

EDUCATION FOR ACTION

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“The great aim of education is not knowledge but action” Herbert Spencer 1830-1903, English philosopher.

It is action that Kanyana Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre, WA, wants to stimulate with its aim of “providing education for the community on the need to preserve wildlife as a resource”. The kind of action that June and Lloyd Butcher took in the early 1980’s when they set up their home to start caring for wildlife and the ongoing action, which has seen the development of the education centre, rehabilitation aviaries and hospital facilities that cater for approximately 1,500 admissions per year.

For our volunteers training begins with an induction evening. These are held once a month and they go through what happens at Kanyana, responsibilities of the centre and of its volunteers, insurance and health and safety matters. All volunteers are encouraged to attend an induction session once a year to refresh health and safety knowledge. This system also allows the new volunteers to meet some of the existing volunteers and find out about wildlife caring first hand. The group then takes a nocturnal tour of Kanyana, to see it come alive.

On completion of induction volunteers are given a handbook. This reiterates the information given at the induction and also includes some useful information for beginners such as diets of various animals as well as size and shape of food to be prepared for different species. There is also a section on the special care of animals, which are in permanent residence at Kanyana. A map of the grounds and the fire action plan are located at the back of the handbook.

New volunteers can then choose a shift to work on and will begin training on the job. Each shift is coordinated by a supervisor. They will allocate other volunteers to buddy up with to learn the tasks to be completed in different areas. They are there to provide advice, direction and assistance. One of the first things volunteers are taught about is how to monitor animals for stress, as low stress levels greatly increase chances of recovery of sick and injured animals. Different temperature, food and comfort requirements are explained for each type of animal. Handling techniques are demonstrated and practiced.

Once volunteers have settled in they may choose to become involved further by learning specialist feeding techniques like tube feeding, or they may train as supervisor or treatment personnel. Other opportunities also exist in administration, promotions and education.

Kanyana has a rapidly growing number of volunteers and support members. This fact along with the way volunteers are arranged into shifts means that communication and education between volunteers has increasingly become a challenge for the centre, a challenge that several volunteers have risen to.

We now have a 'Week in the life of Kanyana' with amusing updates on day-to-day events. This is often read aloud in the tearoom, a good time for socialising between members of your shift. We also have a full colour quarterly newsletter sent to all members and supporters, increasingly via email. Last year has seen improvements in our website (www.kanyanawildlife.org.au) which hosts web discussion forum for members and for the public.

Volunteers who show they are willing and responsible can train for supervisor and treatment positions. They then meet monthly in order to discuss and amend procedures where necessary. These meetings are vital as this is when the key people from each shift can meet face to face. Issues that volunteers have can be raised through the supervisor or added to the agenda before the meeting. The latest techniques and information for carers can be distributed back to the volunteers through their supervisors.

Volunteers interested in joining the education team are welcomed. Kanyana has a number of animals in its care that cannot be released into the wild for various reasons. These animals are assessed for their suitability for use in our educational wildlife encounter program, depending upon how they react to the stress of handling and travelling.

In the aim of best practice Kanyana has developed a written procedure for volunteers to follow when on an educational encounter. Information on hygiene, noise and set up is also sent to the teachers and parents if presenting at a school. The procedure forms part of the educator's handbook, given to all volunteers on the education team. The handbook also contains notes on the biology of the wildlife encountered, to help with consistency and accuracy of presentations.

Volunteers are trained by accompanying other educators and assisting them until they feel competent. Techniques for handling the animals and preparing them for transport are practiced. Each type of animal has its own labelled travel container. This might contain a towel on the base of a sturdy, lockable container for an echidna or a pouch inside a smaller container for a bilby.

Kanyana's educators cater for all levels of understanding, with presentations given to kindi schools all the way through to universities. We also talk to other interested parties, like church groups and other social groups. We can specialise on requested topics like the endangered animals, biology or first aid techniques for wildlife. Last year alone Kanyana's team presented 84 educational wildlife encounters. Many of these encounters are presented as part of a larger range of activities run by CALM's eco-education program at their Hills Forest Discovery Centre.

Children and adults alike seem to have a great experience, backing up what they may have been taught by teachers. When seeing these animals in the flesh it can help people to understand how they are adapted to their environment, what their threatening processes are and how we can help them.

As so much of Australia's wildlife is nocturnal and unseen most of the time we have a unique opportunity to introduce the public to some fascinating creatures. Letting people know what is out there and gain empathy for it is the way to change actions that can be harmful to wildlife.

Kanyana takes every opportunity to provide education to the community. We attend local fairs and last year we even built a temporary nocturnal house for the 100th Anniversary Perth Royal Show. Annual fundraising events like our street appeal and open day also provide a platform for education. This year volunteers manned an information display in the local shopping centre for the street appeal and on the open day the public were shown around the museum and hospital, were presented with information on care of wildlife and were able to get a close up look of some magnificent birds at the raptor display.

Over the last 12 months Kanyana volunteers have designed various educational products to assist the centre with its fundraising and its educational aims. The Garden Wildlife leaflet set proved to be a great hit at both the open day and the street appeal. The leaflets are full colour and the set covers the brushtail possum, bobtail lizards, magpies, quendas and the chudich. They detail information about the animal and how to maximise the opportunities we have for interaction with the animals in the back yard whilst minimising conflict. For example how to build a possum box to keep possums out of the roof and a chudich-proof chook pen to keep the hens safe, how to avoid being swooped by a magpie and how to get rid of snails without poisoning quenda and bobtails.

In response to the need for more information to be available for people who are prepared to stop and help wildlife volunteers have written a "Glovebox Guide - Sick, Injured or Orphaned Wildlife". This contains information on the requirements of animals, containment and handling advice and contact details to get help. Kangaroos are covered in a second leaflet - "What to do if you hit a Kangaroo", both of which are freely available in the hospital reception.

With diseases such as beak and feather in the parrot family we have produced a leaflet to help members of the public spot the symptoms, control infection risk to pet birds and to help them understand that euthanasia is the best option for the bird. This can be very distressing to hear if you have just rescued a bird. The reception also displays information on the husbandry requirements of various animals commonly admitted to the hospital.

When a member of the public admits an animal to the hospital experienced volunteers take down the admission details for the animal. Often this is a very good time to educate people on changing their behaviour in order to prevent injury to wildlife. This might be training dogs to leave wildlife alone, or always walking them on the lead, keeping cats inside, checking in long grass before mowing etc. It is also a good time to help them improve their first aid knowledge and skills, we aim to continue to provide information in response to knowledge gaps in the community, both to enable them to understand and enjoy wildlife and also to try to prevent further unnecessary injury and loss of native wildlife.

As well as presenting wildlife encounters at many of the local schools Kanyana offers work experience for many school children. In a long-term partnership with Gooseberry Hill Primary School a group of school children come for one afternoon a week to help with the preparation of fruit and vegetables for the animals fed in the evening. Other students come on individual work experience programs. These can be every day for a week or once a week for 16 weeks. Many students who complete the week come back the next year for the 16 week program.

Kanyana offers second year veterinary students practical placements and students have come from WA as well as Eastern States, Switzerland, Germany and the UK. Each student is given a pack containing a history of Kanyana, a mud map, the treatment room procedures, the supervisor and treatment staff roster, a recommended reading list and a Wildlife→Rescue→Release Flow Chart. Kanyana is one of only a handful of places in Australia that can offer the second year students farm practical in wildlife care. These future veterinary surgeons have the opportunity to learn about some very different animals from those usually seen as domestic pets or livestock. We hope that their time at Kanyana will inspire them to use their skills to help wildlife in the future just like the practicing veterinarians, who volunteer their time at the centre, do now.

Kanyana has close links with Murdoch University, WA, with postdoctoral students studying conservation medicine undertaking research in association with the centre. Research is being undertaken on the Bobtail Lizard URTI virus, or flu, and also on the wart disease seen in the Western Barred Bandicoot population at Kanyana.

Kanyana also participates in other training, such as CALM's Basic and Advanced Wildlife Carers Courses. The courses run over a weekend and Kanyana is just one of a number of presenters. Kanyana volunteers give talks on birds and also demonstrate a practical on tube-feeding techniques. Sometimes carers from the course decide to volunteer at Kanyana for a while. The centre can provide a good first exposure to wildlife care as volunteers can see if caring is for them with no initial expenditure on equipment. It can also provide valuable practical experience in a supervised environment so carers can build confidence before taking the responsibility of caring for wildlife at home.

Kanyana really provides a base of advice, training and contact for a large network of wildlife carers in the community. Some of these carers are able to provide help in very remote regions of WA. June Butcher is still putting her education into action, with the last project she set up being a first aid treatment room for wildlife at the Telfer Minesite. This treatment room was set up inside a shipping container and will hopefully go some way towards mitigating the bad effects that mining can have on wildlife in the area.