

AUSTRALIA (South Australia, Victoria, Tasmania and Western Australia) and Hong Kong 2015

6,5 weeks in January and February

During January and February 2015 I did a 6,5 weeks trip in Australia. It was my 5th trip in this country and was mostly oriented to see mammals I missed last times. By the end I spent 1 day in Hong Kong. Preparing my trip I used the informations provided on Mammalwatching by John Hall, Matt and Maureen Steer and Andrew and Ben Balmford.

I arrived in Adelaide on the 9th of January. It was abnormally cold after a very warm period.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

On my way to Kangaroo island I found a group of 30 Western Grey Kangaroos.

I spent 3 nights on Kangaroo Island. I saw more than 100 Western Grey Kangaroos, 30 Tammar Wallabies, 4 Koalas (introduced), 1 Echidna, 80 Australian Sea Lions, 60 New Zealand Fur seals and 2 males Australian Fur Seals. I had not time to look for the Platypus introduced in Flinders Chase.

The wallabies were mainly just east of Flinders Chase NP along the road and were active by daylight. Several were freshly killed by cars. In the park they are shier, active at dusk and by night (only 5 seen). I saw also 2 on the east side of the island where they seem to be less common.

The Sea Lions were at Seal Bay. As I arrived early I was offered a private tour. I saw a 3 days old pup. But in fact you can see them as well by doing the self guided trail (you can see close ones at the east end of the trail).

The colony of New Zealand Fur Seals (including the 2 Australian Fur Seals) is at Admirals Arch.

But it is a pity to see that Kangaroo Island claimed to be a haven for wildlife is a cemetery for wildlife. There were dead animals every 200 or 300 meters, mainly Kangaroos, but also wallabies, Possums, Goannas, birds ... People drive very fast including in the national parks (not only on Kangaroo Island).

After Kangaroo Island I went to Blanchetown Conservation Area. My target was Southern Hairy Nosed Wombat. I arrived late afternoon. As Jon Hall says you are not allowed to stay after dusk. As I was inside the reserve I saw 1 wombat crossing the gravel road in front of my car by 6pm. Then I began to localize wombats 'dens or "warrens". Several were occupied (fresh digging, foot prints and smell of them or even you can hear them moving). I chose 1 den and waited until night without seeing anything. Then I left. The following morning was unsuccessful but I met the staff who explained me they are easier to see in winter when early morning they bask in the sun. I was asked not to stay by night, even they are non controls. In the afternoon I looked for dens outside of the reserve along the gravel road running from Blanchetown to Swanreach and again I found many occupied dens. Sometimes when they move inside the den I saw the dust (it was dry), like smoke coming from inside. Then I returned to the reserve, stayed until night at a warren and didn't see any.

After that I spotlighted along the road Blanchetown-Swan Reach and got a close 1 after half an hour. I saw also many Rabbits and a Red Fox. I got twice Feral wild goats.

Southern Hairy Nosed Wombats are decreasing in this part of their range. They suffer from a gale, so in case I wouldn't have seen one I had reserved 3 days more to look for them where they are healthier populations in the York Peninsula. But very satisfied of my sighting I left to Flinders Ranges National Park.

Arriving in Quorn I went to the Visitor Center and was told that all the gorges in Flinders Ranges NP were closed for several days due to heavy flooding. My only chance to see (again) Yellow footed rock wallabies was to go to Warren Gorge. On a sunny day, by mid afternoon I saw one which fast retreated to the rocky hills. Late afternoon I found 8 and the following early morning only 1. There were also Common Wallaroos (light grey with long shaggy fur-8 seen) and Western Grey Kangaroos (4 only).

The following day I drove to Hawker to look for Red Kangaroos: I saw more or less 200, plus 30 Western Grey Kangaroos and 6 Common Wallaroos (the last on a rocky hill). Later I began to drive on the way to Victoria.

VICTORIA

I arrived in Wyperfield NP to find a park devastated by 2009 fires. It was only my first deception in Victoria. More will come. There were nevertheless 40 Western Grey Kangaroos. There were some trees with flowers and I tried to find a pygmy possum.

Disappointed I left to the Grampians to find a park again devastated by the 2009 fires (at least all the part north of Halls Gap was burnt).

I saw more 100 Eastern Grey Kangaroos at Halls Gap (but 0 at Zumsteins where they used to be common), 6 Black Wallabies (they have already recolonised the north of the park because there is already a dense low story of vegetation that they like), may be a Red-necked Wallaby, a Feather-tailed Glider (high in the canopy), 5 Common Brushtail Possums, 2 Red foxes, 2 Red Deers and many Rabbits. But I didn't see any Koalas which are said to have disappeared. I had also a close encounter with a Platypus near Zumsteins.

Then after passing the 12 Apostles I arrived at Otway NP. Of course I saw easily Koalas (after 34 I left), but I was surprised to see a large area of dead trees (may be due to the Koalas; there was no sign of fire). One night I spotlighted at Maits Rest Area seeing 2 Koalas (including 1 on the road) and 4 Common Ringtail Possums, and another night at Melba Gully getting 3 of the last ones. But I missed Squirrel Glider and Yellow bellied Glider. I saw also a Red Fox outside of the forests.

At Kennet Drive (east of Cap Otway I saw again plenty of Koalas (20).

Next stop was Wilsons Promontory that I found also devastated by the 2009 fires (again a park like the Grampians and Wyperfield that I saw in good state in the past). It is there that I saw my first Common Wombat and I was not disappointed to come back (even that there is no true forest now).

I saw 30 Eastern Grey Kangaroos, 6 Black Wallabies, a lot of Rabbits, 1 Red Fox, 24 Common Wombat the 1st night and 25 the 2d (not all the same; including a female with a young), 1 Eastern Pygmy Possum in a Banksia tree with flowers and 6 Hog Deers.

Then I went to Philip Island where I did a tour to approach the colony of Australian Fur Seals at the Nobbies: there were a lot of them (I was told the colony count 8000 animals) including several nurseries of pups. I saw also an Echidna on the island and 1 European Hare east of the island.

I spent 1 night in the Yarra Range looking mainly for Mountain Possum –without success, but again the forests have suffered a lot of the 2009 fires. I nevertheless saw 1 Sambar deer, 1 Common Wombat (plus a dead one) and 1 Feral Cat.

Before leaving I stopped one evening in Heathcote-Graytown NP to find again a forest suffering from fires: I saw only 1 Common Brushtail Possum.

TASMANIA

Arriving in Hobart I found a lot of dead Rabbits, Common Brushtail Possums and Rufous bellied Possum, plus a probable Red Fox (but I can't be sure because it was impossible to stop with the heavy traffic).

In Tasmania I began with 1 day (including 1 night) on Bruny Island and I regret not to have stayed more because I saw a lot of Rufous-bellied (Tasmanian) Pademelons and Red-necked Wallabies (including a white one- this white morph is not rare on Bruny Island, I met people who saw 3 at a different place), 25 Eastern Quoll north of the neck (this place is said to be the last stronghold of this species and it is the true, after finding 25 (including some dark morph; I saw one grabbing by the nose a dead Red necked Wallaby and able to pull it 30cm away), more than 40 Common Brushtail Possums (except 3 cream colored ones, all of them were nearly black), and 1 Long-nosed Potoroo nearly at the same place that the Balmford family saw one.

Then I went to Scottsdale spotlighting along road 382 to try to find a Southern or Tasmanian Bettong, but I was unsuccessful. I saw only many Red-necked Wallabies and Rufous-bellied Pademelons, plus 2 Common Wombats, 3 Eastern Quolls and 40+ Common Brush-tail Possums. Having seen on internet that the best place to see the Bettong is a reserve west of Epping Forest I went there. But after asking locally I learnt this reserve is a private closed property. I got the name and phone number of the owner but didn't try to get a permit. By night I spotlighted around different patches of forests in the area but didn't see any bettong. I saw: 2 European Hares, 7 Common Wombats, 1 Common Ringtail Possum, 5 Common Brushtail Possums and 3 Fallow deer (black ones).

The day after I stopped for 1 hour in Narawntapu NP to see the Forester subspecies of Eastern Grey Kangaroos. I saw 42, plus a Common Wombat by midday on a sunny day and in a very open place. Like the Lambert I got the information that Spot-tailed Quoll are easily seen by camping in the park. But I had not time to stay 1 night there and I was confident to see one at Longanaa. So I left to Devonport to camp at Mersey Bluff where the Lam saw Eastern Barred Bandicoots and it was a very good choice. By night I saw a lot of Pademelons, 5 Eastern Barred Bandicoots, 1 Southern Brown Bandicoot, many Rabbits and unfortunately 1 Cat .

The 29th of January I had booked one night at the Mountain Wilderness Lodge in Longanaa. It is a wonderful, very quiet place. I saw 2 Platypus in the evening and many Pademelons. After the owner had put some chicken in front my room (by 9pm) I stayed inside. Three or four minutes later a big Spot-tailed Quoll came to eat, then left and came back to eat, and left again. After that it was very quiet until 11pm when a Tasmanian devil arrived to eat a lot. As did the Quoll, it then left, came back to eat and left again. By 11h30 pm, tired and satisfied I went to sleep (for a time relatively early and in a bed). The manager had told me that 2 nights before I arrived he got the Quoll and 2 Devils, but that 10 different devils are used to come. When I was there, there was another room occupied, so maybe the other devil was there, or maybe it would have been better to stay waiting later, but I was too tired and it was not my first devil. When leaving the lodge I didn't know where to go to look for the bettong. I had seen in a book that they are a Waterhouse Conservation Area, east off Bridport. I had planned to look for devils near Arthur River in case I didn't see it at the lodge, but satisfied I went to the Waterhouse Conservation Area. I arrived at the beginning of the night and saw a young Spot-tailed Quoll, 3 Common Brushtail Possums and 3 Southern Bettongs. The following night I saw 3 different Bettongs. I checked many Banksias flowers to try and see Little Pygmy Possums which are said to be commonly seen there but finished empty-handed.

During my last evening in Tasmania I drove along the road to Lake Pedder (where I didn't go) but saw only Pademelons.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

I arrived in Perth with 35°C and a lot of rain (for 1 hour only). I wanted to go first to Dryandra, then Perup, then the south near Albany, then Rottnest Island and finally Monkey Mia. But I wanted to visit Barna Mia, a fenced area in Dryandra where are bred some very rare mammals. Regular tours are offered to visit this place by night, but as it was the summer season I was told that there was only one tour available on Friday. So I decided to go first to Perup, but as it was a little late I stopped in Lane Pool Reserve near Dwellingup after stopping at different place to try and see a Water Rat (I didn't stop in Adelaide with the heavy traffic, I really hate cities).

Spotlighting Lane Pool I saw my first Chudich or Western Quoll. The following morning I headed to Perup where I stayed 2 nights, seeing: 8 Common Brushtail Possums including several of the morph with a white tipped tail, 1 Chudich, 2 Western Brush Wallabies, Woylies or Brush-tailed Bettong (1 the first night east of the guesthouse and 2 the second night west of the guesthouse (including a female with a baby in the pouch) but no Numbat. I didn't stay at the guesthouse which may explain why I didn't see any Tammar Wallaby. I was not at the right place.

After Perup I went to Dryandra for 2 nights. There I saw Western Grey Kangaroos, 1 Woylie, 1 Echidna, 6 Common Brushtail Possums, but no Tammar Wallaby and no Numbat, 2 species that I saw there in a former trip. I was told that 17 Numbats from Perth Zoo had been released there (I think they are the radio-collared ones). At Barna Mia I had again a private tour. Of course it is a fenced area and I don't think this animals can be released, they are to used to people, but it was my only chance to see some rare species. I saw 2 Eastern barred bandicoots or Marls, 1 Southern Brown Bandicoots, 15 Boodies or Burrowing Bettongs, 10 Woylies, 10 Malas or Rufous Hare Wallabies and 10 Bilbies.

Then I headed to the Stirling Ranges where I spent 1 night. By spotlighting I saw Western Grey Kangaroos, 2 Western Brush Wallabies and 3 Southern Brown Bandicoots. There was no flower for Honey Possum at the Bluff Knoll Cafe but I checked some red flowers in "heathland" along the road and I met 2 Australian spotlighting. They told me they had seen Honey Possum at Cheyne's Beach near the camping. Of course the following day I went to this place, checking hundreds of Banksias flowers by day and by night and finding nothing. By 11pm I went to Two People Bay and got 1 Quokka at the picnic area. The following morning I birdwatch in this reserve, but in the afternoon I went to Tondirup NP south of Albany. I had got a brochure in which Honey Possum was said to be because of the presence of many flowers year round. But I found just 1 Banksia tree with 3 flowers. By the end I finish walking to Bald Head. On the way I found a place with a lot of Banksias Flowers, but it was next to a very steep rock where I had to be to look at the flowers. So not the best place to look for Honey Possum by night. In the evening I returned to Two People Bay where I got 5 Quokkas, 2 Western Ringtail Possums, 1 Water Rat on the rock between the sea and the heathland, but of course no Gilbert's Potoroo. It was my last night in the south and I had not seen Honey Possum. I had the choice between Cheyne's Beach, far away with plenty of Kangaroos or Tondirup closer and with less Kangaroos. I chose the second place, and walk on the way to Bald Head, checked the Banksias Flowers and finally found 1 Honey Possum. After getting a long very good sighting I continued to look because I wanted to see 1 on a flower, and I finally got 1, seeing first only the tail. Tired, but very satisfied by 1pm I left to find a place where to sleep.

I had booked the ferry to Rottnest Island the following day, but I didn't feel like to go there because there was a much traffic in Fremantle and would have arrived in time for the first ferry, and of course I had seen the Quokkas. I finished with 1 day more at Dryandra, seeing again a Western Brush Wallaby.

Then it was time to head to the north. I stopped in Kalbarri where I saw 4 Euros or Common Wallaroos (very different from those of Southern Australia) on rocky terrain alongside the sea.

Arriving in Monkey Mia I asked to go on the catamaran Shotover (the other one was on repair) immediately (I had booked for the following day), but it was a very disappointing experience: the spotter was unable to find anything, he had binoculars, but never used them. Having seen already 2 distant Dugongs I asked the captain to return to the last one what he agreed. It was the one we saw the best (or better the less bad). We saw 2 more, a very distant turtle (I saw them better from the shore) and finally a group of Inshore Bottlenosed Dolphins, but never could see the dark spots on the underparts. So the following morning I went at the "feeding place". I expected the worst, but there was not too many people and it was interesting to see the behaviour of this dolphins and finally to see the dark spots(on the side of a dolphin) I wanted to see.

Having spared time I headed on the way to Exmouth, stopped for 1 night near Coral Bay for snorkeling (really worthwhile). It had rained and there was some green grass on the sides of the road with unfortunately a lot of dead Red Kangaroos and Euros(a good meal for the Wedge-tail eagles) . Goats were also very common but I also only 1 dead. In Exmouth I went directly to Yardie Creek in Cap Range NP where I slept. It was terribly hot (48°C). Late afternoon I walked along the gorges and saw 5 Black-flanked Rock Wallabies, but they were not active, resting in the cliffs on both sides of the river. There was also group of feral goats. By night I saw a lot of Euros (on the southern part of the park where the terrain is rocky). Early morning was far better. I got up at 5h15am before sunrise and

rushed to the gorges where I saw more than 20 wallabies: most of them were on the plateau at the border of the gorges, but contrary to the Yellow-footed Rock Wallabies, they were not shy, seeming surprised to see me. I approached a female with a baby in the pouch by 2m, and then another animal by 80cm and it didn't move. I had seen at the Park Visitor Center that the newly split Humpback Dolphin from Australian waters was present in the Ningaloo Reef, so I asked a ranger if it was possible to see the species from shore and was told to go to the marina. I don't know if this person knew the difference between this species and Inshore Bottlenosed Dolphins, but I saw only 2 of the last ones. In fact every time I have asked information about the wildlife at the rangers I have got bad information (like at Wilson Promontory where they told me that they are no Pygmy Possums). Worst of all was this ranger at Cap Range National Park who told me: they are millions of Kangaroos in the park, be careful, I hit them, but I have a 4X4 with a protection so it is not a problem. It is true that kangaroos are a nightmare if you need to drive by night but I think many people like to kill them with their 4X4. I used to call them killer-men.

But I saw the same in Montenegro, people doing a detour to kill tortoises with their car.

On my way back to Perth I stopped 1 night near Denham where I saw another Inshore Bottle-nosed Dolphin. Like in Exmouth I saw it chasing in surface in very shallow water.

Australia is great, but it is a pity there are so many fires. In Perth I had once to leave because a fire was approaching, and in Dryandra it was the same. And I am not sure that the baiting of foxes and cats will permit the small marsupials to increase and to be saved. As soon as they stop the baiting foxes will increase, and apparently it doesn't work with the cats. In François Peron NP (Monkey Mia) where they have done a lot to reintroduce indigenous wildlife and it doesn't work so well. At least the Bilbies are breeding.

Flying back home I had a 17h transit in Hong Kong. So at the airport I asked if there was a company offering tours to see dolphins (I knew there were Indo-Pacific Humpback dolphins). I was told yes but that it was Chinese New Year and that they didn't respond. And also that by going to Tai Poi fishing village that it was easy to find a boat there. I went there by bus and found immediately an offer, but I waited a little as I was alone. As soon as we were 4 clients we left, paying 3 euros each. The tour was very short but I saw perfectly 2 Indo-Pacific Humpback Dolphins (1 grey and 1 dirty white). So I went on a second tour, didn't see any dolphin and changed of strategy. By walking along the sea I found a trail with a sign for a look-out to see the dolphins and in fact I saw at least 8 dolphins from there. I saw there were now several local boats with people looking at the dolphins and staying more than I stayed. There were also 2 large boats with foreigners. I returned to the village now crowded and looked for the boats I had seen from the look-out. I went for another tour, but even we looked hard, but didn't see anything, so I stayed in the boat for another tour, and this one was the good one: I saw many times at least 3 dolphins (1 dirty white, 1 slightly pinkish on the flanks and a grey one dark spotted).

By the end I had spent only 9 euros to see the dolphins. A good end to this trip.