through shorebird flocks and keeping my eyes out for cetaceans in Roebuck Bay. I had a couple of distant views of **Australian Snubfin Dolphin**, which can often be seen on a higher tide from vantage points near Crab Creek.

The BBO also offers guided tours to visit restricted access areas around the Broome region. I jumped on a tour hoping for an opportunity to see Yellow Chat out on the Roebuck Plains. Unfortunately no chat, but we did come across 3 **Northern Nailtail Wallaby** on the fringing plain as we were returning on dusk, a species I had been keeping a sound eye out for. I spent some time spotlighting around the BBO on night, particularly around Crab

Creek. Surprising I didn't encounter anything too much; **Little Red Flying-fox** and **Agile Wallaby** were abundant. Around the mangroves I did get onto a echolocation pickup of Western Little Freetail Bat which was very exciting, but unfortunately couldn't find it around me anywhere, I think they must fly around quite high and only brief pass by's.

Even though I had some distant views of Snubfin Dolphin's from the Bird Observatory, I jumped at an opportunity to go on an eco-cruise out through Roebuck Bay. I boarded with Broome Whale Watching on a Snubfin Dolphin Eco Tour and couldn't recommend it higher. We had terrific close views of a number of **Australian Snubfin Dolphin**, a couple of distant **Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphin**, 2 **Dugong** and bunch of other wildlife highlights; over 10 Manta Ray's, Flatback Turtle etc. This tour company also offers whale watching trips out further to sea, Humpback Whales are regular during migration and Australian Humpback Dolphins are also often seen.



Image: Australian Snubfin Dolphin, Roebuck Bay (Broome), WA

Most of my nocturnal escapades while in Broome were concentrated around pursuit of Greater Bilby. There are known populations to the east of Broome and I spent 3 nights out there combing acacia scrub woodland with a sandy substrate, hoping to find something. Unfortunately I didn't get lucky on this front.

Port Hedland:

No concerted effort around Port Hedland, it was somewhat of a transit destination. From here though, I did go on a crazy birding twitch (hoping to find Australia's first Eurasian Teal – no luck though!), heading a few hours west to Harding Dam. A few miscellaneous mammal sightings along the road while I was travelling through the dark in the early hours of the morning:

- **Sandy Inland Mouse;** on 3 different occasions I saw a small rodent scampering across the road in front of me. Relocating them was difficult, but on the last occasion I finally got onto one, a Sandy Inland Mouse.
- Northern Quoll (roadkill); near Whim Creek.
- **Brumby;** a couple of sightings.

Karijini National Park:

The vivid red scenery of the Hammersley Range and associated creeks and gorges was spectacular. A lot of very special mammals can be found around this area, but most are small rodents and marsupials that are particularly

cryptic and could probably only be found with any reliability under trapping surveys etc. Not to be disenchanted, I spent a couple of nights combing the main roads, hoping to encounter something seeking some late night warmth on the asphalt. I pulled complete blanks though, nothing, not even any reptiles.

We spent our time here camping at Dales Campground, the best mammal activity was definitely amongst the fertile creek and gorge system of Dales Gorge nearby. I was absolutely thrilled to find a **Rothschild's Rock-wallaby** down here. They would have to be one of the biggest *Petrogale* species, this individual was shy but allowed me a great look from distance. Rothschild's Rock-wallaby have really taken a hit in recent decades and are much less common on the mainland as foxes are having a real impact on their numbers. Populations on offshore islands, and on the Dampier Archipelago north of Karratha would generally be considered the best way to see them, so I consider myself pretty lucky. Other sightings through Dales Gorge included **Yellow-bellied Sheathtail Bat**, quite a few flying overhead, also **Inland Cave Bat** and a camp of **Black Flying-fox** that has been resident near Fern Pool for a few years – somewhat of an outlier group considering distribution prominence for the rest of this species is mostly along the WA coastline.



Image: Rothschild's Rock-wallaby, Karijini NP, WA

Cape Range National Park (Ningaloo Reef):

We were in the Exmouth/Cape Range NP area right in the middle of peak whale migration time, early September. At any time of the day you can sit at the Vlamingh Head Lighthouse and enjoy the site of **Humpback Whales** slowly cruising south, sometimes putting on quite a show. Over the course of a day there could easily be totals in excess of 100. The local whale watching companies have permit allowances which allow them to conduct small whale watching tours that include a swim with the Humpback Whales (providing the whales meet an assessed criteria – no calves, size/length limits etc.). My wife and I both jumped at the opportunity to do this and were both successful in our own rights – Lisa enjoyed swimming with the whales, though water visibility wasn't super, while my group the day after didn't find any suitable whales, but we did luck into a very late staying Whale Shark to swim right next to. Wow! Whale Shark season is normally April-August. I was on the lookout, and had the whole crew on lookout, for other cetaceans during the trip but didn't find anything extra; Dwarf Minke Whales had been seen recently, maybe once a week or so, Southern Right Whale's often and Australian Humpback Dolphins are fairly regular in the lagoon waters near the Tantabiddi boat ramp. My sister had also been on one of these trips the week before us and lucked into a pod of False Killer Whales, I was very jealous about this.



Image: Humpback Whale (left) & False Killer Whale (right – photo donated by my sister), Tunnel Creek, WA

Outside of the water, Cape Range also has some sensational land mammals. The big highlight and draw card are **Black-flanked Rock-wallaby's** which can quite easily be found along the rocky gorge sites on the eastern side of the cape. Yardie Creek Gorge and Mandu Mandu Gorge are well known sites, we did the full walk around Mandu Mandu and were rewarded with some very cool sightings. Of a night time, I spent some time spotlighting from the car while cruising along Yardie Creek Rd within the national park. **Euro's** were gregarious and a couple very very inquisitive **Dingo's** probably would've jumped in the car window if I let them (hungry, aggressive or tame... I don't know). Some of the tracks in this area can be really great for finding Spinifex Hopping Mouse, or even Stripe-faced Dunnart, but I wasn't lucky. Absolutely zero bat life was found while using the detector in the more open areas. I would anticipate that the gorge areas could be more fruitful, there's plenty of caves, crevices and cracks for them to roost in. Exmouth was also the first place that we came across **House Mouse**, they had established themselves fairly well at the Lighthouse Caravan Park.



Image: Whale Shark, Ningaloo Reef (Cape Range NP), WA



Image: Black-flanked Rock-wallaby, Mandu Mandu Gorge (Cape Range NP), WA

Monkey Mia (Francois Peron National Park):

Monkey Mia is certainly a favourite on the traveller circuit for the opportunity to interact with the tame **Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphin** that come into the shoreline for twice daily dolphin interactions. The crowds can be massive, and I wasn't particularly enthused that it would be a genuine wildlife experience. I was proved very incorrect and thought it was awesome, a real hit for the whole family. While there's something special about finding and observing wildlife on your own means, this experience is broadcast by the local park rangers with a message for enhancing the understanding and appreciation of the regions wildlife. As a father of a young child now, it is opportunities like this that can really draw people into an appreciation of the natural world and activate their thought process to conserve and enjoy what we have, and this was definitely passed onto all visitors.

Shark Bay is the greater region of Monkey Mia, including the Francois Peron National Park, and forms the Shark Bay world heritage area. There is a long list of nationally endangered, even near extinct, mammal species that find this area home, though most can only be found on the offshore islands and access is restricted or via permit only. Species such as Burrowing Bettong, Shark Bay Mouse, Western Barred Bandicoot and Banded Hare-wallaby were very high on my list, but not feasible to see on the mainland. However, there are Greater Bilby populations have sustained after reintroductions around a decade ago. I hoped to find one of these, but again no success. The gregarious **European Rabbit's** and a few **Feral Cat's** seen suggest that habitat destruction and predators are still making life hard for them. **Euro's** were the main macropod that was often seen.

Along the main road (NW Coastal Hwy) north and south of the Shark Bay turnoff we came across quite a few loose herds of **Feral Goats**. It seems these feral populations are doing well.

Kalbarri:

As we headed south there was a massive biogeographical shift entering the Kalbarri region. Gone was the dry expanse of the Pilbara where the desert meets the ocean, in favour of the more fertile heathlands and wildflower rich forests of the mid-west coast. Mammal-wise we started to encounter the first **Western Grey Kangaroo**. A walk around the Loop Walk to enjoy Nature's Window at Kalbarri National Park resulted in a **Euro** and a group of **Feral Goat's**.

Houtman Abrolhos Islands:

Day trips to the Abrolhos Islands can be organised via a full day flight charter from Geraldton. I was lucky that we were in town with my sister and her partner so we were able to split the cost three-way's which was quite achievable. An absolutely sensational day out, the views were magnificent flying over the three island groups, but even better was seeing my first **Australia Sea-lion** loafing about on a sandy island while flying past. The first animal I reckon I've ever ticked from a plane. The highlight though, is the opportunity to spend half a day on the most publicly accessible island – East Wallabi Island. From the airport you're able to roam around the north-eastern portion of the island, swimming, snorkelling or in my case looking for **Tammar Wallaby**. The wallabies have long been present with no introduced terrestrial predators on the islands and have a very healthy population. While generally retiring during the day, thanks to our pilot, we managed to find one discretely sheltering in the undergrowth. While snorkelling later in the afternoon 2 **Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphin's** swan right by in the shallows. We could also see a few **Humpback Whale's** from the air on our flight crossing back to the mainland.



Image: Tammar Wallaby, East Wallabi Island (Houtman Abrolhos), WA

Rottnest Island:

'Rotto', a half hour boat ride from Perth is not necessarily mammal haven, but it has **Quokka's** galore and is the only place in Australia to reliably pick up this species, and they are an absolute certainty. You'll be able to spot them before the boat lands, and photos will be as easy as it gets, just maybe not if you don't want an urban background.

We spent a few days on the island and never tired of the ubiquitous **Quokka**. The remainder of mammals were all ocean based; **Humpback Whale's** continued the theme of the whole WA coastline, there was plenty of breaching and tail slapping from the passing animals. West Cape was a fantastic vantage point for seawatching; albatross and bird activity was exciting. There is also a **New Zealand Fur-seal** colony nearby. While watching the Fur-seal's, a pod of 8 or so **Common Bottlenose Dolphin** cruised by. Even from a distance, the much larger size in comparison to Indo-Pacific was obvious.



Image: Quokka, Rottnest Island, WA

We spent a week or so back in Perth afterwards. **White-striped Freetail Bat** were often heard of a night flying overhead. They're bloody hard to catch a glimpse of in flight though. Around metropolitan Perth **European Rabbit** could easily be found in most open grassy areas, road verges etc., particularly around Woodman Point where we were staying.

Dryandra:

This place is a mammal watchers heaven. It wasn't really on the main route we were travelling, but I managed to negotiate one night camping out here, from my perspective it was a must. While there is a plethora of outstanding mammal highlights, the chance to see a Numbat was really my number 1 motivation. After arriving late morning, we set up camp at Gnaala Mia campground. Gnaala Mia is a relatively new camp area and is a sensational setup, with individual bays for caravans, tents, cars etc., and is set amongst a terrific stand of dry dryandra woodland. Numbat sightings are most often by chance, driving the roads through the forest, and sometimes along the walk trails. There's no clear-cut recipe for success, but I knew I just needed to keep myself in the best habitat to have a chance. A well known site is the Wandoo Walk, just to the south of Dryandra Village, it traverses some great habitat area. To that end, we spent our afternoon wandering along these trails, no luck unfortunately, but we did come across a lovely **Short-beaked Echidna**. The Echidna's on this side of the country were much 'spinier' than the ones I'm familiar with from Victoria, they were cloaked with a dense covering of long spines. Tomingley Rd and associated tracks occasionally offer a chance Numbat sighting as you're driving along – we covered a few laps in the afternoon but had no luck. **Western Grey Kangaroo** were seen on a few occasions. I was also really hoping for chance sighting of Western Brush Wallaby, unfortunately no luck as well, I wasn't really sure how I was going to find this species.



Image: Short-beaked Echidna, Dryandra Forest, WA

I was really pumped for a night out spotlighting, as soon as our son was in bed and dinner was over, I was out of there. We had already had a few inquisitive **Common Brushtail Possum** join us for dinner, but before I drove 100m from our campsite I managed to glimpse a **Woylie (Brush-tailed Bettong)**, another one of Dryandra's highlights, these animals weren't too uncommon for the rest of the evening though I could never get within 20m and they always scampered before a photo was possible. Based on a few trip reports I found for the area (check out mammalwatching.com), I targeted the area of Gura Rd for a fair portion of the evening. This also included a couple of laps of Tomingley Rd, and obviously the area around Gnaala Mia campground. The following was the list that I accumulated for a long night spotlighting:

- **Western Grey Kangaroo** (30+); an open paddock sits adjacent to the Dryandra Village, this was a massive hotspot for Grey's.
- **Common Brushtail Possum** (18); extremely common
- **Woylie** (8); Gnaala Mia (2), Gura Rd (3), Tomingley Rd (2)
- **Southern Brown Bandicoot** (2); Gura Rd
- **Southern Forest Bat** (1); at the far northern end of Gura Rd, I found an open area of forest that was running hot with microbats.
- **South-western Freetail Bat** (2); as above, there was one particular area where bat activity was hot, it was a great example of flight style comparison between different species. While I could ID each with bat detector recordings, the fast, swooping and high-flying style of the larger SW Freetail Bat was quite unlike the dainty fluttering of a Forest Bat.

Not for lack of trying, I didn't manage to uncover a Red-tailed Phascogale or Chuditch for my night's work. It was an extremely late 3am jump into bed, and only a couple of hours later a nice early morning wake up call from a young toddler. Lack of sleep aside, after some brekky with the clan, I still had the next morning to explore the forest (thankyou to my supportive wife!). And I continued a wonderful roll of great sightings. The area around Gnaala Mia was full of birdlife, then as I continued back towards Dryandra Village I was lucky enough to flush 2 roadside **Western Brush Wallaby's** near the intersection of York-Williams Rd and Tomingley Rd. They are an outstandingly attractive macropod too, and even though they kept a good 30m at bay, they headed straight to the top of my favourite wallaby list. I birded around the Kawana Rd dam and found a nice couple of Blue-breasted Fairy-wren while I waited for the morning to warm up enough for Numbat's to become active. It was a perfect day by the time 9am ticked around, but despite my laps along Tomingley Rd, Gura Rd, Wandoo Track and the Ochre Trail near Dryandra Arboretum, I didn't have any luck. It was time to head off and pack up camp.

As so often happens, at the very last minute, I had returned back and turned onto the Gnaala Mia entrance road, when suddenly this light bundle of leaves blew across the track in front of me. A bloody **Numbat!** I was stoked and had ripping views as it ran across the road in front of me and proceeded to slowly wander off into the undergrowth. I just enjoyed this cool encounter from the car, hoping not to disturb it. Once it had headed off to the undergrowth I slowly jumped out of the car with the plan to get some photos, but even as discrete as I was, and knowing exactly where it was, the animal just vanished into mid air. I sat around for the next 20 minutes hoping for it to return from the hollow log or wherever it had disappeared to, but nevertheless it stayed hidden. And it was really time for me to head off. As I was jumping back into the car, a passer-by who happened to be the campground host mentioned that Numbat's had been seen in this exact area for the previous 3 days. So with this in mind, I would suggest this road is a great place to look for any prospective Numbat searchers – it was fantastic habitat too.

As luck would have it, after we had the caravan hitched and driving out of the park, another distant **Numbat** ran across York-Williams Rd, near the southern boundary of Dryandra Forest just near the intersection to Coneglin Campground. We stopped to search, but again couldn't relocate.

Margaret River region:

We based ourselves out of this region for 2 weeks; split between Yallingup Caravan Park and a farm-stay behind Margaret River. It was early October when we arrived, and it just so-happened that this period aligned nicely with the whale-watching season from Geographe Bay at nearby Dunsborough. This place and time of year is a hotspot for (Dwarf) Blue Whale sightings, as they swim by extremely close to the land on southern migration. Their presence close to land occurs as a product of a deep water trench which, extending in a north-south direction, ends abruptly at Geographe Bay. The whales follow the deep water and are then 'captured' by the unique shape of the bay, then passing only a couple of hundred metres from the coast as they round Cape Naturaliste, exit the bay and continue back south in open waters. Prime occurrence of Blue Whale sightings are from mid-October to early-November and, while we were a touch early, I set about by giving myself the best opportunity to see them. Naturaliste Charters run very comprehensive whale tours from Dunsborough, going out twice a day pending weather conditions. At \$90 a tour I think they're very affordable, and definitely recommend them.



Image: Dwarf Blue Whale, Geographe Bay, WA

After two half-day trips I hadn't been successful with the Blue's.. I had some outstanding time spent with **Humpback Whales**, a single **Short-beaked Common Dolphin**, and some really good seabirds including South Polar Skua which is quite a rarity. I boarded a third (and last) trip on our last day in the Margaret River region. By now it was mid-October and a couple of Blue Whale's had been seen in the days prior. As we were ~3km out to

sea watching some breaching Humpback's, a call came over the radio that 3x Blue Whale's had been spotted from land within Geographe Bay. The boat roared back into the coastline, and after ten minutes of patient watching we enjoyed an adult (**Dwarf**) **Blue Whale** surface next to the boat. Even though you only see the top third of the animal, you could tell it was such a massive beast.

Southern Right Whale's and Dwarf Minke Whale were actually seen on that afternoon after my last trip, but they didn't see a Blue Whale..(!)



Image: Humpback Whale (left & right), Geographe Bay, WA

While we were in the Margaret River area, I had reached out to a local researcher that was studying Australian Masked Owl's in the region; once thought extremely rare in the area, it turns out there is quite a reasonable but sparse population, they're just hard to find. In saying that, these magnificent nocturnal hunters are under significant threat, declining at a concerning rate due to poisonous rodenticides passed on by their primary prey. I was lucky to be shown a known male at roost during the day, a very very enjoyable experience.



Image: Australian Masked Owl, Margaret River region, WA

I saw my first **Western Ringtail Possum** in the peppermint woodland forest along Yallingup Brook in Yallingup. It turns out they were reasonably common in suitable habitat. Other stuff regularly encountered around the region included **Common Brushtail Possum**, **Western Grey Kangaroo**, **Southern Forest Bat** and pleasantly only 1 **Red Fox** and 1 **European Rabbit**. These introduced pests/predators did not appear to be regular by any means.

Tone-Perup Nature Reserve:

Another jewel in the crown of south-west WA's awesome mammal watching locations. While staying a night at the nearby Manjimup, I spent a full night cruising the tracks of the reserve. My number one target was Chuditch (Western Quoll), and this location could feasibly contain the highest densities of the species for WA reserves. Not a sure thing by any means, I hoped that by cruising the forest tracks and roads I would give myself a good chance of an encounter. Unfortunately it was not to be, I retired back to Manjimup with no Chuditch, but a terrific list otherwise.

A super eco-tourism lodge, Perup – Natures Guesthouse, is situated in the middle of the reserve. My plan was to visit here where there is a network of tracks to enjoy the habitat, and also nesting boxes situated around the grounds that often contain Brush-tailed Phascogale. Unfortunately the residence was closed this night, so check ahead if you want to stay. Instead I wandered the adjacent forest and explored areas around Northern Rd, Boyup Brook-Cranbrook Rd and Corbalup Rd. Mammals found included:

- **Western Grey Kangaroo** (2);
- **Western Brush Wallaby** (2); near the entrance to Nature's Guesthouse
- **Woylie** (7); mostly near the entrance to Nature's Guesthouse, a couple extra near the intersection of Boyup Brook-Cranbrook Rd and Corbalup Rd
- **Common Brushtail Possum** (18); common!
- **Tammar Wallaby** (1)
- **Southern Brown Bandicoot** (1); roadkill along Boyup Brook-Cranbrook Rd. I considered staking it out for the night, hoping for Chuditch... maybe I should have.

Two Peoples Bay Nature Reserve:

Known for the remnant population of Gilbert's Potoroo, which may have less than 40 individuals remaining (unsure of current status, information boards were fairly dated). If only I could say I saw one of these... (I didn't). I had one night spotlighting through the reserve. We had wandered the tracks during the day, and this served as a good recce as I found a patch of coastal banksia in heavy flower that I was hoping to stake out for the chance at a Honey Possum or Pygmy Possum. I almost ran over a **Western Ringtail Possum** on my drive in that evening, as always it was amongst a stand of peppermint eucalypts, just at the reserve boundary. **European Rabbits** were in massive numbers along the rural roads leading to the park from Albany. Within the Nature Reserve, **Western Grey Kangaroo** were around, and I stumbled upon 1 **Southern Brown Bandicoot** a few hundred metres before Little Beach. I set off along the coastal walk from Little Beach to the flowering banksias. No mammal-related fauna, but it could've been because of this young Carpet Python that was probably waiting for an unsuspecting victim.



Image: Carpet Python, Two Peoples Bay Nature Reserve, WA

Cheynes Beach:

Another well-known wildlife location of WA, I had been here a couple of times beforehand chasing the three skulkers that endlessly string along the birding fraternity. This time, I had priorities on any mammal fauna I could find (don't worry, got the skulkers too..). The one massive priority was Honey Possum; I was lucky enough to have been in contact with a WA local who had seen them here a week or so beforehand. He had passed on some details on the area of flowering banksia that it was found, so I focused a strong search here. This is a species that is partly diurnal and can often be seen in the early morning/late afternoon. The first day passed and I didn't have any luck, staking out the exact bush, or adjacent flowering areas. Spotlighting seemed a bit futile, any rustle within the dense heath seemed to quickly go silent upon investigation. A lot of the coastal heath and banksia was in flower, so I was thinking that there wouldn't be too much loyalty to the previously seen location. Day two came and an early morning hunt had nothing on the mammal front. The outstanding array of birdlife kept me suitably distracted. It was an overcast day, so I decided again to try the suggested area and set myself up to sit and watch a nice flowering banksia bush just behind the caravan park. I was absolutely pumped when after 10mins of watching, a shy **Honey Possum** was eventually seen poking its head into a full banksia bloom and scampering around the bush trying to avoid the honeyeater bullies. Even though it was around 11.15am, I still had success, so it goes to show how diurnal these critters really can be (it was a dull, cloudy day).



Image: Honey Possum, Cheynes Beach, WA

Over the next couple of days, I was out spotlighting each night and exploring the heath. **Western Grey Kangaroo** were their usual ubiquitous self, and I managed to find a very young **Southern Brown Bandicoot** after following a scurrying 'something' through the heathy undergrowth for about half an hour. It was quite small, and I had been thinking Bush Rat or similar, but was quite surprised when this half-size bandicoot showed itself. Late one evening I managed to again see **Honey Possum** in the same area, this time I think there were two. It was quite bizarre watching the little marsupial hopping across the track in front of me, extremely adept on the ground as well.

Stirling Ranges National Park:

We camped out at the Stirling Range Retreat on the northern boundary of the Stirling Ranges NP for 3 nights. This place was a very unexpected, a massive scenic highlight of the holiday. Sweeping 360 degree views, arduous hikes and perfect weather was our calling for the next few days. The park is known for being home to some of the small marsupials that favour dense heathy understorey – species like Western Pygmy Possum, Gilbert's Dunnart and Ash-grey Mouse were high on my list, but a bit far-fetched for a chance encountered. Honey Possum were historically seen around flowering bushes at the Stirling Range Retreat, but the owners said they hadn't been seen

for quite some time. Brush-tailed Phascogale however, had been recorded on recent occasions. None found by me though.

The main highlight was a diverse range of bat life. Warm evenings meant there were plenty of airborne insects, and plenty of bats chasing them. I found spotlighting and use of the detector along road corridors were best. The highlight list, all from the vicinity of the Stirling Range Retreat included:

- **Common Brushtail Possum** (7)
- **European Rabbit** (2); occasional
- **White-striped Freetail Bat** (10+); often heard
- **Southern Forest Bat** (4)
- **Gould's Wattled Bat** (2)
- **South-western Freetail Bat** (5); spectacular night fliers, you could really tell when they were rocketing by.
- **Chocolate Wattled Bat** (1); little flying bat bullets that dart by
- **Western Grey Kangaroo** (3)



Image: Common Brushtail Possum, Stirling Range NP, WA

Cape le Grande National Park:

The arid coastal habitat of Cape le Grande NP isn't full of mammal diversity, but it sure does lay claim to some of the best and most vibrant white beaches in the country. **Western Grey Kangaroo's** here are known for their propensity to spend time on the pristine white sandy beaches, foraging on what appeared to be beach-washed seaweed. They're a real hit of the tourist show and have endless crowds trying to get the perfect photo with a roo on the beach with scenic outlook. I figured they were being disturbed enough and left them to themselves. There wasn't a lot to report from this area; a pod of **Common Bottlenose Dolphin** sheltering at Rossiter's Bay on some wild weather, 1 **European Rabbit** at the Lucky Bay campsite, and I finally caught up with a **Bush Rat** while wandering between Lucky Bay and Thistle Cove one night.



Image: Western Grey Kangaroo, Cheynes Beach, WA

South Australia (3 November 2019 – 17 November 2019)

Nullarbor Roadhouse:

We saddled up for a fairly direct journey across the Nullarbor, covering ground from Esperance to Ceduna over a number of consecutive days. Long days driving didn't leave much time for exploration of a night time. We crossed the border into South Australia and soon after crossed the expanse of the Nullarbor Plain. **Red Kangaroo** were seen on a few occasions. We overnighted at the Nullarbor Roadhouse, nothing fancy from a campground perspective, but the area is a known location Southern Hairy-nosed Wombat's. Plenty of reports suggested they were easy enough to see, with burrow systems in the area behind the roadhouse. I spent the late afternoon and early night wandering and slowly driving around the tracks, but couldn't find anything expect for tons of **Rabbit's**. A few burrow systems were found, but nothing on the Wombat front.

I retired to bed early because I had planned an early morning mission to search for a few local bird targets. The next day I backtracked circa 100km along the Highway to explore the area off Koonalda Rd within the Nullarbor National Park. Nothing on the mammal front, but I was ecstatic to get onto Naretha Bluebonnet and a bunch of good arid plains birds. Nullarbor Quail-thrush went begging, so I'll be back for this one.

Driving further east (during the day), we encountered a high incidence of roadkill Southern Hairy-nosed Wombat (6+) near Nundroo, not an enjoyable sight, but hopefully an indicator of a thriving population out here.

Kangaroo Island:

We had originally planned to explore the Eyre Peninsula, but after a bit of time crunching some strategies on our itinerary we figured that if this area was spared, then we could devote a good week to enjoying Kangaroo Island, a place that had been on our bucket list for a while. Needless to say, it was a fantastic decision. Kangaroo Island was definitely a top 3 destination for our holiday, a diverse range of excellent eco-tourism and wildlife watching opportunities, beautiful scenery and a thriving local economy with plenty of local activities to enjoy. It is somewhat bittersweet as I'm writing this, because in the months since our visit, the Island (and a massive percentage of Australia's forests) have gone up in flames with devastating bushfires tearing through. Most of the sites that we visited, and that I'm about to rave about, have been completely wiped out and destroyed by bushfire. There are

unburnt pockets remaining, and amazing wildlife encounters can still be had. Kangaroo Island still needs plenty of help, and I encourage anyone thinking of heading there to still go for it!

Flinders Chase National Park (Cape du Coic section) – much of the western portion of the island is (was) covered in dense-growth mallee and is protected by national parks. We based ourselves from the Western KI Caravan Park, in itself a great little location. **Koala's** were abundant throughout the grounds; of a night time they really announced their presence with their weird range of vocal grunts. Take note of where you set up camp, our van must've been situated right beneath some juicy fresh gum leaves that the Koala's seemed to have a penchant for tucking into at about 2am in the morning, the result was a fair old ruckus on our roof with a constant delivery of Koala droppings – noisy and drove me insane! **Common Brushtail Possum**, **Tammar Wallaby** and **Western Grey Kangaroo** were equally abundant and I also managed to come across singles of **Large Forest Bat** over a few nights here. The Western Grey's on KI are a separate subspecies compared to their mainland counterparts, and are noticeably darker and shaggier.

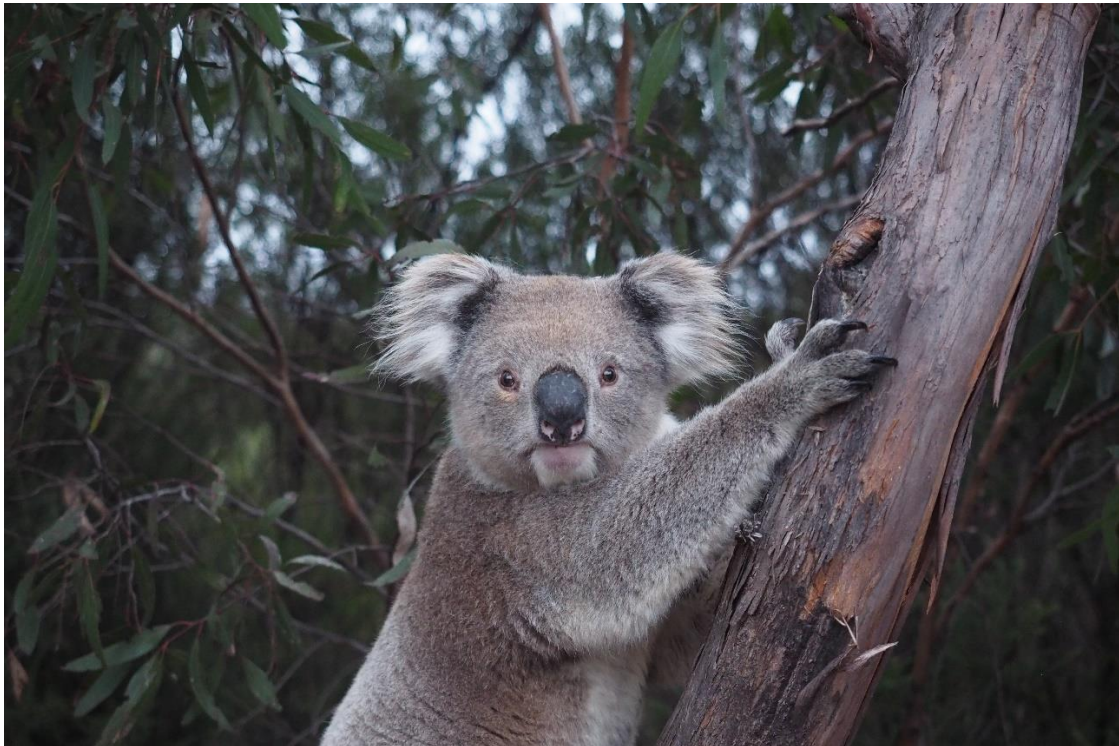


Image: Koala, Kangaroo Island (Flinders Chase NP), SA

The Flinders Chase NP Visitor Centre was a magnificent setup in the middle of national park bushland. It signals the entry down to Admiral Arch and Remarkable Rocks. Admiral Arch is home to a large breeding colony of **New Zealand Fur-seal**; there's a great access down to a viewing platform which takes any viewers for nice close views. We visited a couple of times and I combed through the animals trying and picked out a couple of animals I was pretty confident were **Australian Fur-seal**, also a few random **Australian Sea-lion**, but I'll leave my spiel on them to a touch later. I spent a few return visits wandering the area between Admiral Arch and Remarkable Rocks hoping to find White-bellied Whipbird, but there was nothing on this front and no mammals aside from the regular **Western Grey Kangaroo**.

A number of nights out exploring the area took me up and down Cape du Coic Rd and also wandering the network of tracks from the Visitor Centre. The Rocky River Waterhole behind the visitor centre has some good viewing platforms for Playtpus opportunities, but I didn't see any. The list of stuff I found included more of the usual:

- **Koala** (2)
- **Western Grey Kangaroo** (8)
- **Tammar Wallaby** (20)
- **Common Brushtail Possum** (10)
- **Large Forest Bat** (1)
- **Southern Forest Bat** (1); it was really great to get comparative recordings of these two *Vespadelus* species, and the only two present on the island. There's an obvious difference in echolocation frequency, but also size difference was distinguishable after a bit of practice.



Image: Western Grey Kangaroo, Kangaroo Island (Cape Borda), SA

Seal Bay Conservation Park – one of the major drawcards for the island, the famous **Australian Sea-lion** colony at Seal Bay is home to roughly one sixth of the world's population. The visitor centre is set up to manage itself as a big tourist attraction, and understandably so, it brings in an average of \$30k per day – a massive revenue source that is distributed around South Australia's national parks. Access to the breeding colony is only via guided tour, but it is thoroughly worthwhile. Our visit didn't coincide with any breeding season, but there were still plenty of animals around. I would recommend a visit very highly!



Image: Australian Sea-lion, Kangaroo Island (Seal Bay), SA



Image: Australian Sea-lion, Kangaroo Island (Seal Bay), SA

We visited a number of other destinations across Kangaroo Island; Cape Borda Lighthouse, Cape Gantheaume, Kingscote, Emu Bay and American River. All enjoyable on their own merits, but nothing extra from a mammal perspective. I didn't do much other spotlighting as I was gung-ho on trying to track down a Whipbird and was focussing on early mornings instead. Eventually I was aptly rewarded with ripping views of the skulker in dense mallee near Wheatons Beach at Cape Gantheaume – I hope this section of forest was spared from the bushfires on the island.

Brookfield Conservation Park:

After having no success across the Nullarbor, I was very keen to have another shot at Southern Hairy-nosed Wombat. We were making our way from Kangaroo Island to the east coast, via Mildura, so Brookfield Conservation Park, a known hotspot for them, was somewhat en route and we planned an overnighter at nearby Blanchetown. Blanchetown isn't very much to rave about as my wife pointed out..

The conservation park is closed after hours (I don't know if anyone actually locks the gate, but thought it best to act by the rules), and after a quick comb along the roads in the late afternoon I came out empty handed. There were a few notable burrow systems that would've been worth staking out at night. Instead, I scouted a few of the public tracks to the south of Sturt Hwy. Diagonal Rd had some great habitat and I found an absolute massive burrow system. The prince of wombat town built this one. I figured that something had to live here, so staked it out on dusk. Dusk turned to twilight which turned to pitch black and I didn't see anything at all. Feeling disappointed, I jumped out of the car for a quick walk and spotlight. Straight-away I heard the scurrying movements of something on the getaway and with a flash of the spotlight I found a beautiful big **Southern Hairy-nosed Wombat** sitting right at the edge of the burrow – awesome! A slow drive back along Diagonal Rd yielded 2 extra Wombat's and a few **Red Kangaroo's**.



Image: Southern Hairy-nosed Wombat, near Brookfield Conservation Park, SA

New South Wales (17 November 2019 – 27 November 2019)

We headed east from Brookfield CP to Mildura and on towards Broulee on the coast, passing via Wagga Wagga, Canberra and Bateman's Bay, another big drive. **Eastern Grey Kangaroo's** became common along roadside paddocks as we neared the Great Dividing Range. An overnight in Wagga Wagga had a camp of **Grey-headed Flying-fox** along the banks of the Murrumbidgee River. There were also heaps of **Gould's Wattled Bat** hawking over the river on dusk. We came across one **Red-necked Wallaby** on the roadside about 15km east of Bateman's Bay.

Unfortunately, once again, my recollection and report of sites has since been absolutely ravaged by the bushfires of Dec 2019/Jan 2020. A massive area of national park has been burnt, and all of the below sites no longer exist in terms of their former mammal watching opportunity. There are still pockets of remnant forest that remains, and all of these rural locations are in need of tourist support more than ever, so please continue to plan your trips out there. You never know, due to lack of other suitable habitat, there may be higher concentrations of wildlife in these remaining locations.

Deua National Park

Deua National Park is a remote wilderness area that stretches for ~100km north-south, inland of Bateman's Bay. We were staying at Broulee on the coastline, but I headed out for a night spotlighting through the forest. The national park has vast stretches of tall ash forests and wet gullies across the mountainous range. I had planned to head deep into the forest to explore some caves that are home to large roosts of Horseshoe Bat's, but I didn't even get close, it was a long drive in. Access is fairly restricted, so I just followed a dirt track; Dwyers Creek Rd, which turn into Little Sugarloaf Rd and stopped at intervals for some spotlighting in likely areas. It was a warm evening and there was a great selection of bats, my list included:

- **Swamp Wallaby** (2)
- **Common Wombat** (2)
- **Sugar Glider** (1)
- **Southern Greater Glider** (4)

- **Eastern Bentwing Bat** (4)
- **Eastern Falsistrellus** (4)
- **Little Forest Bat** (15+); numerous, the common microbat, a small *Vespadelus* buzzing around at most locations where I stopped.
- **Chocolate Wattled Bat** (2)
- **Gould's Wattled Bat** (1)
- **Feral Cat** (4); unfortunately, deep in the forest, I found this bright eyeshine beaming back at me, an adult with three kittens.

Plus heaps of other miscellaneous bat recordings – a great list and a good advert for a bat detector I reckon.



Image: Southern Greater Glider, Deua NP, NSW

Murramarang National Park (near Bateman's Bay)

The area around South Durras and North Durras is (was) home to a magnificent area of tall ash forests that end abruptly on the sandy coastline, an amazingly picturesque spot. The campgrounds and caravan parks around both South Durras and North Durras are recognisably featured by the tame **Eastern Grey Kangaroo** and occasional **Red-necked Wallaby** hanging around. **Common Brushtail Possums** were easily found through these urban areas at night. We based ourselves from South Durras and I headed out spotlighting most nights. A little footbridge crosses a small creek just behind (south) the sports ground in South Durras – it was a great spot for bats and they flew straight over, under or past the bridge. Over a few hours on multiple nights I had brilliant views of **Large-footed Myotis**, my first **East Coast Freetail Bat** (quite a few of them), **Chocolate Wattled Bat**, **Eastern Falsistrellus**, **Eastern Bentwing Bat** and **Grey-headed Flying-fox**.

On the other side of Lake Durras, the township of North Durras had great proximity and access to wetter rainforest gullies amongst the ash forest. A couple of nights out here resulted in strong numbers of **Yellow-bellied Glider** along the lake fringe. **Southern Greater Glider** were through the tall forested areas, also **Swamp Wallaby**, and a selection of the common microbats; **Little Forest Bat** and **Gould's Wattled Bat**.

I spent some time with the bat detector at open clearings within the forests hoping to get Eastern Freetail Bat, I got a few recordings that were most likely this species, but never got close to a view.



Image: Eastern Grey Kangaroo, South Durras (Murrumbidgee NP), NSW

South East National Park (near Merimbula)

My final night in NSW out spotlighting was at the Goodenia Rainforest Walk in the South East National Park – the short nature walk heads down into a cool temperate rainforest gully which I was hoping could have some good wildlife diversity. Long-nosed Potoroo can be found in these dense gullies, and I tried to track down any rustling noises in the undergrowth. Most times they turned out to be a **Swamp Wallaby**, **Common Brushtail** or **Common Ringtail Possum**, but on one occasion I stumbled upon a **Feathertail Glider** in the undergrowth; extremely wary once the spotlight was on it, it quickly scampered away. I didn't get great enough views (photos probably needed) to confirm the species level; Broad-toed and Narrow-toed Feathertail Glider both have overlapping distribution in this area. Further studies on these recently split species may reveal a habitat preference or further distribution breakdown for this complex, but on my sighting it can only go down as Feathertail Glider sp. I was stoked with this one either way, something I hadn't seen before. **Yellow-bellied Glider** were very common through this section of the rainforest, their crazy calls bellowing out often. One **Common Wombat** was spotted on my drive out as it tried to get itself run over.

Victoria (27 November 2019 – 2 December 2019)

Howe Flat Wilderness Area:

A favourite birding location of mine in far-eastern Victoria is the Howe Flat Wilderness area. I went out here camping one night, mainly with birding endeavours. While driving in the early evening I came across a group of **Fallow Deer** on the NSW side of the border near Kiah. While driving the tracks towards Howe Flat, **Common Wombat**, **Common Brushtail Possum** and **Common Ringtail Possum** were disturbed in front of the headlights.

Buchan Caves Reserve:

Buchan was just a nice hallway point on our drive home. On our one night here I staked out a cave system where it was known that Eastern Horseshoe Bat's roost. I wasn't too sure on their seasonality here, but either way, I didn't get onto any. Generally spotlighting around the Buchan Caves Reserve revealed a heap of **Common Brushtail Possum**, plus a few of the cave roosting **Eastern Bentwing Bat** and some un-ID'd *Vespadelus* sp.

Yarra Range State Forest:

On the last night of our holiday, it was pouring rain, occasional electrical storms passing through, intermittent hail and bloody cold. We sure were back home in Victoria. We were staying in the outer eastern suburbs at Warburton, and I figured it was only fitting to sign off our magnificent holiday with some spotlighting. I had explored the nearby Yarra Ranges State Forest before and knew it was a good spot for Leadbeater's Possum, a Victorian endemic but critically endangered species. I won't pass on specific details for the site, but after driving up through the forest, along a wet and slippery track in foggy weather, I wasn't even motivated to get out of the car. But I wandered along spotlighting for a little while, and just before the rain properly set in, I got onto the eyeshine of a quickly moving **Leadbeater's Possum!** It froze for long enough for me to get some good binocular views, then scampered away in typical squirrel-esque fashion. What an awesome sign-off for one of the most tremendous holidays anyone could ever hope for.

Summary:

Mammal List – 89 species

Bird List – 420

Reptile List – 37

Frog (Amphibian) List – 10

Feel free to shoot me an email if you've got an queries, happy to help.

My one take-away learnt from this adventure – if you've got aspirations and plans to do something like this yourself, just go for it, mammal wise or otherwise. We had contemplated for so long, ummed and ahned, but whatever your circumstances, you can make something work. It seems like a long time, but when you return back to work, to family and friends, it's like nothing ever happened or changed. Except now we have a bucketload of sensational memories, photos and experiences.

Full list as follows:

Total:	Species
1	Short-beaked Echidna, <i>Tachyglossus aculeatus</i>
2	Northern Quoll*, <i>Dasyurus hallucatus</i> (deceased)
3	Numbat, <i>Myrmecobius fasciatus</i>
4	Fawn Antechinus, <i>Antechinus bellus</i>
5	Northern Brown Bandicoot, <i>Isoodon macrourus</i>
6	Southern Brown Bandicoot, <i>Isoodon obesulus</i>
7	Koala, <i>Phascolarctos cinereus</i>
8	Common Wombat, <i>Vombatus ursinus</i>
9	Southern Hairy-nosed Wombat, <i>Lasiorhinus latifrons</i>
10	Scaly-tailed Possum, <i>Wyulda squamicaudata</i>
11	Common Brushtail Possum, <i>Trichosurus vulpecula</i>
12	Feathertail Glider*, <i>Acrobates</i> sp.
13	Honey Possum, <i>Tarsipes rostratus</i>
14	Leadbeater's Possum, <i>Gymnobelideus leadbeateri</i>
15	Sugar Glider, <i>Petaurus breviceps</i>
16	Yellow-bellied Glider, <i>Petaurus australis</i>
17	Southern Greater Glider, <i>Petauroides volans</i>
18	Rock Ringtail Possum, <i>Petropseudes dahlia</i>

- 19 Common Ringtail Possum, *Pseudocheirus peregrinus*
20 Western Ringtail Possum, *Pseudocheirus occidentalis*
21 Brush-tailed Bettong, *Bettongia penicillata*
22 Agile Wallaby, *Notamacropus agilis*
23 Antilopine Wallaroo, *Osphranter antilopinus*
24 Tammar Wallaby, *Notamacropus eugenii*
25 Western Brush Wallaby, *Notamacropus irma*
26 Eastern Grey Kangaroo, *Macropus giganteus*
27 Western Grey Kangaroo, *Macropus fuliginosus*
28 Red Kangaroo, *Osphranter rufus*
29 Euro (Common Wallaroo), *Osphranter robustus*
30 Red-necked Wallaby, *Notamacropus rufogriseus*
31 Quokka, *Setonix brachyurus*
32 Swamp Wallaby, *Wallabia bicolor*
33 Northern Nailtail Wallaby, *Onychogalea unguifera*
34 Western Short-eared Rock-wallaby, *Petrogale brachyotis*
35 Wilkin's Rock-wallaby, *Petrogale wilkinsi*
36 Monjon, *Petrogale burbidgei*
37 Rothschild's Rock-wallaby, *Petrogale rothschildi*
38 Black-flanked Rock-wallaby, *Petrogale lateralis*
39 Northern Blossum Bat, *Macroglossus minimus*
40 Black Flying-fox, *Pteropus alecto*
41 Grey-headed Flying-fox, *Pteropus poliocephalus*
42 Little Red Flying-fox, *Pteropus scapulatus*
43 Ghost Bat, *Macroderma gigas*
44 Orange Leaf-nosed Bat, *Rhinonictis aurantia*
45 Dusky Leaf-nosed Bat, *Hipposideros ater*
46 Yellow-bellied Sheathtail Bat, *Saccolaimus flaviventris*
47 Common Sheathtail Bat, *Taphozous georgianus*
48 Arnhem Sheathtail Bat, *Taphozous kapalgensis*
49 White-striped Freetail Bat, *Austronomus australis*
50 Northern Freetail Bat, *Chaerephon jobensis*
51 East-coast Freetail Bat, *Micronomus norfolkensis*
52 South-western Freetail Bat, *Mormopterus planiceps*
(*long penis, western form*)
53 Gould's Wattled Bat, *Chalinolobus gouldii*
54 Chocolate Wattled Bat, *Chalinolobus morio*
55 Mangrove Pipistrelle, *Pipistrellus westralis*
56 Northern Cave Bat, *Vespadelus caurinus*
57 Inland Cave Bat, *Vespadelus finlaysoni*
58 Large Forest Bat, *Vespadelus darlingtoni*
59 Southern Forest Bat, *Vespadelus regulus*
60 Little Forest Bat, *Vespadelus vulturnus*
61 Common (Northern) Bentwing Bat, *Miniopterus orianae orianae*
62 Common (Eastern) Bentwing Bat*, *Miniopterus orianae oceanensis*
63 Large-footed Myotis, *Myotis macropus*
64 Eastern Falsistrellus, *Falsistrellus tasmaniensis*
65 Pygmy Long-eared Bat, *Nyctophilus walkeri*
66 Black-footed Tree-rat, *Mesembriomys gouldii*

67	Common Rock-rat, <i>Zyzomys argurus</i>
68	Kimberley Rock-rat, <i>Zyzomys woodwardi</i>
69	House Mouse, <i>Mus musculus</i> (<u>introduced</u>)
70	Sandy Inland Mouse, <i>Pseudomys hermannsburgensis</i>
71	Bush Rat, <i>Rattus fuscipes</i>
72	Black Rat, <i>Rattus rattus</i> (<u>introduced</u>)
73	Red Fox, <i>Vulpes vulpes</i> (<u>introduced</u>)
74	Dingo, <i>Canus lupus dingo</i>
75	Domestic Cat (feral), <i>Felis catus</i> (<u>introduced</u>)
76	European Rabbit, <i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i> (<u>introduced</u>)
77	(Feral) Goat, <i>Capra hircus</i> (<u>introduced</u>)
78	Horse (Brumby), <i>Equus caballus</i> (<u>introduced</u>)
79	Donkey, <i>Equus asinus</i> (<u>introduced</u>)
80	Dromedary Camel, <i>Camelus dromedarius</i> (<u>introduced</u>)
81	Water Buffalo, <i>Bubalus bubalis</i> (<u>introduced</u>)
82	Cattle*, <i>Bos taurus</i> (<u>non-specific taxa</u>)
83	Fallow Deer, <i>Dama dama</i> (<u>introduced</u>)
84	Australian Fur-seal, <i>Arctocephalus pusillus</i>
85	New Zealand Fur-seal, <i>Arctophoca forsteri</i>
86	Australian Sea-lion, <i>Neophoca cinerea</i>
87	Australian Snub-finned Dolphin, <i>Orcaella heinsohni</i>
88	Common Bottle-nosed Dolphin, <i>Tursiops truncatus</i>
89	Indo-Pacific Bottle-nosed Dolphin, <i>Tursiops aduncus</i>
90	Short-beaked Common Dolphin, <i>Delphinus delphis</i>
91	Humpback Whale, <i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>
92	(Dwarf) Blue Whale, <i>Balaenoptera musculus</i>
93	Dugong, <i>Dugong dugan</i>

*Not included on my mammal total list