# DESTINATION TASMANIA (July 2006) - UPDATE INFORMATION FOR VISITING BIRDERS AND MAMMALOGISTS

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The magical island of Tasmania, the real 'down under' of Australia, is an interesting region of endemism, both in regard to birds and mammals. The following text provides some up-to-date information for independent travelers birding and mammal-watching in Tasmania, from a viewpoint of a fellow traveler who visited the region for 8 days in July 2006. The information is based on subjective impressions made on a short trip, and should be judged accordingly. There are references to main target bird and mammal species and subspecies, but no comprehensive lists. The sites visited included, among others, Waterworks Rd, Peter Murrell Sanctuary, Bruny Island, Bronte Park, Lake St. Clair, Warrawee Sanctuary, Narawntapu N.P. and Oatlands Reservoir.

I arrived in Hobart on a delayed Quantas flight from Melbourne, at 22.00. Without a reservation, this was too late to get a room in the city, as all budget options had already closed for the night. I had tried to make a reservation in Hobart, but had failed due to outdated contact details. In any case, there would not have been much time to sleep before sunrise. As the weather was clear and warmer than expected, I opted for spending the night at Waterworks Rd (cf. below), in the hope of spotting a **Masked Owl**. Provisions were bought at Midpoint, few kilometers to the east from airport junction, were a 24 hour petrol station is located. This is also the station which serves airport car rental customers. There is no petrol available at the airport itself.

Good experiences with Avis Tasmania at the Hobart International. Perfect, professional service with a friendly touch. They even gave me a better rate instead of the quoted one, reducing the bill by AUD 100. The new Toyota Corolla was adequate, even though not quite as comfortable and easy to handle as the Hyundai Elantra I had the previous week (SW Australia). The people of Tasmania were in general quite agreeable, with two exceptions, and none of them had six fingers and two heads, against the testimony of several Ozzies I had met in Queensland and West Australia.

In winter, the weather tends to be more pleasant in the northern part of the island (Bronte Park, Lake St. Clair, La Trobe, Narawntapu) than in the south (Bruny Island, Waterworks Rd, Peter Murrell Sanctuary). In the south, the temperatures varied between +2 - +12 C, with clouds, frequent rain and even hail storms in between periods of calm and sunny weather. Winter days are also considerably shorter than summer days. In the north, sun was shining most of the time and temperatures were around 5 degrees higher than in the south. On my drive from La Trobe to Hobart via Launceston on the last day, the difference was very clear. Somewhere north of Oatlands, the cloudless sunny skies suddenly turned 100% cloudy, with much less light and occasional cold showers of rain. Bring woolly clothes with you if you visit Tasmania in winter! I wish I had had a woolen pullover and a rain coat with me.



Photo 1. Winter in South Tasmania.

# WATERWORKS RD (HOBART- FERNTREE)

Said to be a stake out for **Masked Owls**, even though most people appear to fail here (not really a surprise, considering the task and climate). Could not find the eastern access in the darkness of the rainy night and drove to Ferntree, from were the signposted road was easy to find. There is a shelter in the beginning of the road, under which I changed my travel gear to more comfortable and warmer clothes, in the heavy, cold rain. Later, the weather improved and stayed fine till the next morning. Drove down and up the road, past a reservoir, until reaching a residential area close to the Hobart-Kingston highway. A 400 000 candela spotlight was used to spot the birds and animals, and much time was spent listening for the owls, without success. The lower part of the road, before and after the large reservoir on the right, proved to be especially productive. Later on, slept five comfortable hours in the warm car, before making another round, and proceeding to Kingston and Peter Murrell Sanctuary, at sunrise.

# **Birds**

**Tawny Frogmouth**: Four with great views by the road. Appeared after midnight.

**Grey Goshawk**: One white morph bird sleeping on a tree branch above the reservoir, in the tall forest.

# **Mammals**

**Red-necked Wallaby**: 3 pretty tame ones at the lower end of Waterworks Rd.

**Long-nosed Potoroo**: 3 hopping on road in the upper section of Waterworks Rd, and the nearby Ferntree, + 1 roadkill.

Common Brushtail Possum: 1 at Waterworks Rd (reddish brown color phase).

**Eastern Barred Bandicoot**: Two seen in the lower part of Waterworks Rd, the only ones of the trip.

European Rabbit: 2 at Waterworks Rd.

#### PETER MURRELL SANCTUARY

Made one visit here early in a cold morning with drizzle. The first impression was not very favorable: the place appeared as dead as a dodo. Four 'Vomitbirds' (Yellow Wattlebird) were calling by the entrance track, but the trees and the pond of the sanctuary were completely deserted. Later on, as the morning advanced, mixed flocks of birds begun to appear in bushes and trees behind the pond. Brown Thornbills (diedemensis), Yellow-throated Honeyeaters and a Dusky Robin were among the best ones. Kelp Gulls and Forest Ravens were common, just like almost anywhere in Tasmania. A small party of Musk Lorikeets were foraging in the trees.

The first (8) **Tasmanian Native-hen** were seen on an overgrown field by the highway about one km to the south, where a nice wetland with plenty of birdlife was discovered on the right side of the road. Hundreds of **Masked Lapwings** on fields and pastures.

Welcome Inn in Kingston, the place where many visiting birders used to stay, has been closed years ago even though it still exists in the Internet. The Kingston Woolworths, on the other hand, remained a convenient place to stock up before three nights on the Bruny Island, and again before continuing to the north. It is a good idea to buy plenty of fresh food and fill up your car with cheap petrol before entering the island. Bring everything you need with you is a sound advice, also according to the islanders. The self-catering cottages on the island have the storage and cooking equipment you need to prepare nice meals from the ingredients. Petrol can also be purchased at Adventure Bay, for a reasonable rate.

## **BRUNY ISLAND (LUNAWANNA-ALONNAH)**

Bruny Island is the place for Tasmanian endemics, great sceneries, history (sometimes rather grim; cf. below) and peaceful surroundings, a short distance from Hobart. The ferry from Kettering operates throughout the day (timetables in the Internet; e.g. http://www. bruny.com.au/bruny-island-info.htm) and costs AUD 25 (sedan, return trip). Stayed at the Adventure Bay Holiday Village, at the end of the Adventure Bay road, in the Linga Longa cottage (AUD 85 per night). The cottage really had it all despite its

relatively small size: fully equipped kitchen, a small lounge, bedroom with a twin bed and TV, heater, a bathroom with hot shower and easy access at night. There is petrol and groceries available in the nearby village shop.



Photo 2. The Linga Longa cottage, Adventure Bay Holiday Village.

An interesting feature of the otherwise almost deserted (low season) holiday village were its tame Mallards (and hybrid MallardXPacific Black Duck), who were waiting... oh, well... demanding handouts in the mornings. As soon as they saw that lights were on in the cottage, a begging chorus of dozen ducks started their eerie concert behind the door, in a classic 'hitchcockian' style. Eventually, I gave up and fed them, sitting on the patio. The boldest drakes climbed on my lap, and had to be discouraged. The birds remained relatively silent as long as there was bread (their favorite) and salad available, but soon started their concert once again, bowing and begging until I left.

Bruny Island is a laid back place with small rural communities, good roads and beautiful sceneries. The sea is almost always present, but the waters are shallow, with the exception of Cape Bruny, in the southern end of the island. In July 2006, the sites visited included the following ones:

**Mavista Falls Trail**: Located close to Adventure Bay. Take the Mt. Mangana gravel road, and turn left after few hundred meters, continuing along this road till the signposted Mavista Falls picnic site. An easy to walk trail follows a stream uphill, and produced all the target species on the first 300 meters. Other endemics can be seen by the access road, just before Mavista Falls.

**Mt. Mangana Rd**: Not many birds along this road. All the viewpoints had pretty limited views over the canopy. My advice: Do not spend much time here.

Bruny Neck: A Blue Penguin and Short-tailed Shearwater colony; the latter being away in winter.

**Adventure Bay Holiday Village**: Surprising variety of birds in the gardens and on the lawns around the buildings.

**Cape Bruny Lighthouse**: Located in the South Bruny Island National Park, an expensive place to visit with good seawatching, weather permitting. The access is AUD 20 per day, after a recent (excessive) hike.

**McCracken Gully**: A Private Forest Reserve. Not only the best site for Fortyspotted Pardalotes, the star species of Bruny Island, but for a variety of other passerines. Leaving the ferry landing, turn left to Barnes Bay at km 6,5, 1 km before the main intersection to the north (Dennes Point, Barnes Bay). Continue about 1 km to the gully with a small bridge. A site map is also available at the Adventure Bay Holiday Village.

**North Bruny Island Loop**: The road to Dennes Point, Killora and Barnes Bay has plenty of birds and good farmland habitats, especially around Barnes Bay, Killora and around the main junction on the Bruny Island Rd (to Dennes Point, Barnes Bay).



Photo 3. Part of the large boardwalk at the Bruny Neck Blue Penguin colony.



Photo 4. Life on the beach.



Photo 5. Cape Bruny.



Photo 6. Lunawanna-alonnah.

Originally, Bruny Island was called Lunawanna-alonnah, the name still existing in the names of two South Bruny Island settlements: Lunawanna and Alonnah. The story of Truganini, one of the last Aboriginals of Tasmania, tells volumes of the fate of the original inhabitants. At the age of 17, she witnessed the stabbing murder of her mother by men from a whaling ship. Later, sealers kidnapped her two sisters, and sold them as slaves. Timber-getters throw her fiancé to sea from a boat, cutting off his hands with axes when he tried to climb back, being not able to swim. Truganini was then repeatedly raped. Her brother was killed and her stepmother kidnapped by escaped convicts. Her father Mangana (after whom Mt. Mangana apparently is named) was devastated and died within months. No wonder the original inhabitants of Lunawanna-alonnah have disappeared!

Having lost all of her family, Truganini worked as a guide and interpreter for George Robinson, a colonial officer who was appointed to persuade Aborigines to peacefully give up their land. A promise that everybody would be returned to their homelands after a period of exile was ultimately broken. Truganini spent many years at a camp on Flinders Island, where Aboriginals were 're-educated' to give up their culture and identity. She rebelled, escaping and being involved in attacks on white men. Two years after her death in 1876, the Royal Society of Tasmania put her bones on a public display, as a scientific curiosity, against her well-expressed prior will.

British colonialism knew no limits in its exploitations. It took 100 years for the Aboriginal community to get Truganini's remains back, to be cremated and sprinkled over the waters of the D'Entrecasteaux Channel, by her home island, Lunawanna-alonnah. Her

story is now told to people who visit the Bruny Neck penguin rookery, on one of its information boards, apparently against the will of some islanders. In July 2006, a local man at a mainland petrol station advised me, a tourist: "Nothing dangerous in Tasmania, except mixed breed Aboriginals. They are a bad lot. Do not trust them". Fortunately, this is not the whole picture of Australia.

## **Birds**

**Blue Penguin**: In winter, the penguins appear to return to their Bruny Neck colony well after sunset, being difficult to observe. I waited for them on two occasions without success. Plenty of calls were, however, heard two hours after darkness had set, with one individual standing on the road in car headlights, as I passed by on my way to North Bruny Island. At the one calm moonlit night, the penguins created an incredible chorus of wailing and yapping calls, winter being their mating season.

**Shy Albatross**: At least 10 *cauta* and about 20 *salvini* (**Salvin's Albatross**) in three hours at Cape Bruny lighthouse.

**Australian Gannet**: Only 5 at Cape Bruny.

Common Diving-Petrel: Over 50 seen at Cape Bruny in three hours.

**Tasmanian Native-Hen**: Common on the island, with several rather tame ones at the Adventure Bay Holiday Village.

**Black-faced Cormorant**: Common, especially on the shores of North Bruny Island, but also in the south.

**Whistling Kite**: One about 8 km from ferry landing to Adventure Bay. Appears to be regular nowadays.

**Masked Owl**: Fortunately, my last night on the island was completely calm with clear skies and full moon. Consequently, two individuals were discovered calling at Alonnah (on the right, about 3 km before village, when approached from Bruny Neck) and Lunawanna (on the left, about 300 m after Inala farm/guesthouse). Other, rather extensive searches in the north of the island did not produce any owls (windy weather).

**Tawny Frogmouth**: One seen by the road north of Bruny Neck.

**Kelp Gull**: Common; hundreds (e.g. Cloudy Bay).

**Pacific Gull**: Only few individuals (pacificus).

**Green Rosella**: A large party of 60 at ferry landing. Others (hundreds) in a variety of habitats, including deep forest at the Mavista Falls Trail.

**Eastern Rosella**: Two at Barnes Bay, North Bruny Island.

**Strongbilled Honeyeater**: A party of 15 few hundred meters before Mavista Falls picnic site was the only record for this species with sometimes unpredictable seasonal movements.

**Blackheaded Honeyeater**: Very common and conspicuous in the forested parts of the island.

**Yellow-throated Honeyeater**: Only seen on the North Island, e.g. at McCracken Gully.

Crescent Honeyeater: A few, esp. at McCracken Gully.

**Tawny-crowned Honeyeater**: Four at Cloudy Bay, in the dry bush.

**Yellow Wattlebird**: Scarce on the South Bruny Island; several dozen on the North Bruny Island, e.g. McCracken Gully.

**Forty-spotted Pardalote**: Each visit to McCracken Gully produced 1 to 4 birds in the White (Manna) Gum trees. This is at the moment the easiest site to locate this attractive endemic.

**Scrubtit**: Readily seen (2) at the Mavista Falls trail; excellent close views.

**Tasmanian Scrubwren**: Species or subspecies, 3 at the Mavista Falls trail and others elsewhere.

**Tasmanian Thornbill**: Common; esp. along the Mavista Falls access road.

**Dusky Robin**: One resident at Adventure Bay Holiday Village, in bushes by Linga Longa. Otherwise, only 4 seen.

**Pink Robin**: An inquisitive adult male at the beginning of the Mavista Falls trail.

Flame Robin: Numerous on the island, e.g. Adventure Bay and S of Killora.

**Scarlet Robin**: Numerous on the island, e.g. Adventure Bay and S of Killora.

**Olive Whistler**: Great views of an individual on the lawn in front of the Linga Longa cabin, at the Adventure Bay Holiday Village. Otherwise, 2 seen in the forested parts of the South Bruny Island.

**Striated Fieldwren**: One seen by the road to Cloudy Bay.

**Beautiful Firetail**: Two individuals in roadside hedges at two locations (Alonnah & Lunawanna); probably common but relatively difficult to see. Both noticed from a stationary car while looking for other species.

**Black Currawong**: A party of 11 crossed the road high on Mt. Mangana; silent, shy but inquisitive birds. May take some time to locate; much easier elsewhere.

**Clinking Currawong**: 2 seen close to ferry landing (North Bruny Island), and one in the south.



Photo 7. Welcome to South Bruny N.P. – if you can afford it!

## **Mammals**

**Short-beaked Echidna**: None seen despite high expectations (cf. other reports).

**Eastern Quoll**: Though this to be a rare sight on the island, but was wrong. After the first individual (Dennes Point Rd, about 3 km from the main road), no less than 9 were seen around the main road junction to Dennes Point and Barnes Bay, on the weedy fields with large numbers of other marsupials. These small predators appear to be rather timid, being easily scared by larger animals such as **Brushtailed Possums**.

**Red-necked Wallaby**: 73 recorded, with albinos at the Adventure Bay Holiday Village.

**Long-nosed Potoroo**: 1 roadkill at Lunawanna.

**Common Brushtail Possum**: 56 recorded. The 'devilish' reddish brown color phase dominated. One '**Golden Possum**', an albino one, was seen by the road 2 km N from the Bruny neck penguin colony.

**Common Ringtail Possum**: Two 'lovers' on the road, 1 km S of Bruny Neck, at the first night. Too busy with mating to be bothered by a car.

**European Rabbit**: 140+ seen. Plenty of rabbits on the lawns of Adventure Bay village and Cape Bruny lighthouse. It is a bit strange that these introduced animals are favored in a national park.

Additionally, two bats observed flying over moonlit forest at Mt. Mangana were tentatively identified as **Large Forest Bats**.

#### LAKE ST. CLAIR

Went to visit the information center, without entering the trails, to get information on **Tasmanian Devils**. Did not pay the entrance fee to the national park and do not know if one should, if just visiting the headquarters. On the first visit, met a middle aged female official who made her best to put my hopes down. At first, she described the situation realistically: almost complete extinction as a result of the facial tumor decease, latest records made half a year earlier, no recent observations despite intense monitoring (e.g. at Bronte Park). All in all, extremely low chances to actually see one in the wild.

This is how things are at the moment in Tasmania. The **Devil** is in grave danger of extinction as there is no cure to the plague. Fortunately, there are quite a few animals in the safety of zoos and 'wildlife parks'. Nevertheless, I wanted to give it a try. Having traveled all the way from Europe, having already paid two night's accommodation at Bronte Park, and having this once in a lifetime chance to try to see the **Devil** in the wild,

I kept on asking her where to go and have a try, but she was adamant. She refused to suggest any tracks and told me to focus on the 1 km long Bronte Park access road, where I might see a wallaby or two, and, with great luck, a **Wombat!** Alternatively, I could visit the Cradle Mountain 'Devil Sanctuary' in order to see a caged animal. No suggestions for another sites in Tasmania, even though I told her that I was ready to try any place on the island.

In the end I gave up, driving around 100 km the next night, searching for good tracks for mammal spotting. Spotlighting for mammals is technically illegal in Tasmania, but the authorities probably do not mind if you are not poaching and will not cause danger to passing traffic.

The next day, there was another, younger lady at the information desk. She could not provide the information personally, but readily requested a resident field biologist to talk with me. In the following minutes, I got great advice in regard to where to go (e.g. 14 Mile Rd) and when (close to midnight), and heard about the Narawntapu National Park, with its **Spotted-tail Quolls** and still intact **Devil** population. No communication problems at all.

The woman I had met the day before observed us chatting, disapprovingly, from the rear room. Personally, mixed feeling as I finally got the information but had also lost one of the few nights available. There was no up-to-date information on Devil-spotting in the Internet. My advice: Keep on asking around.

Several rather tame **Black Currawongs** at the Information Center and 8 **Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos** along the highway. Petrol station by the headquarters junction (Derwent Bridge), as well as meals. One **Short-beaked Echidna** on the highway between Bronte Park and Derwent Bridge, and another one by the headquarters access road.



Photo 8. Black Currawong – an endemic of Tasmania.

## **BRONTE PARK**

Stayed two nights at the Bronte Park Highland Resort, where a double room was AUD 90 per night, a relatively good deal in a region with expensive accommodation. In the middle of winter, they have very few customers and all cottages plus majority of rooms remained empty. There is a village supermarket close by, next to the resort entrance. **Black Currawongs** are common here, with 30 seen at Bronte Park; e.g. Highland Resort grounds and km2 on the 14 Mile Rd. The best roadkills with scavenging **Eastern Quolls** and potential for **Tasmanian Devils** were around Bronte Park, along the access road, Great Lakes Rd and 14 Mile Rd. The signposted road starts few km to the west (Derwent Bridge) from Bronte Park junction. Turn left and continue 14 miles to the south, where the road again joins the main highway, above a hydroelectric dam.

The gravel road from Bronte Park to Great Lakes was also a nice short cut to the north coast. There were signs such as 'Road closed! Snow and Ice' and 'Only trucks and

4WD; at your own risk' in the beginning of the track. Nevertheless, as the road had appeared fine for the first seven kilometers, I asked the villagers if it was possible to drive all the way. They agreed it should be no problem, if I drove carefully. The road turned out to be in fine condition all the way, with one slight landslide.

The bad stretch was the first 40 km from Miena towards Deloraine, along the western shore of the huge Great Lakes reservoir (**Skylarks**), with thousands of potholes, uneven road surface, and depressing small communities shrouded in mist and light rain. After this section, it was a smooth even though steep and meandering ride down to the coast in a very dirty car. No car wash available at La Trobe (cf. below), went to a self service in Devonport, the port for ferries from the mainland.

## **Mammals**

**Eastern Grey Kangaroo**: One on the Great Lakes road.

**Tasmanian Pademelon**: 140 seen around Bronte Park and along the highway towards Hobart.

**Red-necked Wallaby**: 50 seen around Bronte Park and along the highway towards Hobart.

**Tasmanian Devil**: Used to be common at Bronte Park. In July 2006, the last records from the area had been made 4-6 months ago, the local population apparently being almost wiped out as a result of the facial tumor decease, with possibly some juveniles alive. (They monitor **Devils** here by trapping)

**Eastern Quoll**: Five on the 14 Mile Rd, around km 5, and another five at Bronte Park: on the access road, 9 km towards Great Lakes, and by the Bronte Park junction. Several of the attractive dark color phase.

**Wombat**: One on the 14 Mile Rd, one on the Hobart highway and one on the Great Lakes road, at km 5 from Bronte Park.

Brush-tailed Possum: 31 grey ones and 1 reddish brown around Bronte Park.

**Tasmanian Bettong**: One by the Great Lakes road.

**Southern Brown Bandicoot**: One at km 4 on the Great Lakes road.

**Fallow Deer**: One juvenile by the Great Lakes road.

## LA TROBE - WARRAWEE SANCTUARY

La Trobe is marketed to be the 'Platypus capital of the world' but it also has a fair share of other memorable sights, including biker clubs and the Australian Axeman's Hall of Fame. Stayed at the nice, convenient and affordable La Trobe Motel (AUD 65; a good deal) along the Launceston - Devonport highway, to the right and immediately left at the

second La Trobe intersection, arriving from Launceston. At Warrawee Sanctuary, about 2 km from the town center (signposted on the main street), two **Platypuses** were readily seen and photographed from an observation platform. A variety of common birds, as well, including **Tasmanian Thornbills**.



Photo 9. Platypus walk – Warrawee Sanctuary.

## NARAWNTAPU (ASBESTOS RANGES) NATIONAL PARK

Easily reached from La Trobe via tarmac country roads. From La Trobe (La Trobe Motel), drive to Moriarty (5 km), turn right and continue through Thirlstane, turning sharply right at a T-intersection after 3 km. After another 3 km, turn left along the Frankford Rd. You will cross large bridges and reach the Narawntapu junction (signposted) after 7 km. Turn left, and continue about 15 km to the park headquarters. The park, formerly Asbestos Ranges, has spectacular concentrations of marsupials feeding on open coastal dunes, covered by short grass and low bushes. Late afternoons and night-time spot-lighting are particularly productive, with also birds in lagoons, including **Cape Barren Geese**. Best areas are visible from park headquarters, from where it is easy to walk around the large sandy opening.

At night, continue past the headquarters, towards camping sites and a boat ramp along the Y-road to Baker's Beach, both forks with interesting mammal-watching, and keep on checking the access road. A confiding **Boobook Owl** by the left fork of the Y was seen twice in the same spot, plus a **Tawny Frogmouth**. The gravel road towards the eastern

part of the park (turn right just before entering the park proper), on the other hand, proved to be more or less deserted, with few possums and rather steep gradients. The following records were made in just 4,5 hours of observation; one hour before sunset and three and half hours afterwards.

## **Mammals**

**Eastern Grey Kangaroo**: About 10 seen in the evening. I wonder why they are called Forester Kangaroos in Tasmania?

Red-necked Wallaby: Numerous, at least 200 seen.

**Tasmanian Pademelon**: Abundant, at least 700 seen! Several hundreds could be seen from one point next to the headquarters.

**Wombat**: About 50 seen around the headquarters, openly feeding on grass well before sunset and continuing through the night. Close views and photography possible before sunset

**Tasmanian Devil**: One adult followed by a young one crossed the left fork of the Y-road in car headlights, and a dream came true! The facial tumor plague had fortunately not reached Narawntapu in July 2006. Let's hope it stays away!

**Spotted-tail Quoll**: Wonderful creatures! Five individuals were seen at the beach-side campsites, and along the access road. One passed my stationary car within a distance of one meter, its nails making an audible sound on the tarmac, and kept on walking beside the car when I cautiously advanced, not desiring to scare the animal.

Eastern Quoll: One individual, dwarfed by the Spotted-tails.

**Brushtailed Possum**: About 25 with grey, red, black and mixed color phases.

**Southern Brown Bandicoot**: One by the access road, well before the park entrance.

**European Rabbit**: Only 5 seen in the park.

#### OATLANDS RESERVOIR

At the historical village of Oatlands, between Launceston and Hobart, about 70 km north of the international airport, there is a large and easy to observe reservoir worth stopping on your way across the island. There were 1000+ wildfowl and some common waders such as **Red-capped Plovers**. Lunch can be had in a nearby restaurant. There are other birdy reservoirs and nice sceneries by the road, if you drive to/from the Hobart international airport via Richmond, along the tarmac country roads.



Photo 10. Oatlands architecture.