

# Tasmania

## December 2024 – January 2025

In late December and early January this year, I was fortunate enough to have 12 days in Tasmania and finally go mammal watching in relatively interesting locations. Although the primary focus of this trip was for my family to catch up with relatives in Melbourne and visit the key tourist sites around the island, I expected that it would be possible to see most of Tasmania's endemic birds and mammals within the locations already on the itinerary.

Naturally, travelling with family imposed a few limitations from the offset. The most serious of these was that my dad told me that night driving was completely off-limits, something that I expected would hinder my chances of seeing nocturnal targets. Additionally, the rest of the family was not keen on staying in different places each night. This was a particular nuisance for Bruny Is. And Mt Field, where a night at each could have turned up a good range of mammals. Finally, my own equipment was rather ill-adept for spotting nocturnal critters: a day-use powershot camera, a red cellophane-covered spotlight and a dodgy thermal scope from amazon with a 10 minute battery life!

Despite these challenges, I was able to do a fair bit of mammalwatching at each destination, on top of excellent birding and generally amazing bushwalks and scenery. Mammal sightings are listed in ***bold italics*** for the first mention of each species, and thereafter interesting observations are mentioned in **bold**. Two 'endemics' that I didn't put much effort into were the eastern quoll and southern bettong. This is because I have seen them many times in the predator-free reserve at Mulligan's Flat north of Canberra, and hence by my standards would not be lifers.

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**28/12/24:** We arrived in Devonport early in the morning. Settinf off immediately, we drove east and visited places of little zoological interest (mostly wineries), though the number of mammals in Tassie was already impressed upon me by the sheer quantity of roadkill. Driving to Pipers Brook and back I compiled the following list: rufous-bellied (Tasmanian) pademelon, southern brown bandicoot, eastern quoll and red-necked (Bennett's) wallaby. In the grounds of the Jansz winery I saw my first live mammals of the trip, a ***Rufous-bellied Pademelon*** bolting across the driveway and a ***Short-beaked Echidna*** in the gardenbeds, as well as the first endemic birds.

We arrived at our accommodation at 2 pm, an Air BnB near Table Cape in the northwest. Despite the region being largely cleared, a thin strip of forest ran through the property, and I was hopeful that it could hold some mammals. My suspicions were

confirmed by a fresh roadkill spotted-tail quoll, lying a few hundred metres down the road, and a brief glimpse of a bandicoot (probably southern brown).



**Above:** Rufous-bellied Pademelon  
**Left:** Echidna

Hopeful that there would still be live individuals in the area, I set out chicken scraps by the house and went on a night walk. Nothing appeared other than pademelons, but when I checked in the morning the chicken was gone (though the perpetrator was likely just a possum).

**29/12/24:** Apart from a few walks around the property, the main activity of the day was a drive through the Tarkine wilderness. Following the road to Arthur River, we stopped at Trowutta Arch and walked to the sinkhole. Apart from a lone pademelon, no mammals were present here or at the next few sites we visited. Over at Lake Chisholm, I had a brief view of a *Platypus* foraging near the far bank. Though this is a species that I have seen many times in Canberra, this was only the second time I had gotten a photo, so I was very happy to find it.

Returning to the house, I waited until dark and went on another night walk. Although I stayed until 11 staking out a roadkill pademelon, I didn't see much apart from pademelons and my first sightings of the Tasmanian subspecies of **Common Brushtail Possum**. On the birding front, I saw my first Tasmanian Boobook flying overhead.

**30/12/24:** On my last morning in Table Cape, I had arguably the best sighting of the trip. Before sunrise a few pademelons were grazing by the roadside, while an unfortunate individual had been run over the previous night and was evidently partially eaten. With nothing else showing, I turned back towards the house. This proved to be a very good move. As I walked back, I was alerted to rustling in the grass behind the shed. It was a magnificent **Spotted-tail Quoll!** Although it ran off along the fenceline and into the plant beds before I could obtain photos, it was my best sighting of a species that I've otherwise seen only at night. What it was doing during the day is beyond me, but there was no doubt about the species.

We then drove to Stanley, where we stayed the night. A stop at Boat Harbour Beach turned up pademelons and a **Southern Brown Bandicoot**. Interestingly, the latter species seems to be quite common on the northwest coast, as during my time in Table Cape I saw unidentified bandicoots on both days. Stanley itself had a few pademelons on the Nut, and after watching the penguins at Godfreys Beach we saw many more feeding around the town.

**31/12/24:** The day began with a late breakfast before checking out and driving to Cradle Mountain Lodge. We stopped at Rocky Cape, but didn't see any wildlife (but the views were spectacular). Arriving at Cradle Mountain in the early afternoon, we were treated to a rare day of clear weather on the mountain and did the Dove Lake Circuit. On the way back, we left the shuttle bus at Ronny Ck in the hope of seeing wombats. Not only were we successful in this, with no fewer than 14 **Common Wombats**, but we also saw the first **Red-necked (Bennett's) Wallabies** and another **echidna**. There were more wallabies and wombats around the resort, and after dinner I saw another **platypus**, this time in the pond near the lodge.

Inaturalist showed that the boardwalk going up to Ronny Ck was occasionally host to devils, so I decided to try my luck with a night walk. The 5 km walkway from the lodge proved to be slightly hazardous after dark, so I returned via Dove Lake Rd instead. Between the two legs, I saw both **brushtail** and **Common Ringtail Possums**, wallabies, pademelons, echidnas, wombats and a **feral cat**, but none of the hoped-for dasyurids. At about midnight I heard a devil yowling in the distance, but nothing followed of it and I eventually had to return before my parents got too worried!

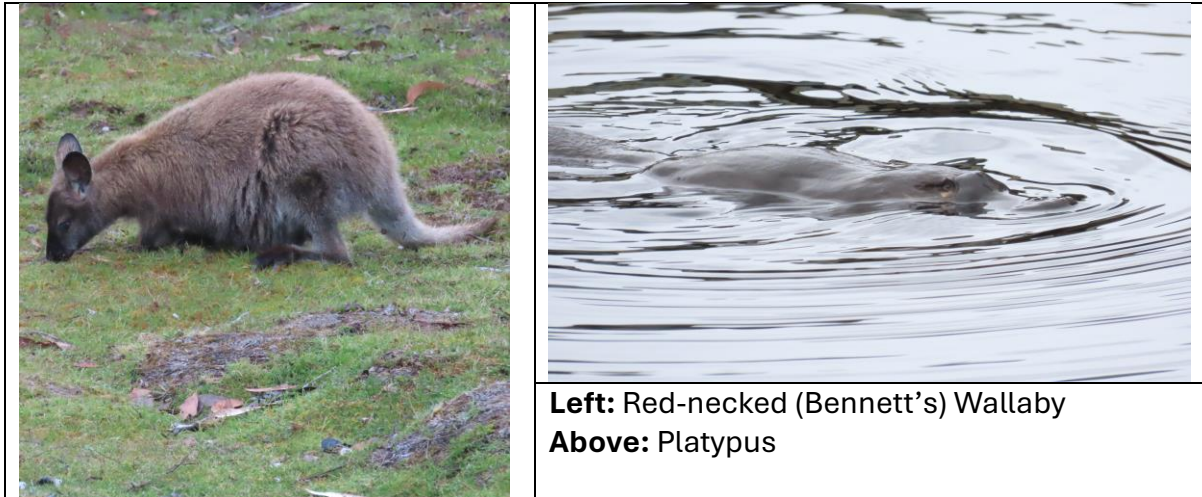


**Above (left to right):** Common Wombat, Brushtail Possum, Ringtail Possum

**01/01/25:** First thing in the morning I walked to the base of the road. The walk was mostly to clean up on the endemic birds I still needed (strong-billed honeyeater, dusky robin and yellow wattlebird), and I saw all 3. The rest of the day alternated between rain and strong winds, so we waited to the afternoon before doing the crater lake hike.

The weather had largely cleared up by the evening, and after an early dinner we visited the devil and quoll feeding at the local sanctuary, Devils@Cradle. While it was fun to

watch, I felt that the time would perhaps have been better spent on another night walk. My dad's 'no night driving' policy was put to the test that evening by reports of the aurora australis, and he eventually gave in to visiting Ronny Ck for a better view of the horizon. As it turned out, it really wasn't necessary: we were amply rewarded with great views through the camera of this spectacle, and by the time we left it was visible to the naked eye well below the treeline.



**02/01/25:** Reluctantly we left Cradle Mountain after a few short walks and drove to Hobart. Most of the day was spent on the road, and where we did stop there was little in the way of wildlife, so I didn't do any mammalwatching.

**03/01/25:** We left our room in the Old Woolstore Apartments in Hobart and drove to Mt Field NP. We did the 3 falls track, passing by Lady Barron, Russel and Horseshoe Falls, along with many enormous mountain ash gums. The scenery was stunning, but apart from a few birds (pink robins, scrubwrens and satin flycatchers) there was little wildlife. As was often the case in the Hobart leg of this trip, it was frustrating visiting places that should have been so good for mammalwatching if only we had stayed overnight. The only mammal I saw was a lone pademelon near the carpark, though on the drive out I spotted an **echidna** walking along the roadside.

**04/01/25:** As one of the 'must visit' places in eastern Tassie, we set aside a day to visit Port Arthur. Unfortunately, it took a while for people to get ready and by the time we arrived at the historic site we only had an hour to see the ruins before a scheduled boat cruise up the Tasman Peninsula, and we left without really seeing much of the site - maybe one for the next visit to the island. Regardless, we arrived at the Port Arthur office of Pennicott Wilderness tours by 1:15 and soon set off on the boat. The cruise provided great looks at the sea cliffs of the peninsula, and we also saw **New Zealand** and **Australian Fur Seal** and **Common Dolphin**. All 3 species were quite common along the cruise and gave great views.



**Above (left to right):** Australian Fur Seal, New Zealand Fur Seal, Common Dolphin

**05/01/25:** Leaving early in the morning, we drove to the ferry terminal for Bruny Island and caught the first boat. I had originally planned to spend the day tracking down the avian endemics I had hitherto missed, but having already seen 11/12 we changed things up to provide the best possible shot at eastern quoll (though admittedly it was a small one given the diurnal visit). At missionary road, along with spotting the last endemic bird (forty spotted pardalote), I thoroughly combed the roadside vegetation in the hope of seeing a quoll. While this didn't pay off, it did attract the attention of a flock of blue-winged parrots.

After a stop in Adventure Bay, where swift parrots were flying between the trees, we drove down to Cape Bruny, spotting the 6<sup>th</sup> **echidna** of the trip as well as plenty of pademelons and wallabies. On the way back to Hobart I had another surprise, and a big logistical challenge. The Mountain Valley Wilderness Lodge was showing a vacancy in their queen 2-person cabin for my last night, which we immediately booked at the expense of a family dinner in Devonport. Quite how we could work things out (given only 2/5 people could stay) was yet to be determined though...

As this was my last night in Hobart, I tried to convince my parents to take me to waterworks for a night walk. Eventually, we settled on a compromise: while waterworks was a no-go, I could walk to Queens Domain as long as I was back by 10 pm. Having seen records of eastern barred bandicoots near the ovals, I set off after dinner and made a beeline for them. Pademelons and **European rabbits** were all over the place, interspersed with wallabies. Eventually my spotlighting paid off and I saw an **Eastern Barred Bandicoot** dashing across the grass 50 metres in front of me. Heading back to the apartment, I got much better views of a second bandicoot at the southern end of the domain.

**06/01/25:** After an unsuccessful dawn walk around the domain in search of southern brown bandicoots, we left the apartments at 10 and spent the day driving to Freycinet. A night walk turned up only brushtail possums and wallabies, though an unidentified microbat made several rounds of a clearing near the campground.

**07/01/25:** We spent the day visiting the main tourist sites, including the hike down to Wineglass Bay, a local seafood place and the Friendly Beaches. Once again, although

the scenery was amazing there were really too many people for wildlife to be out, and neither mammals nor birds showed themselves.

I went on another night walk after dark, this time to and from the main trailhead. In addition to the species from the previous night, a stake-out at a flowering banksia produced a sighting of an **Eastern Pygmy Possum** running about in the lower branches, while rustling in the undergrowth may well have turned out to be a swamp rat or antechinus if my thermal scope was working. Additionally, I heard both boobooks and tawny frogmouths and had a great view of a masked owl as it scanned the scrub from a dead snag before flying away when it noticed my red light.

**08/12/25:** My last full day in Tasmania started with a visit to Cape Tourville Lighthouse. A scan of the rocks offshore from here produced more Australian fur seals, but no cetaceans were visible offshore. We then drove to Devonport, dropping my siblings and mum off at a local hotel before continuing to Loongana for check-in at 3:00. I spotted two **echidnas** in the area, one on the drive in and the other on a walk at the spectacular Leven Canyon. At 8:30 Len, the owner of the property, collected us for a platypus tour, where we saw 2 **platypus** foraging in the river.



**Above (left to right):** Platypus, Common Brushtail Possum

Back in our cabin, I waited for the night show to begin. Len scattered raw chicken and rice around the lawn to attract wildlife, immediately bringing in pademelons. Over the past few nights devils had come well after midnight, so I was prepared to stay up for as long as it took to see them. Several brushtail possums came in to eat, but things were otherwise fairly quiet. Then, at about 11:30 I noticed something small moving about in the undergrowth to the right of my cabin: a **Long-tailed Mouse**. The mouse made several forays onto the lawn, but was just too quick for the camera. Eventually it spooked, dashing across the deck and into a small hole in the wall: moments later, a **black rat** emerged from the opposite side, and the mouse didn't reappear.

**09/12/25:** I spent the rest of the night watching the meat without so much as a glimpse of a devil. At 4 am, I decided to call it quits and leave the cabin, walking to the top of the

driveway and back in the hope of seeing something. Apart from pademelons and both species of possum, there was nothing that could be definitively identified.

Eventually I returned to the rooms and got my dad up. Leaving at dawn we were confronted with dozens of pademelons on the road, but luckily we didn't hit any and reached the ferry terminal without trouble.

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Overall, the trip was a success, with 15 – 17 species of native mammal, depending on ones' idea of what counts. Obviously, the absence of devils was a major disappointment, being the NO.1 target for the trip, and I would have liked better photographic opportunities of the species I saw. Nonetheless, it was great to see so many mammals, with the spotted-tail quoll an obvious highlight. In addition to mammals, I saw 103 species of bird and 17 lifers, including all 12 endemics.

One thing to note is that, even at formerly guaranteed sites such as Loongana, Tasmanian Devils are much harder to see than they were in the past. Len and another guest informed me that the population has crashed even in the northwest, and now there are very few devils on the Mountain Valley property. While still seen on most nights, this may not be the case for much longer.

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HO = Heard Only

E = Endemic

L = Lifer

Count	Species	Location
9	Short-beaked Echidna	Pipers Brook, roadsides, Cradle Mountain, Bruny Is., Loongana
5	Platypus	Lake Chisholm, Cradle Mountain
1	Spotted-tail Quoll	Table Cape
1	Tasmanian Devil (HO)	Cradle Mountain
1	Southern Brown Bandicoot (L)	Boat Harbour Beach (also possible sightings elsewhere)
2	Eastern Barred Bandicoot (L, E)	Queens Domain
23	Common Wombat	Cradle Mountain
12	Red-necked (Bennett's) Wallaby	Cradle Mountain, Queens Domain, Freycinet
82	Rufous Bellied Pademelon (L, E)	Table Cape, Stanely, Cradle Mountain, Queens Domain, Freycinet, Loongana, roadsides
16	Common Brushtail Possum	Table Cape, Cradle Mountain, Queens Domain, Freycinet, Loongana

3	Common Ringtail Possum	Cradle Mountain, Loongana
1	Eastern Pygmy Possum	Freycinet
1	Long-tailed Mouse (L, E)	Loongana
15	New Zealand Fur Seal	Tasman Cruise
95	Australian Fur Seal	Tasman Cruise, Stanley, Freycinet
15	Common Dolphin (L)	Tasman Cruise
1	Microbat sp.	Freycinet

2	Feral Cat	Pipers Brook, Cradle Mountain
3	Black Rat	Loongana
50	European Rabbit	Queens Domain
2	Brown Hare	Table Cape