

CALM and Eagle Heritage restore birds to wild



Les Harris helps RAAF pilot Gair Bowbyes release one of the eagles.
Photo courtesy Royal Australian Air Force



The wedge-tailed eagles. Photo courtesy Royal Australian Air Force

LATE last year, CALM's District Manager at Exmouth, Doug Myers and I were called out to collect a sick or injured wedge-tailed eagle at a water hole on Charles Knife Road, North West Cape.

We found the eagle, a female, lying at the water's edge, and apparently unable to use her legs.

It was a warm day, about 40 degrees, so I checked the water, which was quite warm and full of slime and other growth.

From this, I suspected botulism poisoning as the main cause of the eagle's problems.

To calm her, we covered the bird's head with

by Les Harris

a towel so we could carry out further inspections, but we found no other injuries.

The local vet, Matt Bullard, was away for a couple of days, so we took her to the home of Debbie Coote, a member of Conservation Animal Rescue, Research and Education (CARE).

Over the next two days, Debbie and I fed the bird with meat, along with glucose and water administered orally using a syringe, and she seemed to improve.

When Matt returned, he confirmed my diagnosis, and told me how to

administer the medication he prescribed; this was to be by daily injections into the eagle's chest muscles.

Readers might like to try imagining Debbie and me 'playing vets' while crammed inside the cage; I would cover the eagle's head with a rag and turn it onto its back, while Debbie held its head with one hand and its legs with the other, so I could give the bird its injection.

Later, when I was away on a two-day work-related trip, my son Craig had the pleasure of taking over these duties.

I should mention that the eagle was unable to open her claws, which made our task a

fraction easier.

Eventually, we got the bird to the stage where she could stand, but she still couldn't open her claws; she was literally walking on her knuckles.

A phoned inquiry to Phil Pain of The Eagle Heritage in Margaret River revealed that the bird had 'muscle lock', which required intensive therapy.

So she was sent to Phil and his band of carers, who kept in touch with us, providing updates on her improvement, until she was ready to be returned to North West Cape.

BUT—Phil had a slight dilemma!

Another eagle—a male from the Darkan area—

was housed in the same aviary as our female.

Now, nature being what it is, these two eagles had paired up, which now posed the question: Do we split them up and return them to their respective home territories, or can we return them as a pair to one or the other's territory?

Enter CALM Wildlife Protection Branch at Como with permission for them both to be released on North West Cape.

Then came our second hurdle. The local domestic airline was fully booked at that time, and was unable to accommodate our needs.

So Wildlife Protection Branch approached the RAAF.

Fortunately, the airforce

had a Caribou aircraft flying from Pearce to Karratha the following week, and as the wedge-tailed eagle is the centre piece of RAAF emblems, the boys in blue felt it was entirely appropriate to help.

At long last, the two eagles arrived at the Exmouth Light Aircraft strip to be greeted by the welcoming party which included the RAAF public relations film crew, Debbie Coote and me.

At the release site, about 11 kilometres away, we found a small band of people from the nearby Kailis prawn factory, eagerly waiting to watch the event.

The release took only a few seconds. Once the

heavy cardboard boxes were opened, the female took off immediately and perched in a gum tree about 200 metres away.

The male hesitated, probably because the terrain was unfamiliar to him, but after we gave the box a slight shake, he headed straight for the hills.

It was a heart-warming experience to see these two majestic birds, now flying very strongly, in their rightful place within the natural world.

CALM and the CARE group of Exmouth would like to thank The Eagle Heritage carers and the RAAF for their compassionate response to our plea.



R.A.A.F. CARIBOU
ARRIVING AT EXMOUTH
LIGHT AIRCRAFT STRIP.

5/6/96



UNLOADING THE EAGLES
FROM THE CARIBOU



HEADING FOR THE
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THE MOMENT OF
RELEASE.

L.TOR.

LES HARRIS (CALM.)
DEBBIE COOTE (C.A.R.E).