

## Trip Report: Tasmania January 2022

Note: Mammal names are bolded for their first sighting and are not bolded thereafter.

I got married in Melbourne in November 2021. Domestic travel restrictions from COVID-19 had more-or-less lifted in Australia, but international travel was still not possible, so my wife and I went to Tasmania for our honeymoon in January. She loves great food (I mean, everyone does, but she's a dedicated foodie) and Tasmania has got fantastic seafood, cheese, beer and whisky. Additionally, we both love fishing, I love great scenery, and of course, for me the mammalwatching in Tasmania was probably the strongest draw-card.

Naturally, we designed a nice itinerary that catered to all the above interests. However, once we were there, my wife was pregnant and struggling a lot with keeping her food down. So that inhibited our ability to do anything other than mammalwatching. This wasn't too upsetting for me, although it did put a bit of a damper on things for my wife...

The itinerary was as follows:

### **Bruny Island:** 13-15/01/2022

We stayed for a couple of nights on Bruny Island, and spotlit on one of them. My main target was **Eastern Quoll**. We did find a fawn-coloured one on North Bruny, on the main north-south running road slightly north of the isthmus.

We did not see any Long-nosed Potoroo on Bruny Island, although I hear it is a good site for them. There were plenty of **Rufous-bellied Pademelon** and **Bennett's Wallabies** that were all-too-willing to jump in front of our car at night when we were spotlighting. Thankfully we did not hit any, but anyone spotlighting on Bruny Island should be extra careful to avoid them, particularly as some of the areas have unsealed roads which can make it difficult to stop suddenly.

We chanced across the first of quite a few **Short-beaked Echidnas** during the trip on Bruny Island as well.

### **Hobart:** 15-16/01/2022

We spent one night in Hobart, transitioning between Bruny Island and Port Arthur and exploring the city. No mammalwatching was done though.

### **Port Arthur:** 16-18/01/2022

We did not do any mammalwatching in Port Arthur, although we visited the Unzoo. Interesting concept. For those interested, the bird-feeding show there was a good way to see wild specimens of a couple of the Tasmanian endemic bird species. I wound up with a Green Rosella sitting on my head, and a Yellow-throated Honeyeater not much

further away. Of more interest to mammalwatchers, there were plenty of Rufous-bellied Pademelon hanging around the grounds.

After our stay at Port Arthur we drove to Loongana. We saw a couple of Short-beaked Echidnas by the road on the way.

### **Loongana: 18-21/01/2022**

We stayed for 3 nights at Mountain Valley Wilderness Lodge in Loongana. As far as wildlife-watching experiences go, it was excellent and I highly recommend it. My main targets here were Platypus, Spot-tailed Quoll and Tasmanian Devil, and happily I managed to see all 3 species.

Each evening, the lodge owner takes people down from the cabins to a creek about 200 m away, to look for **Platypus** foraging there. I managed to see two of them foraging in the creek on the first evening, and one on the second. Both times I got pretty good looks, with the closest individual approaching to within 15 m.

Right before nightfall, the lodge owner put a pile of raw chicken in front of our glass-fronted cabin (and some sort of feed for herbivores), and then we switched the lights off in the cabin and waited for the quolls and devils to show up.

I'm not sure how I generally feel about baiting wildlife to show up for recreational viewing. However, I think in Tasmania I'm particularly comfortable with it as we've already radically altered the ecosystem in two major ways that would render the effect of baiting negligible:

1. We hunted the Thylacine to extinction, and the kills made by this species were probably the main source of carcasses for Tasmanian Devils to scavenge from prior to European settlement;
2. We built a lot of roads across much of Tasmania, which, together with the high number of animals that probably resulted from a lack of Thylacines and introduced Red Fox, has meant that Tasmania has the highest rate of roadkill in the world.

Given how we have shifted the main producer of food for scavengers from Thylacines to roads, any effect of localised baiting would likely pale in comparison. If Thylacines are successfully de-extincted and reintroduced to Tasmania, then perhaps there would be some grounds for revisiting this topic, but the effect of roads would probably remain anyway.

In any case, I found the whole experience very enjoyable – the baiting concentrates quite a bit of wildlife to a roughly 9-square-metre space right in front of the cabin, and watching the behaviour and drama of the resulting interactions was very interesting.

The first night was a bit slower-going. Initially we just had Rufous-bellied Pademelon and **Common Brush-tailed Possum** foraging in front of the cabin. Occasionally the pademelons would start boxing each other, which would make things lively. The possums may have an unexpected effect on how likely the quolls and devils are to turn up later – certain individuals seem to rather enjoy the chicken and will start making off with a fair bit of it, which could decrease the chance of quoll or devil sightings later. Fortunately, our patch was defended by a particularly large possum that did not like chicken and invested a reasonable amount of energy chasing away those that did.

Eventually, two **Spot-tailed Quolls** (a male and female, judging by the size difference) turned up and took some chicken (photo below). They were there every night, and turned up earlier and earlier with successive nights. On one of the nights (I cannot remember which), one of them stalked behind a possum that was occupied with foraging, and I was convinced I was about to watch a kill. However, the possum happened to turn around when the quoll was about 2 m away and immediately stood up on its hind legs and raised its forelegs up to look as big and threatening as possible. It certainly didn't work on me, but the quoll decided the chicken would be an easier meal and left the possum alone. Still cool behaviour to see!



**Tasmanian Devils** were, without exception, the last mammal species to turn up each night, and arrived significantly later than all the other species. They turned up eventually

every night, (although this is not a given), and like the quolls, they seemed to turn up earlier and earlier with successive nights. I missed them the first night as the camera-trap showed they were only there at 3am when I was fast asleep. On the second night, a relatively small individual turned up at about 10pm (photo below). At 1-2am, we heard them fighting and yowling outside right in front of the cabin (and with devil densities much reduced by DFTD these days, this is no longer a common occurrence), but we had stopped watching by then and had turned the light off so we decided to leave them to it.



The third night was the best in some ways. By this point, the Spot-tailed Quolls were the first species to turn up, and one of them even turned up before the lodge owner had put the chicken in place, and was pressing its nose right up against the glass door of the cabin (see photo below):



After the lodge owner had put the chicken down and left, after some time once it was properly dark a relatively large Tasmanian Devil turned up and started taking some chicken.

Obviously, the main mammalian attractions at Loongana are only active during the evening and at night, so during the day we went to Dove Lake in Cradle Mountain National Park. There were people around who had seen Bare-nosed Wombat during the day we were there, but we had no luck and did not manage to add to our mammal list there. We did see another Short-beaked Echidna by the road en route (photo below):





The physical effort from doing the Dove Lake circuit also made my wife sick (well, sicker) for the next 2-3 days. Just as well that the main thing we were in the area for was to sit still in a cabin and wait for Tasmanian Devils and Spot-tailed Quolls to appear.

**Devonport:** 21-22/01/2022

After our stay at Loongana, we stayed for a night in Devonport. I went to the Mersey Bluff lighthouse area that night to look for **Eastern Barred Bandicoots** (photo below) and found some mixed in with many **European Rabbits**.



The Eastern Barred Bandicoots seemed to have a relatively large flee radius – they would run away extremely quickly if approached directly to within 40-50 m or so. I was eventually able to get a closer look when I stumbled upon one that was hidden from my line of sight behind a small rock.

The bandicoots seemed much more at ease around cars – one was calmly walking along about 2-3 m from my moving car as I was driving out of the car park at Mersey Bluff.

We did visit the Tasmanian Arboretum to look for Platypus, but were there in the afternoon and conditions were hot. Needless to say, we did not see them.

#### **St Helens: 22-24/01/2022**

We did not do any mammalwatching at St Helens. We did go fishing, where my wife caught 9 fish (whiting and Australian salmon) to my 7 (all whiting). She still brings it up periodically. We gave some of our catch to another pair of fishermen who weren't having as much luck.

#### **Swansea: 24-29/01/2022**

We did little mammalwatching at Swansea. We had intended to go spotlighting in Freycinet National Park and go to Maria Island, but our unborn daughter decided she

really did not like the degustation meal that our resort staff so nicely prepared for us. As a result, my wife was rather under the weather during this leg of the trip, and I stayed with her.

I was able to do a bit of spotlighting on one of the nights. I still hadn't seen Southern Bettong, so I drove to an iNaturalist record of a road-killed one nearby, hoping there were more around. Sadly I dipped; however, I did see a very large Tasmanian Devil scavenging from a road-killed Common Brushtail Possum. This individual would have been right at the upper limit of the species size range of close to 1 m long and 10-12 kg in weight – I didn't even think they got that big in the wild. A very cool sighting.

**Launceston: 29-31/01/2022**

I did not do any mammalwatching in Launceston.

**Mammal List:**

The final species list is below (\* indicates a lifer):

Platypus *Ornithorhynchus anatinus* – seen in Loongana.

Short-beaked Echidna *Tachyglossus aculeatus* – seen along the road while driving across Tasmania on multiple occasions, including near Loongana and on Bruny Island, always during the day.

Spot-tailed Quoll *Dasyurus maculatus*\* - seen in Loongana, scavenging chicken.

Eastern Quoll *Dasyurus viverrinus*\* - seen on Bruny Island while spotlighting on the road in North Bruny, just north of the isthmus.

Tasmanian Devil *Sarcophilus harrisi*\* - seen in Loongana scavenging chicken, and near Swansea scavenging roadkill.

Eastern Barred Bandicoot *Perameles gunnii* – seen in Devonport, while spotlighting near the Mersey Bluff lighthouse

Common Brush-tailed Possum *Trichosurus vulpecula* – seen in Loongana.

Rufous-bellied Pademelon *Thylogale billardieri* – seen in Hobart, Bruny Island, Loongana and Cradle Mountain.

Bennett's Wallaby – seen on Bruny Island.