

# Mammals of the Wet Tropics

The cute and cuddlies of the animal world, Australian mammals are some of the most ancient on the planet. Fossils dating back 180-250 million years demonstrate that mammals evolved from reptiles (as did birds). Mammals can be divided into three groups.

- Monotremes (Egg-laying mammals: platypus and echidna).
- Marsupials such as kangaroos which give birth to very undeveloped young which move to and are suckled in a pouch.
- Placental mammals (bats and rodents) which give birth to fully formed young.

The World Heritage Area has more representatives from these groups than anywhere else in Australia. Over millions of years of evolution, Australian mammals have developed a range of adaptations for survival. For instance, the male Antechinus, after mating for up to 12 hours, dies of exhaustion. This allows for the next generation to survive without competition – an extreme evolutionary strategy.

## Drive carefully

Many species are found on forest floors, near residential areas and cane paddocks. Such close proximity to human activity and roads creates havoc for animals foraging for food. These creatures are often squashed on roads as they scurry between fragments of forest. Be careful at dusk and dawn and be aware of these special animals. If you see an animal on the road, slow down and blast your horn, as this is usually enough to send it scurrying off the road away from being dazed by your headlights.

## Tree mammals

Tree mammals are the voyeurs of the rainforest. Perched high above the forest floor, they peer down at us mere mortals with curiosity. Often blending into the canopy they are camouflaged by day and night. During the day they sleep among the basket ferns and inside tree hollows, but at night they come out to socialise and feed. They move through the canopy dining on leaves and to a lesser extent, fruit, flowers, sap and insects.

North Queensland has the highest number of endemic mammals of any region in Australia. Most are specialist rainforest species, indicating a long continuous history of rainforest in the region.

## Spotlighting

The majority of tree-dwelling mammals (possums and tree kangaroos) only live at altitudes above 250-300m and therefore are more readily seen on the Tablelands. They quietly indulge in their evening meal, while humans on the forest floor look in wonder as they jump and glide to their next destination, glimpsing only a moment in the life of these rare and elusive animals.

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Night adapted eyes are very light sensitive and thoughtless spotlighting can cause distress to animals. The best idea is to go with an expert on an organised tour. This will increase your chances of seeing animals and you'll minimise your impact on them. To see these creatures in the wild ask your local visitor information centres about wildlife parks, commercial tours and volunteer groups.

## **Agile Wallaby - *Macropus agilis***

The most commonly seen macropod in tropical coastal Queensland, the Agile Wallaby is often seen along river banks and open forests. It grazes on native grasses and may even dig to eat the succulent roots. It lives in groups of up to 10 which are often seen in the late afternoon and early morning. A white stripe along the cheek and thigh and dark brown stripe down the forehead make it easily distinguishable from most other macropods.

Body: 80cm Tail: 77cm



## **Atherton Antechinus - *Antechinus godmani***

The Atherton Antechinus has a voracious appetite. It is very strong and can hunt and eat animals its own size. With one of the smallest distribution ranges (150 sq.km) of any marsupial in Australia, it only lives in densely forested country above 600m on the Atherton Tableland.

21 – 30cm (head to tail)



## **Northern Brown Bandicoot - *Isodon macrourus***

Found in eastern and northern Australia, this bandicoot lives in a wide range of open forest and grassland habitats and is a common visitor to our gardens at night. It emerges from a concealed ground litter nest to search for fruit, berries, grass seeds and some plant fibre such as sugar cane. It occasionally eats earthworms, insects and spiders. Also known as the Short-nosed Bandicoot, it is larger than north Queensland's other bandicoot, the Long-nosed Bandicoot. It has the shortest regeneration time of any mammal, taking only 30 days from conception to independence.

Body: 40cm Tail: 17cm

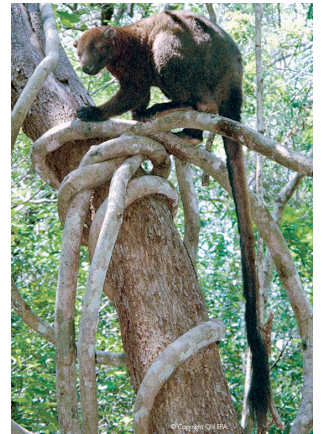


# Mammals of the Wet Tropics

## Bennett's Tree-kangaroo - *Dendrolagus bennettianus*

Found between Daintree River, Windsor Tableland and Cooktown, this rare solitary creature is rarely seen on the ground and only if it needs to travel between fragmented rainforest patches. If startled, it jumps to the forest floor and bounds off like a normal kangaroo. All tree-kangaroos move their hind limbs independently which terrestrial kangaroos can't do.

Body: 65cm Tail: 90cm (to 13kg)



## Daintree River Ringtail Possum - *Pseudochirulus cinereus*

The most northerly of the four ringtail possums. This solitary species is found in cool wet upland rainforests above 450m in three locations - Mt Windsor Tableland, Carbine Tableland and McDowall Ranges.

Body: 35cm Tail: 35cm (to 1.2kg)



## Green Ringtail Possum - *Pseudochirops archeri*

The Green Ringtail is the only possum known to eat the leaves of several species of figs and the giant stinging tree. Unlike other possums which prefer a den, it roosts during the day on an open branch protected from heavy rain by its thick coat. The green fur is an optical illusion, it is actually a mixture of black, yellow and white hairs which creates the perfect camouflage coat.

Body: 36cm Tail: 32cm (to 1kg)



## Herbert River Ringtail Possum - *Pseudochirulus herbertensis*

Living above 300m in cool, wet upland rainforests and wet sclerophyll margins between Ingham and Kuranda, the Herbert River Ringtail Possum is a solitary animal. Herbert River Ringtails spend the day asleep in fern clumps in the canopy and in hollow branches.

Body: 35cm Tail: 36cm (to 1.2kg)





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## Lemuroid Ringtail Possum - *Hemibelideus lemuroides*

This rare possum is found only from Cardwell to Daintree. On the Carbine Tableland two forms exist: red and white. It is strictly arboreal and almost never ventures to the ground. It leaps onto the ends of branches, landing with a loud crash amongst the leaves and twigs in search of flowers, fruits and leaves. More gregarious by nature than other ringtails, it is often seen in family groups of two adults and a juvenile.



Body: 33cm Tail: 35cm (to 900g)

## Long-tailed Pygmy-possum - *Cercartetus caudatus*

This rarely seen mouse-sized possum has a prehensile tail (able to grip) and opposable toes on its hind feet which help it negotiate small branches in the search of nectar, pollen and insects. It is found between Cooktown and Townsville in rainforests and fringing Casuarina (She Oak) forests from coastal plains to 1600m.

Body: 10cm Tail: 13cm (to 30g)



## Lumholtz's Tree-kangaroo - *Dendrolagus lumholtzi*

Found between the Carbine Tableland and Herbert River Gorge, this species is distinguishable from the Bennetts Tree-kangaroo by its lighter coloured fur on the lower part of the back and pale band across the forehead. It is found mainly in the upland rainforest where it dines on leaves and fruits. It can be seen foraging or resting during the day, especially early morning or late afternoon.

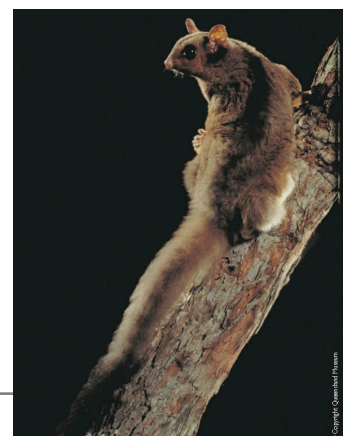
Body: 59cm Tail: 70cm (to 7kg)



## Mahogany Glider - *Petaurus gracilis*

For more than a century, this extremely rare species was considered extinct. It was only rediscovered in 1989 in the 110km strip between Tully to Ingham, in dry coastal eucalypt and paperbark woodlands.

Body: 25cm Tail: 35cm (to 230g)



# Mammals of the Wet Tropics

## Masked White-tailed Rat - *Uromys hadrourus*

The Masked White-tailed Rat resembles a small version of the White-tailed Rat. It is thickset, with short limbs, broad hind feet and a white tipped tail. It is an agile climber and is found only in the uplands of Thornton Peak, Carbine Tableland and Atherton Tableland. As this species was only discovered in 1973 and is difficult to capture, little is known about its habits and diet.

Body: 18cm Tail: 19cm



## Musky Rat-kangaroo - *Hypsiprymnodon moschatus*

This is the smallest and most primitive member of the kangaroo family. Unlike other small mammals, it is active by day and can be seen at Lake Eacham and Lake Barrine. It has possum-like features such as a big toe which allows it climb over fallen trees and branches. At night it sleeps in a leaf nest against a tree buttress.

Body: 23cm Tail: 14cm



## Northern Bettong - *Bettongia tropica*

The Northern Bettong is found in only four populations, all in dry eucalypt forests above 400m on the Windsor Tableland, Carbine Tableland, Lamb Range (Davies Creek) and Coane Range near Townsville. It feeds on underground fungi (truffles) and grass tubers. It builds a grass nest under overhanging fronds, dense undergrowth or among rocks.

Body: 36cm Tail: 40cm



## Spotted-tailed Quoll - *Dasyurus maculatus*

The Spotted-tailed Quoll spends most of its time on the rainforest floor where it hunts small and medium sized mammals, birds, reptiles and insects. It is also an agile climber and hunts for possums in the canopy. Although rarely seen look for its rope-like, twisted scats which are full of hair and bone. One Spotted-tailed Quoll in the Paluma area killed 51 hens over a three week period before it was shot in the 1940s.

Body: 31-55cm Tail: 28-44cm





# Mammals of the Wet Tropics

## Red-legged pademelon - *Thylogale stigmatica*

This cute small red macropod lives in rainforest with a dense understorey where it forages for leaves and small berries. It is commonly seen at dawn and dusk visiting gardens next to rainforest where it dines on a wide variety of plants and lawns.

Body: 49cm Tail: 44cm



## Spectacled Flying-fox - *Pteropus conspicillatus*

Commonly seen either hanging from the rainforest canopy or flying in search of its next meal, Spectacled Flying Foxes are found in large, squabbling colonies. Along with other fruit bats, this animal plays an extremely important pollination and seed dispersal role in our forests.

Body: 24cm Wing length: 17cm



## Striped Possum - *Dactylopsila trivirgata*

Extracting wood boring insects from tree trunks with its elongated fourth finger, the spectacular Striped Possum leaves the wildlife viewer in awe. Although rarely seen it is widely distributed through rainforests and nearby woodland from Townsville to Cape York. It sleeps in a nest inside a hollow tree during the day and evidence of its scavenging can be heard by rustling, snorting and scratching at night. It has a pungent, sweet, musty odour.

Body: 26cm Tail: 32cm (to 300g)



## Sugar Glider - *Petaurus breviceps*

This small compact possum can glide for at least 50m. It is common in areas where there are tree hollows, abundant food such as invertebrates and gum produced by acacias and some eucalypts. Often seen in family groups up of to 10, this blue-grey glider has a dark stripe extending from the forehead to mid-back, is pale underneath with a dark tail sometimes with a white tip.

Body: 17cm Tail: 19cm (to 100g)



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## Eastern Tube-nosed Bat - *Nyctimene robinsoni*

Docile by nature, this bat with unusually large tubular nostrils feeds mainly on rainforest blossoms and fruits. Its brown wings with bright yellow dots may mimic dappled sunlight for camouflage. It is one of 35 bat species found in the Wet Tropics.

Body: 11cm Wing length: 7cm



## Water Rat - *Hydromys chrysogaster*

Only one species of water rat is found in Australia, the other ten belong to New Guinea. Only found in damp habitats with permanent water where it feeds on fish, frogs, insects, lizards and crustaceans. With webbed hind feet and sleek water-repellent fur, this rat is well adapted to aquatic life. Often confused with the White-tailed Rat.

Body: 31cm Tail: 27cm



## Giant White-tailed Rat - *Uromys caudimaculatus*

An excellent climber, the White-tailed Rat is one of Australia's largest rodents and is restricted to northern Queensland and Papua New Guinea. Mainly nocturnal, it forages for fruit, seeds and other plant matter in the canopy or on the ground. It often raids houses looking for food. It has grey-brown fur and cream underbelly. The tail is naked, blotchy dark grey and white with a predominant white tip.

Body: 34cm Tail: 31cm



## Yellow-bellied Glider - *Petaurus australis* (unnamed subspecies)

Found only at high altitudes where cooler temperatures support stands of red stringy bark and flooded gum. It gracefully glides over 90m between tall trees amongst dense forest. They dine on eucalypt sap, nectar and pollen and leave distinctive marks on tree trunks where they bite into the bark to release the sugary sap.

Body: 28cm Tail: 43cm (to 700g)

