

THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE. PROBLEMS, SOLUTIONS AND HOPE

Liz MacGuinness, member of Fauna Rescue since 1995. Committee member since 1997. Fund raising and educational displays and talks. Co-ordinator for reptiles, bat carer. Has cared for possums and kangaroos and been co-ordinator for both. English by birth totally in love with Australian Fauna

ABSTRACT

To cover the journey of Fauna Rescue SA Inc. to acknowledge and openly speak about the difficulties and good side of our wildlife laws and how they impact our work.

Speak about our aspirations for the future and honour our past. Our achievements', our dedication from all our members and our pride in all of this.

The belief that we can go further, work with DEH for the betterment of our fauna.

To understand where Fauna Rescue fits in the scheme of things in SA a brief background history may help. We are proud of our beginnings and the road we have travelled to be where we are today.

Fauna Rescue was founded in humble beginnings in 1988. A small, a very small, band of some 10 people established Fauna Rescue after doing volunteer work at one of our local sanctuaries. Injured and orphaned animals began coming in to the people there for help in getting them well enough to be put back into the wild. The work at the sanctuary finished but the flow of animals did not stop. The need was obvious and those people rose to meet it.

From there we have, like Topsy "grewed". We now number 400+ state-wide; we still have several of our founding members I am happy to say.

We have grown too in our knowledge and commitment to our wildlife and our carers. We have also widened our field of care to just about all types of Fauna found in SA. We continue to learn and spread the word of our precious and unique wild life through our educational talks and displays.

We now work with several different organisations throughout our community. We have forged strong working relationships with the Dept. of Environment and Heritage, who oversee all wildlife and relevant permits, sustainability etc. the RSPCA who were kind enough to help in putting on this conference, the Australian Veterinary Association, Animal Welfare League, the Adelaide Zoo, the Police Dept, Country & Metro Fire Services, State Emergency Services, many councils across SA. and of course, Vets, who are so supportive and without whom we couldn't manage.

SA, as we all know has very different laws pertaining to wildlife. Mainly in the areas regarding release and returning to the wild our rehabilitated fauna. We are allowed to release. But only with written permission from the Dept. of Environment and Heritage. This is often very hard to obtain and it is extremely difficult and so frustrating when it comes to being able to release a healthy non imprinted animal. We are required to obtain permission for each and every animal that is suitable for release if they are in care for more than 24 hours. Even if they come in as adults and require only to be housed, fed their natural food and returned to full health and strength, no hands on as with hand rearing. Those are the hardest to come to terms with.

Has this made life hard in SA for wildlife carers. Oh yes, you betcha boots it has!

On the up side of the coin, we do have more lenient regulations for keeping rescued animals. Those that are not a good option for release can be assessed and used at educational talks and displays. We are still required to inform Dept Environment and Heritage which animals will be used, their owners and usually with permit numbers too. They can be a wonderful educational tool. But only of course if the animal can cope with it and it has a good, very good life, with conditions replicated as closely as possible to its wild environment. Some animals naturally, can have a good standard of life but not be suitable for public viewing. These animals are sometimes kept as life long residents of the carer. They are recorded on a special permit called Keep Rescued Animal Permit and it is free of charge. This is a great step forward as we used to have to obtain a Keep and Sell Permit. This is just such a misnomer and insult to wildlife carers, we do not breed, we do not sell, we do not deal in pets! They are not pets, never pets.

I believe in some states that an animal has to be released or if it is unreleasable, euthanased. That is so black and white; we do prefer our shades of grey.

Yes we have problems in SA. Yes, we would like to release and do it more easily with out having to plead for release. It would be more efficient and less work for all concerned. Yes, if we could turn it around and prove that

we can care for a 'kept' animal in the proper conditions. Providing as near as possible its natural environment. That doesn't mean of course that we just release willy nilly. It can and should mean that we do it sensibly and with great care and thought. It could well see the end of amateurs just dumping animals, particularly possums and roos, when they become too big, too fierce or their pee starts to stink!

We need help in proving that properly, soft released possums can and do survive, as do kangaroos. Such research is costly and beyond the realm of volunteer organisations. Any body out there with a spare few thousand for the tagging micro chipping or radio tracking, and the people who have the know how and time?

We have made advances. Things are a bit easier than they were. We campaigned and won an extension from 48 hrs to 4 weeks on the length of time we have before we have to apply for a rescue permit. You can imagine previously, by the time the rescue permit application hit the desk in DEH the darn critter had up and died in so many cases. And then you had to send in another to say it had died! Any wonder we got frustrated and often didn't send them in within the timeframe.

We now are able to release reptiles, bats and birds on our own timetable, because we can apply for a Letter of no Objection. Now we can wait for the right window of weather conditions to release that animal. Not send in a request and wait and then when it comes back with a date or time frame, the right time for the animal that is, has passed, and then we need to apply and wait again, and hope that the conditions will be right.

We are working together and making progress, things are definitely on the up. We are learning to trust and respect each other and recognise our place in the bigger plan.

The recent arrival of the Grey Headed Flying Foxes has seen a real bonding of groups, the Dept of Env and Heritage, the RSPCA, Adelaide Zoo, PIRSA the authority that oversees the primary industries and related health matters, Aust. Veterinary Association, even representatives from our Botanical gardens. The last were much relieved after the meeting with information they received and could now understand the situation and make plans to protect the gardens. The willingness and openness of information exchange, ongoing help and support was truly astounding and gives us all great hope for its continuance way beyond this unusual event. We have to give huge credit to our DEH for the speed which they put together the training and information sessions, they had Linda Collins bought in for a few days to teach us in a crash course about these fascinating animals. The work and help they contributed in dealing with public information, press releases etc. and all the time keeping us updated

before the press releases went out. They set up a flying fox website to gain information and track the bats by reported sightings. All this in addition to their usual work.

Hopes, what are our hopes for the future? Ah there's a big question. More of the recent involvement and working together with DEH as we did with the Grey Headed Flying Fox situation would be wonderful and what we have wanted for a long time. Working with koalas, wombats and echidnas. We are capable of this and cannot understand the dept. stand on this.

More accountability. We want and would welcome the transparency of caring by the recognised wildlife groups.

More working together to protect and even help in the breeding of our threatened species. Other states do it, we are just as able. It is frustrating to be this huge untapped and willing resource.

More say in the release of animals, we know how, when and when not to release. Its not about feeling good as the little bird flies off, its about putting back what humankind most likely had a huge hand in, in getting it into the strife that rendered needing our assistance in the first place. We really are doing a lousy job of caring for our environment.

A really big hope and dream for Fauna Rescue is to establish a wildlife hospital. Something along the lines of Kanyana in Western Australia. A place where we can take in the animals, work with vets and have on our shelves the possum boxes, the correct food for native animals, somewhere to get the right advice. But, most importantly, a central location where injured and orphaned wildlife can be dropped off. A place where school children can visit and learn. In other words a huge benefit to the community and our wildlife.