

“A Kimberley Wildlife Rescue (KWR) Update”

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Kimberley Wildlife Rescue Inc, based in Kununurra, WA, has been in existence for 16 years, receiving creatures from throughout the Kimberley region from Broome in the south to Wyndham in the north. Over this period of time we have seen a massive decline in the numbers and diversity of creatures that we see presented for care, and in recent years this has reached a truly alarming level.

Some species we rarely, if ever, see these days, such as the larger owls and goannas, and some we see far more often than before, Blue winged kookaburras being definite survivors. Flock numbers of many birds have reduced massively. When I first came to Kununurra 25 years ago, the flocks of kites (black, fork tailed and whistling) were like great clouds in the sky, now you rarely see more than 20 or 30 together. I've not seen budgies for years, the magpie geese that used to come in their thousands are in little groups of 50 or so, and broilgas are a rare sighting. Small mammal species, sugar gliders, quolls and echidna are a thing of the past, and bandicoots are rare.

The reasons for presentation of creatures have also changed significantly in recent times. We still see orphaned baby birds and motor vehicle accident victims, but in the last 5 years we have seen an increase in the numbers of top end predators that are found thin, weak and literally starving to death. These creatures are often juveniles, though there is an increasing number of adults being found affected as well. We have seen jabiru, dingoes, a wedge tailed eagle, sea eagle and many kites affected in this way.

There has been a notable change in the makeup of the reptile population since the arrival of the cane toad in the Kimberley, and our blue tongue lizards, large goanna and monitors have all but disappeared. King Brown numbers have dramatically reduced, which some would say is no bad thing, but as we all know any shift in a populations' dynamics in one area, will have an effect in another.

Personally I believe these changes are the result of multiple impacts, but I also believe that the most significant is the impact of repeated burning of the Kimberley. There are many facts and figures quoted, but we burn (at least) 60 % of the Kimberley each year, leaving no recovery time for food and shelter for wildlife, and physically destroying massive numbers of small mammals, reptiles and birds. Wildlife corridors are virtually non-existent, and if we add to this equation predation by feral cats (which are in massive numbers), the impact of the cane toad, and habitat destruction by humans, we have a recipe for disaster.

Sadly there is also the direct effect of human activity on our wildlife, and as creatures seek food and water along road edges, and close to towns, as their habitat is slowly invaded, our impacts become greater. Deaths on our highways with their huge truck numbers and hustling humans are massive, and sadly there is always the cruelty aspect of human nature, which is well represented, and sadly too frequent, from the Indigenous population. The results of wildlife tangling with rubbish and getting stuck is another problem that we regularly see.

Having now shared the doom and gloom, I am glad to say that we do still have some wonderful success stories to share with you, as there are most definitely still caring people out there in our community who continue to rescue injured wildlife and present them to the Kimberley Vet Centre (the base for KWR) for care and attention by our awesome carers.

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Case Studies:

Fractured turtles Rafi & Michaelangelo



Motor vehicle accident Reticulated python



White Tawney Frogmouths



Jim the emaciated Jabiru



Petal, dingo cruelty case



Dr Edges pythons, and pheasant coucal and babies



Kenny the injured Wedge tailed eagle.



And a little bit of magic to finish off: I had the privilege of meeting this amazing insect whilst out fishing on the Lake Kununurra this year. It is an Iridescent Flutterer, truly a little magical creature.

