

# Queensland 2019 – Part 1 of 4 – Tolderodden Regional Park to Taunton National Park and Australia's Rarest Wallaby.

As Wildlife Watching trips go, this epic of five weeks is my biggest to date, involving seven flights, three hire cars and over six thousand driving kilometres. Although it required a massive effort, the rewards were an astounding 65 mammal species seen, as well as some epic frogs and reptiles, and a good suite of interesting birds.

If all the information from the five weeks were included in the one article it would be overwhelming both the reader and writer, so the trip has been split accordingly into four geographical sections. This is the first of these sections, covering the first week of the trip in *Central Queensland*, from *Tolderodden Regional Park* to *Taunton National Park*.

I caught the red-eye from *Perth* to *Brisbane* on a cold Winter night in July arriving on the East Coast in the early hours of the morning. After a short stopover in the *Queensland* capital I flew on to *Rockhampton*. Here, I picked up a hire car and made the drive four hours South to *Tolderodden Regional Park*, near the town of *Eidsvold*, and the wildlife watching could begin.

## **Tolderodden Regional Park.**





The target species at *Tolderodden* was the **Herbert's Rock Wallaby** the southernmost of seven sympatric *Queensland* Rock Wallabies. I'm an avid follower of Tim Bawden's excellent blog [gobirding.com](http://gobirding.com) and it was here that I had read of *Tolderodden* being an excellent site for this species, so many thanks to Tim.

I arrived mid afternoon and after setting up camp made the short climb up the hill behind the camping area. There on the obvious rocky outcrops on the hill it was easy to find the **Herbert's Rock Wallabies** enjoying the warmth of the afternoon sun. I had excellent views of five rock wallabies, some were skittish but others were engrossed in sunbathing and approach was easier.

**Herbert's Rock Wallaby with Joey.**



Later that afternoon I made the drive into *Eidsvold*, seven kilometres away, for dinner at the pub, and during the drive I saw both **Whiptail Wallabies** and **Eastern Grey Kangaroos** in the fields approaching town.

Back at the campsite after dark, despite the plummeting temperatures, I had a short spotlight before all the travel of the previous 24 hours caught up with me. I was rewarded with great views of a **Common Brushtail Possum**. There were also plenty of **Herbert's Rock Wallabies** grazing on the hillside after dark.

### Brushtail Possum.



The following morning with temperatures hovering around zero I regretted not bringing my thermals on the trip! Once the sun had risen, I revisited the hill behind the campsite and found plenty of **Rock Wallabies** warming in the morning sun. It was a great start to the trip with four mammal species seen over the first 24 hours.

That day I retraced my steps North, stopping at *Biloela* for supplies for the upcoming camping at *Taunton Scientific Reserve*. I was overnighing at the roadhouse at the town of *Dingo*, so that I could be at *Taunton* at the appointed early hour the following morning.

After settling into my room at the *Dingo Roadhouse* I had time to kill before sundown, so I drove 25 minutes to the nearby town of *Duaringa* to see if there were any macropod species on the town golf course late afternoon. **Eastern Grey Kangaroos** were plentiful on the greens whilst on the nearby airstrip there were both **Eastern Grey Kangaroos** and **Whiptail Wallabies**. Approach on foot was difficult but by driving the tracks around the airstrip I was able to get close to a pair of **Whiptail Wallabies**.



**Whiptail (Pretty-faced) Wallabies.**



Monday I awoke full of anticipation, because today I was going to volunteer at *Taunton Scientific Reserve*. This would hopefully enable me the rare opportunity to see the **Bridled Nailtail Wallaby** in the wild.

**Taunton Scientific Reserve.**



The **Bridled Nailtail Wallaby** was declared extinct in 1937, the result of a combination of factors. Firstly, clearing of Brigalow Scrub for grazing stock resulted in a loss of habitat, then drought and introduced predators further sounded doom for the species. Prior to this the **Bridled Nailtail** was widely distributed along *Australia's* East Coast, from the *Murray River* in *Victoria* as far North as *Charters Towers* in *Queensland*.

Almost 40 years passed when a fencing contractor working on a remote cattle station in *Central Queensland* rediscovered the species. That cattle station was *Taunton*, which was then purchased by the *Queensland* government, and along with an adjacent property became *Taunton Scientific Reserve* in 1984 and eventually the National Park it is today.

Twelve months previously I had written to the ranger at *Taunton Scientific Reserve* to ask about volunteer positions. *Taunton Scientific Reserve* is not open to the public so volunteering was the only way to access *Taunton*.

Introduced predators such as feral cats and wild dogs pose a major threat to the survival of the diminutive **Bridled Nailtail Wallaby**, accordingly, biannual shooting and trapping of these animals is carried out at *Taunton* to control numbers of these destructive pests. I was asked to schedule my visit to coincide with this pest control.

I arrived at the reserve at the appointed early hour and found plenty of **Eastern Grey Kangaroos** enjoying the sun after near freezing pre-dawn temperatures. Then, after I had received my induction and set up my tent, which was to be my home for the next five days, I had the rest of the day free.

In the afternoon I jumped at the opportunity to visit the Northern part of the reserve where volunteers were replacing a trap. During the drive North two bluish-grey female **Antilopine Wallaroos** bounded across the track in front of the buggy. This macropod of the grasslands of *Northern Australia* is right at the Southern limit of its distribution at *Taunton*.

After the trap had been replaced, we had time to drive around and look for wildlife, despite it being mid-afternoon and a relatively warm day there were good numbers of **Bridled Nailtail Wallabies** sheltering in the brigalow scrub.

The initial sightings were brief or at a distance, that was until we encountered a juvenile wallaby that was more than happy to pose. I didn't think it possible but the **Bridled Nailtail Wallaby** was even prettier in the flesh than in the photos I had seen. This juvenile looked almost rabbit-like with its miniature size and long ears.



### Juvenile Bridled Nailtail Wallaby.



Over the course of the afternoon we saw up to ten **Bridled Nailtail Wallabies**, mostly sheltering in the brigalow indicating how important this acacia is to the survival of this species. 90% of *Australia's* brigalow woodlands have been lost in the last 200 years.

### Bridled Nailtail Wallabies sheltering in Brigalow Scrub.





The macropod in the greatest numbers at *Taunton* is without doubt the **Black-striped Wallaby**. They are a crepuscular wallaby, starting to forage late afternoon and conveniently for my purposes they were found in vegetation adjacent to the accommodation. The reason for this was the accommodation was situated in the middle of a field and the **Black-striped** would graze the field after dark. Spotlighting after dark there were always large numbers of **Black-striped Wallabies**.

The distinctive features of this species are a reddish brown of the arms and ears, a black-stripe that runs down the back from the neck to the rump, and a distinct white hip stripe.

**Black-striped Wallaby.**



Other macropods seen late afternoon at *Taunton* were **Eastern Grey Kangaroos**, **Common Wallaroos** and **Swamp Wallabies**.

After dark I couldn't wait to get out for a spotlight in this amazing place, and I wasn't disappointed with 10-15 **Black-striped Wallabies**, 6 **Bridled Nailtails**, 10 **Brushtail Possums** and also a few **Rabbits** seen. The standout for the night however was a close encounter with a **Rufous Bettong**.

### Rufous Bettong.



Over the course of the four nights spotlighting at *Taunton* I saw **Rufous Bettong** on every night including a rather endearing male and female that foraged near my tent most nights.

Tuesday morning was a very early start to check the traps and boy was it cold with the dawn temperature at 0C. I threw on as many layers as I could muster, because riding around for four hours in an open buggy I was going to need them.

In addition to **Kangaroos** and a **Common Wallaroo**, the surprise of the morning was finding a **Wedge-tailed Eagle** in a dog trap. It had probably only just got caught hopping along to take off at the approach of our buggy. Everyone was relieved to find no damage to the eagle's talon in the "soft" trap and after a delicate operation involving a blanket, dextrous manipulation and some brute strength the indignant raptor was released unharmed.



### Wedge-tailed Eagle.



Spotlighting on the second night the standouts were an **Owlet Nightjar** and my first glider of the trip in the form of a **Sugar Glider**, as well as the usual assortment of **Wallabies**, **Possums**, **Bettongs** and **Rabbits**.

Wednesday morning on the trap run was another freezing start but wildlife was always plentiful. This morning we saw **Common Wallaroo**, **Black-striped Wallaby**, **Swamp Wallaby**, **Kangaroos** and a **Boobook Owl**. Unfortunately, a Wild Dog made its escape from a trap on our approach.

During an afternoon drive, in addition to the usual **Bridled Nailtail** and **Black-striped Wallabies**, there were plenty of **Common Wallaroos** around. Every one of the **Common Wallaroos** seen at *Taunton* had a much darker fur colour than the usual dark grey or reddish fur of this species, and in some cases the fur was almost black, making for a beautiful looking **Wallaroo**.



**Common Wallaroo.**



**Eastern Grey Kangaroos** were another common macropod at *Taunton*, especially in the Southern part of the reserve where the understory was more open.

**Eastern Grey Kangaroo.**





Wednesday night I put in a big effort spotlighting and was amply rewarded. I started the night spotlighting the access road in the South of the reserve and it quickly became apparent that this was a glider rich part of the reserve with three **Sugar Gliders** found in quick succession followed by a new species for me the **Squirrel Glider**.

I had always wondered if I would be able to easily make the distinction between **Sugar** and **Squirrel** glider in the field, I needn't have worried, the minute I saw the **Squirrel Glider** there was no way the tail could be mistaken for that of a **Sugar Glider**. Other distinguishing features that are not so obvious were the larger size, longer snout and more pointed ears. This was very much a species I had hoped to see on this trip and I was delighted.

#### **Squirrel Glider.**



Also seen from the Southern access road were **Brushtail Possums**, two **Rufous Bettong** and multitudes of **Black-striped Wallabies**.

Moving onto the Northern access road later on I found more **Brushtail Possums**, **Rabbits**, **Black-striped** and **Bridled Nailtail Wallabies** and the night was rounded off with a further two **Rufous Bettong** outside my tent.

Thursday was my last full day at *Taunton* and I visited nearby *Blackdown Tablelands NP* with one of the rangers who was pre-feeding Feral Pigs. As we were leaving *Taunton*, I saw my first reptile of the trip a **Bearded Dragon** sunning itself on the road.

*Blackdown Tablelands NP* was spectacular sitting high above the surrounding plains although sadly fires had recently been through the park so it was not looking at it's best during my visit. We put out the feed for the Feral Pigs that had certainly recently been in the area evidenced by their destructive rooting for food. Returning to *Taunton* late afternoon we saw plenty of **Eastern Grey Kangaroos**.

I had seen five **Swamp Wallabies** during my four days at *Taunton* but these timid wallabies can be hard to photograph. During my last evening drive, I came across a young adult **Swamp Wallaby** unperturbed by the car engine noise, and so I was able to observe and photograph the animal for fifteen minutes.

#### **Swamp Wallaby.**



The final spotlight started with the usual two **Rufous Bettong** around my tent and also included a **Boobook Owl**, five **Brushtail Possums**, a **Sugar** and **Squirrel** glider and was rounded off by a further two **Rufous Bettong**.



**Mr and Mrs Rufous Bettong.**



I feel extremely privileged to have visited *Taunton*, and see the fabulous work done there to preserve native fauna. Many thanks go to all the rangers stationed there during my stay, especially Peter Mowatt who was instrumental in organising my visit.

From here, I was heading North to *Eungella*, one of the best places in *Australia* to see the unique **Platypus**. This and the other wildlife seen between *Eungella* and *Ingham* is covered in part two of this series of four blogs of the *Queensland* Trip

This and other information on Australian Wildlife can be found on my blog  
[www.quollingaround.wordpress.com](http://www.quollingaround.wordpress.com)

