




Wildlife NEEDING AID



Every year, thousands of injured and ill native animals are cared for and rehabilitated by a number of generous and unselfish volunteers. And, with a few behaviour changes, we can all do our part to help protect our precious native wildlife.

by Ann Storrie

Over the past 100 years, more mammal species have become extinct in Australia than anywhere else in the world. A range of factors have played a role with some of the main culprits being introduced predators such as foxes and feral cats. Another significant factor has been loss and degradation of habitat due to increasing human population. And, sadly, sometimes native animals fall victim to vehicles on our roads and tracks and occasionally cruelty through misguided or even malicious actions of people. Although this situation is overwhelming, work is being carried out by Parks and Wildlife through its *Western Shield* program to protect native animals by reducing predation by foxes and feral cats. And, there is a network of dedicated and special people who in their own private, unselfish way, support the tenuous existence of our precious native animals.

UNITED FRONT

Around Western Australia there are about 20 major rehabilitation centres, and almost 200 approved registered rehabilitators who work alongside 2000 volunteer rehabilitators. Parks and Wildlife works with the community to provide guidance on standards for wildlife rehabilitation in Western Australia and offers courses and support for wildlife rehabilitators on an on-going basis.

Much of the work done by Parks and Wildlife in conserving the large and unique array of native animals could not be



achieved without the involvement of the community and the partnerships created throughout the State with wildlife carers and Friends groups.

One group which is making a difference in the Busselton and Margaret River area is Fostering and Assistance for Wildlife Needing Aid (FAWNA) – a not-for-profit, government approved, wildlife rescue and rehabilitation organisation for sick, injured and orphaned native fauna. Based in Busselton, the group was formed more than 30 years ago and is managed entirely by volunteers who run several emergency care centres throughout the area.

Rehabilitators treat and shelter injured and orphaned wildlife until they are able to be released back to the wild. Many volunteers also build and supply the necessary equipment for the rehabilitation and release of animals, some work on

committees; others conduct educational programs (especially for schools), while others raise funds to implement the aims of FAWNA.

As well as caring for wildlife, FAWNA aims to provide support for other wildlife rehabilitators, form associations with groups with similar aims and encourage appreciation and respect in the minds of others for our native animals. FAWNA works alongside Parks and Wildlife, facilitating training for rehabilitators and keeping people informed of the latest wildlife issues.

In 2011, FAWNA was one of the key volunteer groups searching, rescuing and rehabilitating wildlife after the Margaret River fires. Following that effort, FAWNA successfully applied to Parks and Wildlife, plus sought community donations, to purchase an emergency response van. The van is equipped with medical supplies, cages, capturing equipment and information and is used around the south-west to facilitate emergency treatment of injured wildlife. During the fires near Harvey in early 2016, the van was used as a base from where FAWNA and other groups such as the National Animal Rescue Group operated.

RESCUE, REHABILITATE AND RELEASE

Three 'R's' are paramount in FAWNA's aims: to rescue, rehabilitate and release



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Main and inset Ill and injured native animals, such as chuditch and woylies, are often provided care and rehabilitation by volunteers.

Photos – Parks and Wildlife

Above Members of FAWNA and NARGA with the emergency response van attending a bushfire.

Left A tiny juvenile western ringtail possum.

Photos – Ann Storrie



Far left Participant Sue Morrison at a Parks and Wildlife training program learning to stomach tube a reptile.



Left Jeff Falconer securing a ringtail possum release basket into a peppermint tree.
Photos – Ann Storrie

native fauna. This can involve a degree of risk to the volunteers and bites and scratches are an everyday occurrence! It is therefore imperative that all FAWNA members are registered volunteers with Parks and Wildlife to enable cover to be provided for some medical expenses should injuries be sustained while undertaking wildlife rescue and rehabilitating activities.

Volunteers are also obliged to adhere to relevant Acts and Regulations pertaining to either animal welfare or wildlife at all times. Parks and Wildlife runs regular courses in basic wildlife rehabilitation for interested members of the public. Online modules plus two-day seminars are conducted with information presented by some of WA's most experienced wildlife rehabilitators. They share their expertise in their specialist fields such as the rehabilitation of marsupials, reptiles and birds (including raptors). FAWNA also informs members of any other relevant programs and workshops that are organised by groups such as the Possum Centre Busselton, Geo Catch and the South West Catchments Council, to name a few.

RESPONSIBLE REHABILITATORS

Many species of animal that come into the care of FAWNA members are threatened and listed as 'vulnerable', 'endangered', or 'critically endangered'

on the threatened species list. Minimum standards for transportation, rehabilitation facilities (such as cage sizes and disease control), release procedures and record keeping are outlined and should be adhered to. There is a maximum fine of \$10,000 for intentionally killing a specially protected animal and a \$4000 maximum fine for wounding, hunting or capturing protected fauna under the Wildlife Conservation Act. These are set to rise following the introduction of the new Biodiversity Bill into State Parliament late last year, which when passed will see significant new penalties, with offences for harming critically endangered species and ecological communities, attracting a maximum penalty for an individual of \$500,000. Hefty fines can also be imposed if habitat is unlawfully removed or degraded and for harassing an animal.

FAWNA rehabilitators are committed to responsibly feed, nurture, clean, monitor, record, and gradually rehabilitate their charges. This process can be immensely time-consuming. Two especially dedicated volunteers are Jeff and Linda Falconer from Busselton. Jeff has been President of FAWNA for more than six years and has manned its emergency phone helpline almost full-time for this period. Often taking up to 12 calls a day, Jeff and Linda give advice to all callers, attend call-outs to rescue wildlife (some in very difficult situations)

and organise and mentor possum rehabilitators throughout the south-west. As retired teachers, they are also ideal people to educate young and old on the responsibilities to our wildlife.

THE WESTERN RINGTAIL POSSUM

One of the most common native species to come into care in the Busselton region is the western ringtail possum (*Pseudocheirus occidentalis*). Its threat level was upgraded in 2015 from 'vulnerable' to 'endangered'. Ninety per cent of the ringtails' diet consists of leaves from the peppermint tree (*Agonis flexuosa*), which has been severely depleted due to clearing for housing developments in recent years. It is estimated that there are fewer than 8000 western ringtail possums in the wild and it's possible this number is decreasing.

In 2015, Jeff and Linda took in 52 young ringtail possums. Many of these were possum joeys, orphaned or abandoned when their mothers were attacked and injured or killed by domestic pets, or disturbed by people, others were survivors of vehicle accidents, while some adults and their young had to be taken into care after having jumped onto hot barbecue plates. Many were dehydrated and weakened in the heat of summer.

Emergency calls are not only received from people who find these injured or abandoned animals, but from the veterinary clinics in the area. Most veterinary hospitals in Busselton, Dunsborough and Margaret River will treat native fauna, free of charge and will contact rehabilitators when necessary, often via the FAWNA helpline. FAWNA has developed good relationships with local vets by providing each veterinary



Above FAWNA was on hand to help rescue native animals fleeing from the fires that devastated Waroona and surrounding areas. *Photo – Ann Storr*

practice with a hospital box to be used for wildlife only, as well as \$500 for medications. FAWNA contributes to the payment of X-rays and works with the vets and Perth Zoo to establish plans for operations. If you find an injured or abandoned animal, your nearest veterinary hospital may be able to help.

WHAT CAN YOU DO FOR WILDLIFE?

There are many things we can do to help our native species, even in our own home and backyards. You do not have to devote your life to caring for possums, but you can appreciate and accept the existence of them and other native animals. Make your garden fauna friendly. Plant local trees and shrubs to attract native birds and animals. Quendas like scrubby ground cover surrounding patches of lawn – yes, they love digging up those pesky lawn beetles and the small holes they make are easily filled in. Put boxes and hollow logs into trees as nesting places for birds, possums and other arboreal animals such as phascogales. Wildlife stacks are a wonderful way of getting

rid of rubbish and to keep the children (and adults) amused. Made of old timber, building rubble, pipes, metal sheeting and just about anything that is littering the yard, they can be piled up in tiers that provide nesting sites and shelter for insects, frogs and other animals. However, be mindful that piles of material can provide shelter for venomous snakes, so be sure to keep them away from buildings and suburban backyards and check them for snakes before children and pets use them. Place water containers in trees for birds and possums and on the ground for reptiles and ground-dwelling native mammals and install bird baths and ponds surrounded by native vegetation. Develop a compost heap at the back of the garden to attract insects that will in turn attract animals, and put in solar lights to attract insects at night for the frogs.

It is also important to minimise the use of fertilisers and poisons in your home and garden. Look up alternatives to your long-lasting surface sprays and weed killers. It may take a little more effort and time, but the rewards far outweigh the inconvenience and are often cheaper. Use rat and mice traps in their nesting areas rather than poison. Even if you don't kill the native animals directly, rats and mice that have ingested poison can be eaten by raptors and are a large concern for the declining hawks, falcons and eagles in rural areas. Avoid using snail pellets that may be

Contacts

If you find an injured or orphaned native animal you can:

- contact your nearest Veterinary hospital
- ring Parks and Wildlife's Wildcare helpline on (08) 9474 9055.

If you are within the south-west region of Western Australia, ring the FAWNA number on 0438 526 660.

If you would like information on the Basic Course for Wildlife Rehabilitation contact the Parks and Wildlife's Community Involvement Unit on (08) 9334 0251 or visit www.dpaw.wa.gov.au/get-involved/wildlife-rehabilitation-and-courses.

eaten by native wildlife and, instead, use a shallow dish filled with beer to kill snails, and encourage the bobtails in the yard as snails are part of their normal diet (though perhaps without the beer!).

Encourage native birds and other animals to feed only on their natural foods. Ringtail possums in care, for example, if reared on their specific marsupial milk and peppermint leaves with a few native flowers for treats, will not be interested in eating the neighbours' fruit and vegetables when released. And never allow wild animals to become reliant on humans for their main source of food.

Learn about the native species in your area and always keep cats and dogs in at night. Never allow your pets to harass or kill wildlife.

WHY CARE?

You don't need to have rehabilitated an injured ringtail possum joey to understand the importance of our wildlife. We all have a role to play in providing the best environment we can for these animals to ensure they persist in the wild for years to come and fulfil their unique and important roles in the ecosystem.

Anne Storr is a regular contributor to *LANDSCOPE* magazine and a registered wildlife carer. She can be contacted by email (naturescapes.au@hotmail.com).