

Wombat Protection Society of Australia Bulletin 12 Sept 2007
P.O. Box 6045 N.S.W. 2550 info@wombatprotection.org.au

WOMBAT PROTECTION SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA BULLETIN 12
SEPTEMBER 2007

Welcome to Bulletin 12. The Bulletin gets sent by email to some members and is mailed to others. When printed out the Bulletin is on letterhead and looks similar to its' final presentation on the Website. We would like to hear from anyone who enjoys editing to assist with the Bulletin's publication.

REGISTRATION

The Society was entered onto the Environmental Register on the 5th July 2007 and will be listed by the Australian Taxation Office on its Australian Business Register this month as a charity. This news means donations to the Society are tax deductible for Australians and this makes the Society eligible to apply for funding for projects to various entities that require tax deductibility.

HELPING OUT

One of the best things to come out of the Wombat Protection Society setting up as a Public Company has been the number of people who contact and who would like to assist wombats. Some have recently purchased land and found they are now the proud guardians of a family of wombats, others are driven to distraction seeing road killed wombats and not knowing how to help, and others are overwhelmed with compassion having come across a wombat with mange. Often, the result of a member of the public seeking help for a wombat from rehabilitation groups or from state authorities is not a happy one. Recently people from Mudgee were not happy when told by their local rehabilitation group, it having contacted the state authority, to shoot a wombat with mange. Instead they took the animal home. Sadly, it consequently died but the outcome was positive. The kind folk from Mudgee recognised that it would have been better to treat and help the wombat where it was and at least let it die where it lived rather than stress it in captivity. They decided that they needed to find out more about how to help wombats with mange and are going to join their local rehabilitation group so it has more options available when contacted about wombats with mange.

Kerry Hafford wrote to us disturbed by the number of wombats killed by cars on the road leading, ironically, to the University of Sydney's Wildlife Unit near Camden N.S.W. We put Kerry into contact with Lenore Taylor who is our Road/Authorities Liaison and is part of the Road Kill Mitigation Interest Group. They organized a response to the local Council as this road was a local council responsibility. As a result, wombat warning signs will be put on this road and we congratulate them on their efforts.

The Society has a greater problem when dealing with the R.T.A., the responsible agent where the road is a Highway. R.T.A. continues to maintain that unless their workers report significant road kill they have no evidence to support putting up road signs. Lenore will be approaching them again explaining that animal rescue groups purposely pull bodies from the road so the likelihood of the R.T.A. confronting road kill is quite reduced.

The Society has a road kill mitigation pamphlet in draft which is being trialled currently. It aims to educate drivers about the behaviour of wombats in areas where wombats are likely to be on the road. The problem with any such education is that if drivers do not know they are in a wombat area - hence the benefit of the signs - then education about wombat behaviour is of no use because drivers are unlikely to take the recommended precautions because they simply have not been reminded to put them into practise.

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Other folk wrote in concerned that they had just purchased land and found a wombat burrow near to where they intend to build. They recently sent photographs and measured the length of the burrow so we could help them work out whether the burrow is being used currently or not. They have wombats on their property and are trying to make sure that their plans do not disturb the wombats anymore than is necessary.

Finally, another family recently moved to a property at Collector, N.S.W., where they have become the guardians of wombats. They wanted to get help to check whether their wombats are healthy and to get any suggestions about how they can care for them and support them. Donna and John Stephan have agreed to help and be the Society's contact for that area.

We continue to receive complaints about wombats being killed or trapped and relocated without any alternatives being canvassed. We have developed an advisory pamphlet for people who may have recently purchased land where wombats reside, encouraging them to contact the society if they have any problems with wombat behaviour. We hope to distribute these to the officers responsible for issuing culling permits which may help people canvass alternatives before killing wombats.

These types of cases have led the Society to approve a change, from having the contact numbers of organizations listed as wombat contacts on the website. A number of the organisations listed as wombat rescue groups do not have the facilities to do much more than take in orphaned joeys (and the society acknowledges this is hugely challenging as well as time and resource consuming). It is also the case that most rescue groups are stretched to the limit and have to focus on wombats coming into care as orphaned joeys and little time and few resources remain to assist free living wombats. The help members of the public need with wombats often falls outside the parameters of the rescue groups (as often do problems like mange) and by listing these groups as first contact we can unwittingly add to their workload .

The Society recognises that many people who will be nominated as the wombat contact in a particular area will belong to existing rehabilitation organisations, but that is not a requirement for being a contact person for the Society. The ability to provide timely information to someone requesting assistance or advice about wombats, particularly when those animals are potentially in harms way, is the important ability. This may well mean calling on the services of the local rehabilitation group but it may also mean visiting/ talking to people who want to know more about how to care for their wombats.

If you are interested in becoming the contact person in a particular area let us know. Realistically, we don't get thousands of calls or queries and most can be dealt with as they come in. But there are some that need a local support person to advise or follow up and we see this as a good means by which to educate people by having someone local available to talk to them. It will also ensure that the information and advice given to people, comes from people who actually know about wombats and their issues and can get advice when they need it.

Roz and Kevin Holme from Cedar Creek Wombat Rescue have agreed to be the Society's contacts for their area and we will endeavour to cover all States this way.

To support these contact people and the membership generally we are trialling a range of pamphlets. We thank those of you who have suffered through field days with the early versions of three handouts. (They were BIG) and we thank those of

you who have written in with suggestions for additions or changes to the information supplied with them. We have decided to reduce their size both to save paper and so they aren't too intimidating. They remain in draft so further comments are welcome before they are finalized.

The Society recently gave a presentation to the Country Womens' Association and provided the handouts "Shooting Wombats, It's a mugs Game", "Joey Rescue" and "Mange, You Wouldn't Wish it on a Wombat". Each year the Country Womens' Association selects a country, a flower and an animal to learn about. This year it is the Wombat. We were totally upstaged by four orphan babies at the presentation but thens the breaks in show biz.

Members might like to contact their local CWA and offer a presentation on wombats, but beware, when we tried to recruit them, they countered quickly with their own membership offer. They certainly aren't "Just Tea and Scones", www.cwaofnsw.org.au

ALBINO WOMBATS

Claire Davis in Victoria sent us photos of a white wombat and asked whether anyone else had reared Albino wombats. Claire has had three Angel, Babe and the one pictured in the previous Bulletin , Pearl. We noted in Barbara Triggs book "The Wombat" UNSWPRESS (sadly out of publication currently) that she describes ash white wombats with dark eyes on Wilson's Promontory in Victoria and mentions reports of Albino wombats. No one has sent through any pictures of white red eyed wombats or confirmed a sighting of one so far.

WOMBAT COLOURS

Wombat hair colour, length and density appears to define groups geographically, though even within small areas significant coat differences are seen. Some coat dis/colouration is caused through metals in the soils in which the wombats burrow. Some time back we published photos of the forest wombats' hair taken under the microscope.(300um)and commented on the plates that helped define these hairs from those of people and domestic pets. These hairs also define the species as the name coarse haired wombat implies from the smoother hair of the Southern Hairy Nose.

MANGE SYMPOSIUM

The symposium on mange will be held at Potoroo Palace Yellow Pinch N.S.W. On October 6th. This symposium aims to review the work on mange conducted by various people and groups throughout Australia, consolidate the society' position and recommendations on treatments and specifically treatments and methods of treating free living wombats and to discuss future directions and research in this area.

The Society began its interest papers on mange some time back with a review of the reasons people gave for not treating wombats with mange. The next discussion paper reviewed some treatments people had been using or thought would be useful for wombats and ranked these against a scale to give some structure how groups might go about treating mange. Since that time the society has gathered numerous reports from people using these and other methods to treat mange. There have been some adverse impact reports on both wetting wombats with mange and another where someone using the sulphur treatment believes they have become allergic to the sulphur. The Mange symposium will see a final discussion paper arise which while not negating a variety of treatment options will focus on one or two. Further work needs to concentrate on the means by which wombats can be treated and how to monitor the long term efficacy of treatment programs.

The new pamphlets on mange, stress not wetting or washing wombats with heavy scabbing with anything, including the lemon juice suggested as a potential treatment in the treatment discussion papers. This is because we have had a report of an adverse effect following a wombat with heavy scabbing being washed with pintetarsal wash a commonly used wash for animals and people to help reduce itching. Skerrat (2001) described the scab on manged wombats as full of dead skin cells, dead mite bodies and their faeces and skin exudations. It is consequently a bacterial explosion waiting to happen and the report we received described the animal as looking and feeling much better judging from its eating and grooming behaviour after being washed but within a few hours smelling worse than initially, which necessitated another bath the following day. Skin scab were scratched off by the animal which appeared to be doing well and was allowed outside to eat. 24 hours on, the wombat couldn't stand and collapsed and died despite antibiotics and subcutaneous fluids.

Gail Chappel likened the skin beneath the keratotic plaque as like that of a burns victim. This is a good description. The skin has become sponge like and weeps constantly. It is no longer any barrier to bacteria so great care must be taken if the wetting or washing of a manged wombat is contemplated. Certainly where visible scabbing exists we would advise against this and suggest the spot on or pour on with cetrigen or terramycin spray for relief and maggot / superficial bacteria control.

We have had reports of other wombats suspected of mange but without the thick scabs having been washed and a variety of products used, including malawash being used to remove superficial ectoparasites. These wombats survived following treatment. In fact, one of the wombats featured at the C.W.A. had just come from Veterinary Clinic where it was washed to remove ectoparasites.

INTEREST GROUPS

Thank-you to all the members who wrote back to indicate their areas of interest and what they felt they could do to progress the work of the society. All members contribute something just by being more aware of wombat issues, being able to talk to people who know little about wombats and being able to direct people with problems and issues regarding wombats to the Society. We also gather our pictures, comments and information from members so we appreciate all of you, whether you add to what you already do for the Society or not. However, we are very appreciative of those who work to ensure the Society focuses on the problems and issues for wombats, brought to us by members and others via interest groups.

The Research Interest Group is established and has been communicating through group emails. This group is being used to deal with the project of differentiating or not the mites that cause mange on wombats. This involves, initially the collection of mange mite scab from wombats and the exact areas for collection will be determined at the Mange Symposium on October 6th. In the end (after an amazing amount of investigation) our advice has been that samples can be collected dried, or placed in 70% ethanol (surgical spirit and at this dilution is able to be posted) or a special non toxic neutral buffer lysis. This is the medium used by the Fox D.N.A. Project undertaken by University of Western Australia run by Dr. Oliver Berry. Dr. Berry has kindly offered to provide the wombat mange mite project with collection vials using this medium.

JOEYS PAGES



Some time ago one of our members John Merrick noticed that someone had written into Ozark concerned about a joey wombat's teeth they believed were not growing properly. The person who had the baby wombat is Alex Javorosek who looks after wombats in the Snowy Mountains region of N.S.W.. Alex had one little wombat she was rearing and it was given a "buddy" of another wombat someone else had looked after. Alex was worried because both baby wombats appeared to have teeth that were too long.

Wombat teeth are very interesting. If you look at the skull of a wombat you will see they have two teeth top and bottom at the front which are used to cut the grass they eat. These teeth keep growing and if you look at the photograph you will see how long they are .



Full skull courtesy A.Cox overgrown teeth in jaw courtesy D.Sutherland.

The picture shows a wombat skull with the top and bottom jaw from a normal jaw and bottom jaw bone from one with overgrown teeth.

The second jawbone shows what happens when the wombats' back teeth grow too long; can you see how they have arched across inside the mouth ? This wombat used their teeth for a long time after this happened because flattened grinding plates can be seen where the teeth arch.



Photo Courtesy Suzanne and David Alder

The other interesting thing about wombat teeth is that they are hollow, except at the top where the tops of the teeth work and are shaped like a chisel.

Wombats have a heavy fold of skin on either side of their mouth. If you open your mouth and push in the skin between your teeth you'll get the idea....except this is a permanent feature of a wombat. It is why people often have trouble feeding them because they push the bottle into the skin flap and not the mouth!!!!. Wombats use their extra skin to good advantage. If you watch closely when they eat grass they begin in the middle and pull in the grass into their mouths so it folds in half. At first you might just notice that all pieces of grass disappear into the mouth with their head and base protruding, keep watching and see whether you can work out when the wombat nips the grass off.

Now back to Alex's little wombats we were talking about to begin with. Alex's wombats went to a vet who anaesthetized them and filed some of their back teeth but Alex was still worried about their front. So she took them to another member Brian who had filed wombat's teeth before. Brian has seen some pretty overgrown teeth and he was able to help Alex's wombats, but considering ones he'd seen he didn't think they were too bad and feels that the little wombats will be fine now.

Gaylene Parker wrote in to say she had seen a number of wombats with teeth that seemed overshot and that most come right eventually.

Wombats have an overshot/undershot bite when they are relaxed and often the front teeth seem to sit forward or or even behind the bottom jaw naturally. When these two surfaces cannot touch to cut there can be a problem. If the back teeth start growing incorrectly the wombat can't grind up the grass they've eaten. Their skin flap makes it is very hard to look into their mouth let alone do anything to their back teeth.

One last piece of information about wombat teeth. We think that you can tell the age of a wombat by the thickness of its front teeth .You certainly can tell when they are a joey this way but we mean when the wombat is full size it seems that the older it gets the broader or thicker teeth become. One day you might study

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wombat teeth and be able to tell us whether this is correct See you next time.



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