

## **“I’m Hand Raised or Rescued - Now What?”**

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Sydney Metropolitan Wildlife Services Inc (Sydney Wildlife) was formed in May 1997, by a large group of experienced volunteer wildlife carers, to meet the specific needs of urban wildlife in the Sydney metropolitan area.

We are licensed by NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service to rescue, rehabilitate and release sick, injured and orphaned native animals and to educate the community, at all levels, about the need to protect our native animals and to preserve their habitats.

Our organisation is a registered charity and is operated entirely by volunteers. We offer a 24-hours, 7-days rescue and advice service.

Sydney Wildlife rescues and hand raises around 13,000 animals per year. Once the animals are well or almost ready to be released, we need to think carefully about how they are released.

While soft release is the best, it can have its own issues. Did the animal come from this area, are there too many animals of this species released from this site leading to overcrowding etc.?

Understanding that not all carers are able to do soft releases from their back yards, Sydney Wildlife decided to set up a rehabilitation centre for the animals that require rehabilitation and monitoring prior to release back into the wild.

The old Waratah Park, former site and home of Skippy, now owned by Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council (MLALC) was chosen as our preferred site.

Significant donations have been given through our Global Giving project page. Many corporate companies have helped us immensely with donations, materials and volunteers hours.

This paper outlines some of the approaches we have taken to address the problem and the hurdles still to be cleared.

### **Picking a Site for Sydney Wildlife’s Rehabilitation Facility.**

Finding a site for the rehabilitation facility presented me with challenges and considerations. Land gradient, short or long-term options, owner privacy, construction of facilities and cost were a few things that needed to be addressed.

After thinking about the issues and about the area where we wanted to build, I came up with the idea of the old Waratah Park site and former home of Skippy at Duffys Forest, Sydney.

This area could be potentially worth looking at as it may have had some enclosures already there (even though it closed down many years ago). After a few phone calls and multiple discussions I learned Crown Lands owned the land so I met with representatives and put Sydney Wildlife’s case forward for a macropod rehabilitation centre. To summarise, we managed to get a license for part of the park, costing \$540 per year. Now the land is owned by the MLALC and they allow us to use their land for our rehabilitation facility without charging us.

Duffys Forest is a great spot for a rehabilitation facility as it is double fenced where our animals would be located, and there is lots of bush around leading down into Kuring - gai National Park. We are not allowed to release into the park but the bush land setting with very few people around is perfect.

Now the really hard work began because we had to raise funds and construct a rehabilitation area where our hand raised or injured animals could build up muscle strength and stamina before being released.

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## Organising Funds

We listed Sydney Wildlife on the Global Giving site, which is a world wide fundraising site, and although they take a small percentage of the donations, they are very helpful with tools to help you advertise and seek donations.

Many large companies partner with Global Giving, which enables us to promote our Sydney Wildlife facility and cause on an international basis. One of the other benefits is that we are able to engage with multinational companies who support us by offering advice, such as marketing.

Additionally, we have been fortunate in receiving individual local donations towards the project.

## Cleaning up the Area

Sydney Wildlife members are extremely busy looking after their rescued animals, working professionally, and in addition, looking after their families.

Because of Sydney Wildlife's members busy schedules; I needed to find other people willing to commit to helping us on a regular basis.

Contacting organisations such as Dell, VMWare, Ernst and Young, Bayer, Bunnings etc., and asking if they would be interested in helping us, as volunteers to accomplish this need. Many companies have community days where they allow their staff to work for non-profit organisations such as ours. Certain companies allow their staff to volunteer to work once per month while others allow 2 days per year, and other companies allow 1 day per year. We have been fortunate to have on average one volunteer day per month.

In return, on a volunteer day, we provide morning and afternoon tea with homemade cakes and the volunteers organize their own lunch.

Our day begins at 8.30 am and sometimes I have to push our regular Dell and VMWare volunteers to go home. Their enthusiasm is very much appreciated.

Some of the companies use the volunteer day as a team building exercise and also have meetings in the afternoon. Other companies such as Ernst and Young hold workshops and have provided valuable guidance for yet another project, a mobile wildlife vet clinic.

This was an idea that I had previously thought about and so it is exciting to see that plan gaining momentum and hopefully in the not too distant future become a reality.

One important factor we always need to remember on these company days is that these volunteers are not used to working with animals, and therefore, must be monitored closely. For example, when volunteers are building enclosures you must supervise their efforts to make sure there are no sharp edges, etc. that may hurt the animals.

Always be patient and glad that the volunteers are willing to donate their time. Volunteers are extremely helpful but if they are not supervised correctly, they may be unaware their efforts could be detrimental rather than helpful to the animals.

If you want your volunteers to return regularly, it is important to make them feel comfortable, train them properly and to create an atmosphere of fun. More importantly, you must be patient and remember that they are donating their time to help you, always thank them for their contribution.

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## Building Materials

We have begged, borrowed and had donated building materials to keep costs down. By contacting companies for fencing wire, hardware, shade cloth, tools etc we have received many goods.

By far, our largest donor of equipment is Bunnings who have donated equipment such as rakes, brooms, large bins, ladders, paint, screws, wheelbarrows, sets of wooden stairs, steel posts, hoses etc to name a few items.

Matthews Contracting has donated most of our shade cloth that covers all the fences and is also used in some of the aviaries.

We have picked up bits and pieces from the tip as well as soil for planting native plants for free. Basically, if you ask, it is amazing, how helpful people can be.

## Replanting the area

Once we cleaned the rehabilitation area and cleaned all the lantana, crofton, privet and other weeds from the property, we were left with bare land so we decided to plant native edible browse plants.

By planting these, we hope in a couple of years we will have food at close proximity for our rehabilitation animals. We planted over 300 seedlings such as wattles, bottlebrush, eucalyptus and grevillea of which approximately 85% have survived.

## Animals entering Sydney Wildlife’s rehabilitation facility

Our facility is only for animals in the last stage of care, it is here that they will build up their muscle strength, stamina and usually only see people once a day to feed. This separation dehumanizes them and helps them assimilate more easily once released.

When Sydney Wildlife volunteers from any section of Sydney brings an animal to be rehabilitated, we require a record sheet containing their Sydney Wildlife record number and details about their time with the person who cared for them. This allows us to see if the animal had any illness before or if there is anything we especially need to look out for. All animals must be self-feeding and in the case of macropods, joeys must be lapping one bowl of milk per day and preferably still using their pouch.

Sydney Wildlife volunteers are then asked to sign a form giving us permission to make decisions about the animal’s welfare while in our care and asking them to pick said animal up for release if required.

## The Rehabilitation Facilities

We have use of a building on site, we call “The White House”. It has a kitchen, bathroom and two other rooms and a balcony. It is here we prepare our animal food and do paper work etc.

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## The Macropod Yard 1

This area approximately 60 meters x 40 meters has a shed for tools and food storage and two aviaries that can be used for undercover feeding or housing.

We also have the rubber / quarantine room which is used for new macropods coming into the facility. This facility is important mostly for adult macropods that have been handed to us from local vets. This facility is made of padded, rubber walls with gaps in the top of the door and windows allowing visual access without disturbing the animals and allows for good airflow through the room. The floor is concrete allowing it to be hosed and disinfected easily.

Macropods settle very quickly when put in this room and the doors are closed.

The rubber room flows out to a small area of grass where the animal is allowed once settled to graze, still being small enough that we can catch them and treat if necessary.

## Macropod Yard 2

This large area contains 4 aviaries and 3 pits and flows through from a gate at the end of Macropod Yard One where the macropods can jump at speed, feed and hide.

Also in this area are aviaries of different sizes.

- Aviary 1. Is 8 metres square plus an air lock and is used for birds, bandicoots and ringtail possums.
- Aviary 2. Approx. 4 x 3 metres of fine mesh and used for sugar gliders, feathertail gliders and pygmy possums.
- Aviary 3. Approx. 5 x 3 metres and is used for brushtail possums.

Currently our wonderful volunteers are constructing an aviary that is 6 x 4 metres that will be used for possums and birds.

We also have 2 small pit areas and these are used for bandicoots, echidnas, turtles and lizards. There is a large pit area that is a work in progress and needs to be cleaned before we can use it.

## Release of Animals

When animals have completed their rehabilitation in our facility we release them as closely as possible to the suburb where they came from. All the hand raised macropods have been micro-chipped before release. This will enable us with retrieval of information back as to the success of the program. In the last 3 years we have released 14 hand raised micro-chipped swamp wallabies on the northern beaches, and at this time we have not had a report of any of these being found dead.

We have notified the vets in the area that we would like them to check macropods for microchips and have also given the Northern Beaches Road Kill Committee a microchip scanner to use on their rounds. So far we have not had any reports of our micro-chipped animals being found injured or dead. This is not obviously a definitive finding as I’m sure vets when busy might forget to check, or that every wallaby killed by a car is checked but it is nice to know that it is not definite that they are dead either. This gives us a lot of hope that we are doing the right thing by our hand raised animals. We now have a great rehabilitation facility that many animals have benefited from.

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Huge thank you to...

In closing, I would like to thank the dedicated team of Sydney Wildlife volunteers who help educate and look after the animals at the park on a regular basis, they are the people that make this possible.

The Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council for allowing us to use their land for our rehabilitation facility.

We are grateful to the many companies and individuals that have given money and for the many companies that have given people power.

We are extremely grateful to EY for not only providing people power but also setting up a strategic plan to help Sydney Wildlife to flourish.

Dell for being our regular volunteer team, they make such a difference every volunteer day.

VMWare for helping Sydney Wildlife with their computer system and everyone else who has helped make this facility what it is today.

## Acknowledgements

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This paper was reviewed by:

Jane Burgess, Supervisor, Taronga Western Plains Zoo Wildlife Hospital 26/3/16

Justine Stewart, Compliance manager registered training organisation. Sydney Wildlife Volunteer at our Rehabilitation facility. 28/3/16

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