



Ute Wegmann

with Dr Anthony Helman

WILD AND TENDER TALES

Close Encounters
with Australian
Wildlife Rescue
& Conservation

Wakefield Press

WILD WHISKERS, AND TENDER TALES.

Ute Wegmann

Originally from Germany, Ute Wegmann has worked as a freelance photographer throughout Australia for over 18 years, capturing the unpredictability of animals with her artful, often quite humorous images. Her work has been featured in *Black & White* magazine and in *Burke's Backyard* magazine. She was also assigned by *Dog's Life Magazine* to photograph public personalities like Katrina Warren (*Harry's Practice*) and Julie McCrossin (*Good News Week*) with their canine friends.

Ute does not only love domestic animals but has a deep caring for Australia's wildlife. The idea for this book originated after her personal experience with wildlife rescue. For Ute, wildlife carers, who work around the clock and mostly rely on donations, are the true heroes and heroines of the bush!

Dr Anthony Helman

Dr Anthony Helman is a medical doctor who specialises in nutrition and medical education. He is the editor of the *Arbor Clinical Nutrition Updates*, the world's most widely read electronic nutrition journal. As a life long animal lover, he has been happy to turn his pen from nutrition to wildlife rescue.



Left: Emma Wheen & Mossimo

Above: One of Colleen Wood's rescued koalas

Facing: Belinda Gales with Lulu



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Press

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Craig Wheeler

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Hello

Ray Charles first made me aware of wildlife rescue ...

Ray Charles the rainbow lorikeet, that is. I named him after the famous singer because, as a parrot, he encompassed an incredible vocal range (and because rainbows are made of rays of light). He was seriously injured by a car and was left in the middle of a busy street in the inner city of Sydney: he had definitely 'hit the road' as the song goes. I picked him up and, after much ado and several vet visits, he fully recovered from a concussion and a broken leg.

When I released him, close to where I had found him, I experienced an overwhelming feeling of pride and happiness. I had contributed to this bird's recovery: Ray Charles was able to spread his wings again and sing his heart out!

I imagine this is the essence of what life is about for all the incredible and selfless wildlife carers who play such an important part in Australian wildlife rescue and conservation. I'd like to say thank you to all of you, particularly to those featured in each of my chapters.

My sincere thanks also to Dr Anthony Helman, who kindly turned his focus from human health issues to a project of a more animalistic nature and subsequently agreed to write the text for my book.

I am also grateful that Dr Allan McKinnon, a wildlife veterinarian working for the Queensland Department of Environment and Resource Management, volunteered to double check all factual details.

Finally, thanks to Bernhard Waibel and Christel Wegmann for their financial contribution.

Ute Wegmann





Androo & Moon



Marg & Bluey



Colleen & Jacques



June & Meeka



Left to right: Mayor Peter, Linda, Dan, Roydan, Christine, Venisha & Dick



Craig & an Olive Ridley turtle

Preface

It is three o'clock on a cold winter morning, and Belinda Gales is getting up to organise a baby feed. There's nothing unusual in that, except that the baby is a kangaroo joey. A joey so small and immaturely formed that, if it were a human, you would give it no chance of survival. But a joey is not a human, and thanks to Belinda's efforts and fierce determination, it will live.

This is the tale of Australia's rescued wildlife and the extraordinary people who care for them – the story of how animals who are sick, injured, lost and orphaned are rescued, treated, housed, fed and rehabilitated, in most cases back to their native habitat.

All sorts of people become wildlife carers – they are as varied as the animals they look after. Some take on the carer's role as part of their professional work, at institutions like Healesville Sanctuary in Victoria, where platypus keeper Ian Elton works, or the Phillip Island Nature Park, where Marg Healy looks after penguins. Others, such as Beverley Langley in Adelaide and Klaas and Mieke Gaikhurst in Western Australia, have set up their own rescue centres, which typically take care of not just one species but a multitude of native animals and birds. In one case, at Mapoon in far north Queensland, an entire Aboriginal community has organised a turtle rescue and conservation program on its native beaches. And some are individuals who have taken on the task of caring for a single native animal at a time – as in the case of the remarkable teenager Emma Wheen and a cheeky little wombat called Mossimo.

All these people have two things in common: passion and a capacity for hard work. Nobody pretends that caring is an easy task. It can require long hours, disrupted sleep, and heartache when a much-loved animal does not make it, and often a lot of uncertainty. Every animal and their story is unique and they are often cared for in the absence of any uniform, organised support structure to help volunteers learn what to do, where to obtain resources and how to get help when things get tough. In many cases carers have taken the initiative and organised their own support networks, as Judith Hopper from Sydney did with her Wildlife Assistance and Information Foundation.

A wildlife carer's life is not a walk on Easy Street. Colleen Wood is reminded of this every time she is confronted with uncontrollable forces such as serious bushfires, leaving her all of a sudden overwhelmed with work looking after burned koalas at the Southern Ash Wildlife Shelter outside Melbourne. Wildlife care has a habit of taking up a lot of space, physically and emotionally, and your family has to adjust to that. Colleen's family has literally grown up sharing their living room with orphaned koalas! And, although an animal can sometimes feel like a member of the family, a wildlife carer has to tread a delicate line between caring and anthropomorphising. It is essential to prepare each animal for a successful life back to their natural habitat.

On the other hand, the rewards can be profound. The release of nursed wildlife to the bush and the chance to be involved in vital conservation programs to help ensure Australia's native creatures will have a viable future – despite the shrinking area of suitable habitat – can be a very profound reward for any wildlife carer. One good example is the work June Butcher is doing near Perth as part of a nationwide project to save the endangered Australian Bilby. Another is Androo Kelly, at the Trowunna Centre in north-western Tasmania, who works with Tasmanian devils to find ways to save them from a deadly tumour disease that is decimating the devil population.

Volunteers do the bulk of the work but, at the same time, it is not work for the untrained. In most Australian states, you need an official licence before you can become a wildlife carer, and there is a good reason for that. Doing things the wrong way can be very harmful for the animal and sometimes for the human as well. Injured and stressed animals can be aggressive, and some have sharp claws, nasty stings, or can transmit potentially fatal diseases to humans. So, for example, if you come across a flying fox, the right course of action is not to pick it up and try to treat it yourself – as it can transmit a nasty virus – but to call the appropriate rescue service.

Finally, there is the critical question of funding. Although the Australian government relies on these wildlife heroes to provide animal rescue services, in the overwhelming majority of cases the carers get precious little financial support. Quite simply, voluntary donations are their lifeline. So if you feel like adding your support to the wonderful work being done by wildlife carers, look up some of the websites listed at the back of this book and make a contribution!

Dr Anthony Helman



Emma & Mossimo



Klaas & Charlene



Beverley & Monty



Judith & Roland



Belinda & Jewel



Ian & Millsom

Swamp Wallaby & Eastern Grey Kangaroo

Wallabia bicolor
Macropus giganteus



Belinda Gales Animal Nanny

Saturday 7 February 2009 was one of the hottest days in Victoria's history. Temperatures up to 46 °C, high winds and, coming during a 13-year drought, a catastrophe was about to unfold. Started in some cases by arsonists, a series of bushfires tragically killed 173 people, destroyed thousands of homes and cut a devastating swathe through the local wildlife. 'Black Saturday' was to have profound and very personal consequences for Belinda Gales and Chum Creek Wildlife Shelter.

Smoke was everywhere and the sky was red with flames as Belinda frantically packed the animals under her care into cages, ready to be moved to a safe haven. We should say safe havens, in fact, as she had to evacuate three times when each new place of escape came under threat.

When Belinda eventually returned she found her animal enclosures and a brand new nursery burned to the ground and, heartbreakingly, just when the demand for her care was at its highest. But, thanks to the generosity of many people, the shelter is already well on the way to being rebuilt.

If you can't stand the heat, don't be a wildlife carer! But that is exactly what Belinda Gales has always wanted to be and, like many carers, she turned a childhood passion for animals into a profession by training as a veterinary

nurse and working for many animal hospitals and welfare organisations. To develop her skills further she then became a qualified zoo keeper, building up her knowledge at places such as Sydney's famous Taronga Zoo where, among other things, she trained seals!

Belinda has cherished a long-held ambition to run a shelter of her own, to look after sick and injured animals and to educate children about the proper care of our precious wildlife.

But it took a little bit of magic to finally make Belinda's wish become a reality. After searching in vain for months for a suitable place, Belinda dreamed one night that she should look on the internet real-estate pages. She did just that when she woke the next morning and – to her surprise and delight – immediately spotted the perfect place! It was part of a 360-acre property that had been specifically designated for wildlife and was then owned by a school that is committed to wildlife education. The story of Chum Creek Wildlife shelter had begun!



173 PEOPLE
and an estimated
ONE MILLION ANIMALS
lost their lives on
BLACK SATURDAY



Jewel, a very lucky Black Saturday survivor

Black Saturday

Nature's worst brought out the best in carers

Bushfire has been a part of the natural regenerative cycle of the Australian bush throughout history. Often started by accidental events like lightning strikes, or by controlled burning by the Aboriginal stewards of this land, bushfires are fed by the uniquely flammable oil found inside gum trees. And the intense heat of a bushfire allows many seeds to germinate that would otherwise never do so.

But for the animals who live here a bushfire is literally a trial by fire. With the front racing through bush at up to twenty-five kilometres per hour, and temperatures reaching hundreds of degrees, many are killed outright as they are unable to run ahead of the fire. Those who do manage to escape are often so traumatised, dehydrated and hungry that they succumb in the days and weeks that follow. And their suffering often passes unnoticed by humans.

But nature's worst can also bring out the best in wildlife carers. Black Saturday triggered a huge effort by hundreds of volunteers and professional carers. For some it was as simple as noticing an injured animal and telling a wildlife carer about it. For others it was running food drops into the blackened bush to feed the animals left there. Many worked shifts at animal refuges and shelters, hand-feeding orphaned young or changing dressings on a burned animal.



Jewel & Belinda





Once a joey has fur it is more likely to survive hand-rearing.





Jewel is a swamp wallaby and was lucky enough to survive Black Saturday. She was brought to the Chum Creek shelter by a passerby who saw her lying weak and listless on the ground. Her dead mother was found several days later near the spot where Jewel was found. Jewel was only six months of age and so was still a joey in her mother's pouch at the time of the fire. With only fine hair and weighing just 800 grams, she was dehydrated, freezing and close to death.

The top priorities were fluids – given at first via injections under her skin – and warmth. Even with such good care, it took nearly two weeks for Jewel to recover from the trauma and to eat confidently.

**A living jewel
was found
among the
ashes**



Jewel



Jewel

Jewel was an orphan and all the love in the world from Belinda couldn't substitute for a parent – or just a big brother with big feet! – to learn from. So some things just came down to trial and error. Like hopping: the first few times Jewel tried to hop, **she went backwards**. Never mind. It didn't take her long to figure out how to use the forward gears!

Jewel started off as timid and shy as could be, sucking her dummy for weeks until she started to feel secure. She needed a lot of cuddles and care but, suddenly one day, it seemed to dawn on her that she was safe. Belinda says that it was **'as if a light switched on'**. Ever since then, Jewel has become the perkiest and most outgoing wallaby Belinda has ever looked after.