

## WOMBAT PROTECTION SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA BULLETIN 13 OCTOBER 2007

Welcome to Bulletin 13.

This month's main event was the Symposium on Mange which saw a good turn out despite the school holidays and the short notice. People travelled from Victoria and the Snowy Mountains and from all down the N.S.W. Coast. Potoroo Palace Wildlife Sanctuary at Yellow Pinch N.S.W. kindly provided the venue and Janine and Baron Green at the Merimbula Motel looked after people who needed somewhere to stay. We thank them for their support and thank Cobargo Pharmacy N.S.W. for supplying at cost specimen containers, syringes and preservative.

A separate write up and development of a power point presentation of this day is nearly completed and will be available on the website site when it is finished. The main points that most agreed with were that mange is a treatable and preventable infestation that needs to be dealt with as early in the process of infestation as possible. Late stage mange, where the animal is fully corrugated with scab and is now experiencing secondary infections is difficult to treat and the few people who are actually treating animals at this stage all feel that intensive nursing care is required. There is limited information on how well wombats with late stage mange cope in the wild after treatment and we remind everyone monitoring wombats treated at this stage that any follow up information is vital to helping construct a plan for future treatment programs. While treating wombats at any stage of mange will have more benefits than not, it is important to make sure we aren't making the situation for a sick and dying animal worse. Captive nursing is recommended for any wombat with mange less than 15 kilos and barrier nursing is important to protect other wombats that may be present in the same facility (or preventative treatment of those animals to this end) should occur. There are few places with the facilities to adequately care for adult wombats with serious infestations and taking them out of the wild is likely to create more problems for them. This poses major problems for most carers and at this time we know of only two or three places where this type of care is given to wombats and these places have their full compliment of patients. The decision to remove an animal from the wild for treatment is a major one and needs a great deal of consideration.

Products which have been used to treat mange include Cydectin, Ivermectin, Revolution and Advocate, Sentennial as well as a 10% sulphur in oil mix.



An unusual picture showing two free living juvenile wombats together with early clinical signs of mange. Notice the hair loss around the eye. In four weeks the infestations had progressed to corrugated scabbing and one little wombat had died. The other died shortly after. Photo courtesy Julia Clapin N.S.W.

Early treatment, particularly as soon as any clinical signs of mange are present is essential. It is possible that prophylactic treatment of animals in a particular area

may lead to better outcomes for wombats rather than waiting until clinical signs develop, particularly as it appears that the progression can be so rapid in certain cases. The mange mite from wombats can transfer to both dogs and humans, while in humans it appears to be self limiting, it does cause extensive itchiness, generally occurring some days after contact. The itchiness is followed by small raised spots which spread and get itchier when hot (eg.in bed). People handling wombats with mange need to wash down well, some people use methylated spirits, but Scabiol and similar products made for human scabies can be used as a precaution after washing and are effective and less drying. Untreated in humans, it seems to resolve within four weeks.



Raised red spots that are intensely itchy, particularly when hot, increase in number from around 14 days to 30 days on humans following close contact with wombats infested with mange mites. This can be avoided by using any scabies lotion available from chemists, methylated spirits or 10% sulphur in oil or petroleum jelly following contact. Photo courtesy Wombat Protection Society of Australia.

The symposium discussed various ways wombats can be treated using different products. This is a major area of consideration of its own and a variety of techniques and suggestions were reviewed and considered.

The most feasible methods currently are situation dependent, there are methods and devices which can be put near or over burrows where the location of the burrow is known and some people believe that treating all burrows or having a treatment device hung over all burrows in an area may be the best way of ensuring all wombats in a certain area are mange free. This technique leads to concerns about how to avoid double treatment, particularly as wombats may pop into a number of burrows over the course of their nightly meanderings. There is some concern that any synthesised product could eventually lead to long term genetic issues for wombats but at the same time there was overwhelming support for the notion that to do nothing will lead to the decline of wombat populations throughout their range.

It was felt that the symposium was a useful tool in the fight against mange and the Society will hold this event again next year in another State to facilitate attendance.

Voiceless- People's Choice Award see <http://www.voiceless.org.au>

The society was pleased to be shortlisted by "Voiceless, the Fund for Animals" for the mange project submitted called "Mange Can Be Stopped." This is to see the production and distribution of basic pamphlets about mange and treatment options to Rehabilitation Groups, Veterinarians and Animal Sanctuaries and to have the same available on the web site as free downloads. Despite the seriousness of this issue for wombats few, if any, groups include it in their basic training for carers of wombats and many groups have limited information about the infestation available. As a consequence there have been few options available to those rehabilitators wanting to treat wombats with mange and many groups

have not understood that there are many Veterinary options available. The distribution of up to date information and options for treatment should see an improvement in this area and as a consequence may save many free living wombats. We thank everyone who voted and who encouraged their friends to do so. Voting has closed and Voiceless will announce grants during November.

#### People Working on Mange

The involvement of community groups such as conservation volunteers and others formed to care for and monitor mange in free living wombats will be necessary to effectively eradicate mange from the Australian wombat. There are not enough rehabilitation groups to proactively seek out and treat wombats with mange. The Symposium was pleased to have a presentation from Gayle Chappell from Wombat State Forest in Victoria where community action to locate and monitor wombats in that area is planned. The Society wishes them well with their work.

One group in N.S.W., Cedar Creek Wombat Rescue ,has pioneered a number of methods for widespread treatment including temporary holding pens built around burrows to protect sick wombats while they are nursed or treated in situ. This type of program requires significant infrastructure but provides a suitable alternative to removing an unwell wombat from its environment .The pens offer access to an easy source of feed and water for the wombats and to medical care for a period of time until the animals recover. The pens are then removed and used to treat the next group of animals. Highly labour intensive, this type of process needs a big community action group to be involved. Some of the work requires minimal expertise, for example replenishing supplies of water and feed and this can be done by schools or local people. This frees up time for those trained to handle and manage wombats to concentrate on that side of the work.



Cedar Creek Wombat Rescue in action netting a wombat which was treated with antimiticides and antibiotics before being released. Photo courtesy of Roz and Kevin Holmes. N.S.W.

#### Towards Early Intervention

Wombats and their failing health may be synonymous with concerns about the ever degrading general environment and climate change. The Society has previously suggested that wombats are an excellent barometer of general environmental health and sadly, the Society's mange mapping exercise seems to be confirming what many believe, that there are few if any mange free areas. That this crisis is not being taken seriously or addressed by any of the government departments charged with the care of native animals anywhere in Australia remains a national disgrace.



A female wombat showing hair loss around the face typifying early mange with an at heel youngster. The joey will inevitably become infested with mites due to its close contact with its infested mother. Picture courtesy of Phil Borchard's movement activated camera system at work in Kangaroo Valley N.S.W.

### Community Camp Outs

One method being pioneered in N.S.W. are "Community Camp Outs" where people camp out in areas of high mange infestation and attempt to treat as many wombats as possible over a weekend. The methods used include net capture and treatment as well as putting single dose treatments over burrows so animals entering or leaving their burrows receive a dose of antimiticide. A "sneak up" method using a long pole to which a needle-less syringe with antimiticide is attached is also employed. The process needs to be repeated monthly until no wombat seen shows clinical signs of mange and then the population needs to be monitored bimonthly but the later may involve fewer observers doing an evening of spotlight monitoring. We will keep you informed of the progress of these activities and community members wanting to develop such a project are invited to contact the Society. We will help them locate a professional rehabilitator to assist in their work. This is also a good opportunity to involve paying people wanting to see wombats in the project which may help cover treatment costs.

### **A Visit to Putty- From Elizabeth and Chris Neville**

As members of the Wombat Protection Society we took the opportunity to spread the message when we were fortunate enough to be invited to the 'Putty Spring Fair.'

This is an annual fair that follows the OLD style of local fairs as opposed to the market type. Our invitation was for a Wildlife Information Booth and with the assistance of the Wombat Protection Society the local National Parks and Wildlife Bulga Branch with Cedar Creek Wombat Rescue and Rocky Creek Refuge we amassed an amazing quantity of information. Two snake handlers from Muswellbrook volunteered to join us so we had all bases covered.

In the Putty area there are a lot of tree change city people moving in and this area is definitely Wombat territory. We had so many enquiries and not one 'how do we get rid of them?' The information sheets were hot items and discussions on mange and habitat were fairly continuous all day. Thanks to Roz and Kev from Cedar Creek for helping out and getting the message across that mange can be controlled.

It was a good day for Wildlife Carers getting to present facts about our Native fauna. The Snake boys enjoyed themselves as well and were nearly as popular as the rest of us with all their information.

“Good On you”

A big “good on you” to LAOKO – Looking After Our Snowy Mountains Orphans for their work in making up mange treatment kits and distributing them to their rescuers. It was great to see a big contingent from LAOKO at the mange symposium and even better to hear that this group has been inspired to take action.

#### Pamphlets Available

The Society thanks everyone involved in developing and trying out our information sheets. David Adler has drafted a general information sheet for the society and worked on a number of pamphlets and Carola Vamvakaris is setting out the others. Currently available are “Mange, you wouldn't wish it on a wombat”. This is available with one of two fact sheets attached and either a blank section for your group's preferred treatment(s) for mange or a general default treatment section covering a number of options. “Shooting Wombats, a Mugs' Game” is also available with either a blank section for your groups' contact details or a “Joey Rescue” section inserted. There is also a road care pamphlet, “Wombats, Big Brains, No Roadsense , so Use Yours” which explains why wombats are so often killed on roadsides and includes joey rescue details. These are available “in the rough” now but will be smartened up soon.



Cydectin Syringes being made up for distribution to people treating wombats with mange. The pamphlet “Mange/Scabies You Wouldn't Wish it on a Wombat” can be seen in the foreground.

#### General Business

A big thank-you too to Alex Javorosek who has offered to edit the Bulletins. Any errors remaining will be due to inserts after her editing skills have been applied.!

The WPSA, as public company, is required to undergo an audit and all documents have been delivered to the auditors. The audit should be completed by the end of November and copies of the audit report and schedule for the AGM will be sent out to all members.

## Joey's Pages



Hello to all our associate members and thank-you to everyone who has written to or emailed us. This month's joey's pages are dedicated to all the very interesting ways people have tried to study wombats.

One of the best ways to learn about wombats is to simply watch them. This method has been used by people like Jackie French and Barbara Triggs who have both spent a great deal of time just watching wombats. Jackie reckons that wombats enjoy it when you sing to them and because they know where you are because you are singing, they don't get frightened and run away.

Many years ago ,P.J. Nicholson, who was then a schoolboy near Bowral climbed into wombats burrows to try and find out what burrows looked like inside. This research method is not recommended for a few reasons, but P.J. provided a great service by helping people learn about burrows and wombat behaviour. We don't recommend that any of our Joey's climb into burrows because wombats can get very upset if they have visitors and can bite and can do what we call the "wombat rump crush". This is where the wombat uses its very hard back plate to push against the intruder...or part of the intruder and they can crush small mammals and kill them using this technique. If a wombat, even a hand reared one is going through a small tight area, like a gate or into a burrow, never pat them. You could get your hand pushed against a hard surface. The wombat rump crush starts with the wombat flipping its bottom up and they are very powerful. If you are giving the wombat a rub with your foot when it does its flip, even a fully grown adult can be thrown off their feet.

Glenn Shimmin, Jayne Skinner and Russel Baudinette studied the Southern Hairy Nosed Wombat and what it was like in their burrows. They dug a hole with an auger into the top of the burrow and passed a long tube down the hole. Through that hole they dropped in various instruments to measure things like temperature, humidity and carbon dioxide levels. They even put a camera down into the hole to take photographs of what was happening.

If you have been reading all the Bulletins you might recall that the Southern Hairy Nosed Wombat is a bit different to the Bare Nosed Wombat, not only in how it looks but in how it behaves. Southern Hairy Nosed Wombats are more social and live in groups in big burrow complexes that people in South Australia call warrens. These linked burrows end up having many entrances and places for wombats to rest and sleep in, unlike the Bare Nosed Wombat where it is more usual for there to be only one entrance and only one wombat using the burrow.

Alan Horsup had a special video camera made and sent it into the burrow of a Northern Hairy Nosed Wombat where it stayed for many months.(the camera, not the wombat). Alan couldn't get his very expensive camera back. In the end he had to get two groups of conservation volunteers to dig the camera out and by that time it was wrecked. He made up a simple camera on a remote control car to go into the burrow to try and find out where the

wombatcam was first!! Lee Skerratt also lost one of his transmitters in a wombat burrow and he had to get a backhoe in to retrieve it.

Jodie McGill wrote to us about her experience with having dropped in a camera near a Northern Hairy Nosed Wombat in a burrow. He got such a fright he woke up and began digging so furiously that the sand covered the camera and nothing could be seen.

Jake and Jarrad Wynan who made the D.V.D. "Ken's Valley" have used a few different techniques to try and understand what happens with wombats. They found spending lots of time letting wombats accept them was the best strategy, though they and their dad did try a remote camera to check that a wombat they had released was still safe in her burrow.

The picture in this Bulletin taken by Phil Borchard's remote movement activated camera is another way of seeing what wombats are up to. This special camera is left where wombats are likely to walk and their movements set it off.

We have found that there is a great system available used to check buildings and under boats which supplies a long telescopic camera surrounded by l.e.d.s (lights) which remotely relays pictures back to a hand held screen.

You can also get remote cameras and put them near burrows and sit back quietly at home and watch what wombats are up to. BUT we still think there is nothing better than sitting quietly in the bush and listening for the munch.munch.munch sound made by a happy wombat grazing.

Well done to all of you who worked out that the wombat folds the piece of grass in half and eats the middle first and then the bottom and top go in last.

This month's challenge is to tell us what we are seeing in the picture below. It was taken under a microscope set at 300um which means if you measure across the circle it is 300 micrometers across. You may want to look back at the picture of the Bare Nosed Wombat Hair we showed you before to get a comparison of how small this critter is.



