

FAUNA

WILDLIFE RESCUE AFTER BRIDGETOWN AND BALINGUP FIRES

Sheila Howat

We hear a lot about the plight of humans in wildfires, but what about the fauna? Wildlife carers and veterinarians in Bridgetown, Kirup and Donnybrook are puzzled by the lack of wildlife presented for treatment after the wildfires this summer. I am concerned that burnt and orphaned animals may not have been identified as being in trouble.

Discussions with firefighters indicate that some small mammals were left to fend for themselves because they were presumed to be independent, when in fact they were of insufficient size to survive in the best of environments, let alone a destroyed habitat. Because some kangaroos with third degree burns and lost foot pads were still hopping, they were thought to be undamaged. I am hopeful that a more coordinated approach to wildlife rescue can be organised for the next fire season.

There were plenty of experienced carers offering their services. Veterinarians at the Blackwood Veterinary Clinic in Bridgetown were geared up to provide free treatment, but had no calls. Clearly firefighters don't have time to deal with wildlife while fighting the fire, but I hope that we can establish some protocols for application during the less hectic mopping up phases. We need a central triage process and ultimately an evaluation of whether

the recovered animals' original habitat is viable for its later release.

One of the things we hope to do is to explore the possibility of placing wildlife kits in fire vehicles to enable firefighters to safely contain small animals if and when they have the opportunity. We don't want them to put themselves at risk with mature animals, but would appreciate being advised of their position and condition, so that an experienced carer can check the animals when it is safe to do so.



*A little western grey kangaroo with her freshly re-grown foot pads.
Photo: S. Howat*

If anyone would like to discuss this further, please contact me on 9761 2405 or email: sheila.howat@dec.wa.gov.au