

## WILDCARE Helpline

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The Wildcare helpline is a 24 hour 7 day week, statewide service manned by volunteers, for members of the public who find sick, injured or orphaned wildlife. This service was provided after consultation with registered wildlife rehabilitators, senior Department of Environment and Conservation formerly Department of Conservation and Land Management staff, and was implemented in 2000.

The idea came about from the traveling public mainly, after receiving calls from people traveling from the eastern seaboard who were in rural and remote areas, had found an injured animal and didn't know where to take it for help.

Locally people were calling the local government rangers, RSPCA, (who in WA are not responsible for wildlife), so by the time they found out who to call with this problem they were inherently very distressed and the chances of recovery for the animal was greatly diminished.

DEC provides training courses for wildlife rehabilitators and it was at these the Coordinator for Community Involvement Unit started to recruit people to work on the helpline. At the time it was thought that these volunteers would take the telephone during office hours after hours, however, the registered wildlife rehabilitators decided it would be better managed by people who had first hand experience of wildlife, ensuring that the wildlife and public could have the benefits of their experiences especially when they unable to access veterinarian advice until office hours.

The service has grown from a handful of volunteers, with 235 wildlife rehabilitators, to now include approximately 90 reptile removers, 30 animal control agents, 50 veterinary facilities, and wildlife officers rostered after hours supporting the operators, a total of approximately 425 people involved with the service.

Training is carried out in formal courses such as the wildlife rehabilitators course, specialized training for the helpline and an evaluation of the helpline is held annually.

Some of the issues have been:

- The myths that surround the service
- Lack of volunteers
- Lack of respect for the volunteer operators

The WILDCARE helpline has now been operating for six years in October, I cannot say its always been easy, however, it remains a very sound service for injured wildlife, with grateful thanks to the amazing people who volunteer their services.



**BIOGRAPHY:**

Margaret Buckland is the Coordinator of the Community Involvement Unit with the Department of Environment and Conservation and has responsibility for the volunteer issues in the Department and for five statewide volunteer groups.

