



South Australia – a brief trip report

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In September 2022 I and my ever-trusty travel/critter chasing partner Kat took a much-needed break from work and chose South Australia for a two-week wine, bird, mammal and general critter sojourn. A brief report ensues below.

General precis: The weather was kinda unseasonably cold and often quite windy for much of the trip. This appeared to be a combination of our southerly location, time of year and a general ‘crap weather vibe’ which has gripped much of eastern and southern Australia in 2022. The focus of the trip was on a few mammals we had never seen before and catching up with some southern Australian birds I had only seen rarely with hopefully a few newbies thrown in. Given the amount of wine produced in South Australia we also indulged in the odd wine tasting, although this wasn’t a priority (we don’t mind a good red wine but we’re not snobs about it).

First stop: Drove straight from Adelaide airport to Brookfield Conservation Park (1.5 hr drive) to find the park was closed because of feral fauna management going on. This was a major blow to trying to find a Southern Hairy-nosed Wombat, for which this is the well-known place to go. A quick check of the park’s website clearly told us this was going on, so a complete planning fail on our part. Spotlighted around some used-looking wombat burrows of the evening but got nothing except Western Grey Kangaroos. It was really quite cold at night and the nearby town we stayed in had little going for it.

Second stop: Got up early and drove for two hours to get to a boat tour going out of Victor Harbour in an attempt to see Southern Right Whales for the first time. This was the tail end of the season when they ‘might’ still be around and when we got there, apparently whales hadn’t been seen for four days. They remained that way for our trip. We saw Australian Sea Lions, New Zealand Fur Seals and a couple of Inshore Bottle-nosed Dolphins accompanied us on the boat’s return. I wouldn’t particularly recommend this trip unless whales were involved. Drove into the Adelaide Hills and stayed in a b’n’b located in forest along a flowing stream with a very cool outdoor bathtub. Unfortunately, the temperature was way too cool for me to brave using said cool bathtub but the fire was good. Nice birding area too. Hahndorf was incredibly touristy but had good food and wine.



Koala with stowaway



Australian Sea Lion pup

Third stop: Kangaroo Island for three days. It must be said price of the ferry over to the island is quite exorbitant for a pretty short trip I thought, but there is plenty of wildlife to absorb. Got an Airbnb surrounded by heathland on Pelican Lagoon. Had Tammar Wallaby (tick) and the distinctly small island subspecies of Western Grey Kangaroo in our 'yard'. A visit to Seal Bay is well worth it and get the guided trip through the Australian Sea Lion colony. There were plenty of very cute seal pups bumbling around when we were there, and a lengthy ruckus ensued around the visitors' centre when a large sea lion 'walked' a long way up the hill to have a sniff of the tourists which seemed to cause all manner of panic with the parks staff member in charge – rather funny to watch. The colony of New Zealand Fur Seals at Admiral's Arch provides good views (rather cool and windy when the Antarctic breeze blows) although less fun than the sea lions. We got multiple Short-beaked Echidnas and Koalas with young while driving around as well. Spotlighting produced.....nothing of interest. I recommend a visit to False Cape winery and the kangaroo on the menu at the Mercure restaurant at Adventure Bay.



Only one sea lion is having fun here



New Zealand Fur Seal – not cute but quite relaxed



Tammar Wallaby

Fourth stop: Lincoln National Park for three days. Located at the southern end of the Eyre Peninsula. It was a major drive so we broke it up by stopping for a night in the Clare Valley – home to a ridiculous number of wineries. We had a fancy early dinner at the apparently world-renowned (their description) Skillogalee Winery. The food was good without being

Fifth stop: We originally planned to drive to Ceduna for a trip further west to Fowlers Bay to see Southern Right Whales. The end of the whale trip season blew this plan out of the water so we had to find something to fill in a couple of days. Some random scanning of google maps illuminated a farmstay in the middle of nowhere on the west side of the Eyre Peninsula which advertised lots of baby farm animals and a wombat population on its property. We took a chance to go check it out which turned out to be pleasingly successful. Upon arrival at Coodie Park Station I made it known (probably somewhat rudely) that I wasn't that interested in looking at baby goats and was quite keen on finding a wombat. The office had a sign advertising drives across the property at night on an open top quad bike but the lady in the office said she was fine with us just driving through the paddocks on our own as long as we stayed on the tracks. Given how freezing it was at night when we were there I'd say the quad bike would be a rather uncomfortable option in winter. We drove out to hunt down a wombat to find some bedraggled looking guy holding a beer standing beside the quad bike who was about to go out looking for foxes to shoot. Apparently no problem and off we went. We spotlighted a wombat, from a distance, but obviously a Southern Hairy-nosed Wombat so that was a tick. After that we spotlighted a nearby road going through mallee and found a couple more Western Pygmy Possums and this time managed to get good photos of one that decided to come out and stare at us humans – spectacular little beastie!

great and I got a bad attitude when we only deigned to buy a single bottle of wine on the way out – not recommending. At Lincoln we rented out an old stone cottage in the furthest extent of the park which had its own mains power and no explanation as to why it was there – there were no other buildings in the park? Great location with lots of birds around including at least four male emus tending chicks, Western Grey Kangaroos, and local fur seals and bottle-nosed dolphins foraging off the beach. I have had a thermal scope for a while and up until now it had been fun but not produced too much of note. On our second night of spotlighting we checked out some mallee eucalypt blossom I had spied during the day and lo-and-behold we spied a Western Pygmy Possum (tick)!!! In fact we ended up seeing two and probably missed another after seeing something glowing in the scope. I very much doubt we would have seen these tiny beasties without the scope given they were barely any bigger than the eucalypt blossoms they were hiding on.



Southern Hairy-nosed Wombat



Western Pygmy Possum – pygmy by name and nature

The next day we walked around to where we saw the wombat and found what looked like a very active burrow and hatched a plan. The rest of the day was spent driving about 100 km north to Streaky Bay for something to do. It must be said the weather was noticeably sunny and relatively warm and this seemed to result in the waking up of the Shingleback population from its winter dormancy. Shinglebacks apparently mate for life (very rare in a reptile), although spend a fair bit of the year on their own. When the weather warms up in spring they go out in search of their mates. Shinglebacks are right up there with Thorny Devils on the list of great Australian reptiles. We saw at least 20 on our 100 km drive north!?! Unfortunately, five of these had been run over by cars (they do not move very fast or nimbly). Kat rescued seven herself. We returned to our farmstay, stocked the car with wine and cheese and parked a good distance from the burrow and waited for the darkness. In the end we saw 2 and possibly 3 wombats walking around. Plan executed successfully.

Last stop of note was the Flinders Ranges. We ended up staying in a 4wd ‘experience’ oriented property located north of the National Park rather than the park itself which was probably a mistake. The park accommodation is quite expensive but it is in a great location. They have apparently re-released Western Quoll and a few individuals hang around the area where the accommodation is. Several events conspired to prevent us from driving to the usual place to see and photograph Yellow-footed Rock-wallaby at Brachina Gorge i.e. recent flooding closing the gorge to non 4wd vehicles (apparently) and a flat tyre on our AWD vehicle. I hadn’t changed a flat tyre in a long time so it was good to know I still had that level of practicality in me. We walked into Wilpena Pound which turned out to be very good for reptiles. On the way out I asked one of the local staff if there was any rock-wallabys in the park itself.

I was pretty desperate it had to be said. This is Australia’s best looking large macropod and we had travelled a long way to see one (or more). We were directed to a spot quite close to the camping area. We staked out a section of track and spied another couple who were obviously..... ‘waiting for something’. The woman explained she had seen seven rock-wallabys at the spot the previous night. She also mentioned driving her 2WD into Brachina Gorge to see them there which was frustrating to hear. In the end, we saw two come out as it was getting pretty dark at a fair

distance but we got clear views and it was a satisfying outcome given the circumstances.



Our best photo of a rock-wallaby (sadly)

Our final night was spent in Port Augusta where we checked out the botanic gardens which is good for birds and reptiles and judging by the tracks in the sand a few small mammals too.

Native mammal list:

Short-beaked Echidna (*Tachyglossus aculeatus*) - Kangaroo Island, Flinders Ranges and Port Augusta

Koala (*Phascolarctos cinereus*) - Kangaroo Island

Southern Hairy-nosed Wombat (*Lasiorhinus latifrons*) – eastern Eyre Peninsula

Brush-tailed Possum (*Trichosurus vulpecula*) – Kangaroo Island

Western Pygmy Possum (*Cercartetus concinnus*) – Lincoln National Park and western Eyre Peninsula

Western Grey Kangaroo (*Macropus fuliginosus*) – most places

Red Kangaroo (*Osphranter rufus*) - Flinders Ranges and Port Augusta

Wallaroo (*Osphranter robustus*) - Flinders Ranges

Tammar Wallaby (*Notamacropus eugenii*) - Kangaroo Island

Yellow-footed Rock-wallaby (*Petrogale xanthopus*) - Flinders Ranges

Australian Sea Lion (*Neophoca cinerea*) – Kangaroo Island and Victor Harbour

New Zealand Fur Seal (*Arctocephalus forsteri*) - Kangaroo Island and Victor Harbour

Australian Fur Seal (*Arctocephalus pusillus*) – possibly in New Zealand Fur Seal colony on Kangaroo Island

Inshore Bottle-nosed Dolphin (*Tursiops aduncus*) – Victor Harbour and Eyre Peninsula

Other stats: 141 bird and 15 reptile species, 2 wineries, 10 different bottles of red sampled, and 1 gin distillery.

The end



Western Grey Kangaroos in a vineyard – a very South Australian mammal scene

Random photos collection



Shingleback



Short-beaked Echidna



Painted Dragon



Scarlet Robin



Emu and chicks



Rock Parrot (not on a rock)



Osprey nest - perilous living