

Western Australian mammal watching

For the last 10 years I have been living in Western Australia (WA) in both Exmouth and Perth, here are some sites that I have found particularly good for mammals, although this list is by no means extensive.

Perth and surrounds

Even if time is limited and you only have time to visit the capital city of WA Perth it is still possible to see a wide variety of mammals.

Rottneest island a short ferry ride off the coast is the best site in WA to see the endemic **quokka**. Although technically you can see them throughout the day evening and early morning are the best times for viewing large numbers so an overnight stay is worthwhile. Cathedral rocks at the opposite end of the island to the settlement (Thomson bay) has a permanent colony of **Australian sea lions**.

Quokka – Thomson bay, Rottneest island



Yanchep National park (N.P.) on the Northern outskirts of Perth is the nearest place for guaranteed views of the **Western grey kangaroo**, here they congregate on the lawns in front of the tavern late afternoon to graze.

Western grey kangaroo – Yanchep N.P.



Southern brown bandicoots (locally called **quenda**) can be seen in the grounds of Murdoch University in Perth's Southern suburbs, particularly in the area between the cafeteria and gymnasium where there is suitable habitat of dense undergrowth. These mammals come out late afternoon to forage and with patience good views are possible. **Quenda** viewing is much better outside of term time when the campus has less students onsite.

Quenda – Murdoch University, Perth



The introduced **five striped palm squirrel** can be seen late afternoon on the public footpath through South Perth golf course adjacent to the freeway between the suburbs of South Perth and Como.

In season whale watching tours leave Perth with guaranteed sightings of **humpback whales** during the annual migration, whilst **Indo Pacific bottlenose dolphins** are always a possibility whilst walking around the Swan river as there is a permanent school living in the Swan / Canning rivers that run through Perth.

Busselton (2.5 hr drive South of Perth)

This medium sized pleasant seaside town is undoubtedly the best place in the state to see **Western ringtail possums** due to the abundance of their main food source the peppermint tree and a night spent here should almost certainly give a 100% success rate. While the visitor centre should be able to advise you of good viewing sites my favorite are the peppermint trees lining the carpark of Abbey beach resort where I have seen upto 15 animals in 1 night. I have also seen **quenda** early morning on the cycle track that runs alongside the beach.

Western ringtail possum – Busselton



Exmouth (12 hr drive / 2 hr flight North of Perth)

1200km North of Perth is the outback town of Exmouth which is a mammal hotspot both onshore and offshore. There are 3 distinct marine wildlife seasons in Exmouth which can be a good place to start when planning your trip. March-July is whale shark season, July – November **humpback whales** visit to calve and December – March turtles come ashore to nest on the beaches of the Ningaloo reef.

Cape Range National park is a 1 hour drive from Exmouth on the opposite side of the cape, here I found 4 species of mammal fairly easy to see on a regular basis. **Red kangaroos** and more commonly the **common wallaroo** (called the **euro** in WA) are best seen on a late afternoon drive in the park, in fact there are so many **euros** I would recommend driving no more than 60km per hour at this time. A day driving in the Cape Range NP will regularly turn up an **echidna** but the real highlight of the area is the **black footed rock wallaby**. These pretty **wallabies** can be seen on a boat cruise of Yardie creek or indeed by walking the Yardie creek trail that runs alongside the gorge being sure to check out the sheer gorge walls which is prime habitat.

Black footed rock wallaby – Pilgramunna gorge, Cape Range N.P.



Common Wallaroo (Euro) Cape Range N.P.



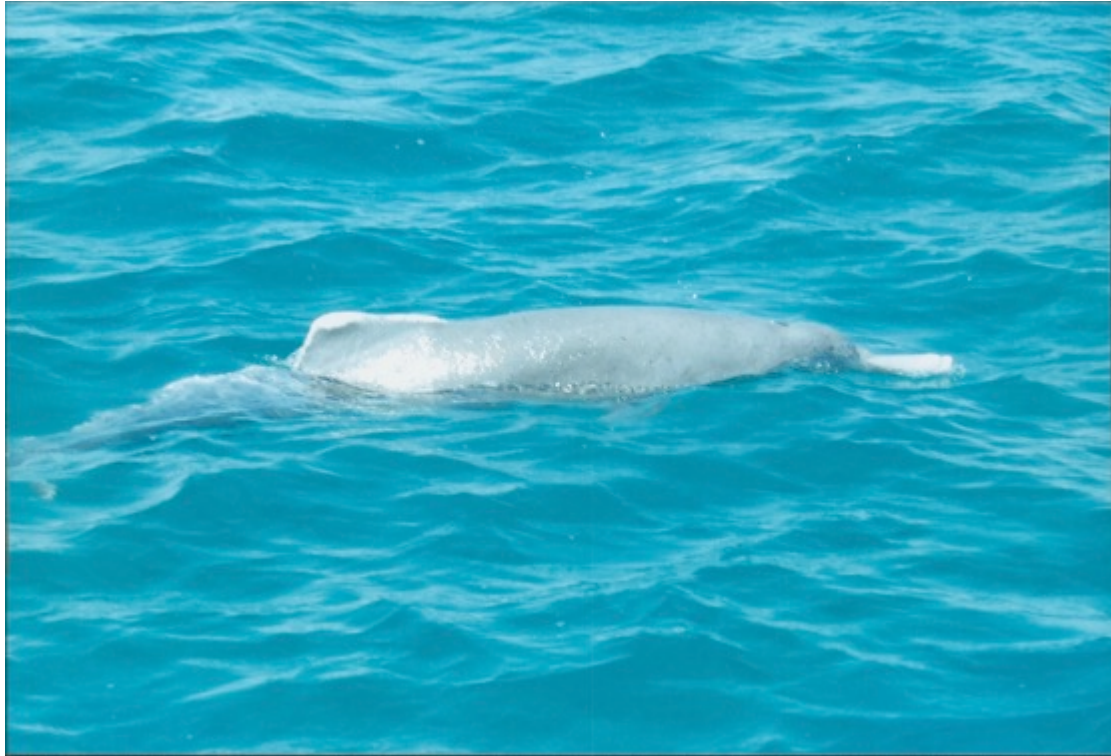
Red Kangaroo – Exmouth golf course



Humpback whale – Exmouth gulf



Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin – Ningaloo reef



Tone – Perup reserve (3.5 hr drive South of Perth)

This reserve in the middle of the South West forests is undoubtedly the prime viewing site for mammals in WA. Accommodation is at the Perup ecology lodge and while there are plenty of animals around the accommodation site at night spotlighting on the roads and tracks around the area will certainly increase the number of species spotted.

Perup cottage with its incredibly serene balcony



Brushtail possums live in the roof of the cottage and at dusk they head off on their nighttime excursions via the cottage balcony and can be viewed every day at this time. **Brushtails** are the mammal most often seen while spotlighting the roads and tracks of the area.

Although not common the most inland population of the **Western ringtail possum** occurs at Perup, check the bull banksia trees when spotlighting.

I have twice seen a **numbat** during the day at Perup both on Cordalup road and in my view Perup is the best place in the state to view these intriguing mammals. Check out the visitors book at the cottage where sightings are often recorded. If visiting during the warmer months it is worth noting that **numbats** often take a siesta during the hottest hour of the day when their food source the termites move away from the surface of the ground, conversely in the cooler months **numbats** are active during the warmer part of the day. A drive of no more than 20-30km/hr should give the best results.

The roads around Perup are mostly unsealed but fine for 2WD



Numbat - Cordalup road - Perup



The **Western quoll** locally known as the **chuditch** is reasonably common in the Perup area after dark and the last five times I have spotlighted I have seen **chuditch** .

I have personally found the Boyup brook – Cranbrook road (sealed) a hotspot for these beautiful mammals especially the few kilometres west of the Simpson Road / track intersection. Beware while spotlighting this road at night whilst there are very few vehicles the speed limit is 110km so be prepared to pull over sharp! It is also worth noting that **chuditch** are of a similar size to the **common brushtail possum** and their movement can look similar so it can sometimes be worth checking out that **brushtail** more closely as it may have a white spotted brown coat and end up being a **chuditch**! **Chuditch** more than the other mammals of Perup use the roads and tracks to get around and many times I have seen them on the actual road.

Western Quoll (Chuditch) – Boyup brook to Cranbrook road (Perup)



Chuditch feeding on roadkill kangaroo – Boyup brook to Cranbrook road (Perup)



I have also had great views of a **brush-tailed phascogale** on the Boyup brook – Cranbrook road whilst spotlighting, but these can also be seen in the main accommodation area especially if the red gums are flowering as they were the first week of November 2015 where **phascogales** were feeding off the insects attracted to the flowers at night.

Brush-tailed Phascogale – Boyup brook to Cranbrook road (Perup)



Brushtail Possum in flowering redgum – Perup



Tammar wallabies are easily seen in the melaleuca thickets behind the caretakers cottage during the day (100% guaranteed) and can be seen around the accommodation when they come out into the open at night to feed.

Tammar wallaby – melalueca thicket, Perup



Western brush wallabies can be seen occasionally at night whilst spotlighting.

Western grey kangaroos can be seen day and night on the walking trails around the accommodation.

One of the walking trails at Perup is called the bandicoot scoot and true to its name I have often seen **bandicoots (quenda)** on this trail at night sometimes upto four at once!

Brush tailed bettongs (Woylies) are much harder to see but they are possible to fleetingly see at night on some of the walking trails and even around the accommodation.

Dryandra woodland

This beautiful woodland is one of WA's best known sights for mammal watching and with accommodation in the middle of the woodland it is a great spot to spend time.

Wandoo woodland – Dryandra



It is undoubtedly the best place in the state to see **echidnas** and **Western grey kangaroos** graze around the accommodation every day. Spotlighting is great for **brushtail possums** on the wandoo walk at night (reflective markers keep you on the track.) I have seen **chuditch** twice at the beginning of the wandoo walk at night (at the site of the old mill dam picnic area) and they appear to be increasing in numbers at dryandra.

Echidna – Dryandra woodland



I have seen **woylies** while spotlighting Gura road at night where it borders the farmers fields. I have disturbed **brush wallabies** walking the ochre trail during the day as well as when driving around the woodland. Unfortunately **numbats** are becoming harder to see and I have yet to see one at Dryandra.

John and Lisa the caretakers at Dryandra village are incredibly helpful and are always generous with their up to date knowledge and should be your first port of call when staying at Dryandra.

Brushtail possum – wandoo walk, Dryandra woodland



Barna Mia is a sanctuary for endangered marsupials within the Dryandra woodland and it is possible participate in after dark spotlight tours certain nights of the week (check website.) The mammals that can be seen here are very rare and include **bilbies, boodies, rufous hare wallabies, woylies** and **marl (Western barred-bandicoots.)**

Burrowing bettong (boodie) - Barna Mia, Dryandra woodland



Bilby – Barna Mia sanctuary, Dryandra woodland



Boyagin nature reserve

This wheatbelt nature reserve has good numbers of **numbats** which would be the primary reason for visiting , I have seen 2 in one day here (check out the wandoo valleys.) Infrastructure at Boyagin is basic with no overnight camping (best to stay at Dryandra 30 mins away) site maps hard to come by and some tracks unsuitable for 2WD. However the open nature of the wandoo woodland (as at Dryandra) makes spotting these cryptic animals easier than in the Jarrah forest with its thicker understory. Recent estimates of numbers in this small reserve are upto 50 animals.

Numbat – Boyagin N.R.



Echidnas are often spotted especially on warm winter / spring days and **brushtail possums** are common at night. Of the larger macropods I have only seen **tammar wallabies** at Boyagin.

Stirling range National Park

The only alpine area of WA is exceptionally beautiful and definitely worth a visit, as well as mammals there are abundant birds reptiles and flowers with late winter / spring being the best time to visit.

Bluff knoll – the highest peak in the Stirling range N.P.



Driving Salt River road the Northern boundary of the park at night delivers both **western grey kangaroos** and **brush wallabies** usually in good numbers as they head out into surrounding fields to graze. During the warmer months I have found **quenda** prolific on Formby Road South and Chester Pass Road. I have seen **brush wallabies** on the lower part of Bluff Knoll road and **quokkas** at higher altitudes near the car park. **Brushtail possums** can be seen in the wandoo woodland South of Bluff Knoll café on Chester Pass road but unfortunately the latest on the **honey possums** at the café is that they have moved on. The owners of the Stirling range retreat recommend trying the banksias near their swimming pool for **honey possums**. **Numbats** have been reintroduced to the Stirling range (see signs on red gum pass road.)