



Save Our Wildlife Foundation Inc.
WILDLIFE RESCUE 101
INFORMATION HANDBOOK

Version 1.3



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INTRODUCTION

This course is designed to give you an introduction to the rescue of a variety of native species found in South Australia. The manual is written to be used in conjunction with the WIRES Wildlife Rescue 101 online and practical training. This course will introduce you to:

- The identification of native species
- Rescue and restraint of native species
- And Work, Health, and Safety processes

If you ever have questions during your time with Save Our Wildlife Foundation Inc. (SOWFI) please contact your assigned district co-ordinator or if unavailable a species specialist.

BEFORE BECOMING A RESCUER

It is a requirement of Save Our Wildlife Foundation Inc. members that before completing their first rescue all wildlife rescuers are:

- Be a current financial member of Save Our Wildlife Foundation Inc. (SOWFI)
- Have attended a 'Wildlife Rescue 101 practical training' course
- And your buddy or district co-ordinator has checked that you have the necessary equipment required to conduct a rescue safely, and without harm to yourself or the animal.

Please remember that our primary precedence is the welfare of the animals that we are entrusted to rescue. All recommendations and assistance supplied via a district co-ordinator, senior member of the team, or species specialist should not be seen as a query about your abilities.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF A WILDLIFE RESCUER

The goal of your work as a wildlife rescue volunteer is to help sick, injured, or orphaned wildlife to the best of your ability. Every volunteer has a duty to conform with the standards and regulations relevant to their role that specify how processes are to be carried out in accordance with WHS procedures. The following list is not comprehensive, but it will help you understand the typical considerations for a wildlife rescuer to assist you in carrying out safe and appropriate rescue, handling, and transport procedures.

Trespassing - Ensure you have permission to enter private property, and if you are asked by a member of public to leave the property you are to do so immediately and without hesitation.

Hard decisions may need to be made - If a sick or injured animal is unlikely to recover to a releasable state or is suffering, you may have to make the decision to end its pain and let it go with the knowledge that the decision is the most kind for the animal. Most vets will make this call for you, but some are not as familiar with wildlife and may ask your opinion.

Animal cruelty - If at anytime you are made aware of a native animal in a threatened environment or you suspect animal cruelty you should discuss this issue with your district co-ordinator who will inform the relevant authorities.

Permits are required - Most species of wildlife in South Australia are protected. You must apply for your Wildlife Carer (Rescue Only) permit from Department of Environment and Water (DEW).

Under no circumstances should a volunteer put themselves or another person in danger to rescue an animal. Check your surroundings, assess the situation and if required, contact your district co-ordinator for assistance. Volunteers should conduct all business and activities in a professional manner with honesty, integrity, compassion, and commitment, realising that an individual's conduct reflects on SOWFI and the entire field of wildlife rehabilitation.

RESCUE AND ANIMAL RECORDS

In SOWFI, our primary method of data collection is through webforms found in the volunteers section of our website, as this was the easiest way to collect data while ensuring privacy for all members.

Below is a step-by-step guide (that is also available for download on the website) to record a rescue.

Please note that the rescue form contains many fields. The more information that can be captured, the more useful the report will be. It is understood that not all the fields will be relevant to every rescue, and sometimes not all information will be known.

- The date/time of report can either be typed or completed by pressing the calendar icon and selecting the date/time (Approximate time is fine)
- The animal group can be selected from the drop-down list
- Please enter any information you have about the person or organisation that requested assistance. This will make it easier if they need to be contacted later about release
- If the circumstances were unusual or noteworthy, please enter a brief description
- Start typing your name (or the name of the person who did the rescue if filling in the form on their behalf). Select your name from the search results that appear
- Select the status of the rescue as of at the time of completing the form
- Enter the street and suburb of the rescue (or where the report was made if no rescue occurred) This is particularly important for rescues where an animal comes into care. If a rescue took place, please continue, and enter the animal details. If no rescue occurred, scroll down, and submit the form
- If you do enter details of an animal, the species field is compulsory, but all known details should be entered. Start by typing the species common name, and select from the search results
- Choose the most relevant reason that the animal needed rescue (to the best of your knowledge)
- Complete the life stage of the animal at the time they were rescued. Enter the gender (if this has been ascertained) and select the current status of the animal in the outcome field. This can be updated later if it changes
- If you have chosen to name the animal, enter their name and press submit

You will then receive a success message once the form is submitted. Provided a valid email address is held for the member conducting the rescue, an email will be sent within a few minutes, confirming details of rescue, and providing links to update animal details or transfer the animal to a new carer.

RESCUE PROCESS

Before attending a rescue, it is important to ensure you have all the necessary information regarding the rescue, relevant information (if known) such as species, age, rescue location and rescue circumstance will help in assessing what equipment may be needed in the capture of the animal. Also consider the risks and hazards associated with the rescue site and keep in mind that rescues can be high adrenaline experiences, so it is often better to revise a plan prior to attending the rescue.

Before conducting a rescue, have the carrier open, lined and as close to you as possible. Then cover the animal with a towel ensuring the head is covered to reduce stress, lift, and secure in the carrier covering with a blanket or towel to reduce visual stimuli. If you choose to leave the animal wrapped inside the towel in the carrier, ensure wings/limbs are flush to the body inside the carrier and the animal is not upside down, loosening the towel if required to allow airflow.

TRANSPORT CARRIERS AND CONTAINERS

It is helpful to have a range of carriers at your disposal to best cater to the age, species, and condition of the animal in which you are rescuing.

- Lockable, top-opening plastic carriers are cheap to buy and easy to disinfect between each animal
- Metal top-opening carriers are sturdy but should be lined internally with shade-cloth or something of similar material to prevent change of feather damage. However, are more difficult to disinfect
- Cardboard boxes are easily stored in the back of the car and ideal for rescues in which the animal maybe suffering from a contagious disease and are easily disposed of after use.

Lining the carrier with a towel is important to reduce the possibility of the animal sliding-around during transport, causing further injury and stress. *Reptiles are known escape artists*, consider a ventilated, lockable carrier with a lid to reduce the chances of the animal escaping during transport.



Image from: desertcart.com

EQUIPMENT

When rescuing, you will need the following items:

- Towel(s), material net, leather gloves/welding gloves, mobile phone (to record found/location)
- Lockable carry basket/container, pillowcases, large blanket/doona covers, torch, binoculars
- Pouches (inside liner with outside pouch), heat source (wheat bag, portable heat disc)
- Digital thermometer, scissors, plastic tweezers, and longnose pliers (entanglement cases),
- Releasable cable-ties/rope (for securing animal inside pillowcase) and SOWFI Hi-vis safety vest

Ensure any towels, blanket, or pillowcases do not have any loose threads or holes as wings, beaks and claws may become entangled causing further injury or stress to the animal. It is important to note, that any heat source must be wrapped in a towel, blanket, or pouch to act as a barrier between the animal and heat source to prevent any burns as well as a device to monitor such as a digital thermometer to prevent overheating.

WILDLIFE RESCUE

UNCONTAINED ANIMALS

If an animal is not contained then you will need to plan how to capture it with the least amount of risk to yourself, any members of public in the vicinity, and the animal. Having a plan also reduces the amount of stress placed on the animal. The important thing is to take your time - no matter how badly injured the animal is; careful observation and planning will make the capture quicker and safer for all.

1. Evaluate the site for risks to both you and the animal.

You will need to reduce threats to the animal, such as keeping people and domestic pets away from the animals direct vision and if possible, hearing. Be aware and manage personal risks involved e.g. traffic, potential injury from the animal, and ensure you have done everything possible to reduce these risks (e.g. wear personal protective equipment).

2. Observe the animal from a distance.

- Is it lying still, is it displaying obvious signs of attack because it is feeling threatened?
- Are there any obvious injuries?
- Can you ascertain the identification of the species from a distance?

If you believe the animal is a species that requires an accredited rescuer such as a snake or bat, contact the SOWFI rescue hotline (08) 7120 6610 to organise an appropriate rescuer. Be sure to explain the situation to the member of public.



Image from: Marian MacLucas



Image from: Marian MacLucas

3. Plan your approach to the animal.

Consider any potential escape routes, and the need for any assistance or specialised equipment to carry out the rescue, e.g. net. The easier the animal is to capture, the more likely it is to be seriously ill or injured. Most animal will calm down once fully covered by an appropriately sized towel or blanket, making the capture process easier and less stressful for the animal.

See relevant animal section for specific details on capturing specific species.

CONTAINED ANIMALS

1. Remove any stressors

2. Determine the ID and any serious injuries.

Ask the member of public to describe the animal. Carefully look through a small opening in the box or basket to determine the species and if there are any major injuries that require immediate veterinary attention.

- If the animal appears to be a bat or venomous reptile, then advise the caller that you will call an accredited rescuer due to the risks involved with handling that species. *Do not attempt to rescue these species even if the animal is contained.*
- In the event that a domestic animal attack is suspected, immediate antibiotic treatment will be required, regardless of whether there are external signs of injury.

3. If the animal does not require an accredited rescuer.

Ask the member of public if you are able to transport the animal in the container, they have contained the animal with, if it is of suitable size and will not cause further injury e.g. unlined carrier with wire structure can damage feathers. Minimising the handling of animals through unnecessary transfer of animals to various carriers will reduce the stress inflicted upon the animal.

4. Thank the member of public for being concerned about our native wildlife and provide them a SOWFI brochure or fridge magnet.

5. Transport the animal to the vet for further assessment or to wildlife carer for rehabilitation.

When removing an animal from a carrier, try to find a quiet enclosed area in which to remove the animal supporting the animal from underneath when lifting and ensuring the head is covered at all times to reduce stress. Once placed in a carrier if the animal is a bird, ensure the wings are flush to its body.

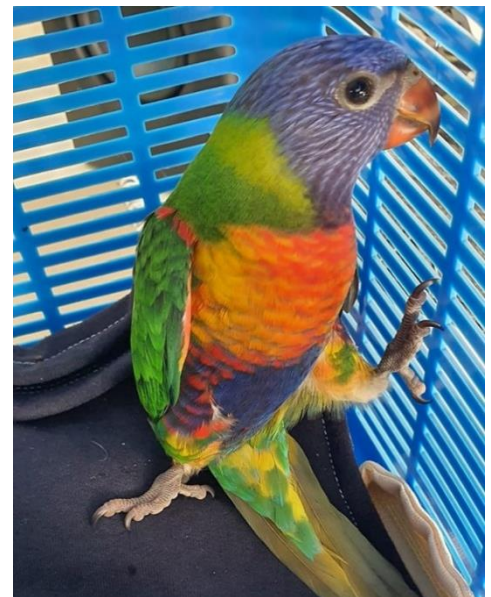


Image from: Lisa De Palo

TRANSPORT

Whether you're transporting an animal home, to a vet or to a wildlife rehabilitator the method is the same.

- Never bring domestic pets on a rescue, keep the radio off and refrain from smoking or wearing strong scents such as perfume or cologne
- Ensure the animal has sufficient breathing holes and that it's secure within the carrier e.g. lid closed, towel on bottom of carrier and towel around the animal
- Maintain the animals warmth by providing appropriate thermal support, if required. This can be done using a wrapped hot-water bottle, filled with hot water from the tap at the bottom of the carrier
 - Ensure any heating devices in the carrier are secure, so they cannot roll around and cause injury
- Use support towelling if required (see below)
- Keep the area warm, dark, and quiet
- Secure the carrier inside the vehicle using a seatbelt
- *Do not put any animal in the boot of a car*

Exceptions to providing warmth is with, reptiles, echidnas and animals suffering from head trauma. They do not require additional heating. Animals suffering from head trauma should not be provided heat as it can make them worse.

SUPPORT TOWEL TECHNIQUE

This technique is used when transporting birds that are having difficulties bearing their own weight.

1. Source an appropriately sized towel with no loose threads or holes
2. Roll up the towel, forming into a 'U' shape
3. Place into carrier and position the bird inside the 'U' with the chest resting on the towel for support



Image from: NSW Wildlife Information Rescue and Education Service (WIRES)

MYOPATHY

Animals can suffer from a stress induced condition called myopathy. Myopathy occurs while animals are under stress, they develop a build-up of lactic acid which lowers the pH of the body and causes oxygen deprivation, muscle and organ damage resulting in organ failure.

Common signs of myopathy are respiratory distress, stiff muscles, muscle tremors, general weakness, lethargy, and sudden death. Long term effects can include renal failure, compartment syndrome, liver damage, heart failure, brain damage and paralysis.

Adult and juvenile are at risk of suffering from myopathy and care must be taken when dealing with these animals. Stressful situations for animals that could trigger myopathy include trapping, capturing, handling and inappropriate housing. Care needs to be taken to avoid trapping animals unless necessary, trapped animal should never be left in the trap for any period. While capturing or rescuing a animal, it ought to be achieved as quickly as possible. The animal should not be chased around or stressed further. Handling of animals should be kept to a minimum unless necessary. Housing should be dark and quiet. The animal should not be exposed to loud sounds, pets, or children.

There is no treatment to reverse myopathy, only to help slow further progression. Death may not occur suddenly and may take several weeks or months. If you suspect an animal may be suffering myopathy, contact your district co-ordinator and seek medical treatment. A vet may give sedatives, corticosteroids, diuretics, selenium, vitamin E, oxygen, glucose, and fluids to an animal suspected to be suffering capture myopathy, however this is not a cure.



Image from: myloview.com

VETS

A good relationship with vets and vet staff is vital to all wildlife. There will be situations that will make us angry or sad but regardless of how we feel we must be polite and respectful to all vet staff. There have been cases where wildlife volunteers have lost their temper or argued with vets or vet nurses and those vets are still unavailable, not just to one species but to all species. Be aware that your behaviour over one animal will impact on not only your future rescues but on all the wildlife in South Australia.

Not all native animals will be seen straight away on arrival. Before arriving at the veterinary clinic ensure.

- The animal is contained and kept warm, dark, and quiet until it can be assessed
- Do not provide heat to reptiles, echidnas or animals suffering from head trauma
- Stop any bleeding from open wounds, by applying gauze and pressure to the area for a few minutes

EUTHANASIA

Animals are usually brought to our attention as rescuers when they are very sick or injured and as a result unfortunately many will die or need to be euthanised, despite our best efforts. It is important to try and not be discouraged by this, you are in a fortunate position where you are able to minimise the suffering of a comprised animal or an animal that would not be fit to be released back into the wild.

Euthanasia is often the kindest option in these instances and is in the best interest of the animal, regardless of our own feelings about the decision. As wildlife volunteers we also have a responsibility to the healthy populations of native species as a result. It is irresponsible to release or retain an animal that has a known disease which has the ability to cause a catastrophic impact on a healthy wild population.

NON-NATIVE ANIMALS & PETS

Some rescues are likely to be non-native animals, particularly where the member of public was unable to correctly ID the species needing rescue. We prefer to refer these calls to the RSPCA or other appropriate organisation where the animal has been clearly identified as not being native.

However, if you are attending a rescue of a non-native animal requiring assistance, please assist the animal in distress. Please note, exotic and non-native animals cannot be returned back to the wild.

AVIARY PET ESCAPEES

Non-native bird escapees should not be released and benefit from being housed with their own kind, this may mean surrendering the animal to an appropriate organisation outside of the wildlife rehabilitation sector. It is not recommended that such animals be bought back into the pet trade, in simple terms, no animal coming into the wildlife rehabilitation space should be financially exploited.

Check for leg-bands, particularly with pigeons, as these may help you to contact the club or group of whom the bird belongs. It is recommended that reasonable inquiries be made to find the owner or person responsible for the animal.

The animal should be publicly advertised, such as listing the animal on your local pet search page and/or group e.g. 'Lost Pets of South Australia'. Care for some captive birds should only be carried out with those who have the appropriate license to keep that particular species. A native bird which is often kept in aviculture, and which is not known to be native to the area in which it was found, should be assumed to be an escapee. Discuss this with your district co-ordinator as it may need to be placed into permanent captivity with its own species, not necessarily within the organisation, but should not be returned to aviculture through the pet trade.

A native bird of a species that is available to purchase as a pet (e.g. Rainbow Lorikeets in South Australia) need to be determined and assessed as to whether it may be an aviary escapee. Things to consider are.

- Aviary bird diseases
- Recognition of native foods
- Imprinting

It is possible the bird will not have a reasonable chance of a successful release.



Image from: facebook.com

WORK, HEALTH, AND SAFETY

SAFETY WHEN WORKING WITH ANIMALS

Working in an animal rescue environment can be hazardous. The animals that you rescue, and handle can be unpredictable and, in some cases, quite dangerous but by understanding animal behaviour, the risk of injury can be reduced. Volunteers must always ensure they only attend rescues that they have been appropriately trained for and are within the medical and physical capacity to safely carry out a rescue.

The 'fight or flight' response is an animals primitive automatic, inborn response that prepares its body to 'fight' or 'flight' from perceived attack, harm, or threat to its survival. For example, an unsuccessful escape may trigger a 'fight' response, causing the animal to act defensively. Likewise, inappropriate handling of an animal can cause discomfort and distress causing the animal to bite or scratch. You may also be exposed to hazards that include.

- Zoonosis - diseases acquired from animals, injuries from scratches, bites, cuts, and punctures
- Infectious agents - bacteria, fungi, parasites, protozoa
- Allergies - animal fur, dander, latex gloves etc., slips, trips, and falls, road rescue hazards
- And stressful situations e.g. difficult members of public



Image from: Cheryl Ayteo

Volunteers need to be mindful of their own health when rescuing wildlife and take the necessary precautions. Preventative measures that wildlife volunteers can take include.

- Tetanus vaccinations performed every 5 years for wildlife carers and rescuers. If you are unsure if you are at risk, or how often you should receive a tetanus booster, please consult your GP
- Seek prompt medical attention for wounds if inflicted by animals. Inform your doctor that you handle wildlife so they can assess the risk of infection
- Wash your hands frequently when handling animals
- Never climb onto a roof, into ceilings, crawl into drains or under buildings
- Never enter dilapidated buildings
- If you must climb a ladder, ensure that it is placed on secure ground, and someone is holding the bottom of the ladder. Do not climb old, compromised ladders
- Do not attend rescues if you are under the influence of alcohol or medication that may affect your co-ordination and/or reflexes

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

Rescuing and transporting wildlife will mean you found yourself in a variety of environments, weather conditions and scenarios that require you to have an array of easily accessible personal protective equipment (PPE). Ensure the PPE you have available is of a suitable fit and reasonably comfortable so that any handling techniques, vision, dexterity, or mobility isn't compromised while performing the rescue. Wearing ill-fitting PPE may adversely affect how well you are able to perform the rescue and may present further risk to you or the animal. Examples of personal protective equipment worn on a rescue include.

- Long sleeved shirt and pants to protect from scratches and from the elements
- Sturdy covered shoes, high-visibility vest, gloves (both disposable and heavy-duty gloves)
- Facemasks, safety goggles or eye protection, hand torch and/or head torch

Is it also important to have an easily accessible first aid kit whilst conducting a rescue. Your first aid kit should contain the following as an example.

- Broad pressure bandage, roll of hypo-allergenic tape, strip adhesives, alcohol swabs
- Scissors and/or tweezers, sterile gauze, safety pins, saline fluid, antiseptic swabs, disposable gloves
- Volunteers requiring prescribed and over-the-counter medications should carry their own medications for use as required

It is also important to protect yourself from the elements during rescues. Ensure you have access to sunscreen, a hat and a weatherproof jacket should you need them while on a rescue. Personal protective equipment should be used in addition to conducting your risk and hazard assessment.

NIGHT-TIME RESCUES

Incidents involving wildlife can occur at any time, not just during the day therefore volunteers may be asked to attend rescues at night. It is important to consider the variety of different risks or hazards involved in night rescues and to ensure you have the correct personal protective equipment, rescue equipment, and to perform your risk assessment in advance, if you accept these rescues.

- Be aware of the change in conditions e.g. reduced vision means you will need to ensure you bring a torch to the rescue and be more aware of trip hazards or objects that may cause harm

- Keep in mind that if attending road rescues, vision for drivers on the road will be reduced therefore you will need to ensure you wear a hi-vis vest in order to be seen and conduct the rescue in a manner where you ensure your safety is not compromised (e.g. turn on your hazard lights)
- If attending rescues in a non-public area e.g. private residences, be mindful of your own personal safety. If possible, have someone come with you even if they are not an authorised volunteer just to be onsite whilst you conduct the rescue

If you are attending a night rescue, it is a good idea to *let someone know where you are going*, where you are dropping the animal off to, and when you should expect to arrive home.

REPTILES

Reptiles contribute a significant proportion of native fauna due to a large amount of diversity supported by Australian habitats. South Australia has a rich diversity of reptile species, totalling approximately 245 species ‘approximately’ as we are still discovering new species and re-appraising the validity of others.

Defining characteristics of reptiles.

- Having a covering of scales or scutes (shell of a turtle)
- Tetrapods
- Vertebrates
- Ectothermic or cold-blooded

HEALTH CONSIDERATIONS

Reptiles have the potential to carry zoonotic disease. There are some bacterial species that may be present in reptiles that can be transmitted to humans such as *Salmonella spp.*, *Campylobacter spp.*, and *Aeromonas spp.* As such, hygiene is very important, and you should wash your hands and/or use anti-bacterial hand sanitizer before and after handling reptiles.

REPTILE IDENTIFICATION

Distinguishing between reptiles is an important factor of conducting a rescue although not always possible. For example, there are limbless species of lizards (e.g. Burton’s Legless lizard). There are key features that can be used to differentiate between these groups.

- If there are limbs of any kind present, then the animal is a lizard
- If the tail length is equal to or greater than the snout-vent length, then the animal is a lizard
- If an external ear opening is present, then the animal is a lizard

(Refer to Appendix 1 - Common reptile species for pictures)

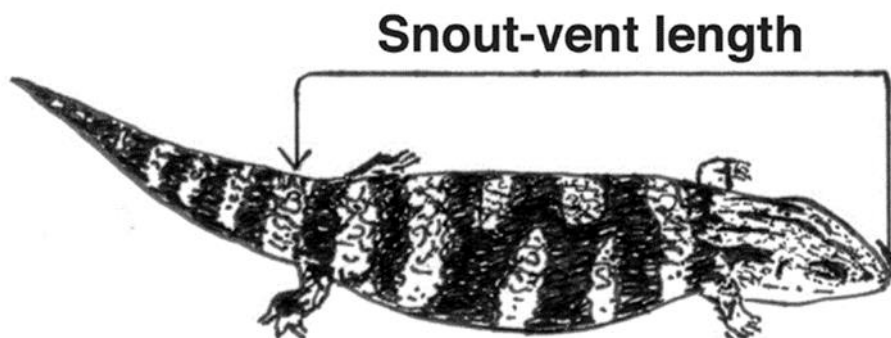


Image from: NSW Wildlife Information Rescue and Education Service (WIRES)

RESCUE EQUIPMENT

- Strong pillowcase type bags of thread free cotton, calico, or soft linen. No hessian or nylon materials. Two bags may be used for extra strength
- Non-latex gloves, plastic container, or lockable rescue box with ventilation
- Paper towel (on bottom of carrier), re-usable cable ties or rope and anti-bacterial hand sanitizer

Common reasons for rescue include.

- Motor vehicle or lawnmower trauma
- Domestic animal attacks
- Injures from predators or other reptiles

HANDLING LIZARDS AND SKINKS

- Grasp behind the head and around the front legs, supporting the body with your other hand as you pick up the animal. Some rescuers use their index and middle fingers to grasp and pin the animal behind the head to prevent the animal from biting
- Once supported the animal will usually stop struggling and quieten down allowing you to place it into the bag and securely tie it off

Blue-tongue lizards may make a hissing sound as a defence tactic or roll and twist in an attempt to escape. *If you are bitten*, place the animal on a flat surface and wait for it to release. If the lizard does not let go, gently stroke near the ear opening and it should open its mouth and turn towards your other hand. Be careful the animal doesn't bite you other finger!

TRANSPORTING LIZARDS AND SKINKS

Lizards are to be transported in a strong bag. All bags should be securely closed utilising a knot at the top of the bag, or by folding the bag over, onto itself creating a loop and placing a cable tie around this loop. To prevent escape, you can place a bagged animal into a rescue basket. Alternatively, lizards may be transported in a box or ventilated container with a towel or newspaper on the bottom to ensure the animal will not slip around in the box during transport.

General rules for transporting reptiles include.

- Avoid temperature extremes when transporting
- Minimise noise that will cause stress
- Transport each reptile in separate rescue bags
- *Always be aware of a reptiles great ability to escape*

HANDLING TURTLES

Turtles may be handled in a number of ways.

- By grasping each side of the shell edge, although you still may find that if its legs are able to reach you, they may scratch causing injury. Alternatively place one hand at the tail-end of the turtle covering the shell and underside with the other hand holding the front-end of the shell
- Smaller juvenile and hatchling turtles should be held between the index finger and the thumb over the shell and underside. Avoid holding the shell edges when they are small, this can cause damage
- Turtles will often shoot-out all four legs at once, especially when lifted
- As a defence reaction, turtles may release a foul smell from their scent glands, so it is advised that you them with their tail facing away from you
- Consider the possibilities of there being a shell injury. If this is suspected lift the turtle from underneath to examine.

- Never turn a turtle upside down, always lift it up to examine underneath. For examination purposes, turtles should be taken to and experienced wildlife volunteer or veterinarian

TRANSPORTING TURTLES

Turtles may be transported the same way as lizards, in a pillowcase or in a ventilated secure container. Turtle should never be transported in water.

INJURIES

When you examine the animal, look for anything obvious. As animals are symmetrical, any differences from either side of the body should be noted. This is a skill you will learn very quickly. Your observation skills will improve with every rescue you do.

- If there is a gaping wound, the wound should be covered with sterile gauze, and gentle pressure applied to prevent further bleeding, then the animal should be transported to the closest vet
- If a lizard has dropped its tail, it needs to be taken to the vet as soon as possible
- Wounds that open into the body cavity should have gentle pressure applied to prevent further bleeding and the animal must be transported to the vet immediately. **Do not attempt to flush out the wound**



Image from: Wildlife Welfare Org SA Inc.

All decisions to euthanise a reptile should be in consultation with a species specialist or district co-ordinator and on the advice of the treating veterinarian.

BIRDS

Australia and its offshore islands and territories have 898 recorded bird species as of 2014. Of the recorded birds, 165 are considered vagrant or accidental visitors, of the remainder over 45% are classified as Australian natives and are found nowhere else on earth.

HEALTH CONSIDERATIONS

- Some diseases are zoonotic, transmissible from bird to human
- Be thorough with cleanliness, ensure hands are washed well before and after handling birds
- Keep your tetanus shots up to date
- If you become ill, respiratory, or gastric, go to your local GP and notify them you handle birds
- If you develop flu-like symptoms after you have handled a sick bird, inform your GP immediately

NATIVE BIRD SPECIES

Identification determines if a bird is a juvenile or an adult, whether it is an endangered species, and if it is diurnal (active during the day), crepuscular (active at dawn and dusk), or nocturnal (active at night). Taking a quick photo of a rescued bird will assist in obtaining an accurate identification while minimising the need to annoy it constantly. When it comes to bird identification, field guides are particularly useful.

Beak and feet shapes, identification tools.

The colour of the plumage, as well as the shape of the beak and feet, are the most important features for identification. The different shapes of beaks and feet between species allow for habitat and food specialisation.

While most birds consume a variety of diets, they are classified according to their primary food groups omnivores, carnivores, insectivores, nectivores, granivores, herbivores and piscivores.

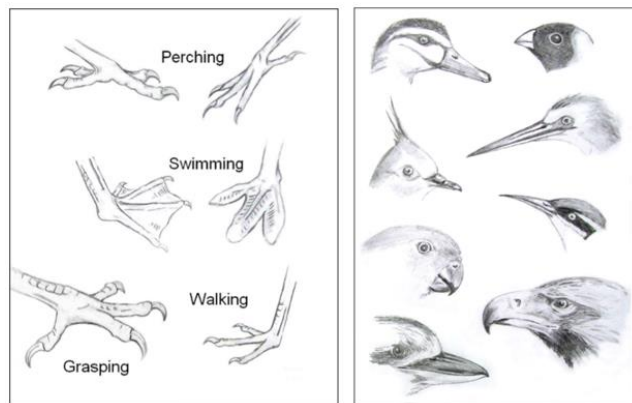


Image from: NSW Wildlife Information Rescue and Education Service (WIRES)

Different beak shapes allow different species to survive and feed in the same environment while using different food sources. A bird's foot shape reveals its ideal habitat and foraging methods.

(Refer to Appendix 2 - Common bird species for pictures)

INTRODUCED SPECIES

Introduced species compete with native birds for food and nesting grounds, can interbreed with native species e.g. Pacific Black and Mallard ducks, and can spread disease. Many birds that have been imported from other countries have thrived in Australia's changing habitats and environment. Because of their adaptability to urban conditions, they are more common in developed areas. It may be difficult to accurately identify young chicks until they have adult plumage, so always seek guidance if in doubt.

Common introduced species include.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Common Name	Scientific Name
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia domestica</i>	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Spotted Turtle dove	<i>Spilopelia chinensis</i>
Indian Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	Red-whiskered Bulbul	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>







FEATHERS

A bird's feathers are one of the most distinguishing features. Feathers perform a variety of functions, including flight, insulation, contact and courtship, camouflage, and even a tactile role in the form of bristles on the beaks of certain insectivorous birds. The most critical feathers that enable flight are the primary wing feathers and the tail feathers. The bird's tail feathers help it manoeuvre through the air and slow down as it lands.

A feather has a blood supply as it is developing, but once it is fully grown, the blood supply stops. Feathers grow in a protective sheath, which the bird then preens off. Feathers cannot self-repair once they are damaged. Bird's moult and regrow aged, worn feathers, and complete feather replacement can take two years or longer in some species. This is why it is important to do everything you can to avoid feather injury during the rescue and transport process. The bird would be unable to fly if its feathers are not in perfect order.

- Prevent feather damage while transporting birds by using a cardboard box or lined rescue basket with a towel on the bottom
- Be aware the members of the parrot family may chew through shade cloth or cardboard, and will need specialised housing

CHICKS

<p>Nestlings</p> <p>Totally dependent on adults, still in the nest and either naked or with downy covering.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Gape for food and cannot fly or perch ○ Due to lack of plumage, can be hard to ID ○ Cannot thermo-regulate 	 <p>Image from: Barb Copus</p>
<p>Branchling</p> <p>Still dependant on their parents for food are out of the nest but not yet able to fly.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Spends time hopping from branch to branch ○ Developing some flight feathers and usually have some down feathers 	 <p>Image from: Kirsten Wallis</p>
<p>Fledgling</p> <p>Mostly dependant on adults for food, still gaping and calling for food but will forage.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Learning to fly ○ Fully thermo-regulating 	 <p>Image from: Marian MaLucas</p>
<p>Juvenile</p> <p>Have adult feathers and size but some species have not developed full adult plumage.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Can fly and forage reasonably well ○ Some have plumage similar to the female (Koel) <p>Species where both genders are similar, will be duller or may have brownish or streaky plumage (Seagull)</p>	 <p>Image from: Samantha Wilkinson</p>
<p>Adult</p> <p>Full adult plumage as shown in avian field guides</p>	 <p>Image from: Bridget Jane</p>
<p>Precocial chicks</p> <p>Can be totally independent of adults (Brush-turkeys) or follow adults for warmth and protection (ducks).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Able to walk as soon as they hatch and are covered in down the moment, they leave the egg ○ Does not gape for food, usually self-feeding 	 <p>Image from: Natalie Logan</p>

RESCUING AN UNCONTAINED BIRD

Take time to assess the rescue site for your own safety as well as the birds. Assessing the situation is important and can tell you how to go about the rescue. You will need to work out the best way to approach the bird to avoid it escaping or further injuring itself. You may also decide that you need help from another wildlife volunteer, or equipment such as a net or trap.

Observing the bird is an essential step and will provide you with useful knowledge. Note the easier an adult bird is to catch, the sicker or more injured it is. If the bird is on the ground and does not fly away, it is likely to be severely compromised. Each of the following signs are severe and should be evaluated and treated by a veterinarian as soon as possible.

- Unable to stand or falling over, limping, drooped wing (common indication of break or fracture)
- Open wounds, bleeding, gape breathing (visibly gasping for air with an open beak)
- And fluffed up feathers (can be an indication of severe stress or pain)

Request that members of public keep their dogs and children at a safe distance, the bird would be less stressed as a result of this. Have your carrier open and prepared with a towel in the bottom and a support towel ready if needed.

1. Choose a towel that is suitable size and weight for the bird and approach the bird slowly and with confidence, gently covering the bird with the towel. Pick-up the bird using both hands
2. Keeping the towel draped over the bird with the head and wings covered, wrap the towel loosely under the animal, supporting its body from underneath, so it can grip on the towel
3. Place the bird in your prepared carrier, then carefully remove the towel covering it
4. Gently close the lid and cover the rescue carrier with another towel to reduce stress

If the bird is gripping onto the towel and you are unable to remove the towel, or you are concerned about the bird escaping when you remove the towel, leave it in the carrier and uncover the bird as much as possible so it can move around in the carrier.



Image from: NSW Wildlife Information Rescue and Education Service (WIRES)

RESCUING A CONTAINED BIRD

If the bird is contained in a box, check to make sure it is not squashed, upside down, or wrapped as this will distress the bird and potentially cause further injury. If you need to transfer the bird, do so in a closed dimly lit room or in your closed car to avoid an escape or further injury.

If you need to transfer the bird into a more suitable transport container, take advantage of the extra time to assess any visible injuries that require urgent veterinary attention. **Only do this if you need to transfer the animal into another container for transport.** To do this, it is the same as with other species already contained, follow the steps below.

1. Slide a towel under the lid or over the top of the box until the top is covered and the animal cannot see out of the top, hold the towel tightly, stretched across the top of the container that it is in

2. Open the lid and have a look under the towel at one side to see where the animal is
3. Softly push the towel down into the box around the animal and pick it up, gently covered with the towel ensuring head is covered to reduce stress and the animal is supported underneath

Is it a chick?

Chick will need immediate care from an experienced wildlife volunteer or veterinarian especially if they are very young, cold, or injured. However it is always best to try re-uniting a chick with its parents rather than it coming into care with a human substitute as a carer.

- For young chicks warmth and security are the immediate concerns
- *Do not give the chick any food or water*

This could mean the difference between life or death for a chick.

RESCUING CHICKS

As wildlife volunteers, we can care for a chick and provide security and food. What we can't do is teach it the intricacies of its own society and natural world. Whenever possible, the best outcome is to re-unite a chick with its family. Many chicks are saved each year as a result of the following events.

- Falling from the nest, nest becomes disturbed, problems when leaving the nest
- Unsuitable habitats, weather conditions, loss of parents, problems with food sources
- Well-meaning member of public finding fledgling juveniles, injury, disease
- And parent birds may discard a chick from the nest if it has a congenital deformity

Every scenario is different and needs to be assessed before removing the chick from its parents. Volunteers should liaise with a district co-ordinator or species specialist before a chick is removed from its parents.

It is important to spend as much time as possible at the scene looking for any observations you can make, not only of the chick, but of their surroundings, the parents, the nest position, and any potential dangers to the chick, this will help your district co-ordinator and/or species specialist work with you to best determine the best next steps for the chick.



Image from: Kirsten Wallis

The below points are general recommendations however your district co-ordinator or species specialist will be able to assist you in determining whether the chick can be re-united and the best way to go about it for your particular case. This will vary greatly between species and their behavioural development so it may be a good idea to send a photo to your district co-ordinator or species specialist for them to be able to assess it while you are still at the rescue site.

- If a chick is injured, cold, or been in contact with a domestic animal, it will need to come into care or transported to a vet, however, this should be discussed with your district co-ordinator to determine the best course of action
- If a chick is not fully feathered, naked or fluffy chicks, it needs to be assessed by a carer ASAP and an attempt made to re-unite with parents
- If a chick is fully feathered, walking around, and flying a little with its parents and is not in any danger e.g. vehicles, domestic animals etc., it should not be bought into care

- If a chick has fallen from the nest and there are no parents attending, it may need to come into care for a few days until it is stronger, and another re-unite attempt made

Remember that every chick rescue will be unique, and it is important to consult your district co-ordinator or a species specialist about the situation. Be patient, re-uniting birds can take time and prolonged observation is an important part of their success.

HUMANE DEATHS

As wildlife volunteers, our goal is to assist birds in regaining full health so that they can live in the wild without assistance. A bird that is not fit and healthy will not survive and will potentially become an easy target for predators or be unable to forage on their own and suffer a slow death by starvation. Euthanasia is an important option in wildlife rehabilitation. If a bird has suffered a severe injury and has no chance of a full recovery, the only humane option is to end its suffering

Wild birds do not make good pets; they spend their lives distressed and trying to escape. Remember that a bird will have left behind its mate, family, home territory and freedom, it is unkind to keep them captive. You could be asked to transport a critically ill bird to a veterinarian for euthanasia if you rescue it. If you are uncomfortable doing so, speak with your district co-ordinator about finding another volunteer to do this.

MAMMALS

Mammals are classified as.

- Having a covering of hair or fur
- Produce milk to feed their young
- Warm-blooded vertebrates

There are three (3) groups of mammals and Australia has example of all three (3) groups.

- **Monotremes** (prototherians) have mammalian characteristics but have no teats, lay eggs, and have a single opening for urogenital and faecal access (cloaca). The two members of this group are the platypus and the echidna
- **Marsupials** (metatherians) also have mammalian characteristics, but have teats, give birth to live young at a very early (embryonic) stage and have a pouch where young complete their development. Marsupials also have a cloaca. Examples include macropods i.e. kangaroos and wallabies, wombats, koala, possums and gliders, bandicoots and dasyurids, carnivorous marsupials such as quolls, phascogales, antechinus and plagigales
- **Placental** (eutherians) all have mammalian characteristics but have separate openings for faecal and urogenital waste instead of a cloaca, have a placenta, which nourishes the young inside the female, allowing them to develop to a greater extent prior to birth, and have teats but no pouch. Bats and flying-foxes, rodents, marine mammals, and humans are examples of placental mammals.

It is important to identify which group of mammals you're dealing with, as they will have specific needs.

HEALTH CONSIDERATIONS

Prior to commencing any rescue of an animal ensure you are following good hygiene practices; anti-bacterial hand sanitizer is an essential part of any rescue kit. There are a number of zoonotic diseases that can be transmitted from mammals to humans, for example *Q-fever* and *Cryptosporidiosis*.

Please ensure that all equipment is clean, and hands are washed or sterilized before and after a rescue.

RESCUE EQUIPMENT

- Towel(s), material net, leather gloves/welding gloves, mobile phone (to record found/location)
- Lockable carry basket, pillowcases, torch, saline wash, pouches (if for younger joeys)
- Heat source (wheat bag, portable heat disc), scales, scissors, SOWFI Hi-vis safety vest
- Anti-bacterial hand sanitizer, large old bedspreads or doona covers (used to encase large animals)
- And weather-proof gear e.g. hat, sunscreen, and sunglasses

BEFORE LEAVING HOME

Prepare all the equipment you may need for the rescue, and it is worth being mindful that in some instances the assistance of a more experienced handler may be required. The procedures for rescuing mammals are similar to those for other types of rescues.

Below are some examples of questions you might need to ask the member of public before you attend a rescue to ensure you have all the information you need.

- Is the animal contained? What have you contained the animal in?
- How did you come across the animal?
- Have you given the animal any food or water?
- What size is the animal? The size of a mouse, rat, rabbit or larger?
- Do you have any idea what happened to this animal or their mother?

If there is only one joey you may need to ask the member of public the following. Some species often have more than one joey. Ask if they can look around, in the grass and bushes where you found the first one, for another one, two or even three (depending on species) and keep them warm please?

AT THE RESCUE SITE

When you get to the rescue site, be prepared to find that the animal has died, turns out to be a species you were not expecting or may have escaped. Regardless of their injuries, these animals will perceive you as a predator and try to flee.

A possum, for example, will be frightened and will protect itself by biting or clawing - use enough pressure to control the animal but no more than necessary at any given time. Too much pressure may cause the animal to struggle more. Look for joeys as well if the animal is female, ringtail possum joeys in particular may have buried themselves; additional joeys may be hiding if out of the pouch.

Initial observation without handling.

As a general rule, the easier an animal is to capture, the greater its injuries or illness. Your observations prior to capture may give you an idea as to whether it should go straight to a vet or experienced wildlife volunteer. Observe the following from a distance.

- Is there any signs of bleeding or a fractured limb? Favours one leg, deformities, or lameness?
- Is it unresponsive, weak, or unable to stand? Is the animal in a state of shock?
- Does it have a hunched or stooping stance? Irregular breathing patterns e.g. laboured?
- Does it respond to your movement or other visual stimuli?

If these symptoms are present, the animal is most-likely seriously ill, so any handling or distress will need to be kept to a minimum. Heat stress can occur in events of extreme heat and can occur as a result of an animal overworking itself to avoid a predator, for example.

A healthy animal will appear alert with its eyes wide open and bright, has clean well-groomed fur, appears symmetrical and can be difficult to capture.

When attending road rescues.

- Always wear your SOWFI hi-vis safety vest
- Keep yourself and the animal safe from traffic. For traffic assistance on major freeways or highways, contact traffic management 1800 018 313
- Transport the animal off the road only when it is safe to do so

Removing deceased animals from the road is essential in preventing secondary roadkill of animals such as Wedged-tailed Eagles that will feed on the carcasses.

RETRIEVING YOUNG FROM POUCH

If a joey is found in the pouch of a deceased or critically injured female, it must be taken to a vet or experienced wildlife volunteer as soon as possible. Having a photo of the mothers body is useful for distinguishing the species of joey, particularly macropods.

If the joey has either been ejected from the pouch, in the case of an attack from a predator, a member of public has already taken the joey, or the mothers location is unknown, follow the instructions below.

- Wrap the joey loosely in a cotton handkerchief and put it in the cotton liner you rubbed in the mothers pouch, if available and the body has not been decomposing for some time attracting bacteria, then place it in a woollen pouch
- Place the pouch next to a secured heat source in your carrier. **Do not place the joey directly on top of a heat source**
- Gradually warm the joey up, monitoring it with a digital thermometer with a remote probe placed near but not on the animal. For furred joeys, the temperature should be at 28°C and unfurred at 32-33°C
- If the member of public is present, ask again when and where the animal was found and if it has been given anything to eat or drink. Make no comment if it has and be grateful if it has not

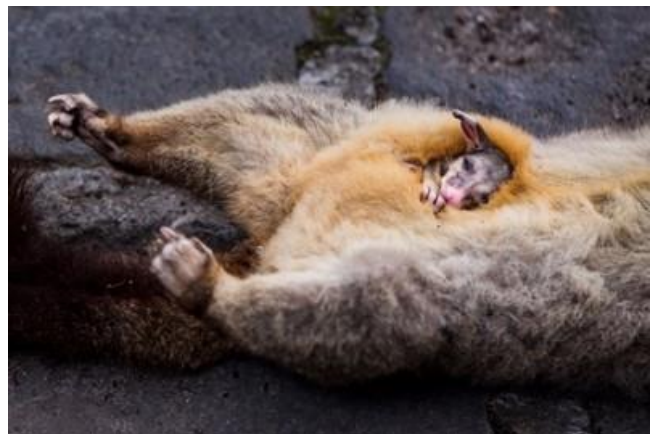


Image from: Backyard Buddies

Unfurred and furred joeys.

A joey **should never be pulled from the teat**. The mouth and suckle reflex of the joey can be permanently damaged as a result of this. In the case of a joey being found in a mothers pouch, you will need to first ensure that mum is deceased then gently and carefully take the joey out of the pouch so you can see the teat it is attached to, using a safety pin secure the teat before cutting the teat away from the mother so that the joey doesn't inhale the teat.

Young joeys should be able to be picked up and placed in a pouch with a secured external heat source. If no heat source is available, they should be placed down your top as close to your skin as possible to keep them warm and transported to an experienced wildlife volunteer.

POSSUMS

Possoms are nocturnal animals, and if found in daylight hours, the reasons for this should be investigated. Be prepared that the 'joey' you have been called out to collect may, in fact, be an adult ringtail possum.

Common reasons for rescue include.

- Domestic animal attacks or motor vehicle trauma
- Rodenticide and metaldehyde poisoning
- Disease and habitat loss

There are some common inquiries that volunteers are not required to attend. These should instead be referred elsewhere such as possums living in roofs. There are professional services available for these types of rescues who are able to address the underlying issues, entrance points in the exterior of the house.



**Image from: Casey Poolman
Husbandry Guide for Ringtail Possum**

Most injured or orphaned possums are found on the ground. You can catch older possums by using a net or throwing a towel over them and scooping them up. Where the possum is still feisty be careful to wear gloves as they will bite and claw at you. Carefully grab the possum by placing one hand around the back of the neck ensuring not to strangle, just tight enough to restrict too much movement and the other at the base of the tail (if no spinal injuries). If a spinal injury is suspected, leave the possum in the position it has chosen to be in and lift into carrier without changing its position (if possible). In this case a towel or a piece of cardboard could be of use.

Young possums can be picked up by turning pouch inside out over your hand, picking up the joey with the pouch, and turning the pouch back in the right way with the possum inside it. Incredibly, young joeys should be able to be picked up and placed in a pouch with an external heat source. If no heat source is available, they should be placed down your top as close to your skin as possible to keep them warm and transport to a

carer. Contact the SOWFI Rescue Hotline (08 7120 6620) to organise an appropriate carer. In the meantime, keep them warm and wait further instruction.

Do not lift a possum from under its front legs like a baby. Always have their full bodyweight supported by one hand under their rear and another holding them upright but slightly curled around the chest cavity.

When rescuing possums, do not place yourself in danger by climbing onto or on roofs or up trees. Enlist the property owner to help retrieve animals stuck in precarious places. If in a public place such as roadside, ensure you are safe before attempting rescue. Ensure you are wearing your Hi-vis vest. Call your district co-ordinator to seek approval in enlisting the help of the Police 131 444 for traffic control or SAPN/MFS/CFS/SES to assist if possum is near power lines.

BRUSHTAIL IDENTIFICATION

Male 'Jack' Genitalia



Image from: Malcolm Whyte

Female 'Jill' Genitalia



Image from: facebook.com

GROWTH PICTURES

Common Brushtail Possum - Pinkie



Image from: Natalie Logan

Common Brushtail Possum - Baby



Image from: Andrew Boyce

Common Brushtail Possum - Juvenile



Image from: Leonie Blewett

Common Brushtail Possum - Sub-Adult



Image from: Katrina Baker

RINGTAIL IDENTIFICATION

Male 'Jack' Genitalia



Image from: Bridget Jane

Female 'Jill' Genitalia



Image from: Lisa De Palo

GROWTH PICTURES

Common Ringtail Possum - Pinkie



Image from: Marian MacLucas

Common Ringtail Possum - Baby



Image from: Jane Kelly

Common Ringtail Possum - Juvenile

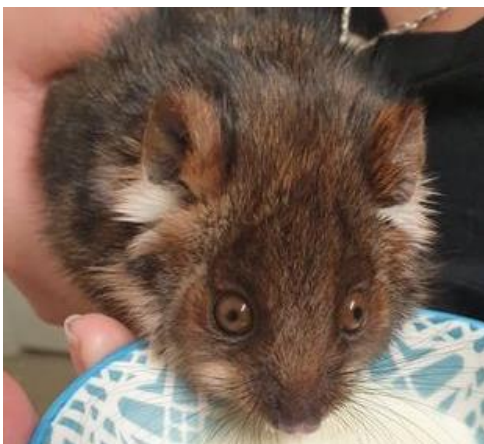


Image from: Helen Goodhew

Common Ringtail Possum - Sub-Adult



Image from: Amanda Reader

KOALAS ON GROUND

The koala is an arboreal herbivorous marsupial native to Australia. That is usually found dozing in trees for up to 20-hours a day. If a koala is sitting, hunching, or sleeping on the ground they need urgent medical attention.

Common reasons for rescue include.

- Koalas at risk in suburban areas
- Domestic animal attacks or motor vehicle trauma
- Orphaned joeys

To capture the animal approach the koala from behind with caution. Place a blanket or large towel around the koala enclosing its arms, then carefully lift and place into a secure mesh carrier or large dog crate. Remember that the koala is frightened and has sharp claws, caution is advised, and gloves may be used.

KOALA IDENTIFICATION

Male 'Buck' Chest Markings



Image from: bioweb.com

Female 'Doe' Chest Markings



Image from: koalainfo.com

The easiest way to identify an animals sex is to look at their genitals, but this is not always possible especially when it comes to wild koalas. The most obvious difference between both sexes is the scent gland on the chest of males. Koala scent glands are quite easy to see in adult males; a dark-edged bare patch on their chests. Females may present with a small crease on their chest, but they are very small and with no brown colouring at all.

ECHIDNAS

Echidnas are found throughout all of Australia. Its short, round, compact body is covered in very sharp spines. The legs are short but very strong, the front feet are designed to be used like spades and the back feet are used for digging and grooming. Considering their size, they are remarkably strong.

Common reasons for rescue include.

- Calls for uninjured echidnas that have moved into a garden. In most cases, if the animals is left alone and monitored, it will likely move on
- Motor vehicle trauma, orphaned puggles

- Bushfires, floods, and other natural disasters have a major impact on these animals

Never use a shovel to dig-out an echidna. When attempting to capture the animal, the 'Stroke' method may be utilised. This involves kneeling next to the echidna and stroking one hand after the other along one side until you can ease the fingers of one hand underneath the animal. Alternatively, the 'tickle' method can be used. Easing your fingers under the belly of the echidna, gently tickle the stomach and the echidna will release its grip. If you keep constant pressure upward every time the echidna gives a little, you will be able to lift it out a little more each time and eventually it will come free. Using a towel, it can then be easily lifted. As you lift the echidna it will curl around your hands, so good quality leather/ welding gloves are strongly recommended.

Watch for any, bright-red or pink, blood in the bubbles as this may be an indication of a broken snout which cannot be repaired, lung or other internal damage that will require immediate vet attention. Clear bubbles are not a concern as echidnas blow bubbles of mucous through their snouts as a normal process to remove dirt.

Avoid relocating adult echidnas around breeding time, mid-May to early September. Young are left in burrows while mum forages for food. Relocate the animal as close to the rescue site as possible as they will try to return once released.



Image from: Natalie Logan

Transport.

- Wrap an ice brick in a towel and place it in the bottom of the carrier to keep cool as the temperature needs to be below 25°C
- Three towels or a woollen blanket should be placed on the bottom before placing the echidna into the bin. Put another towel over the echidna to allow it to burrow into the towels for security and to reduce stress

Young Echidnas, even when spineless, should not be placed on heat but treated in the same manner as a joey rescue using the same pouches. Never pick up an un-spined puggle with bare hands, as a puggles immune system is not able to cope with human bacteria.

ECHIDNA IDENTIFICATION

You cannot tell an echidnas sex by simply looking at them as they have no gender-specific features and their reproductive organs are internal. Echidnas do not have a permanent pouch; instead they have contracting muscles in their abdomens, which forms a pouch-like fold. As both male and female echidnas can form a pouch in this way, it makes the sexes indistinguishable.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to the NSW Wildlife Information Rescue and Education Service, Natalie and Bridget Jane Logan, Marian MacLucas, and everyone else who helped to produce this manual and course.

Thank you also to all the rescue volunteers who supplied their pictures and knowledge for use in this manual. And to those who took on the rescues, so we had time to produce this course.

Finally, to the wildlife of South Australia - thank you for giving us such interest, knowledge, and joy. It is a great privilege to assist you however we would prefer that you stay safe and in your native habitats.

Additional References.

WIRES National Wildlife Rescue 101, online training

Introduction to Possum Care and Rescue by Save Our Wildlife Foundation Inc. (SOWFI) version 2

Introduction to Joey Care and Rescue by Save Our Wildlife Foundation Inc. (SOWFI) version 1.2

APPENDIX 1 - COMMON REPTILE SPECIES

Central bearded dragon



Image from: Cheryl Atyeo

Blue-tongued lizard



Image from: Marian MacLucas

Burton's legless lizard



Image from: twitter.com

Shingleback lizard



Image from: Cheryl Atyeo

Garden skink



Image from: flickr.com

Macquarie long-necked turtle



Image from: Cheryl Atyeo

APPENDIX 2 - COMMON BIRD SPECIES

Australian magpie



Image from: Jane Kelly

Eastern rosella



Image from: Marian MacLucas

Pacific Black duck



Image from: Susan Green

Rainbow Lorikeet



Image from: Rebecca Sanders

Southern Boobook



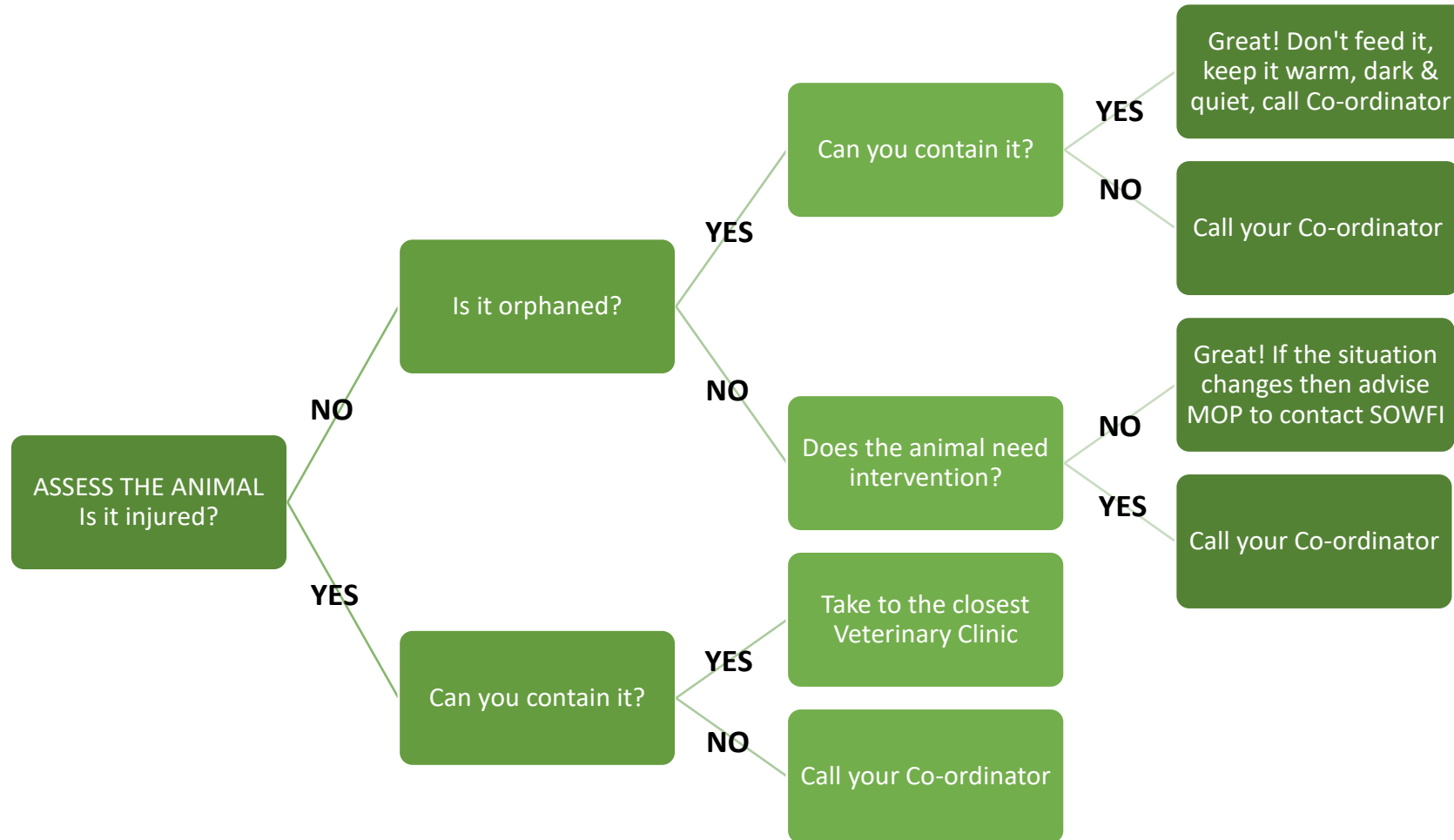
Image from: Natalie Logan

Sulphur-crested cockatoo



Image from: Debra Jones

SOWFI WILDLIFE RESCUE FLOW CHART



DON'T FORGET TO NOW LOG YOUR RESCUE CALL INTO SOWFI DATABASE

What to do if you find a baby bird...

