

Progress update – Certificate III in Native animal rehabilitation

Renee Chamberlin
email: Renee.Chamberlin@deta.qld.gov.au

ABSTRACT: At the 2005 conference, it was announced that “Moreton institute of TAFE” had produced the first Certificate III in Native animal rehabilitation; an accredited course designed specifically for wildlife carers. Since then, there has been much progress with the amalgamation and renaming of our institute which is now known as Metropolitan South Institute of TAFE. We have also just completed the development of a distance / flexible learning mode for students who wish to study the course but are not able to easily travel to our Alexandra hills campus.

We are currently seeking feedback on the level of interest from carers in states outside Queensland to study the new distance mode. With enough support, there is potential to adapt current resources to allow for the different species, legislation etc. relevant to each state.

Introduction

At the 2005 NWRC, I introduced the new Certificate III in Native animal rehabilitation and discussed the possibility of parts of it eventually becoming available online.

There have been quite a few changes since the 2005 conference, the main one being that Moreton TAFE amalgamated with 2 other institutes and our name change to Metropolitan South Institute of TAFE. This hasn't really affected the implementation of the Cert III in Native Animal Rehabilitation other than to introduce some great new opportunities.


For those of you who aren't familiar with our course, it was developed over 3 years, and started in 2005. The Certificate III in Native Animal Rehabilitation was adapted from 2 relevant training packages which are competency-based. These are Animal Care and Management, and Conservation and land management. The training package provides the framework for what we teach and assess, then we customise how we teach & assess it (i.e. specifically for wildlife carers).

Animal Care and Management covers (among other areas) zoo keeping & vet nursing. This is where the husbandry and animal first aid and health subjects are drawn from.

Conservation and Land Management subjects were also used as we recognised that conservation is one of the important aspects of wildlife care. Animal & plant identification and wildlife habitat studies are included from this package.

During its development, extensive consultation took place to ensure the Native Animal Rehabilitation course would meet the needs of wildlife carers and the standards of the associated regulatory bodies.

The intention of the course was to give wildlife carers recognition for the amazing job they do by way of a formal qualification (a certificate III).



The course gives students a grounding in all aspects of wildlife care from the rescue through to the release & teaches to the standards applied in Queensland's Code of Practice for the Care of Sick or Injured Protected Animals by Wildlife Care Volunteers. So, both new and experienced carers gain new skills & knowledge from completing the certificate III in Native Animal Rehabilitation.

Because the course does not focus on specific animal groups in finer detail (as many workshops delivered by carer organisations do) it is designed to complement them rather than to compete with them.

The Certificate III in Native Animal Rehabilitation is currently delivered as a 12 month, part time course at the Alexandra Hills campus of MSIT, and as mentioned previously, the course covers the whole process of rescuing, hand-raising, caring for, rehabilitating and releasing native wildlife. There are also subjects to assist carers with fodder identification and habitat remediation.

There are 16 subjects in total, including vocational placement. During their placement, students volunteer in wildlife hospitals, or vet surgeries where wildlife is treated, to gain more hands-on experience with a variety of species. The emphasis is on providing students with skills so much of the learning and assessment is hands-on.

Our library has an extensive, and constantly growing, collection of brilliant resources (books, videos, DVD's, CD-Roms) specifically relating to wildlife care. Students engage in self-directed project learning using these resources, examine case studies and participate in practical exercises to grow their skills and knowledge. They also benefit from regular guest speakers and field trips to wildlife care facilities and natural wildlife habitats.


The students who have already studied the Native animal course have come from a wide range of backgrounds and chose to study the course for a wide range of reasons. Many of these have continued, or begun, to care for wildlife after completing the course. Some have even gone on to co-ordinate care groups, work in captive animal institutions, and others have come back to do further study in the Diploma of Conservation and Land Management also offered at MSIT.

Other than the amalgamation and name change, there have been many developments since NWRC 2005.

In our quest to continually improve what we do, the teaching team conducted a course review in late 2006. We looked in particular at how the course is taught and assessed, incorporating the student feedback mentioned earlier. Some changes have since been implemented, including increasing the practical aspects of the course and streamlining assessment, to make the course a more valuable experience for our students.

At the 2005 NWRCI said we were intending to make part of the course available for online or distance study mode. Well, I am pleased to say that the entire course is now available for distance study mode. A set of specific course materials for distance education students has been created, and a study program to suit them has also been developed.

We did this because MSIT has long recognised that there are so many carers out there who are not able to study part-time at the Alex Hills campus. This lengthy process has recently been completed and the distance course is now ready to go.



Students will complete the course in blocks of three subjects, studying at their own pace using workbooks designed for distance learning. Once they have completed the first set of subjects, they move on to the next three, and so on. A maximum time of 24 months is allowed to complete the course.

Students will have access to a dedicated distance ed. teacher via phone, fax and email to assist with their study and answer questions. They will also have full access to library resources via mail. Written assessments can be sent in via mail, fax or email. Practical skill assessments will be conducted during the vocational placement.


Also, in preparation for making this and many other courses available online, TAFE Queensland has recently selected a platform or learning management system called Janison. This is the interface students and teachers use when they study & teach over the internet.

Some of the future directions we are looking at for the Certificate III in Native Animal Rehabilitation include:

1. Offering it on some of our other campuses – we realise some people prefer to learn in a structured class environment and might not live near Alexandra Hills.
2. A further adaptation of the course, this time for an online environment, which will suit those carers who are computer savvy.
3. At that point, students will have a choice between 3 different ways in which they can complete the Certificate III:
 - in a classroom,
 - distance education using workbooks, and
 - online learning using Janison.
4. The next step will be to investigate making the course available to carers from outside Queensland.

There are major differences between the states of Australia in terms of legislation, species and the habitats they are released into. The current course was designed around Queensland's Code of Practice for wildlife carers and does not specifically cover some species and habitats not normally found in the State of Queensland.

To make sure students gain maximum value and relevance from the course, it needs to specifically cover this material as it is relevant to carers in each state. There are two ways in which this can be achieved:

- TAFE institutes in your state might potentially be interested in teaching the course. MSIT may be able to assist with this process.
 - If enough carers in your state show interest, MSIT would consider developing an online / distance version that addresses the legislation, species, and habitats relevant to caring for wildlife in your state.
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For those carers who don't live in Queensland, and who wish to gain this qualification you can either:

- Make an enquiry through your local TAFE. The course is accredited across Australia which means that any TAFE can offer it if they choose to.

Or

- If you're keen to study through MSIT's distance mode (or online mode when it becomes available), please ring this number and you can ask to be added to the waitlist – making note of which state you live in.

For more information:

- MSIT trade display this Wednesday and Thursday.
- After the conference, you can contact me:
 - via phone on (07) 3826-8371, or
 - via email Renee.Chamberlin@deta.qld.gov.au
- Full information on the course and all of the subjects is posted on the MSIT website. Type "animal" in the Find a course box and click on the search button.



BIOGRAPHY: Renee is a teacher of environmental studies at Metropolitan South Institute of TAFE in Brisbane, Queensland. She was integral to the development and implementation of the Certificate III in Native animal rehabilitation and currently teaches much of the course as well as Conservation and Land Management Certificate III, IV and Diploma courses.

Renee started her career in the zoo industry in 1990 and has a bachelor of science degree, majoring in Zoology, and a Postgraduate Certificate in Environmental Management. She has considerable experience in the husbandry of a range of animals and has also rehabilitated various species of wildlife throughout this time.
