



We all come into contact with wildlife at some time in our lives. We see and smell wildflowers, listen to birds, and at night we may cross paths with a possum or a wallaby.

Seeing a wild native animal is something special — unexpected and unpredictable. It's a sign that nature is alive and well.

To experience wildlife in their natural environment brings us in touch with a different world where people are the outsiders. Wildlife live by natural rules, not by human values. If we try to feed or pat a wild animal this will have an impact on it, particularly as more and more people visit our natural areas.

The following information will help give you a better understanding of these impacts and what you can do to 'keep wildlife wild'.

Let them feed themselves

Feeding wildlife does them no favours. Every time an animal has 'just a little scrap of food', it loses a little more of the wildness that makes it so special. The tamer a wild animal becomes the more likely it is to turn into a pest or a 'pet' and the less likely it is to live a natural life.

There are many reasons why feeding wildlife is not a good idea:

- Animals such as wallabies, possums and currawongs which are used to being fed can become quite bold and injure you in their attempts to get food.
- Often, possums, devils and quolls which have been fed around campgrounds take up a life of crime, stealing food and damaging expensive camping equipment in the process.
- Eating processed foods can cause bony growths to form in wallabies' jaws ('lumpy jaw'). This can lead to a slow and painful death.
- Animals which have become tame as a result of being fed are more likely to be hit by cars in carparks.

- Feeding wildlife disrupts their normal social behaviour. Wallabies for example, are largely solitary and do not by nature form herds, as they often do around campgrounds.

- For animals such as brushtail possums, there are only a limited number of hollows in which to live. Any extra possums usually die or move into "artificial hollows" such as the roofs of houses.

- Feeding waterfowl, such as ducks, can result in feral domestic species displacing native species.

Letting nature be

National parks are one of the few places where natural ecosystems can operate largely free from the influence of humanity. Feeding wildlife disrupts the natural processes that occur within national parks. It also denies you the opportunity to observe an animal behaving naturally, as it would in the wild. Nor will you learn anything about how to find and watch animals in their wild setting.

There are appropriate places in Tasmania where you can have close contact with our native animals. A number of wildlife parks around the state offer the opportunity to pat or hold our native animals safely.

Who will feed them during the winter?

National parks and reserves are mostly visited in the warmer months of the year. During this time, wildlife populations can increase and animals can become dependent upon hand-feeding.

But what happens in winter? Increased populations of animals have to return to their natural diet at a time when food is usually scarce. This can deplete their limited food supply and increase the risk of starvation. The increase in the local population also means diseases can spread more easily through the population. If wildlife are left to their own natural food in the summer, problems like this are unlikely to occur during the rest of the year.



Wildlife on the road

Visitors to Tasmania are often distressed at the high number of road-killed animals they see. Wildlife often cross Tasmania's country roads at night. Being aware of this and taking care could save an animal's life and avoid damage to your car. Local populations of native animals have been known to become extinct due to road mortality.

If travelling at night, scan the sides of the road for wildlife (this will also help you keep alert). Remember that animals such as Tasmanian devils are very hard to see against a black bitumen road, particularly when it is wet. Driving more slowly at night will give both you and the animal a better chance of avoiding a collision. Take note of wildlife warning signs. They are there to advise you of known 'hot spots'. Animals react differently to approaching cars and it is best to let the animal move off first before passing.

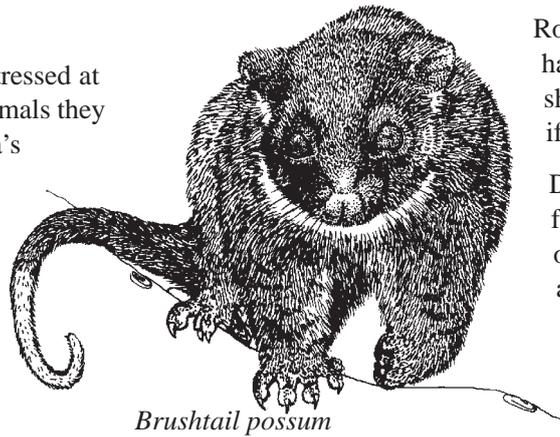
In the case of an accident

If you are unfortunate enough to hit an animal, please stop if it is safe to do so. The casualty may be able to be treated. Females very often have pouch young which can be saved. Injured and orphaned animals require special treatment. Keep the animal in a warm, dark place when transporting it and contact the Parks and Wildlife Service as soon as possible (Phone 03 6233 6556). They will advise you how to care for the animal or find foster parents for it.

Rangers remove dead animals from roads around reserves. This helps stop Tasmanian devils and other scavenging animals such as the threatened wedge-tailed eagle from being killed when they are feeding off a road kill. If you remove an animal from the road consider your own safety.

The importance of being small

Not all wildlife, of course, are large, feathered or furred. Small animals and plants, such as insects and fungi, play a vital role in nature. It's important to remember that they are the hidden 'engine rooms' that keep the whole ecosystem functioning. They have a lot of work to do and it is best if we let them live undisturbed.



Brushtail possum

Rocks and logs provide special habitats for small animals and should be left alone or replaced if you dislodge them.

Dead wood is both home and food to an enormous number of tiny living things. In parks and reserves, it is preferable to use fuel stoves for cooking. If you do use firewood, please minimise the amount you burn and use firewood that is specially provided.

Fish need homes, too

Logs within rivers provide homes for a range of native fish. Removing them takes away their homes.

Small seashore animals which live under rocks can die if left exposed to the sun — please put any lifted rocks back the way you found them.

Beauty is in the eye of the pollinator

It is important to remember that flowers have evolved to attract insects and birds which spread their pollen to other flowers. Enjoy the sight and smell of living wild flowers but leave them alone and let them play their part in producing seed for the next generation of plants.



Currawong

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Forester kangaroo



FURTHER INFORMATION

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