

Wildlife Photo Evaluation by Dr Paul Swiatkowski (BVSc.) 28.2/2021

Relevant Qualifications

Veterinary Surgeon Graduated 1984 practicing 37 years. My expertise is as a small animal Vet, but I actively treat wildlife and other species as required.

Former member Deloraine Field Naturalist Club.

Former President of the RSPCA.

I live on a rural property with various types of wildlife present on the property including pademelons, Bennett's wallabies, bandicoots (barred and brown), ringtail and brushtail possums and Tasmanian devils and quolls.

Overview

To evaluate photos presented by the Thylacine Awareness Group of Australia and provide an opinion as what species may be present in the photos.

Evaluation

Five sequential photos were presented for evaluation. It was noted that date and timestamps in the photos were default factory setting due to a software glitch. The camera was unattended and set up on a trail. Cameras were activated when motion was detected. Images were stored on a SD card.

Photo 0862

This is nighttime flash photo of a small mammal.

The animal is looking towards the camera with light being reflected from the back of its eyes and possibly to lesser degree from its ears.

The animal appears in a sitting position with front legs just definable. The ears superficially seem slightly flattened as opposed to being pointed. Facial, jaw and nose features are recognizable, but not distinct. A body outline is visible but not distinct

On casual observation with mild magnification, facial and jaw features are superficially carnivore like.

Unfortunately when I tried to further magnify the animal in the picture, the image was too pixilated to make any definitive identification of the animal possible. It also made me believe my initial observations were equivocal. This was partly because of superimposed vegetation near to the animal.



Photo 0863

The photo lacks too many features to draw firm conclusions as to species identification.

In this instance the animal looks to be medium sized. The right hind foot plantar aspect identifies it as being a marsupial.

The angle of the photo, together with the effects of shadowing, leaves this photo open for multiple interpretations.

The stance of the animal, however in this photo is more typical of a quadruped.



Photo 0864

The photo shows what appears to be a much smaller animal than the previous photo.

Once again there are features to identify it as a marsupial.

There is evidence of stripes on the body and lack of hair on Right hind foot (metatarsal area) no toes are visible.

There is a strong likelihood in this the photo is a joey following its mother. This is subjective, but not an unreasonable interpretation based on the sequence of the photo.

The position suggests a quadruped stance.

There are not enough features to make a firm conclusion as to the species.



Photo 0865

The image is the posterior view of a mammal medium in size as compared to bracken. Based on fur, tail, and metatarsal features (foot) These features are inconsistent with a dog, cat or fox or any other domesticated animal. It is clearly a marsupial.

The tail seems thick and rigid and is elevated off the ground. Faint stripes were noted on the tail and possibly on the body. In relation to the body, banding remains unclear due to possible shadowing and the angle of the photo.

The foot (metatarsal area) is blurred and light in color providing a point of difference with some of the other photos.

The stance in the photo is consistent with a quadruped moving forward, but with a little imagination you could easily see a wallaby on the hop.

The toes on the hind legs are not visible which would further help with identification.

The head and front legs are not clearly visible which would further aid in identification.

An assessment of motion is not possible just based on the photo and would otherwise be open to conjecture.



Photo 0866

The photo appears to be a medium sized mammal partly obscured by vegetation and partly in shadow providing sharp color contrast. There is also an area of fur loss evident. There are not enough key features to make any general conclusions.



Presuppositions

I have only tried to interpret what is clearly visible.

I can make no interpretation based on the movement of the animals which in these cases would help with identification.

I make no assumptions based on what cannot be seen.

Conclusions

Photo 082 unfortunately being a night time photo lacks the necessary detail to conclusively identify the small mammal primarily due to pixilation of the image.

The photos 083, 084 and 085 are generally more consistent with quadruped mammals of being generally medium in size. (Estimation of weight is not possible just based on the photos alone.) Photo 084 is that of a smaller individual most likely a joey following the individual in photo 083.

Photo 086 does not have enough features to make any major conclusions.

There are enough features to identify the mammals as being marsupials as opposed to placental mammals such as a dog or a cat.

In my opinion there are features in the photos consistent with a Thylacine, mostly based on the quadruped stance of individuals, coloration, size and banding evident in some individuals.

There are also general features that could also be consistent with other marsupials. This issue relates to the limitations of 2 dimensional photographs in a variable lighting and contrast situation, with incomplete views of individuals. Consequently, this may lead to alternative interpretations.

At this point the photos lack enough definitive features that would put species identification beyond any doubt. The photos should be viewed as being encouraging. There are enough features to believe further surveillance in the area should be undertaken and in the near future and that this will lead to more definitive results.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Paul Swiatkowski', enclosed in a light blue rectangular box.

Paul Swiatkowski (BVSc.)