

# Western Australia 6<sup>th</sup> December – 17<sup>th</sup> December 2024

I was in Australia for just over 6 weeks from 5<sup>th</sup> November to 17<sup>th</sup> December 2024 and visited Tasmania; Victoria; New South Wales and Western Australia. The following trip reports cover each of the states visited.

Tasmania 5<sup>th</sup> November – 22<sup>nd</sup> November

Victoria 22<sup>nd</sup> November – 25<sup>th</sup> November

New South Wales 25<sup>th</sup> November – 6<sup>th</sup> December

Western Australia 6<sup>th</sup> December – 17<sup>th</sup> December

**Trip Report** by John Wright, Email: johnpwright1500@gmail.com

I flew from Sydney, NSW, on Friday 6<sup>th</sup> December and arrived in Perth mid-afternoon. I was met at the airport by my friend Tom Van-Niel. Tom is originally from the USA but has lived in Australia for 25 years and now resides in Perth.

In this report, after the first sightings Short-beaked Echidna becomes Echidna, Western Grey Kangaroo becomes Grey Kangaroo, Common Brush-tailed Possum becomes Brush-tailed Possum and European Rabbit becomes Rabbit.

**Itinerary:** Perth, Rottnest Island, Busselton, Dryandra, Perth, Penguin Island.

## Friday 6<sup>th</sup> December - Perth

After Tom picked me up at the airport we drove to his house in the Perth suburb of Wembley. In the late afternoon we drove to Pinnaroo Valley Memorial Park in Padbury (a northern suburb of Perth), arriving around 18:00. We came here to see the many Western Grey Kangaroos that inhabit the park. After a couple of hours watching the 'roos and walking around the park we drove back to Tom's house where we stayed the night.

## Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> December - Rottnest Island, Busselton

We got the 07:00 ferry from Fremantle across to Rottnest Island. Within 5 minutes of landing, we came across our first Quokkas. They were hopping around the area where the shops and cafés are and where most tourists hang out. Although not the best of environments to watch these fabulous little macropods it certainly is easy as being habituated, they allow a close approach. In all I'd guess we ended up seeing around 20

Quokkas - adults and joeys. We walked around some of the island trails for a couple of hours, some good birds seen, but we didn't see any Quokkas out in the 'wild'. Mind you it was getting hot, so they were probably dozing in the shade somewhere.



Quokkas

John Wright



We got a 12:00 ferry off and headed south to Busselton. We arrived at our accommodation, the Abbey Beach Resort, Busselton late afternoon. A few Grey Kangaroos were in fields on the outskirts of town. We then drove to the Ludlow Tuart Forest to get the lie of the land as we were doing a night walk there later. Back in Busselton we had something to eat and waited until it got dark. Back at Tuart Forest we walked the aptly named Possum Spotlighting Trail off of Layman Road from 20:00 - 21:45. Using my thermal imager and our spotlights it wasn't too long before we found what we were looking for – Western Ring-tailed Possums – there were 3 together in a tree. We also found 8 Common Brush-tailed Possums, 4 Grey Kangaroos and some micro bats but they went unidentified.



Western Ring-tail Possum (mobile phone photo)

Tom Van-Niel



Western Grey Kangaroo

John Wright

### **Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> December - Busselton/Dunsborough**

We went back to the Possum Spotlighting Trail in the Tuart Forest from 08:30 – 09:45 and walked a couple of trails but all we saw was a single Grey Kangaroo and found a long-dead Phascogale. We also visited the nearby Malbup Bird Hide in the Vasse Lake reserve which was full of birds – mainly waterfowl. We then went back to Busselton where we were moving accommodation to the RAC Busselton Holiday Park. The grounds at the holiday park were quite extensive with many mature Peppermint trees (*Agonis flexuosa*). The leaves of the Peppermint tree are the staple diet of the Western

Ring-tailed Possum in the Busselton – Dunsborough area. So, we agreed it would be worth a night walk through the grounds to look for the Possums.

In the afternoon we drove along the coast, through Dunsborough to Leewin-Naturaliste National Park, on route Tom glimpsed what he was sure was a Phascogale run into the road on his side of the car, but we couldn't stop as the road was fast and busy. We parked in the Naturaliste Lighthouse car park and walked a trail through coastal heath to Wilanup Lookout and back. It looked like an area worth doing at night, so we decided to go back after dark and check it. There were a few flowering bushes so there was hope of finding Honey Possums. So, we went back and walked the trail again from 20:20 to 22:00. Sadly, not a Honey Possum in sight but we did find a rodent climbing about deep inside the vegetation, but it went off before we could get a light on it. Through the thermal it looked like a species of rat. We saw a couple of Grey Kangaroos, European Rabbits and a Red Fox which was quite bold and took little notice of us.

We got back to the RAC Busselton Holiday Park at about 22:30 and walked the grounds. We found 4 Western Ring-tailed Possums, 1 Brush-tailed Possum and lots of Rabbits. We turned in at 23:15.

### **Monday 9<sup>th</sup> December - Busselton, Dryandra**

We departed Busselton at 07:00 and arrived at Dryandra Woodland National Park at midday. We saw a couple of Grey Kangaroos and an Emu on route. Tom had been to Dryandra before, around 10 years ago and did see a Numbat on that visit. We checked in at the Lions Dryandra Woodland Village, we were in Mallee Cottage. We had a chat with Les and Julie, the caretakers, and asked which tracks were best for Numbats. Both Les and Julie were knowledgeable about the wildlife in the area and were happy to share that information.

In the late afternoon we drove the tracks and trails but didn't find any Numbats, but did see a Short-beaked Echidna and a few Grey Kangaroos. The open grass area on the south side of Lions village held large numbers of Grey Kangaroos. After a hot and sunny day, the night was windy and decidedly chilly. We checked out some patches of flowering Dryandra (Dryandra is a series of 94 species of shrub to small tree in the plant genus Banksia) in the hope of finding a Honey Possum but no luck. We drove the tracks from 20:30 to 23:00 and saw another Echidna and a few Brush-tailed Possums.

Modus operandi for watching Numbats. Numbats are out in the morning as soon as the sun is warm enough for termites - their staple diet – to be about. Drive the tracks/roads at no more than 10 - 15 mph, check the area from the track/road edge up to about 6 metres into the forest. Areas with fallen logs are ideal habitat for Numbats. When you see a Numbat, stop, don't switch off the engine, you can of course watch from the vehicle, or after you have stopped, and if the Numbat is settled quietly get out of the car, leave the motor running and don't shut the car door, stay quiet or just whisper, move slowly with no sudden movements, do not leave the track as this will cause the Numbat to run off. Numbats seem to fall into three category types – those that run off as soon as

they see the vehicle, those that run off when you get out of your vehicle and those that stay put when you get out of the vehicle – for those you can do as stated above. They tend to take a break from feeding when it is hot from around midday to late afternoon when they emerge again to feed. I guess that's weather dependent to some extent. Anyway, that's what Julie and Les told us, and it certainly worked for me and Tom.



Short-beaked Echidna

John Wright

### **Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> December - Dryandra**

A cloudy cool start to the morning but the sun finally shone, and it warmed up late morning. We drove around the tracks and saw an Echidna and then Tom saw a Numbat dash across the road. We stopped, and the Numbat briefly showed for Tom, but I had a tree in the way so couldn't see it! When it ran, I got poor views of it before it vanished into the forest.

After eating and resting during the hottest part of the day we went out again in the late afternoon. This time we met up with Les and Julie and went out in their vehicle to get a better idea of which tracks and roads to drive. It paid off as after about an hour we found a Numbat that allowed fantastic views for nearly 10 minutes.

In the evening Tom and I did a night walk around the village, from 20:30 to 22:00 as Les had earlier told us that 2 Western Quolls were often about as they had made a home under Possum Cottage. We didn't see any Quolls but did find a Western Brown Bandicoot (Quenda) and of course plenty of Brush-tailed Possums and Grey Kangaroos.



Numbat (mobile phone photo)

Tom Van-Niel

### Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> December - Dryandra

A hot day with afternoon temperatures of around 40 degrees C. However, it turned out to be a very good day. We were out driving the tracks just after 05:00 and saw 5 Numbats before 11:00. We even saw a Brown Goshawk make an unsuccessful attempt at having a Numbat for breakfast. We also found 4 Western Brush Wallabies. We then went back to our cottage for lunch and a siesta.



Numbat

John Wright

In the late afternoon we walked a couple of trails to get the feel for them for night walks later. But before any night walks, we staked out Possum Cottage in the hope of Western Quoll. We placed a shelled hardboiled egg on the patio and then sat down a little way away at 20:00. It helped that the cottage wasn't occupied. At 20:15 a Quoll came out from under the cottage and inspected the egg, it returned to the egg on a further 3 occasions over the next 15 minutes. After the Quoll hadn't shown for over 30 minutes we decided to leave. We first checked out the few flowering Dryandras we had found but still no joy with Honey Possum. We then walked the Woylie Trail where we found a Western Brown Bandicoot, 2 Western Brush Wallabies, Grey Kangaroos and Brush-tailed Possums. We got back to our cottage around 00:30.





Numbats

John Wright





Western Brush Wallabies

John Wright





Western Brush Wallaby

John Wright

#### **Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> December - Dryandra**

Another hot and sunny day with afternoon temperatures around 40 degrees C. We were out driving the tracks at 06:30 but only saw one Numbat and a few Grey Kangaroos. In the evening, we staked out Possum Cottage again from 19:50 until 21:00 but no Quolls appeared. After that we looked for Honey Possums in the few areas where we had found some flowering bushes but again no luck. We then walked the Wandoo Trail, from 22:30 to 00:30. We were hoping to find a Brush-tailed Bettong (Woylie) but no joy on that front. We did find 3 Western Brown Bandicoots and, of course, Brush-tailed Possums and Grey Kangaroos.

#### **Friday 13<sup>th</sup> December - Dryandra**

A hot start to the day, clouding over late morning. We drove the tracks from 07:30 to midday but didn't find any Numbats but did find 2 Western Brush Wallabies and a few Grey Kangaroos. In the late afternoon a walk around the village produced only Grey Kangaroos.

In the evening, we visited Barna Mia from 19:00 to 21:30. Barna Mia is a predator-proof sanctuary for some of Western Australia's rarest native mammals. Housed in two 4-hectare enclosures are five species – Bilby, Boodie (Burrowing Bettong), Woylie (Brush-tailed Bettong), Quenda (Western Brown Bandicoot) and Mala. The animals are

habituated and fed at specific times, which is how we and other members of the public get to see them. The guides use red filter torches.

After Barna Mia we walked the village and the periphery of the adjacent open grass area. We found 2 Echidnas, Brush-tailed Possums and Grey Kangaroos. We then went on a short night walk along part of the Wandoo Trail again but only found Grey Kangaroos. Following the walk, we did a night drive which at first only produced Brush-tailed Possums. We then hit a 15-minute purple patch when a juvenile Western Quoll crossed in front of the car and then, just off the road, snuffled around a fallen log for 5 minutes. It looked too young to be totally independent, so we surmised it had a mother and siblings nearby. When it eventually moved off, we drove on, just 5 minutes down the road Tom glimpsed a kangaroo or wallaby on the side of the road. He didn't get a good view of it, but it was worth stopping and reversing to check it out. We were glad we did as in the torch light was a Tammar Wallaby. It was relaxed and carried on browsing. We watched it for a few minutes before it slowly hopped off into thick vegetation and out of sight. We then drove back to Mallee Cottage arriving at 01:30.



Western Grey Kangaroo

John Wright

### **Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> December - Dryandra, Perth**

We departed Dryandra at 08:00 and arrived in Perth around 10:00. Tom dropped me off at my cousin's, in Middle Swan, a suburb of Perth. We said our goodbyes after a fabulous week of wildlife watching. Tom was getting a flight from Perth to Melbourne later in the day to catch up with family members.

### **Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> December - Perth area**

I went for a walk by the Swan River with my cousin Sue. It was a very hot Sunday so lots of people were out enjoying themselves. Some good birds around but that was about it. For the rest of the day, we just chilled out listening to music and drinking cold beers back at her house.

### **Monday 16<sup>th</sup> December - Penguin Island**

I had pre-booked a trip with Perth Wildlife Encounters on their Dolphins, Sea Lions and Penguin Island cruise. Sue and I travelled by train from Middle Swan to Perth, and then from Perth on the Mandurah line to Rockingham, which is south of Perth. Then a short taxi ride (although we could have got a bus) to the Perth Wildlife Encounters office at Shoalwater Bay. We were on the 09:15 cruise which entailed a boat trip around the Shoalwater Bay Marine Park to look for birds and marine life. There is a chance to come across Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphins, but we didn't see any. As part of the cruise, you go to nearby Seal Island. Although you aren't allowed to land on the island you do get close and can still get decent views of the bull Australian Sea Lions that use the island beach as a haul out. There were 22 Sea Lions showing when we came by the island. After that we went to Penguin Island where you are allowed to go ashore. There are two short trails both of which we walked. Most of the Little Penguins were in their burrows or out at sea, but we did see one plus lots of breeding Bridled, Caspian and Greater Crested Terns. There were also lots of King's Skinks on the island. We got a mid-afternoon boat off the island and made our way back to Sue's house.



Australian Sea Lions

John Wright



## Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> December - John Forest National Park

In the morning, we drove the short distance to John Forest National Park and spent a couple of hours there. It was hot and quiet, but we did see a few Grey Kangaroos.

In the evening, I got a lift to Perth Airport for my flight back to the UK.



Western Grey Kangaroos

John Wright

**Systematic List:** 12 mammals seen. Mammal names follow those in the single volume All the Mammals of the World (Lynx).

Short-beaked Echidna	<i>Tachyglossus aculeatus</i>
Numbat	<i>Myrmecobius fasciatus</i>
Western Quoll	<i>Dasyurus geoffroii</i>
Western Brown Bandicoot	<i>Isodon fusciventer</i>
Common Brush-tailed Possum	<i>Trichosurus vulpecula</i>
Western Ring-tailed Possum	<i>Pseudocheirus occidentalis</i>
Quokka	<i>Setonix brachyurus</i>
Western Grey Kangaroo	<i>Macropus fuliginosus</i>
Western Brush Wallaby	<i>Notamacropus irma</i>
Tammar Wallaby	<i>Notamacropus eugenii</i>
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>
Australian Sea Lion	<i>Neophoca cinerea</i>

**Selected Birds:** Little Penguin, Bridled Tern, Bush Stone-Curlew, Nankeen Night-Heron, Emu, White-bellied Sea Eagle, Tawny Frogmouth, Red-tailed and Carnaby's Black Cockatoos, Purple-crowned Lorikeet, Western Rosella, Red-capped Parrot, Rainbow Bee-eater, Splendid and Blue-breasted Fairy-Wrens.

**Herps:** King's Skink, Blue-tongue Skink, Goanna

**End**