

Trip Report: Yarra Ranges, Victoria, Australia, July 2023

Note: Initial appearances of mammal species are **bolded**, but not thereafter.

I live in Melbourne but had yet to attempt to see a Leadbeater's Possum. Thus, for my birthday in March, I asked my wife if we could leave our daughter with our babysitter and join a tour for a night to go look for them. She was ok with it, but due to various circumstances we only wound up doing this in July later that year.

We went with Jay Wilford from Treeswift Wildlife. Jay was an excellent guide - deeply knowledgeable, skilled at finding wildlife with both spotlighting and thermal imaging, and friendly. He took us to some areas roughly around Starlings Gap Campground in the Yarra Ranges. Along the way, we managed to see a couple of dark-morph **Southern Greater Gliders** and a **Mountain Brushtail Possum**. Once we arrived at our first stop, we got out of the car and began walking the track, using the thermal imager to locate any animals. Jay also had a neat little portable songmeter which he used to identify a **Chocolate Wattled Bat** that flew around us at one point while spotlighting.

Within the first hour of looking, we had our first and only **Leadbeater's Possum** for the night. We had incredibly good looks, as it ran up and down the tree, and ended up sitting pretty for us about 4 m from the ground. We had good, close-range, continuous views for about 3 minutes. According to Jay, this was highly unusual - normally Leadbeater's Possums disappear within about 10 seconds, so we were very lucky. We were actually the ones who walked away, as Jay thought this was in the best interests of the animal because it was acting so unusually.

Unfortunately, the night became much quieter from that point. The area we were in produced no more new mammals, and so we moved on to a second area.

The second area was just as quiet. This was made a bit more frustrating by the fact that Jay managed to pick out a bandicoot on the ground by the track on the thermal, but it disappeared by the time we got our spotlight on that spot.

We tried a third area, nearer the campground, and managed to get 2 more Mountain Brushtail Possums in our spotlights, and a Bare-nosed Wombat on the thermal.

A fourth area did not produce any mammals, despite us keeping eyes and ears peeled.

Still, it wasn't a bad night, and there were a couple of little bonuses on the drive back down to Melbourne:

We picked out a pale-morph Southern Greater Glider in a tree by the track on the drive down; and

Once we had left the forest and were in the surrounding agricultural land, we also saw a **Bare-nosed Wombat** cross the road in front of us.

Mammal List (lifers marked with *):

Bare-nosed Wombat *Vombatus ursinus*

Leadbeater's Possum *Gymnobelideus leadbeateri* *

Mountain Brushtail Possum *Trichosurus cunninghami*

Southern Greater Glider *Petauroides volans*

Chocolate Wattled Bat *Chalinolobus morio* *