

Wildlife News



Issue 148 September - November 2017

"Lon" Possum

.....
Story and picture by: Valerie S



While on the hotline recently I received a call from a lovely lady named Yoko, who lives on the Lillfield community with her partner Paul (I know, it should have been John!) For over 3 years they have enjoyed visits from a female Mountain Brushtail they named Lon. Lon would visit often usually with a baby in her pouch or on her back.

Over a month ago they noticed Lon had wounds on her face but they weren't too concerned as they looked like they were healing. Yoko and Paul returned after being away from home for a few weeks and noticed that Lon's wounds were looking infected so called our hotline. I collected a trap and set it up on the veranda at Yoko and Paul's. Luckily she went into the trap the first night and they were able to take her to Keen St vets first thing the next morning.

Continued ...

“Lon” Possum *Continued ...*

That afternoon I was able to collect Lon from the vet, the poor old girl looked a mess. She had a huge abscess around her eye removed leaving a large area of raw flesh and her eye was filled with pus. Dr Bec who treated Lon said that if the antibiotics didn't clear the eye she could have a cancerous growth and may need to end up being euthanased. Luckily Lon is healing really well; she has a beautiful baby in her pouch who needs her mum to get better. Lon has finished her antibiotics and is now on a course of probiotics, she is almost ready for the outside aviary which I'm sure she will appreciate having more room to climb around.

I was a bit nervous at having a wild adult possum in care, I'd only cared for orphaned babies before but she is such a gentle girl and has been very patient in her hospital cage for this last week. It won't be too long before she will be back visiting Yoko and Paul on their veranda again.

Valerie



members

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

*Fred B, Lily B-M, Glen C,
Peter C, Belinda D,
Liam G, David G-P
Jane K, Shirley M,
Colin M, Thomas M,
Keely M, Karen M,
Susanne R, Rod S,
Brad S, Jacqui T,
Katie W and Tiffany W.*

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Wildlife News is the quarterly newsletter published in March, June, September and December. of the Northern Rivers Wildlife Carers Inc. Licensed by the Office of Environment and Heritage to rescue, rehabilitate and release native fauna. Licence No MWL000100243 Fundraising Authority CFN 14907
PO Box 6439 South Lismore NSW 2480
ABN 28 209 143 641

All submissions are welcome. Deadline for editions is the 15th of the month preceding publication.

Email: nrwc@iinet.net.au

Views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of NRWC Inc.

Ziggy

Article and pictures by Kate G



It was only supposed to be for a few weeks, but seven months later I bid a fond farewell and good luck to little Ziggy the mountain brushtail possum.

Jenny was after a possum sitter while she enjoyed a few weeks holiday. One morning in mid-January she turned up with a little possum, weighing in at just under 200g, a cage and all his accessories – a stick, half a dozen pouches, feeding and watering bowls, powered baby possum food, browse holders etc. I promised to do my best to keep the little fellow healthy and happy whilst she was away. He was a sweet thing and so cosy in his little pouch, that my and my daughter Eva quickly fell in love (though it has to be said hers waned a bit when she was peed on).

Now Jenny is a very experienced carer and I'm sure she's raised plenty of possums before, so I didn't feel too bad, when within a couple days, I made it clear that we would not be returning young Ziggy. She didn't seem to mind.

But Ziggy's faeces were wet and messy. Within a week I had decided that little possums were rather revolting and I would return him after all, thank you very much. I was checking in regularly with Cheryl about his progress and she was concerned that he wasn't putting on weight quickly enough. Eventually the subject of his faeces came up and when I described it Cheryl knew immediately that something was wrong. The lovely vet nurses at Vitality Vet in Bangalow assured me that he would be fine, and they prescribed a course of antibiotics. Things were looking up by that evening. I was relieved on a couple of accounts. He was welcome to stay again.

The months passed, Ziggy moved into a big boy possum box (he kept his favourite big pouch) and has was happy and healthy. He went outside into a bigger aviary, which we decorated with plenty of branches to climb along and a nice wobbly rope. Eventually we learnt what plants he liked to eat and as time went on; his eating became more adventurous, which made things a bit easier. Luckily, a few years ago, our family planted out a mini rainforest at the back of our property and it now provided a wide range of native rainforest plants for our growing possum. This was supplemented by corn on the cob, white kumara, apples, pears, bananas and the odd star fruit for a treat.

By the time he had reached 1.5kg, it was clear he had outgrown his aviary and looking for ready to start exploring new horizons. So, with mixed feelings, but knowing it was time, we set about looking for a suitable place to soft release him in. Eventually we found the perfect property. It's at Rosebank, has lots of trees and existing wildlife, including a couple of little wallabies which hopped past whilst we were checking it out.

Continued ...

Ziggy *Continued ...*

So, seven months on, it's a mild day in mid-August and I pack up my car, with Ziggy, his possum box, trusty pouch, feeding bowls and a huge bouquet of his favourite plant varieties. We drive off to his new home. A wonderful team of people, led by Cheryl had already set up his release aviary in place beneath an inviting canopy, with some climbing branches and a view of what is to be.

He will spend two weeks here, acclimatising to his new environment before the door is opened. He will then be free to come and go, knowing he can return to his own warm, cosy possum box and a supply of food on hand when he needs it, until he is ready to make the big break.

During this time of transition, his release carer will be looking out for him, closing the door during the day when he comes back, to keep out uninvited guests and keeping a watch out in case he gets into trouble. I know he will be fine.

Kate

Pictured: Ziggy's rainforest retreat.



Ritchies Community Benefit Card

By: Sandy N

NRWC receives a monthly donation from Ritchies IGA from shoppers nominating us as their charity of choice. You can do this too if you shop at Ritchies IGA. It's easy, read on to find out how. Ritchies' Community Benefit Card Programme donates a percentage of the money spent by our customers to their nominated club, school or charity. Ritchies' Community Benefit Card program is simple to work with and participate in!

Ritchies' Community Benefit Card programme offers savings for customers and fundraising dollars for nominated organisations at the same time! Here's how it works: Ask for your free Ritchies Community Benefit Card at your nearest Ritchies supermarket or liquor store. Enter the name of the community group that you would like to be the recipient of a donation from Ritchies. (NRWC) Your Ritchies Community Benefit Card will be issued and can be used, immediately! You can choose to have a key tag to place upon your key ring or you might prefer the convenience of a Plastic Card to place in your wallet or purse. You might prefer one of each. The card or key tags are free and the choice is up to you! Your completed Application Form is returned to Ritchies Head Office, where your Community Benefit Card number and the CB number for your community group is entered into Ritchies computer. Every time you shop you will be asked by one of Ritchies friendly cashiers to present your Community Benefit Card. Your card will be scanned at the register, which will automatically allocate 0.5% of the money you spend* to your nominated organisation, as long as they are achieving the minimum of \$2,000 spent each month. There are also hundreds of weekly specials that have extra discounts for Ritchies Community Benefit Cardholders. These 'CB' specials are clearly marked with red shelf tickets bearing the Community Benefit logo.

Ritchies also have CB Saver for even more special offers! You must be 18 years or over to receive the email offers. (**Ritchies reserves the right to change the terms of any of its cards, programs or clubs at any time.*)

Store locations are at Ballina, Evans Heads and Kyogle.

Sandy

NPWS 50th!

By Kate G

NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service is turning 50 and NRWC is Invited to Attend the Celebrations!

Cape Byron is one of 8 key locations cross NSW, chosen to host celebrations marking the 50th year anniversary of the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS).

The occasion, to be held on 8th October, will be marked with an exciting program, including a range of performances, workshops, displays and tours. NRWC has been invited to participate and we hastily agreed. The event will be held at the lighthouse precinct, where we will create a beautiful display stall demonstrating our own enduring contribution to wildlife rescue and rehabilitation. I envision a welcoming space where people can stop for chat, share their own stories of wildlife encounters and hear inspiring tales from our own carers. It's a great opportunity to promote our organisation, engage with community and hopefully even sign up a few new members.

If you're interested in participating, please contact Kate on training@wildlifecarers.com or call the hotline and they'll pass your details along. You could be involved at the stall for just a couple of hours and then go and check out everything else that's going on, help with set up, or contribute ideas for the stall. All levels of involvement are welcome.



Wildlife Quiz

By: Paul C.



1. What is the difference between a bill and a beak?
2. Which Australian bird has the longest bill of any bird world-wide?
3. Which Australian raptor is famous for its ability to crack emu eggs using a rock as a tool?
4. Which is the only Australian Fairy-wren not to have blue in its plumage and whose range includes the Northern Rivers?
5. A nuchal crest is one emanating from the nape of a bird rather than the crown or the forehead, can you name an Australian bird that has a nuchal crest which it displays during courting?
6. Florence Nightingale, the "Lady with the Lamp", was a trailblazing figure of 19th century nursing. Before her service in the Crimean War, she hand-raised a wild animal and cared for it for five years. Was the animal: **a)** Bert the tortoise **b)** Freya the nightingale **c)** Harry the chaffinch or **d)** Athena the owl.
7. What anatomical structure of a bird has **plumage** whose name also describes elements of our educational system? (Note: this is a weird question but you try coming up with 10 questions and see how you go!)
8. Who holds the current record for number of Australian birds (including vagrants) seen in one year and what is that record **a)** 712 **b)** 705 **c)** 760 **d)** 770
9. What phrase is used to describe such record attempts.
10. In the Top End, if you meet another grey nomad who sees you are wearing binoculars what are they most likely to ask you? (Note: this is a completely self-indulgent question and I am tempted to offer a huge prize because I am sure no-one will know the answer.)

(Note: as I wrote this in the country just outside Fitzroy Crossing WA, a flying earwig landed on my table. It was a huge surprise as I thought all earwigs were like the ones that you find in the garden - with vestigial wings only and flightless.)

Training Report

By Kate G.



We welcome 18 new members from our recent training day and there were also a couple of people there for a refresher, which was good to see. I wish you all well on this journey and hope to see you at more training courses in the future, so you can build up your skills and discover for yourself where your interests lie.

Participants learned about the main functions of the group, the context in which we operate and the different roles available. Trainer Chrisy, stressed the golden rules of wildlife rescue warm, dark and quiet. Secondly, that the animal must be securely and appropriately contained. Cardboard boxes are suitable for birds, plastic carry cages for birds and small marsupials, large plastic tubs or garbage bins for echidnas and pillow cases (secured with a hair tie or rubber band), within a carry cage, for lizards and small marsupials. Place a towel on the bottom of the container and if the animal is injured place towels around it for support.

Thanks to the team who arrived early to help with set up, the bakers and of course our wonderful trainer.

Snake Identification and Handling Workshop (non venomous)

Date: Saturday **7th October 2017** 9.30am to 4pm

Venue: Crabbes Creek Community Hall

Cost: \$20

Meals: morning tea provided. BYO lunch

Presenter: Sue Johnson - Tweed Valley Wildlife Carers

Transport: Shared transport can generally be arranged with NRW members.

Please let me know if you are interested. **RSVP: training@wildlifecarers.com by 1 October!**

Please wear suitable clothing: long pants, closed in footwear, sun hat and sunscreen.



Topics covered Snake behaviour, physiology, identification, health and safety and responsibilities of a snake handler. Please note that this is a hands on workshop. Theory will be covered in the morning and practical experience in the afternoon.

Kate

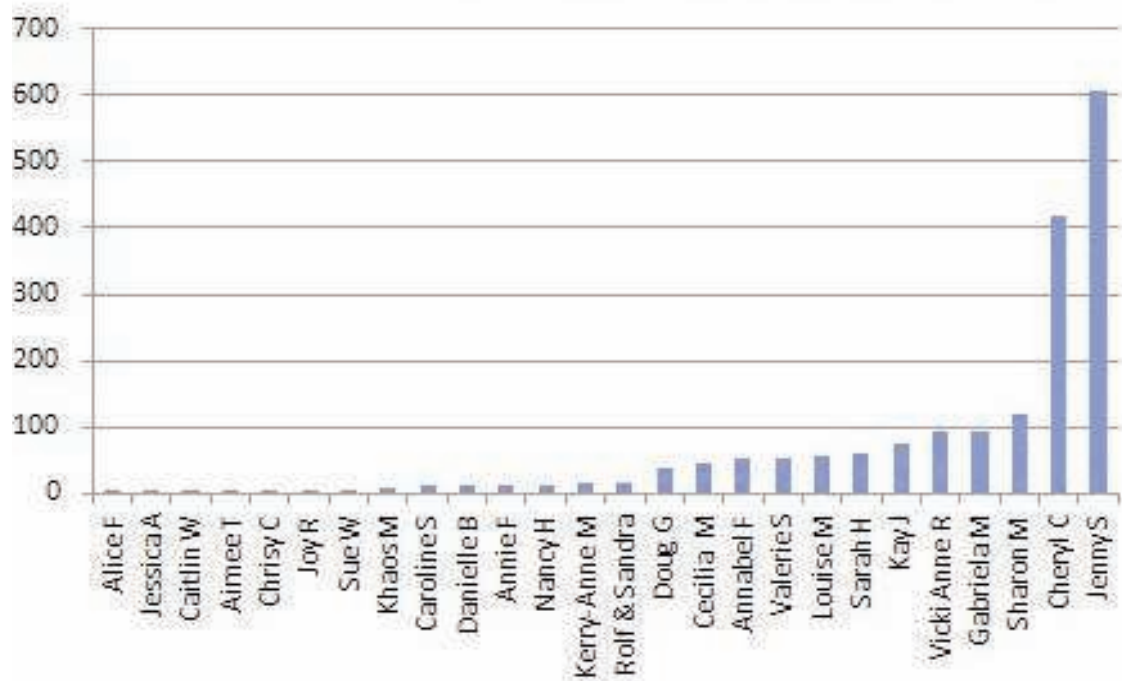
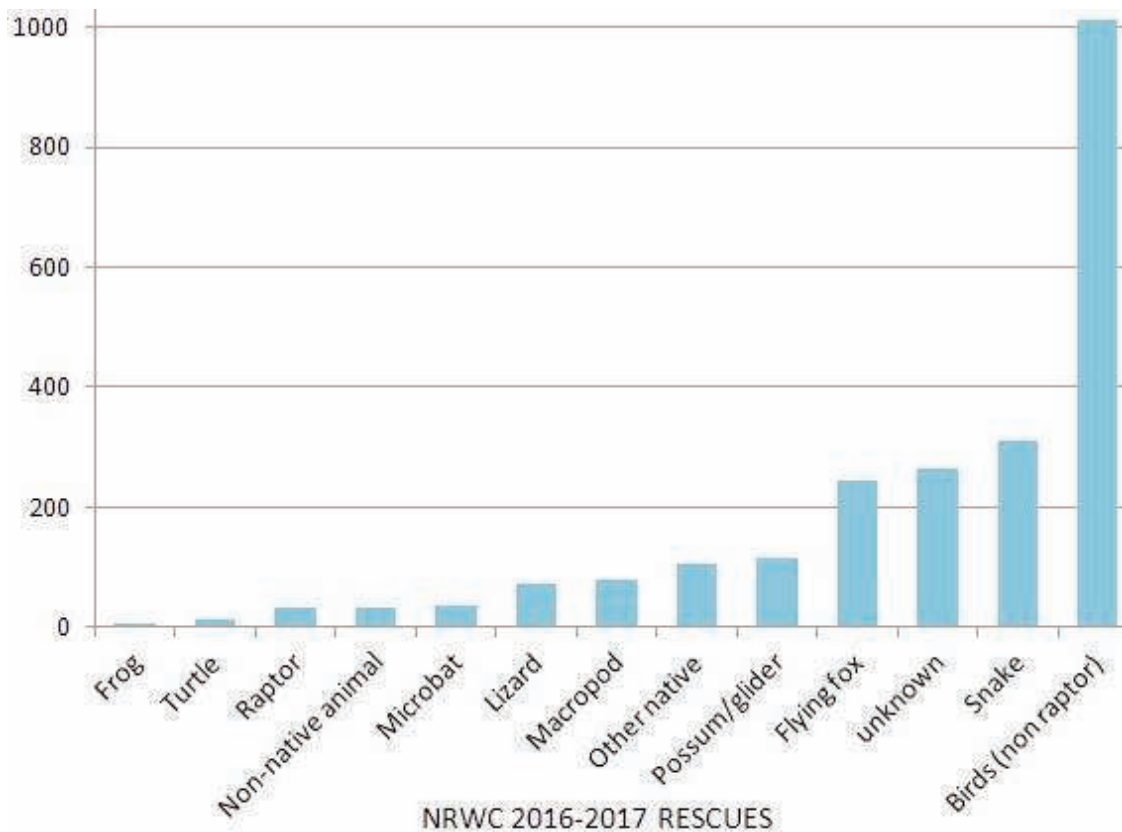
POSITIONS VACANT

Hotline Operators. We need more reliable people that can spare a couple of hours or more to staff the Hotline. Offer advice to the public and coordinate rescuers is all it takes. All shifts are available. Contact the Hotline Coordinator. Contact details are on the Pin-up page.

Some Stats

By Sandy N (Treasurer)

Some Stats from the database for 2016-2017. NRWC received 2313 calls for rescue or advice on the hotline in the 2016-2017 financial year. The breakdown of these calls according to species is shown in the attached graph, which shows that the majority of calls are rescue or advice calls for birds, with snakes getting the second highest number of calls.

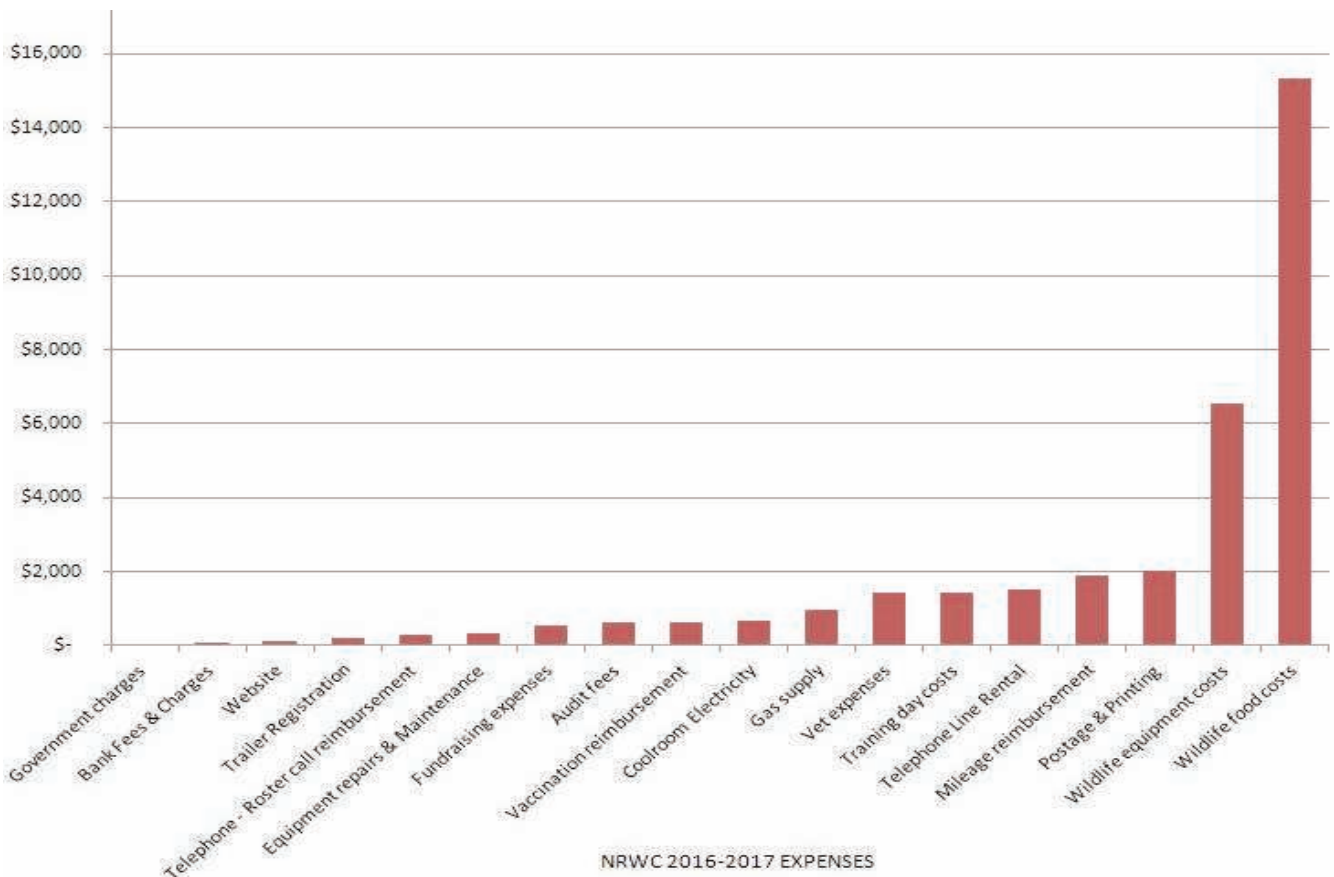
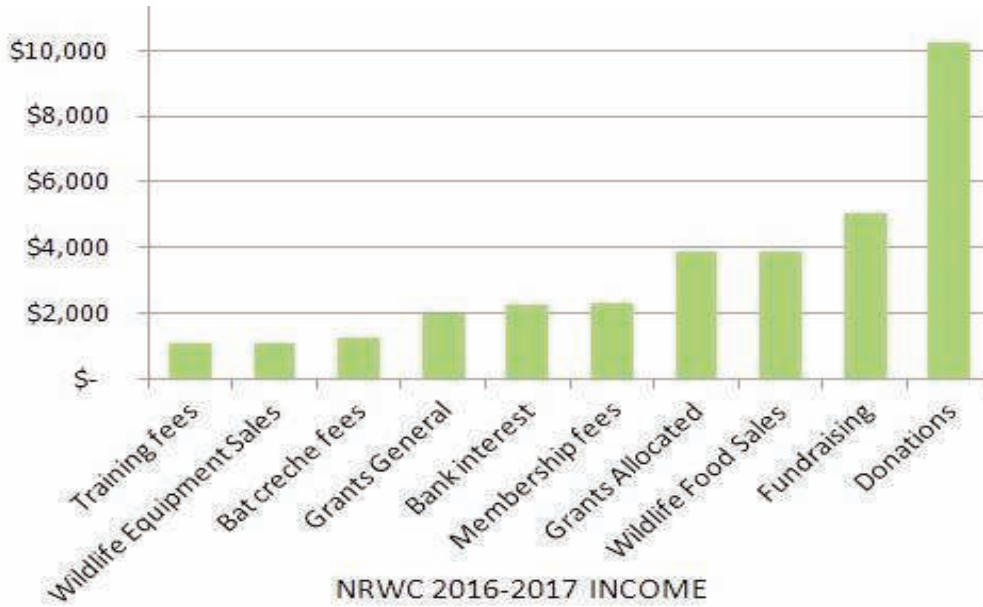


Some Stats *Continued ...*

Income and expenses are also shown in the attached graphs.

Our main income was through donations, with fundraising coming in second - thanks to the great work of all those involved in fundraising activities. We received a grant through Lismore City Council for the construction of a bird flight aviary and a grant through North Coast Community Foundation for training experienced snake rescuers in venomous snake rescue techniques with Geckoes Wildlife.

Our main expenses are wildlife food and equipment. The equipment included the construction of two aviaries by Terry Staples and teats and thermometers.



Reptile Report

By Rowan W. (Reptile Coordinator)

Winter usually sees a complete halt to any reptilian species coming into care but this winter was certainly different. A combination of warmer temperatures and some individual very hot days caused some snakes and lizards to emerge from brumation and need our assistance. The flood also displaced some reptiles but I was surprised that more did not come into care at that time.

The gorgeous 3-legged turtle pictured came to us after the flood. He/she was found near the highway opposite the entrance to Lismore airport and brought to us by a caring member of the public. The turtle looked ok apart from the missing front leg which was an old injury that had healed well. Irrespective of outward appearances the turtle was taken to Currumbin Wildlife Hospital for assessment as turtles can hide internal injuries and a full x-ray and blood tests were done. By the way this is in accordance with our reptile policy that all turtles go to Currumbin for assessment.

He/she was returned the next day thanks to Friends of the Koala providing the transport and was fit to release. The flood had done some good in filling the Lismore Lake and this was chosen as a release site. The turtle was very keen to go and paddling on all three legs as he/she approached the water. The turtle had adapted to having a limb missing and swam away strongly and in a straight line!

Three pythons came into care. The first was found near a road attempting to cross it and was cold and lethargic. No wounds or damage was detected and I took the snake home intending to keep him/her over winter. Sadly it died overnight and another examination failed to show signs of trauma. My feeling is that it had already been hit by a vehicle causing internal injuries before the MoP had seen it trying to cross the road.

The second was found by members Gwen and Rick. The python had left their roof and was laying on the ground coiled and not moving for a day. Their summation was that it looked as if something was not quite right with the snake. They were correct. Next day Rick brought the python to me and at first glance it was underweight and dehydrated with its loose skin "tenting" when pinched lightly. When I lifted the head up to examine it further I was aghast to see that from the head to the lungs the underside of the snake was "hollow" and that the skin went within the rib cage. I pondered immediate euthanasia but decided to have the python assessed by Currumbin. The result was liver failure possibly caused by an infection that the snake was unable to overcome. In the blood analysis, when centrifuged, the white blood cells and plasma should have appeared a creamy white colour and in



this poor animal's case they were green. The snake was relieved of its suffering.

The third python was another unusual one as it was found in a roof gutter at Ballina Primary School and he/she had a very large amount of watery mucous coming out of its nose. After examination at Ballina Vet clinic and discussing the snake's condition with Currumbin's reptile vets it was decided that snaky go to Currumbin. Strangely nothing could be found to account for the condition and the blood tests and x-rays showed the snake to be in good condition. All a bit of a mystery really. I am holding the snake awaiting warmer nights for releasing but I have been told that the school will not allow the snake to be released on its site. I intend speaking with the principal to see if I can persuade them otherwise. Wish me luck!



Fundraisers

By Rowan W. (From information supplied by Lou M and Pam M)

Two recent fundraising events filled the NRWC's coffers. The first was the Byron Bay Market day where we were "Charity of the Day" on Sunday August 6. This event was organised by Lou M. We sought 9 volunteers but were only able to muster a few and thanks go to: Valerie S, Kate G, Penny B, Joe A and Annie F for their efforts through the day. Unfortunately a late arrival and a no-show meant that Lou did all of the setup, pull-down as well as a few shifts on the gate. In all another **\$705** was raised.

Sunday the 27th of August saw the NRWC cater for the "Paws-in-the-Park" event for the Keen St Vet clinic. It was a beautiful day with a great turn-out of people and their pets. Pam M our barbecuing guru organised the day with her usual efficiency. Again volunteers were thin on the ground but much help was given by Jenny, Sarah and Khaos. Rowan staffed the BBQ all day and had the eye-watering task of slicing the onions, Thanks to all for their efforts. We managed to add another **\$491.70** to help wildlife.

Pictured: Pam and Jenny with a happy customer.
Jenny selling cakes.



Quiz Answers



1. I always thought that water birds had bills and all other birds had beaks. However as Dr Roger Lederer states "There is no difference between the terms beak and bill, although beak is more often used when referring to hooked bills."
2. The Australian Pelican.
3. The Black-breasted Buzzard. My information is that only the Egyptian Vulture uses the same technique. (Wendy or Joe can correct me if I am wrong about this.)
4. The Red-backed Fairy-wren.
5. The Great, the Western and the Spotted Bowerbirds. Good work if you found others and please let me know. By the way, this is how my bird guide describes it for the Western Bowerbird: "large pink erectile nuchal crest often wholly concealed when not in display".
6. D) Athena the Owl.
7. Two possible answers – either score a point: A bird's wing has primaries and secondaries. A bird's head may have a crest.
8. The Australian Reptile Parks's John Weigel saw 770 birds in 2014.
9. A Big Year. Thus, John's project was an Australian Big Year.
10. Have you seen any Gouldian Finches? To which my standard reply is "if you be pure of heart and keen of eye then you shall find".

Paul C. (Correspondence: cheesemanpj@yahoo.com.au)

Keeping Cool

By Rowan W. (Adapted from NRW training material.)

On the North Coast we can experience days of extreme heat and humidity during spring and summer. Remember if you are feeling the heat then your animals in care will be too! In the wild they have opportunity to move to a cooler place or take a dip in a nearby dam or creek.

While they are in our care we must take responsibility for keeping them comfortable. If you are not at home to do this, make sure your animals will be ok during the hottest part of the day during your absence. The following tips will help:

Make sure all animals have plenty of clean water, to drink and bathe in. Terracotta pot plant saucers keep water cooler due to evaporation from the porous surfaces. Place water bowls in shaded areas in enclosures. In extreme temperatures place a frozen block of ice in the bowl; this will keep the water cool for long periods.

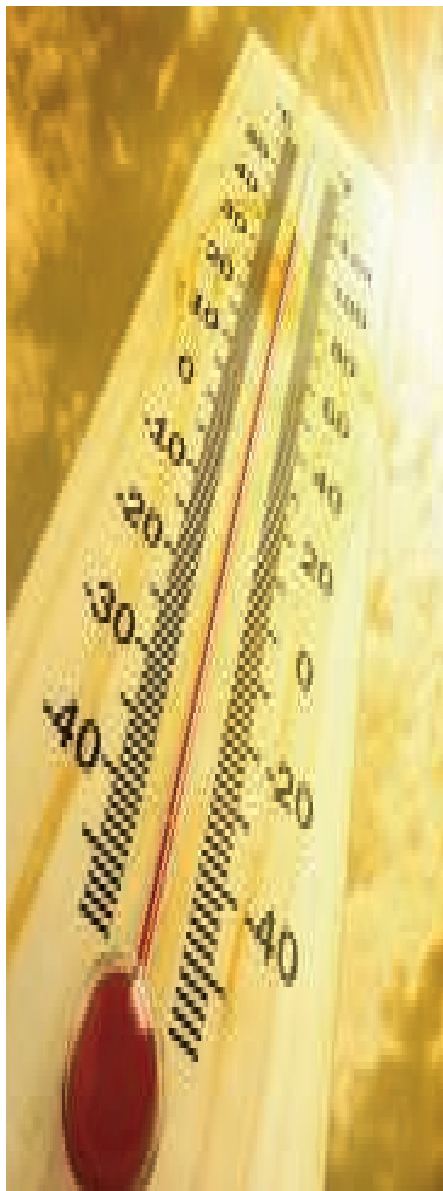
Birds in cages or aviaries really enjoy being misted with water on hot days. If you have the luxury of plenty of water a gentle hosing down of the aviary will cool it, otherwise a five-litre pump spray can be used to save water.

Small cages can be covered on three sides with wet cloth (natural fibres work best) to reduce the inside temperature. You can also hang bottles of ice inside cages or put ice blocks on the roof of the cages.

A second roof over part of the aviary reduces the temperature greatly. Old pieces of canvas (available for free from companies that repair annexes etc) work best. Raised around 40 centimetres above the aviary roof it keeps the heat off the aviary but still allows the breeze through. Metal aviaries heat up the worst but polystyrene boxes broken apart and laid on the roof (attached or weighed down) acts as great insulation. Wet potato sacks hung on wire coat hangers and hooked through just under the aviary roof will keep

the sides of the aviary cool.

Possum boxes in aviaries can be covered with wet towels or a well-wrapped frozen ice brick can be placed inside the box. Animals inside the house are a little easier to manage. Always monitor your inside temperature, it may seem much cooler than outside but may still be well over 30°. Cover cages with wet cloths and place near a fan or under a ceiling fan if you have one. You will need to re-wet these often but the temperature will be much cooler, - you'll wish you were in there!



Reptiles feel the heat too. They have no way of getting cool except by moving to a cooler area which may be difficult in care. Turn heating systems off during hot days; provide plenty of shade and cool rocks for them to hide under. When the temp is above 32° cooling is essential and many will suffer heat stroke or death at higher temperatures.

Finally take care when transporting animals in the car if you don't have air conditioning and never leave an animal in an unattended vehicle. Add a bottle of water and an extra towel to your rescue box. Cover your box or basket with a wet towel and allow plenty of airflow to reduce heat. If possible take a thermometer with you. Digital thermometers are

available cheaply from the food distributors listed on the pin-up page and are an essential care item.

WILDLIFE STORY SUBMISSIONS

nrwc@iinet.net.au

Send digital pictures full size please with the name of the photographer.

All stories welcome no matter how small.

Committee Report



Greetings to you all as we rapidly approach the busy Spring season. Our thanks go to Rowan for his ongoing work in the compilation of, and involvement with our Newsletter which will now be brought to you as a quarterly/seasonal publication.

Our thanks also go to Kate, our Training Officer, and to Chrisy, our presenter, and to our helpers for their work involved in providing another Basic Training Day on 30 July. We welcome our new members and look forward to working with you during the coming busy months of Spring and Summer.

Another appreciative thank you goes to a recent generous donation from Bill and T. who are local community members with an interest in our wildlife. With their support, we are now in the process of erecting some care/hospital, and release aviaries with those funds.

And speaking of release aviaries, at times they need to be re-located to another site. Assistance in this is often needed. Are you interested?

National Parks and Wildlife have invited Northern Rivers Wildlife Carers to be part of their 50th Anniversary celebrations. We invite members and families to join us on 8 October at the Byron Lighthouse area. Volunteers to assist in our presentation would be greatly appreciated.

At our Committee Meeting on 24 July, numerous issues were discussed. Of note, Wendy provided feedback on the ongoing meetings with Richmond Valley Council (attended by SueAnne and Wendy from our group.) The procedures for best dealing with extreme heat events, and the management of wildlife in such events were discussed. A cohesive plan is in the making, and with our appreciated input from SueAnne and Wendy, it will provide a co-ordinated response to future heat events.

The next Committee Meeting will be held on Wednesday 20 September 2017. You are welcome to attend at the Lismore Workers Club at 6.30 pm.

Kay



Annual General Meeting



Will be held in October



Members will be advised by Email

Donations

Donations may be made at any time through the secure "Givenow" Website. \$2 and more are tax deductible!

<http://www.givenow.com.au/northernriverswildlifecarers>





Happenings

By: Jenny S.

As I write this report we are still having the cool crisp mornings and slightly chilly evenings of August. However, by the time you read this, we will be getting into the busy spring season. At the moment the hotline is fairly quiet with only a few rescue calls coming in. Mostly these are for adult birds that had injuries due to collisions as well as few possum, echidna and flying fox calls.

In saying this, I have been noticing that the local birds particularly the magpies are busy squabbling and flying around with sticks in their mouths. No doubt building nests. I was in a park in Brisbane last Sunday and noticed a magpie chick as well as a Masked Lapwing (plover) baby running around.

In September, the phone usually begins to run hot with requests for baby bird rescues and advice. We have actually had two clutches of baby ducklings come into care over the past week or so. One lot of five were found at Brunswick Heads near a busy roundabout while the other, a group of eight, came from Tweed Valley Wildlife Carers who had no one able to care for them.

Only last weekend I was reading a lovely children's book by Pamela Allen called 'Alexander's Outing' to my six year old granddaughter. The story is about a mother duck taking her ducklings for a walk through Sydney. One duckling doesn't follow Mum's instructions to stay close and ends up in a deep hole. He is, of course, rescued by caring people who want to find a way to get him out safely. The book ends happily with Alexander back with his family. Just as in real life these little fellows seem to get themselves into difficult predicaments and need our help. Many have trouble with getting across roads and catching them can be a challenge. However, if you are lucky enough to take some into care they are a delight to have around.

After Bird Training at the end of August, there should be more carers ready to take on the rewarding challenge of having baby birds in care. Welcome also to our 18 new members who attended the recent Basic Rescue and Introduction training. We hope you are inspired to become involved in various activities of the group. There are always tasks to do besides caring and rescues.

Spring is also the time when we have our reptile friends appearing after their hibernation. Many people on seeing snakes near their houses only want them relocated ASAP. With a small number of snake handlers available most calls are advice only which doesn't always suit the caller. We have to explain that we can't climb ladders to remove snakes from inside or outside roofs. After a friendly chat most people are content to let the snake move away of its own accord.

Just a reminder when you rescue an animal please ring the hotline back and or the coordinator to let them know about the outcome. This helps us keep the database up to date.

We are always in need of helpers to assist on the phone roster. This is done at the hotliner's home and call costs can be reimbursed. So if you think you can help on a regular or casual basis please ring me and we can arrange training for you. My number is on the back page or you can contact me through the hotline.

Happy caring everyone!

Jenny

Ed by Rowan

How much time do you spend outdoors? I often spend time in the garden doing absolutely nothing except sitting and enjoying the world around me. Ostensibly I am keeping an eye on Stumpytrunks, our lizard, as he goes about finding a grass to hide under or a delicious bug to eat, but there is a lot to appreciate even in the most modest garden. The magpies have gathered sticks and are building a nest in their usual tree in preparation for this year's breeding season, the grey butcherbird continues his daily quest keeping the adjacent pied butcherbird at bay and the scaly-breasted lorikeets have taken this part of the world as theirs enjoying the grevilleas and other flowering feasts and sharing the bathing facilities of our birdbath and the neighbours one.

In the lavender bushes next to me Australian native bees explore each flower and harvest pollen to add to their laden legs and return to their hives. I watch these sting-less insects with awe and marvel at their dexterity, precision flight and work ethic. We are indeed lucky to have them.

Worldwide, bees are in decline and a recent study into long-term decline in wild bees across England has been linked to the use of neonicotinoid insecticides. The use of neonicotinoids on flowering crops attractive to bees has now been temporarily banned in Europe. In another attack, the parasitic Varroa mite is spreading disease; a bite from these mites injects the deadly Deformed Wing Virus into the bees blood and can destroy an entire honey bee colony. It's been described by scientists studying its effects as one of the most widely distributed and contagious insect viruses on the planet. All of these factors may be playing a role in the catastrophic Colony Collapse Disorder, which is where very few or no adult honey bees are found in the hive. A United Nations report highlights the decline of the world's bee population and its consequences for without bees. We face a massive pollination crisis that will affect food production across the whole planet. If chemicals weren't enough a Varroa mite is spreading a virus which affects bees. A young Australian scientist is working to immunise Australian honeybees against killer viruses, to prepare them for any future incursion of the deadly Varroa mite. The parasite has spread around the world, causing colony collapse and threatening agricultural industries that rely on bees for pollination. Dr Emily Remnant, a research scientist based at the University of Sydney, said the viruses spread by Varroa mites are just as big a problem as the parasites themselves. Dr Remnant hopes to use the same bacteria that are currently being used to combat dengue fever in Cairns mosquitoes, to tackle bee viruses.

Meanwhile in a parliament near you, in a bill introduced by Assistant Health Minister David Gillespie, industry would be allowed to self-assess whether a chemical new to Australia was low-risk and therefore "exempt", meaning it could be brought to market without being reported to the regulator or having its safety assessed. Given that Europe controls its chemicals stringently one could assume that a more free market in Australia would be seen as a dumping ground by multinational companies in the future. – Much like we were when we did not ban asbestos and dieldrin.* - I need to go and sit in the garden now.

Rowan

* Other poisons like 1080 are still in use in Australia despite being banned in most other countries. Glyphosate is banned in countries including the Netherlands, Sri Lanka, and El Salvador to name a few, but not here.

Australia has about 1600–2000 species of native bee. These insects and plants have co-evolved in a complex relationship involving colour, scent and food (nectar and pollen). Native bees are mostly solitary, vary in size from small to ridiculously small (e.g. the smallest is about 1 mm), usually produce no (or very little) honey, have a 60-day lifespan, 80% of them nest in the ground (some dig to 1.6 m) or in timber, and some have evolved unique evolutionary relationships: e.g. an Amegilla bee species vibrates (bangs its head) at a resonant frequency of 350 times a second to release Dianella pollen (the Amegilla genus includes blue-banded bees). Native bees lay their eggs in the nest with a 'patty' of pollen and nectar to sustain the larvae until they emerge in spring and summer.

[From Friends of Grasslands newsletter Sept 2017 – Thanks to Paul C for forwarding it]