

MAMMALS ON THE FALKLAND ISLANDS

24 Feb- 2 Mar 2013

For a week in February and March this year I was fortunate enough to spend a few days on the Falkland Islands as part of a group of wildlife journalists. I stayed in four places: Darwin (East Falkland), Carcass Island, West Point Island, Sealion Island and Port Stanley (East Falkland). This brief report will hopefully pass on a few nuggets of information for other keen mammal-watchers who visit.

House Mice and Brown Rats occur on some islands but I didn't look for these. We saw Brown Hare at Darwin and some Rabbits on Carcass Island.

PATAGONIAN FOX *Dusicyon griseus*

Introduced to a few islands, one of which is Weddell Island. They are easy to see there. On our trip we touched down on Weddell Island for 10 minutes on the way to somewhere else (24 Feb), but still managed to see a fox on the runway.

SOUTHERN ELEPHANT SEAL *Mirounga leonina*

Localised, but easy to see. We were shown colonies on Carcass Island and Sealion Island. Their sheer bulk, their innate aggression, and the hilarious flatulent noises they make (albeit through the nose) make them great entertainment.



The above animals were on Sealion Island (28 Feb). They are around for the breeding season, when the human visitors come.

SOUTHERN SEALION *Otaria flavescens*

These are quite common and we saw them both from Carcass Island and Sealion Island, as well as on a whale-watching trip from Stanley. The males are distinctive and quite grotesque.



Adult male Southern Sealion on its eponymous island, 27 Feb 2013.

COMMERSON'S DOLPHIN *Cephalorhynchus commersonii*

If there's one mammal-watching reason to go to the Falklands, it has to be to see this wonderful cetacean, which is common around the islands. We saw it without difficulty: in Darwin (24 Feb), on the boat transfer between Carcass and West Point Island (25 Feb), from the north end of Carcass Island (26 Feb), on a boat trip out of Stanley (1 Mar), and off the seafront at Stanley itself (2 Mar). Our colleagues who visited Bleaker Island said that they just had to tap the structure of the pier, and that would attract Commerson's Dolphins.

One of our best experiences was to have these dolphins bow-riding on the Carcass-West Point crossing.



Commerson's Dolphins Carcass-West Point Island, 25 Feb 2013

Peale's Dolphin *Lagenorhynchus australis*

Another delightful range-restricted cetacean which, again, we saw without difficulty, although only off Carcass and West Point Islands in the north of the archipelago. Most visitors seem to be successful. We saw them on the crossing from Carcass to West Point and on land from the Black-browed Albatross colony on West Point and from the northern end of Carcass Island (25-26 Feb). Easily told from Commerson's by their sharp-tipped dorsal fins.



Peale's Dolphins off Carcass Island, Falklands, 26 Feb 2013

Sei Whale *Balaenoptera borealis*

The Falklands must be one of the best places in the world to catch up with the Sei Whale. On our brief trip we saw a small group blowing off Sealion Island (27 Feb), and we saw one at close quarters in Berkeley Sound, north of Port Stanley (3 Mar), on a whale-watching trip. Our colleagues also saw some from one of the FIGAS light planes that transfer tourists between islands.

At this time of the year they are just arriving in Falkland waters.



Sei Whale in Berkeley Sound, East Falkland, March 1st 2013

Killer Whale/Orca *Orcinus orca*

We fully expected to have a chance of seeing Orcas on Sealion Island. After all, they had been filmed attacking sealion pups here for one of the David Attenborough documentaries. However, they seem only to be really common in early breeding season (October-January), and by the time we arrived, on February 26, they hadn't been seen for 10 days.