



The Wombat Protection Society of Australia

Summer 2023

Bulletin 80

OUR AIM

The WPSA aims to bring together people involved in the conservation and protection of wombats.

The Society considers mange, caused by the parasitic mite *Sarcoptes scabiei*, as the major health issue impacting wombat welfare. Since our inception, we have successfully brought attention and action to this issue by encouraging and supporting research and collaboration in the treatment and prevention of mange in both free living and in-care wombats.

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OUR BANK DETAILS: BSB 032691 (Westpac) Account 454429 Name: Wombat Protection Society

WELCOME TO OUR SUMMER BULLETIN



The festive season is nearly upon us and many will be thinking about sunshine and holidays, a time to relax and catch up with family and friends. The Society wish you a safe and happy Christmas and New Year and hope you will continue to support us in 2024 with our ongoing program.

This year has seen the completion of the Society's research into mange treatment and the safety of the more appropriate 100mL dose of Cydectin 'pour on' for cattle and red deer. Papers should be published and available early in the new year.

WPSA has continued to roll out the wombat swing gate program which was successfully trialled in Victoria and is now available to landowners Australia wide.

The Society now holds a Biodiversity Conservation Licence (BCL) to treat wombats with mange in NSW. Also, the Society has successfully secured a grant being administered by Foundation for National Parks which will assist landowners, Landcare groups, Conservation Groups and others not covered by a wildlife group to treat mange.



People often ask HOW CAN I HELP?

No one knows what the coming summer season has in store, it may be more rains and flooding, or extended dry periods with the threat of bushfires. Depending on what is ahead there are ways you can help.

If you live in areas that have been affected by bush fires and drought in the past and in fact if you live in most country areas you will be seeing the effects of extreme weather conditions. These are likely to continue for months ahead. In extended dry periods you can help our wildlife by setting up water containers in appropriate spots, out of the sun if possible. Water containers can be set a few inches into the ground to stabilize, and make sure you include a rock or stick, so small creatures can escape if needed.

Let WPSA know if you see a wombat in distress. Report wombats seen out during the day which look sick with mange (bare patches and crusty scabs) this can also be the sign of attack wounds. These wombats need help.

Drive carefully between dusk and dawn and if safe stop and check wildlife seen lying on roadside in case help is needed. Wildlife don't usually survive impact with cars but they could be left suffering with horrific injuries or a pouch young may be safe and alive in it's mother's pouch. Check our website www.wombatprotection.org.au/rescue-contacts for more information or email info@wombatprotection.org.au emails are regularly checked.



WHAT IS A WOMBAT CUSTODIAN?

Two years of raising an orphaned wombat joey can be rewarding and a lot of hard work. During this time you learn their behaviour and personalities so, when it is time for them to be released and fend for themselves you want the very best to help them adjust. This is why we need wombat custodians, people who offer their land as a release site and take on the commitment to oversee the transition from dependant in care wombats to confident free living wombats where they are able to survive on their own.

Lyn and her husband Paul from Wisdom Wombat Refuge know how important a safe release site is for hand raised wombats, and spend a lot of time seeking out such places. Wombat custodians need a property that is suitable as well as a level of commitment to oversee the wombats and report on their progress as they adapt to free living. Wombats ready for release are not handled but simply observed, reporting on progress back to the wildlife carer.

Lyn and Paul start by making sure the wombats by the time of release are at least 22kgs which is a good size if they encounter any wild wombat conflict. They also make sure they are independent, eating the right diet and not humanized.

Lyn relates "This morning beautiful Sunny, was released back into the wild after 20 months growing up in our care. She was calm, friendly and a little apprehensive, understandably, as leaving the burrow she has renovated and loved while in care, then moving to a new burrow is hard.

The beautiful property she is now living on has many perfect burrows and is also where we released Luna three weeks ago. Luna has settled in well to her new abode. Their new custodians are fantastic, they are caring and have worked hard behind the scenes to seek out perfect burrows, plus setting up cameras observing Lunas activities, and now Sunny's.

These two are very lucky wombats! Sunny was calm, immediately investigating her new burrow, then reversing out for a wander around the burrow and nearby grass, sniffing everything, and memorising her nearby domain. Water, fresh grass and pellets were near her burrow should she want them, but fresh native grasses are surrounding her new home along with a dam nearby, which she will soon be using.



Sunny was in and out of her new burrow before starting to renovate it and make it just right for her own requirements. The last photo is her popping out with a dirty face, before returning for a much needed sleep. Many thanks to Paul and Phillip for offering Luna and Sunny such a lovely safe home, and for taking over their transition from captivity to being wild again".



Want to learn about wombat food?

Long time wombat carer Danie decided to put together a list of wombat food plants as she was concerned hand raised wombats are often not familiar with or have the opportunity to try native grasses and plants. With the help of Barbara Triggs second edition of Wombats in the Australian Natural History Series she was able to put together a comprehensive table. Of course all of these foods will not necessarily be available to many wombats.

Danie wanted to encourage schools in wombat areas to grow a Wombat Food Garden - to help the kids and then their parents to identify the often undistinguished-looking plants which make up wombat food. This may help landowners to protect and hopefully restore patches of these native grasses and groundcovers and see them as important wombat (and other wildlife) habitat plants.

She also thought it would encourage wombat carers to identify and maybe grow these plants to help rehabilitate wombats and familiarise them with a range of their native food plants and encourage the growing of these plants in and around soft release enclosures.

Danie realises these may not be all the plants and grasses known to be part of the free ranging Bare-nosed wombat diet so, if you know of others WPSA is always keen to hear from you info@wombatprotection.org.au and maybe they can be added to the list.

Wombat Food Plants

Adapted from information in Barbara Triggs 2009 Wombats (2nd ed) Australian Natural History Series, CSIRO Publishing, Victoria (2011). Scientific names updated Jan 2016.

Bare-nosed Wombat Food

Native species	Common name	Comment
<i>Austrostipa</i> species (prev. <i>Stipa</i> species)	Speargrasses	Obs in SA & Vic - favoured
<i>Carex</i> species	Sedges	Obs in Vic – eaten on coast
<i>Carex appressa</i>	Tall Sedge	Obs in ACT/NSW
<i>Deyeuxia quadriset</i>	Reed Bent Grass	Obs in Vic
<i>Distichlis distichophylla</i>	Australian Salt Grass	Obs in SA
<i>Gahnia radula</i>	Thatch Saw Sedge	Long white bases are favoured
<i>Hypolaena fastigiata</i>	Tassel Rope-rush	Obs in SA
<i>Juncus</i> species	Rushes	Obs in Vic – eaten on coast
<i>Lepidosperma semiteres</i>	Wire Rapier-sedge	Obs in SA
<i>Lomandra</i> species	Mat-rushes	Obs in Vic. Important food item including on coast & in snow
<i>Lomandra longifolia</i>	Spiny-headed Mat-rush	Obs in ACT/NSW
<i>Microlaena stipoides</i>	Weeping Meadow Grass	Obs in Vic
<i>Poa</i> species	Tussock Grasses	Obs in ACT/NSW & Vic – favoured in forests
<i>Rytidosperma</i> species (prev. <i>Austroanthonia</i> and <i>Danthonia</i> species)	Wallaby-grasses	Observed in ACT/NSW- favoured in open country
<i>Scirpus</i> species	Club-rushes	Obs in Vic – eaten on coast
<i>Spinifex sericeus</i> (prev. <i>S. hirsutus</i>)	Beach Spinifex	Obs in Vic
<i>Tetraria capillaris</i>	Hair-sedge	Obs in SA
<i>Tetrarrhena juncea</i>	Wiry Rice Grass, Forest Wire Grass	Obs in Vic – new tips in spring
<i>Themeda australis</i>	Kangaroo Grass	Obs in ACT/NSW & Vic – favoured in open country

Introduced species	Common name	Comment
<i>Ammophila arenaria</i> *	Marram Grass	Obs in Vic
<i>Avena sativa</i> *	Wild Oats	Obs in ACT/NSW – a few wombats in pine plantations
<i>Lolium perenne</i> *	Perennial Rye-grass	Obs in SA
<i>Paspalum dilatatum</i> *	Paspalum	Obs in Vic – eaten on coast
<i>Sporobolus africanus</i> *	Parramatta Grass	Obs in Vic – eaten on coast

Other foods	Comment
Dry leaves and stalks	While eating grass
Strips of fibrous bark	More ripping than eating - possibly to keep teeth in trim
Low-growing and fallen twigs and branches	Gnawed – to keep teeth sharp and proper length
Burnt logs and sticks	Nibbled, and some charcoal crunched up and eaten
Some roots	Roots of various trees (eg. Stringybarks), mat-rush and Poa grasses are dug up and eaten. Small roots of grass and other plants uncovered and nibbled during droughts and times when food is scarce
Moss	When soft and green on logs and when green and moist in damp grass
Fungi	After bush fires when little else available

Southern hairy-nosed Wombat Food

Species name	Common name	Comment
<i>Cyperus rotundus</i> *	Nut Grass - introduced	Some will dig over large areas to uncover corms which form an important part of their diet, especially during droughts
<i>Maireana sedifolia</i>	Pearl Bluebush	In extreme droughts
<i>Sclerolaena</i> species	Bindyi	In extreme droughts
<i>Stipa</i> species	Speargrasses	Preferred
<i>Stipa nitida</i>		
<i>Stipa eremophila</i>		

Northern hairy-nosed Wombat Food

Species name	Common name	Comment
<i>Aristida</i> species	Three-awned Grasses	35% of diet (Andrew Woolnough study)
<i>Enneapogon</i> species	Bottle-washer Grasses	28%
<i>Cenchrus ciliaris</i> *	Buffel Grass - introduced	27%
<i>Fimbristylis dichotoma</i>	A small sedge	4%



Microlaena stipoides



Tetrarrhena juncea

MIRACLES DO HAPPEN

The will to survive and the care and expertise of wildlife veterinarian Dr. Howard Ralph and experienced wombat carer Marie and husband Ray from Jarake Wildlife Sanctuary have seen the miraculous recovery of little Silva.

Little Silva is now thriving after a very rough start when he was orphaned. Being thrown out of his mother's pouch when she was hit and killed by a car, he sustained a fractured femur and had a "stick" penetrating through his abdomen. With many complications and after surgeries performed by Dr Howard Ralph, he is a happy, healthy and often mischievous little joey. Silva is now 3 kgs and continues to put on weight and has been introduced to 'Tinka' a much larger joey that he adores. A larger joey can provide the friendship and security needed as long as personalities don't clash. Having a special buddy makes all the difference, as you can see they are inseparable.



Strzelecki Koala Festival

This year Wombat Protection Society was invited to be part of the Strzelecki Koala Festival on 10th December. The event was sponsored by "Wellington Shire and Middle of Everywhere" and was held in Sale, in country Victoria.

Although the theme was Koalas it was attended by other wildlife groups. Wombats after all are closely related to koalas but to date haven't been in the spotlight. It was a great opportunity to talk to many locals about 'Living with Wombats' and we were able to promote wombat gates and discuss how they can reduce fence damage. WPSA realise

the ongoing friction between landowners and wombats due to fence damage can be amended easily with the installation of wombat gates. The swing gates are designed and manufactured to a high quality, keeping in mind the need for easy installation and durability.

Some landowners were interested to know that wombats sick with mange can be treated and we were able to discuss how this can be done. It was encouraging that people attending were very concerned and supportive of wildlife including wombats.



MIA

Meet Mia, just 4 kgs in size. Her mum was hit by a car, and as a result her body rolled out of sight into a wet gully. This little out of pouch joey was either waiting at the burrow for mum to return to her, or was following her at the time of the incident. Two days later she was seen sitting on top of her mums decaying body trying to reach the pouch to feed,. This little girl was so fortunate that someone saw her descending into the gully and after observing her, stopped and picked her up. She was very cold, covered in ticks, dehydrated and thin.

One of our members Lyn who runs the busy Wisdom Wombat Refuge is caring for Mia until she is settled and a buddy can be found for her to cuddle up to and play with. She may then be transferred to a new carer. Mia has taken to her bottle feeding well and is settled into a warm pen, where she is eating grass daily. She needs a lot of reassuring cuddles as she misses her mum, and the close relationship she had with her. It is often hard to find buddies for joeys of this size, as they are regularly left in the burrow waiting for mum who doesn't return. Often they are frightened, have no knowledge of the outside world, are hungry and time and again the outcome can be death due to not being found or predators finding them first.

Sometimes a joey does arrive, or another carer has one of a similar size or already has two but will add a third to the others. Networking with other carers usually finds a suitable buddy. Lyn says "We have often had a group of five, all similar sizes that have grown up happily together as a group". Fingers crossed Mia finds a buddy soon.



Mia 4 kgs admission
7.7.23

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