

Queensland and New South Wales, July-August 2011

In July-August 2011, my wife and I drove from Brisbane to Cairns along the coast, and then to Sydney through the interior. It took us about 3 weeks. In hindsight, a much better plan would be to fly to Cairns and spend the entire time exploring the surrounding coast and tablelands. The way we did it was more expensive (we seldom camped because nights were bitterly cold almost up to Townsville), and we missed a lot of wildlife (including virtually all herps) due to cold weather. In October, our route would make much more sense.

We found Australia much more convenient, civilized and generally nice than the US (so much so that we now seriously consider moving), but it was prohibitively expensive (a campsite on the coast might be more expensive than a motel room in the US, and a cup of coffee in a roadside restaurant often costs more than a lunch in a US fast food joint). The roads are generally good, especially in the outback where police is scarce and you can drive as fast as it is safe (which usually means 1.5 posted speed limits in the daytime, and less than the speed limit at night due to kangaroos crossing). But around big cities the road network is often inadequate and traffic very slow. Hotels are routinely overbooked and can be of poor quality, so I would recommend bush camping as often as possible.

We used Jon Hall's Australia pages on mammalwatching.com as the main info source. The account below should not be used separately, but as a companion/update to Jon's excellent texts. For a number of reasons, we didn't do any trapping.

Queensland

Springbrook Nat'l Park is generally similar to Lamington, and also has lots of mammals. I saw a **Subtropical Antechinus** on the trail to Best of All Viewpoint.

Daisy Hill Forest Reserve near Brisbane is a good place to see **Koalas** in the wild. There is also a small watchtower with a frogmouth roost just beside the top. **Red-necked Wallabies** are very common.

Cape Hillsborough Nat'l Park has a mangrove boardwalk where **Water Mice** can be seen at low tide. Look also for rare *Eugella* honeyeaters in rainforests there.

Unadorned Rock Wallabies are still abundant at night around Mt. Etna Caves Nat'l Park visitor center. As for **Proserpine Rock Wallabies**, we found them grazing in a garden on the northern side of the road to Arlie Beach less than 2 miles past the turnoff from Hwy 1 near Proserpine. **Spectacled Hare-wallabies** haven't been seen in or around Inkerman Station for a long time.

Many parts of the coast between Air and Cairns have suffered a lot of damage from a cyclone in February 2011; it was not uncommon to see rainforest without any canopy at all. Probably because of that, we saw some species along the road that we didn't expect: a cassowary was happily grazing in a recently plowed forest on the outskirts of Innisfail (a good name for this town – tells you all you need to know about local accommodation choices), and a **Mahogany Glider** in a roadside tree near Conn. We also saw a small wallaby near Conn that could be a **Sharman's Rock Wallaby**. In a roadside wildlife park just south of Townsville, the name of which escapes me, a **Common Ringtail Possum** had a day roost under the ceiling of women's bathroom.

In Paluma, many businesses (including the Tea Rooms) were closed, and trails blocked by windfall. We still managed to see a **Rusty Antechinus** on the municipal trail, and a **White-footed Dunnart** at the waterfall on the road from Mutarnee.

Cape Bowling Green Nat'l Park is good for **Allied Rock Wallaby** (around Alligator Creek campground, for example).

The bat cave at Bramston Beach had a few **Eastern Horseshoe-nosed Bats** in addition to **Dusky Leaf-Nosed Bats**. The **Coastal Sheathtail Bat** colony at Wangetti was down to just one individual at the time of our visit.

In Cairns, **Northern Freetails** roost under the roof of an unnamed motel two blocks south from Cairns Beach House Hostel (look for "\$55 accomodation" sign, which is misleading as it is \$65+).

We did a 3-day diving trip to the Great Barrier Reef. Diving was a bit disappointing compared to eastern Indonesia, but there was a lot of **Humpbacks**, and one small group of **Melon-headed Whales** off Fitzroy Island.

Yungaburra is a great base for exploring the tablelands. A hotel called The Gables was the best-value accommodation we've seen in Australia so far. Ask the owner for directions to the best platypus-viewing sites (10 min walk). There's plenty of **Platypuses**, but you can only see them as they surface, because the water is murky. A nearby (5 min drive) town called Lakeview has a colony of **Spectacled Flying-foxes** (there is only one loop street in town – follow it until you see a patch of forest on one side, and listen for the bats). We saw a **Green Ringtail Possum** at Curtain Fig Nat'l Park just west from Yungaburra. **Yellow-bellied Sheathtails** roost in the large tree near the post office.

Crater Lakes Nat'l Park is great for spotlighting. In addition to the species listed by Jon, I found a baby **Echidna**, **Fawn-footed Melomyses**, **Giant** (many) and **Masked** (only one) **White-tailed Rats**. Lodges in the park have **Sugar Glider** feeders (best ~1 hr after sunset), **Red-legged Pademelons** and lots of riflebirds. You don't have to stay there, just walk in.

Malanda Falls are surrounded by a small patch of exceptionally beautiful rainforest with lots of big trees, which is said by some locals to be the best place for **Lumholtz' Tree Kangaroos**. I found one after about an hour of searching. There was also a **Yellow-bellied Glider** and a few **Red-legged Pademelons**.

Atherton Bat Hospital is an interesting place to visit: they have many species of flying foxes and a few microbats. We witnessed a release of a **Hairy-nosed Freetail** (recently described as *Mormopterus eleryi*) and a **Common Bentwing**. Nearby is Hasties Swamp, where we watched a **Dingo** trying to stalk a small mixed group of sarus cranes and brolgas. Spotlighting in Mount Hypipamee Nat'l Park produced only one small possum (**Long-tailed Pygmy**, I presume).

Kingfisher Park near Julatten has tons of bandicoots, **Bush Rats**, and **Striped Possums** (we saw one fight with a **Black Flying-Fox**). There is a **Platypus** viewing place where you can see them underwater (the creek was very shallow), but prepare for a long wait. Don't expect it to be boring: there will be plenty of mammals running around (all of the above plus **Fawn-footed Melomyses**). Check also the women's bathrooms for **Eastern Tube-nosed** and **Northern Broad-nosed Bats** and hibernating treefrogs.

Mount Lewis Road makes a great night drive (in late July it was perfectly OK for a passenger car). I drove up and down three times, and walked around for the rest of the night. At Km 2 I saw a **Bettong** that looked like a **Northern** rather than a Rufous. There was also a very tame Papuan frogmouth at Km 5, a very shy **Northern Quoll** at Km 9, a **Daintree River Ringtail Possum** at the bridge at Km 10, another possum nearby that I think was **Herbert River Ringtail Possum**, and a **Prehensile-Tailed Rat** at a clearing at Km.11. Birders often go to that clearing during the day to see blue-faced parrotfinches; I did the same only to learn from a small plaque that they are summer visitors.

Undara Lava Tubes Nat'l Park is still great for **Wallabies: Antelopine, Whiptail, and Mareeba Rock**. The latter can be found on the cliff above the campsite (if you, like us, cannot afford a tour of the caves where they are said to be more common). For the other two wallabies, look along the road to the caves at dusk. **Rufous Bettongs** are not easy to find anymore: we saw only one pair after thoroughly searching the touristy area, and one lone individual on the road to the caves. **Little Bentwings** were night-roosting in the stockman cabins area.

We were surprised to see **Camels** just south of Porcupine Gorge Nat'l Park.

Bladensburg Nat'l Park was full of life: herds of **Red** and **Eastern Grey Kangaroos**, huge flocks of birds, and one precious little **Julia Creek Dunnart** in rocky grassland near Skull Hole. I also briefly saw a rodent that looked like a hopping mouse in the same area, but maps in Menkhorst & Knight don't show any in that part of Queensland; **Spinifex Hopping Mouse** comes the closest. A population of **Purple-Necked Rock Wallaby** has been recently discovered nearby, but we only learned about it after leaving the area.

There are rocky outcrops with **Yellow-footed Rock Wallabies** southwest from Blackall (ask rangers at the breeding center in Charlieville for directions). Around those outcrops and near Charlieville, **Western Grey Kangaroos** can be seen at dusk together with **Eastern Greys, Common Wallaroos** and occasional **Black Wallabies**.

Many roads in that part of Queensland are lined with insanely high numbers of roadkill animals (mostly kangaroos and wallaroos, but also feral species). On some roads there was a corpse every few meters. Interestingly, there were much fewer dead kangaroos on the southern (dingoless) side of the dingo fence.

New South Wales

Why wouldn't they shorten it to New Wales? Anyway, we checked out Barren Grounds Reserve and the adjacent Budderoo Nat'l Park. Despite ongoing fox baiting, we didn't see many mammals in the reserve (but had three ground parrots fly low over our heads at dusk). In the park there is a beautiful canopy walkway (\$25 during the day, free at night if you don't mind trespassing). It's a great place to look for gliders, possums and wombats, plus there are lyrebird dancing sites directly under the walkway. I was surprised to see a **Squirrel Glider** in the park (my edition of Menkhorst and Knight says that they occur in coastal heaths only north of Sydney). **Brush-tailed Rock Wallabies** (I hope my identification was correct) inhabit the cliffs and graze along the road at night (as do **Black Wallabies**). Walking Budderoo Plateau Fire Trail and camping at the gate there produced **Long-nosed Potoroo, Dusky Antechinus,**

Southern Brown Bandicoot (not seen well), **Little Forest Bats** and a small rodent that was likely a **New Holland Mouse**.

Garigal Nat'l Park is just north from Sydney. It has dense low heath forest, where **Feathertail Gliders** can be seen almost at eye level. We saw two **Swamp Rats** during a short evening walk. Look also for **Water Rats** in the river.

We did a full night of spotlighting in Gundabooka National Park. No **Kultarrs** (rangers said none had been seen for many years), but one **Giles' Planigale** (along the road to the rock art site), a few **Long-haired Rats**, plus lots of feral rabbits, foxes, cats, goats and one **European Hare** on the road to Bourke.