

# CERTIFICATE III IN NATIVE ANIMAL REHABILITATION A FIRST FOR WILDLIFE CARERS

*Renee Fischer  
Moreton Institute of TAFE*

---

## Abstract

Moreton institute of TAFE has produced the first Certificate III in Native animal rehabilitation; an accredited course designed specifically for wildlife carers. The course was developed in collaboration with Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and RSPCA Qld. It covers all aspects of wildlife care and rehabilitation, and includes plenty of hands-on, practical based training for our students who range from experienced carers through to people who wish to become carers.

The course has been three years in the making, and we have now seen the first class of full-time students successfully graduate in June 2005. The first part-time night class will graduate this December. Currently, the course is offered part time during the day or night, however we are working on making the course more flexible, aiming to offer a variety of study modes to potential students. Our goal is to make at least part of the course available for study by correspondence and over the internet in the near future.

## Introduction

*"Little learning, indeed, may be a dangerous thing, but the want of learning is a calamity to any people."*  
Frederick Douglass

Wildlife carers are truly inspirational people. They give their time, energy and resources to animals in need and expect nothing in return except for "that" feeling when an animal is released (and maybe a few cuddles).

Much of what is known about rearing and rehabilitating native wildlife has been learned by people who were willing to give it a go and learn along the way. Many of these people have passed their knowledge and passion on to others with an interest in wildlife. New carers have much to learn from those more experienced people among you.

There are currently short courses and books available for people wishing to learn how to effectively care for injured and orphaned animals. Many carer organisations also hold their own workshops to disseminate information among their members. There has never been a formal qualification available that specifically caters to the needs of wildlife rehabilitators.

## An Idea is born

*"A mind once stretched by a new idea never regains its original dimensions."* [Anonymous](#)

Three years ago, a colleague of mine saw the invaluable work that carers do and felt they deserved access to a formal, recognised qualification. He set out to provide this for them. At the time, Moreton TAFE was running a short course called "Native animal conservation". It was a general interest course for anyone with an interest in Australian wildlife. It lightly touched on wildlife conservation and management issues and briefly covered wildlife care but in no real detail.

Preliminary investigations revealed broad interest in the possibility of a formal course for wildlife carers. Queensland wildlife rehabilitation council (QWRC) was being formed, and Queensland parks and wildlife was in the process of reviewing their code of practice for the care of orphaned, sick or injured animals by wildlife care volunteers. The timing was exceptional.

A CDAC (course development advisory committee) was formed, including representation from educational institutions, regulatory bodies (RSPCA Qld & Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service), Queensland Wildlife Rehabilitation Council, the zoo industry, and of course, carers. Our aim was to contribute to increasing the standards for wildlife rehabilitators in Queensland. The committee discussed in detail, the subjects to be included in the course. Once these were finalised, we set guidelines for how they would be taught and assessed. The cooperative approach to developing this course is one of its strengths. Together we ensured the course would be comprehensive, relevant and interesting to both experienced and inexperienced carers.

### Course information

The course is an adaptation from the Animal care and management training package. It is recently developed, and caters to a range of animal sectors. Some subjects from the Conservation and land management training package are also included.

Training packages differ from previous curriculum-based courses in that they aim to make training simple, flexible and relevant to the needs of our clients and industry. They emphasise what the learner can do, not how or where they learned it. Though certain knowledge is required to successfully complete the course, the emphasis is on developing skills such as animal handling, animal first aid and critical care, and plant identification.

The animal care and management training package was used as it covered all aspects of animal care, was new (hence current), relevant and innovative. The subjects (called units of competency) are as follows:

- Recognise animals
- Recognise plants
- Maintain wildlife habitat refuges
- Carry out daily clinic routines
- Carry out workplace OHS procedures
- Rehabilitate and release wildlife
- Work within a captive animal institution
- Prepare and present information to the public
- Prepare and maintain animal housing
- Prepare animals diets and monitor feeding
- Monitor and maintain animal health
- Capture, restrain and assist in moving animals
- Care for young animals
- Identify behavioural needs and implement improved husbandry
- Nurse animals

Vocational placement (similar to work experience) was deemed essential by the CDAC, and is mandatory. Students spend their vocational placement at organisations such as wildlife hospitals and vet surgeries where they refine their skills and gain more experience.

The Certificate III Level is intended for students who, at completion of study, will:

- Demonstrate some relevant theoretical knowledge
- Apply a range of well-developed skills
- Apply known solutions to a variety of predictable problems
- Perform processes that require a range of well developed skills where some discretion and judgement is required
- Interpret available information using discretion and judgement
- take responsibility for their own outputs in work and learning
- take limited responsibility for the output of others

The course is customised to specifically meet the unique aspects of wildlife care and rehabilitation. It will appeal to both experienced and novice wildlife carers, as well as people wishing to become carers. There are no prerequisites for students wishing to enrol in the course.

#### Current situation

We are currently teaching two classes of Native animal rehabilitation: part-time throughout the day and a part-time evening class. So far, most of our students have been people interested in caring for wildlife with little or no experience. We have also had a few experienced carers do the course to help keep current and broaden their skills and knowledge.

Our classes are held at the Alexandra hills campus of Moreton TAFE, a perfect place to study wildlife. It is situated in the "bayside" suburbs of Brisbane, arguably one of the most important koala habitats in Australia. We have a few resident koalas on the campus as well as possums, eastern-striped skinks, a multitude of birds and at least two species of frogs. We visit many local wildlife care facilities and nearby wildlife habitats throughout the course.

There are four main teachers currently delivering the course. Jim and Tom are our plant experts and guide the students through plant (browse/fodder) identification and habitat rehabilitation. Karen Fripp is our resident vet and teaches all of the animal health, first aid, critical care aspects of the course. I focus on the animal handling, husbandry and rehabilitation units in the course. We also call in many guest speakers with a vast array of experience and knowledge throughout the course.

As of semester one 2006, there will be part-time day and night courses running concurrently, for twelve months. Potential students can enrol in either day, night or a combination of the two to ensure their study fits their work commitments and lifestyle. Really keen students can enrol in both day and night, study for 3 days and 3 nights to gain the qualification in 6 months. We use a "hands on" approach to our teaching, ensuring the course is interesting and skills-based.

#### Future possibilities

Our current priority is to make at least part of the course available for study by correspondence. We are currently working on paper-based and internet-based distance delivery to make the course more accessible for carers in remote regions and those who wish to study in their own time. Ultimately, we anticipate entire course will one day be available for study by correspondence or over the internet.

We also aim to initiate a mentor program for inexperienced carers. With assistance from carer groups and regulatory bodies, we hope to link our less-experienced carers with more advanced carers who have been rehabilitating wildlife for some time. This will increase the amount of experience new carers receive as part of their education, and give them someone to contact if they have questions or difficulties with their animals. Hopefully the program will also provide some assistance to experienced carers who do a tremendous job, often with little help.

Our long-term vision is for the course to be accessible for carers in different situations throughout Australia. Our current subject matter is specific to carers in Queensland, hence we would like to produce “state-specific” content relevant to each respective state’s legislation and species. Once these resources have been developed, we can look into making the course available to carers in these states.

### Conclusion

The development and teaching of this course, has been a truly rewarding experience. Our hard work, persistence and patience have produced benefits for the teachers, our students, and most of all the wildlife they will care for.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who helped us bring the course to fruition. Without their assistance, we would not have been able to offer this opportunity to wildlife carers.

The hard work continues. We will continue to liaise with carer groups and regulatory organisations to keep the course relevant and current. We are continually refining our resources and techniques, and are also working towards improving the accessibility of education for all carers.