

Call of the Wildlife



AN ADULT FEATHERTAIL GLIDER, THE WORLD'S SMALLEST MARSUPIAL GLIDER, IS FED NECTAR WHILE RECOVERING FROM BURNS TO HER FEET

Doug Gimesy visits Currumbin Wildlife Hospital – one of the largest native wildlife treatment centres in the world – and meets the creatures convalescing and the people nursing them back to health.

by **Mel Fulton** Deputy Editor

When I ask Michael Pyne, senior vet and general manager of the Currumbin Wildlife Hospital on the Gold Coast, what a typical day is like for him, he cracks up laughing. “A typical day!” he repeats between chuckles. “Well!”

It’s a silly question of course, because any given day is a complete unknown at the hospital, which is one of the largest of its kind in the world and last year treated some 12,200 native Australian animals, all free of charge to the community.

One thing that’s for certain, though, is that the number of casualties admitted to the hospital continues to grow, and currently hovers between 50 and 60 patients a day. Another is that most of those casualties will require treatment for injuries sustained as a result of human impact on the environment. Pyne and the team at Currumbin treat animals that have been hit by cars, ravaged by barbed-wire fences or attacked by domestic pets. They treat birds that have swallowed fishing hooks or flown into windows. They treat animals whose habitats have been destroyed. They treat animals injured in the bushfires.

“It’s been a really intense time that we’re still feeling now,” says Pyne of the fires that swept through south-east Queensland and northern NSW from September of last year, prompting a spike in admissions. While not all of these fire victims were burnt, many of them are suffering in ways that Pyne has never seen before – and he’s been working at the hospital for the past 20 years.

“The extended droughts, the really dry weather and the hot weather have been devastating on our wildlife,” he says. “We’ve had a number of animals come in that are literally starving and dehydrated, and that’s a whole new thing... These are Australian native species that are meant to deal with drought – for it to be that bad that our native animals can’t cope with it is really extreme.”

Treating burns victims is a slow process. He tells me about Ember, an 18-month-old female koala who came to Currumbin eight weeks ago with injuries likely sustained from climbing down a charred tree trunk. Her daily course of treatment is extensive. Ember receives pain relief, antibiotics and intravenous fluids, and has had surgery on the burned areas. Her bandages need to be changed and her wounds re-dressed every second day, which requires an anaesthetic. Ember, like all koalas, is particular about food and will only eat certain varieties of gum leaves. Like all koalas, she has a sensitive stomach, so giving her the right dosage of the meds she needs is a challenge.

Ember’s around halfway through her treatment now, and Pyne looks forward to the day when she’s strong enough to be released back into the wild. He says it’s the most rewarding part of his job. “You see these animals come to life when they get to go back home and be released. It’s magical to see that – that’s what it’s all about.”

DOUG GIMESY (GIMESY.COM) IS A CONSERVATION AND WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER. FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT CURRUMBIN WILDLIFE HOSPITAL, VISIT CURRUMBINSANCTUARY.COM.AU



NURSE SARAH GIVES AN ANAESTHETISED 12-MONTH-OLD KOALA JOEY OXYGEN



NURSE MIMI CHECKS A BOOBOOK OWL CHICK, WHO WAS TREATED FOR HEAD TRAUMA, BELIEVED TO BE CAUSED BY AN ATTACK FROM OTHER BIRDS



- A BABY BLACK FLYING FOX HAVING A HEALTH CHECK. SHE WAS FOUND ON THE GROUND BY A MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC, NEAR HER MUM WHO HAD HER LEG CAUGHT IN A FENCE
- NURSE JASMINE TENDS TO AN AUSTRALIAN WHITE IBIS, RECOVERING FROM SURGERY TO REMOVE A FISHING HOOK STUCK IN ITS STOMACH
- A 12-MONTH-OLD KOALA JOEY IS WEIGHED AS PART OF A HEALTH CHECK