



North Queensland, Australia

Christmas/New years 2020-2021

Participants: Brett Taylor and Kat Spruth

Overview: Twelve(ish) days flying in from Brisbane on the 26th December having gotten the required Christmas family gathering out of the way. After a night in Cairns spent three nights at Kingfisher Park at Julatten (northern Atherton Tablelands), two nights in the Daintree in a very nice little bungalow (The Cascades), one night in the dry country around Chillagoe, three nights on the central/southern Atherton Tablelands including two nights at Chambers Lodge and a final night back in Cairns. As always at this time of year (start of the rainy season) you take your chances and we experienced a fair bit of regular rain but in the end it didn't really stop us doing almost all of what we planned to do.

Targets: Given it's summer in north Queensland (ie. the best time for fauna) we were looking at all taxa available for viewing but significant species were several new bats (for me), Daintree River Ringtail Possum, and Red-necked Crake (a source of frustration from multiple previous visits). A planned drive to try and see Mahogany Glider at the end of the trip was foiled by monsoonal weather and tiring participants.

Kingfisher Park, Julatten

On our drive up to Kingfisher Park we stopped in at Wangetti Beach and found six or so Coastal Sheath-tailed Bats (tick!) roosting in the rock cleft located directly beneath the lookout which also serves as a launch pad for parasailers. Thanks to mammalwatching.com for that location.



As always a stay at this lodge produces the goods. The owners are helpful with bird sightings/places as always (thanks Carol!), the bird feeders outside our room were entertaining as was the rat/bandicoot feeding in the evenings (a bit of a unique offering that one). The Bush Rats in particular were very active. Ten mammals in the grounds with the highlights being a Striped Possum, Platypus, and a Yellow-footed Antechinus which made afternoon visits to the sugar water placed out for honeyeaters. The very attractive Buff-breasted Kingfishers were about (summer visitors that give the lodge its name – see left). After three tedious afternoons sitting around the 'crake lagoon' and

being repeatedly told by others that I had just missed seeing one I finally saw a Red-necked Crake (a very furtive forest rail) which also happened to be my 600th Australian bird. The beer following this event was extra tasty.



Daintree River ringtail – Mt Lewis



Fawn-footed melomys – Kingfisher Park

Mount Lewis National Park is very close to the lodge and was the scene of a couple of morning visits to see the Blue-faced Parrot-finch visiting the weedy grasses at 'the clearing' (a wet season haunt and likely the only place you have a good chance of seeing one). It's a good place to get a few of the highland rainforest birds endemic to the tablelands. Musky Rat-kangaroos could be seen foraging along the main track. The second night of our stay we joined forces with a visiting birder and his partner and drove up the mountain for some spotlighting with Daintree River Ringtail Possum the obvious target. In the end we had good views of three (possibly four) (tick!). The only other mammal we saw was a rodent that got away from us. Other highlights included Lesser Sooty Owl, a Chameleon Gecko (another tick and a good one), and a Superb Fruit-dove roosting right above the track.

The 'Daintree'

Down to the steamy lowlands and our very nice little off the beaten track bungalow which had a great rocky stream in the backyard which featured two threatened frogs – Australian Lacelid and Common Mistfrog (poorly named these days). Night visitors included Fawn-footed Melomys and Long-nosed Bandicoot and in the morning a rather confiding Musky Rat-kangaroo allowed some good photographic moments. At Kingfisher park we were told by the birder that a friend of his had seen Bennett's Tree-kangaroo from a boardwalk only a month ago. This was not something I was really targeting as it's so hard to see, but, 'when in Rome' as they say.

There were only two boardwalks to choose from and one of these was a mosquito infested swamp/mangrove area so the second night we spotlighted in the other boardwalk (Jindalba) located near the 'Rainforest Discovery Centre' (where you can apparently see animatronic dinosaurs in the rainforest if you really want to). Our spotlighting produced hardly anything and no mammals. It soon bucketed down rain so we beat a hasty retreat back to our bungalow. The next morning we were driving out so gave it another go before leaving. The boardwalk isn't that long and was partially closed at the time. We stopped when hearing some strange wheezing/grunting noises. I thought it might be a Cassowary. Then I saw leaves moving in a densely foliated tree (which are most of the large trees are in that part of the world). After a few minutes of nothing I put it down to likely being

some feeding pigeons. As I moved on I noticed some movement through a gap in some leaves and lo-and-behold I saw a Bennett's tree-kangaroo?!?! A great find (even though not the first time I have seen one)! We watched it for five minutes or so getting some crappy photos before it disappeared into the foliage. There was likely a second individual present based on movements in a nearby tree but they kept themselves very well hidden. We were told at the discovery centre that a family group was living in the hills behind the centre. Excellent score!



Musky rat-kangaroo



A very ordinary photo of Bennett's tree-kangaroo

Chillagoe Caves

Back onto the tablelands for the drive to Chillagoe via Mareeba. Stopped for one of the excellent gigantic Mexican burgers at Mt Molloy. I managed to finish mine but I forgot to tell Kat what was coming so I had to help her out a bit so as not to leave too much on the plate and potentially offend the owners. The drive out to Chillagoe (via Mareeba) went smoothly and the recent heavy rains in the area had resulted in a luminescent bright green grassy ground cover which was quite striking given how dry this country usually looks. As we approached Chillagoe we came across a mob of Antilopine Wallaroos grazing close to the road (tick!). Checked into our overnight digs at the Observatory and went to the caves in the afternoon as rain appeared to be closing in.

A few Mareeba rock-wallabys were hanging around the caves as well as plenty of Agile wallabys and a couple of Common Wallaroo (or whatever your chosen name is for them). Two of the caves are free to access while two of the other (evidently more scenic) caves are only accessible via guided tours. After deciding Bauhinia Cave looked a bit beyond my limited caving abilities I ventured into Pompeii Cave. There were several Troughton's sheath-tail bats and two Diadem sheath-tail bats roosting in the main cave (see left). Not really close enough for decent photos. As it was getting late I resolved to visit in the morning and see if there were any closer bats in a large opening I could see in the bottom of the cave. Following a heavy evening downpour we did a bit of spotlighting. Plenty of burrowing frogs to be found, rock-wallabys (actually in the town), and Ring-tailed gecko at the caves. The morning visit back to the caves proved successful as I got close



enough to a Diadem leaf-nosed bat roosting in the aforementioned opening and there was an unidentified microbat also roosting down there (possibly a *Vespadelus* species).

Lake Eacham and the Atherton Tablelands

Our first night at Chambers Lodge was spent spotlighting on an Alan Gillanders led tour. The specialty here (if you can call it that) was the Yellow-bellied gliders and even though the time of year wasn't that great we managed to see three feeding at the same spot - great stuff! We also had a crushingly brief view of a Feather-tailed glider which got scared off and unfortunately we had to leave. All the usual possums were seen (Green, Herbert River, Lemuroid and the rusty coloured brush-tailed). A search for a Pygmy Possum unfortunately failed (another annoying species group - never seen any of them). Also picked up a Rufous Bettong. A good night and a worthy expedition. Spent the next day birding and finding Platypus at the usual creek in Yungaburra. We also saw a daytime resting Green Ringtail in a tree along the creek. An obligatory trip to Nerada tea plantation produced a very heavy bout of rain and the usual great views of Lumholtz's tree-kangaroo in the narrow band of trees the local tree-kangaroo family has adopted as home. There was a female, a young one and what looked like an adolescent present, generally paying no mind to the hoards of tea visitors looking, chattering and photographing them. That means I had started off 2021 with both of Australia's tree-kangaroo species within 3 days??!! Happy days!



Yellow-bellied gliders (northern subspecies)



Green ringtail possum



Herbert river ringtail possum

That evening we spent some time at the feeding area at the lodge (they wipe honey down a pair of trees in a sheltered lookout area - very entertaining) and were treated to great views of a Striped Possum and two Krefft's (ex-Sugar) Gliders. A Long-nosed Bandicoot hung around early on as well as a rather nervous Bush Rat. An Antechinus flashed through unfortunately too quick for me to get the bins on it - Atherton Antechinus? I'll never know - that would have been a quality sighting. We drove around the area to try and do some more spotlighting but the rain gods weren't on our side. A number of bats were roosting under the Platypus bridge at Yungaburra (from photos I surmise Large-footed myotis and/or a Bentwing-bat species) and we found some feeding Little red flying-fox in a flowering tree we'd spied during the day. Back to the lodge for some good frogging and some more time at the feeding tree with the possum and gliders.

Having decided the 3hr trip to Ingham was a bit risky due to the predicted rains from an incoming low from the west (leftover from a cyclone) we decided Mahogany Glider was out for this trip. Another day and night hanging out in the tablelands. This isn't a hard thing to do and it gave me time to find some tree-kangaroo themed souvenirs - fridge magnets and a stuffed Lumholtz's tree-kangaroo. I was genuinely surprised to find such an obscure animal being sold as a cute toy, China's toy manufacturing taxonomic reach knows few bounds it seems.



Striped possum (Chambers Lodge)



Krefft's gliders (Chambers Lodge)



Lumholtz's tree-kangaroo (Nerada tree plantation)

Last days

Our final night was in Cairns so we dropped into Etty Bay (south of Innisfail) to try to find one of the resident Cassowaries to photograph. A male was hanging around with a juvenile. He was incredibly humanised as he walked up to a couple eating lunch at a picnic table and tried to go for their chips (actually he tried this more than once). The woman got up, walked up to it and physically shooed it away. We found this an incredibly 'brave' (ie. FOOLISH) move given there was a male with a young one present, but it just moved on. Not sure how I feel about this experience but nevertheless, they are an impressive bird to see and they have large legs and feet with accompanying talons.



Cassowary and chick (Etty Bay)



Nordmann's greenshank (Cairns foreshore)

Our final evening/morning was spent with me trying to see a Nordmann's Greenshank at the Cairns foreshore (a famous spot for migratory waders) which had turned up while we were visiting. This was a source of great excitement in the Australian bird world as it was reputedly only the fourth record for the country. The visiting ex-cyclone foiled my first late afternoon attempt and I turned up at the pub to have a drink with a friend absolutely saturated. The following morning required two tries, an early morning attempt brought very distant views of what I was assured was the bird by one of the several other birders present. Dissatisfied I came back later when the rising tide would hopefully bring it in closer. Thanks to another birder letting me look at it through his scope when it was a lot closer I felt better about seeing it properly. To be fair, it was a.....wader, for me not a particularly inspiring groupbut it was good to see it and it was fortunate it had turned up when

we were in the area. They're not exactly a Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher. I probably won't seek it out again. Kat was visibly underwhelmed by the sighting. Flew home.

North Queensland – always a pleasure!

Final statistics:

- 31 mammals including four newbies, one new subspecies (northern yellow-bellied gliders) and one species new for Australia (Diadem leaf-nosed bat, also seen in Malaysia). Anyone wishing to try and i.d. some microbat photos feel free to contact me.
- At least 21 frogs including some very cool tree frogs
- 19 reptiles – Boyd's forest dragon is a great lizard
- 178 birds – a great birding destination

Mammal list attached. I can provide a list of the birds/frogs/reptiles for anyone interested.

Cheers and let's hope for a better 2021 (hope everyone is staying covid-free).

Happy mammal searching!

Brett



Bush rats at feeding area (Kingfisher Park)



Long-nosed bandicoot getting it's own fill at feed trees (Chambers Lodge)



Yellow-footed antechinus at honeyeater feeder (Kingfisher Park)



Antilopine wallaroo (road into Chillagoe)



Mareeba rock-wallaby (Chillagoe caves)



Tapping green-eyed treefrog (Chambers Lodge)



Coastal sheath-tailed bat (Wangetti Beach)



Boyd's forest dragon (Kingfisher Park)

GENUS/SPECIES	COMMON NAME	Cairns and lowlands	Kingfisher park and surrounds	Daintree	Chillagoe	Lake Eacham/tablelands
<i>Ornithorhynchus anatinus</i>	Platypus		K park creek			Yungaburra
<i>Tachyglossus aculeatus</i>	Short-beaked echidna					X
<i>Antechinus flavipes</i>	Yellow-footed antechinus		K park - at bird feeders			
<i>Antechinus godmani</i>	Atherton antechinus					Possibly seen at feeders at lodge (also could be Yellow-footed but pure rainforest present)
<i>Isoodon macrourus</i>	Northern brown bandicoot		K park - fed at night (single individual)			
<i>Perameles nasuta</i>	Long-nosed bandicoot		K park			Feed trees at lodge
<i>Trichosurus johnstoni</i>	Coppery brushtail possum (northeast Qld)					The Crater
<i>Dactylopsila trivirgata</i>	Striped possum		K park			Feed trees at lodge
<i>Petaurus australis reginae</i>	Yellow-bellied glider (northern subspecies)					Alan Gillanders
<i>Petaurus notatus</i>	Kreff's glider					Feed trees at lodge
<i>Hemibelideus lemuroides</i>	Lemuroid ringtail possum					The Crater
<i>Pseudochirops archeri</i>	Green ringtail possum					The Crater, Yungaburra, Wongabel
<i>Pseudochirulus cinereus</i>	Daintree River ringtail possum		Mt Lewis			
<i>Pseudochirulus</i>	Herbert River ringtail					Crater

GENUS/SPECIES	COMMON NAME	Cairns and lowlands	Kingfisher park and surrounds	Daintree	Chillagoe	Lake Eacham/tablelands
<i>herbertensis</i>	possum					
<i>Acrobates frontalis</i>	Broad-toed Feathertail glider					Alan Gillanders
<i>Hypsiprymnodon moschatus</i>	Musky rat-kangaroo		Mt Lewis	Accom		Accom
<i>Aepyprymnus rufescens</i>	Rufous bettong					Alan Gillanders
<i>Dendrolagus bennettianus</i>	Bennett's tree-kangaroo			Boardwalk		
<i>Dendrolagus lumholtzi</i>	Lumholtz's tree-kangaroo					Tea plantation
<i>Macropus agilis</i>	Agile wallaby	X	K Park and elsewhere		X	
<i>Macropus antilopinus</i>	Antilopine wallaroo				Chillagoe Rd	
<i>Macropus robustus robustus</i>	Eastern wallaroo				Caves	
<i>Petrogale mareeba</i>	Mareeba rock wallaby				Caves, Chillagoe	
<i>Thylogale stigmatica</i>	Red-legged pademelon		K Park, Mt Lewis			Accom, Wongabel
<i>Pteropus conspicillatus</i>	Spectacled flying-fox	X		X		
<i>Pteropus scapulatus</i>	Little red flying-fox					Yungaburra
<i>Hipposideros diadema reginae</i>	Diadem leaf-nosed bat		Mt Lewis		Caves	
<i>Taphozous australis</i>	Coastal sheath-tail bat		Coast roast lookout			
<i>Taphozous troughtoni</i>	Troughton's sheath-tail bat				Caves	
<i>Scotorepens sp?</i>	broad-nosed bat species				Seen resting (at night during rain) in artificial shelter at caves - needs confirmation	

GENUS/SPECIES	COMMON NAME	Cairns and lowlands	Kingfisher park and surrounds	Daintree	Chillagoe	Lake Eacham/tablelands
<i>Vespadelus finlaysoni?</i>	Inland cave bat				Roosting in caves - needs confirmation	
<i>Myotis macropus?</i>	Large-footed myotis					Yungaburra bridge - needs confirmation
<i>Miniopterus spp.?</i>	Bentwing-bat species (two options)					Yungaburra bridge - needs confirmation
<i>Melomys cervinipes</i>	Fawn-footed melomys		K Park - fed at night			
<i>Pogonomys sp</i>	Prehensile-tailed rat		? K Park - seen very high in fruiting tree but way too high to discern - species was known to occur in the grounds			
<i>Rattus fuscipes</i>	Bush rat		K Park - fed at night - up to 7 individuals present			Feed trees at lodge
<i>Uromys caudimaculatus</i>	Giant white-tailed rat		K Park only – strange not to see it elsewhere on this trip			