

Wombat Protection Society News.

Article by Marie Wynan

Mange

Mange is one of the biggest threats to Australian wombats. It can wipe out isolated colonies in just a few years. It is geographically widespread and affects thousands of animals. As wombats are nocturnal and live underground and mainly living in pockets along the Eastern Seaboard of Australia few people see them.

In some areas the animal is viewed as a nuisance and this creates an unsympathetic audience to its plight in some sectors of the community. As the wombat is not yet listed as "endangered", no Federal or State authority has any intervention plan in place or proposed. The wombat is "owned by the Crown" and receives fewer rights and protection than that of any domestic pet or farm animal.

Leaving wombats with sarcoptic mange to die is unethical and likely to lead to more wombats dying from mange.

What is Mange?

Mange is an infestation of the mite *Sarcoptes scabiei* the same mite which causes scabies in humans and mange in dogs. In wombats, the female mite buries into the flesh and tunnels through it depositing eggs. The wombat reacts to this invasion process which leads to thick scabby plaques developing all over the animal's body. The scabs draw the body together, so often the impression given by a completely manged wombat is of a hunched-up creature walking on its toes.

The skin cracks and fissures become infected and flyblown and full of maggots. The animal reeks of rotting flesh, scabs grow over the eyes and eventually the animal dies a slow painful death. The death of a heavily infested wombat in its burrow, if shared with another wombat, is the most likely means by which an intense load of mites will be transferred to another wombat.

How can it be stopped?

Stopping mange must start by getting people to know enough and care enough to act. For some reason some of these animals come into dangerous situations they normally would avoid and are seen under houses and in people's backyards. Whether this is the animal seeking help or trying to find water or fresh grass remains untested. Currently, these are the few that are observed and have any chance of being treated.

Treating wombats with early stages of clinical signs will lead to complete resolution of mange and the wombat will be healthy and not more likely to become re infested, probably less so.