

TWO TREE ISLAND ROO RESCUE

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A few months ago Two tree Island, which is in the middle of Lake Burrendong*, became an island again. It has been so dry in the Central West that the name seemed like a joke. The Lake has hovered between 2-15% of it's capacity for a few years now.

We woke on 1 December 2010 at Lake Burrendong Sport and Recreation Centre to discover that the Lake had increased 25% overnight due to heavy rain fall in the catchment. I was at a loose end on my day off and decided to kayak to Two tree Island to witness the phenomenon of all the land having disappeared. Only the tops of a few trees could be seen from the shore.

When it was first isolated by water again, Darren Marcus, a fellow WIRES member and I had kayaked to the Island. We saw a couple of emus and a mob of 50 eastern grey kangaroos. As the Lake continued to rise we checked on the animals regularly to see that there was plenty of food. Over the next two months as the land area decreased we noticed the mob was decreasing in size and the emus disappeared.

Our Dubbo branch of WIRES sought advice from the Dubbo branch of National Parks and Wildlife who advised that it was not our role to be involved in large scale animal rescues. The locals from Wellington were of the view that the roos and emus would swim off the Island. This appeared to be confirmed when Gary Chown, who works at Lake Burrendong Sport and Recreation Centre, actually saw an emu swimming, although we don't know for sure if it came from the Island.

As I paddled into the middle of the Lake I was horrified by the thousands of spiders, crickets and all manner of other insect life floating on the Lake, a legacy of the land disappearing so suddenly. As soon as they saw the kayak they swam towards me and soon I was covered in them.

As I got closer in among the tree tops I saw many kangaroos standing neck deep in water, also covered in insects, spiders, frogs and mice. A few moved a short distance when paddled up close, but mostly they were still and let me touch them, not normal behaviour for wild kangaroos. I tried making noise to get them swimming; a few took one or two hops but returned to the same spot.

Half way back to shore I noticed a roo in the water. He had stopped swimming with just the tip of his nose out of the water, too exhausted to make it. I tried getting my life jacket around him; I tried lifting him onto the side of the kayak and he held on for a while but kept slipping. He was shaking a lot and gave me half hearted nip. In the end I got a rope and paddled him to shore - not a straightforward task as he wasn't always swimming in the same direction as me. At the waters edge Garry and Rod Downton lifted him onto land. He stayed still for some minutes, urinated a huge amount of water and hopped off.

Back at the Sport and Recreation Centre office, Helen Swan, the General Manager of Lake Burrendong Sport and Recreation (also a WIRES member) had mobilised the Volunteer Rescue Association (VRA) and the Program Coordinator, Andrea Van Eyssen to plan the mass macropod rescue. This time the Bathurst branch of National Parks and Wildlife agreed we were best placed to do the rescue.

The Sport and Recreation Centre have highly trained, safety conscious staff who are used to large scale planning and coordination of activities with large numbers of children in their care. This formidable team included five kayakers - Tim East, Jen Lound, Tim Gregson, Rachael Thompson and myself) Rod and Tracey Woods in the tinnie (Tracey was the chief photographer) and Garry coordinating from shore. The VRA team are also highly trained and experienced rescuers included Barry Graham, Dave Reynolds, Bob Armstrong. Brett Gleeson from the Lake Burrendong State Park completed the team.

The VRA helped us pack the kayaks into their motor boat and headed towards Two Tree Island. Using ropes we secured some roos to the kayaks and paddled them to shore in increasingly choppy waters. Some roos we lifted across the laps of kayakers or onto the kayaks and secured them for the trip. Some 50-60 kilo sodden dead weight roos were lifted from the water over the edge of the boats into the boats by the men in the tinnie and the VRA boat. Amazingly the roos accepted the handling and proximity of humans without any issues. A couple of the largest males had some fight left in them, but even they just seemed to be so relieved once they were out of the water that they just stood still.

In all eighteen roos were rescued and no carcasses found in the following days. I think we were just in time. Sadly, we did see a pink joey and a couple of other dead roos floating in the water before the rescue.

Congratulations to all those involved as the whole team were brave and disciplined. Some people stayed on shore and they played an important role in looking out for the details to ensure that everything went safely and smoothly. No one was injured, and amazingly there was only one spider bite!

*, 26 km from Wellington in the middle of NSW

Ann Mara: Ann Mara moved back to rural NSW after 25 years living in Sydney. She is an out posted public servant these days, after many years working in the not-for-profit-sector. Outside of work she is the Chairperson of the Dubbo Branch of WIRES (Wildlife Information Rescue and Education Service). This branch is almost the size of the state of Victoria, presenting many challenges to our enthusiastic volunteers. The Dubbo Branch is very lucky to have the support of the veterinary staff at the Taronga Western Plains Zoo – one of whom suggested I present our famous Burrendong Roo Rescue at the Conference