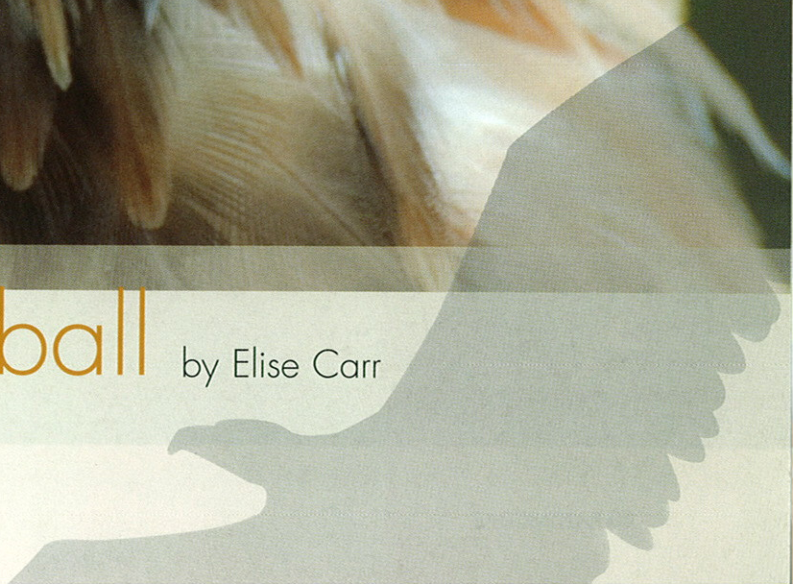


Feathers, fame and football

by Elise Carr

Whiteman Park and the Western Australian Birds of Prey Centre share a vision for the rehabilitation and protection of native animals.



Whiteman Park, located in the Swan Valley, provides a valuable habitat for a range of plants and animals by acting as an important refuge within 25 kilometres of Perth. The park is also home to the Western Australian Birds of Prey Centre, which is devoted to the care and management of native birds of prey. The centre features an outdoor arena for interactive and educational displays which offer visitors to the park the exhilarating opportunity to see eagles, falcons, kites and owls up close or soaring through the sky.



Within its 4,200 hectares of bush and wetland, Whiteman Park also provides desirable nesting grounds for a vast array of wild bird species. More than 100 species of birds inhabit the park, including a pair of nesting wedge-tailed eagles which have made the park home for more than eight years. Last year the pair produced two chicks in the breeding season.

Feathered football star

The most well known of the Western Australian Bird of Prey Centre's inhabitants is Auzzie the wedge-tailed eagle, famed not only for entertaining visitors to Whiteman Park but also for its association with the West Coast Eagles Football Club.

With the cooperation of the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC), Auzzie highlighted the importance of bird rehabilitation and protection, and raised the profile of the Western Australian Birds of Prey Centre by making game appearances during the 2007 AFL season. Auzzie flew around the grounds of Subiaco Oval before West Coast Eagles home games

impressing audiences with its grace and two-metre wingspan. The appearance of Auzzie at Subiaco, as well as on television shows and at exhibitions, is a positive platform for providing educational information about the preservation of these amazing animals.

Rise to stardom

Taken from its nest in Alice Springs, Auzzie was kept illegally as a pet until authorities rescued and placed it in a temporary home with a Northern Territory wildlife carer. Once Auzzie's condition was assessed and an export licence obtained, the Birds of Prey Centre was authorised to start rehabilitation and provide it with a new home in the west.

After transporting Auzzie from the Northern Territory to Perth, an assessment was carried out to determine the level of 'human imprinting' by watching Auzzie's behaviour and response to various environments. The assessment deemed Auzzie non-releasable as a result of human interference that had rendered it unable to survive in the wild. The assessment also resulted in approval for the centre to include Auzzie on its education licence, which allows fauna to be displayed for educational purposes. Socialisation and ensuring familiarity to a broader variety of environments was necessary to adapt Auzzie to life as an ambassador for the centre and all birds of prey. If not for the commitment, time and expertise of the centre, Auzzie would have been euthanased.

Bird rehabilitation

The rehabilitation of Auzzie, as with any wedge-tailed eagle or bird of prey, was very involved. Treatment



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Main Auzzie the wedge-tailed eagle.
Photo – Dennis Sarson/Lochman Transparencies

Above left Juvenile wedge-tailed eagle.
Photo – Whiteman Park

Left Wedge-tailed eagles have long entertained visitors at Whiteman Park.
Photo – Ann Storrie



Left Auzzie at a West Coast Eagles football game at Subiaco Oval.
Photo – William Crabb Photography

Above The Western Australian Birds of Prey Centre rehabilitates a number of species, including the brown falcon.
Photo – Whiteman Park

Below Whiteman Park flag.
Photo – Dennis Sarson/Lochman Transparencies

the displays and talks use birds that are unable to be returned to the wild. Many organisations, including DEC, rely on the centre to rescue, rehabilitate and care for sick, injured and orphaned birds.

Flying into the future

The relationship between Whiteman Park and the Western Australian Birds of Prey Centre will continue to support the protection and educational awareness of these birds of prey through the park's school and holiday education programs and park flying displays. By doing so they will help to ensure these magnificent birds survive well into the future.



Elise Carr worked with Whiteman Park in environmental communications and as the Volunteer and Education Coordinator. Whiteman Park can be contacted on (08) 9209 6000. Anyone who finds a sick, injured or orphaned bird or animal can call the Department of Environment and Conservation's 24-hour, seven-day-a-week WILDCARE helpline on (08) 9474 9055 for help and advice.

and recovery, with the purpose of preparing the animal to return to the wild, requires a great commitment of time, constant training, husbandry and regular assessment by a knowledgeable, specialised carer. The importance of custom-made aviaries, transport logistics and diet are paramount in ensuring the condition and survival of the bird.

There are three stages of rehabilitation and protection when treating birds of prey. The first stage involves animal collection, initial hospitalisation and intensive veterinary monitoring. Issues of confinement for injuries such as a broken wing or leg, as well as necessary medication are addressed. The second stage is a less intensive transition phase, which focuses on rehabilitation and constant care to regularly assess the progress and wellbeing of the bird. The final stage specialises in flying training before release, if the bird is deemed suitable to return to life in the wild. This involves providing stimulus so the bird

can think for itself, scavenge or search for food and regain the ability and confidence to survive independently. It is imperative for the carer to determine a bird's fitness level and establish the best exercise programs to ensure it can fly and therefore enjoy a successful release.

The Western Australian Birds of Prey Centre receives several calls each week from people asking for advice or assistance with injured or malnourished birds and babies that have fallen out of nests. Birds are cared for on an individual basis, with their own rehabilitation program and regular personal assessments. It can take a couple of weeks to 12 months to rehabilitate a bird, with the average time being three to six months.

The centre is run by Yvonne Sitko, and employs eight other staff who are assisted by volunteers. The centre is funded by donations and money raised from educational demonstrations, such as flying displays and talks for school and corporate groups. All of

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