

We all love wildlife, but care is more complex than concern, it's hard work and can be expensive

Policy

The Animal Justice Party (AJP) believes that if wildlife is killed, injured, sick, orphaned or displaced as a result of direct or indirect human activities, we have a duty to rectify the harm caused, by caring for the wildlife and taking necessary measures to prevent suffering and further harm. If humans are not responsible, it is reasonable to expect that the animals be provided assistance, wherever possible, in the spirit of kinship and compassion.

The AJP recognises that wildlife rescue, rehabilitation and release conducted according to best practice, is crucial to animal welfare and wildlife conservation. Therefore, it must be adequately regulated, funded, and supported like any other public service.

Key Objectives

1. Take proactive measures to mitigate human impacts on wildlife (See Wildlife Protection policy) and to therefore reduce the number of animals that need rescuing.
2. Recognise the importance of wildlife and wildlife care in our environment and society, and support wildlife carers by providing funding, resources and training.
3. Introduce a legal duty of care to assist native animals injured, orphaned or displaced, whether by one's own actions or not, and whether found in private or public areas. At the minimum, this duty would require the finder to contact a wildlife carer/organisation who can give advice or assist with taking the animal to a vet or qualified carer.
4. Review the policies for licensing, and the operational practices of wildlife care groups and individuals. This might include inspections of facilities and a review of training required to care for wildlife.
5. Centrally coordinate and oversee the activities of wildlife carers in all jurisdictions through state-based Wildlife Rescue Committees. During natural disasters, such committees would coordinate urgent intervention of trained carers and collaboration with emergency services.

6. Establish a national wildlife care database to help identify wildlife hotspots and species at risk; assess outcomes for animals rescued; best practice for rescue, treatment, rehabilitation and release; and identification of suitable wildlife release areas.
7. Consult with wildlife carers/organisations regarding activities that may have a detrimental impact on wildlife, such as urban development, logging, mining and land clearing.
8. Support the creation and operation of mobile wildlife hospitals for emergency situations.

Background

Each year in Australia, millions of native terrestrial and marine animals are killed, injured, orphaned or displaced through natural causes or human-related impacts (see Wildlife Protection policy).

Some of these animals are rescued and taken into care but many more are not, because they are not seen, not reported, already dead, or because there is no one available to help. There is no reliable dataset about the number of native animals that are rescued nationwide, although it has been *estimated*¹ conservatively at hundreds of thousands, with 50,000 *joey*s² alone coming into care each year.

There are also many animals, mostly nestling and fledgling birds, that are displaced by well-intentioned people thinking the animals are in need of rescue when they are not. More can be done to direct this energy to animals actually needing care.

Wildlife care: rescue, rehabilitation, release

Wildlife care involves rescuing sick, injured, orphaned or displaced animals, rehabilitation if needed, and release if possible. The twin goals of wildlife rescue are to reduce the animals' pain and suffering with treatment (or euthanasia if required for their welfare) and, where possible, to rehabilitate and release healthy animals back into their natural environment. It has been *estimated*³ that, of all the animals rescued, half die

¹<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10871200009359180?journalCode=uhdw20>

²<https://www.publish.csiro.au/WR/WR17099>

³<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10871200009359180?journalCode=uhdw20>



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or are euthanised, with this outcome even higher for some species such as koalas.

Wildlife caring is regulated under state and territory legislation, with requirements for carers' licensing varying between jurisdictions. Most jurisdictions have codes of practice for the welfare of animals in care, but they may vary and often prioritise species conservation over animal welfare and rights. If there is no likelihood of successful rehabilitation and release, the animals' needs should be met in captivity for the duration of their life, but this can be difficult with wild animals, so euthanasia may be a necessary option. The AJP believes that wildlife should be euthanised immediately if they experience severe pain and there is no capacity to relieve the pain, or if treatment/surgery is unavailable and they will continue to be in pain or severely incapacitated. Wherever possible, whether euthanising an animal is appropriate and necessary is a decision that should be made by a suitably experienced wildlife carer or veterinarian.

Resources

Injured, sick, orphaned and displaced wildlife are rescued throughout Australia by individuals who act alone or as members of NGOs - from large, statewide rescue/care groups to small local groups and shelters. This leads to a wide disparity of available resources such as knowledge, experience, mentoring and training, equipment, access to cheap food, release sites, veterinary services and funding. In turn, this can result in inconsistent levels of care and outcomes. Logistical challenges are unavoidable without a system to coordinate the efforts of the various charities and community groups involved.

Wildlife care is *expensive*⁴ and most costs are borne by volunteer carers, with some assistance from public donations. Traditionally, governments have not funded wildlife care activities. In the past few years, some state governments have started realising the importance of wildlife rescue and care and have made *grants*⁵ available to wildlife groups. Wildlife rescue is a public service and wildlife carers are "a *strategic national asset*"⁶. As the number of animals needing rescue increases owing to urbanisation, logging, clearing for animal agriculture and the impacts of climate change, and as the

number of safe release sites decreases, further assistance will be required to fund and support wildlife care activities, from rescue to release. Governments should commit to appropriate funding, in line with community expectations and a growing acceptance of our responsibility to care for animals displaced or harmed by human activity.

Caring for wildlife is not only expensive, it is also time-consuming, stressful and can carry a significant emotional burden. Often animals do not survive, even with the most dutiful care. These highly stressful situations can lead to *poor mental health*⁷ outcomes for carers, which in turn can lead to conflicts and dysfunction in wildlife organisations, and ultimately poor outcomes for wildlife. There is a strong need to care for both the animals and the *carers*⁸ who look after them, with training and support.

Trying to prevent or mitigate human impacts to avoid the need for wildlife rescue is also crucial - indeed, it should be the first priority. Resources are required to make our environments wildlife-friendly as well as to conduct public education campaigns on basic principles of wildlife rescue and on the inherent value of wildlife coexisting in our shared landscape.

References

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- (3) Carlton, Frances (2018), 'Wildlife rescue and the potential impacts on mental health', AWRC Conference 2018, <https://www.awrc.org.au/sydney-2018.html>¹¹
- (4) Hoering, Ron et al (2018), "Towards a more effective model of local wildlife care with the volunteer wildlife rehabilitation sector: A survey of volunteers in New South Wales, Australia", AWRC Conference 2018, <https://www.awrc.org.au/sydney-2018.html>¹²

⁴<https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/9/12/1127/htm>

⁵<https://www.wildlife.vic.gov.au/grants/wildlife-rehabilitator-grants>

⁶<https://www.publish.csiro.au/WR/WR17099>

⁷<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-04-27/wildlife-carers-being-driven-to-suicide-and-struggling-to-cope/11049928>

⁸<https://www.publish.csiro.au/WR/WR17099>

⁹<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10871200009359180?journalCode=uhdw20>

¹⁰<https://www.publish.csiro.au/WR/WR17099>

¹¹<https://www.awrc.org.au/sydney-2018.html>

¹²<https://www.awrc.org.au/sydney-2018.html>



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