

## North West Australia Mammal Watching – Sep/Oct 2018.

The Kimberley trip was all about my favourite marsupials the Quolls. Australia has four Quoll species, and the Northern Quoll, found from WA's Pilbara region around the top of Australia to Queensland, was the only Australian Quoll species I had not yet seen.

### **Cockburn Ranges seen in Smoke Haze.**



The relentless march of the Cane Toad across the top-end of Australia, has been devastating to the wildlife and ecosystems of that region, since their introduction to North Queensland to control cane grubs in 1935. They reached the Northern Territory in 1984, and Western Australia's Kimberley Region in 2009. The invasion front is estimated to be moving between 40km and 60km per year.

Northern Quoll numbers are expected to initially drop as much as 85% with the arrival of the Cane Toad in the Kimberley, so time was now of the essence if I was to see this and other interesting Kimberley species in good numbers. Species killed by eating or mouthng cane toads, include Freshwater Crocodiles, Monitor Lizards, Elapid Snakes, Quolls and Dingoes. Although Cane Toads have not caused extinction of any of the above species to date, populations of these species have undergone huge crashes.

Enquiries during my travels, revealed the Cane Toad front reached Lake Argyle in 2009 and Mornington during the 2016/17 Wet Season. They weren't present at any of the following Kimberley sites when I visited - Broome, Windjana Gorge, Tunnel Creek, Mount Hart, Bachsten Creek Bush Camp, Mitchell Plateau, Wolfe Creek or Fitzroy Crossing.

They are expected to reach Bachsten Creek Bush Camp this wet 2018/2019 (their arrival will be posted on the Bachsten Camp Facebook Page.) They are expected to reach the Mitchell Plateau in the wet season 2019/2020. The taste aversion programme involving sausages baited with small amounts of Cane Toad toxin have already been deployed at the Mitchell Plateau, although worryingly not yet at Bachsten!

### *The Drive North – Perth to Broome – 3 nights - 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> Sep.*

Departure North from Perth was in darkness on a cold Spring morning. Aside from excellent wildflowers in the Northern Wheatbelt it was uneventful until I reached the Gascoyne. The day had now warmed enough for reptiles to be basking on the road, where sadly many had become roadkill, but I managed to move both a **Thorny Devil** and **Western Bluetongue** to safer ground.

#### **Thorny Devil.**



I overnighted at Minilya Roadhouse aka “The Hilton,” and the following morning picked up my first mammals of the trip in the form of **Euros (Common Wallaroos,)** as the highway passed through rocky country adjacent to the North West Cape.

My visit to Karratha for a couple of nights was to see Rothschild Rock Wallabies. This species is extremely easy to see on the islands of the Dampier Archipelago, but also occurs in low numbers on the Burrup Peninsula. My first port of call was the Department of Parks and Wildlife to enquire about sites on the Burrup, but unfortunately the relevant staff member was out in the field.

I had arranged a boat through a friend, and was all set to visit the Dampier Archipelago the following morning when plans were scuppered by an electrical fault, bugger. This meant I needed to rely on the Burrup to find this species.

Roads on the Burrup are unsealed North of Withnell Bay. This wasn't a problem with my 4WD, what was a problem was an obstacle called the "jump-up," which needed to be negotiated in order to access the far North of the Peninsula. The track was severely degraded and littered with large rocks, to attempt it was to risk serious damage to the car, and the success of the trip.

Instead I headed down a rough 4WD track along a gorge East of Withnell Bay, where I was hopeful searching would yield Rothschild's. Despite finding small amounts of scat, some fresh, I didn't find any Rock Wallabies. I did however disturb a **Microbat** sheltering between boulders and there were many **Euros** which are extremely common on the Burrup.

A search of the area behind Withnell Bay the following night also didn't produce any Rothschild's so disappointed I had to accept defeat and continue the drive North.

*Broome – 2 nights - 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> Sep.*

The two nights in Broome were to recuperate from the long drive and to stock up on supplies for the Gibb River Road (GRR) and Mitchell Plateau. I did however find a few mammal species in town. **Black Flying Foxes** roost in the mangroves bordering town on Roebuck Bay. I didn't search for the colony, but from the direction from which they were flying, I would guess that it was somewhere near the Streeter Jetty. **Agile Wallabies** are common on the golf course in town. A short spotlight at Cable Beach produced many **Black Flying-foxes** feeding in trees and a solitary **Tawny Frogmouth**.

*Windjana Gorge – 2 nights - 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> Sep.*



Thirty driving hours from Perth and finally I had reached the Kimberley proper. If I wanted a stunning first stop I got it in Windjana Gorge, I loved this place. The campsite was quiet so late in the season and the scenery and wildlife were bloody great!

The stars of Windjana are undoubtedly the **Freshwater Crocodiles**. September being so late in the dry meant that water in the gorge was reduced to a series of pools. The main pool just inside the gorge contained the most **Freshies** and I would estimate there were around 80 of these reptiles in this one pool.

## Freshwater Crocodile.



Mammals were well represented at Windjana, with **Short-eared Rock Wallabies** common on the descent into the gorge from the campsite, and on both sides of the gorge itself early morning and late afternoon from 4pm. **Agile Wallabies** were to be found in the Day Visitor Carpark, and also drinking from pools in the gorge. A colony of **Black Flying-foxes** was easily found by sound and smell further up the gorge, and **Microbats** were in huge numbers hawking over the water at night. I was lazy and didn't search for bats in the gorge walls but I think they would be fairly easy to find.

**Short-eared Rock Wallaby.**



*Tunnel Creek – Day Visit 11<sup>th</sup> Sep.*



Around a half an hour drive South of Windjana is the excellent Tunnel Creek. This water-worn creek runs 750m through the Napier Range and contains large numbers of **Megabats** and **Microbats**. The walk through the tunnel passes through waist high water in places and the yellow eyes reflected from torchlight on the surface of the water gives away their crocodilian owners.

The first bat I found inside the tunnel was a **Common Sheathtail**, and these were quite common. The only other microbat I found were **Common Bentwings**, huddled together in small colonies in chambers in the tunnel roof.

#### **Common Sheathtail Bat.**



**Little Bentwing Bats.**



The sign at the tunnel entrance claimed Red Flying-foxes roost near the Tunnel collapse but when I visited the colony consisted entirely of **Black Flying-foxes**, around 100 animals.

**Black Flying-fox.**





It is worth walking all the way to the end of the tunnel where the stream exits to a beautiful creek. There is aboriginal rock art on the walls after it exits the tunnel, on both sides. I got my first sighting of a **Mertens Water Monitor** basking on the side of the creek here.

*Mt Hart Station – 2 nights – 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> Sep.*

This is another excellent Kimberley Mammal Site, with large numbers of **Dingoes** around the Homestead and Airstrip. Indeed, of all the sites I visited in the Kimberley, Mt Hart by far had the largest number of **Dingoes**.

### **Dingo.**



I was lucky during my visit that one of the **Dingoes** had two **Pups**, and on the first evening the family were heading to drink at pools of water formed at the newly planted orchard. The mother hesitated on seeing me and coughed out to the **Pups** to come back. One **Pup** was obedient and returned to mum, but the other **Pup** was bolder and continued to the water to drink, very near to where I was.

**Dingo Pups.**



**Thirsty Dingo Pup.**



As mentioned above the orchard was newly planted and was barely waist high so didn't warrant a spotlight during my time at Mt Hart. There were a few mango trees at the back of the Homestead but I didn't find any mammals when I checked this area the first night. Although I didn't see this animal, there was a Northern Quoll frequenting the Homestead grounds, especially the area around the kitchen.

I was delighted to find a **Northern Nailtail Wallaby** grazing at the Airstrip after dark and was even more delighted to find it reasonably confiding.

#### **Northern Nailtail Wallaby.**



Dolorite Gorge was only a 5km drive from the Homestead, and it was here I spent the majority of my time at Mt Hart. The gorge used to be called Mt Mathew Gorge, indeed it is referred to as this in Jon Hall's Kimberley report. The gorge consists entirely of boulders of rock which makes excellent homes wildlife.

A day walk in the gorge gave close encounters with lots of monitors of the **Mertens** kind, spectacular beasts! Night time the gorge became the domain of huge numbers of Crocodile-faced Dtellas.

**Mertens Water Monitor.**



Mammals seen in the gorge during my two nights of spotlighting included numerous **Short-eared Rock Wallabies**, **Common Rock Rats** and **Northern Quolls**. The gorge was extremely warm during the early part of the night with heat radiating from the rocks. Fortunately, the pools in the gorge were refreshing if you didn't mind sharing them with the resident **Freshwater Crocodiles**.

## Northern Quoll.



**Agile Wallabies** were in huge numbers around the Homestead, and also at the Campground 1km South of the Homestead, on the road to Dolerite Gorge.

*Mornington – 1 night - 14<sup>th</sup> Sep.*

I had pre-booked two nights camping at Mornington but ended up staying only one night. The work they do at this AWC sanctuary is really great stuff but I just wasn't digging the vibe of the place. I watched a lovely sunset at Sir John Gorge (rough track,) and after dark had a short spotlight that produced a solitary Cane Toad, which left rather a sour taste in my mouth. Later that night I spotlighted around the campsite but pickings were slim.

The following day I packed up at dawn and backtracked to Silent Grove Campsite / Bell Gorge, after hearing reports of numerous Quolls and marauding Bandicoots. I'm so glad I did!

*Silent Grove Campsite / Bell Gorge – 1 night – 15<sup>th</sup> Sep.*

Bell Gorge was a highlight of the GRR, with a beautiful swimming hole below a tiered waterfall. The campsite was great for wildlife after dark. On a tip-off I set up camp near the cliff face at the back of the campground. After dusk I didn't have to wait long for numerous **Northern Quolls** to materialise from crevices in the rock, the first **Quolls** appearing well before dark proper.

While I was spotlighting I could hear a sound similar to a creaking camp bed, a low two-tone sound, which I initially attributed to amorous campers. Shortly after I spotlighted a **Sugar Glider**. Then a second, third, fourth and fifth in quick succession. They were enjoying the feast provided by *Verticordia cunninghamii* dotted through the campground.

This member of the Featherflower family, is a 2m-7m high shrub that flowers from September to October. It is a mass of flowers hard to miss, given away also by its sickly-sweet smell!

**Sugar Glider with a Face Full of *Verticordia* Nectar.**



**Northern Brown Bandicoots** were around the campsite after the moon had set, in good numbers. I had been sure to secure my rubbish bag as these night time bandits of Silent Grove Campsite make short work of any left in reach.

### Northern Brown Bandicoot.



The spotlight at Silent Grove Campsite also produced **Fruit Bats**, **Tree Frogs** and a **Freshwater Crocodile**. As you can imagine the Verticordias attracted Huge numbers of birds during the daytime, and there was even a **Gecko** in the toilet.

*Bachsten Creek Campground – 3 nights – 16<sup>th</sup>,17<sup>th</sup>,18<sup>th</sup> Sep.*

After obtaining gate keys from Mt Elizabeth Station (\$50 deposit, refundable) and paying my track fees (\$150,) I set off down the Munja Track 146kms to Bachsten Creek Bush Camp.

The Munja Track is a challenging, rough 4WD track. I loved it! The scenery it passes through is an utterly breathtaking vista of sandstone escarpments, rock arches and aboriginal rock art sites. The utter remoteness is palpable, and it was not hard to imagine this wild country as a prehistoric land.

## Jamieson Arch – Munja Track.



Wildlife seen on the Munja included a **Dingo** a pair of dancing **Brolgas** and plenty of **Red-winged Parrots** and **Lorikeets** flashing through the canopy. I had to evict **BIG Feral pigs** from some of the water crossings and had several stand-offs with **Bulls**.

## Dancing Brolgas.





The track itself is pretty cruisy for the first 66kms, with the only obstacles a flat rock river crossing and a couple of creek crossings. At 66kms the first and longest/roughest of the three jump-ups is encountered, the formidable Magpie Jump-Up.

### **Magpie Jump-Up.**



The track gets rougher from here on in, although there are only two other Jump-Ups. Fig Tree Jump-Up at 80kms and Bachsten Jump-Up at 124kms. There are also quite a few sandy creek crossings and water crossings, although water levels were low in September.

It had been a long 11 hours on the road from Silent Grove that morning when I pulled up to the camp. I had been warned at Mt Elizabeth the Bush Camp would be empty, the owners having left a week earlier, but I was delighted to find the toilets and showers (hot) open. A taste of the amazing wildlife of Bachsten was immediately apparent when a **Northern Quoll** scarpers across the rocks as I pulled up at the camp.

Despite the long day I couldn't wait to have a spotlight around the camp, and after setting up camp I explored the ridge behind the camp. It quickly became obvious that there were huge numbers of **Northern Quolls** and **Monjons** at Bachsten and they were extremely easy to view.

Monjon, I'm going to go with male.



The first nights spotlighting also produced a **Kimberley Rock Rat** easily distinguished from the Common Rock Rats at Mt Hart by their furred tails in many cases broken. I saw up to five of these animals around camp during my three nights at Bachsten. **Short-eared Rock Wallabies** were the last mammal I saw on this first short night of spotlighting.

### Kimberley Rock Rat.



Once it was light the following morning I climbed up on a ridge to watch sunrise, even in daylight there were **Monjons, Rock Rats** and **Short-eared Rock Wallabies** around.

Later in the day I set off to explore the area, following Bachsten Creek downstream to what became Bachsten Gorge. The riparian vegetation below the series of waterfalls was Kimberley Rainforest which I would have loved to have explored after dark except for two factors. The climb down into the gorge would have been a dangerous one and I had no-one to ask if the waters below the waterfalls contained Saltwater Crocs, definitely not a risk I was prepared to take.

## Stunning Bachsten Gorge.



It was tough going at Bachsten Creek with temperatures nudging 40C during the middle of the day. More onerous than the temps were the flies, and I spent a lot of time cursing myself for leaving my fly-net in Perth. The little flies that tried to enter your mouth/nose/eyes/ears were enough of a problem, but in addition there was an abundance of biting March flies. Photographing crepuscular wildlife was impossible, but once night fell all the problems of the day melted away once the abundant mammals emerged.

As dusk fell at Bachsten, this became my favourite part of the day as I made my way down to the creek to watch the huge number of **Microbats** hawking insects.

The second night at Bachsten saw me spotlighting for six or seven hours. In addition to the **Monjons**, **Northern Quolls** and **Kimberley Rock Rats** of the previous night, I saw a **Northern Brown Bandicoot**, **Common Rock Rat**, **Sugar Gliders** and a **Rock Ringtail Possum** (poorly.) The find of the night was undoubtedly a **Golden-backed Tree Rat** that bolted down from a vine thicket and up into the rafters of the caretaker cottage.

**Golden-backed Tree Rat.**



**Northern Quoll.**



I had noticed flowering *Verticordias* near the junction of Bachsten Camp with the main track on the drive in, and checked these out briefly, but instead of the Sugar Gliders I found at Silent Grove these flowering shrubs had attracted **Black Flying-foxes**.

On the morning of the second day I drove to Wren Gorge a further 15 kilometres along the track towards Walcott Inlet. Wren Gorge was an incredibly special place. The serene rock pool at the base of the waterfall was beautiful, made all the more special by the abundance of aboriginal art at the base of the falls. The first time a landscape has moved me to tears.

Both afternoons at Bachsten I explored the ridge on the opposite side of the Creek, and both of these afternoons I got disappointingly brief views of a monitor about 1m long, that disappeared into rock crevices. I think this species was probably the **Black-palmed Monitor** from its colouration and yellow tail-tip.

The final night of spotlighting was once again filled with **Northern Quolls** and **Monjons**, I think over the three nights I would have had 60+ sightings of Quolls, and 40+ sightings of Monjons at one point I had two **Monjons** and three **Quolls** in my beam at once! I was woken during the night by what I thought was a JCB digging outside the tent, on investigation I found a **Northern Brown Bandicoot** and a large hole. It was 3am so I thought I may as well have a spotlight before I drove out. I'm glad I did because a **Golden-backed Tree Rat** froze for great views.

#### **Golden-backed Tree Rat.**



I saw this animal thrice more over the next hour, the last time I was viewing a **Monjon** and I reckon it was in a tree at head height just to the right of my beam. The first I saw of it was when it exploded off into the rocks. Damn, if only I had noticed it before.

Bachsten Bush Camp is an incredibly special place, the best place I have viewed wildlife in all of Australia for the variety and large numbers of each species. I feel extremely privileged to have visited before the Cane Toad and hope that one day Quoll numbers will return to the levels at the time of my visit. It took a lot of planning and effort to reach Bachsten but the rewards exceed expectations. Next time I visit I will spend at least a week on the Munja, there really is so much to explore in this amazing part of the Kimberley.

Ps Now that I have driven the Munja, I fully appreciate Jon Halls dedication to mammal watching. Any person who drives the Munja to see the mammals of Bachsten and returns on the following day has dedication I can only dream of! Respect Jon!

### *Drysdale River Homestead – 1 night – 19<sup>th</sup> Sep.*

I broke the drive to the Mitchell Plateau at Drysdale Homestead and dipped on the Northern Nailtail Wallaby during an extremely short spotlight. I did manage however to find the Homestead Bar that served plenty of cold Coopers Pale Ale and an excellent Thai Green Chicken Curry. Bliss.

### *Mitchell Plateau – 3 nights - 20<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup> Sep.*

With the exception of about 30km of road south of Drysdale Homestead, the Kalumburu Rd was like a dream from the GRR to the Mitchell Plateau turn-off, things took a turn for the worse after the turn-off with the road HEAVILY corrugated. I trialed a few speeds to find the sweet spot and pass over the corrugations as smoothly as possibly, but even this was hard with patches of rock appearing in the road requiring sharp use of the brakes. It was hard to believe but the road continued to continually deteriorate, until the last 16km to Mitchell Falls Campground speed was reduced to under 20kph.

I was glad to finally get to the campground even if the temps were already soaring. After setting up camp I set off for a recce mission late afternoon for the spotlight that evening.

The track from Mitchell Falls Campground passes over a creek (useful to cool off as there are no showers,) then passes over an area of rocky sandstone. Approaching little Mertens Falls there is an area of rainforest to the left of the path along the creek line. Past little Mertens Falls, the path passes through Woodland before ascending through more Sandstone Acacia, then descending through a second patch of rainforest (about 200m long.) This was as far as I spotlighted both nights, a distance of around 2kms one way from the campground. Past this point the track skirts Big Mertens Falls and finally arrives at Mitchell Falls.

During the walk I found a **Monjon with Joey** at the far end of the second patch of rainforest, in rocky habitat to the right of the path.

### Monjon with Joey.



On the drive into the park it was clear to see that intense fires had recently burnt on the Mitchell Plateau, and as a result of this large areas of the Sandstone Acacia habitat had been back burnt to protect the campground. This was unfortunate in that it would have been a great area to look for the Golden Bandicoot that I was hoping to, but didn't find. On speaking to the campground ranger on arrival he was pessimistic about my chances of finding many mammals at all.

After dark I wandered around the campground, and had my first find of the night with a **Sugar Glider** licking the sap off the branch of a cocky apple tree. After crossing the creek, I found a **Northern Quoll** on the rocky country that scarpers up a small tree and obligingly froze. Things were quiet until I reached the second patch of rainforest when I disturbed an animal up into the far side of a paperbark trunk. I could see the eyes peering out of one side of the tree but was unsure of what I was looking at, until I saw the distinctive white feather duster end of the tail poking out of the other side of the trunk below. I had found another **Golden-backed Tree Rat**, which shot off into the rocky escarpment like a bolt of lightning.

**Fruit Bats** were commonly heard flapping away from the rainforest trees as I passed underneath.



I had my second major find of the night when I disturbed a **Rock Ringtail Possum** into a crevice at obvious cliffs on the opposite side of the creek immediately past this second patch of rainforest. Although views were brief maybe under 5 seconds I was delighted after the very, very brief silhouette of this animal at Bachsten Creek.

Returning to the campsite I added a further nine **Monjons**, a second **Northern Quoll** and four **Tawny Frogmouths** to the nights tally. There were also plenty of Dingoes heard around Mitchell Falls Campsite where they kept up a chorus of howling. Awesome!

The following morning, I walked out to Mitchell Falls, finding a **Mertens Water Monitor** at Little Mertens, and choppered back (\$150.) Really cool to see the land from another perspective. The heat was too much for me back at the campsite so I retired under Little Mertens Falls with a book where temperatures were considerably cooler than the campsite.

The second night, as I was approaching Little Mertens Falls, I heard a disturbance in the rainforest to my left. On investigation I found a **Possum** high up the trunk of a tree, I couldn't see the tail which was wrapped around the trunk, but when I did it was clear this was a **Scaly-tailed Possum**.

#### **Scaly-tailed Possum.**



**Monjons** were common around the top of Little Mertens Falls and I couldn't believe it when eyeshine from high up in a rainforest tree, in the second patch of rainforest, that I thought was a Fruit Bat, turned out to be a second **Scaly-tailed Possum**!

In addition, I found a couple of **Euros** on the return walk. Frogs commonly seen on the Mitchell Plateau were the **Striped Rocket Frog** and **Wotjulum Frog**.

My final night on the Mitchell Plateau I spotlighted Surveyors Pool an hour North of Mitchell Campground where I saw a **Dingo** and a **Quoll** late afternoon and a sole **Sugar Glider** during the spotlight.

I had heard numerous reports of Honeymoon Pool, North of Kalumburu being an excellent spot which I decided to visit especially in light of the fact that the Kalumburu Road was recently graded. However, fate was against me when I reached Kalumburu and the store was shut (Sunday,) because I was dangerously low on supplies. On the drive to Kalumburu I had seen 4 x **Antelope Wallaroos** and a **Jabiru** so the journey fortunately was not a complete waste of time.

I lunched at Drysdale River, then afternoon I continued on the GRR. I timed the journey so that I would be passing the Cockburn Ranges late afternoon when they would be reflecting the late afternoon sunlight. They were bathed in smoke from massive bush fires when I passed, and when I reached Kununurra it too had its own fire emergency with four houses lost.

Mirima National Park was on fire so any visit to see the Short-eared Rock Wallabies there was out of the question, the road to Lake Argyle was closed due to the fires so I overnighted in Kununurra.

### *Lake Argyle – 1 night – 24<sup>th</sup> Sep.*

I spent one night at the Lake Argyle Resort from where I had booked the Sunset Cruise on Lake Argyle. The cruise itself was great with plenty of **Freshwater Crocodiles** seen on the banks. Unfortunately, the Short-eared Rock Wallabies I was hoping to see on one of the islands turned out to be **Euros**, although excellent views of these animals are guaranteed. Having a sunset beer in 28C water, in a lake with a catchment area the size of Switzerland containing 25,000 Freshwater Crocodiles was definitely one of those Kimberley Experiences!

The spotlight around the bar area of the caravan park that night was disappointing with none of the Northern Brown Bandicoots or Sugar Gliders present on the property around.

*Wolfe Creek – 1 night – 25<sup>th</sup> Sep.*

There was no way I could pass up spending a night in the second largest meteorite crater on earth (350m diameter.) It is 130km off the main highway into the desert and fortunately the road had been recently graded and was a dream. Wildlife encountered during this excursion included **Red Kangaroos**, **Wedge-tailed Eagles**, **Major Mitchell Cockatoos** and numerous **Ring-tailed Dragons**.

**Red Kangaroo.**



*Fitzroy Crossing – 2 nights – 26<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup> Sep.*

I camped at the excellent Fitzroy River Lodge for 2 nights to chill-out before I met Lorenz in Broome and really chilled-out. This is the best place in the Kimberley to see **Agile Wallabies** which are around the well-watered campground in huge numbers. Fitzroy Crossing is also the jump-off point for Geikie Gorge although I didn't find this gorge as impressive as other gorges I had visited.

## Agile Wallabies.



*Broome – 4 nights – 28<sup>th</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup> Sep, 1<sup>st</sup> Oct.*

Now that the camping, bush toilets and dust of the GRR were safely over Lorenz flew to Broome, where we stayed at Cable Beach Resort. This is a busy resort but still has good wildlife with **Agile Wallabies**, **Green Tree Frogs**, **Gilbert's Water Dragons** and **Northern Brushtail Possums** on the property.

**Northern Brushtail Possum.**



**Green Tree Frog.**



On the last evening, we visited Broome Bird Observatory and did the Bush and Plains Tour. We dipped on the Northern Nailtail Wallaby, although we did see **Agile Wallabies**.

Chatting to the excellent bird guide Andy I discovered that the Dampier Downs Road that Jon Hall had previously seen Bilbies on was in good condition. After seeing the roadworks on the highway both North and South of Broome after this year's busy cyclone season, I had mistakenly assumed it would be in a terrible condition and so had decided not to try for this species.

*Karratha – 1 night – 2<sup>nd</sup> Oct.*

I finally got hold of the Rothschild person at DPaW in Karratha and she confirmed all the sightings of Rothschild's they had on motion cameras were North of the "Jump-up" on the Burrup. I had booked on the Discovery Cruising the following day but cancelled after the Rock Wallabies were removed from the agenda because the other cruise guests were wildlife heathens.

*Exmouth – 3 nights – 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> Oct.*

It had been eight years since I had lived at Exmouth, and I was pleased to find that the wildlife was as excellent as I had remembered. Pilgramunna Gorge was jumping with **Black-footed Rock Wallabies** (40+) and **Euros** were of course extremely common in the Cape Range National Park.

**Black-footed Rock Wallaby.**



### Euros (Common Wallaroos.)



At the end of the second day we parked up by the lighthouse on the tip of the Cape to watch sunset and had four **Humpbacks** breaching in the ocean in front of us. Incredible.

We booked on a sunset whale watching cruise in the Exmouth Gulf and easily saw 30+ **Humpbacks** including an extremely exciting “heat run,” with up to eight bulls jostling to follow a cow for the opportunity to mate. A **Manta Ray** and **Sailfish** were unexpected bonuses on the cruise.

### Humpback Whale "heat run."



The trip was now over and finally I could say I had visited the Kimberley. There were ups and downs visiting in September. The ups being the low visitor numbers, the low water levels at creek crossings and of course the increased reptile numbers. Downs were the fires that had scarred much of the landscape and the very hot daytime temps (11am – 3pm.) Would I go again in September, definitely. Although to see it in the wet would be such a profoundly different experience. I was happy with the excellent haul of wildlife I saw but my dip on the Frilled-necked Lizard leaves me itching to get back North. Maybe next time in the wet.....



