

THE BASIC ROLE OF A WILDLIFE SPOTTER CATCHER WITHIN THE CONSTRUCTION AND MINING INDUSTRIES - INCLUDING DEMOLITION WORKS.

DESLEY SALMON

Wildlife Spotter-Catcher and Wildlife Rehabilitator
Vital Signs Environmental Services
desley@vsenviro.com.au

BASIC ROLES OF A WILDLIFE SPOTTER-CATCHER

People often ask me “what is a Wildlife Spotter-Catcher” and “what is it that you do?” Some say that we are engaged to “minimize” injury and death to wildlife during land clearing. But that doesn’t actually tell you much, does it? There are many aspects of being a Wildlife Spotter-Catcher, for example;

- There is the equipment required to perform ones duties
- Species identification
- Animal trapping procedures
- Capture techniques and handling
- Assessment of the overall health and condition of captured wildlife (Including any injuries and the treatment required)
- Assessment of suitable release sites
- Correct emergency euthanasia procedures

How to actually locate, capture, handle, care for and release wildlife and under some circumstances euthanize wildlife, well that should really be treated as trade training. Even though we have all come to this conference to learn, I believe this is an information conference not a training seminar. Apart from which it would be impractical to attempt to cover such topics in the allocated time. So instead I have chosen five key issues that hopefully I will be able to cover in one session and may just give you a small insight into what we do.

QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS AND SAFETY WITHIN THE INDUSTRY

Wildlife Spotter-Catchers should:

- Have experience with wildlife (both in theory and in practical)
- Be working under the correct permits
- Hold a current motor vehicle license
- Ensure that you are vaccinated for the Australian Bat Lyssavirus (ABL) and that you have regular Titre level checks
- Have an up to date Tetanus vaccination

They should have successfully completed accredited courses and hold current tickets/certificates for:

- Occupational Health and Safety Induction Training for the Construction Industry (referred to as the White Card)
- Venomous snake handling
- Chainsaw use
- Safe working at heights

Some sites have extra requirements that may include but not limited to:

- Electrical awareness
- Confined space training
- QR training and inductions
- Holding a current four wheel drive course certificate
- Being *Coxiella burnetti* (Q Fever) vaccinated
- Passing a coal board medical
- BMA or BMC training and inductions

There are many “on-site” safety requirements for working within the industry. Before being allowed to work on any site you must pass a site specific induction and understand what is required of you to actually work on that site. It is important to remember that Demolition, Construction and Mining sites are all different. Here are a few of the more standardized requirements:

- Have the correct training and adhere to the “standard operating procedures” (SOP’s,) for example; the use of two way radio’s on site
- Comply with the correct personal protective equipment” (PPE) requirements for each site and use your PPE correctly
- Attend daily Pre-start meetings and tool box talks
- Ensure you are signed onto and have completed the correct paperwork before commencing any task
- Comply with the “zero tolerance to alcohol and drugs” (Daily BAC tests are carried out and random drug testing also occurs)
- Mine sites have “Golden Rules” (these are a list of non-negotiable rules and if not complied to may lead to instant dismissal)
- All vehicles to be driven on site must be either Construction or Mine specification compliant as applicable
- Your vehicle must be roadworthy, registered and insured. Weekly vehicle inspection check lists must be recorded
- Like your vehicle, you too need to be insured. You should have professional indemnity, public liability along with accident and illness insurance/appropriate workers compensation policies.
- All equipment being used on site should be well maintained and in good working order, for example your chainsaw
- All electrical appliances being used on site must have a current test tag attached, for example your laptop and its lead.

There are other helpful qualifications and safety courses that I have not yet mentioned, for example you could complete CPR training or a first aid course. You might join a wildlife group and attend regular workshops learning how to treat injured wildlife and care for orphaned wildlife. However none of these qualifications are a requirement for a Wildlife Spotter-Catcher.

A Wildlife Spotter-Catcher does not just simply turn up at the job site and “spot and catch” wildlife.

ECOLOGICAL SURVEYS OF ENVIRONMENTS INCLUDING MARINE

Although it may be helpful, it is not a requirement for a Wildlife Spotter-Catcher to hold a Bachelor of Science Degree, we do not have to be an Ecologist or a Marine Biologist or even a Vet. It all comes down to experience, skills and knowledge, which must be kept up to date and constantly improved upon. There will always be room for improvement and there is always so much more to learn.

Ecological surveys are carried out before the approval is given for the land clearing to go ahead. The information gathered from an Ecological Survey assists with the writing of such documents like a Species Management Plan (SMP) which covers flora and fauna. For the Wildlife Spotter-Catcher our focus is on the fauna not the flora, however we do still concern ourselves with the flora issues on each site. For example we are quite often asked to report and record such things as “Black Orchids” or “native grasses” that may have been identified as being on site and within the designated clearing area. The SMP will include information on all fauna that is anticipated to be present and all flora and fauna that has actually been identified as being on site and drawing attention to species of particular concern or interest. It will also contain information on the guidelines for carrying out the associated works and a whole lot more. The SMP is passed onto the Client and assists the Environmental Team and the Wildlife Spotter-Catchers with some of the specific requirements for that particular Project.

Not all clearing works require an Ecological Survey to be conducted before an approval is given and unfortunately there are still cases where clearing can legally happen even without a Wildlife Spotter-Catcher being required.

Although writing Ecological Surveys do not usually form part of a Wildlife Spotter-Catchers regular duties, Pre and Post Clearing Reports often do.

PRE AND POST CLEARING INSPECTIONS AND REPORTS

Pre-clearing inspections are carried out prior to the commencement of any clearing activities. This allows us to locate and identify such things as Potential Habitat Trees (PHT's), actual Habitat Trees (HT's) or Food Source Trees (FST's.) This process should include binocular checks of individual canopies for hollows, dreys, bird's nests, termite nests and also for loose bark which fauna like our gorgeous native geckoes love to hide behind. There's also Ground Shelter Values and burrowing wildlife to consider. Our reptiles and ground mammals love to take advantage of not only logs and vegetation on the ground but also old termite mounds. Naturally the type of habitat and the location you are working in influences the type of wildlife you will be looking for. As you all know, seasonal time of year, specific breeding requirements and seasons, the climatic zone and even the lunar cycle can all influence the behaviour of wildlife. Food source availability, hibernation and migratory patterns must all be taken into consideration. Locating scats and tracks along with day and night monitoring also gives us valuable information. Sometimes just sitting and listening can assist us to identify wildlife without even seeing them, especially our birds and frogs. Recommendations can be made. Perhaps nesting boxes should be erected due to the amount of hollows that will be removed. This might be a recommendation prior to clearing, or to be erected once the clearing has been completed. There is a lot of information to be collected if a written pre-clearing assessment is required for the client. Things like the project overview, site location, type of vegetation, fauna values and results of the pre-clearing inspection along with any recommendations.

Demolition inspections should give the same information results, with the main difference being what you are inspecting. You are still trying to locate wildlife but you are just looking for them in a different environment. Possums, micro bats or snakes could be in the ceiling or walls or native geckos throughout the house. Nesting birds might be under the eaves or underneath a high set house. There could be frogs in the toilet or the outdoor tanks or even native rodents in the gardens, not forgetting the skinks and other reptiles.

So the pre-clearing inspection is just as important for demolition works as it is for clearing works.

Post-clearing reports incorporate the data collected during and sometimes after the clearing has occurred. This typically includes a summary of the scope of works, type of vegetation and the fauna results. It should contain information like the scientific and common names along with the number of each individual that was observed, or was captured and released and also any deaths that may have occurred. If there was any wildlife orphaned or injured and what was the outcome for each individual animal. Recording all GPS locations for each sighting, dispersal or capture and release of every individual is also a requirement. Additional comments, for example if it was recommended that compensatory nesting boxes were to be installed was this done? Also it highlights the important positive outcomes of the work carried out as well as any negatives that may have arisen. This allows for improvement to future wildlife management plans as well as it promotes the fact that Wildlife Spotter-Catchers should be considered not as an expense to a business but as an asset to the reputation of that business as well as an absolute necessity for the welfare of our wildlife and their future survival rate. It should be considered best practice to engage a spotter catcher on all land clearing projects.

BASIC CLEARING METHODOLOGY

I use the word “basic” rather loosely as clearing methodologies will vary according to the type of vegetation to be removed the anticipated wildlife and the actual wildlife located on site and also the type of equipment or machinery being used for the land clearing. Is it a demolition, construction or mining site? Perhaps the work is tree trimming underneath power-lines, or grass and shrub removal for a fence around the newly built neighbourhood children’s playground? Or is it a home owner who just needs to remove a Cocos Palm, or several trees for a carport or swimming pool? Every site and every situation must be assessed individually. We, as Wildlife Spotter-Catchers, do not get to choose the type of equipment or machinery that will be used for the land-clearing. This will often

depend on the client's resources and on their budget. The SMP may also help to influence these choices. Sometimes even when we are told how the clearing will be carried out, that information may change during the course of the project, often due to machinery breakdowns, operator availability or the effects of the weather.

Surrounding environments also have a large impact on the land clearing methodology. Some considerations are:

- Consequences of the direction of clearing chosen
- Is there any adjacent habitat?
- Will the wildlife have the opportunity to freely disperse into any adjacent habitat?
- Connectivity and suitability of any adjacent habitat
- Future potential clearing for further development
- Proximity of suburban roads and main highways also housing and industrial areas

Demolition works involve the same considerations for our wildlife as it does in the land clearing process. Just like trees, no two man-made structures are exactly the same and therefore every structure on a demolition site has to be assessed individually. Demolition projects bring added hazards, for example; working in confined spaces such as ceilings. There can also be the extra hazard of the removal of any asbestos which forms part of the demolition process and this will impact on the demolition methodology. Wildlife Spotter-Catchers do not have the power, nor do we have the knowledge to give directions as to how a structure should be demolished.

Good communication with the Client can influence the outcome for the clearing direction or demolition process. Hopefully the decisions made will provide the best possible outcome for our wildlife (under the circumstances) and yet ensure that the Client's needs are also met.

So it can be a win – win for all involved. (“Under the circumstances”)

We may suggest - but - we do not have the power to demand.

Remember that this profession is not a legislated necessity like safety, although ultimately the Nature Conservation Act and other similar documents are there to give some protection for the wildlife, it often comes down to individuals, their attitudes, their actions and their regard for the environment and their empathy towards wildlife.

Good people skills are a valuable asset to a Wildlife Spotter-Catcher. We must be able to comprehend all aspects of the job and make allowances accordingly. We should not just focus on our desire to save wildlife.

We must be professional, patient, understanding and polite.

VARIOUS METHODS OF LAND CLEARING AND THE MACHINERY INVOLVED

Land clearing can be done in many ways it can be done with a simple pair of secateurs, hand saw or chainsaw, or perhaps a D11 dozer or a 47 ton excavator.

Demolition work is usually carried out using excavators, with the clean-up work sometimes incorporating a bobcat.

Selective individual tree clearing and limb removal is usually done by a qualified chainsaw operator, sometimes they might be an arbourist and sometimes they are even a qualified tree climber. Sometimes we have access to an Elevated Work Platform (EWP) that can make our job a little easier. There can be a lot of “sometimes” in this profession.

Clearing on a large scale could be for things like: -

- New roads
- Housing estates

- Industrial areas
- New buildings – office blocks
- Shopping centres - cinemas
- Schools
- Hospitals
- Infrastructure relocation
- Gas pipelines
- Don't forget the mining industry

Just to name a few, well, that's a whole different ballgame.

That's where the big boy's toys usually come out to play.

Unfortunately, there often has to be destruction before there can be construction.

*Various methods of clearing and the machinery involved were presented in the form of a photographic power point accompanied with detailed explanations.

A few final comments

We often work in harsh conditions, having to endure the effects of the sun and the heat. We are exposed to rainy, muddy, windy and a lot of dry and dusty environments on a regular basis, (not to mention the flies, mozzies, spiders, creepy-crawlies and sandflies.) We regularly work alongside heavy earth-moving equipment during land clearing operations which can be extremely dangerous. Sometimes we are required to work 12 to 14 hour days, often with the only chance to sit down being at one half hour smoko-break and one half hour lunch break. There is often a lot of travelling involved. It may be a "Drive in drive out" (DIDO) job or it may be a "Fly in fly out" (FIFO) job. We may be required to work on a roster, for example; working for 3 weeks and then 1 week off, living away from home for those 3 weeks and working those 21 days straight with only one rest day in between. Often living in temporary "Camps" with basic

accommodation and located in remote areas. We interact with all kinds of people, some who judge the worth of our very existence within the industry. This industry can be a very brutal and dangerous one and therefore is not a profession for the soft hearted. We have to be mentally and physically prepared to deal with any situation that may arise. There are occasions where heart breaking decisions have to be made. It can be soul destroying at times. Depending on your location there may also be little to no access to external assistance like vets and wildlife rehabilitators.

However I wouldn't want to do anything else. No amount of words could describe the immense satisfaction that I receive from being a Wildlife Spotter-Catcher. We have the opportunity to be educators and are contributing to the education of personnel within the industry and helping them to understand and appreciate wildlife. The positive impact that it is having is extremely encouraging. That too is almost a session on its own. Our wildlife is so incredibly precious!

DESLEY SALMON has been a Volunteer Wildlife Rehabilitator for over fifteen years. During that time Desley has worked on projects throughout S.E. Queensland as an Environmental Officer. For the last eight years Desley has worked full time as a Wildlife Spotter Catcher within the Construction and Mining Industries throughout Queensland and the Northern Territory.

Whilst working in this industry can often be quite challenging, it offers immense satisfaction in the rescuing and relocating of Wildlife. This profession allows Desley to educate others and share her love of all wildlife.

Where possible, Desley is still actively involved in Volunteer Rehabilitation work and is always trying to improve her knowledge by attending workshops and by listening and learning from other like minded people.