

FRIENDS OF HODDLES CREEK NEWSLETTER



Thanks to Yarra Ranges Council for their generous printing of the Newsletter.

Wombats no match for thoughtless drivers

It seems that our native wildlife is under extreme stress. Following a hot and dry end to summer, it suddenly turned cold and wet. This has possibly caused reduced amounts of food for wildlife, in what little undisturbed habitat they have. The first sites where there is likely to be regrowth of grass following a dry spell is on road verges. Wombats, wallabies and kangaroos are seeking out grass on road verges at this time of year and so are more likely to be hit by cars.

Why does our wildlife want to share our roads? Native animals find roads and roadside attractive for a number of reasons. Some species, especially reptiles, are attracted to the warmth of the bitumen. Birds such as kookaburras, magpies and prey birds are attracted to road kill as a source of food. Mammals, including wombats, wallabies and kangaroos, may not only enjoy the lush green growth, but often the road passes through their habitat and grazing range and so, for them, crossing the road is essential.

Lusatia Park Road

Recently, five healthy wombats were killed within one week on Lusatia Park Road in Hoddles Creek (although up until then, the number of sightings of wombats in that area was dramatically down).

What does this unfortunate statistic mean for our local wombats? Do we have an over abundance of wombats in the area? Many people assume the number of road kill is an indicator of population density. In actual fact, it may be an indication that wildlife numbers are down and surviving wildlife is searching out food. Wombats have been known to roam for up to 5km a night to search out food.

Wildlife shelters and Carers are being run off their feet at present, with all native wildlife species, in particular wallabies, kangaroos and wombats (possums and birds will come in soon with the arrival of Spring). There are countless cases of other



All too common: a dead wombat by the roadside.

NOTE: Road kill marked by a cross indicates that it has been checked for any joey.

native wildlife being injured on roads, caught in fences and orphaned.

Slow down during danger hours

Marsupials are often killed around dawn and dusk, which are the times when these animals are most active, crossing roads while moving to and from their feeding areas. Unfortunately, this also coincides with periods of high vehicle traffic.

Animals are often dazzled by car headlights and don't know how to escape. Some animals, particularly wombats, have dark fur and are not very visible against the black bitumen of the road. Slowing down by just a few km/h at these times will greatly reduce the risks of fatalities and costly damage to vehicles.

Wombats are the least studied of our native wildlife and their numbers cannot be accurately assessed easily. Burrows do not indicate population numbers, nor do road kill numbers. It is possible that in the not too distant future, free-living wombats

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Wombat woes

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will rarely be seen and the only way to see one will be to visit a zoo or sanctuary. This could also be the same for the Swamp Wallaby and many other native species who share our roads.

There are many strategies that humans can put in place to 'help' our native wildlife, including reducing speed limits on roads that wildlife cross, increasing wildlife corridors and parks, educating the public on wildlife habits, encouraging wildlife to visit and feed on our properties and, last but definitely not least, removal of barbed wire from fences.

Ten tips to reduce road kill

1. Don't exceed speed limits and slow down by a further 10-20 km/h at dusk and dawn, as these are the times when animals are most active.
2. Always expect that there could be an animal just out of sight and be alert as you approach bends, rises or dips.
3. Watch for shadows and movement at the road edge, be alert and be prepared.
4. If you see one animal crossing the road (especially kangaroos) always be prepared for another.
5. Never assume an animal or bird will move before you reach them – they often don't move, may be blinded by headlights, or may not have even heard your vehicle.
6. Don't swerve suddenly as it is dangerous – taking your foot off the accelerator for a moment, or a gentle touch on the brake is often enough to give the bird or animal time to escape, if you are not able to slow right down.



Would you want to be responsible for this tragedy?

A grey kangaroo and her beautiful joey silent victims of the native wildlife road toll. Slowing down at dusk and dawn can save lives.

7. If you think it is not possible to avoid an animal safely, give your horn a blast to at least give it a chance.
8. Note that many animals do not view vehicles as a threat, as they haven't evolved a defence strategy for vehicles, since cars don't smell or look like predators, like we do!
9. Be alert in spring and summer as reptiles appear on the roads and look closely at anything on the road that at first glance appears to be a stick.
10. Avoid throwing food waste from your vehicle (even an apple core) as this may attract wildlife to our roadsides.

Wombat Crossings

A 2012 research study presents us with what could be a relatively simple solution to help wombats across our roads, by using drainage culverts. Despite these structures being numerous along highways, there has been little data evaluating their use as roadway underpasses by wildlife, including the bare-nosed, or common wombat (*Vombatus ursinus*).

Like in Victoria, the common wombat is involved in substantial numbers of vehicle collisions in NSW, resulting in significant road kill. Culvert use by wombats was measured with camera traps positioned at 19 drainage culverts over a 10-night period along an 8 km stretch of road known as 'Thunderbolt's Way' near Nowendoc on the Northern Tableland in north-eastern New South Wales.

Wombats were frequent users of the culverts, with 8 of the 19 culverts used from once to several times a night during the 10 night observation period. Despite the short time frame over which this study was conducted, its outcome gives empirical support to the idea that wombats are willing to use drainage culverts to cross under roadways.

While drainage culverts could represent cost-effective devices for reducing wombat mortality resulting from vehicle collision, managing the habitat surrounding the culvert is also an important strategy. The normal practice of clearing the forest to create a broad roadside verge probably reduces the likelihood of wombats using culverts. However, because wombats prefer to forage in open areas, this increases wombats being exposed to the road verge and probably results in greater road mortality. Instead, maintaining forest cover or encouraging the growth of trees near culverts would enhance the attractiveness of these structures for use by wombats and may guide wombats towards the culvert entrance. Installing fauna fencing to funnel wombats towards the culvert opening would further enhance these structures as wildlife underpasses.

This summary is based on an article entitled: Bare-nosed wombats (*Vombatus ursinus*) use drainage culverts to cross roads, by Natasha Crook, Stuart C. Cairns, and Karl Vernes, from the University of New England, Armidale. The complete article can be accessed at

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/255908771>
Bare-nosed wombats *Vombatus ursinus* use drainage culverts to cross roads.

Simply copy and paste this link in your web browser.

A day in the life of a Wildlife Shelter/Carer

Read this moving account of a single day in the life of a wildlife carer and be amazed.

- 0500** Bottle feed small kangaroo joey & change pouches/bedding. Check 4kg wombat joey that came in overnight – kept warm in bathroom.
- 0600** Bottle feed 2 wombat joeys (about 2kg each) in pen in laundry – clean pen/ change bedding. Check possums in outside cages – food/cuttings should be eaten & possums should be curled up in boxes.
- 0700** Check 2 wombats in outside pen – clean pen/change bedding/top up food/wash dirty bedding.
- 0800** Respond to call about injured wombat by road – about 20km away.
- 0830** Arrive at scene – large male wombat with broken back – take to vet to be euthanised. On way to vet – see wombat beside road, killed overnight – stop to check for joey – young female/no joey – mark with X to show it has been checked for young.
- 1000** Another carer arrives to collect 4 kg wombat (carer given small kangaroo joey, in pouch, to cuddle). Have a cup of coffee together to share wombat's history – it was seen wandering on a property on its own for 3 weeks, often near busy road, no sign of mother – probably killed by truck regularly using the road – around 9-10 months old, out of pouch but still drinking milk from elongated teat & learning from/protected by mum – highly unlikely to survive on its own – very stressed & wild so will require experience/patience to settle and feed.
- 1100** Bottle feed small kangaroo joey & cuddle for a while.
- 1130** Collect grass for wombats. Receive call from Wildlife Rescue Group re 2 King Parrots unable to fly and in poor condition – agree symptoms appear to be Psittacine beak and feather disease (PBFD), also known as psittacine circovirus (highly contagious & untreatable) – suggest take to Healesville Sanctuary to be assessed & probably euthanised.
- 1200** Bottle feed 2 wombat joeys (about 2kg each) – clean pen/change bedding/give grass. Check all animals in care – top up food, etc.
- 1500** Collect grass for wombats/cuttings for possums. Clean out possum cages/change branches around/put in fresh cuttings and food (fruit, etc). Take 2 wombats outside for a romp.
- 1600** Take other 2 wombats out for a romp. Receive follow up call re King Parrots – both were euthanised.
- 1700** Bottle feed small kangaroo joey/change pouches/bedding/cuddle for a while.
- 1800** Respond to call re kangaroo hit by a car – still alive but back legs/pelvis smashed – joey in pouch. Arrange for joey to be removed & police to euthanise kangaroo.
- 1830** Kangaroo joey arrives – placed in pouch on heat to recover – looks OK – too stressed to do major evaluation – kept warm/quiet/calm.
- 1900** Receive call from carer to say wombat handed on today is stressed, but has taken some fluids and eaten grass.
- 2000** Bottle feed 2 wombat joeys (about 2kg each) – clean pen/change bedding/give grass. New kangaroo joey checked & offered fluids (not milk) via bottle and teat – took 15ml – hold tight for a while – bruising and swelling coming up in hind legs/pelvis. Possums checked – all out of boxes & romping in cages.
- 2045** Sat on couch watching TV (volume low) cuddling kangaroo joey.
- 2230** Bottle feed small kangaroo joey/change pouches/bedding/cuddle for a while. New kangaroo joey checked & offered fluids (not milk) via bottle and teat – took 20ml – hold tight for a while – bruising and swelling in hind legs/pelvis looks worse – will need to take to Healesville Sanctuary in morning for assessment (had injuries in hind legs/pelvis that could not be treated so was euthanised).



A part of the daily routine is to check the scats (poo) of all animals in care – a change in them is often the first indication of a problem – could be stress/change in food/milk, etc.

Wildlife Shelters/Carers and Wildlife Rescue Groups do not receive Government funding, so fund their work themselves, or via donations.

Protect your property for future generations

Hoddles Creek has significant intact bushland with high natural biodiversity and good 'connectivity' across the broader landscape. However, there is increasing stress on this habitat with its unique flora and fauna from a range of pressures, including incremental clearing, too frequent burning (often resulting in the loss of hollow bearing trees), feral animals and the increasing impacts of climate change. Here are two ways you can protect your property.

Conservation Covenant

Trust for Nature developed the conservation covenant program so that landowners could permanently protect native vegetation, including habitat for plants and wildlife, on their own properties. This covenanting program is established under the Victorian Conservation Trust Act 1972. A conservation covenant is a permanent, legally-binding agreement placed on a property's title to ensure native vegetation on the property is protected forever. This agreement is voluntary and negotiated between Trust for Nature and each individual landowner.

Conservation Covenant benefits include:

- Habitat protection 'in perpetuity'
- In Victoria, Trust for Nature's conservation covenants are the only legally binding way to protect habitat on private land in perpetuity
- Free access to landowner support, including land assessment, mapping biodiversity, revegetation, monitoring and pest, plant and animal control
- A range of financial incentives including income tax deductions, concessions related to capital gains tax, rate reductions and even fencing of land
- Being involved in one of Australia's oldest conservation organisations
- Trust for Nature signage for land with a Conservation Covenant

<http://www.trustfornature.org.au/>

FOHC member Keith Jesse has a Conservation Covenant on his land and is happy to talk on 0409 003 231.



Wildlife Land Trust

In 2007, Humane Society International (HSI) launched the Wildlife Land Trust (WLT) Australia in an effort to preserve and protect our vital native habitats and the animals that depend on them, in a network of sanctuaries, both throughout the country and internationally.

Working under the guiding principle of 'humane stewardship', the WLT protects not only vast and impressive landscapes, but also smaller, humbler places that provide for the needs of all wildlife, rare and common species alike.

Wildlife Land Trust member benefits include:

- Becoming part of a continually growing national and international network of sanctuaries promoting best conservation practices
- The facilitation of useful communication between sanctuary members, as well as HSI staff and experienced land managers and native wildlife rehabilitators
- Assistance regarding both the legal and ecological integrity of the property should it be required
- Opportunity to talk about the invaluable work undertaken to protect important wildlife habitats through feature pages on our website and in our regular Wildlife Lands newsletter
- Wildlife Land Trust signs to erect on your property

<https://www.wildlifelandtrust.org.au/>

FOHC member Sharon Murray has a Letter of Agreement with Wildlife Land Trust Australia and is happy to talk on 0414 322 906.



Like to join FOHC? The Friends of Hoddles Creek are always on the lookout for new members to add new ideas, new helpers and new friends to our group. If you'd like to join, simply contact us with your name, address and phone or email details. You can mail these to FOHC, PO Box 298, Yarra Junction, Vic 3797, or email us at friendsofhoddlescreek@gmail.com. See more at our website (www.friendsofhoddlescreek.com) or on Facebook – just search 'Friends of Hoddles Creek' or 'FOHC'.

