Robyn Gough

Robyn Gough, sadly passed away recently and will be sorely missed by many within the NRWC as she was a founding member and mentor to many. The cover picture is of her and the last flying-fox baby that she cared for.

In this special edition of “Wildlife News” dedicated to the memory of Robyn, you will find tributes and stories about this remarkable wildlife warrior.

On the 18th of February a memorial service was held and attended by family, friends and many from the NRWC.

members

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

Jenny P,
Tracey S.

Robyn Gough ............... 1-4
Tributes .................... 5
Wildlife Quiz .............. 14
Trapping Sick/Inj Birds . 15-16
Fundraiser at Bunnings ..... 16
Chairpersons Report ........ 18
Quiz Answers ............... 18
Hotline Happenings .......... 19
The Fauna Fetcher ........... 19

Finding a Possum House ....... 6
Casino Heat Event .......... 7-8
Atomic Betty ............... 9-11
Raptor Report ............... 12
Osprey Rescue ............... 13
Bat Report .................. 17

2017 training Programme ..... 14

Editorial ................... 20

Pin-up Page .................. 21
Robyn Gough

By: Wendy A.

On the 9th of February, NRWC lost a pioneer wildlife carer with the sad passing of Robyn Gough. Robyn began caring for flying-foxes in the late 1980s after rescuing one from power lines on her property at McLeans Ridges. Yes, Robyn rescued it - climbing up a tall teak tree with a pool pole and scoop in hand! Something that she since recommended getting the electricity company to do instead.

Robyn always spoke about that first year of her caring for baby flying-foxes, where she would call the Kuringai bat colony group for information and Helen George was her mentor. She would describe how the Kuringai group would set up clothes racks on tennis courts while the ladies played!

Robyn, John and their daughter Evelyn, were flying-fox carers at a stage where National Parks and Wildlife gave individual licenses. Robyn cared for one baby in the first year, two in the next and then six the following. Robyn then put up a notice on the Lismore library board that brought their dear friends Roz and Bruce in. They had weekly weigh-ins on their veranda with afternoon tea, and as you could imagine it was a lot of fun.

Robyn got permission from the Lismore Car Boot Market organisers to stand at the entrance and let three of her most gentle and appealing babies charm the general public. Of course Robyn did the charming too, and she would sign up two or three new carers each weekend. In 1992 when NPWS changed the wildlife licensing requirement to groups, that’s when Northern Rivers Wildlife Carers formed. It consisted of 25 bat carers.

Robyn, was a mentor to many flying-fox carers that are now located around Australia. Robyn was the bat co-ordinator for many years and was an active carer until her ill health of last year. Robyn was always there to answer any questions, and even if they were silly, she certainly didn’t make you think they were.

Robyn had no ego, she always had a good story to tell and always had advice. We took many flying-foxes to Robyn for assessment, even on Christmas day, it wasn’t a problem. In the later years, Robyn would assess the flying-fox outside, where she’d lay out towels on a bench, and expertly put the bat on its tummy for an assessment, before flipping it over for a thorough check over its body for injuries. Every bat had that look of surprise on its face of ‘what just happened?’.

In 1996 Lyssavirus was found, and it was Robyn who suspected something was wrong, with a black flying-fox found near Ballina.

Robyn and John were advocates for flying-foxes. They undertook countless studies to find the right netting to

Continued...
Robyn Gough  

continued ...

protect their stone fruit orchard from flying-foxes and birds (John will state that the birds were just as bad!). They started in 1989 working with the netting companies to design a net with small aperture and create a taught cover, so that the bats would just ‘bounce’ off and not become entangled. Robyn and John also promoted ‘bat safe’ on the jars of their stone fruit chutneys which they sold.

Robyn had gone through many heat events, and I am glad that she wasn’t here for the last one. Robyn was at Moore Park 7th January, 1994 when the colony went down. This was a time before Lyssavirus, and Robyn often reflected on how great the community was, with kids and town folk turning up with ladders, sprays, and water, climbing trees.

Robyn and her team rescued 130 babies that day, of which 113 survived. Robyn would tell the story with a smile, focussing on those they rescued, and not the horror she saw as the colony lost more than 5000 bats that day. Robyn and John’s house was also taken over by 200 baby bats and a lot of bat carers the first night of the heat event back in 2014. Robyn always wanted to help her beloved batties.

The knowledge that Robyn had about bats, both flying-foxes and microbats was immense, and if there was a something that she didn’t know on the spot, it wasn’t long before she called you back with advice.

Robyn was farewelled at Booyong Nature Reserve, by family and friends on the 18th February. It was very fitting for Robyn’s ashes to be scattered amongst the trees that once accommodated her beloved flying-foxes, where she had released many flying-foxes when the colony was there.

Robyn will be sorely missed in the flying-fox carer’s community. Robyn, you were an inspiration to many, and we and thousands of bats thank you for your time with us.

Wendy
Tributes to Robyn

Claudia Wahlgren (Robyn’s sister): Dear wildlife carers, how wonderful to read of your fond memories, your love and your respect for my beautiful big sister Robyn. I know that your friendship and dedication and her love for the flying foxes and all animals enriched her life. Thankyou for recognising what an amazing person she was. There is a big brilliant full moon shining over the snow here in southern Sweden tonight...spread your wings and fly Roby!

Carol Davey: Beautiful, caring, always welcoming, happy and loving Robyn. You will be sadly missed by all who’s hearts and minds you touched.

Lorraine Black: Thank you for your inspiration, information, love,and willingness to share your knowledge and wisdom on all things flying-fox . You will leave a huge hole in many hearts. My sympathy to John and all the family.

Marny Bonner: Shocked and deeply saddened. I first met Robyn on the Steering Committee of NRWC in 1992 and bathed in her beautiful light every time we met. Her humble gentle patient nature was a shining inspiration, and she saved countless lives with her dedication to flying foxes. I was honoured when she personally coaxed me into caring for my first FF baby... so honoured to have known her and shared some good times with her. Deepest condolences to John & family. RIP beautiful woman.

Dave Pinson: Some of you may know, but it is with very sad regret that I pass on news that a true legend of Australian bat care has passed away this morning. Robyn Gough from Northern Rivers Wildlife Carers was my mentor. When I started bat care (back in 1998) I was quickly pointed in Robyn’s direction, and 80 kilometre round trips were nothing to sit with her and learn. Her sheer knowledge, decency, unassuming nature, lack of ego, and generosity with both time and knowledge-sharing was second to none. This is why Robyn is in the dedication page of The Flying-fox Manual. For those that don’t know, Robyn and husband John were orchardists; growing stone fruit in the Northern Rivers region of NSW. Despite this they were bat carers, and John pioneered safe full-exclusion netting for the area - proving commercial orchards and large bats can co-exist. Robyn, I will forever be in your debt. Rest in peace and my thoughts are with your family.

NSW Wildlife Council - Vale Robyn Gough. Those who knew Robyn will be saddened to learn of her death last Thursday. Robyn was a long time and early advocate for flying-foxes and all wildlife, playing a pivotal role in education and learning and teaching the protocols for successful rehabilitation of our Flying Foresters.

Robyn was one of the original Flying-fox Information and Conservation Network pioneers back in the days when FFICN was made up of NSW licensed group flying-fox co-ordinators who would get together over a weekend, networking and developing protocols and systems for rehabilitation processes and statistical data collection and analysis of outcomes for flying-foxes in rehabilitation. Robyn worked tirelessly for flying-foxes, not only in her immediate Northern Rivers environs with Northern Rivers Wildlife Carers, but State-wide and into Queensland. Robyn will be missed by those who respected her work and were her friends.

Robyn’s Memorial. Picture: Sandy N.
Finding a possum a home isn’t always easy. This is my mountain brushtail possum, Leroy Brown. He came to live with us when a member of the public found him last October. Leroy was quite fierce, being, about 400gms, so got his name from the old song. He still needed milk and a small cage to play in. I have had a lot of Brushies who have been either black or charcoal but he was the most handsome one so far being a mottled brown with cream chest and lovely black tail.

At the time I also had another possum, Boris that I had raised from a baby at about 100gms. When he moved on to a release site with Soli at Goonengerry, Leroy took up residence in the large cage and had been happily living there until the time came to find a release site for him.

As usually happens to us before we go away, there are dramas in settling my animals into new homes. Previously, Cheryl had mentioned that there was a possum release cage at Terania Creek, near The Channon which was not far from us. One of the carers had it on a multiple occupancy property and was away travelling for a few years. We needed to retrieve this and move it to a new site. Firstly the group’s trailer needed some repairs, which my husband was able to complete. I then contacted the guy that was looking after our travelling member’s house but he informed me that he would be away for three weeks. Luckily I was able to contact our member, Chedwa, through his parents and he was returning for a few days and would assist us with the cage.

In preparation, we drove up to check on the situation. The windy driveway led up a steep hill which didn’t look great for towing a heavy trailer. After another phone call, we were reassured that there was plenty of room for manoeuvring and the drive up not so bad for a 4WD. So off we went for the second time with the trailer in tow. The plan was to leave it there and Chedwa would organise friends to get the cage onto the trailer and then down to the bottom of the hill at the gate. I can tell you, I was feeling a little anxious that this would all come off ok. The trip up the hill to the top was quite exciting but we managed to negotiate the terrain successfully and left feeling a bit relieved.

True to his word, another call came though to say it was ready for pickup. The third trip followed and finally we could get Leroy’s new home back to our house. Stage one complete. Next step more discussion with Cheryl about where to take it. Time was running out. Two suggestions were considered but both sites had not been checked. I spoke to Dylan at Meerschamvale who was willing to become the new ‘dad’ and thankfully, Janet, who agreed to check Dylan’s place for easy access. All seemed fine and so we set off for the new location. With the help of our friend and Dylan’s dad, we, were able to place the cage in a quiet shady spot which Leroy should love.

I haven’t heard from Dylan so I figure that everything is going well for my baby and he finds having a little furry friend a rewarding experience.

Jenny
Casino Heat Event

Article and pictures by: Wendy A.

The summer of 2016-2017 has delivered some devastating heat events at Casino, with temperatures in the 40s. Flying-fox camps suffer mass mortality when temperatures are above 40 degrees, their bodies absorb too much heat for them to remove, and although their amazing wings can keep them cool initially, high temperatures and low humidity will cause dehydration and organ failure.

Picking up bats during such an event you can feel the heat radiating from their little bodies, hotter than the ambient temperature of 45 degrees. - They were cooking.

Although having gone through the 2014 heat event and the recent ones, it doesn’t get any easier seeing the horror. Bats falling from the trees, some still alive, some able to be saved and some already dead; it is utterly heart breaking, unfortunately these are images that many of us will not forget.

The worst heat event came just days after we lost our dear friend and batty mentor Robyn, on the weekend of the 11th February, so we were already feeling low. That weekend, we were at Casino, monitoring the maternity camp for black flying-foxes, which was in huge fig trees in a park off Canterbury Street with no understorey. Although the flying-fox colony spread across various trees, including the fig trees in the accountants where we had monitored before, the Canterbury Street fig trees had more black flying-foxes and fewer little red flying-foxes then elsewhere. Little reds spook easily and will take to the wing, scaring others to do so too, and they also will clump in vast numbers causing branches to break and fall, as we experienced at other fig trees. A tad dangerous!

Black flying-foxes will be the first affected by heat and low humidity, followed by the grey headed flying-fox and the little reds are more hardier, being nomadic and used to these extremes. I spotted only one grey headed at our camp, although they were elsewhere in the Casino colony.

This year we were more prepared, with back pack sprays, plenty of fluids and a small pool to dunk the heated bats! The pool saved many lives. And thank goodness for Lorraine who monitored the Casino colony continuously when the Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) predicted temperatures to be 40 or more. Thankfully some days were false alarms, but unfortunately others weren’t.

Lorraine and I were the only bat carers available 11th February, and bats started dropping in the afternoon. We gave fluids, both orally and via intraperitoneal injections, but of the 8 I took home, 7 died. By morning more than 100 were dead throughout the camp. Things were already looking grim.

The 12th saw Casino’s hottest February on record, reaching 45.7 degrees officially. I think this is also the hottest day recorded; the last record was our last heat event 15 November, 2014 at 44.1 degrees. As the day heated up, the flying-foxes would move down the trees, into clumps where we continuously sprayed them with back packs sprays, offering some relief. Others, higher up

Continued ...
Casino Heat Event Continued ... 

that we couldn’t help that were frantically fanning themselves to try and cool themselves. We had organised for a fire truck to spray the bats, and our early pleas in the day unfortunately saw a communication breakdown between Council and NSW Fire and Rescue. Hours later, we were so relieved to see North Casino Rural Fire Service came to the bats’ rescue in mid afternoon, saving many lives.

Lorraine, who had set up care facilities at her house, was inundated with more than 40 bats of all ages. Including one newborn and premature at that, with placenta still attached! More and more came in we had to make the decision to hydrate what we could, put them back and hope they would be ok.

That night, Ted and I brought 30 juveniles back to Sandy and my house, with ages between 8 to 11 weeks. Sadly three died, but the rest are now all bright and well, and loving steamed apple, rock melon, grapes and water melon and a smoothie.

I thank everyone that answered the call for help, or called the hotline knowing that it was going to be extreme temperatures, humbling to see how many people care for our batties. Thank you to Lorraine Black for your tireless monitoring and caring for all those batties; Valerie and Kay for your work on Sunday, monitoring with Lorraine on other days, and Valerie taking babies into care; Sandy who monitored some days but had to stay at home that weekend and kept the group’s already 50 batty babies in crèche cool and hydrated; Khaos, who was there early then wagged work to be able to help; Mark and Linda - and Mark even had to do a koala rescue! Sue who was able to euthanase bats who were suffering; Sharon, Carol, Dani and Marcie who all just got in and helped; Susannah and Marley from Friends of the Koala - who brought cages and bought food and drinks; Ted who would go early to the camps each morning to search for survivors; Donna and Warren, wildlife carers from Mudgee who were just up here on holidays, took two babies home. And all our other wonderful batty carers that took home babies (Catriena is a champ taking home the premature one); Jo is also awesome taking 10 babies as well as having other wildlife in care and monitoring Moore Park and Cheryl and Sandy for getting additional carers for help and phone calls to Council and the fire brigade. Sandy’s mum Lyn and Cooper for bringing cold water for everyone and for those people from Casino who called in over the days we were monitoring to offer their help or use of their facilities. Everyone always had a smile, and a ‘can-do attitude’ it was so good to see so many batty people, thank you everyone!

We rescued more than 60 batties on Sunday, when the death toll would be in the order of more than 3000.

Heat events at Casino Summer 2016-2017
31 December:  42.5°  (5 rescued)
1 January:    40.8°  (5 rescued)
14 January:   39.3°  (2 rescued)
18 January:   41.3°  (6 rescued, about 40 dead)
11 February:  42.9°
12 February:  45.7°  (>60 rescued, >3000 dead)

Wendy

Bat helpers
In early October, on a Sunday, I received a hotline call about a snake in a car at Casino and no-one could be found to get it out. We have a couple of members at Casino so I thought that I would try to find someone locally. I called Lorraine as she is one of our founding members and has a lot of experience with reptiles. Unfortunately she was away at the time but suggested that I call Sue-Anne who also happens to be a vet nurse. As it was after noon, I called Sue-Anne who happened to be just finishing work for the day and she said she would attend to it. Job done, or so I thought.

Sue-Anne had attended and tried to extricate the snake which was in a Toyota Rav4 engine bay and had “some lacerations on the body and was very big snake”. So big in fact that two people would be needed to get it out and that he/she had gone from under the car to an almost impossible to extricate place behind a suspension strut and the brake system and under the plenum chamber. This is the area in front of the fire-wall and under the windscreen where the wiper motor is. Sue-Anne told me that it would be very difficult to remove from there and that as she had other work to go to later in the day she could assist no more.

I made some more calls but was unable to find anyone to assist. I pictured the predicament I now faced. The Member of the Public (MoP) that owned the vehicle was happy to leave the bonnet open so that he/she could make their own way out but this was not an option because the snake had entered their car at Empire Vale beach south of Ballina and would be out of their home range and because the injuries needed to be treated. There was no other choice but to dismantle the car and even then no guarantee that the snake would cooperate. It was then that I remembered from snake training at Crabbes Creek with Tweed Valley Wildlife Carers the Sue J had to get a python out of a car chassis through a small hole and had injected the snake with a muscle relaxant to make the job easier. But what did she use? I called her and found out that it was “Alfaxan” — an anaesthetic agent. All I needed to do was to get some. I called the then Chairperson, Jenny S and gained approval for an out-of-hours call a local vet, and to spend some of our hard-earned money. A local Doctor was on call and he met me at the clinic. He was happy to give me the medication as he was unable to travel to Casino but was unsure of the dosage for a snake. I called Sue J again and found out the dose per kg but I didn’t know the weight of the snake so I guessed 7kgs to be sure that I had enough. Alfaxan thankfully, is a drug that is tolerant of overdosing.

Continued …
**Atomic Betty**  *Continued ...*

I made my way to Casino and called the Hotline to update Valerie. She suggested that WIRES had a carer in Casino that usually does flying-foaxes that might be able to help. Valerie called Lib R and she met me at the premises. As usual it was very hot in Casino and the vehicle was parked in the open. We discussed the best course of action and with the consent of the MoP to dismantle their car we set about getting the snake out.

He/she was very firmly wedged in position and we could not grip anywhere on the body. Alfaxan to the rescue! I had to inject 1ml at a time in various positions but access made this almost impossible. I managed 1ml at the first site, wasted 1ml at the second when the snake moved and managed 3ml and 1.5ml at two other sites. Enough drug for a 5.5kg snake. While we waited the 20 minutes or so for that to take effect we assisted the owner with wrecking, er, I mean dismantling their car.

The plenum chamber grille, weather seals and the full wiper assembly were removed and the plenum chamber itself unbolted on the driver’s side but it refused to move. The seals around the chamber would need to be broken and the MoP surprisingly, was ok about it.

Snaky was starting to relax and Lib and I had the plenum chamber up on one side and were able to retrieve part of the body. More gentle coaxing over several minutes and the head was out. This was one big snake and the largest python I have ever seen! He/she had some deep cuts evident on the body and I was glad that we were able to provide some pain relief. Lib was happy to hold the enormous head and although the snake was a little “groggy” I would have been happier if it were a little more groggy! Eventually we were able to get the huge snake out and thanks to the willingness of a nearby neighbour, able to hold the animal. Inspection revealed about 6 deep lacerations that were open and an area about 30cm long by 5cm wide where the skin was dirty, oily and burned. This could have been from a rotating shaft or an exhaust burn.

After thanking Lib (Great cooperation between WIRES and NRWC!) and the MoP I placed the snake in a container and left the MoP to re-assemble their car while I took the snake home.

On an episode of “Bondi Vet”, Dr Chris was asked to help with a reticulated python that needed nine people to hold it. She was called “Atomic Betty” and so I decided that was a suitable name for the biggest python that I had ever seen. (Betty was outdone a few weeks later when Rolf showed me his 8kg python that he and Sandra rescued!)
Atomic Betty  Continued ...

Betty was weighed, (5.1kgs) wounds were cleaned and treated with Betadine and Solosite, with a thick layer over the burn, while the anaesthetic held and then she was placed in a warm dark enclosure with a large bowl of water. Betty drank all of the water that night, about 600ml and a further 400ml before I “bagged” her to go to Currumbin Wildlife Hospital. The Alfaxon had worn off and she was a little angry. She was treated at Currumbin and given subcutaneous fluids, pain relief, antibiotics and anti inflammatories and released to me four days later.

Betty needed wound care daily with Flamazine ointment on the burn and injections every second and third day. She was proving quite a handful and disliked everything we did. She was a powerful snake that needed two people to handle her and one to administer the injections and treatment. Currumbin allowed me to combine the injections and give one every three days which was some help but she still needed wound care daily. As it happened Rolf and Sandra were having problems handling their monster snake so we agreed that I would keep both and Rolf would come around on injection day and assist. This worked out well. Thanks Rolf!

At the end of October I noticed weeping discharge from under the burnt skin so Betty went off to Currumbin where necrotic tissue was removed under anaesthetic and a wound that she had pulled the stitches out was stapled. She came back with a large red patch of flesh visible that had to be treated with Flamazine – initially twice daily. Betty had been offered food but had refused it. She was proving to be a difficult customer on every level and although I had a lot of respect for her she did nothing to endear herself to us. This was probably because she had lived for 20 years or more without seeing a human and now all we do is wrestle her, prick her and rub her sore spot!

By mid November the burn was looking good and healing well and her disposition was a little more active. The staples and stitches were removed and she had began to eat. She had a partial and poor skin shed in the past but was looking at having another one soon.

Betty was kept in care and sloughed satisfactorily. By mid December she was ready for release but due to the number of holiday makers in the area I decided to hold her until New Year.

On the 4th of January we did the 49km journey to the end of the bitumen on Empire Vale Rd and carried Betty the last kilometre down the sand track to her home. She was eager to leave and probably extremely glad that her “torture” had ended. As we drove back to Lismore we were amazed that not only had this snake done this part of the bumpy journey clinging under a car being burned and cut, but had gone all of the way to Casino surviving for over an hour. No wonder she was a little angry!

Rowan
I have had more barn owls in care last year than any other species. Altogether there were five and all came in between September and December. Three of them were young ones and they, along with two adults, were all released.

The first bird into care in 2017 was yet another barn owl. I received a call from Alstonville vet nurse Janice. This one was found lying on the ground near the Meerschaum Vale Hall and was taken straight to Alstonville where vet Douglas checked it. An enormous tick was found (as large as the tip of the vet’s fingernail) and serum was immediately given. After a thorough check nothing else appeared to be wrong except the owl was in a bad way; it was lying motionless with closed eyes.

The next day it was no better and had not moved, in fact I thought it was dead. It wasn’t but seemed to be taking a long time to show any improvement. By the evening there was slight movement and by the next morning it had opened its eyes. From then on I felt it would be okay but still needed to crop tube-feed.

It was another two days before it was up and about and looking so much better. I cut its food up into bite sized pieces and that went down well so the next day it had a day old chick and some mice.

I moved the owl to a larger cage and it certainly made the most of it. Its appetite was very good and, thanks to my neighbours, the owl was fed on rats caught for it.

When the owl had been in care for ten days, it was ready for release. I took it back to the Meerschaum Vale Hall on a lovely summer’s evening and released it shortly after 8.00pm. It rapidly flew to a large tree not far away and disappeared in the foliage.

It was a beautiful, gentle owl and made all the more special by the black round spot in the centre of its beak. How that came to be is a mystery – it was raised and was definitely part of the beak. I have never had an owl, or any other bird, with a mark like that.

Thank you to everyone mentioned for your help with these two gorgeous birds.

Wendy
Osprey Rescue

Article and pictures by: Wendy L.

On New Year’s Eve early evening, Joseph received a call from the hotline. A raptor was on the ground in a car park in Byron Bay attracting a lot of attention. He successfully rescued the young, terrified bird and took it home for the night. The next morning Joe took the osprey to Vitality Vets in Bangalow. Vet Megan was fantastic and did a thorough check and x-rays. Nothing broken and nothing else amiss apart from being underweight.

Joe brought it to me later that afternoon. I needed to crop tube-feed the bird. It had no idea what to do with pieces of mullet. Three days later it was eating small pieces of mullet itself so I stopped the force feeding. Another few days and it discovered what a perch was for - young Ospreys always take a few days at least to work out how to get off the ground. As their young life to date has been spent in a nest five metres or plus above ground level, their confusion in finding themselves on the ground is more than bewildering, let alone terrifying.

The gorgeous bird progressed really well and was soon flying and perching on various widths and heights of perches. He was getting mullet out of the blue swimming pool in the aviary. After almost three weeks, John and I took him back to Byron Bay. His release, on a spectacular early morning, was one of the best ever. He soared and flew out towards the sea before making a distinct turn towards land and the ridge of trees. We watched until he completely disappeared and for some time afterwards.
2017 Training Programme

By: Kate G. (Training Officer)

Our first Basic Training of the year is set for Sunday 19 March, goes from 9.30am to 3:00pm and is held in Lismore. These sessions are a great chance for us to put ourselves out there and attract some new members. So, if you've got any friends, family members or colleagues who have expressed interest in volunteering to care for wildlife, be sure to direct them to this training.

Also, if you have taken out membership, but not yet done basic training, we would like to see you there, so you can learn some skills to enable you to get out and undertake some rescues.

Register by calling the hotline 6628 1866 on or email training@wildlifecarers.com

In May, when things start to cool down a bit, we’ll have two interesting sessions “Introduction to Echidnas” and “Raising Your First Possum”. The possum training is suitable for people who have already done “Introduction to Possums and Small Marsupials”, as it is more advanced and assumes some prior knowledge.

When August comes around there will be a second opportunity to do Basic Training and this will be followed by “Introduction to Birds”. The birds session is particularly useful, given the number of birds our group rescues and cares for each year. So I would definitely encourage anyone who hasn’t already done so, to do this training.

Then, as things start to heat up again, a session on flying foxes. Towards the end of the year Tweed Valley Wildlife Carers (TVWC) usually conduct two sessions, one on “Introduction to Reptiles” and then “Reptile First Aid” which is about treatment and care or reptiles. These sessions have been made available to our members and we expect that they will be again.

More information about all of these training opportunities will be provided closer to the date. Meanwhile, if you have any training enquires please direct them to me on training@wildlifecarers.com

Wildlife Quiz

By: Paul C.

1. Who is Migaloo?
2. What is a biodiversity hotspot?
3. Where is the only biodiversity hotspot in NSW?
4. How many ARL teams are named after native Australian animals?
5. How many AFL teams are named after native Australian animals?
6. What is Australia’s largest honeyeater?
7. On a bird, what is a wattle?
8. Why are some Acacias known as wattles?
9. On a bird what is a gorget?
10. When did the last known Tasmanian Tiger die and what is the current significance of this date?

(Answers on page 13)
Trapping Sick or Injured Birds

Article and pictures by: Rowan W

Some years ago now the NRWC bought a bird trap to catch a Magpie that was trapped in K-Mart in Lismore. The trap was a success and the committee decided to buy another for use on the coastal areas as there had been unsuccessful attempts to catch injured birds like scrub turkeys in that area.

These traps work well and many birds owe their lives to them. The problem is that they are a little fiddly to setup and the use of them generally falls to either Joe A or me as we have used them before. One trap is kept at Joe’s place and the other at mine or Nat’s. The Hotline will give you the addresses if needed. So that all members know how to operate them here is a short tutorial. The original manufacturer’s instructions are with each trap.

The bird trap is a mesh base of about 90cm square, a spring-loaded arm, a mesh net, two trip levers with differing sensitivities, a hook for holding the trap open, a pecking tray, a remote trigger pin and length of string and the manufacturer’s instructions. It is suitable for birds as small as a grey butcher-bird and as large as a scrub turkey. Pelicans and long-legged water birds or birds that can fit through a 2cm net (finches) cannot be caught with the trap.

To use the trap you have to decide the method of triggering and each has its merits and drawbacks. The manual trigger is best for use where there are many birds other than the target bird. The automatic trigger is for use when the only bird around is the target bird. This was used to catch the magpie in K-Mart.

1. Place the trap on a firm level surface out of direct sunlight. If the trap rocks, a bird alighting on it or a wind gust may trigger it.

2. Choose the trigger arm you wish to use. There are 2 arms. One has a smooth end and is harder to setup but will trigger at a light touch and is suitable for small birds. The other has a roughened area on the top end of the arm and will need a slightly stronger touch but is less likely to trigger erroneously. The unused one and the hook may be stowed by using the Velcro strap.

3. Open the trap against the force of the spring and ensure that the net is not caught on anything and is bundled towards the trigger arm’s side.

4. Place either the pecking tray (with food in it) or trigger pin in the holder and place the selected trigger arm over
Trapping Sick or Injured Birds

the opened net arm and beneath the tray pin or trigger pin. If using the manual trigger food is placed on a dish near the centre of the trap.

5. Align the two pins (It’s really hard at first!) and allow the net to come up and put tension on the trigger arm. Be sure to keep your face and body clear as the net can fly up with great force if the pins separate. The hook is designed to help you hold the net before locating the pins but I find that stowing the hook so that the net does not catch on it, can trigger the trap.

6. Test by throwing something onto the pecking tray or pulling the manual trigger. If all is well you should see the net fly up and over where the bird should be.

Note. Trapped birds will struggle but should come to no harm. They need to be promptly removed.

If the bird has soiled the trap and net please clean it with a mild bleach and detergent solution, rinse and dry in the sun. Pack the trap neatly in its box and ensure that all items are clean and included in the box.

These traps cost us $400 each so please look after them as your own. A pecking tray was lost some time ago resulting in a $25 replacement cost and the inability to catch a scrub turkey with a broken leg. The trap should always be ready for immediate use by the next carer.

Rowan

Fundraiser at Bunnings

Our first fundraiser of the year was a sausage sizzle at Bunnings in Lismore. The temperature reached 34.8° at the airport but inside the gazebo with two sides covered, opposite a reflective wall, on hot bitumen and with a large bbq operating it was much higher! Still we thought we were lucky it wasn’t the previous week! Pam M, our fundraising officer did her usual great job of organising everything, and was helped by her friend Chris, and volunteers, Doug, Rolf, Rolf’s brother Marcus who was here on holidays, Kay, Val, Marcie and me. In all we raised $1247.25 for the group after costs.

A great effort by all involved especially Pam!

Pictured: Chris, Val and Doug

Rowan
Bat Report

At the start of this year I think we were lulled into a false sense of security with low numbers of baby flying-foxes coming into care for the last two years in a row, only three baby bats last season.

All was going well till mid-November with loads of flowering trees meaning a plentiful food supply, better than I’ve seen for many years. Then suddenly it stopped! And there was a major food shortage up and down the east coast with starving females abandoning their young babies. Other areas were much worse affected than we were here with thousands of flying-foxes dying across the state. Following this we had several periods of extreme heat which bought even more bats into care.

This year we have in excess of 115 juvenile flying-foxes in care a mix of black and grey-headed (a nationally threatened species). Some of the babies that came into care were up to seventy grams under their weight for age and required extra care. All our baby bat carers were looking after multiple babies including three new carers, Cecilia, Janet and Jo who all did a brilliant job. And even in mid-February we still are getting young babies in from Casino and our new carers are having a second round of bats. It’s going to be a very long bat season this year.

On the 9th of February we lost our dear friend and mentor Robyn Gough. Robyn was one of our founding members and Bat Coordinator for many years.

I first met Robyn and my first flying-fox twenty two years ago when we found a bat that had been shot on our property in Lychee Drive at Rosebank by our orchardist neighbour. Shooting flying-foxes was common back then but with Robyn’s guidance we were able to put a stop to it very quickly and the Lychee crops were bulldozed soon after. Shortly after that Michael and I joined NRWC and I took on the Public Relations Officer position on the committee after some gentle persuasion from Robyn. Robyn not only cared for animals but for the carers as well, always making sure we had a drink or something to eat while we were working with the bats or doing feeding. We will miss her greatly but will never forget her.

Cheryl

Chairperson’s Report

By: Kay J.

It has been a demanding time for many of our rescuers and carers during the recent extremes in weather, and especially for our local wildlife. This was highlighted with the demise of many flying-foxes on Sunday 12th February at the Casino colony located in McAulliffe Park. (See the full report by Wendy A on pages 7 and 8).

Arising from this critical heat event, and on a more positive note, we will be liaising with Vets Beyond Borders and their special group AVERT (Australian Vet Emergency Response Team), Richmond Valley Council, NPWS, Area Health and other relevant bodies in order to focus on co-ordinating and enhancing protocols and procedures for future heat/bushfire events.

On another note, the NRWC Committee Meeting was last held on 18th January 2017. Among many issues discussed was the 2017 Training Calendar which you will see detailed on page 14. In addition to that training, we intend to conduct a Fluid Therapy course which will focus on different hydration processes. The date is yet to be determined and advised.

Those working on the Hotline have commented on the lack of active NRWC members we have in Ballina, so if you know of any interested folk in that area, please ask them to consider becoming an active member. In the meantime, we propose doing a recruitment drive for new members in Ballina.

Some members of the public have contacted us about the number of Indian Mynah birds in some areas, and how best to deal with them. Should you have similar enquiries, Councils in the Northern Rivers region have capture cages available and can assist with advice.

The next committee meeting will be held at 6.30pm on Monday 20th March 2017 and if you are interested, you are welcome to join us.

Quiz Answers

1. Migaloo is an all-white Humpback Whale first sighted passing Byron Bay on 28 June 1991.
2. “An area that supports natural ecosystems that are largely intact and where native species and communities associated with these ecosystems are well represented. They are also areas with a high diversity of locally endemic species” https://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/conservation/hotspots
3. The Border Ranges North and South
4. Three – Sharks, Sea Eagles, and Eels. Each of these animals occurs in the area of the respective club.
5. Five - Crows, Magpies, Hawks, Kangaroos and Eagles. I am discounting the Sydney Swans as it is a white swan. - It would be quite something if instead the club adopted the Black Swan.
6. The Tasmanian Yellow Wattlebird followed by the Red Wattlebird.
7. A coloured fleshy lobe hanging from the head or neck of the turkey and some other birds. https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/wattle
8. “Wattle is an old English word meaning interlaced rods and twigs. In the early years of the European settlement in Australia, shelters were constructed of flexible sticks woven together and plastered with mud, a technique known as wattle and daub, and the wood most commonly used came from a plant now called Callicoma serratifolia which became known as "Black wattle". Callicoma has Acacia-like flowers but is not closely related to Acacia. However, because of the similarity in flowers, the term wattle eventually became associated with all Australian Acacias.” http://anpsa.org.au/acacia1.htm
9. A patch of colour on the throat of a bird or other animal, especially a hummingbird. From Late Middle English (denoting a piece of armour protecting the throat). https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/gorget In Oz the Olive-backed Sunbird is described as having a gorget.
10. On 7 September 1936 in Hobart Zoo. The date is now National Threatened Species Day.
Happenings

By: Jenny S.

I am writing this report from a lovely resort in Thailand and thinking of you all back home in the heat wave conditions we heard about on the news. We read about the temps in Casino and Kyogle getting up to 44 degrees and of the bushfires at Lennox Head. No doubt the poor wildlife is suffering.

Over the past month or so there have been more calls coming in for rescues. Quite a few of these were for snake relocation and this is probably due to people leaving their windows open because of the heat. This has left our snake handlers, like Rowan and Rolf, busy, not to mention the rescuers in other areas as well. Other little critters have also been affected by the weather conditions and some have been lucky enough to be re-hydrated and released. Microbats seem to be affected badly and we have had MoP (Members of the Public) ringing in and asking for advice when they find them on the ground or floor. Our bat colonies are always a worry when the temperatures rise so our wonderful batty carers have been keeping a close look out for baby bats on the ground. I hope they are able to cope with the weather conditions.

A few weeks ago Cheryl had a call concerning a black swan at Casino which is a rare rescue. She was able to call Sue-Anne to deal with it and hopefully it will be back in the wild soon. Birds are still coming into care from collisions and with injuries but apart from figbirds there have been fewer calls for baby birds. I did have one delivered to me by a neighbour which turned out to be an Indian Mynah. These invasive feral birds are becoming obvious in our area as our neighbour reported that there were 30 or more in his trees. Time to get a trap!

Thanks to the hotliners for taking on more shifts while I am away and it is great to have Sharon back with us and Cecilia starting on the roster. We always need more help to share the load. Anyone who can spare some time to assist can contact me. My number is on the pinup page, or ring the hotline. Keep up the good work everyone!

The “Fauna Fetcher”

By: Rowan W

I had the pleasure of meeting Bridget Thompson who goes by the name of "The Fauna Fetcher" when I received an injured eastern brown snake from her. Bridget had been asked to relocate the snake by a member of the public and she found it trapped in mono-filament netting with some deep lacerations in its body that had become infected. She had taken the snake to Currumbin Wildlife Hospital for treatment but as her licence does not permit her to hold wildlife for longer than three days, NRWC was asked to continue its treatment.

When I collected the snake and its medicines, Bridget showed me her outdoor reptile enclosures and some of the animals that she has. The outdoor enclosures were beautifully constructed and are certainly the “gold-standard” when it comes to reptile accommodation. She was having electricity run to each pen to provide heating and UV light.

Bridget does documentaries and maintains a facebook page of her work. Importantly for us she is one of the few licenced reptile re-locators in the area. Her rates are affordable at $30 for relocations in the Ballina region increasing with distance from Ballina.

We should keep her in mind for relocations requested by members of the public. She makes herself available 24/7. Her number is 0488579163.
Robyn.

I was saddened to hear of Robyn’s passing and I am sure that she found peace in knowing that she had made a difference to all wildlife in this region, raised awareness of the beauty of the natural world that abounds for us on our doorstep and as an enabler for the caring souls that lay within us.

Climate change again!

The superlatives keep flowing in almost every news report about our ever changing climate and the temperature, rainfall, lack of rainfall or whatever records. Each report surpasses the previous and as we have seen in Wendy’s report on the Casino heat event, records were broken there too. News reports encourage us to keep cool, stay indoors or go to a public place with air-conditioning to prevent succumbing to sometimes-fatal heat stress. What can the animals do? Not only do flying-foxes die around 40° but reptiles stress and die too around these temperatures. Snakes and lizards are amongst the most resilient creatures, yet every snake that has come into my care recently has been terribly dehydrated. Baby loggerhead turtles have been cooking on Queensland beaches either in the area in which the eggs are laid or traversing 75° sand temperatures after hatching. Given that more than 100 hatchlings are needed to produce one adult turtle the prognosis for survival of the species is bleak. Also in Queensland the passage to the west of Bribie Island is suffering mass marine fatalities as the shallow passage this year has heated to temperatures beyond which its marine life can cope. Heat is even affecting Tasmania with the ABC reporting that kelp forests that were once strewn all along the east coast have now been completely wiped out with just a pocket south of Bruny Island. While our politicians play pass-the-parcel with a lump of coal in parliament and intend diverting funds from green projects to “clean coal” power stations, (think healthy cigarettes) the task of wildlife carers is ever escalating. We have a training day for new wildlife carers soon. Can you do your bit to swell our ranks? We will need all of the help we can get in the years to come.

Pangolins.

Pangolins are burrowing mammals that eat ants and termites and are the only mammals to be covered in scales like a shingleback lizard. Poaching and habitat loss have made these incredible creatures one of the most endangered groups of mammals in the world. The unspeakable cruelty faced by many wildlife species to meet culturally derived notions of health, beauty or other dubious benefit is similarly barbaric and should be confined to the dark ages. I believe that it’s time such “cultures” were outlawed and seen for what they are – barbarism. The ivory trade, shark fin soup or dubious medicinal practices from the death or torture of animals should be a crime. In a world facing the extinction of species the plight of the pangolins means there is no time left to be unduly culturally sensitive.

Jan-Feb 2012

The Jan-Feb 2012 was a special edition newsletter like this one because it marked 20 years of the NRWC. Doing the maths, that makes this year our quarter century or silver anniversary.