

Tour Report Australian Wildlife Photo Safari 29 November – 15 December 2025

Tawny frogmouth



Koala



Short-beaked echidna



Platypus



Compiled by Bret Charman

Saturday 29 November 2025

Day 1:

London to Singapore

The first day of the trip involved catching the group flight from London to Melbourne, via Singapore. On this occasion, the majority of the group were already in Australia, while others were catching alternative flights. This overnight flight means that we effectively skip an entire day in transit.

Sunday 30 November 2025

Day 2:

Singapore to Melbourne

The flight departing London was a couple of hours late due to a technical issue, but with plenty of time in Singapore, our late arrival didn't cause any further problems. Departing Singapore on time, the flight to Melbourne took off on time and went smoothly overnight.

Monday 1 December 2025

Day 3:

Melbourne

Arriving in Melbourne, it was a particularly cold summer's day. In fact, it had been one of the coldest springs on record in the state of Victoria. I caught a taxi from the airport to the Radisson hotel on Flagstaff Gardens. Meeting the clients and introducing them to our 'local' guide Laurie in the afternoon, we went through the plan of action over the next couple of days, before meeting back up for dinner in the hotel restaurant. Enjoying a tasty meal together, we headed up to our rooms for a good night's sleep.

Tuesday 2 December 2025

Day 4:

Serendip Sanctuary & Geelong

This morning, we met in the hotel lobby (after breakfast) for our departure to the nearby city of Geelong. We met our local guide Angus in the hotel lobby, before local bus driver Nick, picked us up from the hotel entrance. Soon, we were on our way to Serendip Sanctuary, heading out of the city of Melbourne on the motorway.



The journey took around an hour and upon our arrival, we unloaded our camera gear and set about heading for a short walk in search of the sanctuary's resident wildlife. Serendip is well known for its fantastic birdlife, as well as a couple of resident mobs of kangaroos (which can sometimes be a little elusive). Angus led the way as we soon found some of the most beautiful residents, red-rumped parrots. These beautiful birds can be a little skittish, but today we were in luck as a male in stunning plumage decided to pose for us after coming out of its nesting hole. It

wasn't just the red-rumped parrots that we enjoyed, we also had views of a host of other species, including New Holland honeyeater, red-wattled bird, sulphur-crested cockatoo, grey shrike thrush, willie wagtail and white-winged chough.

We carried on down to the lakes for which Serendip is most famous. The sanctuary was an important breeding centre for rare species of birds, and the big success story here was undoubtedly the magpie geese. These birds were hunted to oblivion, but thanks to the breeding programme and a concerted conservation effort, there are now thousands of geese across the state of Victoria. Indeed, the group were lucky enough to see a large flock of these striking geese. Other species around the lakes included chestnut teal, Australian ibis, black swan, hardhead, Hoary-headed grebe, Cape Barren goose, dusky moorhen, Pacific black duck and Australasian grebe, alongside so much more.

Waiting for us at the end of the track was Nick with the bus. The group were soon aboard and we drove around the sanctuary to see if we could find some of the resident Eastern grey kangaroos and emus, too. Upon entering one of the paddocks, there was a group of emus on the far side. To try and get them a little closer, so the group could get some photos, I lay down in the vegetation and lifted my limbs in the air. Emus are a curious bird and something unusual in the landscape nearly always draws them in.



There were also a couple of kangaroos on the edge of the paddock, but they were not interested I stick around, and they weren't interested in becoming photographic subjects. Having had a good morning in Serendip, we drove back around to the main entrance, where we were due to have lunch. There is often a breeding pair of tawny frogmouths around the sanctuary car park and Angus went to see if they were nearby. Within only a couple of seconds, he said he had spotted them.

It was then a challenge for the group to see if they could spot them. With a little guidance, the group were able to see these incredibly well camouflaged birds and we sat about trying to capture some stunning imagery of these oddities. There were three frogmouths, perched in a low branch. The group comprised of two adults and a nearly fully-grown chick. All three of them made for the most wonderful photographs.



It was amazing just how close we were able to get as a group.



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Tawny frogmouths are renowned for having absolute faith in their camouflage and almost never fly off, as they are adamant they can't be seen. It was obvious these birds were not at all bothered by our presence, as they fell asleep as the group added more photographs to their portfolio.

After the excitement of photographing these stunning birds, we dragged ourselves over to the picnic area where a fabulous spread had been set out for us by a local caterer. During lunch, we had magpie larks, little raven and white-winged chough all hopping around the picnic area and the white-winged choughs in particular provided us with plenty of entertainment and some good photography opportunities.



There was also a little raven which posed perfectly on the fence on the edge of the picnic area, while a couple of sulphur-crested cockatoos perched up in the nearby trees too. It was time to leave Serendip and head to a small reserve on the edge of Geelong to try to photograph some more species of local birds. It was the resident sulphur-crested cockatoos here that put on a particularly good show for the group.



Of course, there were plenty more species here to photograph, including Australian purple swamphen, maned duck, Australian magpie, crested pigeon, long-billed corella and rainbow parakeet, as well as three species of cormorant – great cormorant, little black cormorant and pied cormorant.



After another stellar session with these stunning birds, it was time to head into Geelong and check into our accommodation. Having checked in and got everyone into their rooms, we had a little downtime before heading out to the Geelong Botanic Gardens to see if we could get some good views of the resident colony of grey-headed flying foxes.



The botanic gardens are only around a 10-minute drive from the accommodation and so we were soon getting off the bus and heading to the trees where the bats usually roost. And there they were. Thousands upon thousands of flying foxes utilise the large trees of the gardens as a resting spot. It really is quite a sight, something which is quite an alien concept to those of us from Europe. Many of the females had pups and were struggling to take off with the weight of their oversized young.

We spent around an hour here, both photographing the flying foxes, while also enjoying some of the resident birds, including some particularly curious and inquisitive Australian magpies. As well as a couple of adults, there were also a few immature magpies who came to see if we might share some scraps. Unfortunately, for the magpies at least, we had nothing to share and so they soon made their exit and left us looking at the views across Stingaree Bay and to Port Philip beyond. It was soon time to head back to the bus, driving the short distance back to our accommodation and to get ready for dinner at a local Vietnamese restaurant. We enjoyed a fabulous meal and wandered back to our

rooms with rather full tummies. The next day would take us to the nearby You Yang Range and it was due to be a hot one.

Wednesday 3 December 2025

Day 5:

You Yang Range

We awoke to a cool morning with big blue skies overhead. The forecast was for the day to be very warm and so we dressed accordingly. Despite the cool start, the strong sun soon warmed up the air. Once everyone had their luggage ready, we boarded the bus and drove to the nearby community of Little River. This small town/village was a good place to have a brief stop at some toilets as well as enjoy a flock of long-billed corellas that often spend their mornings in the trees around the local sports field. There were probably between 50 and 100 birds all around the sports pitch, noisily calling as they sat in the trees and fed on the ground.



After everyone had the chance to use the facilities, as well as capture some images of the corellas, it was time to head up the road to the You Yang Ranges. These volcanic hills stand high above the surrounding plain, and they are among the best places in the area to find koalas. The park has long been home to a koala research project and with the help of researchers, we do our best to find and photograph these iconic Australian marsupials.

On our way up the gravel road that leads to a locked (back) entrance to the park, we saw a huge mob of kangaroos in the farmers' fields off to one side. They were distant, but it was fabulous to see such a large number of these impressive macropods (members of the marsupial family, which includes kangaroos and wallabies). A few of the group captured some distant photos before we continued on to the You Yangs proper. By working with the local research and conservation project, we are allowed exclusive access (by vehicle) into this area of the You Yangs and as such, we can drive as close to the potential koala sites as

possible. On a day like today, when the heat was already starting to build, this is an absolute godsend. We had heard about one koala which was visible. So this was, obviously, our first port of call. Due to the heat, the birdlife was almost completely silent and so we focused our efforts on finding the koala. Setting off on a short walk into the bush, we found the koala high in a eucalypt. It was a long way up and in a particularly tricky spot to capture any sort of recognisable image. It was getting hotter by the minute, above 30 degrees Celsius, and it was hard to find much wildlife in the forest habitat. And so, we headed to lunch.

While we enjoyed our lunch, Angus had heard from the Koala researcher, who had another one, but this time it sounded like it was in a better position. Once everyone had their fill, we climbed back aboard the bus and headed back to the forests of the You Yangs to see if we could find our koala quarry.

This time, we were in luck. There was a koala sitting in a tree just off the track. It was lower down than the previous individual, resting in the fork of the tree. After the disappointment (in terms of wildlife photography) from this morning, it was great to see it and capture some photos.



Having finally caught up with one of our main targets in Victoria, it was time to hop back aboard the bus and brave the rush hour traffic as we headed back into Melbourne for the night. We arrived at the hotel in the late afternoon, agreeing on a time that we would meet in the hotel lobby the following morning, for our flight to Launceston, Tasmania. Tonight was a free evening. Some of the group headed out for dinner, while others chose to dine in the hotel's restaurant.

Thursday 4 December 2025

Day 6:

Melbourne to Launceston; Mountain Valley

The group ate breakfast in the hotel restaurant, with a minibus coming to pick us up for our transfer to Melbourne Airport. As soon as the minibus arrived, we loaded the bags into the back and drove the 25-

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minute journey to the airport. Upon arrival, ensuring everyone's luggage was checked in, we headed on through security and into departures. Unfortunately, our flight was delayed. We arrived in Launceston, in northern Tasmania, nearly an hour late and Laurie was waiting for us with the minibus. She had flown out early from Melbourne, ensuring she had everything prepared upon our arrival. Lunch was booked in the town of Deloraine, which was around a 45-minute drive away. Arriving at the café, we all made our orders and enjoyed a fantastic meal. We didn't have too long until we carried on with our journey to our final destination at Mountain Valley. On our way, and as we arrived, we had views of the endemic Tasmanian native hen, swamp harrier, laughing kookaburra (an introduced species to the island) and the Tasmanian pademelon.

We had two nights at Mountain Valley, which would be the best place to try and observe some of Tasmania's rarest predators – the Tasmanian devil and spotted-tailed quoll. This remote property is based in one of Tasmania's wildest areas, to the north of Cradle Mountain. Much of the wildlife here is not used to people and it is the most magical place to stay. With five cabins nestled on the edge of the forest, our guests were set to stay up and see what came in for the meat left out for them.

After a dinner prepared and cooked by our hosts, the group went to their cabins and set about waiting to see what might come in. Laurie and I were staying in a B&B around 10km away as there wasn't enough space available at Mountain Valley. Therefore, we would only know what was seen the following morning.

Friday 5 December 2025

Day 7:

Mountain Valley

Laurie and I headed back to the cabins first thing and found the group around the cabins. After a long night, we were keen to find out what everyone had seen. Not everybody had luck, but some of the cabins had views of brush-tailed possum (new to the group) and many pademelons, otherwise it seemed to be a quiet night. Nobody had views of a devil, which is becoming increasingly rare due to Devil Facial Tumour disease.

It was a bright sunny day, but still surprisingly cool for this time of year. Once everyone was ready, we wandered away from the cabins to see if we could find any tiger snakes or echidnas which should have both been around making the most of the morning sunshine. To start with, all was pretty quiet, with the sounds of black currawong and kookaburra in the forest nearby. Then, after going down to look at the river, I spotted a pair of echidnas busy feeding at the end of the clearing.



The group slowly followed me as we ensured we kept our distance, so as not to disturb them as they went about feeding on ants. One of the echidnas decided to disappear, while the one lingered in front of the group, gorging itself on what was clearly an ant bonanza. Once the second echidna had its fill, it too decided to move out of sight. And so, it was time to head back across the clearing and go for a walk into the forest, which is all part of the Mountain Valley Reserve.

It was here we had our best views thus far of the black currawongs and kookaburras that we had so far only really heard. Even though the kookaburras are not native to Tasmania, they are such an amazing species to enjoy and photograph. It's always amazing when you think that the laughing kookaburra is the largest kingfisher in the world.



For me though, one of the most beautiful birds in Tasmania is the black currawong. These large, crow-like birds (although they are not related to corvids) have piercing yellow eyes and are incredibly intelligent. It is worth sitting back and watching as these birds go about their business. Their inquisitive nature and their antics make for great photography, but furthermore, they bring joy to those watching them. After exploring the forest trail and the tree fern glades, we wandered back to the cabins and set up lunch, tea and coffee.



Our plan this afternoon was to drive up to Leven Canyon and walk the trail to the viewpoint positioned high on the canyon's edge. The views from here are mightily impressive. With favourable weather conditions, we couldn't have asked for a better day to explore this beautiful part of northern Tasmania.

There were some beautiful orchids along the path up to the lookout, including spider and sugar orchids. There were also some fantastic birds which we

enjoyed watching from the viewpoint. We could hear a peregrine falcon screaming just as we started to walk back to the minibus, only to turn back and see it screaming across the canyon at high speed. A wedge-tailed eagle was also soaring over the distant ridgeline just above the trees.

After a fabulous day in the surrounds of Mountain Valley and Leven Canyon we drove back to the cabins for a little downtime before dinner. We enjoyed another tasty meal cooked by our hosts before I set up a remotely triggered camera to see what we might capture in the night. Once everyone was back in their cabins, ready for another night watching wildlife, we headed back to our B&B.

Saturday 6 December 2025

Day 8:

Mountain Valley to Cradle Mountain

We headed back to Mountain Valley to find the group were all packed and ready to head on the road. We found out that the Tasmanian devils had been elusive once again, but the beautiful and rarely-seen spotted-tailed quoll was seen, as well as brush-tailed possum and of course the ever-present pademelon.

Having packed everyone's luggage into the trailer, we set off towards the town of Burnie, where we would stop at Fern Glade Reserve for a walk and it would be here that we would also have our lunch. Our final destination for today was Cradle Mountain, but it is quicker to head to the coast first (as well as allowing us to pick up lunches for the next few days) before taking the road up into the highlands.

Upon arrival at Fern Glade it was slightly overcast, but there was the threat of rain overhead. We went for a walk along the river, hoping we might get views of platypus, as well as the resident birdlife. Almost immediately, there were superb fairy wrens flitting among the riverside vegetation. Grey fantails were busy feeding along the bank across the river from the path. Fern Glade is so called because of the spectacular giant tree ferns that line the steep-sided valley.

Despite the overcast conditions, the platypus were keeping themselves out of sight, however, there was a posing pademelon for some of the group and it's a beautiful place to wander along the river.



We enjoyed our lunch in the picnic shelters, keeping out of the now persistent rainfall. With a drive of around an hour and a half and increasingly heavy rain, it was soon time to hit the road and head up to the higher altitude landscapes around Cradle Mountain. Part of a huge UNESCO World Heritage Site, Cradle Mountain is one of the best wildlife destinations in Tasmania and the scenery is spectacular. Despite it being summer, the weather forecast was set to be particularly cold and wet over the next few days, but we would endeavour to make the most of this remarkable landscape.

A few echidnas were feeding along the roadside as we climbed ever higher, as well as the odd pademelon, Tasmanian native hen and plenty of ravens, which were making the most of the plentiful road kill along the verges. In fact, the high density of road kill suggests healthy populations of the macropods that call the island home.

It was still pouring down as we arrived at our accommodation. After checking in, we drove everyone to their cabins, where the fires were soon alight, and everyone was keeping warm in the winter-like conditions. Having agreed to pick everyone up for dinner (with dinner at a hotel restaurant up the road), we were soon back together, and we enjoyed an excellent dinner. With a busy day the next day, we returned to our cabins and enjoyed a cosy evening in front of our fires before retreating to bed.

Sunday 7 December 2025

Day 9:
Cradle Mountain

We awoke to another heavily overcast day with some wild weather and extremely cold conditions, particularly for this time of year. After a filling breakfast, we drove across to the car park where we had to pick up our park passes (including tickets for the shuttle bus system). Due to the park's popularity, they implemented a shuttle bus system to help people work their way up and down the valley which leads to Dove Lake at the base of Cradle Mountain. There were a surprising number of people picking up their passes,

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including a number of trekkers looking to complete the Cradle to Lake St Clair Overland Track.

Having got our passes and used the facilities, we wandered up to the bus stop and waited to be whisked along the narrow roads up to a spot called Ronnie Creek. This is the best spot for wombats, probably in the whole of the Tasmanian 'mainland'. As we approached Ronnie Creek, we could see that Cradle Mountain was currently cloud-free and the landscape was covered in snow. What a sight! A quick, last-minute decision was to carry on up to Dove Lake and capture some photos of the stunning scene.

So, with that plan of action suddenly implemented, we carried on up to Dove Lake to see the spectacular scene that lay before us. There was Cradle Mountain, towering above the idyllic lake on this freezing summer's day. The mountain top was dusted in snow, while the surrounding landscape was seemingly made up of browns, greens and greys. It is worth noting that the weather here is notoriously changeable and has only around 60 days a year when the mountain is even visible.

After hopping off the bus, we wandered around the new, and in my opinion, rather ugly viewing building to see Dove Lake and Cradle behind. Wandering down to the lake's edge, the group took some photos of the beautiful scene that lay before us.

It was here that the group decided to split up. Two keen walkers decided to head out and walk the Dove Lake circuit, with Laurie keeping them company, while the rest of them caught the bus back to Ronnie Creek to find some wombats and other local wildlife. One of the group (Peter) took a stunning image of Cradle Mountain Dove Lake and the famous boatshed – see the next page – capturing the vista perfectly. It was an exceptional moment in what can so often be a very wild and unforgiving landscape. Which some of us were soon to discover.



As the main part of the group and I started to walk along the boardwalk at Ronnie Creek, Cradle's weather

gods decided to throw everything at us. The terrain wasn't overly challenging as we stuck to the boardwalk, but we experienced extraordinarily heavy sleet and hail. Within a few minutes, we were all soaked as the winds roared across this endemic moorland. We persevered, despite not seeing a sign of any wildlife, and finally, the weather broke.

There was some faint sunlight doing its best to pierce through the clouds. Carrying on up the boardwalk, up the hill towards Waldheim Cabin, we slowly neared the forest, and it was here we had our first close views of the bizarre pandani plants, which are found across this moorland.

Our aim was to find wombats and Bennett's wallabies among the trees and the pandani plants, but it was unusually quiet. This was likely due to the wild weather we'd just encountered and the extremely cold conditions (particularly for this time of year – even at Cradle). We stopped at a picnic site as there were some wallabies some 50 metres below, feeding on the grass as the sun now tried to properly pierce the lingering clouds.

The sun brought a little warmth to the landscape and slowly we started to dry out and thaw a little. As we were at a picnic spot, it seemed an opportune moment to sit down and dig our lunches out of our backpacks. With the wallabies still in sight, there was also an incredibly distant view of a wombat, around half a kilometre away. This, for Cradle Mountain, is not a quality view, and so I assured the group that better views would almost inevitably come.

As we sat eating our lunch, we were soon joined by an inquisitive and rather cheeky black currawong, but despite its charm offensive, we didn't give in and it remained hungry. It did however, pose perfectly for a few close-up portraits of this striking bird.



Having finished our lunches, I heard from the other trio that they were down at Ronnie Creek bus stop eating

their own lunch. Therefore, we grabbed our bags and started to wander down the road to where they were. It was only now that the marsupials finally started to show themselves. With the extreme weather now seemingly keeping away, one by one the wombats and wallabies started to come out and sun themselves. Success at last.

Working our way down the road to where Laurie and the rest of the group were sitting, we saw more and more wombats. They weren't in the best position for photography, but it was great to finally see some up close. Much more like it. As we neared the bottom of the road, having passed through some beautiful old forest, we could see Laurie and the other two guests watching something small along the roadside. It was a small echidna. There was only one thing to do – join them.

We spent the next 20-30 minutes watching and photographing this charismatic little monotreme. Echidnas here are some of the largest in Australia (due to the cold temperatures), but this one was definitely on the small side and likely a youngster. It was a particularly relaxed individual, and it was completely unperturbed by our presence. It was busy feeding on ants along a steep bank. In fact, it was perfectly situated between the road and the boardwalk, which meant the group could choose from where they wanted to capture their imagery.

When you find wildlife which is particularly habituated, one of the best things to do is to put away the camera and simply enjoy the moment. Sit back, relax and just revel in the glory of being in such a privileged position. Elsewhere on the island, most echidnas are afraid of people and will either move into the undergrowth or dig down into the ground to escape. For whatever reason, the wildlife of Cradle Mountain has realised that people pose little or no threat and, for the most part, ignore the visitors. This does however, make for fantastic photography opportunities.



It was now, as the day finally started to warm a little (and I do mean a little), that the wildlife really started

to show itself and provide plenty more photography opportunities.



The wombats were now lining the grassy areas on either side of the Ronnie Creek boardwalk, moving right past people and allowing some incredibly close approaches.



With the shuttle bus system, the group were able to spend as long as they wanted with the wombats, hopping back aboard as and when they wanted to. However, one of the group hadn't yet seen the wallabies and so I took them up towards Waldheim Cabin to see if we could get more views of the charming marsupials. When we got there, the first thing we came across was a black currawong. Likely to be the same bird as earlier, it was busy feeding on a scoparia. It was wonderful to photograph and watch as it delicately used its long bill.



Not far from the currawong were several wallabies out in the open, grazing on the short grass that covered the slope. They posed well and allowed us a pretty close approach. And so, we set about trying to capture some images of these incredibly fluffy wallabies. The Bennett's wallaby is a Tasmanian version of the red-necked wallaby, which is found across much of southern and eastern Australia.



The extra-thick fur certainly makes for a very different wallaby, but they certainly make for good photographic subjects.



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Once we'd had our fill of the wallabies, we wandered back along the boardwalk to the Ronnie Creek bus stop. Here we caught the bus back to the ranger station, where my guest went to the education centre, while I wandered along a nearby trail which is often good for tiger snakes. Another member of the group was desperate to see these dark morph elapids. However, likely due to the exceptionally and unseasonably cold weather, I was unable to find any snakes. Rather than hop aboard the bus, I decided to walk the last kilometre to our accommodation along the road to see what might be about.

There was a beautiful blonde wallaby, which many of the group also saw, feeding across one of the clearings. It was noticeably paler than its darker kin; it really stood out in the rich browns and greens of this upland vegetation. Likely to be leucistic (due to the presence of some pigment and colouration), this wallaby was thriving. The last large carnivore in Tasmania is the Tasmanian devil. As their numbers continue to fall, the numbers of wallabies and pademelons are likely increasing. As such, it is probably going to be more common to see unusual colour morphs such as this pale wallaby.



It wasn't until I got back to the entrance of the accommodation that I stumbled upon an echidna. This was much larger than the one we had all seen together earlier in the day and particularly accommodating once again. I've been to Australia many times over the past 10 years, and I could never get bored with seeing one of nature's most weird and wonderful mammals. When you are so close to an echidna, you can hear their snuffles, you can clearly see their inverted rear feet (they face backwards) and their characteristic waddle. One thing you can't help but notice is their fierce array of spikes and the patterns that emanate from a crown towards the rear of their spine. They really are a unique piece of evolution and are undoubtedly absolutely fascinating.



It was starting to rain again and the temperature was dropping, now that the sun was in. It was due to rain a lot the next day and that's why we made the most of the day – it was forecast to be the best of our time here. And so, I walked the last couple of hundred metres to the cabin to have a shower, warm up, dry the clothes and get changed for dinner.

Tonight, we were dining at the restaurant on site, and so it was only a short walk before we were inside again with a blazing fire. We enjoyed a delicious meal with views across the valley, all the way up to Cradle Mountain, which occasionally appeared from behind the clouds. Knowing the weather forecast for tomorrow, we made the most of what would likely be our last glimpses of this iconic peak.

Monday 8 December 2025

Day 10:
Cradle Mountain

We awoke to a very sodden and overcast day. Despite the weather, we had made some plans to try and make the most of what the area had to offer. As such, we booked the guided keeper tour at Devils at Cradle. This is a dedicated Tasmanian Devil, spotted-tailed quoll and eastern quoll breeding centre.

After breakfast, we popped back to our cabins to grab cameras and some more warm clothing (some of us at least), before driving the short distance to the centre. Once we were all checked in and paid for, we were met by the senior keeper on a covered veranda. He explained all about the threats that the devils face in the 21st century, from the devastating Devil Facial Tumour Disease to deaths on roads and human wildlife conflict (primarily loss of habitat). It was fascinating to learn also about their physiology, behaviour and the importance they play in the ecosystems of their island home.

Thanks to a well-structured breeding programme, there is hope for the devil, but while disease levels are

prevalent, releases are not taking place to ensure they do not succumb to the disease. There are also ark populations on islands and on mainland Australia, just in case no cure is found and the wild population goes extinct. We were also introduced to several of the breeding spotted-tailed and eastern quolls. These are both marsupial predators and they are stunning. The spotted-tailed quoll is the equivalent of a large cat or a small dog, with a fawn-coloured coat and, as its name suggests, spots across the body and along the tail. The eastern quoll is much daintier and incredibly agile. We were able to see both the light (fawn) and dark morphs. What beautiful creatures. Again, we learnt about the threats they face in our modern world, while also discovering all there was to know about both species.

As our tour came to a finish, the heavens really opened up and we lingered under cover until it stopped. We were then free to wander the park and try to capture some images of the devils, particularly as they evaded the group at Mountain Valley.



Unfortunately, the weather deteriorated and any chance of going back up the valley in search of wildlife was not really an option. The temperature was still incredibly low and the rain would likely keep the resident wildlife out of sight.

With that in mind, we decided to head to the art gallery, which was the perfect place to warm up and discover some local artists and enjoy some spectacular landscape photography. We spent around an hour enjoying the sights of the gallery before heading back to our cabins for lunch and some hot drinks to properly thaw. For those who were interested, I arranged a photo digital darkroom session in my cabin, answering questions about Lightroom and Photoshop, but also demonstrating some of the capabilities of these powerful pieces of software.

Before we knew it, it was time for dinner and we enjoyed another hearty meal at a nearby hotel restaurant, returning to our last night in the cabins. With fires lit and cabins providing a warm refuge, there was the chance of snow overnight.

Tuesday 9 December 2025

Day 11:

Tasmanian Arboretum & Devonport

We awoke to another overcast and cold morning in Cradle Mountain, but the potential snow which was forecast hadn't materialised. Everyone met up for breakfast before returning to their cabins to get their things together. The trailer was hitched up to the minibus, and we soon had everyone's bags loaded and were on our way.

Our main destination for the day was the Tasmanian Arboretum, near the town of Devonport. The arboretum has unwittingly become one of the best places on the island to see platypus. The second species of monotreme that inhabits Tasmania, the platypus, is one of the world's most iconic species of wildlife. Once again, because of the colder climate, the platypus here are among the largest in all of Australia.

By the time we had descended from the highlands, the weather had completely changed. It was now a gorgeous day with sunshine streaming across the undulating landscape of farms and forest. Upon our arrival at the arboretum, we were awash with Tasmanian native hens and the calls of magpies resonated across the valley. I led the group, with cameras in hand, to the ponds where the platypus can be seen with relative ease. We arrived at the ponds, and we did see a couple of platypus early on, but they weren't cooperating as we'd hoped. Persevering, we stuck around the area that I have found the most rewarding for photography in the past.



We only really enjoyed distant views in the morning and photography opportunities were limited, but I had high hopes for the afternoon. The sun was still shining, but the air temperature was a little on the cool side. Retreating back to the little café on site, we enjoyed lunch, drinks and a delicious ice cream before returning to the important matter of capturing a striking image of a platypus. Back to the ponds!

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After all the group's patience, they were finally rewarded with some fantastic views of these mammals.



We had several different platypuses put on quite a show and everyone captured a range of images of these oddities. They are a fascinating species to watch, but certainly not the easiest of species to photograph. Time and perseverance are always key and eventually those who put in the effort get the rewards. There are a couple of bridges over the channels that connect the different ponds and it was these that provided us with the unique chance to see the platypus from above. What an incredible sight.

Having spent the afternoon getting our platypus fix, we headed to Devonport, where we were spending the night. Laurie had arranged an early dinner at a local restaurant – arguably one of the best in the area – as we had plans to go out to the nearby penguin viewing platform after dark. Enjoying an excellent meal, we hopped back aboard the minibus and drove the 10 minutes or so as darkness started to fall along the northern coast of Tasmania.

With the help of local guides (all volunteers), we were able to see the little penguins (the world's smallest species of penguin) as they arrived on shore. These diminutive birds head out to sea each day to fetch food to feed their chicks, only returning after dark to avoid predators. They are particularly vulnerable onshore, primarily due to their small stature and their trouble walking efficiently on land. Using red lights, you can observe these amazing birds as they change over with their breeding partner and take care of the chick until they return.

Once everyone had enjoyed their views of penguins, we headed back to our accommodation and headed off to bed.

Wednesday 10 December 2025

Day 12:

Narawntapu National Park

We awoke to another bright sunny day – something of a revelation after such cold and wild days up on Cradle Mountain. Our accommodation wasn't able to provide any breakfast and so we had booked a table at

a nearby café. A delicious selection of options was on offer, while excellent coffee and tea were served to all of the group. The food was fantastic and we were suitably refuelled for a day ahead with a little more walking, albeit on a mostly flat terrain.

Our destination for the day was Narawntapu National Park on the shores of northern Tasmania. This coastal national park is home to a wealth of habitats, including sand dunes, dry forest, open grasslands, heathland and mature eucalypt forest. Our main focus here was on one species, the eastern grey kangaroo.

The largest native mammal on Tasmania, this species is often referred to as the forester kangaroo here, but it is the same species as on the mainland (*Macropus giganteus*). It was around a 45-minute drive from Devonport to the park, where we parked up and readied ourselves to walk across the marsupial lawn.

It wasn't long before we came across our first kangaroo. A lone male was resting on the edge of a flooded hollow and ensuring we stuck together, we slowly made our way over to where he was lying. As we settled across the far side of the pool, the roo suddenly rose to its feet and came down to the water's edge to drink. We were treated to a wonderful sight and some cracking images as the kangaroo drank for some time right in front of us. Once he had quenched his thirst, he hopped off into the distance, by that I mean around 100 yards away.

This was an excellent start to our day at Narawntapu, and I hoped there would be plenty more kangaroos further along the lake that lies between the dunes and the heath. With the lone male moving off, we decided to continue on and see what other wildlife we could find and photograph. There was plenty of evidence of wombats being here, but they had long since retreated to their burrows; the hollows around their burrows seemed the perfect spot for tiger snakes. Luck still wasn't on our side regarding serpents, but we still had time to find them in the coming days.



Wandering along the trail that meandered across this coastal plain, we found kangaroo heads were popping up all over the place. There was a large mob of kangaroos ahead of us and we again slowly made our approach. Ensuring not to disturb these beautiful, large mammals, we made sure to never make a direct approach and act as if we were not interested in them. It was as we were photographing a kangaroo lying down that another young individual decided to take a particular interest in us, and one of the group in particular.



Having wild animals take an interest and trust in you gives you a real rush. Adrenaline and endorphins make these encounters truly special. We spent the next hour or so with the kangaroos, trying to capture some portraits as the animals carried on with their business, seemingly unaware of our presence. The kangaroos are well used to people here, as long as you respect them they will typically not be bothered as you watch them, or in our case, photograph them.

Time this morning had seemingly flown by and it was time to start wandering our way back to the spot where we were having lunch. The group started to make the walk across the plain and we tucked into our lunches, trying to cope with the now gusting wind. While we were eating lunch, a fan-tailed cuckoo kept coming to and fro, perching and feeding from a tree and a number of old fence posts.



After finishing lunch, the group decided to split up a little, searching out different sights and sounds. For some, the kangaroos were too big a draw to ignore, while others enjoyed the resident birdlife and the spectacular beach beyond the dunes, and a pademelon posed right by where the van was parked.

We had a bit of a drive to do this afternoon to the city of Launceston, the largest conurbation in northern Tasmania. One of Australia's oldest cities, founded in 1806, this was simply a stopping point and a comfortable place for a night's accommodation before heading south the next day (via Ben Lomond National Park). We arrived at the Grand Chancellor Hotel in the late afternoon, which gave everyone a little time to freshen up before dinner in the hotel's restaurant.

After enjoying dinner together, we headed back to our rooms to catch up on sleep after our late night with the penguins.

Thursday 11 December 2025

Day 13:

Ben Lomond National Park; drive to Hobart

Meeting up after breakfast, we brought the van up to the hotel's entrance and loaded everyone's bags into the trailer before heading out of the city of Launceston and starting to journey up towards Ben Lomond National Park. This is one of the most beautiful parts of Tasmania and although it can be tricky to see wildlife here (due to the terrain and vegetation), it is a great place to stop and break up the drive to the island's southeast.

When we reached the base of the mountain, we dropped off our trailer at the café where we would be coming back for lunch. With the vehicle now a little more mobile, we started the drive up to the base of the huge dolerite cliffs on the mountain's edge. Winding our way up through beautiful native forests, we soon found ourselves at the base of rock columns which towered above us.



We were hoping that a wedge-tailed eagle might soar overhead and work its way along the impressive dolerite walls, but it was not to be. We had to make do with the spectacular scenery instead. It is one of those parts of the world where you can sit quietly and just absorb the magical feel of the landscape that is all around.

The zig-zag road up to the top was in particularly poor condition and therefore, we kept to the lower parts of the track and stopped at a point where we could turn the van around and return down the mountain to the café. As we descended, we had an echidna cross the road. The group tried to get out of the minibus to photograph it, but unfortunately, it quickly disappeared into the forest's undergrowth.

Reaching the bottom of the track, we turned into the café (where we had left the trailer) and stopped for our lunch. The sun was blazing, with not a cloud in the sky, while we enjoyed our food and drink. With a long drive ahead of us today, it wasn't too long before we got back on the road.

Our journey took us to Campbell Town, where we stopped for ice cream and a toilet break, before continuing on to Hobart. Upon our arrival in Tasmania's capital, we unloaded everyone's luggage and got them checked into their rooms. We met up for dinner, enjoying a delicious meal before catching up on some sleep.

Friday 12 December 2025

Day 14:

Hobart to Bruny Island

Our plan for today was to drive south out of Hobart and head to the coastal town of Kettering. Here we joined the queue to catch the ferry across to Bruny Island. The waters between the 'mainland' and Bruny were like glass – it was flat calm. In fact, the water was so flat that it was nearly impossible to even tell that the ferry had actually started to make the crossing.

Upon our arrival on the island, we had to journey from North to South Bruny, taking the road across The Neck (a thin isthmus) and turning off to Adventure Bay. This beautiful bay is where Captain Cook came ashore to find fresh water and met some of the indigenous peoples. We stopped here as it is one of the few places you can see hooded plover nesting on the white sands of the beaches. The group were also able to see yellow-tailed black cockatoo, pied and sooty oystercatchers, black swan and white-faced heron. In the trees, high above the beach, there were also a couple of green rosellas, while the usual silver and kelp gulls were always present. Laurie spotted a pod of dolphins way out in the bay, but these sightings were all a challenge for any sort of photography opportunity. It was soon time to set out lunch and so we headed the short distance to the village picnic area and set out our lunch spread.

As we sat eating our lunches, there were more green rosellas flying by and lots of birds flitting about in the nearby vegetation, including superb fairywren and a black-faced cuckoo shrike. The area around Adventure Bay is also famed for its population of white wallabies. These beautiful mammals are a leucistic form of the Bennett's wallaby found all over Tasmania. The white morph here is still a recessive trait and therefore, they are still in the minority, but much more readily found than elsewhere. With this attractive mammal in mind, we drove to the edge of town to see if we could find some. The light was a little harsh; it was midday after all, but we found a white wallaby grazing on an empty plot of land. It was completely relaxed as the group sat along the edge of the property and photographed this handsome mammal.



After attracting a little bit of a crowd (it turns out the white wallabies are quite a popular sight for tourists), we hopped back aboard the minibus and headed to the far south of Bruny to the famous Cape Bruny Lighthouse. The habitat here can be great for echidnas, as well as a number of native birds such as honeyeaters and robins. Upon our arrival, it wasn't long before we saw our first crescent honeyeater, while the views were exceptional on this beautiful day. There was also a flame robin coming to and fro to a nest with food, perching nicely for some great portrait photography. There was also some light cloud cover now, providing much softer light for photography.



As we were gathering, ready to head to our accommodation, the flame robin put on a particularly good showing. These beautiful birds are fiercely territorial, and each time the bird settled on a perch, it would ensure no competitors were around. This meant the members of the group photographing the robin had prolonged opportunities to capture some striking imagery.



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Having had a busy day, with a fair bit of travel, it was time to drop everyone at their comfortable cabins and have some time to get themselves ready before dinner. Dining options are limited on Bruny and we had already arranged a dinner booking at Hotel Bruny. We picked up the group and drove the ten minutes or so to dinner. Along the way (and on our return), there were wallabies galore in the paddocks and the fields along the roadside.

Saturday 13 December 2025

Day 15:
Bruny Island

This morning, we awoke to another lovely day on Bruny. It was slightly overcast and cool, but this should allow us to enjoy the fabulous wildlife the island has to offer. The group had their breakfasts provided in their cabins and so it was after that, we picked everyone up and drove just up the road to Inala private reserve.

Upon our arrival at Inala, we were met by team member and guide Catherine, who talked us through the plan for the morning. We were to have a guided walk around part of the property, learning about the critical conservation work for the critically endangered swift parrot and the forty-spotted pardalote. As we set out into the Gondwana Garden, a brown falcon flew overhead, while tree martins were busy feeding on insects all around.

As we walked along the avenue with old white gums towering over us, the calls of forty-spotted pardalotes could be heard among the branches. Then suddenly, there were a couple of swift parrots perched up in one of the trees. It wasn't the best for photography, but what luck to see two of Australia's rarest birds so quickly.



There were also some striated pardalote hopping around, a flame robin and a very cooperative pademelon and her joey. The pademelon was particularly cute and made for great photography.



Continuing through the reserve, we slowly made our way into the mature forest and started to rise up the gentle incline. We saw more pademelons and could hear the calls of a pink robin, but despite our best efforts, it didn't want to come out and pose for us. As we descended back down towards the garden, we came across some stunning sundews and a beautiful orchid too.

There was the opportunity for some of the group to enjoy the purpose-built raptor hide on the property and a few people went in to see what might show up. Others took some time to wander within the garden and see if they might be able to spot some of the smaller endemic mammals that can be found here. The area supports a thriving population of swamp rats and dusky antechinus, which in turn has led to a couple of tiger snakes making the area home.

Other species enjoyed, other than the plentiful pademelons, included black-headed and New Holland honeyeaters, grey shrike thrush and a scarlet robin. We reconvened for lunch, we headed to a nearby café before returning to the Inala reserve for the afternoon. There was another chance for the group to visit the raptor hide in the afternoon and see what showed, as well as the chance to wander the gardens and see what birds, mammals and reptiles might decide to show themselves.

Upon entering the hide, some of the group found a brown goshawk busy feeding on the carcass, while New Holland honeyeaters provided great subjects for those enjoying the peace and solitude of the gardens. Everybody had a few hours to explore and enjoy the wildlife at their own pace, with the minibus on hand for anyone who wanted to be dropped off at the cabins.

Finally, after two weeks of searching, we came across a large tiger snake, which was enjoying the relative warmth of the sun, which had now burnt through some of the clouds. I'm sure some of the group felt the same, as it was unseasonably cool, despite the relatively settled weather we had been experiencing.



We had arranged dinner at the Bruny Island Hotel once again and once everyone was ready, we drove to

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the restaurant. On our way, once again, we came across plenty of wallabies and pademelons, with a few white wallabies standing out amongst their more traditionally coloured brethren. As per the previous evening, we enjoyed another good meal, with huge portions, before heading back to our cabins for the last time as a group.

Sunday 14 December 2025

Day 15:

Bruny Island to Hobart; fly London via Sydney & Singapore

Our final morning on Bruny and we were soon all packed up and loading our bags into the trailer. We had an early start, driving across to North Bruny so we could catch the ferry back to the mainland of Tasmania. We arrived with plenty of time for the ferry, before driving on to a ferry a little less flat than before. There was a strong wind today and the water was a little choppy. The skipper expertly manoeuvred the vessel to ensure as smooth a ride as possible and it wasn't long before we were unloaded and driving up towards Hobart.

We had a couple to drop off in the city centre, as they were extending their stay by a couple of days, saying our goodbyes before continuing on towards the airport on the northern edge of the city. We were soon checked in for our flight to Sydney and it was here that the group split further. There were some catching different flights, while another was staying in Sydney. And so we said our goodbyes to these members and set about catching the shuttle bus to the other terminal for our onward flight to Singapore.

Everything went to plan and we were soon in the air, able to sit back and enjoy the service from Qantas. We had a couple of hours upon arrival at Singapore, before the final leg back to London.

Landing in London on time, we were soon through immigration and collecting our luggage without any difficulties. For the remainder of the group, it was now time to say our goodbyes and go our separate ways. What a fabulous two weeks we had enjoyed, seeing and photographing some of the world's weirdest and most charismatic species.

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