

Encouraging the Vets of Tomorrow
A Joint Initiative of Wildcare Australia and The University of Queensland
School of Veterinary Science
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Introduction

As wildlife rehabilitators, having a close relationship with local veterinarians is critical to enable us to provide the wildlife in our care with the best possible chance for survival. We rely on their knowledge and expertise to provide assistance with the diagnosis and treatment of sick, injured and orphaned wildlife. This often includes:

- providing critical first aid for injured wildlife when they first arrive into care
- performing diagnostic tests such as faecal and blood tests, radiographs etc
- performing surgery on injured wildlife

Over recent years local veterinarians have become more willing to assist wildlife rehabilitators in our role in caring for wildlife. However it is a constant frustration for wildlife rehabilitators throughout Australia that veterinarians are provided with little or no training in our own unique wildlife during their Bachelor of Veterinary Science degree. This often results in them being unwilling or unable to treat sick and injured wildlife.

Australian Wildlife Course

Wildcare Australia is a non-profit organization whose principal aims and objectives are the rescue and rehabilitation of sick, injured and orphaned native wildlife in the South East Queensland region.

We have recently been given the privilege of delivering an eight week course (consisting of one evening each week) to veterinary and veterinary technician students enrolled through the University of Queensland.

We initially expected (and hoped) that a minimum of 35 students would enrol in the Course. Within four days of registration being offered, there were 205 students enrolled. There are currently in excess of 100 students on a “waiting list” for the next time that the Course is offered. Students vary from 1st year students through to 5th year students.

The course commenced in late July 2006 and will run through until mid September.

Aims and Objectives

The principal aims and objectives of the Course are:

- to encourage students to learn more about our unique native wildlife
- to provide students with an adequate baseline knowledge of wildlife medicine
- to equip students with the knowledge and skills to effectively diagnose, treat and manage wildlife patients
- to provide students with an understanding of the ethical and legal obligations of veterinarians towards wildlife patients

Course Structure

The course consists of the following sessions:-

- An Introduction to Wildlife Rehabilitation
- Koalas
- Macropods
- Birds – General
- Birds – Seabirds and Raptors
- Echidnas
- Possums and Gliders
- Bats
- Reptiles and Amphibians

The Introduction to Wildlife Rehabilitation includes topics such as:-

- Animal Welfare issues
- Record Keeping and Data
- Euthanasia
- Working with Wildlife Rehabilitators
- What Rehabilitators expect from Vets
- What Vets should expect from Rehabilitators

The remaining sessions on specific wildlife species cover the following topics:-

- Identification
- Rescue Techniques including handling
- Triage – Initial Assessment
- Emergency Housing
- Emergency Feeding – equipment, food and methods
- Pain Relief
- Emergency Care of orphans
- Common Diseases and Conditions
- Common Injuries

Each session is being taught by an experienced wildlife rehabilitator with the exception of the Reptiles and Amphibians which is being taught by a registered veterinarian, Dr Tania Bishop.

Student Resource Kit

Each student receives a Resource CD-Rom that includes training material on each species including:-

Koalas

- Principles of Koala Rehabilitation for Veterinarians and Wildlife Rehabilitators
- The Care of Orphaned Koalas
- Growth and Progress Chart for Orphaned Koalas

Macropods

- Diseases of Handreared Macropods – Dr Jon Hanger
- The Care of Orphaned Macropods
- The Rescue and Management of Adult Macropods
- Growth and Progress Chart for various species of macropods

Bats

- The Rescue and Care of Adult and Sub-Adult Flying Foxes

Echidnas

- Principles of Echidna Rehabilitation
- Growth and Progress Chart for Orphaned Echidnas

Birds

- Husbandry and Rehabilitation of Injured Native Birds – Dr Anne Fowler
- Birds – Guide to Housing and Dietary Requirements

Possums and Gliders

- Caring for Orphaned and Adult Possums
- Easy Reference Charts for various species of possums and gliders
- Growth and Progress Chart for various species of possums and gliders

Reptiles and Amphibians

- Caring for Injured Native Reptiles – Dr Anne Fowler
- The Care of Injured Frogs

Orphaned Mammals

- Introduction to Caring for Orphaned Mammals

The Resource CD-Rom also includes:-

- **Minimum Housing Standards** – prepared by Wildcare Australia and which include appropriate hospital facilities for common species ; and
- **Rescue Examination and Progress Charts** for common species

The material in the Resource Kit consists predominantly of our own training material for each species which includes chapters on housing, handling and feeding together with common diseases, injuries and conditions and preferred methods of treatment.

Two papers have been included by Dr Anne Fowler who graciously allowed us to use her training notes on birds and reptiles for this purpose.

The Resource CD-Rom also includes links to other resources such as:-

- A list of wildlife rehabilitation groups throughout Australia
- Contact details for various wildlife institutions in Australia (for example – Australian Wildlife Hospital, Australian Wildlife Health Centre etc)
- Wildlife websites (for example – Australian Registry of Wildlife Health, Environment Protection Authority, Department of Primary Industries & Fisheries); and
- A Useful Book List

At the completion of the course students will also receive a Certificate of Attendance.

Summary

It has been a tremendous privilege for Wildcare Australia to deliver this course to the University of Queensland students. A large amount of time and effort has gone into preparing and running the course, however the response and enthusiasm of the students has been overwhelming and has made the project extremely worthwhile.

These 205 students will be the vets of the future. Some students will complete their degree as early as late this year. Hopefully, in the years to come there will be more veterinarians that have an appreciation for our unique wildlife and be eager to provide essential veterinary assistance in their times of need.

We strongly urge all wildlife rehabilitation groups throughout Australia (if you have not done so already) to liaise with your local universities and colleges and offer your experience and knowledge to students in the veterinary industry. There is an obvious overwhelming desire within the students to learn more about our unique wildlife.

If any organization requires assistance or further information about putting a Course together please do not hesitate to contact us.

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