

Evan Quartermain

KEYNOTE ADDRESS: NEW DIRECTIONS: ACCOMMODATING CHANGE

Change is a common theme across the board in Australia today, be it climatic, in the political landscape, relating to people's behaviour and attitudes, or technological. All of these fluctuations have their impacts on the world of wildlife conservation and rehabilitation, with their cumulative pressures increasing the need to adapt to, or accommodate for, change. Humane Society International and Wildlife Land Trust Program Manager Evan Quartermain discusses the sensitivity of Australia's species and ecosystems to such changes, and the need for new ways of thinking about biodiversity conservation and how we care for wildlife.

A plethora of anthropogenic influences, or 'man-made' changes - such as introduced species; expanding populations clearing more habitats; greater amounts of water extraction and soil compaction through agriculture; and increased greenhouse gas concentrations and landscape destruction for energy - are reducing the resilience of native wildlife species and the ecosystems on which they rely. Those inclined towards complacency trivialise many of these changes as localised or insignificant on a national or global scale, though when their impacts are considered collectively, for many species they spell a long road to extinction through death by a thousand cuts.

A recent shift in how ever diminishing environment budgets are distributed has seen habitat connectivity play a leading role, as evidenced by the surge in government investment in conservation corridor programs such as the Great Eastern Ranges Initiative. This is not without sense; well-connected habitats are one of the most essential components for the long-term biodiversity conservation, improving the ability of species to adapt by enhancing the flow of genetic diversity, and facilitating migration in a changing climate, be it to different latitudes or elevations.

However while such investment in connectivity should be applauded, there remains a real policy and management challenge to accommodate for changing ecosystems and shifting species, and we

need to rethink our approaches as limiting ecological change becomes increasingly difficult. There is a need to focus on maintaining the health of ecosystems as they change in response to a shifting climate, with new directions being formulated in conservation policy, and always new science to guide management. Correspondingly, flexible strategies should be implemented as a matter of priority.

Fortunately, one thing that hasn't changed is the significantly positive efforts and characteristics of wildlife carers. We're at the point where such individuals, as well as custodians of habitat, are truly torchbearers for a better world. But as everything around us continues to change, we're not immune from such necessary adaptation. What's in store for wildlife rehabilitators and habitat protectors in the future? And how should we best prepare for the next decade and beyond?

Evan Quartermain has been a Humane Society International Program Manager and the Coordinator of the Wildlife Land Trust network since early 2010, his primary responsibilities relating to terrestrial habitat protection and wildlife conservation. Under his stewardship the WLT program has grown from 45 sanctuaries to approximately 250 (covering some 40,000 hectares) nationwide. He has a Bachelor of Applied Science majoring in Ecology and Biomolecular Sciences from the Queensland University of Technology, and spent several of his formative years in Tasmania, attending Bagdad Primary School (around 30 minutes north of Hobart).