

TEN TIPS FOR WILDLIFE CARERS

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There are many people out there who have been wildlife carers for years, to them I apologise now if this talk presents nothing new for you. I also know that there are many less experienced carers out there, many of whom have received information from both more and less reliable sources. I hope this provides some helpful information for everyone.

The great thing about gatherings such as this wonderful Conference is that many people will eventually gain access to the information that will be presented.....not just those that are actually here today. The marvels of technology will make all this information available to many around the world, for years to come.

With this in mind I would like to provide ten tips for carers, both experienced and inexperienced, that I consider foundations of wildlife care and rehabilitation.

Let me also say that it can be difficult for any of us to meet all the needs of our wildlife patients, for many and varied reasons. All we can do is to keep trying to increase our knowledge and to provide the best care and facilities we can for our patients, with the resources within our grasp.

TIP ONE: Consider the **WHOLE** creature.

Does your patient have life altering injuries that would make future life miserable? A percentage of wildlife that we receive into care will need to be euthanased due to incapacitating injuries.

Massive head trauma or spinal injuries can rarely be successfully treated. Injuries that have caused amputation of parts of legs or wings are remarkably common, and require critical assessment. Whilst dogs and cats are able to cope well with amputations, I generally do not feel that it is appropriate for most wildlife. Reptiles can manage well with limb loss though, so are a slightly different situation.

It is very easy as wildlife carers, to care so much that you want to save EVERY patient.

Unfortunately this is not always in the best interests of the patient. If you are unsure of what is best for a case, be sure to seek the opinions of other more experienced carers, or a vet (if you can find one to help...)

TIP TWO: Consider the needs of the body.

One of the hardest things we encounter at the vet centre, even with our large Lotterywest wildlife hospital these days, is finding an appropriate cage or enclosure for each new patient. Every case has a unique combination of needs to provide for, and we all have a limited range of cages available.

We find it is great to have different carers that specialise in certain species, as they have facilities that are suited to those special requirements. We have one couple that care for most of our owls, kites and tawney frogmouths, and they have a wonderful set up to care for them. Specialising also allows you to improve your skills for the group that you care for, which is a wonderful thing.

They shared a trick with us recently that I have just remembered as I write this paper. They crop feed the weak raptors and water birds they receive with beaten egg, thinned with a little water. This is brilliant thinking as it is energy and protein in a really available source, which will get the belly working again. This would work for all birds I imagine.

Remember: in the early stages of care most patients require a small sized cage so that their energy expenditure is minimized whilst they are stressed, so that they can heal injuries and so that food and water intake can be supplemented and bodily outputs monitored. Cage size needs to be increased once strength has returned and there is the chance of self-harm in a confined space.

TIP THREE: Consider the needs of the mind.

It is really important to consider the background noise and activity that is always present in our environment when we are caring for wildlife. The noise of our human world and activities is very stressful to wildlife in care, and it is very easy to overlook these stressors.

Radios, tvs, barking dogs, traffic and playing children are all noises that will chronically stress patients in care. It is important to select a site to house your patients that is as quiet as possible, and not in areas that have lots of people traffic and constant noise.

We cover the top and 3 sides of a box or cage, so that the patient does not always have to be on the alert to watch what is coming from every different direction. Predators often come from above or behind, so covering the cage will provide some security and prevent your patient having to be on the alert all the time. We also generally cover the front of the cage for at least a few days, until we feel that the patient is less stressed and reactive.

TIP FOUR Consider the needs of the spirit.

Most wildlife that end up in care do so because they have suffered some form of trauma. They are then subject to further trauma due to close contact with humans.....however loving that human is. Even though we do our best to reduce the stress that wildlife are subject to, the very fact that they are within our environment makes them feel threatened.

Homeopathic remedies are a fabulous way to treat not only the shock and trauma of injuries, but also the mental and emotional stress that wildlife experience. I have used homeopathy to treat all of my patients, both domestic and wild, for many years now, and I have no doubt of their benefit.

There is not time to go into the use of homeopathy in this talk, but I have written an extensive paper that is available on our Kimberley Wildlife Rescue website if anyone is interested in more information. My greatest hope is that carers would start by adding Arnica to their repertoire to treat wildlife, and the benefits would be enormous.

The other thing that I consider to support the spirit is to have a friend or companion of the same species. Many organisations consider that it is wrong to keep creatures in care that are non-releasable, but all of us at some time end up with some individuals that remain with us. These souls often make wonderful companions for others as they progress through their healing, and I truly believe that they can be great solace for each other.

We have a Blue Winged Kookaburra "Magda" who has been with us for many years, who has raised many of our orphaned kookies. By having our bubbas in with her she encourages them to feed themselves, and shows them the ropes and helps them to settle in. I think she is also happy to have the peace and quiet again when the kids leave home!

TIP FIVE Consider the need for hydration.

We all know that creatures need hydration, but it is also important to consider how we present their fluids. Low, heavy bowls are the best I feel, and we have a selection of ceramic bowls that work really well. They are far less likely to be tipped over, as always happens with plastic bowls, which leaves your patient with no fluids and further disruption when it needs to be replaced and refilled.

We also suggest putting honey in the water which will provide instant energy for any patient. It can be a life saver for a weak and stressed case, and most everyone has access to honey. Electrolytes are obviously the better option as they provide salts as well as energy, and even Powerade and the like are an option if there is nothing else available. We are often contacted by people in remote areas that have found injured wildlife, so it is great to have options available to suggest to use until the patient can be brought into care.

TIP SIX Consider the needs of the wound.

Wound care can be a most challenging issue, and often one that determines the speed with which we are able to release a patient. Non-healing wounds are a great frustration, and those with a lot of tissue damage need effective cleaning.

Any wound can be cleaned with salty water or vinegar and water, which is always safe and gentle for any patient. Betadine is safe but always use it diluted, never use Dettol.

Dermaclens is my secret for wounds with any dead or dying tissue. It can be used on ANY wound, and is excellent for use under bandages or dressings. It is a veterinary product and is a combination of gentle acids that help dead cells come away from the wound and leave live cells nice and healthy.

Aloe vera is an awesome wound treatment, especially for wounds that are dry or crusted.

Paw paw ointment or honey are natural products that soften and moisturize dry wounds and greatly assist healing.

Bepanthen is a product that is available from the chemist and is great for wounds that are infected and dry. It is wonderful on tail tips, ear tips, toes etc and I also use it on dry noses.

TIP SEVEN Consider the needs of the immune system.

Chronic infections, conditions like diarrhoea and fractures that take a long time to heal all take their toll on the body and the immune system. In recent times I have been using colloidal silver to support these cases, and am finding that it can make a significant difference. My favourite treatment for the diarrhoea is bentonite which is a chalk tyoe substance, which you can get as a powder and a liquid. (The liquid is easier to get along with but the powder is the best thing in the world to treat jock and boob rash!)

Colloidal silver can be added to the water or given orally, and for most wildlife 5 to 10 drops are all that is needed. It can be put on food and can be used daily. I also use a liquid called 5 Mushroom Extract to support the immune system, which is a naturopathic product which is excellent immune support, as is Vitamin C.

TIP EIGHT: Consider the needs of the feather.

Feather damage in birds in captivity is always a problem, and badly damaged feathers will delay the release of a patient. Many weak birds cannot perch well, and when they sit on the ground their tail feathers become damaged.

For these cases we use short logs that have had one face cut off, so that they sit flat on the floor of the cage. Weak birds can then sit on these logs comfortably and keep their tail feathers off the ground and away from damage and soiling with faeces.

Lining cages with shade cloth can also reduce tail feather damage for birds that hang on the sides of the cage. Feathers are still slightly damaged at the tip, but as the tail does not poke out through the wire the damage is less.

TIP NINE Crepe bandages are a wildlife carers best friend.

Crepe bandages are wonderful for wildlife dressings and wing bandages as they are stretchy, reusable if the dressing doesn't sit right on the first go, and do not stick to feathers or skin. There are many different names and brands, Vetwrap, Coflex, Coplus etc and they are available from vets and some chemists.

We snip them up into small strips and wrap them around syringes to use them for small birds and fiddly jobs. They are great for figure 8 wing bandages, and for feet and tails, but always remember if you are bandaging a limb to include the foot or paw so that it does not swell up and restrict the circulation. We have recently developed an addition to wing bandages to hold the wing up at the shoulder and prevent it rotating forward. Using crepe bandaging for this, means that it does not rub at the shoulder or cause pressure sores.

AND MY MOST PROFOUND TIP: TIP NUMBER TEN

Sugar gliders and echidnas are sneaky little bastards and will escape from **any** cage. Never trust them.... *seriously!!!!!!!!!!!!*

Thank you for your time. If you would like some more extensive first aid tips please visit our Kimberley Wildlife Rescue website www.kimberleywildliferescue.org.au and you will find the conference notes that I presented for the Colebrook Wildlife Rescue and Care group in Tasmania in December 2011. Thank you to the group for inviting me to present to you, you were truly inspiring.

If you are interested in any further information on Homeopathy, you will also find the full set of notes on Homeopathy for Wildlife Carers, which was part of the same course, on the website. Homeopathy is something that everyone can add to their repertoire, which is safe, cheap and extremely effective.

My contact details are part of these notes, please feel free to use them. I will do my best to help in any way I can.

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DR SARAH BRETT: Dr. Sarah Brett has been helping East Kimberley native fauna for 15+ years in Kununurra, and also runs and owns the Kimberley Vet Centre, which pays for most of Kimberley Wildlife Rescue's medication, food, supplies and other administrative costs. She has an extensive medical background and also takes on a holistic approach using homeopathic remedies to assist wildlife and domestic animals in the practice.