

Trip Report – Australia and New Zealand, March-May 2011

We spent two weeks in Western Australia, driving up to Shark Bay and then around the south-west forests. After that we spent four weeks exploring the South Island of New Zealand for amazing scenery and aquatic mammals. Returning to Australia we spent ten days on Tasmania, then two weeks driving from Melbourne to Adelaide. We spent six days in the red centre around Alice Springs. Amongst this we were also in and around Sydney for eight days. We saw a total of **42 native mammals** and **8 invasive/feral** species over the twelve weeks.

Western Australia

Driving north from Perth along the endless road you can't help but see big macropods at the roadside around dusk and dawn, both living and squashed. Other good places for these were the Pinnacles in Nambung NP and up around Shark Bay. The trick is working out what you're looking at. Eventually we determined by staring at photos (and checking with Jon!) that the ones with hairy noses are **Western Grey Kangaroos**, the ones with a hang-dog expression and more rust and white colours are **Red Kangaroos** and the somewhat more wallaby-ish ones are **Common Wallaroos** (aka **Euros**).

We saw the famous **Indo-pacific Bottlenose Dolphins** at Monkey Mia, and it's such a carefully managed experience these days that you have to pinch yourself to remember that you're not at an aquarium. On a catamaran trip out from Monkey Mia we saw **Dugong**, although we also spotted one from Eagle Bluff back along the highway later. These catamaran trips sometimes pick up whales too. We tried a spotlighting foray on the highway at Shark Bay with vague hopes of Bilbies which have been successfully reintroduced now that most of the peninsula is being a predator-proof fence, but saw nothing.

Back in Fremantle we took a day trip to Rottnest Island. The **Quokka** are numerous and so unfazed when sheltering under rocks that you can get within two metres and sit with



them a while.

Quokka on the run

In the south-west forests we focussed on Perup Reserve and Dryandra Forest. Bev from the DEC office in Manjimup was very helpful with arrangements. Sadly from what we heard and also comparing our sightings with older trip reports, it seems the situation for indigenous mammals here may be getting worse, in spite of apparent early success with fox baiting programs.

Perup has a great little cottage that will sleep four. Two evenings spent walking the trails in the reserve and driving the dirt roads around it showed us two **Chuditch (Western Quoll)**, one **Woylie (Brush-tailed Bettong)** seen briefly, 10+ **Tammar Wallabies** and 40+ **Common Brush-tailed Possums**. Best of all for rarity was a **Brush-tailed Phascogale**, though only seen long enough scurrying up a tree to identify it. The driving was much more productive than walking – the trails are too crunchy to hear animals before they've already legged it into deep cover. Though you can get Tammars in the late afternoon just around the main cabins. There's a predator-proof enclosure here where 40 Woylies have been released to try and keep a viable population; in just a few years trapping at Perup has gone from 90% woylie, 10% brush-tailed possum to exactly the reverse. And the caretaker tells us Western Ring-tailed Possums have been driven out by the brushies; you need to focus on coastal heath environments for them now.



Chuditch

Dryandra is set up nicely, but although we put in pretty much the same hours of spotlighting as at Perup, we saw almost nothing: 11 Brush-tailed Possums, 2 Tammar Wallabies and a few Western Grey Kangaroos. We spent many daylight hours driving in search of Numbats, but no luck – the caretakers tell us their numbers are dropping and dropping here, so Perup is probably a better bet for Numbats. We did put in a few hours of daytime driving there and didn't see them either.

Along with Numbat, we also hoped for but missed seeing Western Ring-tailed Possum

and the Honey Possum.

New Zealand

We focussed on New Zealand's unique aquatic mammals, since the only terrestrial mammals are introductions which are rapidly tearing through the endemic bird life. **New Zealand Fur Seals** are readily seen all around the South Island; any town on the coast can boast a colony somewhere not far away. On the beautiful Catlins coast we found **Hooker's Sealions** at Waipapa point and apparently Elephant Seals and Leopard Seals are fairly regularly but entirely randomly spotted along the coast – just not by us.



Hooker's Sealions

On a whale-watching trip at Kaikoura we saw three **Sperm Whales** (this is practically guaranteed) and a small pod of **Dusky Dolphins**. We also went for a dolphin swim at Kaikoura, but the dolphins utterly failed to make an appearance and we had to make do with a juvenile **Humpback Whale** breaching and fin-slapping near the boat. We got a refund on the trip, so it became a free whale-watching trip instead. In the Marlborough Sounds at Picton we joined another dolphin swim but as though dogged by fate we again found no swimmable dolphins. Instead we got a pod of 20 or so **Hector's Dolphins** swimming and sporting in a crystal-clear bay, with several jumps and spy-hops. These tiny dolphins aren't usually demonstrative, so we were blessed. And in Milford Sound we saw oceanic **Bottlenose Dolphins**.



Hector's Dolphins

Tasmania

At Mount Field NP in the main car park around the camping ground we picked up 3 **Eastern Quolls**, 20+ **Tasmanian Pademelons** and a couple of Common Brush-tailed Possums after dark. At our lodgings, Giant's Table up the road in Maydena, we saw Pademelons and brushies on the lawn, along with **Rabbits**. We also spotted a **Platypus** in their lake at dusk, and they claim to have up to eight of them living there. Pademelons were also visible along the road after dark and frankly you can't visit Tasmania without tripping over them. Or squashing them with your car, as many people seem to do every night.



Duck-billed Platypus

Narawntapu NP on the north coast must be the easiest place in the world to see **Common Wombats**; with still an hour until dusk we could see six on the lawns visible from the car park and probably saw ten in total. They're approachable to less than ten metres too. At dusk we saw at least 4 **Bennet's Wallabies** and 2 **Forrester Kangaroos** (sub-species of **Eastern Grey Kangaroo** endemic to Tassie). We didn't stay here until dark, but have a pretty reliable tip that this is a great place for Spotted-tailed Quoll if you leave some meat

out around the camp site and wait.



Common Wombat

We didn't get to do any night spotting at Cradle Mountain, as we were told that the number of tourists still pottering around looking for things after dark means that the more interesting wildlife like Quolls and Devils are unlikely to appear until 10pm or later these days, and we weren't staying near enough to wait. We stayed at Mole Creek Guesthouse, and they claim to sometimes get Long-nosed Potoroos, Quoll and Platypus in their garden – we saw a **Southern Brown Bandicoot** in the garden in broad daylight, so maybe. On unsealed roads in the mountains between Cradle Mt and Mole Creek we went on a looong night drive and picked up another Eastern Quoll, a pair of **Ring-tailed Possums**, a Common Wombat, 20+ Pademelons, 20+ Bennet's Wallabies and 63 Common Brush-tailed Possums. Yes, we counted them. They're everywhere – at the Waterworks Reserve we peered into a trash bin and two possums peered up at us with their mouths full of food. After a few moments they resumed chewing.

One of the highlights of our year of wildlife watching will be Mountain Valley Wilderness Holidays at Loongana, where we got to watch **Tasmanian Devils** on the veranda of our cabin with only a pane of glass separating us from them and an open fire roaring behind us. We stayed three nights, and saw 2 on the first night, 3 on the second night and 8 different animals on the third night. That was the only night we stayed up until 3am, though. There are also two or three Platypus consistently visible just before dusk at the riverside on the property, and while watching them I saw a **Spotted-tailed Quoll** run across the rocks above their pool; it visited the cabins later, but we had gone for a night drive! Even if you don't stay here, the unsealed road past the property is great for night drives. On two drives we saw a total of: 2 Ring-tailed Possums, 5 Common Wombats, 2 Tasmanian Devils, 4 Bennet's Wallabies and uncounted numbers of Pademelons and Brush-tailed Possums.



Tasmanian Devil

In the north-east we tried night driving the C832 near Scottsdale, and picked up 1 Common Wombat, 8 brushies, 5 Bennet's Wallabies, 10+ Pademelons and 1 **Tasmanian Bettong**. We saw another bettong on a night walk at the Hobart Waterworks Reserve, but apart from the biggest horde of brushies yet we didn't see anything else interesting here. The bettong is a nice little macropod; it tends to look lighter than a pademelon in the spotlight and its tail is wiggly like a snake when it flees rather than stiff like a pademelon's or wallaby's.

So, nice going Tasmania. The only two things we wanted to see but didn't were the Long-nosed Potoroo and the Eastern Barred Bandicoot.

Victoria

We didn't get much mammal watching done in Victoria. Driving along the Great Ocean Road we found **Koalas** in abundance along the Kennet River Road and then on the road towards Cape Otway near the Blanket Bay turn-off. There were Eastern Grey Kangaroos on Anglesea golf course too. We didn't get to spotlight at Cape Otway, but ended up trying at Melba Gully a bit further east; this is a rainforest gully and all we got was some very good views of half a dozen obliging Ring-tailed Possums. On Griffith Island in the town of Port Fairy it is terribly easy to see **Black (Swamp) Wallabies** around dusk and we spotted nineteen. We visited nearby Tower Hill Reserve, which is a beautiful spot, and spotlighting got us a few Eastern Greys, a couple of Koalas and almost certainly an **Agile Antechinus** (since that's the only species on the list for this reserve).



Grizzled old Black Wallaby

We were disappointed at Portland - we were there in the last week of April, but no Blue Whales had been sighted for at least three weeks. We also spent three nights in the Grampians, but with typical ill-luck it was over the weekend. The folks at the park info centre had no clue about what animals might be found in their park, and told us that the Parks Victoria people wouldn't be in until Monday - the day we left. So we tried some spotlighting on two nights anyway, and were either in the wrong areas or just unlucky because a single Red-necked Wallaby and a few Eastern Greys is all we saw.

South Australia

Kangaroo Island was a useful couple of days. We were guided along the beach at Seal Bay to see **Australian Sealions** up close, much better than the distant view from the boardwalk above the beach. The guide himself was an idiot, but we simply ignored him. In Flinders Chase NP we went down to Admiral's Arch and were able to pick out a single **Australian Fur Seal** bull from all the New Zealand Fur Seals, identifying him by a much more gingery colour and a more "muzzle-ish" snout. It's easy to find Tammar Wallabies and the local sub-species of Western Grey Kangaroo if you head along the "Platypus Waterhole Hike" within an hour or two of dusk. We found both these elsewhere on KI too. And having hunted for them everywhere else in our trip, we finally saw **Short-beaked Echidna** here too. We drove around a lot of the island without finding them, but based on advice we tried Hanson Bay Road and picked up 3 in a couple of kilometers, then 2 more a few kilometers along the main road near Kelly Hill. This was on a sunny late afternoon, but we got another one next morning on the same bit of road. Oh, and we accidentally cornered a Brush-tailed Possum in the outside kitchen of Flinders Chase Farm where we stayed!



Short-beaked Echidna

Back on the mainland we went up to the Flinders Ranges and following a tip we found two of the incredibly handsome **Yellow-footed Rock-wallabies** before dusk at Warren Gorge, just north of the town of Quorn. Just up the track from the day car park. So if you wanted to try for them with just a day trip from Adelaide, this might be the spot. We were counting ourselves lucky, but then driving down the Brachina Gorge in the national park next afternoon we picked up five more of them without much trouble! And another two next morning back at Warren Gorge.



Yellow-footed Rock Wallaby

In Adelaide we spotted two **Water Rats** in the Torrens River. This was from the bridge right in the middle of town near the zoo, and at two in the afternoon. Finally, we made two attempts at finding Southern Hairy-nosed Wombats at Brookefield Conservation Park. There are absolutely loads of burrows around, but although we tried an early morning and a dusk/evening either (a) we were unlucky, (b) we did something wrong or (c) the season and/or weather changed their habits. All we saw were some roos and feral goats.

Northern Territory (Red Centre)

The summer rains had led to a winter mouse plague in the middle of Australia, so we saw plenty of **House Mouse**. Hundreds in fact, day or night and brave as you like. The one place we didn't see any was Yulara resort and I'm guessing that they'd worked hard at eradication to spare their precious tourists from any rodent encounters. We searched for a while for Spinifex Hopping-mice here, but got nothing. However, at King's Canyon resort we found a couple of **Spinifex Hopping-mice** while out spotlighting for dingos, just a few yards from the Reception where we had been told that dingos are seen every night around the BBQ restaurant and that spinifex-hopping mice doesn't exist here. Needless to say we didn't see any dingos.



Spinifex Hopping Mouse

This was a good trip for introductions. As well as the mice, we saw a pair of **Dromedary Camels** and a **Red Fox** on the road to Uluru at night, and a **Brumby** and a pair of **Dingos** on the Mereenie Loop road. One of the dingos was jet black, which apparently 4% of them are, and so far as I can guess they were both purebred.

At Simpson's Gap we tried morning and afternoon for the **Black-footed Rock-wallabies** and despite the most oblivious-looking tourists remarking that they had seen them only ten minutes previous, we couldn't find one. Then finally we saw something leaping amongst the rocky scree. Oddly, it turned out to be a Red Kangaroo?!? Admitting defeat, we walked to Heavitree Gap Lodge on our final afternoon where every day the resident Black-footed Rock-wallabies hop down just before dusk to be hand-fed pellets. At least the photo-ops were good.



Black-footed Rock Wallaby

New South Wales

We didn't really try for any mammal watching here, too busy enjoying the delights of Sydney. The **Grey-headed Fruit Bats** at the Botanic Gardens are a marvel, and it's an unusual spectacle to watch them flapping across the face of glass-walled office blocks and past the Opera House in the twilight. We tried but never managed to hook up with Steve Anyon-Smith, but spent one evening spotlighting along Lady Carrington's Drive in the Royal National Park anyway. We picked up a couple of **Rusa Deer** and a single **Sugar Glider** only.

Plenty more photos from this trip along with our daily blogs can be found at <http://otteradrift.com>.

Species	Country	Life list	First spotted
Duck-billed platypus	Australia	Yes	Loongana, Tasmania
Short-beaked echidna	Australia	Yes	Kangaroo Island
Tasmanian devil	Australia	Yes	Loongana, Tasmania
Eastern quoll	Australia	Yes	Mount Field NP, Tasmania
Spotted-tailed quoll	Australia	Yes	Loongana, Tasmania
Western quoll (chuditch)	Australia	Yes	Perup nature reserve, WA
Brush-tailed phascogale	Australia	Yes	Perup nature reserve, WA
Agile antechinus	Australia	Yes	Tower Hill Reserve, Victoria
Southern brown bandicoot	Australia	Yes	Mole Creek Guest House, Tasmania
Koala	Australia	Yes	Kennet River, Victoria
Common wombat	Australia	Yes	Loongana, Tasmania
Common ringtail possum	Australia	Yes	Loongana, Tasmania
Common brush-tailed possum	Australia	Yes	Perup nature reserve, WA
Sugar glider	Australia	Yes	Royal National Park, NSW
Brush-tailed bettong (Woylie)	Australia	Yes	Perup nature reserve, WA
Tasmanian bettong	Australia	Yes	Near Bridport, Tasmania
Tasmanian pademelon	Australia	Yes	Mount Field NP, Tasmania

Quokka	Australia	Yes	Rottneest Island
Yellow-footed rock wallaby	Australia	Yes	Warren Gorge, SA
Black-footed rock wallaby	Australia	Yes	Heavitree Gap, NT
Tammar wallaby	Australia	Yes	Perup nature reserve, WA
Bennet's wallaby	Australia	Yes	Loongana, Tasmania
Black (swamp) wallaby	Australia	Yes	Port Fairy, Victoria
Common wallaroo (Euro)	Australia	Yes	Shark bay
Eastern grey (Forrester) kangaroo	Australia	Yes	Narawntapu NP, Tasmania
Western grey kangaroo	Australia	Yes	Perup nature reserve, WA
Red kangaroo	Australia	Yes	Shark bay
Dingo	Australia	Yes	Mereenie Loop, NT
Spinifex hopping-mouse	Australia	Yes	Curtin Springs, NT
Water rat	Australia	Yes	Torrens River, Adelaide
Grey-headed flying foxes	Australia	Yes	Sydney Botanic Gardens
Dugong	Australia	Yes	Shark bay
New Zealand fur seal	New Zealand	Yes	Doubtful Sound
Hooker's sealions	New Zealand	Yes	Catlins coast
Australian fur seal	Australia	Yes	Kangaroo Island
Australian sealion	Australia	Yes	Kangaroo Island
Indo-pacific bottlenose dolphin	Australia	Yes	Shark bay
Dusky dolphin	New Zealand	Yes	Kaikoura
Hector's dolphin	New Zealand	Yes	Queen Charlotte Sound
Bottlenose dolphin	New Zealand	No	Milford Sound
Sperm whale	New Zealand	No	Kaikoura
Humpback whale	New Zealand	No	Kaikoura
Introduced species			
Cat (feral)	Australia	No	Tasmania
Red fox	Australia	No	Melba Gully, Victoria
Red deer (feral)	Australia	No	Halls Gap, Victoria
European rabbit	Australia	No	Everywhere
House mouse	Australia	No	Kangaroo Island
Brumby (feral horse)	Australia	No	Mereenie Loop, NT
Dromedary (feral)	Australia	Yes	Near Uluru, NT
Goat (feral)	Australia	No	Brookfield Conservation Park, SA