

Trip report – Queensland, Australia, July 1-21, 2018.

I visited Queensland, Australia on a family trip in July. The trip was more family vacation than hard-core mammal watching, and I realize that Queensland is well covered on mammalwatching.com., but I thought I would post a trip report anyway to update some of the information already available.

I travelled with my partner, Tracey, and my two children. Josie turned 18 in Australia and Ben is 14. We arrived in Brisbane around noon on July 1. We met up with my niece, Emma, and her partner, Brad, for dinner. The only mammals seen were *Homo sapiens*, but particularly pleasant and affable specimens. The next day we enjoyed some of Brisbane's urban delights. That evening we drove to the Greater Glider Conservation Area near Alexandra Hills in Redlands in suburban Brisbane. It's a fairly small park in suburbia but surprisingly dense with mammals. We saw Greater Glider, Squirrel Glider, about five Common Brushtail Possums and at least six Common Ringtail Possums. Several wallabies were seen which appeared to be Red-necked Wallabies. We then drove out to William Gibbs park. This is an even smaller park next to a school. However we quickly found two Koalas, two Common Ringtail possums and two Grey-headed Flying Foxes. Perhaps they were preparing to enter Noah's Ark. Anyway, after about four hours we were so tired and jetlagged that we called it a night.



Greater Glider

The next day we drove to Binna Burra in Lamington National Park, less than two hours from Brisbane. I had been here a number of years ago and was pleased to see how little it had changed. After dusk the grassy areas near the lodge and campground become covered with Red-legged Pademelons. Hiking some of the trails revealed Red-necked Pademelons, several Common Ringtail Possums and two Fawn-footed Melomys. We also found a Short-eared Brushtail Possum (Northern Bobuck) close to the lodge. The following day we hiked the Davies track, which is a gorgeous walk through some interesting vegetation and offers magnificent views out towards the coast. Red-necked Pademelon was the only mammals seen during the hike. Around 5 PM we drove down the entrance road and saw several Whiptail Wallabies by the side of the road just outside the park. Evening spotlighting again revealed Common Ringtail Possums, Short-eared Brushtail Possums and Common Brushtail Possums.



Common Ringtail Possums

The following day consisted largely of the drive to Hervey Bay to visit a friend, Paul, and his wife, Kate, who we had met three years ago in Borneo. Paul has done extensive wildlife surveys in Australia and the Solomon Islands prior to going to medical school. The next couple of days were more hanging out on the beach then looking for mammals but we saw a number of Eastern Grey kangaroos. Along the Esplanade, dolphins were visible which appeared to be Australian Humpback Dolphins (thanks to Jon Hall for the identification). A walk around the western edges of town revealed a Common Ringtail Possum with a baby, a Northern Brown Bandicoot, a European Hare and Eastern Grey Kangaroo, lots of which were seen in various places around town.

After returning to Brisbane, we flew up to Cairns. We had rented an SUV with rooftop tent from Wicked Campers. The vehicles have rude slogans on the sides, which caused some surprised looks when we emerged from within. I think folks were expecting vicious-looking hippies rather than a vacationing family. The kids got quite a kick out of this. Fortunately, Aussies are a good-natured lot. As a business, Wicked Campers is a bit chaotic, but the vehicle was fine. We spent the afternoon at Mossman Gorge, camped nearby that night and continued up to Cape Tribulation the next day. The beach at Cape Tribulation is absolutely gorgeous. The boardwalk trails through the forest revealed fantastic vegetation but few mammals, at least on our walks. I did see two Northern Brown Bandicoots and the odd unidentifiable microbat.

The next day's drive was up to Shipton Flats south of Cooktown. North of Mount Malloy the population density thins dramatically as one gets into much drier territory. A couple of Agile Wallabies were seen on the road. At Shipton Flats we managed to connect with the legendary Charlie Roberts. Unfortunately, my garbled recollection of his directions resulted in us doing much more driving around than planned to reach his place. Mammals seen during drives on random bits of the Bloomfield Road included one Northern Brown Bandicoot, one Fawn-footed Melomys, one large feral pig and one feral cat. Eventually we met up with Charlie. He has lived his entire life in the area and is a wealth of knowledge. His father had assisted on biological work in which Charlie has been involved since childhood. The outing started in spectacular fashion. Charlie had picked up a road-killed Northern Quoll and put it in the back of his pickup truck to show us. Shortly after admiring it, I glanced down and there was a live Northern Quoll at Charlie's feet. For a moment I thought the one in the back of the truck had undergone resurrection and come back to life but realized it was a different individual, possibly out to investigate. Over the course of the next couple of hours we saw three more Northern Quolls, a couple of Northern Brown Bandicoots, a Giant White-tailed Rat who obligingly posed on a branch at eye height, a couple of Striped Possums unfortunately quite high in a tree, Eastern Tube-nosed Bats flying around and a Red-legged Pademelon - a rather spectacular walk by any measure. Back at the Lion's Den pub we saw another Northern Brown Bandicoot as we admired the 4WD's that had arrived from doing the Bloomfield Track. The vehicles were straight out of Mad Max apart from the absence of visible weaponry.



Giant White-tailed Rat

The next day we drove up to Cooktown after a stop at Black Mountain National Park to look for rock wallabies. We got going later in the morning than I had hoped to so we didn't manage to actually see any. From Cooktown we drove south to Kingfisher Park in Julatten. This is a well-established site on both the bird-watching and mammal-watching circuits. We waited by the creek at the back of the property around dusk and were rewarded with the sight of a Platypus moving at high speed down the creek. Watching the feeders close to the lodge revealed Fawn-footed Melomys and House Mouse. Walking through the orchard, we saw numerous Red-legged Pademelons, Northern Brown Bandicoots and Long-nosed Bandicoots. An Eastern Horseshoe Bat previously seen roosting in a toolshed was regrettably absent. One of the saplings on the grounds held a Boyd's Forest Dragon, the first we had seen on this trip, and we also found several White-lipped Tree frogs. These are the world's largest tree frogs and quite remarkable in their own right.

After an early morning walk during which only Red-legged Pademelons were seen we drove south, stopping at Mareeba Gorge for some of the world's easiest mammal watching. Mareeba Rock Wallabies are fed here and are almost impossible not to trip over, let alone watch. The site also has a swimming area. Overall it's a bit overpriced but a lot of fun, a description which applies widely in Australia. We continued on to Atherton Birdwatchers Cabin just south of Herberton. Do not be fooled and potentially repulsed by the name. Christina and Thomas built the cabin in the heart of the forest for wildlife enthusiasts and it is fantastic. They have a 15 hectare property which abuts Mount Hypipamee National Park and have built a number of walking trails through the property. Both Christina and Thomas are avid

naturalists. We went out walking and spotlighting several times with Christina. The first evening started with a Rufous Bettong on the road before we even reached the property. An evening walk provided a good look at a Long-nosed Bandicoot followed by a Sugar Glider on a feeding tree. A little later that evening a Yellow-bellied Glider visited the same tree, a rare sight in this area according to Christina. We saw several Lemuroid Ringtail possums as well as the coppery variant of Common Brushtail Possum.



Mareeba Rock Wallaby

I went for a predawn walk on the property next morning and again saw a coppery Brushtail Possum and Lemuroid Ringtail Possum. The highlight of the walk was a brief glimpse of a Feathertail Glider in flight. At first it looked like a falling leaf. Back to the feeders for breakfast and the pleasure of drinking coffee while watching Australian King Parrots and Victoria Riflebirds come to the feeders. On the mammalian front the only visitors were House Mice and so the birds took top billing this morning, which I'm sure would be much to Jon's chagrin. We did morning walks around the crater at Mount Hypipamee and the Malanda Falls. Saw Saw-shelled Snapping Turtles in Red Lake and pademelons were seen beside the Johnston River near Malinda. We then headed out to the Nerada tea plantation, a hotspot for Lumholtz's Tree Kangaroos, and within minutes we saw three of them. Mammals just do not get much cuter than this. Stopping at Peterson Creek in Yungaburra gave good views of a Platypus in the late afternoon. On the drive back to the cabin we saw Swamp (Black) Wallaby on Webster Road. That

evening we went spotlighting at the entrance road to the crater in Mount Hypipamee National Park. I'd heard that spotlighting was no longer allowed here but we didn't experience any problems and saw a couple of other people doing the same. We quickly found a Green Ringtail Possum. We briefly saw a Herbert River Ringtail Possum on a branch. There was a sudden scuffle and seconds later a Lesser Sooty Owl was perching in a nearby tree with a young Herbert River Ringtail Possum in its clutches. A classic Queensland tableau. Speaking with Christine I discovered that Herbert River Ringtails often leave their young on a branch nearby and it appears the owl had swooped in and grabbed the infant while we were watching the mother further along the branch. A number of Lemuroid Ringtail Possums and one feral cat rounded out the tally here. Briefly checked out another site nearby and saw further Lemuroid Ringtail Possums. Arriving back at the cabin there was a lump in a bush by the house, which turned out to be another tree kangaroo about 6 feet off the ground.



Lumholtz's Tree Kangaroo

The highlight of the following day was an evening of spotlighting on Tinaroo Creek Road with my daughter Josie. We drove as far as we could and then walked to the end of the road. At one point a bettong hopped across the road, but did not stick around long enough for a definitive ID. Fortunately, a second bettong appeared on the way back and posed on a rock long enough to confirm that it was a Northern Bettong, an increasingly rare species. For confirmation, a Rufous Bettong appeared beside the road while we were driving back later that evening, giving us a good chance to compare the two species. Other species seen this night were Northern Quoll, Spectacled Flying Fox, Agile Wallaby, and Red-legged Pademelon.



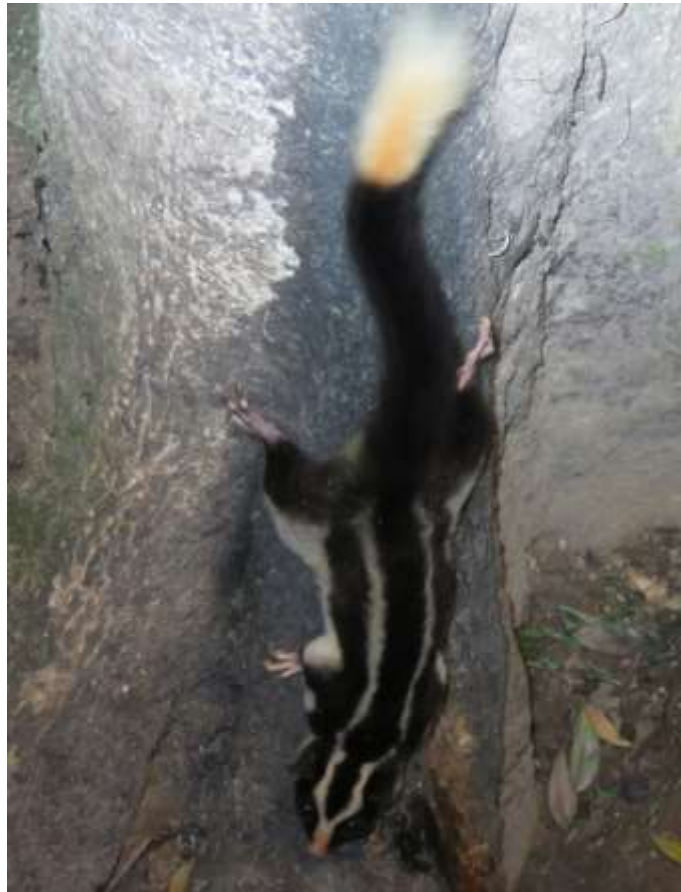
Rufous Bettong



Green Ringtail Possum



Herbert River Ringtail Possum



Common Striped Possum



Northern Brown Bandicoot

From ATBC we drove to Chambers Wildlife Lodge, another fixture on the Queensland wildlife circuit. There is a shelter beside trees which are painted with syrup each evening. Not exactly the most naturalistic of settings, but spectacular views of Striped Possum, Sugar Gliders and Bush Rat. The grounds provided more opportunities to see pademelons. I also found a very nice leaf-tailed gecko.



Red-legged Pademelon



Sugar Gliders

The next morning we hiked around Lake Barrine. This is a well-known spot for Musky Rat-kangaroo and we saw at least twelve of them. We did a boat cruise on the lake and got a nice look at a Red-bellied Black Snake sunning itself by the water's edge. As we were in Queensland in the middle of winter there was generally a dearth of snakes, so this was a very welcome sighting. The Amethystine Pythons often seen there did not make an appearance, but nice sightings were had of three Eastern Water Dragons.

Off to Mission Beach for the last few days of the trip. By this stage, Tracey was starting to describe mammal-watching as a good walk spoiled so I tried to curb my enthusiasm for dragging the family along on nocturnal hikes. We did walk to the nearby national park one day and were rewarded with the sight of a pair of Southern Cassowaries. They are spectacular, with a gait out of the Monty Python Ministry of

Silly Walks. The avian highlight of the trip. We tried to drive out to Barrett's lagoon near Tully to look for Mahogany Gliders but I couldn't find the site, much less the gliders. A few weeks later Jon told me that the current thinking is that they are not a proper species, merely a form of Squirrel Glider, which retroactively cheered me up.

We drove back to Cairns to return the vehicle. The local fair was on and the compound was locked up, so we left the vehicle just outside the gate and caught our flight back to Brisbane and from there back to Canada.

In all, a very successful trip, although a bit heavy on wildlife observation and light on other things according to some expedition members. It's hard not to like Australia – similar enough to home to be easy, exotic enough to be interesting and filled with some of the world's coolest mammals, at population densities that generally allow a fair number of specimens to be seen.

List of mammals seen:

1. Platypus
2. Northern Quoll
3. Northern Brown Bandicoot
4. Long-nosed Bandicoot
5. Koala
6. Short-eared Brushtail Possum
7. Common Brushtail Possum
8. Feathertail Glider
9. Common Striped Possum
10. Sugar Glider
11. Squirrel Glider
12. Yellow-bellied Glider
13. Greater Glider
14. Common Ringtail Possum
15. Green Ringtail Possum
16. Herbert River Ringtail Possum
17. Lemuroid Ringtail Possum
18. Rufous Bettong
19. Northern Bettong
20. Musky Rat-kangaroo
21. Lumholtz's Tree Kangaroo
22. Agile Wallaby
23. Whiptail Wallaby
24. Eastern Grey Kangaroo
25. Red-necked Wallaby
26. Black (Swamp) Wallaby
27. Mareeba Rock Wallaby

28. Red-legged Pademelon
29. Red-necked Pademelon
30. Eastern Tube-nosed Bat
31. Black Flying Fox
32. Spectacled Flying Fox
33. Grey-headed Flying Fox
34. Fawn-footed Melomys
35. Giant White-tailed Rat
36. Bush Rat
37. House Mouse
38. Feral House Cat
39. European (Brown) Hare
40. Wild Pig
41. Australian Humpback Dolphin