

Wildlife whispers | by Nikki Medwell



People often ask; "What does it take to be a wildlife carer?"

Have you put water out for wildlife?

Have you planted native trees to encourage wildlife?

Do you donate or volunteer at a wildlife shelter?

Do you fight for their rights to live alongside us?

Then you are already a wildlife carer!

There are many ways people can help our wildlife. None more important than the other. From someone that hangs a small dish of water from a tree filled with pebbles for native bees, to someone that gets out of bed at 2am to drive miles to help an injured native animal - both "care".

At the time of writing this article we have just survived one of the hottest summer weeks on record. If we as humans were suffering in our air-conditioned homes with our cool drinking water, can you imagine the real suffering of our wildlife?

We have been heartened by the number of stories we have been told over the last few weeks of locals (and our extended neighbours) that considered wildlife by offering them refuge, food and water. Some bowls of water left out, to sprinklers put on to offer moisture through the nibbling of grass tips. I know the bees here zip in and out of the misty spray the sprinkler puts out and appear to be thoroughly enjoying themselves.

We all remember the photo of the firefighter from a few years back that offered a koala water and the one of the man that rescued a kangaroo from flood waters. Well these photos to me show the Australian spirit in motion.

Sadly, there have been reports of kangaroo mobs returning to their home ground in smaller numbers. The large males unable to protect their families from the myriad of threats and dangers they face whilst in search of food and water. Cars, human cruelty, dehydration, starvation and even dog attacks. It must be soul destroying for these proud males to be unable to keep their families safe.

A large male kangaroo is referred to as an alpha male and they are born alphas. There are many smaller males in mobs, yet only a few alphas. For an alpha male to get to the good size where his muscles are prominent takes seven years. That's a long time for these boys to survive against such harsh odds and they are so desperately needed if we are to preserve the gene pool of this species. It is one thing to kill an animal, it is another to

deliberately kill it off and change its design forever.

When alpha males are removed, the mob becomes disjointed, scared and confused as their protection and leader/s that would take them to food and water are gone. Younger, weaker and less virile males are then given access to the does that they would once not have. This breeding then produces a smaller and weaker species. It is up to us to stop this from happening. People in the city are only interested in as far as they will bring overseas visitors to the 'country' for a day trip in the hope to see a kangaroo, so as actual residents of the 'country' it is our role to act as guardians for there is no one else.

The kangaroo is a noble and gentle creature that only wishes for safety and silence for their families. They will not attack unless they feel threatened or their family is threatened - no different to any male of a human household. Humans do not seek out trouble, we ourselves wish for peaceful lives for our families. This is but one of the many similarities we share with this ancient creature.

I really hope that the Elphinstone community can be leaders in awareness and show others how to co-exist with our wildlife.

Gas guns used by local orchardists is one great example of farmers protecting their crops without killing. White tape as top fence lines prevents fence hanging.

People making others aware that wildlife is welcome on their land is helpful as you can then safely direct wildlife there. Our native animals are smart. Treat them as such, give them a chance to understand what it is you want and with patience.

Kangaroos only take the tips off grass, they do not strip the land and they do not ringbark trees. Their large front toe creates large divots in the ground as they hop which captures grass seeds. Buried a centimetre down, once the rains come and fill up that little divot, new grass has been planted which is how they have succeeded in being part of our environment for eons. They keep empty paddocks down lowering the risk of grass fires, they never decimate the land and they help replenish it.

If an alpha male seeks refuge on your land with his mob then see it as a compliment for when he is looking at you, those eyes will be pleading for sanctuary during these hard months.

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Affectionate and playful the kangaroo never forgets kindness. The joeys we have raised have shown completely different and unique personalities and being around them has shown us how very different each one look appearance wise. Besides the body shape, each one is as different and as unique as a human.

Whether you care at a grass roots level and do what you can or want to dedicate yourself further, there are plenty of roles you can fill.

Volunteer

Whether you help out a shelter a few hours a week to clean, feed or do some washing, for wildlife carers that do this 24/7, it's like having a holiday! But if you do contact a shelter, be sure to guarantee a permanent shift. It takes time to train someone up and that shift is no different to that of an employee to the shelter operator. You will be 100 per cent relied upon to show up, rain, hail or blistering heat. Please note, shelters are reluctant to take on volunteers because the commitment just isn't there – but we live in hope.

Man a phone that takes calls from members of the public that have found injured wildlife. You can dedicate the amount of time and hours you want and you never need to leave your home but a minimum 12 hour block is desirable. With training you will be given the names and numbers of rescuers ready to head out and help (one is currently needed now)

Become a rescuer. Be that person that heads out to assess a situation. When able, take the animals to a vet

or shelter. Make a call on the situation and decide; does this animal need to be humanely euthanised or is it a viable save? There are many components to this role and you will need your own transport.

Become a foster carer under the guidance of a registered shelter. This can be done on a casual, part-time or full-time basis but if you take it on full-time, be prepared for the expense and the sleep deprivation that comes with it (it is SO worth it – the rewards are beautiful).

Do you own large plots of land that would be safe for wildlife to be released on once rehabilitated? This is desperately needed!

Are you good at fundraising?

Are you available to transport animals from one shelter to another? Or collect medication from veterinary clinics and drop them into a shelter?

Does any of this appeal to you? Then please phone WRIN (Wildlife Rescue Information Network) on 0419 356 433 and mention your expression of interest to help (phone operators currently needed urgently).

Do you wish to help educate the wider community? Then Google "Mr Boo the Kangaroo" or go to this link: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-05-27/central-victorian-kangaroo-school-education-program-goes-global/9800628>

Red Box Wildlife Shelter has a primary school aged program running for schools and/or groups. Packs are limited and are put together through donation. If you know of a primary school or group that might be interested, please send us an email requesting an information pack: elroos3448@gmail.com
Beside this program, we welcome your contact.

Wildlife Emergency numbers:

Wildlife Victoria: (03) 8400 7300

WRIN: 0419 356 433 (Central Victoria Region)