Innovations in Rescue Technology

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Abstract

It is difficult to comprehend the number of sick, injured and orphaned native animals needing assistance every year in Australia. WIRES alone receive over 80,000 requests for rescue advice and assistance annually.

To address the massive need to assist overwhelming quantities of wildlife in distress faster, to better assist community members calling to get wildlife advice and rescue assistance and to better engage with large volumes of rescuers and carers, WIRES have increasingly focused on technology to make this possible.

Keywords: wildlife rescue, rescue technology, animal welfare

Introduction

As Australia's largest wildlife rescue organisation WIRES (NSW Wildlife Information, Rescue and Education Service Inc) receive between 200 and 1,000 community calls for help daily and engage with thousands of volunteers. With significantly increasing community demand to provide more wildlife information and to assist more sick, injured and orphaned native animals, demonstrated by over 568,000 unique visitors to WIRES website in the financial year ending June 17 (FY17) and over 145,000 calls annually to WIRES 1300 number, implementing new systems to increase rescue efficiency is imperative for animal welfare.

WIRES began rescuing and caring for wildlife over 30 years ago. For about 20 years all records were paper based and about 10 years ago the organisation moved to an online platform to manage all rescue and care records. As the incoming call volumes grew a dedicated Rescue Office operating 365 days a year was established which currently takes all WIRES 1300 calls and manages the majority of WIRES rescue calls across NSW. In FY17 WIRES 1300 number also received over 7,400 interstate calls for assistance.

Over the last 30 years there have also been major changes in society. There has been increasing residential, agricultural and industrial development which is significantly impacting habitat, leading to more human/wildlife interaction and making it harder for native animals to survive and thrive in the wild. There have also been major technological changes that have seen the world wide web and mobile phones launch in the early 1990's becoming mainstream with continuous advancements including faster internet access from 2005 and the rise of smartphones from 2012.

WIRES Rescue Office was coordinating rescues from volunteer spreadsheets 5 years ago, making over 130,000 outgoing calls per annum to volunteers and vets working to resolve rescues. It was an increasingly impossible task to try to handle the significant volumes of incoming calls professionally and follow up each rescue quickly so that available volunteers were notified promptly. To better assist wildlife, the community and volunteer rescuers, changes had to be made.

Results
With an ongoing focus on continuous improvement WIRES have been implementing a range of incremental improvements consistently over the last 5 years to better assist native animals and the community.

In 2013 WIRES launched a wildlife rescue app to assist the public when they found a native animal in distress. A new website was introduced in 2015 with the ability for community members to report a rescue online and 5,300 online rescue forms were received in FY17. The new website was also mobile friendly and in FY17 64% of all traffic to WIRES site was via mobiles & tablets (12% up on the previous year).

WIRES also launched a new rescue communications system in December 2014, enabling every available volunteer in the relevant area with the right skills, to be contacted instantly about available rescues across multiple devices, which has significantly improved WIRES ability to consistently rescue faster. This has also enabled WIRES to begin partnering with other wildlife organisations to further improve rescue assistance for native animals.

This year WIRES have begun a system transformation project that will change all major IT platforms in the organisation. Once completed, WIRES will have an integrated platform for volunteer management, training, communication and most critically wildlife rescue and care. The new platform will enable the organisation to eliminate inefficient processes and automate a wide range of communication and interaction that will further improve WIRES rescue service delivering better outcomes for more native animals.

Discussion
WIRES new systems to be implemented in 2018 will be designed to better assist native animals and better engage with volunteer wildlife rescuers, vets and the community.

Some of the advancements expected include: improved ability to update and engage with the member of public reporting a rescue on the rescue status, faster sending of rescues out to volunteers as they are entered in the system, instant visibility of assigned rescues to volunteers, ability to accurately report on time to rescue, improving engagement options for vets, automated volunteer follow-up to ensure fates are updated, automated prompts to ensure training and vaccinations are up to date and significantly enhanced reporting capability.

The new system will deliver immediate improvements but critically it will be able to be consistently improved enabling ongoing advancements to be made in the delivery and management of WIRES wildlife rescue and care services.

Conclusion
WIRES are implementing new systems to provide better, faster rescue services for sick, injured and orphaned wildlife. This is the next step in WIRES commitment to continuously improve community and volunteer engagement in wildlife rescue for the benefit of more native animals.

As WIRES focus on ways to improve wildlife rescue and animal welfare outcomes there may increasingly be potential opportunities to partner more broadly with other organisations in the sector to better benefit annually the hundreds of thousands of Australian animals in need.