



*Rescue
Rehabilitate
Release*



**Newsletter of The Northern Tablelands
Wildlife Carers Issue N0 92 February 2012
Phone - 1800-008290 www.ntwc.org.au**

“Boris” - The Rehab Lace Monitor (*Varanus Varius*)

By Richard Biffin

On the 14th of February, I answered a call from a young couple for some assistance with a large male Lace Monitor (or Tree Goanna) that they had

movement, then waited patiently for my arrival. As it was an overcast day with intermittent rain, I suspect the Lacie's home tree (or at least one of them in his territory) must have been

for this particular Lacie. They were a nice young couple who were both very distraught at what had occurred and offered all the assistance I required to assess and restrain the large male Lacie for transport back to Armidale, for which I was very grateful. At first, we tried placing him in a large canvas postal bag, but he shredded it before I was even able to carry him to the car and dropped, unceremoniously through the bottom onto the ground below. So out came the duct tape, over all four ankles, which were then tied around the body and tail base of the animal, thereby disarming (apologies for the pun) his secondary defence weapons (ie: claws and tail). Another wrap around his snout, to hold the jaws closed and all was safe, or so I thought. I then offered to follow the couple out to the main, tarred road as they were



unfortunately collided with about 50K east along the Kempsey-Armidale Road. After the collision, it had enough energy left to drag itself off the road and the couple had placed a blanket over it's head to stop any further

close by the road (there is one particular candidate I have in mind) and he had come out between showers for whatever warmth was available from the roads surface. An all too common scenario, unfortunately,

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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 \$20 single and \$25 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.

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Armidale co-ordinators report , January 2012

What a change this summer has been so far, with wet , humid and lush growth everywhere. I can remember my father saying 'it is easier to cope with the problems of dry times than wet ' and I can see why. Our biggest problems have been macropod joeys in care which have suffered. As they begin grazing it is always danger time especially when there are so many

with the manager . I then sent a good old fax to a number I had been given and found a lovely Adrian at an Australian office desk . Thankfully something must have worked as we have had only one out of area call since. I didn't miss the opportunity to suggest Optus might like to sponsor an Australia wide wildlife contact referral service..... something we all need desperately (wishful thinking I know).



worms and bugs on the lush grasses. This can be a mega heart wrenching time for the 'Mums' who put so much effort into raising a joey. The numbers and variety of animals and birds coming into care or being relocated has been steady with fewer reptile calls so far. There is a delayed or second nesting happening for some species of birds so we can expect some late 'L' platers around. A bigger issue has been the 1800 number which has been unusually busy after Optus listed it as an Australian wide rescue number. We have had calls from everywhere and at all times of the day from desperate people looking for a rescuer. While it is nice to chat to these good people, when the call has been diverted to a mobile the cost is ours so treasurer is not pleased. Several desperate attempts to have the number removed from the list have been made including to someone in Phillipines and sitting in local office waiting for a moment

**Wanted;
another 2 carers
to assist on the
1800 number**

There are several good training courses coming up which I hope carers can attend.

Macropods will be covered by Julie Willis and Gary Wilson on 26th February and Lynda Stacker in Musswelbrook end of April. Koala course in Lismore 11th February.

Wanted; another 2 carers to assist on the 1800 number please. Just one day a week would make such a difference to those needing a rest. Give it a go, it is quite entertaining.

Julia

Do you utilise Our Website as much as you could?

www.ntwc.org.au

Main advantages of using the website

You can print out your

- Membership form
- Foster Care report
- Milk request form
- Animal transfer form
- Animal report form
- You can have access to most carer

organisation throughout Australia

- Have access to lots of useful links for education and help for native animals

- Read the latest and older issues of you newsletter

- See lots of photos of animals in care and those that have been released

- Lots of stuff to help you care for our native animals

- Check out the snakes in our area and see which are non; partly or very venomous

- Leave a message for our committee

In future, to save on postage and paper we will be sending out emails with the website address of the latest newsletter to all who have internet access.

Please register you email address with Colin at turton37@bigpond.com

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experiencing tire problems. You guessed it, low and behold, a flat tire, not metres from the main intersection. Anyway, after rendering assistance for a good hour or so (we had to entirely unpack the old ford panelvan so we could get to the spare wheel, of course) I arrived back at the car to find my captive sitting at the steering wheel!



Why does it always happen to me? Luckily, he couldn't reach the pedals (he was big, but not that big) or he probably would have driven off and left me!! Anyway, another half an hour of goanna wrestling, duct taping and a few choice swear words and we were safely on our way home to Armidale.

"Boris" as he's now known (thanks, Julia) has since been assessed more thoroughly by our local vet (with further advice from a well known reptile specialist vet based at Taronga Zoo) and, not surprisingly, has suffered head injuries consistent with a motor vehicle impact. Thankfully, the rest of his person is in perfect condition. That is to say, for an estimated 35 years plus male adult Lace monitor. The local vet's were astonished by his refusal to "pass out" prior to his medical assessment. In anaesthetising we poked him, prodded him and eventually gassed him

before he was willing to submit. Even then, we were all thankful that his x rays only took a few

priorities. Despite all this, however, Boris "The Battler" continues to amaze with his never say die attitude and stoic commitment to be around the following morning. Recent improvements, in such a short passage of time, include; both eyes now open, although only one pupil is still responsive to light and movement, some improvement in hearing and in the smelling department (ie; he reacts to clapping hands and the sound of movement and the provocative smell of my two captive bred lovely lady Lacies) and he continues to eat everything and anything that smells like possible food (force feeding, at first, and now feeding voluntarily). Today's small step forward was drinking a cocktail of water laced with fresh rat's blood. There's something mystical and truly awe inspiring about having an animal, who's evolutionary path diverged 250 million years ago from our own, with a head the size of your average human foot that's loaded with razor sharp teeth (not to mention the claws and tail), quietly drinking from a plastic cup in the palm of your hand like a 10 week old puppy.



minutes, because that's all it took for him to regain a dangerous state of consciousness! His list of injuries includes: almost total loss of vision (he has limited vision in his right eye), deafness to a greater or lesser degree (left ear orbit "blown completely", but I guess two ton of ford panel van travelling at 60k in your ear will do that to you, no visible damage to his right, at least externally) and an associated loss of balance, loss of his primary sense of smell (a tongue that seems to poke out of the mouth at every different angle, except the correct one) and possible brain injury, all making his most obvious injury, a dislocated lower jaw, seem low on his list of medical

So, to sum up, although release is looking unlikely at this stage, I am more hopeful that survival for Boris is a definite option. Further recommendations from the Taronga specialist vet still to come. In any event, I'm sure he'll give it a damn good shot!! Personally, I don't think he'll give up the ghost until he's happily "torn me a new one". He REALLY hates me.

Tawny Frogmouth 'P' platers and their cage mum.

The family grew to three chicks eventually so I am very grateful for the extra mice from UNE which have helped them grow into beautiful strong birds.

All are now catching every grub and bug I can find to place into the leaf litter tray, but those white scarab grubs are getting scarce. So now we wait for the moths to appear. I have recently read Tawnies eat lots of bull dog ants..... fantastic but I am not catching them.

First release went well for the oldest male tawny but the younger one didn't fly away so popped her back in with the youngest one and they can go together. It is the first time I have had a cage mum for the young tawnies and it was great to see them all cuddled up on a branch, I think it has made a difference so will consider applying for permanent care status .

She is a brilliant teaching aid as well.

Julia



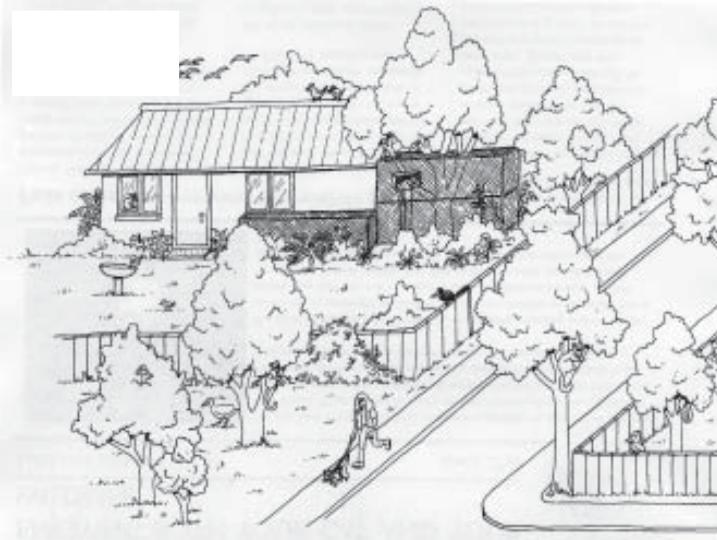
ENJOYING BOTH YOUR CAT AND YOUR WILDLIFE

Taken from Land for Wildlife Note No. 16

Do you have a warm and furry companion purring on your lap as you read this? Good. What follows has been written for cat-owners who appreciate the natural environment but who are equally attached to a feline friend. Any meaning-

Felis catus - an overview of a wildlife predator

The cat, *Felis catus*, whether domesticated or feral, is a natural predator of animals up to its own weight and size, although the majority of



For cats that love the outdoors, an outdoor cat run attached to the house is a great alternative

ful discussion about cats and the environment must include both feral and domestic animals because in reality one can become the other.

Evidence of wildlife losses caused by cats, through hunting and the spread of disease, is mounting as the findings of more studies are reported. Some people may feel exposed to criticism and even derision because of their cat and its effect on wildlife, but there is positive news for beleaguered owners and their pets. Some simple and sensible steps will remove the threat to wildlife.

animals killed -weigh less than 100 grams. In Australia, cats have been recorded as consuming a wide range of endemic wildlife as well as introduced pest species like the rabbit. Known prey includes 186 species of birds, 87 reptile and 64 mammal species and numerous frogs and insects. According to the Environmental Protection Agency¹ it is inevitable that rare and endangered animals, such as freckled ducks and bilbies, are numbered among the victims.

Statistics vary from source to source, but it seems likely that Australia has between 2.2 and 3

million domestic cats. According to a study conducted by Adelaide zoologist Dr. David Paton¹ these pets, despite generally being well fed at home, on average take 16 mammals, 8 birds and 8 reptiles annually — potentially up to 96 million vertebrates each year.

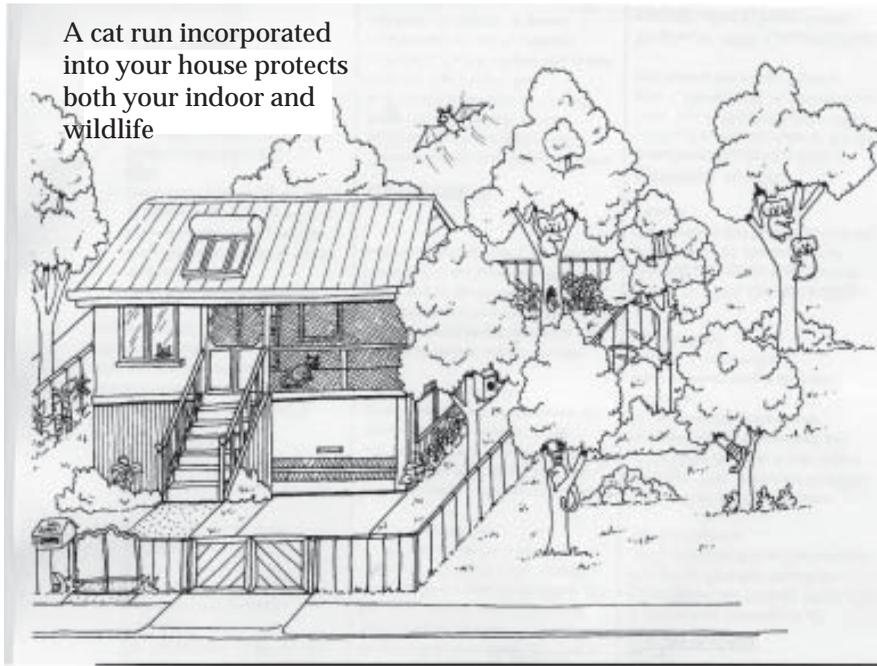
Some people claim there are actually 12 million feral cats Australia-wide. Even if we accept the more cautious estimate of 3.8 million nominated by the Cape York Peninsula Landuse

endangered Proserpine rock wallaby is among the casualties.

History

Cats may have been introduced to the continent by ships -wrecked in northern Australian waters prior to 1788. They were certainly carried by the First Fleet and brought in as pets by European settlers. References to wildlife kills by domestic cats are recorded as early as 1839\ The 1841 diary of Miss Anne Drysdale³, who lived

A cat run incorporated into your house protects both your indoor and wildlife



Strategy³, this is still a lot of feral cats

living on whatever they catch — an adult cat needs about 300 grams of food daily to sustain itself. Since feral cats have no supplementary diet it is certain that they require more prey than domestic cats and the loss of wildlife is much greater, thousands of millions of animals a year.

The blood protozoan disease *Toxoplasmosisgpnidii*, to which the cat is a host, causes death and foetal injury to native animals including marsupials and macropods. The

near Geelong in Victoria, notes that each day her cat brought home many small birds and reptiles. She tells of eating a couple of quail captured by her pet. Fauna surveys⁵ in 1929 on Cape York Peninsula recorded the presence of feral cats and it is claimed that all areas of Australia have carried feral cats for at least a century, currently at an estimated density (on average) of one cat per 200 hectares¹. Cats filled a vacant ecological niche in Australia and settled into the bush -with very little opposition from the endemic wildlife. They had few established predators or diseases

to control their numbers although, in some areas, dingoes may have reduced or controlled populations. The cat's hunting methods were very successful in Australia and native species were not adapted to this new stalking predator. Nocturnal hunting allowed predation during the hours when many diurnal native wildlife were at their most vulnerable. In Australia, unlike in many of the colder countries in the northern hemisphere, cats were able to live outside all year. Consequently, reproduction rates were high with females presenting up to three litters annually, quickly swelling the cat population. In arid areas, where a lack of water may have been expected to reduce cat numbers, they were able to live on the water contained in prey.

Management problems

In Australia, traditionally the cat has been admired and ownership has been encouraged by many Australians as both a social companion and a destroyer of vermin, despite its inefficiency at the latter. Cat control or licensing has only recently been introduced in some Australian states. Our loss of wildlife, invisible to most of the public, has never been quantified in economic terms and therefore not confronted in a coordinated manner across the country. Given the will, cat control is very difficult as these animals are intelligent, hardy and well-equipped for survival even in the harshest environmental conditions.

The impact of cats

While there is no evidence of cats being directly responsible for the actual extinction of an endemic species on mainland Australia, it is apparent on smaller islands in various parts of the world. Predation by cats is thought to be the reason for the extinction of the spectacled hare wallabies and golden bandicoots on Hermite Island off the coast of Western Australia¹. It is reported that the brush-tailed bettongs of St Francis Island, south-west of South Australia, were all removed by a lighthouse-keeper's cats¹.

In Australia, studies have shown that the predator can certainly control bird numbers by preventing a net population gain³. Failure of endangered species recovery programs has also been blamed on feral cat predation¹. When Northern Territory wildlife rangers failed to re-establish a colony of rufous hare-wallabies in the Tanami Desert, the finger was pointed at feral cats in the area. In terms of ecology and competitor pressure, the introduced cat has probably placed stress on Australia's native quolls, which traditionally ate the same food.

The wildlife kill statistics presented earlier are undoubtedly alarming. If the best estimates of the scientists in the field are accepted, annually nearly four thousand million wildlife kills can be laid at the feet of cats, feral and domestic. To be both statistically more accurate, and certainly fairer, it should be noted that in southern Australia feral cats eat many rabbits, hugely reducing native animal kills. Even so, there are claims by government agencies that about 80 percent of animals killed by cats are endemic to this country¹.

Unfortunately predation is not the only ill effect on Australia's wildlife attributable to cats. While, as hunters, cats kill only animals up to their own size, they are solely responsible for the introduction and the sexual reproduction of the disease toxoplasmosis, *Toxoplasma gondii*. This blood protozoan disease has serious implications for all native animal populations, particularly kangaroos and wallabies otherwise too large to have been harmed by cats. The sexual reproduction phase of the disease can only take place in a cat's gut, which is unaffected by the cycle. Infected cat faeces, over four days old, carry parasitic eggs (oocysts) that when ingested by other animals, including humans, multiply, causing clinical illness often leading to both foetal and adult deaths. Rodents and arthropods can act as re-infecting agents to cats, allowing the oocysts to complete their life cycle. While feral cats are the most serious carriers of the disease, Dr David

Middleton of The Wildlife Health Australia Trust estimates that up to 30 percent of domestic cats may be infected⁴.

Management - short and long term

Management begins with problem recognition by the Australian public and government. The cat as a vertebrate pest may appear to fall into the distinct categories of domestic and feral, but in fact they intermingle to such an extent that the line is very blurry. However, such a division is



useful tactically in the management of these animals.

Domestic cat care

From the outset it should be made quite clear that there is a simple win-win solution to the problem of domestic cats and the surrounding wildlife — a bonus for the humans that love both.

The companionship provided by cats to many people is important socially and should not be played down by over-ardent environmentalists. A 1989 survey of cat-owners revealed that 23 percent of men and 45 percent of women spent between 30 and 120 minutes playing with their cat every day¹.

There are three big management issues confronting a cat-owner — uncontrolled breeding, wildlife hunting and spread of disease. But they are easily resolved by those genuinely wanting to make an environmental difference.

Desexing domestic cats prevents them further populating the wild should they stray or interact with feral animals. The pay-off is that, on average, desexed cats live longer and fighting and roaming in 90 percent of males is eliminated. Both sexes rarely spray urine when desexed because they become less territorial.

Most cats will use litter trays if trained to. By cleaning the litter out daily and carefully disposing of the faeces, you can remove the danger of toxoplasmosis to members of the household as well as to wildlife.

The combination of the freedom of the house and a secure outdoor cat-run, perhaps connected by a cat-flap provides absolute safety for wildlife and cats alike. Cat-runs need not be expensive, unsightly or dull! Chicken-wire enclosures can include shrubs and trees, and even elevated tunnels through the garden canopy.

For cat-owners less committed to absolute wildlife and pet care but who are prepared to make some effort, management is straightforward.

Desexing as previously mentioned. Keep the cat in at night to reduce prime-time kills. Ninety percent of domestic cats that go missing don't return after being out at night. Keep a cat litter tray and encourage the animal to use it. Triple-bell your cat so that all the movement is captured; single bells appear to be ineffective. Note that bells don't help reptiles, which can't hear.

Managing feral cats

Feral cats have in the past been shot, trapped and baited, methods useful for short-term control in small areas like rubbish tips that attract cats in large numbers. In the Diamantina region of Queensland, at the centre of prime greater bilby habitat, in an area of only a few square kilometres about 500 feral cats were shot in a fortnight. It is uncertain what caused such an aggregation but certainly shooting was successful in lowering feral numbers for a time. Trapping is used in



Compiled by: **Mick Barrett** 'Landfor Wildlife Co-ordinator Whitsundays

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urban areas where shooting is inappropriate. Elimination by baiting has succeeded on small islands off New Zealand where repopulation did not occur¹. Research in that country shows promise in the formulation of baits attractive to cats.

The management of other pests, like rabbits, needs to be integrated with that of feral cats; a reduction in rabbit populations, for example, could greatly increase wildlife predation by cats in southern Australia.

Biological control may be the only effective management strategy in the long term, but a vaccine for the protection of the family pet must be developed at the same time. Research into a viral sterility gene is continuing.

Conclusion

Without management action to reduce and control cats, the species will remain one of Australia's most successful vertebrate pests. Control methods thus far have been ineffective. Until a solution arrives and cat numbers are greatly reduced, hundreds of millions of native animals will continue to die annually. But cat-owners need not feel that they are die bad guys in this war. By taking the simple measures outlined here to manage their cat, they can hold up their heads as protectors of wildlife as well as enjoying the love and affection provided by their pet.

**Meeting dates &
times**

19th February

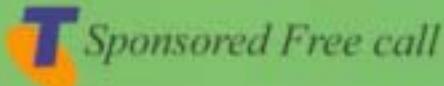
Committee meeting

10.30

**12 noon Fund Raising
meeting**

**1.30PM General
meeting & Talk by
Jessica Price-Purnell
business consultant**

**Training Course 26th
February email
turton37@bigpond.com
for details
Support you group
and buy/sell raffle
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