

Welcome to Bulletin 18.

Bob Cleaver from South Australia sent us this letter about Bilbo, a Southern Hairy Nosed Wombat, seen in all his glory below.



You've just gotta love wombats don't you - they really have 'attitude'. I love 'em to bits. Anusha is about as good as they come (so far) but then we have Bilbo in an enclosure outside. Dear Bilbo; he is as mad a cut snake with a severe attitude problem. We do not go into his enclosure for ANY reason whatsoever (unless we feel like committing suicide). He would have your leg off as soon as look at you. He was handraised by a friend of ours from an 800grm pinkie who would bite the teat off his bottle (even at that age). He (Bilbo) eventually bit his carer and hospitalised him for a couple of days (teeth met in the fleshy part of his hand behind the thumb). It was then that we were asked if we would take him (he was then about four years old) as we had a vacant enclosure. Like a fool I said yes. But he's a good animal to be able to show visitors. We can guarantee that he will show himself regardless of the time of day or weather conditions. He will come barrelling out of his burrow (self dug incidentally) and straight to the perimeter fence looking for a fight. God help us if he ever gets out.

We had a good laugh about Bilbo the terrible and

recounted the odd "terror wombat" story we had been involved in or had heard. Not to be outdone, and knowing of a similarly natured bare nosed wombat we decided to get a photograph for the Bulletin. They say pictures speak a thousand words.



## Mange Update

This fellow is a hand reared wombat ready for release but has had a skin condition that looks like mange and this has delayed his release. He has had skin scrapings and a biopsy which showed no mites and he has been treated with ivermectin injections, selamectin ( Revolution) and Cydectin, so it is unlikely that any self respecting mite would manage to be alive. Currently the thought is that this may be a fungal condition rather than mite related, however he was previously checked for fungi. Many fungal conditions result from an imbalance in gut bacteria, which can occur after antibiotics, which

Ivermectin et.al are. Previously, stress alopecia was considered but the general consensus is that this condition forms on both sides of the animal where this condition is restricted to one side.

The Society previously reported fungal filaments in the scats of wombats known to have mange. In following up on this area the Society spoke with Vet. Grahame Collins who is treating a wombat believed to have a malassezia spp. fungus on it following treatment for mange using ivermectin injections.

The Society would also like to thank Howard Ralph who has offered to look further at this matter. Two other wombats appear to have the same skin condition as Lenny and previous reports of mange not responding to treatment may also suggest the involvement of a fungal infection either occurring with or as a result of treatment for mange.

The Society would be interested to hear from anyone who has further information and will pass the information on to others involved in this work. Send information to [research@wombatprotection.org.au](mailto:research@wombatprotection.org.au)



Mange-like patch on wombat

## Trapping Wombats

Andrew Dinwoodie from the Northern Hairy Nose Wombat Program spoke with us this month about their plan to try and move some of the wombats from Epping State National Park. Andrew is hopeful that since the last census when numbers were down to 115 good breeding years may have seen the group increase to as many as 300.

Floods in the area are causing some concern and their site hasn't been accessible for a number of weeks. This is one of the reasons they want to move a breeding group because were something catastrophic to happen in Epping N.P., it would mean the end of this wombat species.

Andrew was interested in minimal stress capture techniques for adult wombats. The Northern Hairy Nose are easily startled and respond by digging furiously ( see Jodie McGill report, previous bulletin) but they are also curious and enter feed stations built to supplement feed them during hard times. Unlike the bare nosed wombat they, like the Southern Hairy Nosed Wombat, have multiple burrow entrances so some of the techniques used for these wombats aren't as useful.

Alison Matthews found trying to capture some free living bare nosed wombats in the Snowy region a major challenge this month. Despite using wombat traps on one occasion and trying seal nets on another, the Snowy wombats refused to come to the party and be collared for radio tracking.

Wombats behave differently in different areas and there are huge behavioural differences amongst individuals as well. Lee Skerratt (2001) managed to regularly capture wombats in Padilpa in Victoria using wombat traps without difficulty but many rehabilitators report waiting up to five nights before a wombat will enter a trap and many more report the wombat digging out round the trap rather than getting trapped. Traps should be checked hourly so the animal isn't stressed so this can become a major exercise. In some areas walking quietly or standing still downwind

of a wombat will let you get close enough to net it or in some cases pick it up but that is unusual. The easiest solution when there is a bit of time is to use something like a drum or wheelie bin open both ends that the wombat gets used to moving through and then when it is regularly using the tunnel put trap flaps in. Of course wombats being wombats, he or she is likely to trot off to another burrow the night before you lock the flaps!!If you can help contact Alison contact [almatthews@csu.ed.au](mailto:almatthews@csu.ed.au)

Georgeanna Story from Macquarie University runs Macquarie's Wildlife Management Course and her students undertake six month long research projects. She also contacted the society to discuss suitable projects. We have suggested following up on wombats treated for mange and tracking released wombats, providing tracking devices don't impact negatively on the wombat's behaviour. These discussions indicated that virtually any area of wombat behaviour was "up for grabs" in terms of research as so little has been done. Her contact [scatsabout@yahoo.com.au](mailto:scatsabout@yahoo.com.au)

### The Need For Research

During the month a facility in N.S.W. able to house adult wombats closed down. This has created a major "hole" in facilities for treating adult wombats and/ or for assessing or rehabilitating bigger wombats.

In Australia we seem to not have noticed that our animals are individual across and within their species. Native animals that come into care generally do so as orphaned young and in N.S.W. And Victoria are mandatorily released into the wild. Any assessed as unreleaseable are meant to be euthanised. Yet there is absolutely no scientific or research study that indicates what constitutes a releaseable or otherwise wombat, nor are there any studies following up on released wombats that have been published and peer reviewed.

Information from the few tracked are of such low numbers as to be statistically irrelevant and no base line for

survival of free living wombats naturally rearing their young established. Unfortunately, there are no longitudinal studies on what constitutes releasability and as "Bilbo" in the South Australian story indicates, signs in him that he was ready for release were he to live in N.S.W. are unimportant as hand reared wombats cannot be released in South Australia. ( One theory is that wombats which bite at their carers are more ready for release than those not displaying this behaviour). Overseas rehabilitation projects, in particular with apes, have been more able to document differences in individual animal behaviour and the necessary and individual rehabilitation methods required. Orangatang in Indonesia kept illegally as pets are being rehabilitated and released into semi enclosed rain forest as a means of maintaining numbers in the wild and discouraging poachers from taking young to sell as pets. Animals in these programs are treated as individuals and the individual skills they need to live independently are taught over time ensuring each animal, when released, has the optimal chance of living a good quality life.

The rehabilitated orangatangs are not allowed to be released into the limited wild population for fear of them spreading disease to free living orangatangs but they have a much better quality of life than being locked up in small cages in people's backyards in their semi free environment.

We need in Australia to begin looking into options for wombats, particularly in those areas where there are no suitable release sites- eg; where mange is rampant and any released animal is likely to be affected or where shooting and trapping continue.

Zoos and display sanctuaries have specific requirements placed upon them in respect to adequate enclosure construction and size , yet these bear no relationship to what would be considered by those who rear for release the necessary requirements of a healthy free living animal. ( Some zoos operate totally with artificial lighting

as an example, meaning the animal never experiences the sun). The D.P.I. Licenses zoos and display facilities while each state has separate rules and regulations for the keeping of native animals.

These rules, currently; are not based on any documented or reviewed science and are generally political in nature. It is therefore surprising to hear of groups accepting the "unreleasability" of wombats and encouraging euthanasia of ones so deemed. It is more a case that in Australia our research and information about wombats is paltry and we need to be encouraging and supportive of any further research and aware and receptive to those few individuals who have had the opportunity to work with wombats.

There are so few people who have spent any significant time studying wombats in any way to dismiss any observations from any of them is counterproductive. Until such times as adequate, open to review, research occurs then no one has the "only way". It may well be that we need in Australia to develop a range of options for wombats, including semi protected release sites where animals have a good quality of life but are restricted to large areas of land rather than fully released. It may be that divergent groups (eg; specific hair colours) should be fenced into protected areas and protected from mange which may wipe out such a group.

Numerous options for caring for wombats need to be explored .The wildlife rehabilitators and their observations of releasing wombats and those of others in other States of keeping such animals, need to be used to work on improving the health and safety of free living wombats and to inform research that may lead to the creation of sanctuaries, protected areas and a range of options to ensure a healthy and genetically divergent wild population.

It is pleasing to find many groups letting us know of training and information sessions they are holding about wombats. Copy needs to get to us as soon as possible as the Bulletin is generally readied mid month and sent out

at the end of the month or the first week of the following month. Our apologies to those groups we weren't able to advertise. We understand a terrific workshop was held on the Central Coast of N.S.W. run by Shirley Lack and Linda Dennis, following a similar one held earlier at Berridale. A local reported from the Echo, covered this event.

#### *Wombat Workshop in Berridale*

*On Sunday the 17th of February at the Berridale Community Hall, a wombat workshop was held by Laoko and the Wombat Protection Society of Australia to discuss techniques and better ways of looking after orphaned and sick animals. Guest presenters took the group of over twenty participants, including local carers Jackie MacPherson and Alex Javorsek, through the A-Z of caring for wombats*

*During this wombat education day, presenters Shirley Lack and Linda Dennis explained the techniques of looking after the animals, from when they are rescued, feeding techniques and diet, right up to when the animals are finally released. Amanda Cox gave a presentation on mange and wombat behaviour.*

*Alex said "It's an opportunity to not only update people's knowledge but also network and look at the different things people are doing whilst building and consolidating our knowledge. We also need to deal with some of the misconceptions about wombats, like the destruction of fences; there are different ways of dealing with those issues like putting in wombat gates".*

*One of the focuses of the day was Sarcoptic Mange which affects many wombats causing blindness, hair loss and eventually death, and can be transmitted by foxes and wild dogs as well as from wombat to wombat. Fortunately, it is quite easy to treat in the early stages with chemicals such as Cydectin (a pour-on treatment used mainly for cattle and red deer) but as the disease becomes more advanced, the animal may have to be euthanised.*

*I talked to Amanda Cox from the Wombat Protection Society of Australia. She said: "It's quite likely that a wombat in any area is likely to come in to contact with*

*another wombat with mange and they have absolutely no immunity to the mites”.*

Another workshop is to be held by NARG on May 17<sup>th</sup> in N.S.W. This workshop focuses on release and care of older wombats and all members are invited to attend and to give input to this workshop. Those of you unable to attend but wishing to have your information or experiences included, please contact the Society or send the information. Our Public Officer is attending this workshop and will ensure your information is presented.

## **NARG WORKSHOP 17 MAY 2008 – PREPARING & RELEASING WOMBATS**

### **Introduction**

There are quite a few opinions as to how hand reared wombats should be prepared and then released. Should animals be raised and released one or two at a time; soft versus hard release; what weight is best; what about other factors; how should we ‘train’ wombats; where should they be released; post release support; dealing with returnees; alternate release options; are we successful? Can we do better?

### **Aim**

The aim of the workshop is to review the known methods for preparing and releasing wombats with a view to improving individual carer's abilities and knowledge to successfully release their wombats. It is to exchange ideas.

### **Participants**

The workshop is aimed at wombat carers who prepare animals for release and/or release animals on their properties or elsewhere. But it is of interest to all wombat carers, as ‘training’ starts at an early age.

The workshop is open to members and friends of NARG, neighbouring wildlife groups and the Australian Wombat Protection Society.

### **The Workshop**

- 0915 Register. Tea Coffee on arrival
- 1000 - 1005 **Introduction** - administrative detail
- 1005 - 1035 **Wombat Overview** - (Amanda Cox)
- 1035 – 1120 **Wild Wombat Behaviour** (Jackie French)
- 1120 - 1205 **Preparation for Release** - (Shirley Lack)

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P.O. Box 6045 N.S.W. 2550 [info@wombatprotection.org.au](mailto:info@wombatprotection.org.au)

- 1205 - 1250 Lunch – Sandwiches & Cake provided. Tea & coffee
- 1250 - 1335 **Weight & Health at Release** (Howard Ralph)
- 1335 - 1420 **Release Methods Overview** – (Lesley Waterhouse)
- 1420 - 1435 Break
- 1435 - 1520 **Alternate Release Ideas and Options** – (Bill Waterhouse)
- 1520 - 1600 **General discussion & Finish**

(Speakers will lead the session and allow time for discussion and questions)

**Where:** Braidwood Central School

**When:** Saturday 17 May 2008

**Cost:** Gold coin donation to cover lunch, tea/coffee

**Contact:** If you plan to come along, please contact Lesley Machin 02 6238 3717; [machin4@bigpond.com.au](mailto:machin4@bigpond.com.au). It is intended to produce some notes on the workshop, but be prepared to take your own notes as well.

## Your Letters

Dear Katy/Amanda,

I've only just opened this email. I suspect I may be too late to vote but wanted to let you Landcare Illawarra have conducted a trapping/shooting program to get rid of foxes (goats & deer as well) over 6000 hec around Gerringong on the south coast just south of Kiama.

During 02 56 foxes were culled, and during the real program in 05/06 319 foxes were got rid of. On two nights follow up this year 12 foxes were shot. We are trying to make Foxground (named after the Flying Foxes) , fox free. One of our landcare members is passionate about WOMBATS . We all love them.

Best of luck with your mission.

Barbara Mathie

A.G.M.

The next Bulletin will give a full presentation from the A.G.M. Held March 1<sup>st</sup> 2008. All 10 propositions put to members were passed.

## JOEYS PAGES



This month we have masks for you to make. These ones were made from coloured felt and glued together, but you could also practise



your sewing.



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P.O. Box 6045 N.S.W. 2550 [info@wombatprotection.org.au](mailto:info@wombatprotection.org.au)

Wombat Mask Pattern.  
Sent as pdf file to email recipients.



Wombat Protection Society of Australia

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Quaama

N.S.W.

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