

# Wildlife News



Issue 144 January - February 2017

## Curry On!

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*Story and pictures by Joy and Doug R.*



Two baby Currawongs, Curry and Kerry, came to our home on the 11th October and 7th of November respectively. Currie, the first, fell from a tree, dogs were likely to get it and the nest was too high for rescuers to return him to the nest.

He was cleared by the vet as being well and I picked him up to watch for the weekend. He had a cage inside my home because of the weather but was then moved to a larger bird cage in my enclosed verandah when I was asked to keep him here longer.

He ate mince with Insectivore and calcium on demand and the demand was strong. From there his door was opened for him to learn to fly around the wider area and he talked to me and fed through the window to my office.

When Cheryl said he could be let outside when I'm around, he started flying short trips between trees. His first flight into a tree was just before a storm. He didn't come back all night and I raced out the next morning relieved to hear his squawk. It took him several mad swoops to eventually land on the roof and be lowered down for a feed.

*Continued ...*

## Curry On! *Continued ...*

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Now he just swoops down, lets us know he is there and gobbles the offering provided.

Kerrie, the second Currawong, came four weeks later. She had been found on a road near the Showgrounds. Kerrie was also kept inside for a few days after which her cage was moved outside.

The two got on so well that Kerrie was given time out of the cage when I was on the deck and jumped around after Currie. They got on well. Kerrie learned a lot from Currie to the point that she made her first flight earlier than Currie in order to be with him.

They now are both often seen in the trees. They also feed at our neighbour's place. Kerrie does not come close but is obviously doing well. Fast learner! (Must be a girl!) She has also been seen with two



other adult Currawongs. Is it love?

I hope they both drop in on me occasionally to say hello! It has been a great experience for all four of us!

*Joy and Doug*



## members

*NRWC would like to welcome these new members into the fold and hope that you enjoy your time with us and the animals.*

*Alana H,  
Rhonda M,  
Ilona R*

## Contents:

January - February 2017

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### News and Information

Welcome to New Members .....	2
Wildlife Quiz .....	9
Chairpersons Report .....	10
Ordinary Members' Role .....	10
Quiz Answers .....	12
Hotline Happenings .....	13

### Rescues and Care

Curry On! .....	1-2
Raptor Report .....	6-7
Pocket Python .....	8-9
New to Care .....	13

### Training

Wrestling Venomous Snakes ..	3-5
Non-venomous Snake Trng ..	11-12

### Opinion

Editorial .....	14
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### Administration

Pin-up Page .....	15
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# Wrestling with Venomous Snakes

*Story and pictures by Tom M.*

Gabriela and I have been removing snakes from people's homes for a few years now and have attended a number of non-venomous snake handling training days. While we have caught the occasional black snake, brown tree snake or baby brown snake, we have never felt fully confident dealing with venomous snakes. So when this venomous snake handling course came up, we finally stepped over the (mental) barrier and enrolled.

The training was held on Sunday, 6th of November 2016 at "Gecko's Wildlife", just under an hour's drive north of Brisbane, which involved a three hour drive from Ballina.

The day before the course had been very hot and the training day itself promised to be another hot one also. Kate had organised a bus for us to travel to "Geckos" as a group. Meeting point was Bunnings in Ballina. Julie had travelled up from New Italy and Lorraine had come from Casino, surely they were the ones having the longest day of all. Rolf and Sandra had already gone up a day early, so as to be rested for the day of action. On our way north we also picked up Sue and Cameron (Cam is with TVWC). In all, we were a cosy group of 8 snake wranglers. We eventually arrived at "Gecko's Wildlife", eager for the course to begin.

Martin Fingland who operates "Gecko's Wildlife" welcomed us at the gate. He would be our facilitator for the day. As we learnt more about Martin's background, we realised that he is quite an authority in dealing with our slithering legless friends. He is very passionate about what he does and I could sense his compassion towards all wildlife. The theoretical part of the training consisted of general information on venomous snakes in Australia, their toxicity – something like 20 of the world's most venomous 25 snakes all reside in Australia –, the do's and don'ts of catching snakes, examples where bad approaches to catching a snake had had devastating health implications, as well as statistical information on envenomation through snake bites. For example, did you know that around 85% of brown snake bites are "dry bites"? Recognising that for example a cow, horse or human are not suitable prey, the brown snake simply wants to make a point without wasting its venom. Speaking of venom, another interesting thing about snake venom is that not only does it serve to kill prey, but also acts as "digestive aid", in that it dissolves the flesh of the eaten prey. Of around 3,000 snake bites annually in Australia, only 300 require treatment and of these only 3-4 cases result in the death of the bitten person.



*Continued ...*

# Wrestling with Venomous Snakes

*Continued ...*

After a short lunch break we went down to a nearby reserve for the practical part of the training. Martin pointed out the importance of acting in teams of two when dealing with venomous snakes, whenever possible. He also emphasised the importance of proper protective clothing/footwear and the use of suitable snake handling/catching gear. Whilst the primary goal has to be not to be bitten by a snake in the first place, he also talked us through the use of first aid, such as how to apply pressure bandages. As snake envenomation travels through the body via the lymphatic system (usually the venom would not be injected into the bloodstream), applying a tight pressure bandage is considered the best course of action until medical assistance is available.

Catching venomous snakes today would be with bag and hook. Martin demonstrated how a venomous snake can be securely bagged by observing a few essential points when using the hook and bag. As most snake handlers would have experienced during non-venomous snake handling courses, a supposedly "securely bagged" snake would suddenly reappear out of the bag, before the bag could be securely tied. You would not want something like this to happen with a venomous snake.

Martin and his two assistants placed a few "kind" (generally non-venomous) snakes in bushes and on a children's swing for us to get "warmed up" with catching snakes. The two pythons as well as a green and a brown tree snake quite happily "hung in there", while Martin gave us some further instructions.

After all of us had had a go at bagging the "nice" snakes, Martin brought out the first venomous ones for us to catch and bag. But not before we all had donned our protective gear, including special snake gaiters. And so, three or four of us in various locations around the reserve were allocated snakes to catch. As "Gecko's Wildlife" is home to a large variety of venomous snakes, we had plenty of types to train with. There were Collett's, spotted and red bellied black, rough scaled, tiger, Stephen's banded, death adder, mulga (king brown) and eastern browns to train with. The coastal taipan at the end had a cruisy slither through the grass and remained unharassed by us; Martin decided to rest her, as she was about to shed her skin shortly. Whilst some snakes would willingly disappear into the presented bags, others, like some black and tiger snakes and especially the brown snakes, tried to avoid the bags like the plague. It was hilarious to watch us running across the paddock with bags flying in the breeze for yet another try to lure the elusive snakes into the bag. Sometimes it was only thanks to Martin and his RSPCA approved "gripper" tool that prevented some snakes from disappearing into the undergrowth.

*Continued ...*

*Julie with a mulga snake.*



*Gabriella with a collet's black snake.*



*Lorraine with a tiger snake.*



# Wrestling with Venomous Snakes *Continued ...*

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TRAINING

Martin also demonstrated the technique of "tubing" a snake. A transparent tube, slightly bigger than the thickness of the snake, would be held in front of the advancing snake. Eventually the snake would slither into the tube, making it easier to control and hold the snake. This technique is being used where for example the snake had to be safely assessed by a vet.

Even though most of our snake capturing takes place in home environments, usually furnished or rooms full of "stuff" like boxes, it was great to get face to face with these notorious elapids in the open reserve, where we could have multiple attempts at catching the snakes. Martin also offers "advanced" courses, where venomous snakes are removed from confined spaces, from under objects or vegetation. So hopefully there will be a possibility for all snake handlers in our group to attend this one also.

Overall, we all had a very enjoyable day out and learnt a lot. What resonated with me most is that whilst venomous snakes in Australia don't have to be feared, they certainly deserve the utmost respect when dealing with them.

**Tom**

*Spotted black snake.*



*Tiger snake.*



*Martin with a "tubed" brown snake.*

# Raptor Report

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Article and pictures by: Wendy L.

At about 8.00am on a Sunday morning in November, I got a call from Cheryl concerning a wedge-tail eagle on the ground at a farm near Tullera. The farm owner said the eagle had been able to fly short distances for a few days but was now unable to do so.

Wendy A and Sandy N were our closest members to the farm so they set out for the rescue. Despite never having caught an eagle before, they were very successful. I was delighted they managed so well.

Wendy and Sandy then drove to Lismore where I met them for the handover. I went straight to the weekend North Coast Emergency Vets in Ballina where fluids were given and x-rays done. Thankfully there were no broken bones and the blood clotting was okay; the eyes were fine and no sign of internal bleeding. As a precaution, a Vitamin K injection was given in case her condition was a result of poisoning. The eagle was thin, weak and full of lice. Later on I found five paralysis ticks around her head, mainly above the beak and around the eyes.

The next afternoon she was able to stand for short periods and took more interest in her surroundings. I checked her again for ticks and found three more.

From a distance I noticed her right wing was slightly drooped. She was reluctant to use it so I suspect it was bruised or very sore. I kept her in my 2m by 2m aviary for a few more days. Thankfully she ate very well right from the beginning. Initially I gave her a little liver, strips of beef, mice and day old chicks. After a couple of days it was rats and roosters as I was unable to get rabbits.

Over the next few days she became more alert, agile and able to perch on a branch a metre and a half high. I needed to catch her to check for any more ticks and also to spray the lice. I was amazed at how quickly she had regained strength as she struggled to get away whilst her wings , and then her body, were sprayed.

I moved her to a larger aviary where she continued to improve and get fitter and stronger by the day. I took away low perches and replaced them with two higher ones. Flying from one end of the aviary to the other was easy for her now and from ground level straight up to a perch. She was back to preening and loved drying out her wings, draping them over a branch, after the numerous thunderstorms at that time..



*Wedge-tailed eagle drying its enormous wings.*

A few weeks later it was time to release her. Wendy and Sandy came with John and me to release her on the farm. It was a gorgeous morning. I placed her on a branch of a fallen tree; she chose another one and then perched and looked around. One and a half hours later she was still there, and so were the four of us, watching from a distance.

Wendy and Sandy had to leave shortly afterwards. About twenty minutes later I got up to put a rat within sight (for food later if needed) and as I bent down she took off. She

*Continued ...*

# Raptor Report *Continued ...*

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flew into the wind and then up into one of the highest trees around and landed perfectly. She had decided earlier, I expect, where she was going to head for. She was quite a distance away and we tried zooming in on her but the photos, sadly, were not good. We watched her there for a while before leaving. I was so, so pleased this beautiful eagle was back where she belonged.

I released the young barn owl, mentioned in my last report, that was attacked by magpies in the grounds of Ballina High School. The wounds healed well and the feathers grew back.

In November Kay brought a barn owl to me that had been taken to Currumbin the previous month for treatment. This owl had a left wing injury from being caught on a barbed wire fence. The wing had healed well and the owl was ready for release. Aaron kindly released the owl for me one evening on the Nimbin Road near Coffee Camp, close to where it was found.

In late November I received an adult barn owl from Ballina. This one was on the ground in front of the Court House – another magpie attack. Fortunately it was rescued before any real damage was done but I kept it for a few days to make sure it was all right and to feed it up a bit before release.

Many thanks to everyone mentioned for all your help.

Have a safe and great 2017!

*Wendy*



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**18 Feb**  
Saturday

Bunnings fundraiser sausage sizzle.  
Volunteers needed! Contact:  
Pam M [Fundraising Officer]  
Details on the Pin-up Page



# Pocket Python

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Article and pictures by: Rowan W.



Fiona releasing Pocket python

Many years ago I witnessed a pedestrian walk out into a busy road and then being struck by a vehicle at a reasonably slow speed. Nevertheless his body was thrown a short distance and no doubt he received some severe bruising or worse. Although this was an unfortunate incident, the pedestrian stepped into the path of an ambulance and was swiftly placed into the back of the vehicle and taken to hospital. He could not have chosen a better vehicle to be struck by.

In a parallel universe at another time, Fiona W, one of our members, was driving along the road between The Pocket and Billinudgel, when she entered a dark area of road that was surrounded by thick forest. As her eyes adjusted to the light level she saw in front of her vehicle a large python lying across the road! Having the presence of mind not to brake heavily she had no option but to run over the snake as there was nowhere else to go. She stopped her vehicle, got out and was able to stop a truck that was following her and get the driver to avoid the snake. – He managed to stop in time but the now coiled reptile was between the front wheels of the truck. The driver was petrified of snakes and told Fiona to leave it alone. – He certainly wasn't getting out of his cabin while the snake remained there!

Snaky was considerably upset but had no visible injuries and Fiona was able to contain the animal using a stick

that she had found and a pillowcase in her car. Fiona volunteers at Currumbin Wildlife Hospital on Tuesdays and was on her way there at the time. The python went to Currumbin for assessment and an x-ray revealed a few fractured ribs and some soft tissue trauma but other than that the snake was fine. How could this be? The snake was run over by a small four-wheel drive by both axels!

The road between The Pocket and Billinudgel is much like any in the Northern Rivers (a goat track) and the corrugations and pot holes may have offered some protection by bouncing the wheels over the snake. As the vehicle was small with low-pressure tyres this helped to spread the weight over a larger area and as the snake was reasonably large and in good condition, its muscle tone may have protected its internal organs. Had Fiona been following the truck the outcome would have been very different!

Pocket-python, as he/she became known, was discharged from Currumbin in early June and I was to continue treatment with an anti-inflammatory medicine and look at releasing in late June. As winter weather had set in I decided that this python would be a winter guest. Over the next few weeks he/she ate well but had not passed

Continued ...

# Pocket Python *Continued ...*

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any food and preferred to stay still most of the time. A recheck by Currumbin revealed no abnormalities so I decided that some exercise might be needed and snakey was taken into the garden on sunny days and made to move around. Warm baths and some climbing in our bathroom did the trick and soon food was passing normally. I suspect that the snake still had some soreness inside as I witnessed defecation followed by some striking out as if the animal was in pain. This passed after a few more weeks and I was glad that I had kept the snake over winter as its demeanour changed significantly and it was now active and alert. – Time for release as soon as the warmer weather approached.

On the 4th of September I met Fiona on the road near where the incident occurred and we searched for a suitable release site. On the other side of a nearby creek we found a very good area and Fiona released Pocket-python into a nearby tree and his/her rehabilitation was complete. It is never good for an animal to be run over but for this python he/she couldn't have chosen a better vehicle.

*Rowan*



## Wildlife Quiz

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*By: Paul C.*

1. What is the difference between a kangaroo and a wallaby?
2. What is the difference between a pigeon and a dove?
3. There are several Australian animals whose names end in “roo”. Can you name them?
4. What is the fastest Australian flying bird?
5. What is the tallest Australian flying bird?
6. There is a road sign that also means something about birds – what is it?
7. In terms of feral animals what is an ABC?
8. What kind of roofing do Wildlife Carers have on their houses?
9. What Australian mammal has been most recently discovered?
10. What bird features in the new (issued September 2016) Australian \$5 note.



*(Answers on page 12)*

# Chairperson's Report

By: Kay J.



By now you all will have entered a brand New Year. Best wishes to you all for 2017. You will note from the Pin-up Page in this edition that there are some new/additional names on the NRWC Committee. Thank you to those past members, for your contributions and welcome to our newcomers. Meetings are held every two (2) months, and are open to all members to attend.

Numerous issues are covered at your NRWC Committee meetings , so to give you a brief overview of aspects that are relevant to you all, here are the following:-

With thanks to Kate G, we were granted funds towards venomous snake training, from the Northern Rivers Community Foundation.

The Office of Environment and Heritage Survey completion date has been extended, and all NRWC members are invited to respond.

2017 NRWC Calendars are still available for sale for fundraising. With thanks to Sandy N and Wendy A for their preparation and organising of the calendars.

Given that the past few months have been particularly demanding with rescues and caring/rehabilitation, just a reminder of your NRWC Coordinator roles. Coordinators oversee the day to day activities of carers. You must contact your coordinator after you have rescued an animal and your coordinator will decide the next course of action. They will direct you to the closest vet with the best expertise. They will also identify whether you are ok to leave the animal there.

And finally, a huge acknowledgment to our many very active rescuers/carers/hotliners/cocoordinators. As NRWC members, our common philosophy is the welfare of our wildlife. Being supported, being valued and being treated with respect, are paramount aspects in how we treat the animals in our care. We all need to remember that all of we humans in this wildlife welfare area are also entitled to that same degree of support, respect, value and care for one another. Thank-you for all that you do.

*Kay*

## Ordinary Members' Role

By: Joe A

As an "Ordinary Member" of the committee my role and that of the other Ordinary Members is to represent the general membership and vote and act on their behalf. We have four such members at the moment and I welcome the three that joined at the last Annual General Meeting; Cecilia M, Valerie MQ and Cath W-L.

If you have ideas, concerns, suggestions, complaints, bouquets or anything that you would like the committee to address please let me or one of the above know. We welcome your input. Our contacts are on the Pin-up Page at the back of the Newsletter.

*Joe*

*"I don't work at being ordinary" - Sir Paul McCartney MBE*

# Non-Venomous Snake Training

Article by: Rowan W  
Pictures: Rowan W and Solé H.

With the warmer weather starting it was time again for some reptile training. A Snake Handling and Identification course was held on Saturday 5th of November and Basic First-Aid for Reptiles was on Saturday 26th of November at Crabbes Creek Hall, both run by the ever talented Sue J from Tweed Valley Wildlife Carers.

We had possibly the largest attendance I had witnessed for the H&I course and it was good to see a great turnout from NRWC with more reptile handlers joining our list. The morning was spent identifying snakes that we encounter in the Northern Rivers and identifying some that come from further afield.

As usual a great cruelty-free morning tea was available and by then the weather had indeed warmed and was well on the way to an expected 37°!

At the lunchtime break we were introduced to some of the snakes that we would be handling later that afternoon. Celia was kind enough to bring some of her own snakes and everyone fell in love with the green-tree python and his or her striking colour! I was fortunate to handle the snake and it squeezed onto my arm to gain some warmth. – This snake really likes the tropical heat!

The afternoon was taken up with splitting into two groups and capturing some very warm and considerably active snakes! It was good to see the apprehensive participants get over their early nerves and beam with pride at landing their first “catch”.

For me the second highlight of the day was to handle a keelback snake (*Tropidonophis mairii*) that had

Continued ...



Sue J with her pet python.



Green-tree python.



Spotted python

# Non-Venomous Snake Training

Continued ...

finished rehabilitation and was soon to be released. He/she was a very gentle snake with differing scale textures and beautiful colouring. (The keelback is an elusive snake found near waterways and is easily confused with the venomous Rough-scaled snake. Their claim-to-fame is that they are rumoured to eat cane toads with no ill effects but in reality only smaller toads and their tadpoles are generally targeted. They are common in moist localities within wet and dry forest environments and persists along riparian margins and associated drainage lines well into farmland and sometimes suburban localities. Like some lizards they can drop their tail if threatened.)

I believe most had a good day and learned a lot about our reptilian friends. It was good to see people nominate for both courses so we may soon have some more reptile carers as well. Strangely this summer has been very quiet for reptile calls so our newly trained folk may not have had much of a chance to exercise their skills.

*Rowan*



*Keelback*

## Quiz Answers



1. Both belong to the family Macropodidae (macropods). Kangaroo is a general term for large grazing macropods. Wallaby is the term used for small to mid-sized macropods, most of which rely on the protective shelter of habitats with dense undergrowth or rugged terrain.
2. Pigeons and doves belong to the same family, Columbidae. The names pigeon and dove are often used interchangeably. Although "dove" usually refers to the smaller, long-tailed members of the family. An example of name interchangeability is the Australian Feral Pigeon which is known in its native habitat as the Rock Dove. (From: <https://global.britannica.com/animal/dove-bird>)
3. I could think of: kangaroo, tree-kangaroo, rat-kangaroo, wallaroo and potoroo. Well-done if you had more!
4. The Peregrine Falcon will pursue flying birds, being able to fly at speeds of up to 300 km/h.
5. The Sarus Crane
6. Crest
7. An Alien Big Cat. These are reportedly large felines, such as jaguars, cougars, and leopards, which allegedly appear in regions outside their natural range.
8. Rep-Tiles
9. Formally recognised in 2015 - the Tasman Peninsula Dusky Antechinus found near Port Arthur in Tasmania. (*Antechinus vandykei*)
10. The Eastern Spinebill.



# Happenings

*By: Jenny S.*

Our hotline has been running hot with the busy season and the unpredictable weather conditions. Lots of baby birds have come in and quite a few injured adult birds. Snake calls have been scarce which is good. However due to dry weather, one of our bat colonies collapsed when the adult bats abandoned their young and left them to starve. Our bat carers came to the rescue of several baby bats and took them into care.

Some recent interesting calls included a seal swimming near the breakwater at South Ballina which we reported to The Australian Marine Mammal Centre ([marinemammals.gov.au](http://marinemammals.gov.au)) also a MoP asked for assistance with a tortoise found dead on the road. It had an egg with it and the caller was asking us to care for it. Another lady rang about some brush turkey eggs found after they did some gardening and exposed the nest. She was not keen on keeping the eggs because of the destruction of the garden caused by the birds. In both cases we were only able to give advice.

We had a report of an albino brushtail possum recently. Seems that it was sighted at Modanville late one night eating the scraps put out for the man's chooks!

As you may all realise it is important for the hotline to be covered 24/7 every day and just lately this has become very difficult for me as some of our regular people have stopped for various reasons. This means that I have had to cover many shifts myself. If any of you could help out by doing a bit of hotline I can organise the training which doesn't take too long and this would make a big difference. You don't have to have a computer as some of our roster people phone through their calls. Please contact me on 6688 6292 or email me at [nrwchotline@gmail.com](mailto:nrwchotline@gmail.com) if you can help. It would also help if you could let the hotline know if you will be away over the holiday break.

Thanks to all our wonderful hotline helpers for your support last year.

*Jenny*

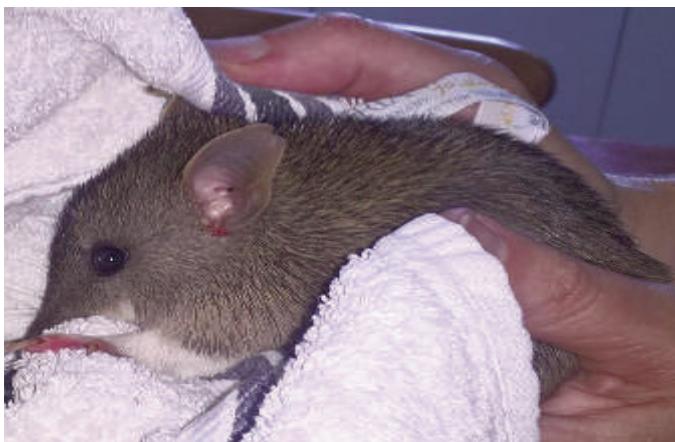
## New to Care



*Article by: Jenny S.*

*Pictures: Jenny S and Janet G.*

These two tiny Nightjar chicks (Right) were found huddled on a road after a wild storm just a week ago. Nightjars almost never come into care, although they are quite common in our area they are very rarely seen. In the Northern Rivers we have the Owlet-Nightjar and the White-Throated Nightjar. Left picture is a bandicoot which was found at Modanville and taken to Keen St Vet. He was Ok to release so he was taken back home.



Welcome to 2017 and best wishes for a great year for wildlife too! There have been so many animal-related things to comment on recently it is hard to know where to start.

### Nimbin.

I was sickened, as so many other Northern Rivers residents were, to read in the Northern Star about a horrific attack on animals at the Djanbung Gardens permaculture college in Nimbin. Chickens were brutalised and killed, and a pig was terribly injured. The local community and indeed the police were disturbed by this occurrence as we all should be. The comments on the on-line news site rapidly filled with speculation of drug use, mental illness and the comparison between the massacre and the slaughter of animals for food. Fortunately PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) is offering a reward of up to \$5000 and a member of the public has offered an additional \$1000. Crimestoppers 1800 333 000. *[As this newsletter goes to press the Lismore police have two suspects in custody. -Ed]*

### Bats.

Also in the Northern Star I learned that flying foxes were dying all across the east of NSW and south-east of QLD, but the reason behind the deaths is unclear. A food shortage in some areas to the south is believed to be a contributor while here a blood parasite is suspected. Grey-headed flying foxes, which are already on the brink of extinction, are most affected. As Jenny has mentioned in "Hotline Happenings" a mass abandonment of babies has added to the workload of our bat carers.

### Reptiles.

It has indeed been quiet compared to last year on the reptile front. (Sorry to the people that have recently trained!) I have had very few calls and most have been just for advice. All of the callers I have assisted are happy with their reptilian guests and I have been amazed at the number of calls that just want more information on how to best look after their friends! Listening to ABC Hobart one Saturday morning via the internet, I was astounded at the number of positive callers to the woman from Reptile Rescue about snakes. Bearing in mind that all snakes in Tassie are venomous, this was quite heartening.

### Penguin.

Several editions ago I mentioned the story that had aired on ABC radio about a family that had encountered hardship when the mother received a spinal cord injury after a fall and how an orphaned magpie called Penguin brought a ray of hope to their lives. I finally bought the book (*Penguin Bloom*) and revelled in this bird's story. It is a story of hope and an amazing insight into animal behaviour. Buy or borrow it if you can. The good news recently is that the story will be made into a film. I cannot wait for that! ([www.penguinthemagpie.com](http://www.penguinthemagpie.com))

### Newsletter.

The newsletter is **your** newsletter and is only as good as the material I receive. There is a saying about computers that if you put reptiles in you get reptiles out. – Well it's something like that! I try to keep a balance of stories and I am aware that reptiles have taken up a lot of space in recent editions. I hope that other carers can send in their stories and help restore the balance. That said I would like to thank all of our contributors especially Wendy L who is always on time with a great raptor report, Joy for her Currawong story and special mention to Paul C who did a sterling effort on the Wildlife Quiz and his "dad" jokes, while travelling Australia on holidays.

