

Boxes and Bags – the challenges of transporting wildlife.

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ABSTRACT: Have you ever been faced with the daunting task of transporting a 7ft tall macropod? Or maybe you've attempted to move an injured raptor? Or have you survived to tell the tale of the time you had to relocate an emu?

As wildlife carers we are faced with many challenges including rearing, feeding, cleaning and medicating our charges, however transportation of wildlife is often a grey area for carers. This paper aims to shed some light on wildlife transportation and highlight some methods and practices that may reduce the stresses of transportation for wildlife and carers alike.

The paper will explore the pros and cons of a range of transportation methods, including commercially available pet carriers, purpose built boxes and fabric bags using case studies and diagrams.

The paper will also discuss the appropriateness of transportation methods in various situations, including initial collection and response through to transportation to the release site.

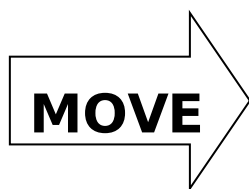
This paper has been composed as a result of the over whelming interest from wildlife carers from the 2006 NWRC paper "Roos and Raptors", which introduced some options for transporting and dealing with large macropods and raptors.

Introduction:

As wildlife carers we are faced with many challenges including rearing, feeding, cleaning and medicating our charges, however transportation of wildlife can often prove to be the biggest challenge of all.

There is a wide range of methods and countless products available through the pet industry for transporting wildlife, so what are the best methods and what is considered best practise?

The 'MOVE' anagram provides a simple and logical illustration of the key elements of successful wildlife transportation. An understanding of these four critical elements of wildlife transportation will ensure efficient stress free operations.



MODE
OTHER CONSIDERATIONS
VITALS
ESTIMATED TIME OF
ARRIVAL/ETA

MODE

There is a huge range of products available for transporting wildlife, including...

Commercially available products

- Pet packs -Dog boxes -Bird boxes
- Padded pet carry luggage

Species specific and purpose built containers

- Roo boxes -Raptor boxes
- Purpose built boxes/containers

Bags and other containers

- Calico bags -Hessian bags -Styrofoam boxes/eskies
- Plastic boxes/lunch boxes

It is vital that the mode of transport is appropriate for the species. Consideration must also be given to the method in which the animal will be transported. Cars are the most commonly used mode of transport, however remote or marine wildlife is regularly moved via aircraft, bus, train or boat.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

There are a wide range of other considerations to address when transporting wildlife other than the mode, including...

Anchorage & security


Carers must ensure that the animal can not escape from the container while in transit. Wildlife must always be securely anchored, regardless of species or transportation means. Wildlife should preferably be placed on the vehicle floor behind the passenger seat, however securing the container to cargo barriers in wagons and 4WDs is also appropriate. Always ensure if transporting wildlife in bags that the animal is clearly identifiable and secure to avoid accidental squashing or mishandling.

Number of animals to transport

It is always recommended that animals be transported individually to avoid injury or over crowding. Animals that are related or have been housed together will often fight or injure each other during transportation and are best to be separated. Juvenile mammals that are attached to teats or can still retreat completely inside the pouch may be transported relatively safely with their mothers, however adult ducks and similar species should never be transported with their young.

Footings

Stable footings are vital in avoiding further injury infliction for wildlife in transit. Ensure the floor of any transport container/box is appropriately lined with non-slip material, such as shredded paper, towelling, carpet or other appropriate materials. Transporting birds may require the installation of perching, however always ensure perching is secure and will not move during transit. Do not offer perching to birds with suspected broken extremities instead place them in a confined and secure box.



Direct light

Avoid placing wildlife in direct sunlight. Prolonged periods can lead to heat exhaustion and excessive discomfort to the animal. Likewise, excessive exposure to direct sunlight will cause considerable distress to nocturnal wildlife.

Noise

Avoid playing music, speaking loudly or talking on the phone while transporting wildlife. A quiet stable environment will equip wildlife with the best chances of survival.

Sedation

If the animal requires long distance transportation or is particularly susceptible to shock or myopathy consider if sedation is appropriate and who you may need to contact to access or administer such drugs (eg. vets).

VITALS

Assessing and maintaining an animals vital functions is paramount. Remember keep the wildlife warm, secure and quiet.

First Aid

Initial first aid may be required before transporting wildlife, this may include stopping bleeding, freeing an animal from barbed fencing or removing juveniles from deceased parents. Consider any implications that may affect the animals major injuries while in transit (eg. restrict movement of suspected broken/injured limbs).

Temperature

Avoid placing wildlife in extreme temperatures, either air conditioning or heating. Maintaining a vehicle temperature of around 25-30c will provide comfortable travelling conditions for wildlife.

Air flow

Ensure that airflow is maintained to wildlife, however do not expose animals to strong draughts by placing them in front of air conditioning vents or open windows.

Never transport animals in enclosed vehicle boots! If transporting wildlife in enclosed boxes or sealed containers ensure that the animal can still access fresh air/oxygen.


ESTIMATED TIME OF ARRIVAL (ETA)

It is important to prioritise tasks when transporting wildlife, to ensure travel time and the related stress is minimised for wildlife and carers alike.

Transport time

Take direct routes when transporting wildlife and try to minimise transport time, but ensure these measures are safe and within the law... don't speed! Avoid multitasking when transporting wildlife, don't leave an injured animal in a vehicle while you go shopping or drop in for a coffee at a friends place!

Establish an ETA (estimated time of arrival) before setting off and notify relevant parties of your plans (eg. vets/release site operators/carers), this will ensure people and equipment are organised on your arrival.



Food/Water requirements

When transporting wildlife for lengthy periods consider if food or water is required and if so how it will be accessible to the animal (remember a cold dehydrated animal in shock will not be able to process food easily). Food requirements are particularly important for juveniles and feeding allowances may need to be scheduled.

Species Specific ‘MOVE’ table

The overleaf table illustrates ‘MOVE’ in action and lists basic considerations for a range of major native wildlife groups. Note that space has been left at the bottom of the table to allow for details of species you may regularly deal with to be added.

Appropriate Wildlife Transport

Transporting wildlife should be a flexible process and must consider an animal’s condition, age and history. An adult kangaroo can not be transported in the same tiny woollen bag it arrived in when it was a pinkie, similarly a bird with a broken wing can not be transported the same way as a rehabilitated emu.

Careful consideration must be given to the transportation of rehabilitated wildlife, especially when transporting wildlife to release sites and locations due to their expected increased strength, size and activity levels. The following table explores the pros and cons of various transportation methods and the appropriateness for various species.

	PROS	CONS	IDEAL FOR...
PETPAK	durable, hygienic	expensive, vent hole damage	most birds/mammals
PADDED PET CARRIES	soft & warm, inexpensive	easily damaged	juvenile mammals
WIRE BIRD CAGES	inexpensive, hygienic	too exposed, easily damaged	birds/possums
P/BUILT ROO BOXES	specific design, durable	expensive	most large mammals
P/BUILT RAPTOR BOXES	specific design, durable	expensive	raptors/seabirds
P/BUILT EMU BOXES	specific design, durable	expensive, difficult to move	emus/storks
FABRIC BAGS	inexpensive, soft	easily damaged, very restrictive	most birds/small mammals
HESSIAN BAGS	inexpensive, durable	loose fibres, very restrictive	large mammals/echidnas
STYROFOAM BOXES	inexpensive, hygienic	easily damaged	juveniles/reptiles
CARDBOARD BOXES	inexpensive, wide range of sizes, easily sourced	easily damaged (especially if wet)	small-medium mammals/reptiles/birds

	M MODE	O OTHER CONSIDERATIONS	V VITALS	E ETA
GENERIC MAMMALS	box, petpak, bag, p/built	strong teeth/claws, pouch young?	keep juvenile/injured warm	keep dark & secure
JUVENILE ROOS	bag, lined esky, jumper/blanket	secure bag, body heat is vital!	keep warm	may require feeding/hydration
ADULT ROOS	box, p/built, bag (short distances)	minimise noise/handling, sedation?	avoid over heating & injuries	keep dark, avoid long distances
GENERIC BIRDS	box, petpak, p/built, covered cage	perching requirements, feathers	keep juvenile/injured warm	keep dark & secure, low tolerance
RAPTORS	box, petpak, p/built	secure footings, feathers	keep juvenile/injured warm	keep dark & secure
EMUS/STORKS	box, p/built	minimise handling, secure footings	avoid over heating & injuries	keep dark, avoid long distances
GENERIC REPTILES	box, bag, plastic box, esky	label venomous snakes, secure bag	keep warm, avoid extreme cold	keep dark & warm, high tolerance
..... ...				

p/built – purpose built box/container

Always ensure the container or bag being used is large enough for the animal to comfortably fit inside. Never force an animal's tail, foot or other extremity into a transport container. Never compromise the animal or your own safety, if you arrive on the scene and you don't have appropriate transport means call for back up or source appropriate materials from the scene (eg. Cardboard boxes, bags).

NOTE

This information has been produced as a guide only and is based on predominantly Arid Zone fauna and the experiences of WILDCARE Inc Alice Springs members and Wildlife Management staff from the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts, Northern Territory.

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BIOGRAPHY:

Jon comes from a zoo based background, having worked for various wildlife organisations throughout his career, including Adelaide Zoo and Alice Springs Desert Park.

Jon has recently transferred to Katherine in the Northern Territory's 'top end', after being based in Central Australia for the past five years co-ordinating wildlife rescue and pest species programs within the Wildlife Management Unit in Alice Springs.

Jon's current work involves managing flying fox and estuarine crocodile populations within the Katherine region, as well as threatened species recovery work for Gouldian Finches, Purple Crowned Fairy Wrens and Carpentarian Rock Rats.

Jon first appeared on the NWRC scene at the 2006 Darwin conference where he presented a paper on WILDCARE Inc Alice Springs joint wildlife management programs with the NT Parks and Wildlife Service.

