

Melbourne, December 10-22, 2018

VLADIMIR DINETS

This was another work/family trip; I was limited to 1.5 hrs driving distance from Clayton and managed to find only 12 native species. I spent many hours trying to see small mammals of coastal heathlands, but they proved very difficult to see and pretty much impossible to photograph, even with a thermal imager. **Common ringtail possums**, **eastern grey kangaroos** and **swamp wallabies** were seen, and **white-striped freetail**s heard, at all locations listed below.

Mornington Peninsula is home to Morrington Peninsula and Fort Nepean National Parks, said to have 16-18 species of native land mammals including some rarities (see https://parkweb.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/687026/Point-Nepean-Flora-and-Fauna-Report_2008.pdf). I spent a night spotlighting in both, and found lots of **echidna** and **bandicoot** diggings, a **swamp rat** (38.326817S 144.697961E), a **white-footed dunnart** (38.372051S 144.765140E), and lots of introduced stuff. A bunch of tour operators run tours to see **Burrunan dolphins** near the tip of the peninsula; they offer snorkeling with dolphins (success rate 90% according to the operators, or more like 10% according to online customer reviews) and with **Afro-Australian fur seals** (guaranteed). We took a tour from Sorrento and saw only the seals; later I saw the dolphins (but not underwater) while diving at Rye Pier.

Birdsland Reserve (37.918846S 145.341617E) is said to be a good place to see **platypus** and **yellow-bellied glider**, but I didn't in a few hours of searching.

Anglesea Heath (partly a National Heritage Area and partly in Greater Otway National Park) is famous for rare plants, but you have to come in spring to see them in bloom. Mammals are said to be very diverse, but proved difficult: in two full nights of spotlighting I got one group of **red-necked wallabies** (38.345392S 144.150900E), a **swamp antechinus** (38.362067S 144.174603E, identified by chestnut rump), and another **antechinus** I didn't see well (38.382898S 144.172650E, could be **swamp** or **agile**). I didn't see a single introduced mammal there, except for rabbits along the periphery. Dirt tracks were only borderline passable in a sedan; it's better to walk on them and use Gum Flats Rd. for night drives. There used to be a population of **New Holland mouse** there, but it's now extinct.

Bunyip State Park is probably the best place for mammals within an hour's drive from Melbourne; this time I got a few **common wombats** (best along Camp Rd.), a **dark antechinus** (along Buttongrass Walk at 37.989672S 145.643760E; identified by dark coloration), and a **bush rat** (within 25 m from the antechinus) in one night.

Kinglake National Park has diverse forest habitats; I found an **eastern false pipistrelle** roosting in a hollow tree along Shelley Harris Track (appr. 37.544521S 145.343169E; my phone's GPS didn't work well there but the tree was visible from the trail).

Woodlands Historic Park has a large fenced area with **eastern banded bandicoots** (map at <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/589bf93b9f7456ed1d1b9be2/t/58d32d6dbf629a6b1dd2da87/1490234747169/Park-note-Woodlands-Historic-Park%5B1%5D.pdf>), accessible by walking south from 37.647634S 144.866750E; a few bandicoots now can be found outside the fence. There's also a lot of **common brush-tailed possums** (often feeding on the ground in absence of predators). The park is a good place to see relatively approachable **swamp wallabies** in open habitat. Other places to do that are Serendip Sanctuary and Organ Pipes National Park.