

Dear supporters

It's a long time overdue but we thought you would like to know how everybody's been getting on at the shelter. Firstly we would like to send a huge thank you all for your very welcome support and supportive messages during the fires. Knowing that there were so many people out there thinking of the wildlife and supporting the work we do was overwhelming in the nicest way possible and very encouraging.

During the fires we took in kangaroos, wallabies, koalas, wombats, possums, 2 echidna, a Night Heron, a Brown Goshawk and a Swamp Harrier. Most of the animals had second and third degree burns to their hands and feet but the birds of prey were starving from loss of prey. Strangely enough the wombats had burns down their backs, which has puzzled us a bit but we suspect they are radiation burns from the extraordinary heat in the soils and tree roots burning underground. So initially we were mainly treating burns, which meant a lot of bandage changes and injections of antibiotics and pain relief. Many of our patients also needed rehydration and most were put on intravenous fluids. Any animal we suspected to have suffered smoke inhalation (which was most) we put in a tent with a vaporizer to keep up the humidity and open the airways.

The animals came to us from the Wildlife Victoria rescue crews who did a truly fantastic job, searching fire grounds for injured wildlife day after day for months on end. The rescue efforts continued on into July as so many wombats were suffering mange and emaciation, so most weekends we still had a wombat or two arrive at the shelter from the fire grounds. We had one as recently as two weeks ago.

We had fires around Daylesford come very close to the shelter as well. Fortunately the wind conditions were in our favour and it was late summer so a bit of rain fell in the nick of time. The hardest thing for us was not having any volunteers able to get to the shelter because of roadblocks. The local community responded though and new faces just turned up on our doorstep to help. People came to take our growing pile of rubbish to the tip, drop of blankets and towels, transport injured animals from rescue grounds to the shelter or just to mop the floor or clean the dishes.

It's been an exhausting start to the year and the number of animals coming into the shelter just doesn't seem to diminish. The fires are over for now but the everyday trauma to wildlife goes on. We have nearly one hundred animals in care at the moment. Most are kangaroos that have been hit by cars or caught in fences, but now we have a reputation for treating adult and manged wombats, we find more are sent to the shelter from other parts of the state and we are very busy trying to find more effective ways to treat them.

We have a fantastic crew of volunteers that come in most days and we can't sing their praises enough. Our local vet in Hepburn Springs, Emma Tomkin, has been a godsend and her veterinary support has been simply wonderful and very thorough. We feel we have been blessed for the people around the shelter, and us and for the help that has been given to keep up going and enabling us to keep helping the wildlife.

Recent donations have meant that we have been able to build more facilities to treat adult wombats. We have purchased a humidicrib for small intensive care patients and in preparation for the baby bird season in spring. Next fire season (be nice if there wasn't one) it will be used for koalas with suspected smoke inhalation. We would like to build a unit that can take an adult wombat, as they are susceptible to ash inhalation. We have bought new heat pads and medical equipment and bandages. The vet, milk and feed bills have been enormous and we have been able to keep up with the demands only thanks to all of you. Wildlife Victoria has been very supportive with veterinary and lab costs and assisting with some more wombat facilities.

Exciting plans for the shelter are afoot and we are currently working towards building a trial wildlife hospital/ treatment centre here that will also be built as a fire bunker for all us animals. It's a large project but looking probable as, with the assistance again of Wildlife Victoria, a grant has been secured to get the project going. Preparing the shelter to protect the animals during an extreme fire event is a current priority as we are not far from the next fire season.

Other than yourselves and Wildlife Victoria, the only other external support for the shelter and fire affected wildlife came from the Department of Sustainability and Environment in the way of a \$500 fire grant. Currently, the shelter costs about \$2 000 a month to run, excluding new enclosures and infrastructure that seem to be a constantly growing requirement. We remain optimistic about the future of this shelter as we strive to keep up with the ever-growing demand for our services.

Enough from me for now; I'll introduce you to few of the creatures.

Warm regards

Gayle and Jon.

To make a donation please post to Hepburn Wildlife Shelter, P.O. Box 133 Daylesford, Vic 3460 or go to our website at www.hepburnwildlifeshelter.com



This little wallaby (Sumac) was one of the first fire victims to come in to the shelter. His ears and the tip of his nose had been badly burnt and he had no whiskers left. He had been protected from the flames in mum's pouch but he had stuck his head out of the pouch at the wrong moment.

Sumac has made a complete recovery although his ears have been reduced and reshaped by the fires his spirit and sense of mischief have not been scarred.



These burns to the hands and feet of a kangaroo are typical of the burns we saw on kangaroos and wallabies. Hands and feet would sometimes need to be soaked in saline multiple times to remove ash and debris from the wounds. Bandages were changed daily for the first 7 - 10 days then less frequently. Most healing was complete in 6 weeks.



Many of the kangaroos that came in to the shelter were exhausted, dazed and in shock. In some ways this was more dangerous for them than the wounds themselves. Most females that came in showed signs of losing joeys (active teats in the pouch), only one retained a live furless joey and several had dead joeys still in the pouch. The sense of ache and bewilderment we felt with treating these survivors was heart wrenching. Not only did they lose their homes so completely, they lost their family groups and their society.



Sam the koala became the face of wildlife fire victims but in reality she was one amongst many. Koalas suffer terribly in fires and this burnt foot is typical of koala burns. All four of this little ones feet were burnt. They burn as they come down from trees and climb over still burning (hot coal) trunks and branches and as they walk across the ground still covered in hot ash and koalas.

Smoke inhalation and severe eye irritation, sometimes leading to cataracts, are also common complication in fire victims.

We had three females koalas in the hospital room when we brought in a fourth. She's the one in the basket. She wasn't burnt but she was suffering quite bad smoke irritation of the eyes. As soon as we put her in the room one of the females started to call to her; a series of squeaky, croaking grunts. The girl in the basket replied.

The older female came down from the 'hospital tree' directly to the new female and they had a long conversation, as that is only how it could be described, full of a range of sounds and flourishes.



Jon and I sat by the hospital door and watched them for about an hour as they spoke, reached out to grasp each other and pull each other close. It was entrancing and moved us to tears as they so obviously found comfort in meeting the other.

We are always being reminded not to anthropomorphize or impose our interpretation of life on animal events, but sometimes it's just not possible to deny your self, so strong is the impression. I will not be swayed from the certainty that these two strangers were sharing fire ground stories and finding healing for their aching hearts, just as humans do.

Both these girls, along with the two others in that hospital room were returned to the wild.





This is the first fire season that we have had a lot of wombats come into the shelter and we had to erect extra facilities to accommodate them. Now we need to make those facilities work better for the treatments they need, meaning attaching electricity, preferably solar, so we can properly heat their hospital pens. We also need to install hospital grade flooring for better cleaning and also for warmth.

I think the worst wombats were sent to us for intensive care. They arrived in such a dreadful state of starvation and were usually badly manged or badly burnt. Most didn't make it, dying within the first 24 - 48 hours of arrival.

Tragic though the circumstances have been we have learnt a good deal about treating emaciated and burnt wombats which will inform future handling and treatment.



Both of these wombats to the left have mange. The little guy below has made a very good recovery although it has taken many months and my legs have paid for that in scars from his sneaky and relentless biting when he first arrived.

We think that so many manged wombats turned up because there was no where for them to hide and there were so many rescuers out there to see them. If not treated in time, mange is fatal for wombats but the journey to death is far from kind. Our shelter has been working for a few years now specialising in treating mange in wombats. During the fires, because Wildlife Victoria was paying veterinary costs, we were able to have some of the manged wombats that didn't survive autopsied and this yielded some very useful and interesting information. We would dearly like to be able to be able to afford to gather more information and we aim to be able to do this in the future.



The burns in the wombats tended to follow the same mysterious pattern, burnt down the centre of the back. Occasionally the odd foot was burnt and all wombats were thickly covered in ticks and close to dying from starvation. Once we got them over the first hurdles of re feeding and stress, they healed well. We still have three wombats awaiting release.





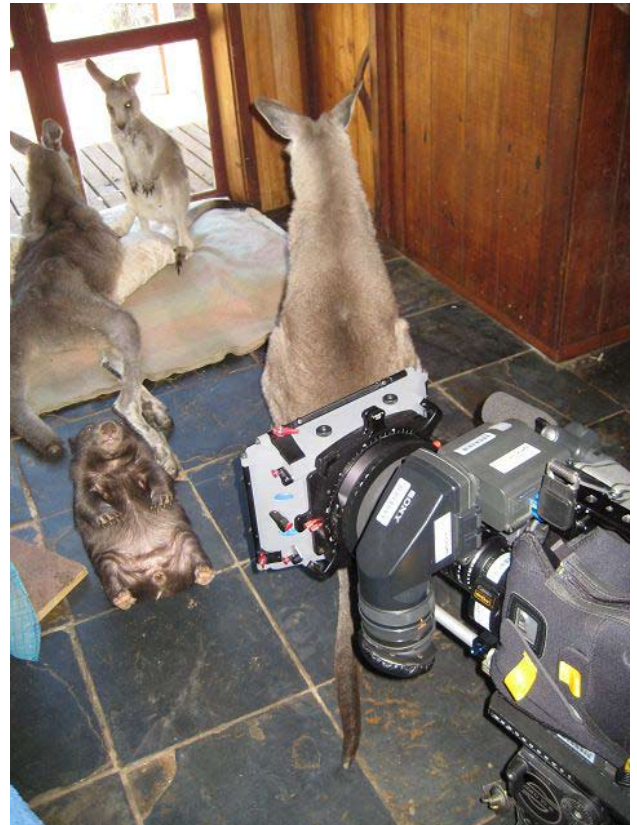
We raise a lot of birds in spring and summer but none as charming as the Tawnie Frogmouths. Not an owl but a Nightjar, we find that Tawnie chicks are adept at falling out of rather flimsy and precariously placed nests. These three young birds were raised together as chicks, and with two others all have been released back into the wild.



Feldspar (the wombat not the cat) cuddled up to anything warm and furry when he was young. Tolerance and comfort - two essentials at the shelter.



A German documentary film crew came to the shelter to film in January and it turned out we had a few naturals for the camera. This little roo, Graphite, followed the camera man everywhere and no doubt managed to get himself in more than a few shots. The crew were great and we look forward to seeing the final product.



This little critter is a Brush tailed Phascogale, an endangered species that occurs in our area (on our property) and the first we have ever raised at the shelter. They are a carnivorous marsupial that grow to the size of a large rat with a beautiful brush tail. Despite their size they are known to be able to take the heads off chickens! We made sure her release site was a good distance from the chook pen.

