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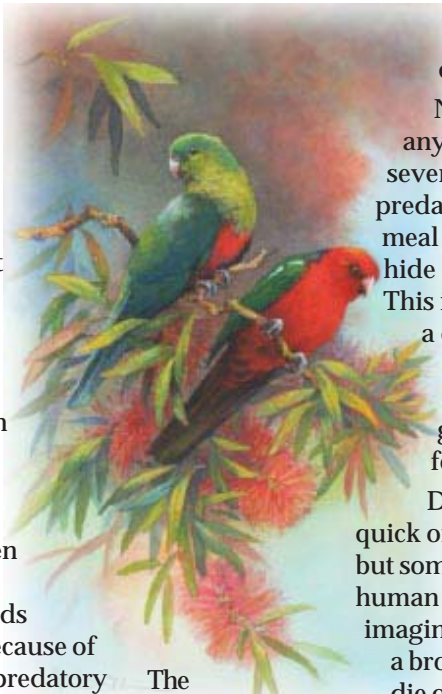
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**Newsletter of The Northern Tablelands  
Wildlife Carers Issue No 82 July 2009  
Phone - 1800-008290 [www.ntwc.org.au](http://www.ntwc.org.au)**

## Letting Nature Take Its Course...

By: Cheryl Cochran.  
Northern Rivers Wildlife  
Carers

Unfortunately this is a phrase I often hear, mostly from callers to the hotline with two very different views on what 'nature taking its course' means. There are callers who want a green tree snake taken away because it has eaten one of their favorite green tree frogs, or they want a nest of birds taken into care because of the risk of larger predatory birds like Butcherbirds eating them. To me this is nature taking its course and even though it may not always be pleasant it is part of the natural ecosystems.



The attitude of '*letting nature take its course*' is also unfortunately used in relation to sick, injured or orphaned animals.

Some people have the idea that it's better to leave an injured animal to die quietly in the bush rather than take it to a vet or carer.

Native animals rarely show any signs of being ill or in severe pain as this would alert predatory species that an easy meal is to be had. Instead they hide away and suffer in silence. This is the case whether they are a common species such as a noisy minor or one of the cuter species such as a glider. Be assured they all feel pain the same as we do.

Death in the wild is rarely quick or painless, at best it's days but sometimes weeks. To put a human perspective on it, could you imagine having a severe wound or a broken bone and being left to die of dehydration, starvation, infection and in terrible pain or even worse being eaten alive because injuries have resulted in decreased mobility?

When the long list of causes that brings hundreds of native  
Continued on page 3

## Contacts for Northern Tableland Wildlife Carers (NTWC)

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- Write to NTWC PO Box 550Armidale 2350

Northern Tableland Wildlife Carers is a network of trained volunteers licensed by NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service.

We rescue, rehabilitate and release injured, sick, orphaned & unwanted native fauna. Any assistance please call the above numbers in your area.

Membership \$15 single and \$20 family year for authorised and support members All donations over \$2 are tax deductible.

This Newsletter is designed by Colin Wood and printed by New England Credit Union. Telstra Country Wide are also proud to be a sponsor of NTWC



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## Important notices for all members

- Next meeting 16 August Armidale Tree Centre East Mann St
- Business meeting 10.30
- Fund raising meeting 12 noon
- general meeting 1pm
- Membership renewals are now due.  
Individual membership \$20 ~ Family \$25
- Guest speaker Linda Dennis our new wildlife trainer and Fourth Crossing Wildlife website webmaster
- Travel costs reimbursement forms available on website [www.ntwc.org.au](http://www.ntwc.org.au) or contact Colin Wood for a form if you don't have internet access, we have been allocated \$2500 for travel costs so get in and recoup your travel costs.
- Raffle tickets have been sent out and plenty more available we need to raise money from this raffle for Wombaroo powder and other food for our injured wildlife so support this raffle. lots of great prizes,

### Training days

- Care of Flying Foxes - by Dave Pinson
- Wildlife Awareness - by Linda Dennis
- Snake Handling

**for these training programmes See website or minutes document.**

Continued from page 1  
animals into care every year is looked at, it has little to do with anything natural. Cat and dog attacks, being hit by cars, shooting, caught in netting, fly traps, electrocution, run over by mowers, poisoning, falling into swimming pools, disease caused by loss of habitat, the list goes on and on. Humans and their activities are the main reasons animals come into our care.

It is unethical, inhumane and against NPWS policy to leave an animal suffering when intervention may mean a full recovery or a peaceful and quick death.

As carers we have a responsibility to relieve animals' suffering with either treatment and pain relief or if necessary euthanasia. The decision to end a life and prevent suffering can be an extremely difficult and an emotional one. Carers are not expected to and shouldn't be making these decisions on their own. Veterinary assistance is available or the knowledge of an experienced carer if it is outside vet hours. NRWC has several CO2 containers which are used to humanely euthanase animals. Coordinators are able to direct carers to these if the need arises.

## Lucky Find

Kelly Stumbles –

Glen Innes Co-ordinator.

I received a call from a lady called Lynn. She was concerned about a little Joey that she had seen hop across the road in front of her on the way to work. She explained that it was only tiny and no doubt should still be with its mother. She gave the details of where she'd seen it, which was about 10km out the Red Range Rd where the properties of Lilburn and Sunny Glen are directly opposite each other.

It was almost 9am and I was at work; with no one else to call upon I said to my boss "I've just got to duck out for a while, is that OK?" He said yes so off I went out the road like a bat out of hell not knowing if I was going to be able to find this little thing, as 15 -20 minutes would have passed by the time I would get there.

I pulled up by the side of the road and started to walk along the fence line clicking away in the hopes something would call back. Up one side I went and back down the other, but nothing, not a sound of any kind. I scanned the paddocks on either side looking for any movement at all, but again nothing. This little thing could be anywhere by now and I couldn't stay to long since I should have been at work.

I was just about to give up when I thought I'll walk up towards the driveway a bit further just in case. So clicking away again I slowly headed towards the

driveway. I headed up a slight embankment towards some fallen branches, when I heard something click back at me. So I kept clicking till I got closer and heard it clicking from under one of the fallen branches. It got a fright when it

saw me and tried to get out and away but I scooped it up and tucked it into my jumper.

The little Joey turned out to be a little Red-neck Wallaby (*Macropus rufogriseus*) male who weighed 1130 grams and most certainly should have still been with his mother. I was extremely lucky to find him as he could have

ended up anywhere but luckily for him he had the sense to find a safe hidey hole. I never found any sight of his mother so as to why he was by himself hopping across a dangerous road will always be a mystery.

I named him Sunny as it was a sunny day and he was found opposite the property of Sunny Glen. He had no injuries and soon settled into his new home at my place. He has grown into a very handsome wallaby, who was transferred to pre-release at Karen's place on the 3rd April 2009 weighing 6kg, with his friend Mousey the Swamp Wallaby.

So from a frantic rescue not knowing if I was going to find anything, came a beautiful wallaby soon to be released, just what wildlife caring is all about.



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# Possum

by Colin Gibson

You can go where you like,  
Wherever you care,  
But wherever you roam  
Possum is there.

Wherever you are,  
In the bush or the town,  
Possum is always  
Sniffing around.

Deep in the bush  
In your comfortable camp,  
He'll ransack your larder  
That cheeky old scamp!

And beware when asleep  
Beside the campfire:  
He'll bite your big toe,  
Ooo... no creature is slyer.

And in the big city  
As soon as it's dark;  
Possum and friends  
Will take over the park.

She will jump your back fence  
With consummate ease,  
And steal your vegies  
With no "may I?" or "please?"

Sometimes I would like  
To chasten her manner  
By scratching the bark  
As would a goanna,  
But I haven't the nerve,  
And I think there's no doubt  
She'd only get angry  
And single me out.



Yes, I'm afraid,  
It's just as I said:  
Wherever you run  
Old poss is ahead,

And she waits your arrival  
(She's so very shrewd)  
For she thinks you're a walking  
Supermarket of food.  
So stay on alert,  
Be always on guard,  
For possum might now  
Be raiding your yard.

But listen to that...  
There, you have proof...  
My friend, that is poss  
Thumping over your roof.

So I hope you're convinced,  
Should I need to remind you?  
Wherever you go  
Possum will find you.

But what can you do?  
Not a thing, I suppose;  
For when possum's around...  
Just stay on your toes!

## Hangin' With Flying Foxes

by Courtesy Australian Geographic

If you happen to be crossing the Belling River at Lavender's Bridge around dusk you could be forgiven for

throughout the animals' range, their choice of places to feed and camp has been reduced. We know from early settlers' accounts that they've been



coming to Bellingen Island for at least 100 years, and Aboriginal tradition refers to their presence much earlier than that. They once had their pick of dozens of sites in this area, and until the 1975 the island was left unoccupied for up to 10 years at a time. Then the animals began using the site constantly. Despite

thinking that this is the flying-fox capital of the universe. The exodus of up to 80,000 of them from Bellingen Island Reserve, upstream from the bridge, is one of the country's premiere wildlife spectacles. They're off for a night's foraging at feeding grounds up to 30 km away, where eucalypt, paperbark and other native blossoms provide a rocket fuel of raw nectar, which is necessary for long-range flight. As the animals feed, their fur and wings become dusted with pollen grains, which are transferred from tree to tree. The seeds of rainforest fruits that supplement their diets - including figs, koda berries and brush cherries are dropped over a wide area. In this way flying-foxes connect forest remnants across large distances far more effectively than other mammals, or pollinating birds and insects. But as patches of native bush diminish in size and number

this, the overall population is in decline, fall-ing by as much as one-third since the late 1985.

.Restlessness intensifies, The backward flip is the thing to watch out for. That's when a suspended flying-fox switches its

**During Carol and Alan Rose' leave the following positions will need to be filled:**

- NPWS Licencing Reports
- Flying Fox/Bat Co-Ordinator
- Deepwater Co-Ordinator
- Form updates & register.

**Please contact Julia Rose on 1800 008 290 & volunteer to help.**

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grip from its toes to its thumbs, reorientating itself head up, tail down. If you spot this manoeuvre, don't hang around under-neath because it probably means that something digested is about to land on your head.

In 2001, grey-headed flying-foxes were listed as vulnerable by the NSW, Victorian and Federal governments. Species

babies, mating, looking about, squabbling with neighbours or just fanning their wings in an effort to shrug off the thick humidity.

By late September, after a six-month gestation, females begin giving birth. Hanging in a tree seems a precarious way to go about it, but the mother's wings form a safety net in case her baby



numbers were rapidly declining due to habitat destruction and shooting.

THE COLONY is at its noisiest from February to April, the height of the mating season, and most of the racket you hear is made by males shouting seductively into females' faces. Many of the colony's immediate human neighbours have learned to develop a tolerant attitude to their wild partying. Although not everyone in town is bat-happy, mostly they've been accepted as part of the branding of Bellingen.

During the day the island resembles a dormitory. Some flying-foxes doze, heads tucked into furled wings. Others are awake, grooming themselves, caring for

doesn't immediately grasp a nipple with its teeth and find a firm toe-hold in her belly fur. For the ensuing five weeks the little accompanies its mother everywhere. "During the colony's nightly exodus, you can see the torpedo-like shapes of hundreds of youngsters, each clinging to its mother's side as she flies.

The camp's size is in a constant state of flux. In November new arrivals spill into nearby trees. Many of the newcomers are mothers with developing young.

### **Scare tactics**

HISTORICALLY, the evening exodus of up to 80,000 flying-foxes from Bellingen Island was enough to make a fruit grower's blood run cold. Today, many

growers have nets to protect their crops from these flying mammals as well as from birds and hail. But it wasn't always so.

BY EARLY JANUARY the camp's adult population has swollen. Downstream on the banks of the Bellinger River, onlookers enjoy the spectacular supper show. As the sky slides from blue to orange to salmon pink, a trickle of flying-foxes becomes a flood. After following the river for a short distance, great trails of flying-foxes head west and are lost to the huge expanse of State forest bordering Bellingen. Somewhere out there a massive flowering of nectar-rich blackbutt is taking place.

As the last of the adults leave the roost for the night is filled with a chirruping clamour of thousands of young flying-foxes. Their mothers began leaving them alone here when they were five weeks old. To begin with, they climbed nimbly around among the branches using their feet and thumbs, flapping their wings purposefully. In the weeks since, those flight muscles have strengthened.

The treacly night air is stirred by scores of little helicopters. One will give a quick flap, let go of the branch and become briefly airborne. By now most of them can fly only as far as the trees at the edge of the camp. It will be another two months before they'll fly well enough to forage for themselves. Until then, they'll continue to rely on their mothers' milk.

The adults return to the camp just before dawn, their fur dusted with fragments of blossoms and pollen the forest's real pixie dust. Scattering it far and wide, flying-foxes have been working real magic overnight - the kind that has kept Australian forests in business for millions of years. Hereabouts it's said

that the spell will hold for as long as there are flying-foxes on Bellingen Island.

**Thanks to AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHIC for allowing me to use parts of their article featured in the June issue.**

## **Spotted tail quoll in care**

Harold and Shirley have yet again had the privilege of handrearing a small quoll.



What magic animals! Playtime was very entertaining to watch as he practised swinging under branches and climbing. It is just their absolute 'out of control' desire for nice fat domestic chooks and any 'easy catch' birds in a cage which becomes a challenge when adult animals come in from the wild.

As quolls have such a short lifespan (males 4-6 yrs) and handreared ones are also unafraid of humans, it was a great solution to find a need for a male quoll (Quentin) in the breeding colony at Featherdale Park. NTWC members are very welcome to visit and receive a wildlife carers welcome.

### **Important note for contributors**

**All articles supplied to be in txt, word or RTF format with no headings in capitals, no double spaces between paragraphs. Pictures to be JPG no larger than 200dpi and 200kb in size and "named" not just camera details. If in doubt contact Colin at [turton37@bigpond.com](mailto:turton37@bigpond.com)**



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# Linda Dennis our Wildlife Trainer

as interviewed by Colin Wood

Linda's passion for Australian native animals was kick started nearly 15 years ago with her very first raptor experience at Eagle Heritage near Margaret River in WA. After an up close and personal experience with a Black Kite perching on her gloved hand she vowed that she would soon work closely with these magnificent creatures.

Some years later Linda held true to the vow and become licensed to raise and rehabilitate native animals that had been injured, were sick or orphaned. And, with the help of her husband Todd, Linda had been experiencing the joy of wildlife care for 10 years.

Linda has cared for many Australian native animals including several species

of macropod and possum, various reptiles and many species of bird including her beloved Birds of Prey, in which she specialised in for 3 years. Linda has had the immense pleasure of successfully rehabilitating and releasing many Birds of Prey including the awesome Wedge-Tailed Eagle, Nankeen Kestrel, Collared

Sparrowhawk, Peregrine Falcon, Black-Shouldered Kite and more.

In the last few years Linda has had the enormous delight of raising Bare-Nosed Wombats. These short and stocky bundles of energy and bravado

have become her ultimate passion in life! Her first wombat Tici - with very little effort - took over a large part of her heart and she has been hooked on wombats ever since.

Some of you may already know of Fourth Crossing Wildlife – [www.fourthcrossingwildlife.com](http://www.fourthcrossingwildlife.com) – Linda's website of 6 years. She originally started FCW to share her wildlife stories but it has since grown to include a host of care tips including quality wildlife resources submitted from all corners of the wildlife community, including carers, vets and zookeepers. Many wildlife carers contribute to FCW with photos and stories of their own, giving FCW a real community feel.

In 2004 Linda recognised that there was a gaping hole in her region in wildlife carer and public education relating to

**Tici - with very little effort - took over a large part of her heart and she has been hooked on wombats ever since.**



Australian wildlife and so she established Fauna First Aid. The programmes début was to teach vet nurse students at Orange TAFE how to properly care for native animals in a veterinary care



*Linda with Echidna*

situation Lectures have also been presented at Bathurst TAFE.

In 2005 Linda extended the programme to include school age students - high-

*Linda being presented with an award by Bob Debus MP*



lighting the dangers involved in handling wild animals and to show what Mum, Dad, Grandma and Grandpa could do to rescue a native animal in distress and to provide short term care.

“What to do with a Wiggling Wombat” is a real success with the kids while also teaching children and parents to have a healthy respect for our native animals. A community program – Wildlife Awareness - has also been included in the series teaching rescue, proper handling technique and short term care.

Linda also teaches specialised care of Bare-Nosed Wombats and have written, with the help of veterinarians and naturopaths, a comprehensive care guide for wombats called “A Guide to the Care of Bare-Nosed Wombat” which can be downloaded free of charge from FCW.

In June 2005 Fauna First Aid became a project sponsored by the Australian Geographic Society –Linda found to be a very humbling and proud moment. In 2006 Linda came Runner Up for the

prestigious Serventy Conservation medal from the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia and Linda is currently one of their Regional Councillors. And in 2007 was so honoured to receive the IFAW Animal Welfare and Education Award.

All in all Linda has had a very blessed “wild life” and she is looking forward to doing more for wildlife here in Armidale and it’s surrounds.

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# Can We Save our Wild Koala?

## The Conference

Friends of the Koala, also widely known by the acronym FOK, certainly know how to deliver a memorable conference. As the town of Lismore was declared a natural disaster zone and the Wilson River peaked at an incredible twenty centimetres below the town levee



(nearly eleven metres), koala conservationists from around Australia braved the elements and gathered for the Koala Conservation Conference, the first of its kind in Australia.

Unfortunately, due to the treacherous weather conditions and flooding many of the conference delegates had to leave Lismore in the early hours of the morning and with them several of the guest speakers for the day, including Professor Frank Carrick and Dr Bill Ellis of the University of Queensland who were to respectively deliver the Keynote Address and a paper on

‘Climate Change and the Koala’

. Also making an emergency departure was the Conference Opening Guest Speaker, Colleen Wood of Southern Ash Wildlife Shelter in Victoria who is

currently caring for the famous koala “Sam”, who reached world wide fame by those amazing photos showing her drinking from a fireman’s water bottle while holding tightly onto his hand.

The FOK Team re-planned with ease however and the conference was launched with Mark Graham of Coffs Harbour City Council with his paper

“Are Our Laws and Policies Knocking North Coast Koalas Out Of Their Trees”? which I must admit set a rather depressing atmosphere to the start of the conference! which unfortunately seemed to last the entire day through as more and more speakers verified Mark’s words.

## Habitat Loss

Mark painted a very grim picture for the future of our koalas, particularly those in the northern areas of NSW, an area which is drawing more and more sea-changers who see the beauty of the north as prime human habitat. Sadly, as more humans migrate north massive urban development follows resulting in habitat destruction for our precious and vulnerable koalas.

Development, so it would seem, is today’s top priority and it comes at the cost of many of our native animal species. Numerous loopholes exist in current state and local laws that allow indiscriminate broad scale clearing of native vegetation and many of the agencies that are responsible for the koala, including the Department of Environment and Climate Change,



Department of Planning and the Catchment Management Authority are “turning a blind eye” and are not pursuing breaches of the legislation designed to protect the koala and its habitat. We are seeing local extinctions of the koala as a result, even in areas where the koala has quite recently been considered abundant.

The State Environmental Planning Policy No 44 – Koala Habitat Protection (or better known simply as SEPP44) as outlined by Sue Higginson, a solicitor with Environmental Defenders Office, is a law that was introduced to New South Wales in 1995 after recognising critical problems in koala conservation.

It would seem though that today, 14 years after the policy commenced, we are not seeing improvements in koala conservation and SEPP44 is not considered as a useful or effective tool in the management of koala conservation.

Part of the reason for this is because

SEPP44 is not valid for land sizes under one hectare and much of the koala habitat in northern New South Wales is located on land parcels that are under one hectare and so SEPP44 is not relevant. As a result large areas of koala habitat are cleared in a patchwork manner and nothing can be done about it.

SEPP44 is also not recognised on land dedicated or reserved under the National Parks and Wildlife Act or the Forestry Act, and as mentioned above government agencies are not interested in pursuing relevant legislation breaches when it comes to native animal protection and so these areas seem to fall into a black hole.

SEPP44 encourages local governments to implement a Koala Plan of Management (KPoM). However the wording within the policy is vague at best, stating that “a plan of management may be prepared for” – the use of the word “may” renders the policy redundant as it is merely a suggestion not an enforcement. The word “must” surely would have been more useful terminology in a policy aimed at protecting a species.

Out of the 106 local government areas listed in SEPP44 (areas with known koala habitat) only one has implemented a Koala Plan of Management and that is Port Stephens. Coffs Harbour was the first council to implement a KPoM but it has since been audited and was found to have failed in its objective. Taree council, we were told by Christeen McLeod of Koalas in Care, wrote a KPoM some years ago but it has never been implemented.

Sue Higginson writes that State Envi-

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ronmental Planning Policies are necessary and important, but there is dire need for policies such as SEPP44 to keep up with changing pressures and growing knowledge. SEPP44 needs to be monitored and assessed in order to be able to be considered and measured as an effective species protection tool. The long awaited and welcomed recent approval and release of the NSW Recovery Plan for the Koala makes specific references to the need to reform SEPP44, which arguably do not go far enough.

## Disease

Jon Hanger, of the Australia Wildlife Hospital at Australia Zoo, presented his paper “Infectious Disease in Koalas: Implications for Conservation” which seemed to deepen the depressed mood of the conference. Jon discussed how, along with habitat destruction, koala diseases are undoubtedly one of the most critical threatening processes contributing to their dramatic population decline in New South Wales and Queensland. Two of the most troubling diseases for the koala is Retrovirus (KoRV) and Chlamydia which are both still relatively misunderstood.

John told us that “Koala Retrovirus are

fragile organisms that are able to integrate their own genetic sequences into the DNA strands of the cell that they have infected. In doing so they are able to hijack host cell processes to produce many more virus particles in effect, turning the host cell into a virus factory”. Scary! While in this process the virus may also “accidentally” switch on genes of the host cell, and this in turn may cause cancer.

The following conditions may be caused by infection with KoRV

- ✦ Leukaemia (a cancer of the blood)
- ✦ Myelodysplasia (abnormalities in production of blood cells)
- ✦ Immunodeficiency syndrome (koala “AIDS”)
- ✦ And other cancers, including lymphoma, osteochondroma and mesothelioma, and more.

Jon believes, based on current research, that 100% of the koala population in NSW and Queensland are effected by KoRV at some level. Interestingly, it would seem that the prevalence of KoRV in Victorian and South Australian koalas is considerably lower, but that result may be due more to the lack of study in that

region. The reasons for such a high prevalence of KoRV is that it is a genetic disease, inherited from parent to offspring, but it also spreads from koala to koala in close contact, similar to the spread of other viruses.

Jon told us that it is still unknown where the virus came from and what kind of impact it will have on koala populations. Studies into this continue.

It is considered that Chlamydiosis is now more



*Koala with Chlamydia*

common in koalas because of KoRV. Chlamydia affects most mainland koala populations and many islands ones too, but it is more common in the northern koalas of NSW and Queensland.

Some of the symptoms of Chlamydia include:

- ✦ Cystitis
- ✦ Conjunctivitis
- ✦ Reproductive tract disease
- ✦ Infertility

Again it would appear that southern koalas are not affected by these illness as much as the northern koalas are.

Chlamydia in southern koalas is relatively minor and rarely cause debilitating disease where in contrast severe chlamydial disease is commonly reported in their northern cousins.

Koalas that are infected with Chlamydia and KoRV may not show any outward signs of illness, and therefore some believe that these diseases are not as prevalent as they really are.

It is clear that more research into koala diseases is paramount to saving the species. Jon strongly urged all to lobby government to reach this goal and even suggested that as our past and previous government seem very lax on native animal research - and indeed saving species from decline - that we should all be “voting green”

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it would appear that these two key issues that threaten the survival of the wild koala - habitat loss and disease - really need to be fused into one very big important issue. If we as a nation focus on habitat protection only and comprehensive disease research is

not funded and quickly implemented then we are simply wasting our time. And vice versa.

We need to see more laws that protect the koala - better laws that don't have loopholes or can simply be ignored by a lazy government. We need to see legislation breaches pursued. We need to see the rehabilitation or construction of wildlife corridors for ease of movement for the koala and we need to implement a comprehensive public education program - disturbingly there is still so many people who share the koalas home that don't know enough about the koala, how they live and what threatens them. And we need to see comprehensive and in-depth research carried out on koala diseases - and we need to see it NOW!

The state of koala is in a very bad way. Along with these two key issues there are the others that threaten all of our wildlife including predator attack and road kill and injury. It is clear that there is much work to be done to ensure the longevity of these beautiful Australian icons.

The question is... can we save our wild koalas in time?

*This report is written with the help of Jon Hanger and Mark Graham who kindly forwarded their conference papers to me. Many thanks to them both.*

## Sources:

Are Our Laws and Policies Knocking North Coast Koalas Out of Their Trees? - Cr Mark Graham

Infectious Disease in Koalas: Implications for Conservation - Jon Hanger, Australia Zoo

State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP) No. 44 - Koala Habitat Protection

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## **‘Little Kanga’s Pocket’ is the title of a book by Marie Battersby**

by Julia Rose

which I was given after my first year in primary correspondence school.

Obviously I was ‘imprinted’ by this lovely story at the early age of 5yrs.



I was reading it to my grandson the other day and asked him what was odd about it, ‘Did he think all kangaroos had pouches?’ He quickly replied no only the girls. being well informed at age 6. So we laughed about it and decided it was just a nice story. Then Pam rings only 2 days later and said a new joey had come into care and guess what... it had both a penis and a pouch. I couldn’t believe the coincidence.

A chat to Australia Zoo vets got a recommendation that the joey should be euthanased on the grounds of it ‘never having a good life after release’. This is a very hard decision to make with an otherwise very healthy joey in care. We will seek other opinions and question whether some hormone treatment could tip the balance either way.

So there you go..... boy joeys can have pouches after all !

## **‘Vana,’ a Bettong in Carmels’ care.**

We never know what bundle we will be asked to collect or is delivered to our door.

Vana a Bettong arriving in Tenterfield as a healthy orphan. The fun then began to find a carer who had experience with bettongs, there was the feeding and their



*Vana the Bettong*

early independence to consider. Carmel named her Vana after the strange ‘chainsaw’ sound coming from the nest. Vana loved computer electrical cords so she ended up being quite expensive resident as she chewed her way through many things and even built her own nest from supplied grasses and added toys she found around the house. Easy care as far as feed times however only requiring 2-3 feeds a day even at a small size. She loved to find a lap to nestle into but hated being picked up. Carmel said it was more like raising a rabbit than a roo. Release was a difficult option so a breeding colony was sought and now Vana is in her new home complete with possible husband. What a privilege to know and care for this special animal.

# Fractures In Birds

By Dr Anne Fowler BSc(Vet)(Hons) ,  
BVSc, MACVSc (Avian Health)

Highton Veterinary Clinic  
Barrabool Rd, Highton, VIC, 3216

Our licence permits us to rehabilitate wildlife for release. For this to occur they must have regained their normal function, be 100% fit and have recovered fully from their injuries ? otherwise they are dog/cat food. What can be done for a bird with a fracture is dependent on many factors:

- \* Availability of veterinary assistance
- \* Type of fracture
- \* Duration of the fracture
- \* Location of the fracture

## AVAILABILITY OF VETERINARY ASSISTANCE

This is essential to treat fractures effectively. If you do not have access to this, then find it, travel the bird or don't start. There will be situations where due to a lack of resources, the bird is euthanased ? that is better for the animal than 6 weeks of pain and suffering and the same outcome. Not pleasant, but a fact of life.

\* Radiographs are required to diagnose a fracture. Often a second x-ray view is required. Where possible, to reduce pain and further damage, x-rays should be done under anaesthesia by a veterinarian.

\* It is a surgical procedure to place implants into bones. Ideally, surgery is performed to reduce the need for bandaging and permitting the immediate return to function of the affected limb.

\* Antibiotics, such as Clavulox are required for a minimum of two weeks.

\* Pain relief should be provided for the first 3 ~ 5 days. Metacam or carprofen is suitable for birds.

\* Follow up is required. Birds with strapped wings should be anaesthetised every 3 days for physiotherapy on the wing and bandage change. Repeat x-rays are taken at 10 days, 21 days and further if required.

\* Physiotherapy involves stretching the pytagial tendon and performing supported full range of motion starting at the hand and working back to the broken joint. This is performed under anaesthesia to prevent further damage to fracture site.

The cost of this to a paying client may approach \$300 - \$500! or more, so if your vet can and will help, please be appreciative!

## TYPES OF FRACTURES

We can describe fractures in different ways



## HAS IT BROKEN THE SKIN?

Open fractures are where the skin has been broken. They carry a poorer prognosis due to contamination of the wound and ascending bacterial infection.



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Closed fractures are where the skin has not broken. They carry a better prognosis. **IS ONE BONE OR MORE AFFECTED?**

If one bone is affected, the prognosis is better. If two bones are affected, such as the radius and ulna of a wing, then surgical intervention is a necessity, and a poor prognosis results. If two discreet bones are broken, say humerus and femur, then this may suggest euthanasia is preferred as the bird cannot use its wing to balance its leg or vice versa. Each case needs to be assessed on its individual merits.

**IS THE BONE IN ONE OR MORE PIECES?**

If the bone has a simple fracture, it is in two pieces and the prognosis is good.

If the bone has a comminuted fracture, then there are many pieces of bone. With loss of the length of bone, prognosis is poor as it is difficult to put several pieces back together as bird bone is more thin and brittle than mammalian bone.

**DURATION OF THE FRACTURE**

In the perfect world, fractures that are repaired within 24 hours of their occurrence have the best outcome and prognosis.

This does not always occur, animal is not found, or it is held by a member of the public, or more commonly, the carer does not appreciate the importance of the bird seeing a vet today and having a diagnosis made and surgery if required.

Fractures that are open (and thus infected) for longer than 24 hours have a much poorer prognosis. The longer the fracture spends broken, the more muscle contraction, drying of tissues, and progression of infection that occurs. The ends of the bone have begun to heal over by 48 hours.

We age fractures by looking at the colour of the bruising: red- less than 24 hours, blue-purple older than 24 hours but less than 5 days, green, 5 ~ 7 days, yellow greater than 8 days, no colour



older than 2 weeks. This is not accurate, but it is a start!

**LOCATIONS OF FRACTURES**

Where the fracture is found has a great bearing on whether the bird will be successfully released and also what method to fix the fracture is used.

Humerus fractures! most common fracture and requires surgery. Prognosis: 13% are released (Mason 2004)

Radius, can be bandaged, about 20% are successfully released.

**WHAT FRACTURES CAN BE BANDAGED?**

\* Shoulder fractures of coracoid, scapula and furcula if less than 400g (Redig 1993) and not in a high performance flier (raptor, migratory bird).

\* Radius, closed fractures from middle of bone to distal end.

- \* Ulna - closed fractures along length.
- \* Hand, closed fractures (rare occurrence).
- \* Tibiotarsus ? upper two thirds of bone, common in young magpies.
- \* Metatarsus (foot) ? simple fractures ? ball bandage required.

Bandages are changed on the wing every 3 days, and every 5 ~ 7 days for leg fractures.

The frequency of bandage changes is dependent on the presence of open wounds, daily changes for first 3 days with saline dressings, reduced to changes every 3 ~ 5 days dependent on the wound. Check bandages daily for swelling, pain or lack of use on limb.

Use Vetrap (Coplus, etc) or Micropore only as bandage material, NO ELASTO-PLAST as it damages the feathers.

#### **FRACTURES FOR SURGICAL REPAIR**

- \* Humerus fractures, biceps and triceps muscles will distract ends.
- \* Both radius and ulna are broken, wing length is reduced.
- \* Fractures that are near joints.
- \* Fractures of high performance birds, raptors and migratory species. Get these birds to specialist institutions immediately to improve their prognosis.

#### **IF YOU CANNOT FIND A FRACTURE, BUT THE BIRD CANNOT FLY, CONSIDER:**

- \* Shoulder fracture
- \* Muscle damage
- \* Nerve damage
- \* Concussion
- \* Blindness
- \* Metabolic disease, psittacosis, beak and feather disease
- \* Poisoning, oil, heavy metal, organo-

phosphate, etc.

#### **POST OPERATIVE CARE**

Look after feathers! The bird may need euthanasia due to feather damage preventing it from flying. Give medication as directed, and return to the vet promptly for rechecks. Feed a balanced diet ? consider supplementing with calcium to help the bone to heal.

Implants may be removed around the 14 day mark, depending on the individual and fracture.

#### **HOUSING REQUIREMENTS FOR THE BIRD WITH A FRACTURE**

A solid-walled cage that has enough space to turn around and stretch a wing is suitable for the first two weeks. It prevents further damage and makes it easier to catch the bird to medicate.

A larger cage can be used after the first two weeks. It should be large enough for the bird to extend its wings fully but not to fly.

At 30 days, the bone should have healed completely and the bird can start to regain fitness to fly in a large aviary. Force the bird to fly by (gently) chasing it around the aviary twice daily. Start with 5 minute sessions and build up to 10 minutes. Birds are lazy! If the bird cannot fly, have it re-evaluated by a veterinarian.

#### **References:**

Redig P. Clinical Review of Orthopaedic Techniques Used in the Rehabilitation of Raptors. In: Fowler ME (ed). Zoo and Wild Animal Medicine, 2nd Edn. Pub: Saunders. 1986, p 388 ? 401.

Mason P. Outcomes of Injuries in Wild Birds. Unpublished paper presented at Association of Avian Vets Australian Association Conference.2004

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# Steps To Avoid Loving Wildlife To Death



## OZARK is the Australian Wildlife Carer's Network.

<http://www.ozarkwild.org/>

It is a vital communication link enabling wildlife carers from a wide range of areas and experience, to learn from one another, to discuss pertinent issues and to be part of a non-political supportive community of fellow wildlife workers and carers.

First established over a decade ago, Ozark is the original and the largest national Australian wildlife carers network, which has subscribers from care groups across Australia, as well as individually licensed carers, wildlife vets, vet nurses, zookeepers and sanctuary workers worldwide, particularly those working with Australian fauna.

Resources on the Ozark website are checked by vets or known authorities in the field before being presented on the site, and material presented is genuine and original. Resources include an active mail server list, quality information and care notes, documented case studies, and much more. The purpose of Ozark is to provide quality information, communication and support to wildlife workers and carers, for the benefit of wildlife in care.

\* Learn about the animals you are hand-raising and about the approximate timing and stages of development. Encourage hand-raised animals to self-feed and to become independent at the appropriate time. Don't "baby" juvenile animals once they are starting to mature. Never hold back a wild animal's natural development.

\* Provide suitable facilities for animals in care, at the right stage of their development or rehabilitation. If you are unable to provide the right facilities, arrange to move the animal to a carer who can, as soon as possible.

\* With appropriate species, wherever possible, hand-raised wildlife should be placed with others of their own species, at a similar stage of development. Whilst some carers may want to hang on to the baby animal they have rescued, it is important to consider this animal's welfare first and foremost.

\* Never release a hand-raised animal without first ensuring that it is strong, fit, healthy and agile. It must be able to recognise, and capture, or obtain its natural foods, and be of the right age and stage of development to be able to not only survive, but to thrive where it is released.

\* Remember that the native animals we rear and release are not pets. Treating them as pets, and not allowing them to grow into normal healthy adults of their species, will ultimately cost them their lives. In any considerations, always put the animal's welfare and ultimate survival first.

**Next Meeting**  
**16th August**  
**Tree Group East Mann St**  
**Armidale**  
**Business Meeting**  
**10.30am**  
**Fund-raising 12 noon**  
**General meeting 1pm**  
**Speaker Linda Dennis**  
**our new wildlife trainer.**

**Training**  
**Care of Flying Foxes - by**  
**Dave Pinson**  
**Wildlife Awareness - by**  
**Linda Dennis**  
**Snake Handling.**  
**For these training**  
**programmes**  
**See website or seperate**  
**minutes document**



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