Mammals of Tasmania

As I will go on to describe in the second section of this trip report, not only is Tasmania already a favourite destination, it is a great place to look for a relatively small but diverse collection of mammals, most of which are not too difficult to observe. As such, and given the spectacular landscapes, it would make an ideal starting point for many first-time visitors, as it is home to at least one of all of the major iconic species that you would hope to see in Australia, with the exception of the koala. Conversely, the legendary Tasmanian devil can only be encountered in Tasmania, although it did occur on the mainland many centuries ago, and this is also the case for the eastern quoll, which was eradicated on the mainland as recently as the 1960s. Excluding marine and several introduced species, there are 34 distinct mammals in Tasmania, eight of which are bats and five are rodents. Of the remaining 21, we were able to observe an impressive sixteen in three weeks and this figure increases to seventeen if you include the sugar glider already encountered on the mainland, which we consequently did not specifically target in Tasmania. In all we missed four major species, the two pygmy possums, the dunnart and one of the two antechinuses, but we also saw one of the rodents, at least three of the bats and three additional marine mammals. Some of the species that occur here are now extinct on the mainland and for many vulnerable populations Tasmania represents a final sanctuary from the out of control red fox and feral cat populations that have devastated so much wildlife on the mainland. I am not aware of any extremely detailed Tasmanian mammal books, but I can certainly recommend the revised 2015 edition of 'Tasmanian Mammals - A Field Guide', by Dave Watts, which is an excellent introduction to each species with some superb photographs. Of course taxonomy is nothing if not flexible and since Watts released his updated version, scientists from Queensland University of Technology have announced the discovery of a new species of antechinus, the Tasman Peninsula dusky antechinus or *antechinus vandycki* according to the proposed scientific name. In the same report they also state that the mainland and Tasmanian versions of the dusky antechinus are distinct species and should be split, which would make *antechinus swainsonii* endemic to Tasmania. I have not followed these proposed revisions at this stage, as I am not certain how widely accepted they have been or whether further verification is required. What I do know, is how wonderfully complete the list below would look with an entry for the ill-fated thylacine and while Watts and many other serious and credible authorities remain convinced that the Tasmanian tiger survives somewhere, and I would dearly love it to be so, I fear that the uncomfortable truth is that we cannot simply undo the indefensible crime committed against this helpless creature and that we instead need to learn from it. Finally, as Watts correctly identifies in his useful guide, the lack of fossil records suggest that the sugar glider was probably introduced to Tasmania, perhaps in the early 19th century.

No.	Species	Scientific Name	Notes
1	Tasmanian Devil	Sarcophilus harrisii	At least four at Narawntapu, one at Cradle Mountain and two on Maria Island, as well as several habituated animals at Loongana.
2	Spotted-tailed Quoll	Dasyurus maculatus	Two at Narawntapu and at least one habituated animal at Loongana.
3	Eastern Quoll	Dasyurus viverrinus	One sighting at Narawntapu, but easily observed at Mount Field and Mount William and extremely common at one location on North Bruny Island.
4	Swamp Antechinus	Antechinus minimus	Two extended sightings at Narawntapu.
5	Dusky Antechinus	Antechinus swainsonii	Did not observe.
6	White-footed Dunnart	Sminthopsis leucopus	Did not observe.
7	Platypus	Ornithorhynchus anatinus	Only observed at one location in Tasmania, as we had already seen this animal regularly on the mainland.
8	Short-beaked Echidna	Tachyglossus aculeatus	Three sightings at Loongana and Cradle Mountain and one at Port Arthur.
9	Common Wombat	Vombatus ursinus	Animals with severe mange at Narawntapu and Loongana and healthy individuals at Cradle Mountain and Maria Island.
10	Sugar Glider	Petaurus breviceps	Not observed in Tasmania, but we had viewed several on the mainland and did not therefore search specifically for this species.
11	Common Ringtail Possum	Pseudocheirus peregrinus	Common at Cradle Mountain and observed in low numbers at several locations throughout Tasmania.
12	Common Brushtail Possum	Trichosurus vulpecula	Abundant at more or less every destination in Tasmania.
13	Little Pygmy Possum	Cercartetus lepidus	Did not observe.
14	Eastern Pygmy Possum	Cercartetus nanus	Did not observe.
15	Southern Brown Bandicoot	Isoodon obesulus	Three or four around the campground on Maria Island.
16	Eastern Barred Bandicoot	Perameles gunnii	Common at Mount Field and observed at several locations in Tasmania.
17	Tasmanian Bettong	Bettongia gaimardi	Low numbers at a small private forest near St Marys on the northeast coast of Tasmania.
18	Long-nosed Potoroo	Potorous tridactylus	One on Bruny Island whilst watching eastern quolls and several on mainland Tasmania at our guide's property.
19	Tasmanian Pademelon	Thylogale billardierii	Common throughout Tasmania, excluding the islands.

20	Eastern Grey Kangaroo	Macropus giganteus	Abundant at Narawntapu and across northeast Tasmania.
21	Red-necked Wallaby	Macropus rufogriseus	Routinely observed at several locations.
22	Common Water Rat	Hydromys chrysogaster	Extended views of two and three at Narawntapu and one in the sea at Bruny Island.
23	Broad-toothed Rat	Mastacomys fuscus	Did not observe.
24	Long-tailed Mouse	Pseudomys higginsi	Did not observe.
25	New Holland Mouse	Pseudomys novaehollandiae	Did not observe.
26	Australian Swamp Rat	Rattus lutreolus	Observed on the mainland, but not in Tasmania.
27	Gould's Wattled Bat	Chalinolobus gouldii	Not recorded.
28	Chocolate Wattled Bat	Chalinolobus morio	Not recorded.
29	Eastern False Pipistrelle	Falsistrellus tasmaniensis	Not recorded.
30	Lesser long-eared bat	Nyctophilus geoffroyi	Not recorded.
31	Tasmanian long-eared bat	Nyctophilus sherrini	Not recorded.
32	Large Forest Bat	Vespadelus darlingtoni	Not recorded.
33	Southern Forest Bat	Vespadelus regulus	Not recorded.
34	Little Forest Bat	Vespadelus vulturnus	Not recorded.

Trip Overview - Tasmania

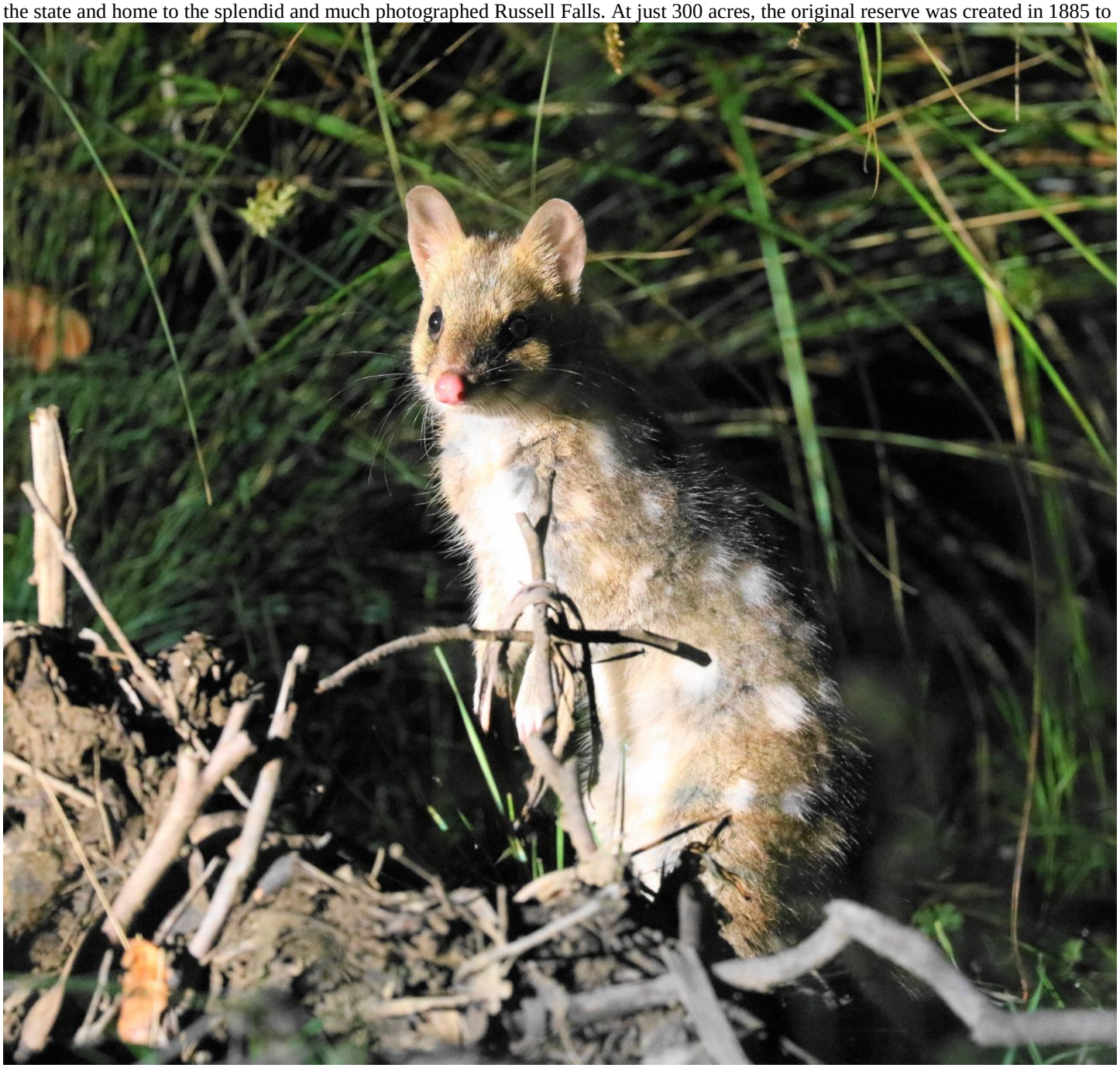
As much as I loved our amazing stay in exotic Queensland and am very much looking forward to returning to what must be one of the best wildlife destinations on the planet, Tasmania had an even more profound impact, at least in terms of its outstanding natural beauty and breathtaking scenery. As I have already outlined, there are far fewer species on what is a relatively small island, Tasmania has almost exactly the same land mass as Sri Lanka and is less than a third of the size of the United Kingdom, but they occur in healthy numbers and are comparatively easy to observe amid a variety of irresistible settings. You cannot exactly describe a state that had one and a quarter million visitors in 2016 as one of the world's best kept secrets, but Australia as a whole received over seven and a half million international visitors alone during that same period and you suspect that if Tasmania had the same climate and sea temperatures as say Cairns, it could well be the most popular tourist destination across all of Australia. Having said that, if it was as hot and as dry as the rest of the country, it would not be the same location of course and the real beauty of Tasmania is the contrasting climate that has helped to forge such stupendously impressive landscapes. Obviously the closer you get to the equator the hotter it becomes and whilst most of Australia sits within the southern tropics and subtropics, the extreme southeast, including Tasmania, lies

in a temperate zone where the weather is remarkably similar to that of the United Kingdom and other parts of the northern hemisphere, where it is generally wet and green as opposed to dry and brown. If you can excuse that rather fundamental oversimplification, which does not take a number of contributory factors or environments into account, including immense swathes of tropical rainforest across an entire stretch of the globe, the climatic variations for a single country are still remarkable and did not become truly apparent until I took a first swim at the visually exquisite Hawley Beach and very quickly realised why this picturesque gem was not competing with the likes of the French Riviera or the Maldives in terms of flambéing human skin on sand. For the record, the average January sea temperature at Darwin in the Northern Territory is a most agreeable 31°C, compared to more than 26°C in the same month in Brisbane and a decidedly chilly 16°C or so in Tasmania's southern capital Hobart. Whatever the ambient temperature, and it was glorious for much of our three-week stay, the water was never warm or even tolerable for an extended period and we usually found ourselves diving in to cool down for just a few minutes at the hottest point of the day. Most of the locals were using wetsuits to surf and swim, but on the whole there were far less people in the water than had been the case along the coast in Queensland. First discovered by the Dutch explorer Abel Tasman in November 1642, the island was named Van Diemen's Land after Tasman's benefactor Anthony van Diemen and became a British penal colony in the early 19th century, more than 30 years after Captain James Cook had landed the HMS Endeavour at Botany Bay in April 1770 and claimed the entire eastern coast of Australia in the name of King George III and Great Britain. The last of the 70,000 convicts transported to Van Diemen's Land arrived in 1853, although the practice would continue in Western Australia until January 1868 when the last convict ship, the Hougourmont, docked in Fremantle, and in 1856 the name of the island was officially changed to Tasmania, in honour of its original discovery more than two hundred year earlier. Of course the indigenous Aboriginal people had lived in this region for thousands of years before the arrival of the white man and at one stage a land bridge linked Tasmania to the mainland and the Palawa, as the original Tasmanian Aborigines were known, would walk between the two across the Bassian Plain. The plain became the Bass Strait at the end of the last ice age some 11,500 years ago, when the ice melted over perhaps six thousand years and the sea level increased by approximately 120 metres, eventually isolating an entire population of Aborigines until the arrival of the European explorers and ultimately the British convicts and settlers. No two sources appear to concur regarding the size of this population and in much the same way, no one can quite agree how many died following the initial contact between the two entirely contrasting civilisations. However, while the scholars and historians continue to debate the numbers, the fact is that by the early 20th century, there were no surviving native Tasmanians of pure indigenous descent. An entire people had been intentionally eradicated in around a century. Several hundred and perhaps many more

were killed in the so called Black War, which also accounted for some 200 white settlers and would ultimately descend into the government sponsored slaughter of largely unarmed natives. A combination of austere detention camps, death camps for all intents and purposes, and disease would claim the remainder, as like so many native communities across the world, the Aborigines had no immunity against the introduced European viruses and bacteria such as influenza, tuberculosis or indeed the sexually transmitted infection venereal disease, which led to a high rate of infertility among the Aboriginal women. Many of these females were abducted and raped, as men vastly outnumbered women amongst the colonists and in numerous substantiated cases, Palawa men were murdered to enable settlers to steal their women and children. Some of the recorded atrocities make for entirely uncomfortable reading even now and many indigenous people were clearly mutilated and killed purely for the sport of it. Although the term genocide did not exist until coined by the Polish lawyer Raphael Lemkin to describe the specific Nazi policy to systematically eradicate the European Jews during the Second World War, it has been applied retrospectively to several historical atrocities, including by Lemkin himself regarding the Ottoman or Turkish annihilation of probably more than a million Armenians, again in the guise of warfare during the first global conflict of the Great War. In much the same way, many notable Australian historians believe that the regulated extermination of the Tasmanian Aborigines qualifies as genocide and whether it meets the actual legal definition of the term as described by the United Nations Genocide Convention of 1948, which the academics continue to squabble over, morally there can be little doubt. An entire race does not disappear by chance or ill fortune and if any neutral observers remain uncertain, they need only read the article published by the Colonial Times on the 1st of December 1826, which declared:

'We make no pompous display of Philanthropy. The Government must remove the natives--if not, they will be hunted down like wild beasts and destroyed!'

I would have liked to have devoted more time to this and other Aboriginal issues, particularly in terms of their presence and culture on the mainland, and will return to the subject, as well as other historical matters that interest me, in future reports. For now, we would be visiting several important historic sites in Tasmania and our first stop was at Mount Field National Park, the oldest nature reserve in the state and home to the splendid and much photographed Russell Falls. At just 300 acres, the original reserve was created in 1885 to

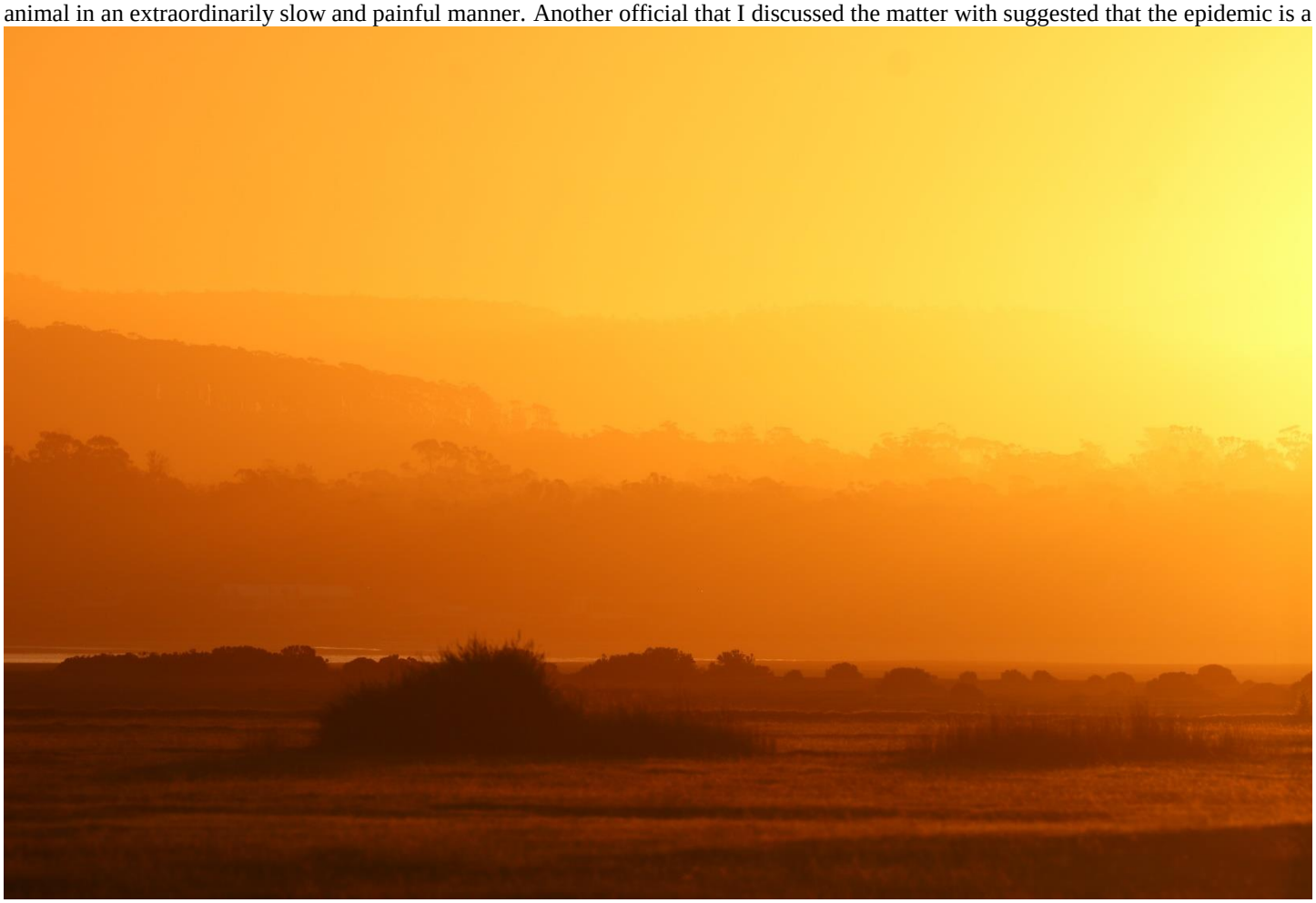


provide access for the tourists that were already flocking to what is often described as the prettiest waterfall in Tasmania and although today Mount Field is still relatively small at less than 56,000 acres, it forms part of the much larger Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, one of nineteen UNESCO World Heritage sites in all of Australia. Stretching from the extreme south of the island to within approximately 45 kilometres of the northern coast near Devonport, the Tasmanian Wilderness encompasses an area of more than two and a half million acres and as such, is significantly larger than Yellowstone National Park in the United States. Only a fraction can be explored at Mount Field, but due to its unique position and an altitudinal range of between about 150 metres and 1,434

metres at the summit of Mount Field West, the park is one of the most diverse in terms of habitat, a great deal of which can be accessed via a series of outstanding hikes among some exceptional scenery. One of the lower trails takes you through a forest of exotic tree ferns and towering swamp gums to not one, but three perfectly concealed and exquisitely framed waterfalls. The dramatic drops and spectacular setting of Russell Falls, as well as Horseshoe Falls, which sits adjacent to its more famous counterpart, and Lady Barron Falls, a gentle cascading waterfall that flows down a series of fairly low stone tiers into a pretty creek. Elsewhere you can trek up through luxuriant rainforest and out onto patchwork heaths and moorland, where the dense forest plants are replaced by king billy and pencil pines, pineapple grass and an arresting variety of cushion plants and sphagnum mosses growing around the pristine alpine lakes and bogs. As the world's tallest flowering plant, the swamp gum, or mountain ash as it is also known, is particularly impressive and can reach heights in excess of 100 metres, which makes it either the second or third tallest tree on earth, after the undisputed king, the coastal redwood, and perhaps the douglas fir, which may or may not be taller than the swamp gum, depending on which source you refer to. The tallest accurately measured swamp gum was discovered in southern Tasmania in 2008 and was recently measured at eighteen centimetres short of one hundred metres. Appropriately enough, it has been named Centurion and for anyone familiar with two of London's more famous landmarks, it is almost twice the height of Nelson's Column, the monument erected to commemorate the life of the British Admiral Horatio Nelson, and taller even than 'Big Ben', which is actually a bell, but is the name that most people use when they refer to the majestic clock tower of the Palace of Westminster. Mount Field does not have any trees that can rival this behemoth, but the tallest still stands at a magnificent 79 metres and can be viewed on the same popular circuit that carries you to each of the three waterfalls. There is also a promising road linking some of the trails and although we did try it on multiple occasions at night, with mixed results, we were more successful spotlighting on foot in the lower sections of the park, especially near the entrance and campground. As per my separate list of 34 Tasmanian mammals, we were hoping to see plenty of new animals on this second leg of the trip and our three main targets were all feasible at Mount Field. The first was a Tasmanian devil, which it felt as if I had waited a lifetime to set eyes upon, followed by a wombat, for me another intrinsically Australian mammal, and finally an eastern quoll, to complete the set of three quoll species that it was possible to encounter throughout the tour. We knew that we would need to be fortunate to spot a devil at our first location and while we had seen plenty of evidence of wombats during the day, we were not to encounter them here and would have to wait until our next destination to see them at all and even longer to see them in an acceptable condition. This just left the eastern quoll, which had the reputation of being by far the easiest of the three quolls to observe and is usually encountered at Mount Field with just a modicum of effort. Both assumptions, or perhaps aspirations, proved to be the case and within less than half an hour of turning our spotlights on, we were watching the first of the ten or so eastern quolls that we would discover here. None of them were greatly concerned by our presence, or our lights for that matter, but they were all busy hunting and scavenging and we consequently did not follow any individual animal for that long. Instead we searched for the mammals that we were still hoping to see and having already encountered a few Tasmanian pademelons, we took the total to three new species in a rather special single evening when we spotted an eastern barred bandicoot, our fourth and probably most distinctive bandicoot of the trip. In addition to the first of literally hundreds of rabbits, which were far more numerous and widespread in Tasmania than

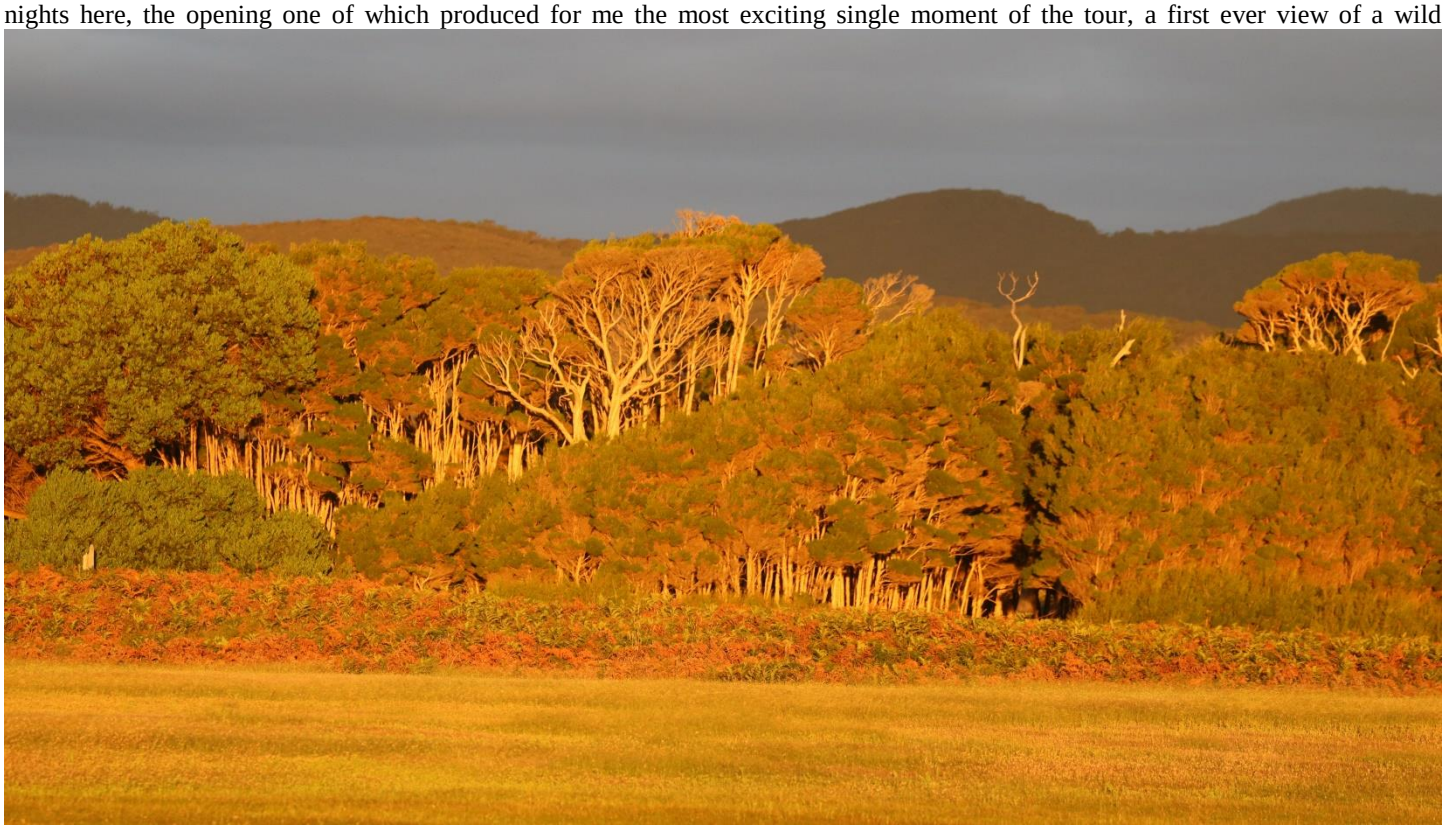
Queensland, Mount Field produced a number of red-necked wallaby sightings and dozens of common brushtail possum, which you could always hear before you could see, as they lumbered over the cooking and shower blocks around the campground. Many had young and we were treated to the inordinately entertaining sight of beleaguered mothers attempting to climb or even walk with more or less full grown possums clinging desperately to their backs. Of course they were always far quicker when travelling independently, but whenever we shone a light towards one that happened to be young, it would automatically jump on its mothers back and she would waddle off as fast as her bulking encumbrance would allow, which in reality, was not very fast at all. Having found one of our final three remaining targets at Mount Field, we moved on to Narawntapu National Park knowing that we were more or less guaranteed to see at least one of the other two, as this small reserve on the north coast has always been home to a healthy and highly visible population of wombats. In fact, despite its limited size, Narawntapu has the reputation of being one of the best destinations in the state to view wildlife and has been dubbed the 'Serengeti of Tasmania' due to the ease with which eastern grey kangaroos, red-necked wallabies and of course wombats, can all be observed across its fertile rolling grasslands and contrasting coastal heathland. In addition to the abundant wildlife, a visit to Narawntapu also involves a stay just across the bay at the delightful Hawley Beach and it

is difficult to imagine a more idyllic combination in terms of glorious beach accommodation and a stunning reserve full of equally striking animals. The only blight on these devastatingly attractive horizons are the wombats, as no one mentioned the fairly critical fact that most of the wombats at Narawntapu have been killed by sarcoptic mange and that the few surviving creatures are literally dying in front of the visitors. Certainly not the Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service, who run the national park, but had nothing on their website regarding such a prolonged outbreak of this horrific skin disease and are still using a wombat symbol on the Narawntapu home page, despite the fact that they have allowed around 95% of the wombat population to die over the previous six years. One ranger informed me that there were at least 250 wombats in the vicinity back in 2010 and that at best there were perhaps eight to ten remaining, the majority of which were displaying the severe and highly distressing symptoms of advanced mange, which kills an animal in an extraordinarily slow and painful manner. Another official that I discussed the matter with suggested that the epidemic is a



natural occurrence and that nothing can be done to help the afflicted wombats and that it is just a question of allowing the infection to run its course and then possibly restocking the park with healthy animals from another area. Whilst this decidedly callous and rather simplistic stance completely overlooks the fact that the parasitic mite that causes mange *sarcoptes scabiei* was introduced to the country by the early settlers on their livestock, and cannot consequently be considered a natural part of Australian ecology, it could also be viewed as duplicitous, as the park authorities should at least be making potential visitors aware of this terrible situation. Instead, they have continued to market the national park as some kind of wombat heaven and have actively encouraged unsuspecting tourists to visit in order to view animals that they know are either unlikely to be seen or will be observed in the most appalling condition. We were a victim of this rather dubious policy to some degree, for although I was aware of an outbreak of mange in the region, I had no idea of the severity of the situation and had seen no official notices regarding Narawntapu. Of course the welfare of the wombats is of far more consequence than our own feelings and I would rather completely miss a fit and healthy animal than observe one suffering in this way. That said, it was still disappointing that our first ever sight of such an iconic and endearing animal was achieved in these sickening circumstances and at least five of the seven wombats encountered, the other two were young and appeared as yet untouched, were clearly all dying. I found the entire episode deeply distressing and it must be just as difficult for other visitors, particularly those with children, as the symptoms are horrendously severe and the pitiful animals that we observed had almost no fur and were covered in scabs and sores. Two were obviously blind where the infection had spread to the face and although some limited efforts were made to cure the Narawntapu population previously, mange needs to be treated over several months and the parks service did not persevere with this labour intensive treatment. Volunteers have done far more and have produced hundreds of handmade burrow flaps that deliver a dose of an antiparasitic solution whenever the wombats have to push under them in order to exit or enter their burrows. However, this initiative has not been continued within the park either and none of the many burrows that we observed had these simple but frequently effective devices. Despite this disappointing apathy at both a national park and government level, there does appear to be the possibility of at least some hope for the wombat, as a new chemical treatment is currently being trialled that lasts far longer once it has been administered, which would greatly reduce the number of applications required and makes the treatment of these susceptible animals far more practical, particularly across large widespread populations. Of the three wombat species, all of which are endemic to Australia, the northern hairy-nosed wombat is already critically endangered, with perhaps only 240 enduring in Epping Forest National Park and a further ten at the Richard Underwood Nature Refuge, both of which are in Queensland. No doubt surprisingly given the shockingly low number, in many ways this represents a conservation success story, as there were only 35 remaining in the 1980s and the species looked doomed to extinction, principally as a result of habitat destruction. This depressingly familiar issue has also witnessed a significant decline in southern hairy-nosed wombat numbers, which is now classified as near threatened, and only the common wombat, the type found in Tasmania, is categorised as least concern, despite the

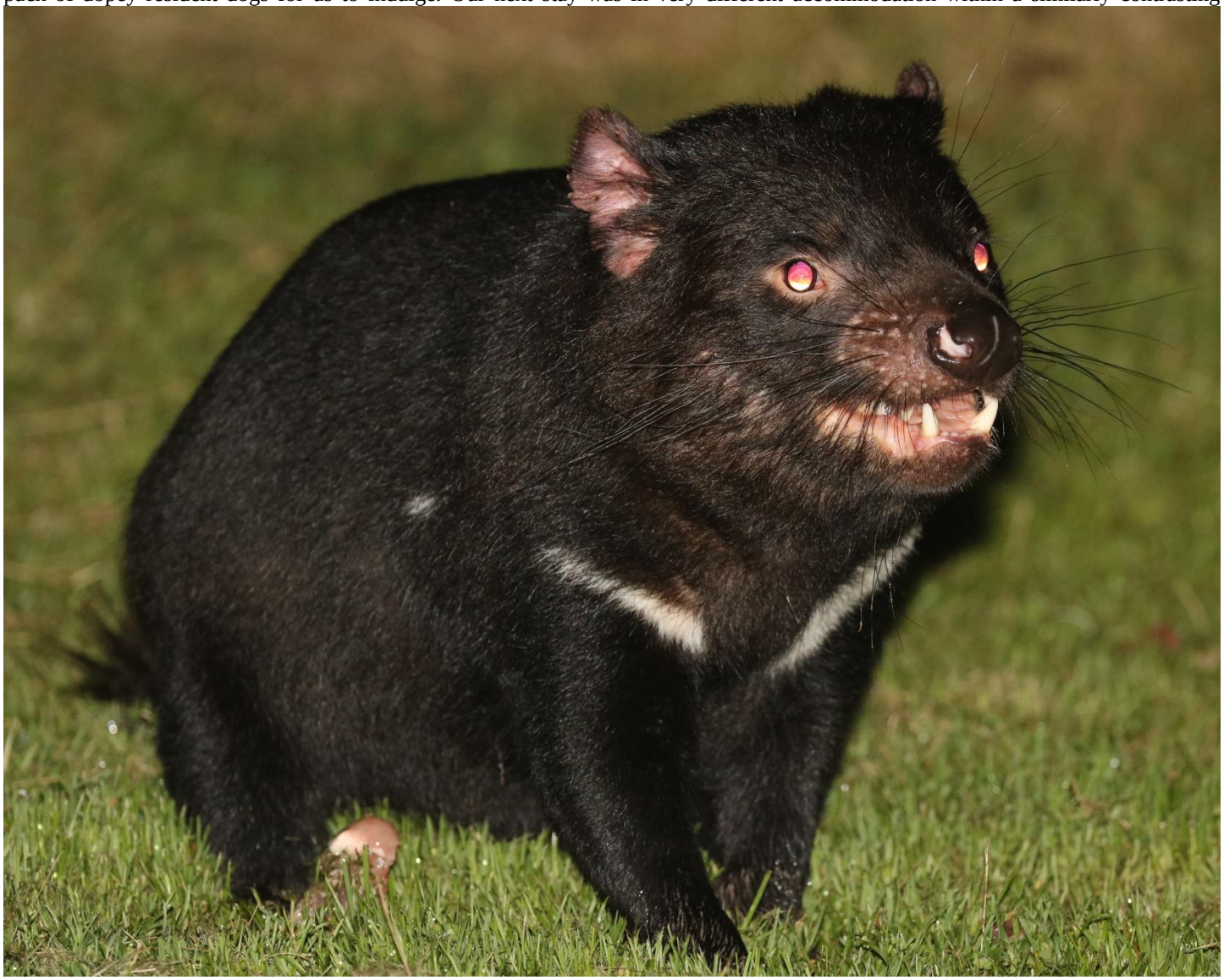
fact that this species has also experienced severe population reductions in certain areas. As all of the adult wombats were in such awful condition, I have not included any photographs of them from Narawntapu and we would have to wait until we visited Cradle Mountain to see a healthy one. This was obviously a great disappointment given the park's association with these tank like marsupials, but in every other respect Narawntapu more than lived up to its outstanding reputation and we had three unbelievable nights here, the opening one of which produced for me the most exciting single moment of the tour, a first ever view of a wild



Tasmanian devil. I discuss these wonderful and entirely unique creatures in greater detail at our next destination, particularly in terms of the devastating facial cancer that has threatened their very existence in recent years, but for now we were simply overjoyed to find the animal that we had both been so desperate to see in Australia. In all our night walks at Narawntapu produced a remarkable fourteen sightings of at least four individual devils and we were as relieved as we were thrilled to note that all of them appeared to be free of that horrific disease. We actually almost bumped into the first, when we disturbed an evidently engrossed devil just a few feet away in an isolated patch of long grass. It was certainly not how I had anticipated encountering my first devil and it was difficult to say which of us was more surprised, as the startled devil took one guilty look and scarpered in the distinctive lolloping gait that would become so familiar over the next two weeks. It is difficult to say exactly where we had the most success in terms of spotlighting, but there is no doubt that Narawntapu would feature in the top three nocturnal destinations of the tour, along with Atherton and Carnarvon on the mainland. In all we saw a dozen species here at night and although a few were also easily observed during the day, there were some really special and significant nocturnal sightings. In addition to more eastern barred bandicoots and another eastern quoll, we discovered the only spotted-tailed quolls that we could be certain had not been attracted by bait and these authentically wild predators were further complemented by our first extended views of an antechinus, a swamp antechinus on this occasion, and a first common water rat, which we had been searching for since landing in Australia and are anything but common. That last statement should also apply to both their appearance and their behaviour, as these dynamic mammals,

with their conspicuous white tail tips, barely resemble rodents and more fulfil the ecological niche that otters or mink play elsewhere, although they do not have such well insulated fur and cannot therefore afford to get either too hot or too cold. They are one of the few native animals able to predate on cane toads with apparently no ill effects, either because they are immune to the cane toad toxin or somehow instinctively know to avoid the toad's poisonous glands, and most environmentalists concur that they are a key indicator species in terms of assessing the health or otherwise of a wetlands or river system. Known by the Aboriginal name Rakali in some areas, their hind feet are webbed for a largely aquatic life and we were able to observe three adults swimming and feeding on successive nights in a small creek off the main estuary. It was whilst watching these diverting rodents that James noticed our first swamp antechinus and in some respects these carnivorous marsupials are just as fascinating, as they lead a tragic existence designed purely to safeguard the species at the absolute expense of the individual. Whilst many people are aware that all of the males die before the age of one after mating for the first time, it is less well known that most females fare only slightly better and in turn expire after rearing their first and only litter, although in rare cases they have been known to wean two litters and live to the age of three. The males actually commit suicide to some degree, as their testes fall away and they consequently stop producing sperm before the mating season even begins and they spend the next few weeks frantically using their stored supply of sperm before it disappears in their urine. Driven by the raging testosterone coursing through their blood, they will begin striping their body of essential proteins and their immune system will shut down as they devote all of their metabolic energy to mating with as many females as possible, sometimes for several hours at a time. This biological trade-off does not come without a terminal price, as the increasingly exhausted animals begin to physically degenerate and start to haemorrhage and bleed internally. Stress levels increase beyond tolerable levels and with no immune system to offer any defence, organs fail and gangrene can take hold as these doomed lotharios basically disintegrate from the inside out. This form of single reproductive strategy is known as semelparity and is more commonly recognised in the various types of salmon that return to their freshwater spawning grounds in order to breed for the only time before death. The entire process is actually incredibly sad and although more or less all life is driven by the irresistible urge to procreate, this particular reproductive adaptation is natural selection in its harshest form, as individual animals look to pass on their genes and in doing so ensure the survival of their species. Wondrous behaviour of course and whilst it must be edifying to observe such a specialised natural phenomenon, I was glad in a way that we were not visiting during the breeding season and that the two swamp antechinuses eventually encountered were both calm enough for us to spend time with. Although it can occasionally be unpleasant, my tours are very much about observing this type of natural behaviour in a genuinely wild environment and at Narawntapu we were privileged to experience the sight of two eastern grey kangaroos fighting, if indeed privileged is entirely the correct term for something as violent. Having seen this activity so often on wildlife films, where it is usually described as kangaroo 'boxing', it certainly felt like a momentous occurrence, but it was equally difficult to watch two animals clash with this intensity and the sound of them kicking each other reverberated painfully across the grass plains. As much as I probably winced at every shuddering blow, it was impossible to turn my gaze away from this brutal ballet of powerful flaying limbs and graceful acrobatic leaps and ultimately I was relieved when it was all over with no apparent harm done to either animal. In reality I think that this quarrel was not as ferocious as many become during the mating season and that perhaps this could have been considered some type of minor dispute or possible sparing exercise, despite

the obvious aggression and force involved. Whether this was the case or not, it was an amazing spectacle and it was just nice to see so many kangaroos in such a harmonious setting, as the kangaroos on Tasmania were hunted to the point of extinction and almost went the same way as the Aborigines, the emus and the Tasmanian tigers, none of which survived the arrival of the white man. What I did not realise before planning this tour, was how few reptiles occur in Tasmania compared to mainland Australia, where there are now believed to be over 900 different types, apparently 93% of which are endemic, with new species being discovered on an annual basis. There are just 21 reptiles on the entire island, only three of which are snakes, which I appreciate makes sense given the considerably cooler climate, but surprised me at the time. Given this inexperience in the region, I am not exactly certain how fortunate we were to encounter a lowland copperhead snake, but it remains a highlight of our stay at Narawntapu and we also greatly enjoyed watching the yellow-tailed black cockatoos that would feed in the immaculately tended gardens of our luxurious accommodation, which even had a pack of dopey resident dogs for us to indulge. Our next stay was in very different accommodation within a similarly contrasting



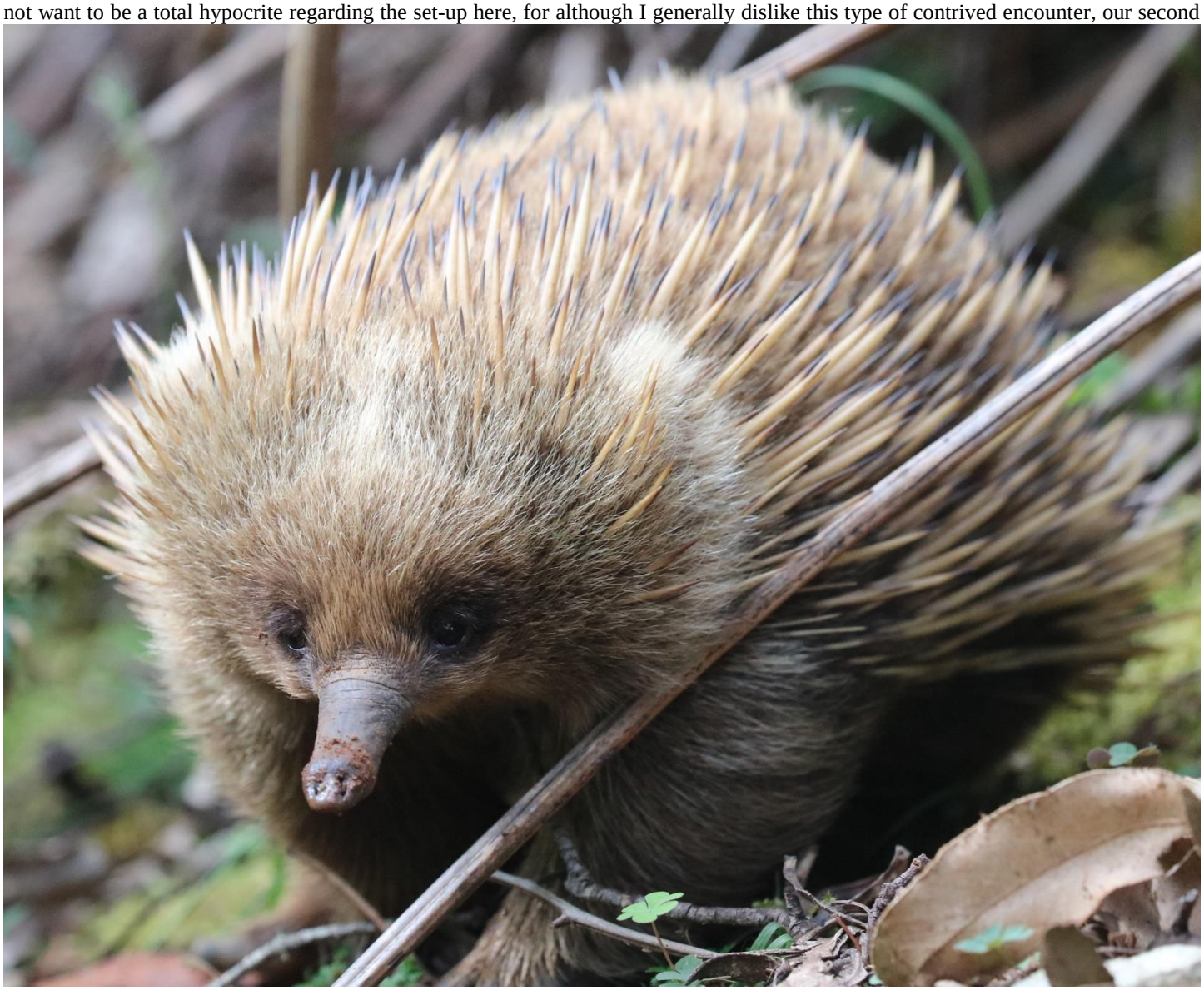
setting, as we moved on to a perfectly comfortable log cabin sitting within a secluded mountain valley that you would never find unless you were specifically searching for it and even then the route at times was less than obvious. Although a notable wildlife destination in its own right, this location had been selected purely to ensure that we did not leave Tasmania without seeing a Tasmanian devil, as they have been feeding them here for a number of years and the property and surrounding 150 acres, much of which is old growth forest, has been an official private nature reserve since 2005. As most people that know me are aware, I do not generally support the feeding of wild animals, but a great deal of wildlife is fed in Australia, particularly on private land, and the limited feeding of small predators like quolls and devils is unlikely to cause a great deal of harm. It is still not ideal of course and I had additional reservations as a result of the terrible disease that has reduced the Tasmanian devil population by more than 100,000, or by approximately 80% to 85%, since it was first discovered near Mount William back in 1996. Devil facial tumour disease, as it has since been diagnosed, or DFTD for short, is a singularly rare form of contagious cancer that can be transmitted from one individual animal to another, generally as a result of biting, but perhaps also through the sharing of food. As the name suggests, the disease causes the most horrific malignant tumours on the face and within the mouth and although death is inevitable, it can take up to six months and involve an obscene degree of suffering, as the tumours become so severe that infected animals are no longer able to eat and eventually starve to death. To make matters even worse, just as it was determined that the immune systems of some devils were beginning to produce antibodies against DFTD, which were thought likely to evolve into a form of immunity against the disease, a second genetically distinct facial cancer has emerged and the situation again looks bleak for a species that now appears to be regrettably prone to developing some of the rarest forms of contagious cancer in the natural world. Among mammals, transmittable cancers have only previously been recorded in one type of hamster and some dogs, that spread a form of genital tumour through mating, and scientists have suggested that Tasmanian devils may be more susceptible to this type of disease as a result of their low genetic diversity. If this is the case, devils are likely to need our support for years to come and thankfully significant efforts have been made to help conserve what is now the largest carnivorous marsupial in the world, which is more than can be said for the previous holder of that particular title, the thylacine. In addition to a captive breeding programme involving multiple reserves, both in Tasmania

and on the mainland, a vaccine has been created to help boost the devil's immune system in order to help fight the disease. In field trials eighteen of the nineteen animals vaccinated had developed at least an initial immune response to the cancerous cells, but unbelievably, or perhaps all too predictably given the daily carnage on Tasmanian roads, all but five of the nineteen vaccinated devils introduced to Narawntapu National Park, were killed by motorists within a few months of their release. Two of the surviving females did go on to produce litters and various forms of the vaccine have since been tested in different locations with largely encouraging

results, although none as yet have proven to be 100% effective. We would visit two of the reserves involved in the captive breeding programme, as well as Maria Island, which was chosen in 2012 as the site for a disease free insurance population of Tasmanian devils, just in case the DFTD continued to spread and wipe out the entire species. The decision was a controversial one, largely for ignoring the existing ecology of the island, that we would have the opportunity to assess towards the end of the tour, when I had arranged a brief stay to search for some of the introduced devils and their recent offspring. Meanwhile, despite already having seen devils at Narawntapu, I had previously arranged three nights in our isolated valley cabin just to make sure and we had very little to do each evening until the first animals appeared, as the owners request that you do not walk around at night in case you disturb the devils for

the other guests. A small area is illuminated outside each cabin where a variety of food is scattered for the different wildlife and I increased the light by adding one of our spotlights. I presume that you are supposed to watch the devils and other animals through the large glass doors, but that was never going to work for me and we kept the sliding doors open at all times with some unexpected and exhilarating results. The evening procession normally begins with Tasmanian pademelons and common brushtail possums, which instantly scurry off as the first devils arrive and eventually a spotted-tailed quoll may appear when it is satisfied that the dominant devils are no longer in the vicinity. This was exactly the way that each evening unfolded for us and in all I think that we saw eleven

different Tasmanian devils over the course of three nights, as their markings are fairly distinctive and individual animals are reasonably easy to distinguish from photographs. Of the eleven, nine appeared to be clear, but two poor creatures were unmistakably suffering with facial tumours and I believe that my initial concerns were probably justified. It simply cannot be a good idea to encourage healthy and inflicted animals to mix in such close proximity and there was indisputable evidence that fights were occurring, both in terms of the raucous disputes that we could hear and the fresh bite marks that some devils would appear with. That said, I do not want to be a total hypocrite regarding the set-up here, for although I generally dislike this type of contrived encounter, our second



night produced one of the most memorable moments of this or any other tour, when a devil suddenly noticed that there was no barrier between us and made its way in to investigate. Its first stop was at my toes, which considering I was barefoot and that these pocket dynamos have the most powerful bite of all mammals in relation to their size, could have been deemed slightly alarming. However, I know that devils have a largely undeserved reputation, for although they squabble amongst themselves over food, they are basically shy animals and can be very curious as well if they feel safe. This one certainly was and as I wriggled my bare toes just to make it fully aware that they were not part of the midnight feast, it sniffed and licked them individually before sprawling out at my feet like an affectionate puppy. In all our inquisitive guest returned on four further occasions and whilst I understand better than most that these were not authentically wild experiences, they were still authentically thrilling and I will never forget the little devil who came to make friends. I appreciate that in many respects it is unfair to have favourite animals and that we should try to look on them all equally, but it is very human as well and I have to admit that I instantly fell for these monstrously sweet and immensely charismatic beasts. They are actually far more social than people realise and coexist happily where there is sufficient food. They will even eat in groups on large carcasses and one of my favourite stories concerns a dead whale that was washed up on a west coast beach at the height of summer. A local wildlife ranger found the rotting carcass after several days and as you can imagine, the smell after that long in that heat was almost unbearable. Just as the ranger was about to escape from the dreadful stench, he noticed a slight movement from the corpse and when he examined further, he discovered a dozen supremely contented devils sleeping within the decaying whale and eating their way out. This is by no means an isolated occurrence, as devils will regularly fall asleep in a carcass they are actively feeding on and simply continue eating when they awake. Breakfast in bed Tasmanian devil style. Whilst the devils were certainly the main reason for our visit, the private reserve has a good reputation for wombat and platypus sightings and we were also hoping to encounter a first short-beaked echidna since Carnarvon on the mainland. Sadly the only wombat that we chanced across was covered in mange and we were not to see a platypus in the attractive river that flows directly through the property, as the one time that we went to look with our host, another guest was allowing her children to play at the water's edge. No matter, as we had already found a delightful spot for platypus and had savoured superb views at close quarters in a wonderful local setting on successive days. These were the last platypuses that we would see in Australia, but really only because we agreed that it would be difficult to better these sightings as a finale and that we would subsequently concentrate our efforts on more elusive targets. The echidna had been one of these until we doubled our encounters with these peculiar creatures from three to six in the space of a couple of days and were able to spend long periods watching two of them. Strangely, until the very last day of the trip when the pattern was finally broken with a lone

encounter, we would either completely fail to see echidna at a destination or would always find three over the course of our stay. That record was maintained when we made the short transfer south, just over twenty kilometres as the crow flies, to Cradle Mountain, which sits within the rather laboriously named Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair National Park, but is yet another Tasmanian gem. The jagged dolerite peaks of Cradle Mountain attract more than a quarter of a million visitors each year and sit within a pristine wilderness of vibrant alpine heathland, ice blue lakes and cool cascading streams. At around 400,000 acres the park is the third largest in the state and combines with the top two, Franklin-Gordon Wild River National Park and Southwest National Park, to form the vast Tasmanian

Wilderness World Heritage Area, a UNESCO World Heritage site that I mentioned earlier in this report whilst describing our stay at Mount Field. Cradle Mountain rises in the northern section of the park, where we would spend the majority of our time, and Lake St Clair can be found in the extreme south of the reserve. Although everyone appears to accept that this distinctly boomerang shaped lake is the deepest in both Tasmania and Australia, few sources agree on the actual depth and I have seen estimates, or perhaps guesses would be more accurate, from anywhere between 160 metres and about 210 metres. Somewhere between the two landmarks rests Mount Ossa, which all sources mercifully concur stands at an impressive 1,617 metres and is consequently the tallest mountain in Tasmania. Given the diverse terrain and spectacular scenery, one of the main features of the park are the glorious hiking opportunities, which range from short walks of just a few minutes, including one that goes through a section of temperate rainforest, to a series of inspiring day hikes and ultimately the renowned Overland Track, which runs almost the entire length of the park from Ronny Creek in the north to Cynthia Bay on Lake St Clair to the south. The entire trek takes between six and seven days, depending on how exactly you prefer to tackle it, and the full distance is just over 80 kilometres, which is a couple of marathons in running terms. Although we completed most of the shorter walks and one of the two longest single day hikes, we did not have sufficient time to explore more than a fraction of this sublime landscape and I therefore decided to book a helicopter flight to provide us with the type of view that such a resplendent setting undoubtedly deserved. It was another unforgettable highlight of a trip packed full of them and we had already fulfilled one ambition here, when we had almost tripped over the first of dozens of healthy wombats. These were magnificently fat lumps and it was lovely to observe how supremely relaxed they all were within an entirely natural sanctuary, where they have relatively few predators, certainly in the case of the large adults, and have not been exposed to the dreadful parasitic mite that causes mange. Most would allow you to approach to within a couple of metres and they were so comfortable around people that they would barely glance up and it actually proved time consuming, if not exactly difficult, to take an entirely clear picture. Among several nocturnal specialists, our night walks at Cradle Mountain produced the first common ringtail possums encountered in Tasmania, as well as an enormously welcome bonus in the form of yet another Tasmanian devil. This one appeared to be relatively young and was spotted at the entrance to the national park just as we were about to make additional sweeps of the Enchanted Walk and Rainforest Walk trails. I do not generally use photographs in overtly artificial environments, but I have included the picture below, because this was exactly how the animal was spotted, peering out cautiously from under a metal barrier. The next day we visited Devils@Cradle, a sanctuary that forms part of the national Tasmanian devil captive breeding strategy and also includes breeding programmes for the eastern quoll and spotted-tailed quoll. The impressive 25-acre facility is situated a few hundred metres from where we saw our devil at the park entrance and I spent quite a long time discussing various aspects of the facial tumour disease with one of the staff members, who happened to mention that she had not seen a wild devil in the five years that she had lived and worked in the area. I hardly liked to mention that we had bumped into one the night before, maybe a two-minute walk from the sanctuary, but we actually hear this a lot, as we are often informed how fortunate we have been to see something and when we enquire further, it transpires that the individual concerned has never actually been out spotlighting or to look specifically for the animal being discussed. There is no question that we were lucky to see that inquisitive little devil, but if we had just gone back to our lodge for an early dinner, as opposed to searching for a minimum of five or six hours each night in all weather, we could not have earned the opportunity to be lucky and would have missed what for me was one of the most

memorable brief moments of the tour, principally because the young devil was so inordinately sweet and the sighting so unexpected. The sanctuary itself was very professionally run by people who genuinely care about the continued existence of this fabulous animal and if you would also like to help protect Tasmanian devils, you can either contact one of the many sanctuaries and reserves involved in the captive breeding programme or the University of Tasmania, who are coordinating the Save the Tasmanian Devil Appeal. Their website address is www.utas.edu.au/giving/devil and you can also sign up for an electronic newsletter, appropriately titled 'Devil's Advocate', that will keep you up to date with the battle to save this iconic species, a battle that none of us can afford to lose. Believe it or not, one of the biggest problems facing the Tasmanian devil, in fact one of the biggest problems facing more or less all wildlife in Australia, is the insane number of animals killed by vehicles every year, as many of the disease free devils born and raised in captivity are despatched almost as soon as they are released. Around 350 devils die on Tasmanian roads annually and if that figure does not sound particularly high, it is more than are being born in captivity and is only a fraction of the barely credible 300,000 to 500,000 animals that are estimated to die at the hands of Tasmanian drivers each year. The death toll runs into millions when you take the entire country into account and I recently read that more animals are killed per kilometre on Tasmanian roads than anywhere else in the world. Although I am not entirely sure how anyone could verify that data with any degree of accuracy, it certainly would not surprise me if it turned out to be true and we noticed that the situation was far worse in Tasmania than Queensland and it was pretty bad in Queensland. In this respect many Australians are a real contradiction, as they feed everything, but refuse to slow down for anything and whilst their collective long-term record with wildlife is one of the worst on the planet, both in terms of stupidity and cruelty, I am aware that many individual Australians care deeply about the natural world and the phenomenal country they have been so blessed with. However, there is no escaping the fact that the number of animals slaughtered unnecessarily is shamefully high and that a proportion of the population either kill wildlife deliberately or, at the very least, make no effort not to. Whilst I am aware that kangaroos are prone to run directly in front of moving vehicles, this does not excuse the unconscionable number or variety of animals killed, as it is pretty difficult to blame echidnas or penguins for dashing in front of a car and these were just two of between forty and fifty different species that we saw dead on the road. One pademelon had been obliterated maybe three metres from the entrance to Mount Field National Park and it would have been almost impossible to do that accidently or whilst driving at the recommended reduced speed between dusk to dawn. This of course is the key, as most of Australia's wildlife is nocturnal and there are signs everywhere asking motorists to slow down at night, but unfortunately it is not a legal requirement for them to do so. I do not drive particularly slowly by any means and in addition to two speeding tickets issued by traffic police on long daylight drives in the outback, I incurred so many minor speeding violations, none of which I was even aware of, that when I returned home, I discovered I had been banned from driving in Queensland for three months. This has never happened previously, but I still did not kill anything, despite the fact that I was driving for extended periods at night and usually after long exhausting days in the field. I basically cut my speed in half whenever it got dark and although that meant that we would always get back to our accommodation far later than was strictly necessary, at least one creature survived as a result, when a pademelon burst out of the undergrowth and I was able to brake without hitting it. Unfortunately, recent road kill surveys have revealed that the Australian public are killing more animals on the road than ever and the situation has become so bad that solutions are now being sought that do not involve them. Various forms of virtual fencing systems are currently being trialled, including units that flash and emit alarm signals when activated by the headlights of oncoming cars. Spaced at regular intervals along the side of the road to form a virtual fence, these warning alarms frighten wildlife away as cars approach and in areas where they have been tested, animal mortality has been reduced by between 60% to 70%, which although still not ideal, would save the lives of millions of creatures every year. I mention the night driving at this stage, as I made a

mistake with our accommodation at our next destination and we ended up staying too far away from the areas that we wanted to visit each day. This resulted in three fairly horrendous drives, as we crawled back to our chalet in the early hours after long spotlighting sessions. Our main target locations were Mount William National Park and the Bay of Fires and my error occurred because I wanted to stay on another private nature reserve near St Marys, where I knew a small population of Tasmanian bettong occurred. This was actually an inspired decision, as these were the last of the three bettong species that we had been searching for and we would ultimately only encounter them in the forest surrounding our accommodation. That said, I should have split our time between the various sites that we intended to explore, instead of trying to use a single base for every area. Apart from the extremely long nights, it did not make a massive amount of difference and we were still able to enjoy one of the most sensational stretches of coast I have been fortunate enough to gaze upon. Extending from Binalong Bay in the south to Eddystone Point in the north, the Bay of Fires takes its name not, as many believe, from the distinctive orange lichen that carpets the granite rocks along the shoreline, but from the Aboriginal campfires observed by the British Royal Navy officer Tobias Furneaux when he sailed past in 1773. In command of HMS Adventure, Furneaux was accompanying Captain James Cook on his second voyage, but the two ships, Cook was in command of HMS Resolution, the same ship that would carry him to his death on his third voyage in 1779, lost contact with each other for several months and Furneaux consequently produced the first British charts of the south and east coasts of Tasmania, although it was of course known as Van Diemen's Land at the time. The bay itself is an archetypal paradise of white sandy beaches and turquoise blue water and is so perfect it looks as if it has been stolen from a film set or copied from a holiday brochure. To see it at its absolute best, although it is difficult to imagine perceiving it in any other light, you need to view it from Furneaux's original perspective and that

means taking to the water. We did on a couple of occasions on magical boat trips out of Binalong Bay and although we missed the Australian fur seals that usually hang out on the same group of rocks, the breathtaking backdrop more than compensated, as did a pod of short-beaked common dolphins that played and jumped around our boat with the customary joie de vivre of these exuberant marine creatures. One of the tours went all the way up to the 19th century lighthouse at Eddystone Point, which actually sits within Mount William National Park, another excellent reserve for viewing all three of Tasmania's more familiar macropods. At night the two large possum species were as abundant as the kangaroos and wallabies were during the day and one of the brushtail possums, could it have

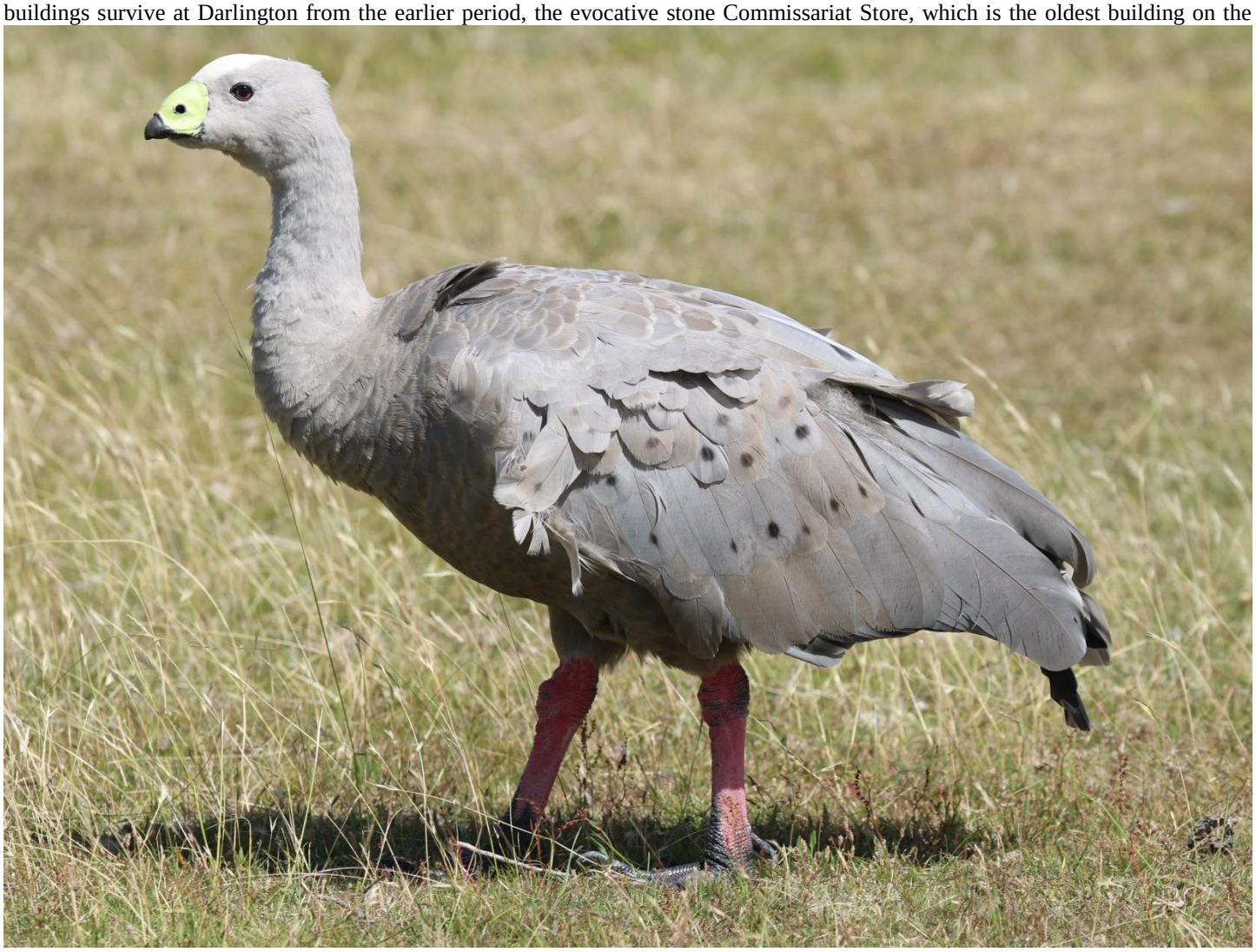
been anything else, produced probably the silliest moment of the tour, which, considering the ridiculous nature of most of the mammals here, is saying something. James and I could barely stop laughing as this particularly preposterous possum was caught out in the open on one of our night walks and did what all of these lovable but intensely inane animals do, it made directly for the nearest tree to climb to safety. Sadly for the possum, the only 'tree' in the immediate vicinity just happened to be a traffic sign on a circular metal pole and no sooner had the panicky possum climbed to the top, than it realised it had nowhere to go and that its distinctly portly body was too large for the meagre pole, at which point it slid slowly back to terra firma. Instinctively it began climbing again, only to experience exactly the same embarrassing fate, a slow but inevitable descent towards two predators who were by now laughing so violently, we could not have caught the possum had we tried. By the time it had deployed the same hapless survival strategy on a third occasion, we could barely hold the lights straight and eventually, no doubt sensing our indecision and vulnerability with its heightened sensory skills and highly evolved animal instinct, it abandoned its pole and ran off screeching bitterly into the night. If this was

undoubtedly the comical highlight of our time at Mount William, and probably anywhere else for that matter, a handful of disarming eastern quolls and an imposing Tasmanian wedge-tailed eagle vied for the top wildlife sighting. I must admit that I was especially pleased to see the raptor, as this is the largest bird of prey in all of Australia and the variety that occurs in Tasmania is a distinct and endangered subspecies of the wedge-tailed eagle found on the mainland. We had already observed a few white-bellied sea eagles, which are also huge and happen to be the second largest raptor in the country, but this was our first wedge-tailed eagle and I had not been at all convinced that we were going to see one. It would probably not be fair to the penguins to write from the sublime to the ridiculous regarding our journey south to the little penguin colony at Bicheno, but it does work in terms of size, as a wedge-tailed eagle can grow to more than a metre with a wingspan exceeding two and a half metres in some cases. In comparison, the little penguin, or fairy penguin as I have always known and prefer, is the smallest of the world's eighteen to twenty penguin species, depending on your source, and grows to around 30 centimetres with a wingspan of basically nothing. Instead, as is the case with all penguins, their wings have evolved over millions of years into flippers, which enable them to fly gracefully through the water instead of above it. We waited patiently for them to return from their daily fishing trip just after dusk and were treated to the arresting sight of dozens of essentially miniature penguins waddling past us to their nests, which are burrows excavated in the soft sand and often under vegetation or between rocks. The transfer from Bicheno to our next destination Freycinet National Park was a short one, which was just as well, as we were running out of time by this stage and had only one night at what is the oldest national park in Tasmania, albeit jointly with Mount Field. It was not sufficient of course and in order to see as much of the park as possible, we hiked to Wineglass

Bay and I booked a sightseeing flight that circumnavigated the entire Freycinet Peninsula and Schouten Island, which also forms part of the national park. In addition to multiple views of the renowned Wineglass Bay, which is consistently voted one of the best beaches in Australia and/or the world, our spectacular flight included a unique perspective of the rugged pink granite peaks that form the Hazards mountain range, which was named after the American whaler Captain Richard Hazard. Indirectly Hazard was also responsible for naming the famous bay, as it was his small whaling boats that southern right whales were harpooned from whenever they entered the bay and as the water was stained crimson with their gushing blood, so the bay took on the appearance of a glass of red wine. This method of whaling from the beach at Freycinet lasted for around twenty years from the 1820s, by which time the inshore whale population had been practically wiped out. They are thankfully now returning and both southern right and humpback whales can be spotted from shore as they migrate north to their breeding grounds in warmer waters and it is possible to see other resident species, killer whales for example, at any time of year. Great Oyster Bay, which is essentially formed and sheltered by the

Freycinet Peninsula, is one of the best places to observe the migrating whales and various marine wildlife boat tours are available along this sensational stretch of coastline. I had no way of extending our time here and was more using a spare day in our schedule to research another major destination before we moved on to catch our ferry to Maria Island, a former penal colony that is now being used to secure another type of abominable miscreant, the Tasmanian devil. We only had one night on Maria Island as well, principally because I was initially uncertain about whether to include this national park on my itinerary or not and the limited accommodation had been booked by the time I made the decision to visit. We could have camped of course, but I did not want to have to carry a great deal of camping equipment for maybe two or three nights out of a seven-week trip and therefore decided that one night would suffice as a brief initial reconnaissance and that I could always return if necessary. I would certainly like to, for although my only real purpose here was to learn how the insurance population of devils was faring, the 28,000-acre island turned out to be yet another Tasmanian masterpiece, as both an outstanding wildlife reserve in a ravishing location and as a fabulously well preserved monument to the island's rich history. As I previously mentioned was the case with mainland Tasmania, Maria Island was discovered by Abel Tasman on his voyage of

1642 and I presume that he must have had at least one eye on securing funding for further expeditions, as not only did he name the main island Van Diemen's Land after his benefactor Anthony van Diemen, he named this smaller isle after his patron's wife Maria van Diemen. Having been used for sealing and as a whaling station after the British settled Tasmania, Maria Island was chosen as the site of a penal colony for what were considered less serious offenders and in March 1825 the first fifty prisoners and a military escort landed at what would become known as Darlington to the north of the island. One of eleven Australian convict sites now recognised as a combined World Heritage Site by UNESCO, five of which are in Tasmania, Maria Island subsequently held prisoners for two periods in her history, as a main penal settlement between 1825 and 1832 and as a probation station from 1842 to 1850. Only two buildings survive at Darlington from the earlier period, the evocative stone Commissariat Store, which is the oldest building on the



island and is now used as a visitor centre, and the Penitentiary, which used to house almost 300 convicts but now provides basic accommodation for up to 68 visitors in ten rooms on a far more voluntary basis. Far more endures from the later probation centre period, including the Oast House, Mess Hall and Bakehouse, and several exhibits relate to the grandiose ambitions of the Italian entrepreneur Diego Bernacchi, who attempted to transform the island into a major tourist destination. He was not ultimately successful, although he did go on to launch a cement business on the island, but in 1888 he opened both the Coffee Palace, a large restaurant that is now an atmospheric museum, as well as the Grand Hotel, a luxurious French Riviera style property that, much like Bernacchi's aspirations at the time, now lies in ruins. The devils aside, there is a great deal of wildlife on Maria Island and little credible research appears to have been undertaken in terms of what impact the introduction of Tasmanian devils has had on resident populations. Certainly the decision to introduce a voracious predator among animals that have never been exposed to serious predation was always going to be controversial and I am aware that the little penguin colony has been more or less wiped out since the first fifteen devils were released in 2012. However, I am also conscious that those responsible were sufficiently concerned for the future of the Tasmanian devil, that they believed the risk to the other species was acceptable, particularly as none were themselves endangered and they all had far larger populations elsewhere. I was never going to be able to assess the situation systematically in less than 24 hours, but we spent as much time in the field as possible on long hikes and the animals that I expected to see were all routinely encountered. Common wombats were exactly that and many had young, which would indicate that they are finding a way to elude the devils, possibly by feeding more during daylight, as we observed higher numbers in the day than at night. The three larger macropods, the eastern grey kangaroo, red-necked wallaby and Tasmanian pademelon, were all spotted regularly and in the sort of numbers you would expect for an island of this size and that was also the case regarding the two common possums, the brushtail and ringtail. The absence of any juvenile cape barren geese was worrying, given how many adults we observed, and we also failed to see an echidna, although that was by no means an unusual occurrence and may well have just been a matter of chance. Certainly we were more fortunate with the southern brown bandicoot, which I had been expressly searching for since we landed in Tasmania and was a new mammal for a tour that had now produced four different bandicoot species. I was also fairly desperate to find a long-nosed potoroo and whilst this rare creature continued to evade us, we had two further opportunities remaining and one of these had been added to the itinerary purely for that animal. Of course the main objective on Maria Island was to see Tasmanian devils in their new home and this reasonably significant goal on our part was fulfilled almost as soon as it got dark. Our encounters here were actually the best of the trip if you do not take into account the fed animal that decided it would move in and adopt us, for although I believe that we probably only found two animals, it was difficult to say with complete certainty as there were 30 to 40 sightings over the course of

almost a full night, some of which were fleeting glimpses, their territory was near the main campsite and they were all but oblivious to our presence. On several occasions we were able to stay with them for extended periods and we tried to make the most of the opportunity without disturbing them too much, as I was acutely aware that these might be the last wild devils we would see. We had already considered this rather depressing prospect regarding the impressively plump wombats we had sat with earlier, as our last major wildlife destination was going to be Bruny Island, where neither devils or wombats occur. It was therefore a question of savouring every second spent with these two wonderful creatures just in case and I am pleased to say that it would have been almost impossible to improve on our views of either on Maria Island. We eventually turned our spotlights off to allow our pair of absurdly silly assassins to devil around without intrusion and before we caught the return ferry the next morning, we said farewell to one last rotund furry lawnmower, which did not even glance up as it grazed with a steadfast and entirely laudable determination. Having personally visited the site, it remains difficult to know exactly how to feel about the introduction of devils to Maria Island, as it is a

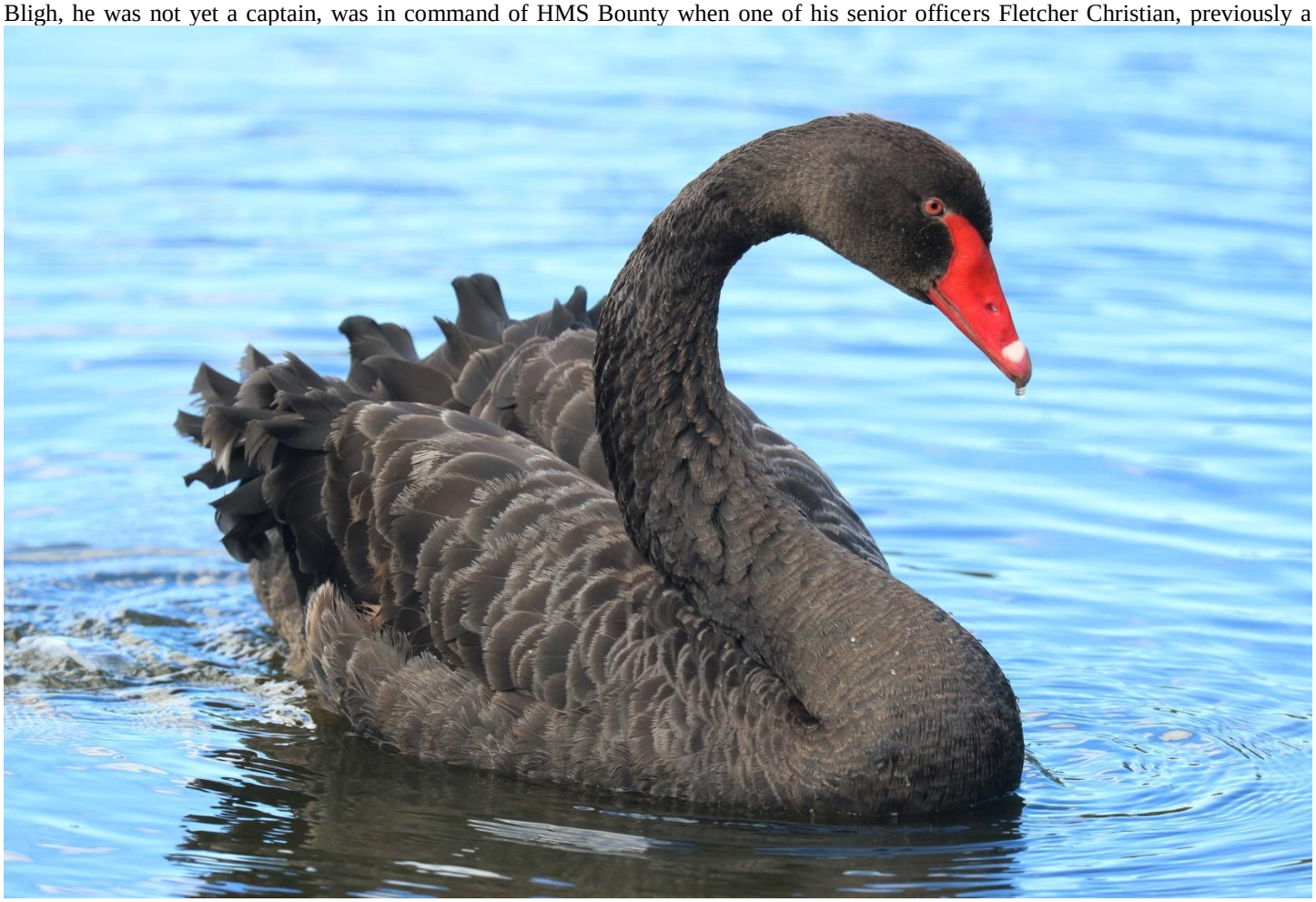
complex issue and whilst I am not at all comfortable with a robust predator being dropped into the middle of an ecosystem that has evolved without this type of invasive ecological pressure, it is undeniably comforting to know that there is a population safe from the horrific disease that has carried the Tasmanian devil at least towards the realm of extinction. You have to remember that they are the largest carnivorous marsupial on the planet by default and that if even a fraction of the care and consideration that the devils are now quite rightly receiving had been shown to the thylacine, the only mammal lost in Tasmania since British colonisation would have almost certainly survived. I grew up knowing this distinctive animal as the Tasmanian tiger and even from a young age when I first saw pictures and later film of a pair in Hobart Zoo, I felt a real sense of loss that this handsome dog-like creature no longer walked the same earth as me. For years I hoped that a hidden population might be discovered somewhere and then as I grew to understand my fellow man, I wished instead that if they did exist, they were never found. All extinctions are a tragedy, certainly in terms of the species lost to our greed and ignorance, but when you learn more about how it occurred, this one seemed particularly senseless and I remember thinking as a child that if I could bring back just one species, it would be the Tasmanian tiger. The tiger disappeared from mainland Australia around 3,000 years ago and for decades it was thought that the dingo must have been the cause, as they are not found in Tasmania, where the thylacine continued to thrive until colonial times. However, it was recently established that the two animals actually lived side by side for several thousand years and that climate change and drought were more likely to have caused the demise of the thylacine, which would explain how they endured in Tasmania's more temperate climate. They did so until the arrival

of the white man and, perhaps even more significantly, the white man's livestock, as sheep and other domestic animals were introduced to Tasmania in the early 19th century and immediately the farmers began killing tigers more or less on sight. This is a depressingly familiar theme that has been repeated all over the world for centuries, as farmers have generally proved to be woeful custodians of the land and instead of developing better practices and attempting to live in harmony with the resident wildlife, the vast majority prefer to slaughter anything that might adversely affect their profits. Excluding the millions of animals killed each year as land is cleared to make room for yet more livestock, kangaroos and wallabies have been massacred in simply immeasurable numbers for grazing the land they roamed before man even existed and Australian farmers still routinely persecute much of their endemic wildlife. Dingoes are eliminated in the same obscene fashion as the thylacine, dozens of species of birds are targeted for eating crops and even wombats are killed for damaging fences. There is very little respect or compassion for anything that does not make money and in 1830 the Van Diemens Land Company, a huge farming corporation, began offering bounties to encourage people to eradicate thylacines. The Tasmanian government followed in 1888 and offered £1 for each adult killed and ten shillings for each pup. In all 2,184 bounties were paid between 1888 and 1909 when the scheme was terminated, although it is known that farmers continued to persecute the thylacine essentially until its extinction. The last thylacine taken from the wild was captured in the Florentine Valley near Mount Field National Park in 1933, perhaps condemning the species at that very moment. On the 10th of July 1936 the governor of Tasmania Sir Ernest Clark announced that the thylacine was now officially protected by Tasmanian law. In doing so, he almost certainly became the only elected official to confer government protection to an already extinct entity, as only one Thylacine remained in captivity and that sorry beast died exactly 59 days later on the 7th of September 1936 in Hobart Zoo, principally of neglect. It was not all bad news though, as I am sure that it died much happier in the knowledge that it had the full strength of the Tasmanian legislature behind it and that, in death at least, it was finally protected. You would have perhaps thought that following these levels of literally terminal incompetence and dispassionate brutality that most Tasmanians would want to forget this sorry episode in their history, but the opposite is actually the case and I was amazed and more than a little troubled to discover that there is a considerable commercial industry surrounding the thylacine and it feels as if the poor creature is being exploited all over again. Thylacine books, art, gift cards, mugs, t-shirts, keyrings, coasters, cuddly toys and even duvet covers are just a few of the items available and basically if you can name it, you can probably buy it with a thylacine print on. With so much wildlife in need of our support, I find it difficult to comprehend this obsession with an animal that your recent ancestors were responsible for exterminating or the rather disturbing correlation between the people who buy such a vast array of thylacine souvenirs at significant cost and the citizens who kill more animals on their roads than any other people on earth. What exactly is the point of visiting a national park and purchasing a gift to either celebrate or commemorate an extinct animal, depending on your perspective, and then driving home and ploughing through an echidna or a pademelon with barely the blink of any eye? Perhaps people remain fascinated by the thylacine because they sincerely

believe, or at least desperately hope, that the animal is not extinct and that redemption awaits in the form of the one grainy film that turns out to be genuine. There are certainly several credible experts who share that view, although some of these insist that it is more likely that an extant population will be found on the mainland than in Tasmania. For what it is worth, my personal view is that they probably did endure beyond the death of that forlorn individual in 1936, but that Tasmania is not large enough to conceal a viable population for this long and that we have lost these precious creatures forever, as well as another little part of ourselves. We would continue to receive fairly constant reminders of the loss throughout the last few days of the tour, but there was very little time to dwell on anything as we swapped one island for another and drove south to catch the ferry to Bruny Island, where we had two nights. Whilst I would have again preferred more, I only had limited time available for this section of the trip and was aware when I arranged everything, that in some respects I was sacrificing a degree of quality in order to explore and assess as many important destinations as possible. I have always thought of Bruny Island as a miniature New Zealand, as it incorporates two distinct islands, which in this case are joined by a narrow strip of land known as the Neck. This type of geographical feature is called an isthmus and the one that connects the two land masses at Bruny is home to colonies of little penguins and short-tailed shearwaters. The site is protected as a

nature reserve and features an observation platform from which you can survey the rookeries and enjoy superb 360-degree views of the surrounding ocean and beaches. We visited it on several occasions, but not so much for the penguins this time and to instead hopefully catch a glimpse of a leopard seal that had been in the area eating them two days prior to our arrival. Sadly, although certainly not for the relieved penguins, it had moved on by our visit and we were regrettably denied the opportunity to see what is a fabulous predator. At almost 90,000 acres, Bruny is considerably larger than Maria Island and whilst many sources disagree regarding its actual length, the drive from the beginning of Dennes Point Lane in the north all the way south to the Cape Bruny Lighthouse on the western fork of the southern island is approximately 65 kilometres. The island has a rich nautical history, as some of the most famous explorers and seafarers have visited its waters beginning, of course, with Abel Tasman in 1642, who attempted, unsuccessfully due to a severe storm, to land at what would later become known as Adventure Bay. The island itself is named after the French naval officer Bruni d'Entrecasteaux, who was searching for the lost French expedition of 1785 led by another officer Jean-François de Lapérouse, of which there had been no news since Lapérouse had sailed from the British settlement at Botany Bay in 1788. The rescue mission departed Brest in 1791, but d'Entrecasteaux would never discover what became of the earlier expedition or indeed see his homeland again, as he died of scurvy less than two years later somewhere in the Maluku or 'Spice' Islands. Perhaps in a way it was for the best, for France was now in the grip of the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror had already claimed the head of King Louis XVI. Marie Antoinette and thousands of others would meet the same fate and d'Entrecasteaux, as an entrenched royalist, would no doubt have had his own appointment with Madame Guillotine. As for Lapérouse, it later transpired that his two ships had run aground in a storm off Vanikoro in the Santa Cruz Islands and that many of the survivors were slaughtered by the

indigenous South Sea Islanders. The fate of the rest of the two crews, including Lapérouse, remains unknown. Before the expeditions of either Lapérouse or d'Entrecasteaux, Adventure Bay had been named by Captain Tobias Furneaux after his own ship when, as I have already mentioned whilst describing our time at the Bay of Fires, he became the first Britain to chart the south and east coasts of Tasmania. Furneaux sailed with Captain James Cook on his second voyage and the legendary British explorer and maritime hero in turn landed at Adventure Bay in January 1777 on his third and final voyage. Cook came ashore principally to take on fresh water and supplies and among his crew was a sailing master by the name of William Bligh. As no doubt many people will recognise, Lieutenant Bligh, he was not yet a captain, was in command of HMS Bounty when one of his senior officers Fletcher Christian, previously a



personal friend of Bligh's who had sailed with him on several occasions, led the famous 'mutiny on the Bounty', which has since been immortalised in a number of celebrated films with some of the greatest actors, or in some cases movie stars, of the day. Although all of the cinematic adaptions portray Bligh as a tyrannical monster and Christian as a reluctant hero attempting to protect the crew from his cruelty, the reality is less clear, as there is documented evidence that Bligh was actually less severe with his men than many

naval commanders and it has been suggested that the crew simply did not want to leave Tahiti, where they had spent five idyllic months. Duties were comparatively light as breadfruits were cultivated for the return journey and Bligh made no objection regarding the widespread sexual liaisons with the Polynesian women. Several of the crew were treated for venereal infections, including Christian, and if Bligh was guilty of anything, it may have been of allowing his men too much freedom when he knew that they faced an arduous voyage home. Whatever thereafter occurred, and historians still disagree regarding the exact cause of the mutiny and the validity of the accusations against Bligh, there is little doubt that the entire affair rests on the contrasting personalities of the main protagonists, the indubitably quick tempered Bligh and the seemingly troubled Christian, a man Bligh took under his wing and personally loaned money to. To further complicate matters, when Christian finally took the ship by force with the aid of seventeen mutineers in April 1789, so many of the 44 crew remained loyal to their commander that there was not sufficient room for them all in the ship's launch that Bligh was cast adrift in and several had to remain behind against their will, with Bligh promising to clear their names if he made it back to England. What followed is the stuff of legend and sealed Bligh's reputation as one of the finest mariners

of his age, as he navigated a seven-metre long open boat some 3,618 nautical miles to safety, in some of the roughest seas and harshest storms imaginable. The original idea had been to put in at Tofua Island to take on fresh water and hopefully additional food, before moving on to Tongatapu, the largest island in Tonga, where Bligh had met the local king on a previous voyage with Captain Cook. The plan had to be changed almost immediately, when the natives on Tofua stoned the quartermaster to death and Bligh and his men barely escaped with their lives. With rations already extremely low, Bligh decided that no more islands would be risked and suggested that he set a course for Coupang in Timor, which he miraculously reached on the 48th day at sea without losing an additional man. Although six of the seventeen crew members to reach Timor would ultimately succumb to illness and the debilitating rigours of such an horrendous ordeal, the fact that Bligh was able to pilot what was basically a small sailing boat the equivalent of over 4,150 land miles in largely unchartered waters, was testament to his remarkable seafaring skill and when he finally returned to England in March 1790, the subsequent court martial cleared him of any blame for the loss of his ship. Meanwhile, the mutineers separated, with Christian agreeing to take some back to Tahiti before he began the search for a less obvious location to hide, knowing that the authorities would attempt to bring the fugitives to justice and were certain to begin their search on Tahiti. He eventually

settled on Pitcairn Island and in January 1790 HMS Bounty was set ablaze and sank in the fittingly named Bounty Bay. Of the eighteen mutineers, only two survived their rebellion by more than ten years and most suffered traumatic deaths. Six were murdered by Polynesian natives on Pitcairn Island, including Christian who was thought to have been shot, and another took his own life on the same island by throwing himself off a cliff. Of the mutineers who returned to Tahiti, two were murdered there and of six captured by the British navy, three were drowned in irons when the frigate HMS Pandora sank on the Great Barrier Reef and three more were hung at Spithead on the Solent. Another is believed to have returned to the navy and been killed in active service in 1797 and the final two died of natural causes on Pitcairn, one in 1800 and the second, John Adams, a few weeks before the 30th anniversary of the mutiny in 1829. Some fine actors have played the respective roles of Bligh and Christian over the years and it is interesting to note that talented and theatrically trained British actors are always chosen to play Bligh, with big Hollywood stars taking the more sympathetic role of Christian. The 1935 black and white film, which was the first version I saw, had the mesmeric Charles Laughton as the despotic Bligh, a few years before his performance as Quasimodo in 'The Hunchback of Notre Dame' would thrill and terrify me in equal measure decades later. Clark Gable, one of the biggest stars in the business at the time, played opposite Laughton as Christian and both men received best actor academy award nominations. In 1962 Trevor Howard, superb in three of my favourite films 'Ryan's Daughter', 'The Offence' and 'The Third Man', turned in a nuanced performance as Bligh, but the character had been marginalised somewhat by Marlon Brando, who played Christian almost as a foppish Englishman and had insisted that the film should concentrate more on the story of the mutineers and not on the complex simmering relationship between the two leads. The 1984 version took the opposite approach and was the only one of the films to highlight that Bligh and Christian had been friends and that Bligh had taken the fairly unusual step of promoting Christian as his second in command during the actual voyage and ahead of more senior officers. With the remarkable Anthony Hopkins in commanding form as Bligh, and it must be said dominating Mel Gibson's weaker portrayal of Christian to some degree, the film attempts to redress the historical balance but ultimately falls between two stools in trying to convince the world that Bligh was actually a misunderstood nautical genius, whilst still trying to bathe Christian in at least a partially heroic light. Captain Bligh landed on Bruny Island on more than one occasion, including in the Bounty in August 1788, and for anyone interested in the maritime history of the island I can heartily recommend the Bligh Museum in Adventure Bay, which is fairly small, but crammed full of fascinating artefacts and memorabilia. Having relayed the story of the mutiny on the Bounty to James during the course of our journey, I spent much of the next couple of hours engrossed in terrible bastardised renditions of only partially accurate quotes from the aforementioned films, mainly repeating my best Charles Laughton impressions, which have always been dire but amuse me at least… *'This is mutiny Mr Christian, mutiny'*. I think that I had probably started on my equally poor Quasimodo impressions by the time that we arrived at our accommodation, a private nature reserve just a couple of minutes walk from South Bruny National Park. As it was fairly late after a full day travelling and exploring the north section of the island, we decided to spend the first evening searching for a long-nosed potoroo around the reserve and the second night at a destination we had been informed was generally productive in terms of eastern quoll sightings. We did not have a great deal of good fortune initially, but our only full day on Bruny was far more successful and would produce the last three new mammals of the tour. The first two, the Afro-Australian fur seal and the New Zealand fur seal were both observed on a fabulous cruise along Bruny's rugged coastline and some of the tallest sea cliffs in all of Australia. I mentioned the itinerant leopard seal to the skipper and although they were aware of its recent presence, it had not been seen on any of their cruises and we were not able to improve on that record. We did encounter some of the albino red-necked wallabies that the island is becoming famous for, as the population with this generally rare genetic mutation has increased to more than two hundred in recent years. Given the number of wallabies culled annually on Bruny, I am not certain how natural these population figures are and it would not surprise me if less of the white ones are shot because they attract tourists. They may also be breeding quolls for the tourists, at least it felt like that along the various stretches of road recommended to us, where we experienced 40 to 50 sightings of at least twenty different quolls. Both colour morphs were present, sometimes running down the road side by side, and in around three hours of spotlighting in the one area, we encountered more quolls than brushtail possums. The big bonus of the evening, if an abundance of quolls does not qualify as a bonus, was our first ever view of a long-nosed potoroo, the last macropod that we had been looking for and our 74th and final mammal of the trip,

excluding a large number of bats and several unidentified small mammals. There are three surviving species of potoroo, as the broad-faced potoroo has either been extinct since 1875, when it was last observed, or at some stage after that date. There is not sufficient data to know the exact cause, beyond that fact that it was another unnatural tragedy of course, but it is thought that a combination of habitat loss and predation by feral cats probably tipped the balance for a species that did appear to occur in high densities. What we do know, is that the red fox could not have been involved on this occasion, as the potoroo was already extinct before foxes reached their former territory in Western Australia. Of the three extant species, the long-footed potoroo and long-nosed potoroo are assessed as vulnerable and near threatened respectively and gilbert's potoroo is critically endangered, which is awful, but better than its previous classification as extinct. It was thought to have been extinct for over a hundred years when the species was rediscovered entirely by accident in Two Peoples Bay Nature Reserve on the south coast of Western Australia in 1994. A student working on her PhD was attempting to catch quokkas for her research and got more than she bargained for when she eventually discovered, it took some time to positively identify the two trapped animals, that she had inadvertently unearthed a species that had not been observed, at least not by anyone who knew what they were looking at, since 1879. Despite extensive surveys, no additional populations have been located and after bushfires killed several potoroos and destroyed much of their habitat at Two Peoples Bay in 2015, there are thought to be only around 50 to 60 remaining. I am intending to gather more information about this animal when I visit Western Australia in December 2017 and will hopefully have an opportunity to support some of the conservation efforts being made to save what is

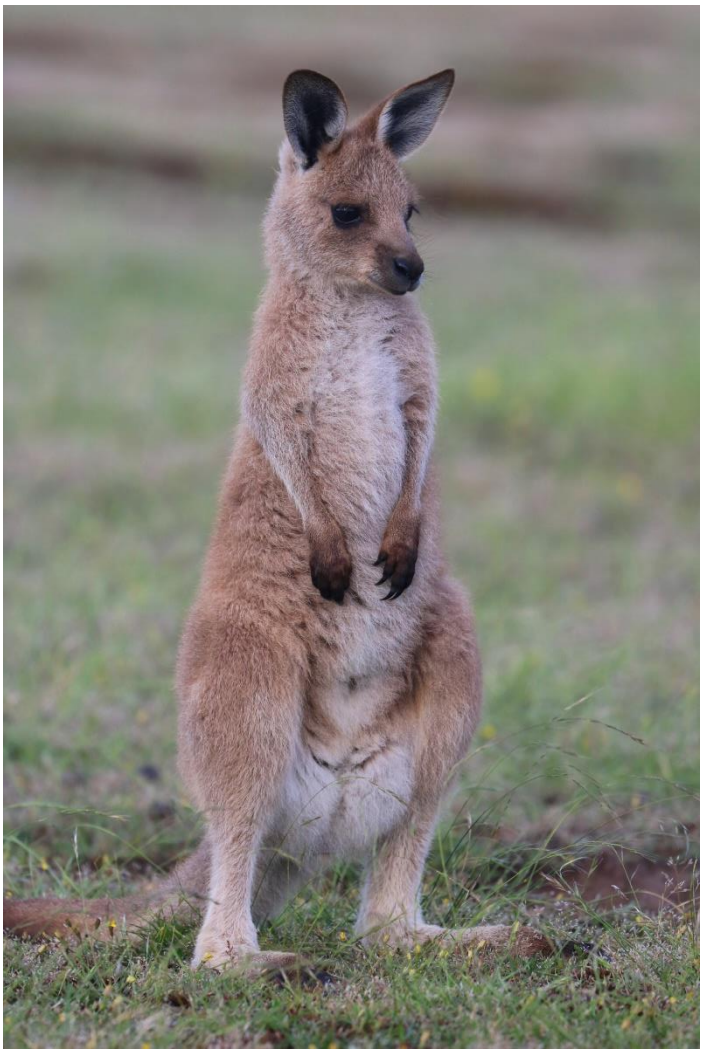
considered to be the world's rarest marsupial and one of the most threatened mammals on earth. The long-nosed variety is at least relatively secure on Bruny, where there are few major predators and none of the carpet pythons that are known to have predated on several gilbert's potoroos on the Tasmanian mainland, particularly at Waychinicup National Park, where a large enclosure has been built to protect them from invasive and feral predators. Foxes are not an issue on Bruny Island either and I am not convinced they are elsewhere in Tasmania, at least not in sustainable numbers, despite recent concerns to the contrary. On their website the Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service state that *'no physical evidence of fox activity has been collected in Tasmania since July 2011'*, but I am not certain how current that statement is, as I saw photographic proof of one apparently killed by a vehicle in northern Tasmania just before we travelled. To further muddy the waters, there have been accusations that evidence of their presence in Tasmania has been fabricated in order to secure additional funding for the Fox Eradication Program that the Tasmanian Government operated between 2006 and 2014, but was ultimately terminated two years ahead of schedule. The programme apparently cost some $40 million and an anti-corruption inquiry concluded that those involved might have *'fabricated or falsified evidence by placing fox scat into the landscape. However the strength of the available evidence is not sufficient to make a conclusive finding on this issue.'* If that conclusion appears to evade the issue to some degree, two facts were established beyond any doubt. The first is that there have certainly been live foxes on Tasmania in the past two decades and the second is that some evidence of their presence has been falsified, either by employees of the eradication programme, hoaxers, for whatever bizarre reason, or by individuals looking to fraudulently claim the $5,000 reward on offer for having *'killed a fox within the state of Tasmania.'* Possibly a combination of all three were involved, but it remains highly encouraging that the reward was never claimed and I can only hope that this does indeed indicate a complete absence of foxes in Tasmania, for although they are a favourite animal of mine, and have been inexcusably persecuted in so many countries, they obviously have no place within such a potentially vulnerable ecosystem. Despite such a short stay, our visit to Bruny had been an unqualified success and on the way back from a frankly surreal evening with so many quolls, we experienced only our second water rat sighting of the tour, when I spotted a lone animal swimming in the ocean and we were able to watch it from a nearby jetty for about fifteen minutes. Our wildlife encounters would be less frequent and less spectacular now, as our final destination was Port Arthur on the Tasman Peninsula, a former penal colony and another of the eleven Australian convict sites that have been given UNESCO World Heritage status. I have only visited one of those sites, but if any are better preserved or more

atmospheric than Port Arthur, then they must be very impressive indeed, as the settlement here is an historical tour de force, an evocative and emotional window to the past, through which we can watch real people and real lives, as opposed to dry facts and meaningless statistics. Named after the then governor of Van Diemen's Land George Arthur, the community at Port Arthur was founded as a timber station in 1830 and the first prisoners did not arrive until 1833 when the Macquarie Harbour Penal Station on Sarah Island was closed and the convicts transferred to Port Arthur. Macquarie Harbour was actually the penal settlement that the famous murderer and cannibal Alexander Pearce twice escaped from and on each occasion he killed fellow fugitives and dined on their flesh. Pearce went to the gallows at Hobart in 1824, the same gallows that Thomas Jeffries, another cannibalistic killer, would die upon two years later. By 1840 the penitentiary held over 1,100 prisoners and had gained the reputation as being one of the harshest of the fourteen punitive colonies spread across Australia, eight of which were in Tasmania, with a fifteenth on Norfolk Island in the South Pacific. With the last convicts transported to Van Diemen's Land arriving in 1853, prisoner numbers began to decline and in 1877 the infamous prison was closed. What remains is a superb historical memorial to the past and whilst the wonderfully preserved buildings and illuminating ruins all help to set the evocative scene, it is the individual stories that bring the cold stone buildings to life, many of which are sympathetically presented within several of the terrific exhibits. The cemetery on the Isle of the Dead and the isolation units of The Separate Prison are particularly haunting, as is the simple Memorial Garden that commemorates a far more recent aberration, the 1996 massacre of 35 people, including women and children as young as six and three, by a lone gunman. Excluding the slaughter of indigenous Aborigines, the death tolls of which have numbered hundreds in some cases, this was the single worst mass murder in Australian history and the garden features the shell of the former café, in which twenty people died in a matter of seconds. Many of the guides still employed at Port Arthur lost people they cared for on that peaceful Sunday in April and as they choose not to use the name of the man who changed life forever in this beautiful part of the world, I have chosen to respect their wishes and do the same. There are lots of sources that provide more information on that atrocity, but I would instead recommend, if you are interested in history at least, that you concentrate your efforts on the fascinating convict story, as there is so much more to be told than I have been able to relay and the Port Arthur Historic Site website is a great place to start. Had it not been for another sea cruise, which yielded Afro-Australian fur seals and common bottlenose dolphins, as well as splendid views of the imposing dolerite cliffs of the Tasman Peninsula, I would have been delighted to tarry, but we also had one final Tasmanian Devil breeding centre to visit and I was not going to miss the opportunity to say farewell to an animal that I had very much taken to my heart. Given its remote setting and restricted access, the Tasman Peninsula was the perfect location for a prison, as Eaglehawk Neck, the narrow strip of land connecting the Tasman and Forestier peninsulas, and consequently mainland Tasmania, was very easy to guard. Both peninsulas were further isolated by the manmade Denison Canal, which was completed in 1905 and separates the entire landmass from the main island of Tasmania. The convict settlement had been closed by this stage of course, but the combination of natural and artificial barriers are now having unforseen and beneficial consequences for the Tasmanian devil, as it has been possible to introduce and protect a disease free population on the peninsula, after the original animals were all removed in order to create a healthy environment entirely free of

the deadly infection that is threatening the very existence of these susceptible creatures. This is the only population of biologically secure devils currently living within their natural range and although a large number of the reintroduced animals have been killed on the deadly Tasmanian roads, the surviving devils are breeding successfully and the population is increasing. The centre that we visited is called the Tasmanian Devil Unzoo and the owners are working at the very forefront of devil conservation. In addition to breeding animals for release, they maintain a devil-proof barrier at Dunalley to ensure that no devils can access the peninsula and possibly spread the facial tumour disease and are also involved in the implementation of a virtual fencing system, in order to drastically reduce the number of devils being killed by Tasmanian motorists. They have already devoted a large number of alarms to the initiative and have launched a funding campaign to try and protect all kinds of wildlife along additional stretches of road. If you would like to

support this important work on behalf of these wonderful creatures, there is a link to the campaign on the Unzoo website, which can be accessed at www.tasmaniandevilunzoo.com.au. Situated on a former fruit farm among 25 acres of sympathetically restored local flora, the Unzoo itself is an interesting concept that involves barely any caged animals and a complete absence of boundary fences, all of which have been removed to enable wild animals to come and go as they please. The enclosures have been swapped for nesting boxes and instead of peering at captive animals through glass or bars, the visitor can explore a variety of natural habitat. There are still animal attractions and of course the devils, but in a way the Unzoo more resembles a nature reserve than an actual zoo and consequently the genuinely wild sightings are totally unpredictable. It would be a wonderful place to explore at night, but we had already arranged to meet a local guide near Hobart to go spotlighting on our final evening and the highlight of our time at Unzoo was one last short-beaked echidna. This was only our tenth view of an echidna in seven weeks and although it shattered our rather curious record of having observed either none or three at every destination, there was something very satisfying about seeing this unusual creature again in such a harmonious setting and we travelled back to Hobart in relatively good spirits, despite the palpably depressing fact that we would fly home the next day. Our final evening also went extremely well, with last views of eastern barred bandicoots, long-nosed potoroos and multiple common brushtail possums, which, so accustomed had I become to these pesky bungling beasts, I was struggling to accept I would not continue to see them on a daily basis back in England. If there was perhaps a resigned air of inevitability about proceedings, it was understandable, as it had taken me a lifetime to reach this fabulous continent and it was always going to be difficult to leave. Many of the issues that I have raised in this report are far from comfortable and several reflect badly on both the Australian government, which has one of the worst wildlife welfare and conservation records on the planet, and, in some cases, her citizens as well. The levels of cruelty and destruction are simply inexcusable in a contemporary society and I wish that more Australians would take responsibility for their wildlife, certainly regarding the casual manner in which they kill millions of animals on their roads and also in terms of the atrocities that they allow to be committed in their name each and every year. A disastrous combination of greed, apathy and weak leadership has resulted in almost two and a half centuries of woeful decision making and more species have paid the ultimate price for the lack of moral judgement and shocking self-interest displayed in Australia, than anywhere else on earth. I intend to further explore these and other conservation issues following my Western Australia tour in December 2017, but for now I would add that, despite these fundamental problems, as a wildlife destination, and as a breathtakingly beautiful land for

that matter, in many respects Australia is beyond compare. Given the astounding array of superlative wildlife, the majority of which was entirely new to me, and an almost unparalleled freedom to explore a huge variety of dynamic ecosystems more or less without restriction, I cannot remember the last time a single trip fulfilled quite as many boyhood dreams and aspirations as this one. It also produced probably my favourite collection of photographs, not because they are exceptional by any means, but because they provide a real flavour of this extraordinarily diverse country. I would love to know exactly what we saw in all and have estimated that we encountered between 400 and 500 mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians, a figure that you can at least treble when you include fish, crustaceans, molluscs, insects and arachnids etc. It was certainly a monumental way to end what was a strange year in many respects, as it has been a long time since I had a tour cancelled and whilst this reduced the number of trips to just four, two of them were seven-week epics. All contained sightings and individual moments that I will never forget and while reviewing the year I decided that I would select only one cherished memory of each of my three major tours, so India, Alaska and Australia, as there were so many in Australia alone, I would basically have to start this report again to include them all. From our Indian subcontinent odyssey the decision was relatively simple, despite some stiff competition in the form of eight different cats, one of which was an elusive caracal. For both James and I, and we made the decision independently, the undoubted highlight was our magical time with a young red panda in Singalila National Park in West Bengal. We had spent several days searching in difficult circumstances following the tragic death of two cubs just before our arrival and it was a massive emotional release to finally encounter this entirely healthy and adorable creature after such awful news. Alaska was a reasonably easy decision as well, again notwithstanding several momentous sightings, including a rare Canada lynx, some spectacular muskox and an amazing walrus colony. However, it is not every day that you have 800lbs of rampant grizzly charging directly at you and we have often since asked each other what exactly would have happened if that doomed salmon had been just that fraction stronger or faster and had actually reached us. I guess that we may not have had the immediate opportunity to see a Tasmanian devil and that would have been the real disaster, as this animal, and in particular the curious and courageous little soul that came to say hello when it realised there were no longer any barriers between us, was the undoubted star of our first grand Australian adventure. Of all my many childhood ambitions involving this distant and captivating land, the one that excited me the most was the prospect of one day seeing a Tasmanian devil and to be able to finally realise that dream with my own son was a priceless moment. I had no idea how hopelessly endearing the devils were of course or that I would first encounter them in the midst of such a catastrophic epidemic, as this is an animal fighting for its very existence and whilst it is tremendously gratifying to see so many people actively involved in its survival, conservation on this immense red continent cannot simply be a matter of the devil we know. We have lost too many species already and I am not only talking about historical calamities like the Tasmanian tiger, as the latest Australian mammal extinction was announced a few months before we travelled. The Bramble Cay melomys, a rodent living on a small island in the Great Barrier Reef, is thought to be the first extinction as a result of climate change, as the rising seas and storm surges destroyed most of the vegetation on the island and thereby the rodent's only food source. As smitten as I am by the Tasmanian devil, I have no idea why Australian conservationists did not consider the Bramble Cay melomys equally worth saving, as it had been classified as critically endangered for two decades and had not been observed at all since 2009. Are we now only conserving animals according to their popularity, as formal recovery plans, including a captive breeding programme, had even been prepared to ensure its survival, but they were not implemented due to cost and instead another irreplaceable species was allowed to disappear from our world. How many more will we let slip away before we say enough is enough and when will one of them be something you finally care about?



No.	Species	Scientific Name	Notes
1	Dingo	Canis Dingo	Three at different locations around Atherton and one at Lamington.
2	Tasmanian Devil	Sarcophilus harrisii	At least four at Narawntapu, one at Cradle Mountain and two on Maria Island, as well as several habituated animals at Loongana.
3	Spotted-tailed Quoll	Dasyurus maculatus	Two or three around our accommodation on the mainland, two at Narawntapu and at least one habituated animal at Loongana.
4	Northern Quoll	Dasyurus hallucatus	Two individuals in the same evening near Tinaroo Dam.
5	Eastern Quoll	Dasyurus viverrinus	One sighting at Narawntapu, but easily observed at Mount Field and Mount William and extremely common at one location on North Bruny Island.
6	Brown Antechinus	Antechinus stuartii	Brief view on the side of a tree at Lamington.
7	Swamp Antechinus	Antechinus minimus	Two extended sightings at Narawntapu.
8	Kultarr	Antechinomys laniger	Several animals within one small area on a night walk at Bladensburg.
9	Stripe-faced Dunnart	Sminthopsis macroura	Several sightings at Bladensburg.
10	Platypus	Ornithorhynchus anatinus	Observed at seven locations on the mainland and one in Tasmania.
11	Short-beaked Echidna	Tachyglossus aculeatus	Three each at Carnarvon Gorge, Loongana and Cradle Mountain and one at Port Arthur.
12	Koala	Phascolarctos cinereus	Five on Magnetic Island, one at night near Lamington and one at Noosa National Park north of Brisbane.
13	Common Wombat	Vombatus ursinus	Animals with severe mange at Narawntapu and Loongana and healthy individuals at Cradle Mountain and Maria Island.
14	Brumby	Equus ferus caballus ssp	Small herd at Carnarvon Gorge.
15	Greater Glider	Petauroides volans	Routinely observed at Carnarvon Gorge.
16	Yellow-bellied Glider	Petaurus australis	Several encounters around Atherton and one of five glider species observed at Carnarvon Gorge.

17	Sugar Glider	Petaurus breviceps	Extended sightings at Atherton and Carnarvon Gorge.
18	Squirrel Glider	Petaurus norfolcensis	Observed at Carnarvon Gorge only.
19	Feathertail Glider	Acrobates pygmaeus	One at our accommodation at Carnarvon Gorge.
20	Striped Possum	Dactylopsila trivirgata	Recorded at two locations around Atherton.
21	Lemuroid Ringtail Possum	Hemibelideus lemuroides	Several at one location on one night walk near Atherton.
22	Common Ringtail Possum	Pseudocheirus peregrinus	The most commonly observed ringtail possum.
23	Green Ringtail Possum	Pseudochirops archeri	Three individuals at one site near Atherton.
24	Herbert River Ringtail Possum	Pseudochirulus herbertensis	One individual high in the canopy for an extended period near Atherton.
25	Short-eared Brushtail Possum	Trichosurus caninus	Four or five encounters at Lamington.
26	Common Brushtail Possum	Trichosurus vulpecula	Recorded in large numbers at more or less every destination on the mainland and in Tasmania.
27	Northern Brown Bandicoot	Isoodon macrourus	The most commonly observed bandicoot species on the mainland.
28	Southern Brown Bandicoot	Isoodon obesulus	Three or four around the campground on Maria Island.
29	Eastern Barred Bandicoot	Perameles gunnii	Common at Mount Field and observed at several locations in Tasmania.
30	Long-nosed Bandicoot	Perameles nasuta	Regular sightings at several destinations in low numbers.
31	Rufous Bettong	Aepyprymnus rufescens	Two around Atherton, three on the exit road out of Undara and fairly common on the mainland thereafter.
32	Tasmanian Bettong	Bettongia gaimardi	Low numbers at a small private forest near St Marys on the northeast coast of Tasmania.
33	Northern Bettong	Bettongia tropica	Four near Tinaroo Dam and one at Davies Creek.
34	Long-nosed Potoroo	Potorous tridactylus	One on Bruny Island whilst watching eastern quolls and several on mainland Tasmania at our guide's property.
35	Musky Rat Kangaroo	Hypsiprymnodon moschatus	Low numbers around a lodge at Kuranda and one at Mount Lewis.
36	Lumholtz's Tree Kangaroo	Dendrolagus lumholtzi	Two sightings during the day of the same mother and young and a different adult at night at Atherton.
37	Tasmanian Pademelon	Thylogale billardierii	Common throughout Tasmania, excluding the islands.
38	Red-legged Pademelon	Thylogale stigmatica	First recorded at our accommodation near Mount Lewis and observed at several subsequent locations.
39	Red-necked Pademelon	Thylogale thetis	Routinely observed at Lamington.
40	Agile Wallaby	Macropus agilis	Observed at several locations between Daintree and Eungella.
41	Antilopine Wallaroo	Macropus antilopinus	Group of four at Undara.
42	Black-striped Wallaby	Macropus dorsalis	Small population near Imbil to the west of Noosa.
43	Eastern Grey Kangaroo	Macropus giganteus	Observed at most locations, often in large numbers, including in northeast Tasmania.
44	Whiptail Wallaby	Macropus parryi	First observed at Undara and fairly common thereafter.
45	Common Wallaroo	Macropus robustus	Several individuals and mothers with young at Undara.
46	Red-necked Wallaby	Macropus rufogriseus	First recorded at Lamington and routinely observed at several locations in Tasmania.
47	Red Kangaroo	Macropus rufus	Healthy numbers at Bladensburg.
48	Allied Rock Wallaby	Petrogale assimilis	Small population on Magnetic Island.
49	Herbert's Rock Wallaby	Petrogale herberti	Low numbers at our accommodation at Carnarvon Gorge.
50	Unadorned Rock Wallaby	Petrogale inornata	Seven at distance at Eungella Dam.
51	Mareeba Rock Wallaby	Petrogale mareeba	Small colony at Granite Gorge near Mareeba and two at Undara.
52	Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby	Petrogale penicillata	Five or six on a private reserve near Lamington.
53	Swamp Wallaby	Wallabia bicolor	Viewed briefly at several destinations and well at Undara.
54	Feral Pig	Sus scrofa scrofa ssp	Small herd at Bladensburg.
55	European Hare	Lepus europaeus	Good views of individuals near Lamington and at our accommodation near Warwick.
56	European Rabbit	Oryctolagus cuniculus	Widespread in several areas on the mainland and in Tasmania.

57	Fawn-footed Melomys	Melomys cervinipes	Abundant at our accommodation near Mount Lewis.
58	House Mouse	Mus musculus	Several at various locations.
59	Common Water Rat	Hydromys chrysogaster	Extended views of two and three at Narawntapu and one in the sea at Bruny Island.
60	Bush Rat	Rattus fuscipes	Recorded at a number of locations with extended views on private land near Lamington.
61	Cape York Rat	Rattus leucopus	Several encounters at night at Atherton, possibly of the same two or three individuals.
62	Australian Swamp Rat	Rattus lutreolus	Two sightings at Lamington.
63	Black Rat	Rattus rattus	Several on Green Island and elsewhere.
64	White-tailed Giant Rat	Uromys caudimaculatus	Prolonged view of a lone animal near Tinaroo Dam.
65	Black Flying Fox	Pteropus alecto	First observed at our accommodation on Magnetic Island and in large numbers on the mainland.
66	Spectacled Flying Fox	Pteropus conspicillatus	Low numbers at roosts on Green Island and near Atherton.
67	Grey-headed Flying Fox	Pteropus poliocephalus	Large colony on the edge of a road near Lamington.
68	Little Red Flying Fox	Pteropus scapulatus	Large numbers at several sites on the mainland.
69	New Zealand Fur Seal	Arctocephalus forsteri	Colony on a boat tour from Bruny Island.
70	Afro-Australian Fur Seal	Arctocephalus pusillus	Relatively large colonies on boat tours from Bruny Island and Port Arthur.
71	Short-beaked Common Dolphin	Delphinus delphis	Pod of about 30 on a boat trip out of Binalong Bay.
72	Australian Humpback Dolphin	Sousa sahulensis	Low numbers close to the shore on a marine cruise at Moreton Island.
73	Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphin	Tursiops aduncus	Two on the same boat tour at Moreton Island.
74	Common Bottlenose Dolphin	Tursiops truncatus	Several small pods on the Moreton Island boat tour.


Australia
Cape York
Darwin
Kakadu
NORTHERN TERRITORY
Daintree
Cairns
Atherton
Great Barrier Reef
Broome
Indian Ocean
Karlamilyi
Alice Springs
Bladensburg
WESTERN AUSTRALIA
Uluru
Simpson Desert
QUEENSLAND
Pacific Ocean
Carnarvon
Gibson Desert
Great Victoria Desert
Brisbane
Gold Coast
Lamington
Geraldton
Lake Eyre
Nullarbor
SOUTH AUSTRALIA
NEW SOUTH WALES
Perth
Sydney
Adelaide
Canberra
Kangaroo Island
VICTORIA
Melbourne
Bass Straight
Southern Ocean
TASMANIA
Hobart
1000 km
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Iron Range
Great Barrier Reef
Jack River
Daintree
Gulf of Carpentaria
Coral Sea
Port Douglas
Staaten River
Cairns
Atherton
Pacific Ocean
Magnetic Island
Townsville
Mount Isa
Whitsunday Islands
200 km
Eungella
Mackay
Great Barrier Reef
Queensland
Bladensburg
Longreach
Rockhampton
Simpson Desert
Carnarvon
Fraser Island
Moreton Island
Brisbane
Lamington
Gold Coast
Currawinya
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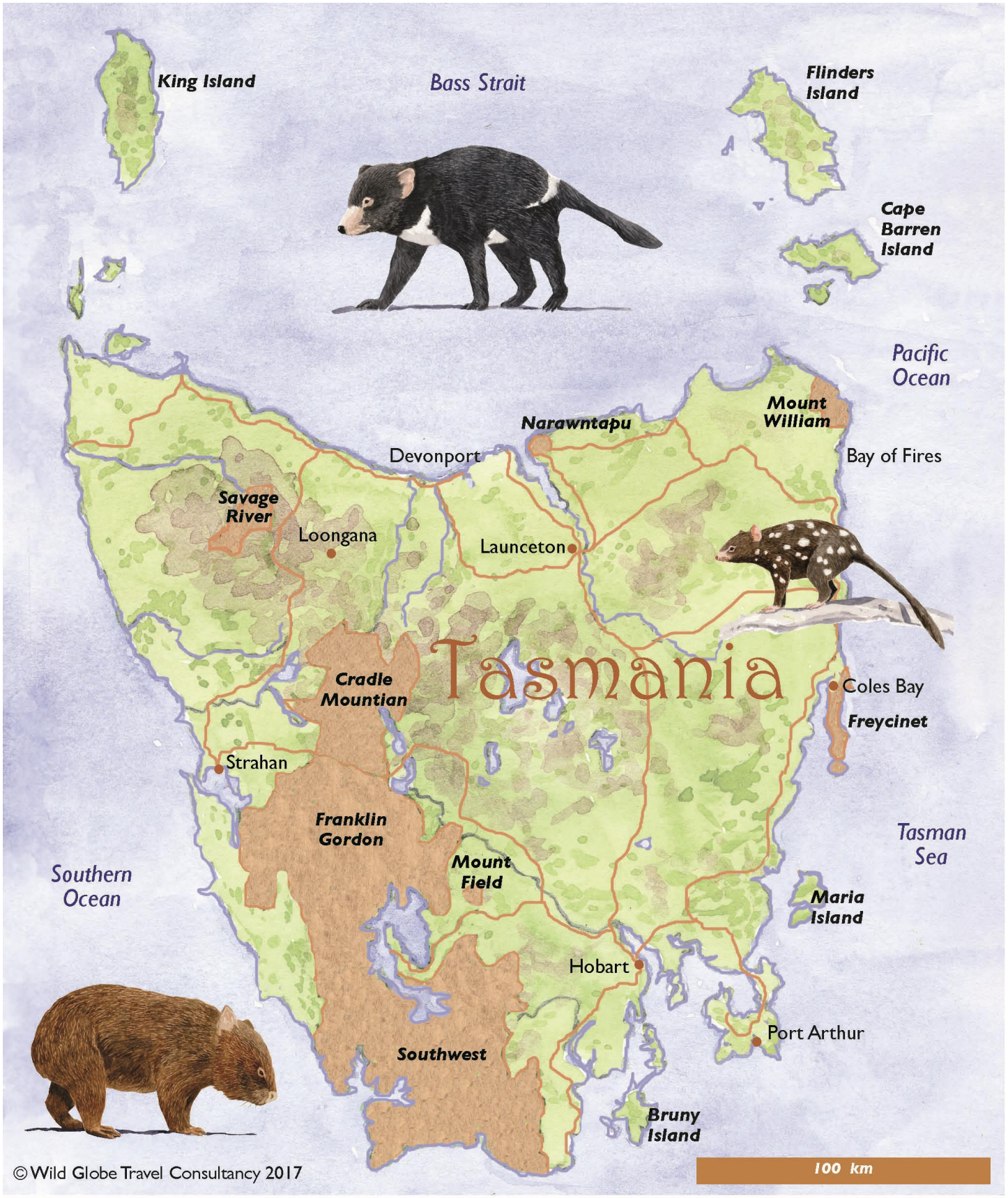
New South Wales



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