



If you plan to take on the responsibility of rearing an injured or orphaned native animal then there are several important points you must first consider.

Motivation and time

At times caring will be very inconvenient. You should do some soul-searching before you start. Wait a while to see if your enthusiasm persists. Rearing native animals can take a lot of time, patience and perseverance. Some animals need to be fed EVERY 3-4 hours. If you work during the day, can you take the animal with you and is there a quiet place to keep it? Some animals such as wombats and Bennetts wallabies can take over twelve months to raise.

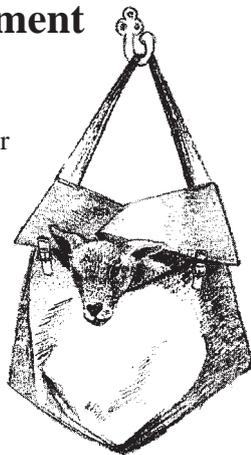
Suitable facilities

Do you have access to the facilities required to rear the animal? Facilities needed will depend on the species and its development stage. You may need indoor housing as well as outside housing and any facility must be separate from companion pets and domestic animals. There are ways of providing adequate housing without huge expense, for example, enclosures can be made from recycled materials.

First, make a decision on the species you would like to try and rehabilitate and seek advice as to what facilities you will need, (Nature Conservation Branch can put you in touch with experienced carers), then organise the facilities. This way when an animal becomes available you are ready to accept it with adequate facilities in place.

Stress free environment

Native wildlife is particularly vulnerable to stress while in rehabilitation as they are in (for them) a completely unfamiliar environment. They must be kept away from loud noises such as televisions and radios. They also do not cope with constant handling by young children. They should not be exposed to the sound or smell of companion animals. They require a regular consistent care routine. Can you provide a stress free environment?



Safe from pets

It is vital for both the short and long term survival and successful release of any native animal that it is kept away from domestic animals. Dogs and cats, your own or a neighbours, can easily kill or maim native animals.

Native animals reared with domestic pets develop a trust and so become easy prey when released back into the wild. Companion animals, such as cats, and domestic stock, such as poultry, can carry diseases which may be transmitted to wildlife in care.

Enough money

Raising injured and orphaned native animals costs money. Bottle-fed young need the correct milk formula, bottles, teats, some type of heating device and a pouch substitute. You will also need to provide indoor and outdoor housing facilities. If your animal is sick or injured, can you afford to pay for any costs that may result from its veterinary care?

Suitable food

As a carer you must provide your animal with the correct type of food. Orphan marsupials require special milk formulas: Wombaroo, Divetelact or Biolac. Amounts and concentrations change as the animal develops. Weaned animals should be fed a diet as close as possible to that eaten in the wild.

For example, weaned bandicoots eat live food such as worms, grubs and beetles. Are you prepared to provide them with at least some of this food? Grazing or browsing animals need lots of grass or leaves.

Hygiene for animals

Sterilise all utensils used in the preparation of the milk formula. All equipment should continue to be sterilised until the animal is eating substantial amounts of solids.

All bedding must be kept clean, warm (in particular for pouch dependent marsupials) and dry. Whilst being bottle or syringe fed, all joeys must have the area around their mouths wiped clean with a warm damp cloth after each feed. Pouch dependent marsupials must also be regularly toileted by gently dabbing a moist tissue over the animal's anal area to encourage it to defecate, DO NOT RUB.

This practice helps keep the animals and the pouch clean and dry and mimics the natural behaviour of a female with a joey. Weaning herbivores should have access to droppings from healthy individuals of their own species.

Your own health

People whose activities bring them and their families etc. into contact with animals or animal environments are exposed to the ever-present, hidden hazards of zoonotic diseases or zoonoses. Zoonosis is the transfer of diseases from animals to people. A zoonotic disease can range from infections from bites and scratches from an injured, stressed animal to such things as gastroenteritis, ringworm, psittacosis and Australian Bat Lyssavirus to name a few.

Personal hygiene is critical in prevention. Hands must be washed with soap, preferably antibacterial, and water before and after handling any animal. Any abrasions and cuts on any exposed part of the body should be covered prior to handling an animal. Any scratches or bites received from an animal must be disinfected and medical advice sought and tetanus shots must be up-to-date.

If you become unwell while you are caring for wildlife you should always let your doctor know that you are a wildlife carer. Excellent personal hygiene is vital for a wildlife carer, their families and the animals in their care. Anyone wishing to care for bats should discuss vaccination against the Australian Bat Lyssavirus with their doctor.

Permits

Please remember, that most of our wildlife is protected by law and can only be rehabilitated with a permit. Permits are available from the Nature Conservation Branch of The Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment. Permits are free. Departmental officers from Nature Conservation Branch or a Parks and Wildlife Service officer will be pleased to give advice regarding permits and care of wildlife.

Release

Rehabilitation means returning animals to the wild with a chance of survival similar to what they would have had at their age, NOT making pets of them. You must be prepared to break the bonds you establish with an animal and release your animal back into the wild when it is ready - the whole point of your efforts!

From the time you receive an animal or make a decision to become a carer you must seek out 'safe' release properties for your animals. The Carers network or Nature Conservation Branch may be able to assist you with this.

Before an animal is released you must consider the following:

1. Is the animal ready for release (i.e.: exhibiting normal wild behaviour and fitness)?
2. Timing of release
3. Release techniques
4. Release site.

Training

Training courses on the rehabilitation of wildlife are held regularly. If you would like more information on training opportunities, please contact the Nature Conservation Branch.

Further information

Prior to undertaking any caring, please try to refer to some of the books listed; they offer comprehensive information on caring.

Austin, M. A. (1995). *A practical guide to the successful hand rearing of Tasmanian marsupials*. Regal Publications.

Parsons, Heather. *Caring for Australian Native Birds*. Kangaroo Press.

Smith, B. (1995). *Caring for possums*. Kangaroo Press.

Williams, Anne and Ray. *Caring for Kangaroos and Wallabies*. Kangaroo Press.

White, S. (1998). *Caring for Australian Wildlife*. Australian Geographic.

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