

Complementary Therapies for Wildlife

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ABSTRACT: Many people imagine complementary therapies to be something strange and mysterious, that are too complicated for them to use. In fact, many different natural medicines can be safely and easily incorporated into your repertoire of emergency or daily care of orphaned or injured wildlife.

Natural therapies include using such simple things as vinegar, aloe vera, honey and salty water, which are all readily available in the home. A number of very effective homeopathic remedies complement these natural products, and can give you the ability to treat simple injuries and ailments suffered by creatures that come into your care.

This talk is not aimed at discouraging wildlife carers from seeking veterinary treatment for your patients or to suggest that the use of conventional medicine is inappropriate or not needed. Instead, it is intended to demonstrate there are various complementary therapies that can be safely used in the treatment of wildlife, and which can be used in combination with other medical or surgical therapies.

In my veterinary practice, we routinely combine the use of some Eastern and some Western medicine on all of our patients, both domestic (human!) and wildlife, and I have no doubt about the benefits of the combined use of these treatments.

With thanks to Argyle Diamonds for enabling us to be here

Introduction

Today I would like to present a glimpse of some of the complementary therapies that I use in my mixed veterinary practice in Kununurra.

I do not profess to be extensively trained in the majority of the modalities that I use. I am simply sharing with you a taste of some of the therapies I have come to use over my 20 years in clinical practice.

Some of my history:

I have practiced in Kununurra for the past 16 years, treating a huge variety of wildlife, as well as all domestic species, from large to small. Over my years as a vet I have had the privilege of treating wedgies and wallabies, crocs and alligators, pelicans and pigeons and everything in between!! I have even had the thrill of treating tigers, tickling lions and once I was kissed by a Komodo Dragon!

Since my graduation in 1986, my own healing practices have gradually evolved to include an equal balance of both eastern and western medicine. I often combine both of these modalities on the one patient, though I find I am using more and more complementary therapies overall, especially on my human animal friends and myself!

I studied my western medicine at Murdoch University in Perth, and now I also use a mix of acupuncture, homeopathy, vitamins, nutraceuticals, natural diet, bodywork, herbs, hands on healing and more!



In this very short talk, I would like to give you a basic insight into a few safe and simple practices that you can use on any of your patients - be they wildlife, pets or humans. I have chosen just two areas today, so I don't keep going on and on, which I am very well known for doing!

Today I would like to talk to you about

- **Arnica** & basic homeopathic first aid, and
- some simple wound care tips

Before I address these two topics though, I would like to say something to all wildlife carers: I would like to encourage you all to listen to your own gut feelings, to believe yourself when treating and caring for your wildlife patients.

If the opinion of one vet/carer/doctor or whoever, does not feel right to you, **seek a second opinion**. We all have the right to do this. As my partner Trevor would say, "if it doesn't feel right, it ain't!" (well he is a cowboy!).

I have often had carers bring me creatures that they have taken to other clinics, or that have been given advice by other carers, and who will come to me and say "I don't know but I think it has such and such.....". When I give them my diagnosis (which agrees with theirs), so often they will say, "I knew it was that! I suggested that to the last vet! But they didn't believe me!"

I know it is often hard to be heard, but stick to your guns! Most times, you are right.

Remember you are the one that has been feeding, toileting and caring for that patient and it does give you real information to base your opinions on. I have certainly learnt to listen to clients when they say, "you might think this is unimportant, but I have noticed him/her doing this strange thing...." These observations are just about always relevant, I find.

Homeopathic philosophy calls these "strange, rare or peculiar symptoms" and places great importance on them. This is so because they are things that are specific to each individual case. This brings us nicely to arnica, and homeopathic first aid remedies...

So what is homeopathy?

Homeopathy has been around since 1796, and is founded on the healing principle of "like cures like", (instead of opposites being given, as is often the way in western medicine). Homeopathic medicines are known as remedies, and are substances (animal, plant and mineral) that when given in concentrated form, cause a consistent pattern of sickness and symptoms. This is called the remedy's "picture".

When the remedy is diluted, and succussed (shaken rhythmically), it loses its toxic effects and is then used to treat any of the symptoms that it can create. Hence, "like treats like". Remedies are safe and gentle, and employ the body's own inbuilt healing powers to cure sickness. Western medicines, on the other hand, tend to mask, or suppress symptoms. Homeopathic remedies are also much cheaper!



My favourite example of a homeopathic remedy and its' picture is Nux vomica. Nux is made from the crushed seed of a poison nut tree, and its' remedy picture (ie the symptoms that taking the concentrate gives you) include all the symptoms that you have ever experienced with a hangover or over indulgence: irritability, colic, nausea, vomiting, headache, collapse, constipation or diarrhoea, to name just some of them! I can personally vouch for the efficacy of Nux to treat the symptoms of a hangover, and it is a miracle cure for those puppies that are in a dreadful state from eating garbage!

I have now worked with homeopathy for the past 5 years, and the more I use it the more I am amazed by the results. I have gained much of my experience from treating family, friends, & myself and in fact, homeopathy was originally entirely tested on people.

Homeopathic remedies are very effective when used to treat wildlife, as wild creatures have energies that are not "clouded" by excessive use of other medicines or poisons. As a result, their own healing power (the body's vital force) is able to respond strongly and quickly to these remedies.

Arnica and homeopathic first aid

What is Arnica?

Arnica is probably the most commonly known homeopathic remedy, and it is used to treat shock, bruising and trauma. It is made from the flower of the alpine plant Arnica montana, and is brilliant for treating pain and bleeding. Arnica helps heal the physical effects of trauma and injury, as well as healing the mental and emotional effects. It works even if that trauma occurred some time ago. Arnica is great for treating the muscle pain of injuries and extreme exertion, as well as a host of other things.

Use of arnica: when, who, how, how often?

Every single wildlife patient that is admitted to our Vet clinic is given arnica. My staff routinely dose them with arnica drops as soon as we receive them, whether they are mammals, birds or reptiles. I believe that every wild creature we see as carers will be in some sort of trauma, even if it has not been injured. Purely being in contact with, and being handled by, human beings is a significant stress on our wildlife, which arnica will help.

At the Kimberley Vet Centre we actually use a combination of 3 remedies which we call "surgery drops", as it is the blend we use on all of our surgical patients. It has Arnica (for the trauma and bruising), Ledum (for the punctures and cutting of surgery) and Staphysagria (for the violation of surgery and handling and which, incidentally, is my favourite word in homeopathy!). As so many of our wildlife patients have been run over, bitten, squashed and chased, I feel all these remedies will benefit them.

Homeopathic remedies can be delivered as drops, pilules, or even as creams, but I find drops the simplest and easiest. They are received surprisingly well by most patients, who seem to lap up what they require from the eyedropper, with little, if any, stress.

Usually we give each patient 2 or 3 doses of drops over their first half an hour in the clinic, and then we leave them to rest. As far as dosage goes, potency (~strength) of remedies is quite complicated, but for first aid cases, you do not need to worry about selecting the right potency. Your first aid kit needs only one potency of each remedy.



With homeopathy, the body sees one dose as either a drop, or a cupful, at one time. Each time you treat the body you are asking it to create the change produced in response to that remedy. Very traumatised or bleeding patients you would treat with arnica frequently, maybe 6 times during the first hour. The remedy needs only to touch on the mucous membranes (mouth, beak, lips, tongue or gums) to be effective.

As far as frequency goes, if the patient is looking better, and seems settled and comfortable, stop treating with arnica until they seem to change. Remedies can also be put in the drinking water if it is too stressful to keep dosing, or even in the swimming water, for say crocs (for us in Kununurra!) or with turtles etc.

Other first aid remedies

There are many, many remedies available, hundreds in fact, but I believe that if every carer were to start out routinely using arnica, the benefits would be immense. I am very happy to supply people with arnica, or even surgery drops, and many chemists stock homeopathic remedies these days. Arnica or other remedies can be still be safely used, and will still produce great benefits, even if your vet is using other western medicine on your patients.

Other useful remedies that you might choose to include in your first aid kit are:

Aconite: for fear, and for patients that have been exposed to extreme heat or cold. It is great for birds and joeys that have had a terrible fright.

- Apis: for any oedema (fluid swelling) in the lungs or under the skin
- Carbo vegetabilis: for collapsed and cold patients- those cases that look as if they are dead. We once treated a bandicoot that had been trapped in a pool filter that came in almost unconscious. It very rapidly recovered after one dose of arnica and carbo veg, and then went flying around the carers' car on the way home!
- Nux vomica: great for joeys with diarrhoea or constipation
- Phosphorous: to stop bleeding (a great discovery for use in surgery)
- "RRA" (rhus toxicodendron, ruta graveolens & arnica): which is a blend used for arthritis, sore joints, tendons and ligament injuries.

As homeopathic remedies are energetic medicines, keep them in the cupboard in a cool, dark place, not in the fridge. The electromagnetic radiation produced by fridges and electrical equipment can affect them.



Simple wound care tips

Treating skin wounds is a very common problem when dealing with injured wildlife, and we all have many different methods of managing them. Our wound care practices are very simple, and I always feel that the simplest things are usually the best.

There are many commercial wound care products available, but the main product that I use is Dermaclens (previously Otoderm) cream. I have heard and read many different opinions of this cream (as is always the way), but I have used it on every wound imaginable for 20 years, and I still think it is magic.

The principal behind this cream is that it is a combination of acids in an oily base. Dead cells fill up with water and come away from the wound, and live cells are left there nice and healthy. It can be used on deep wounds that involve muscle, or on simple, superficial wounds. Anywhere there is dead tissue that needs to be removed Dermaclens can be used. We use it on all species, and under bandages, and I have never experienced any problems.

For cleaning wounds, you can never go past salty water or 1 to 10 vinegar to water. Both are safe in any situation. Tea tree and other essential oils have their uses, but always be very careful to use them in an extremely diluted form, and never on open wounds. I believe vinegar and water is the safest and best.

Once a wound is relatively clean and healing has begun, honey, aloe vera, or paw paw ointment are all excellent. These safe and natural products coat the wound, putting a film over the healing cells, which nourishes these new cells and protect them from dehydration. They are safe even if licked or chewed, and can be applied as often as

needed. All of these treatments reduce scabbing and scarring, which usually produce tight and irritating wounds, which cause creatures to chew or scratch at them.

There are very many natural therapies available to us all, and I continue to be amazed at the simple benefits of their use. There are other gentle and safe products that we use, such as bentonite to treat diarrhoea in joeys (thank you Jan Martin), but they will maybe be a topic for another year!

Thank you again to Argyle Diamonds for enabling us to be here, it's a long way from Kununurra!



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