



# A wild ride

Caring for an injured or orphaned animal has its rewards, but the reality is far from cute and cuddly for many carers who put the wellbeing of wildlife ahead of their own

WORDS GRACE HEATHCOTE PHOTOGRAPHY SAM ROSEWARNE

Tasmania is well known for its wildlife – in particular the charismatic devil, the shy spotted quoll, the extinct tiger. Marketing materials emblazoned with images of these species are helping to drive the booming tourism sector. According to the Tasmanian Visitor Survey, almost 170,000 tourists paid to see wildlife within a park or zoo between September 2016 and October 2017, a 16.5-per-cent increase on the previous year. Another 246,000 tourists in the same survey reported seeing wildlife in a more natural setting.

But this great drawcard is in peril. Estimates of the number of native animals killed by vehicles in Tasmania each year start at a conservative 370,000. There are approximately 17,500 feral cats in the state, which kill an estimated 272,000 birds each year, in addition to thousands of small mammals and reptiles. The risk posed to wildlife by marine debris and feral cats led to the inclusion of these factors as key threatening processes under the federal Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.

Many injured or orphaned animals require veterinary

treatment and an extended period of care before being ready for release. Tasmania's relatively small network of just over 300 registered volunteer wildlife carers is struggling to keep up.

Wildlife carers often describe their job as wonderful and rewarding, but also stressful and exhausting. Sleepless nights take their toll when very young animals require bottle-feeding every two to three hours. Equipment such as bottles and teats must be carefully sterilised after each use, enclosures must be cleaned and food prepared around the clock. There's little or no downtime.

Costs associated with milk formula, bottles, pouches, safety pens and outdoor enclosures must be covered by the carers themselves. Animal mortality rates can be high and veterinary treatment is expensive. Advocacy groups have emerged to support carers and to promote their interests, but an increasing number report feeling burnt out and depressed, and many are quitting altogether.

Despite these challenges, many carers continue to take on animal after animal, fostering them until they are ready for release.



Wildlife carer Linda Tabone, with Tooralie the six-month-old wombat she is currently nursing back to health at her home in Brighton.

**Linda Tabone has raised more than 40 wombats** in the past 10 years, since a childhood interest in caring for wildlife was reignited when she came within metres of the usually shy species on the snowy banks of a central highlands lake.

Now, wombats dominate Tabone's life – her house has been fortified to accommodate her furry guests, with PVC piping placed across electrical cables, and baby gates installed to block the exits to the living areas. Despite these measures, tooth marks are evident across the bottom of cabinets where the wombats have explored. A playpen set up by her bed is ready for the next tiny baby, to keep it close as it seeks the comfort of a mother figure during the night. The backyard is dominated by a matrix of enclosures that house older wombats being prepared for release.

Tabone holds in her lap six-and-a-half-month-old Tooralie, found orphaned after her mother was struck by a car. "Toorie" spends her days sleeping (mouth open, feet in the air) in a cotton and polar fleece pouch on the floor, or frolicking wildly across the tiles. At night, she is placed into a playpen in Tabone's spare room where she can be heard banging around for hours. "The pen is trashed in the morning," Tabone says. "But at least it's not the whole house."

Tabone sometimes has three or four wombats in her care at once, and when they are young, the large couch becomes her base. "When you have three and you feed one, then the next one, then the next one, it's time to start again. Some nights I've been known to sit here and doze between feeds and then start again. It's pointless going to bed," she says.

Recent health issues have meant Tabone has had to reduce her workload and is now only caring for one wombat at a time.

"I'll always have a wombat," she says. "It's a passion and my passion has just about been the end of me lately, but we'll be back on track again soon."

**Thirty years ago**, Jude Lennox found a strange bag at her door. It contained a young brushtail possum and, without knowing who placed it there or why, Lennox took the orphan into her home. Since then, she has raised thousands of mammals and become one of Tasmania's most experienced and respected wildlife carers. The Blackmans Bay resident is one of just a few people in the state who are permitted to care for the endangered Tasmanian devil and her love for the animal is evident. "They're gorgeous little things and so underrated," she says.



Main image: A two-month-old ringtail possum in the care of Jude Lennox; above, Lennox feeds a two-month-old eastern barred bandicoot.

"A wombat will turn and eventually be nasty. That doesn't happen with a devil – to their carers they will always be loving, more loving than a puppy."

Despite her decades of experience, Lennox still finds the work emotionally taxing. "You can't do this and not get emotionally involved," she says. "I can't help it. When it's release time I've got a smile from ear to ear and tears pouring."

Lennox says the stress of the role is to the blame for the high dropout rate among carers. "They think it's all laughter and light and it's not. They're not aware of the work that it actually does take and the commitment involved," she says.

Nonetheless, Lennox will usually have upwards of 14 critters in her care at a time. "You so want to get in there and help them all that you don't know how to say no," she says.

When asked what motivates her to keep caring, Lennox says: "Their trust. It absolutely amazes me that you've got this little wild creature who has no reason to trust humans – and let's face it, we're predators – and yet they trust you."

**Honey McClay inherited a love of wildlife** from her mother and grew up sharing her home with dozens of creatures undergoing rehabilitation. Now, McClay wants to share her knowledge with others and for the past 12 months she's been

crisscrossing the state, delivering training sessions to carers of all experience levels. In addition to providing information on standard husbandry practices, her courses encourage carers to focus on their own mental health.

"We work 24/7," McClay says. "And it's emotional. I've yet to find another volunteer role that is 24/7 in your home where there is no counselling support, no phone support, nothing."

As McClay describes the care manuals and courses she is developing, she's making tea, bottle-feeding and toileting a pademelon joey, and checking on three juvenile green rosellas in a pen beside her kitchen table.

She says she's disheartened that only five of the 230 people she trained in 2017 have registered to become wildlife carers.

"Many of the species we're talking about are still in abundance, but in my son's lifetime many more species will become endangered," she says. "The more we do now to build up our knowledge and create a generation of people who care, by the time a species is in trouble, the work is already done and they can just focus on the saving bit."

*For information on how to become a wildlife carer, contact the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment on 6165 4305 or [wildlife.reception@dipwe.tas.gov.au](mailto:wildlife.reception@dipwe.tas.gov.au)*



Wildlife rehabilitator Honey McClay is caring for three eight-week-old green rosellas at her home at Neika.

## Advertisement

### Dear Southwood Fibre

You want to build a woodchip export facility in Port Esperance, Dover. You plan to locate a woodchip pile up on a hill, 80m above sea level. Two bulldozers will operate up to 24 hours a day, 6 days a week. Your massive 240m bulk woodchip carriers will dwarf our fishing boats and tinnies.

Dover and the Far South have turned the corner after hard times. We want investment in our thriving nature tourism industry, and the jobs it will keep on giving. The stigma and division of industrial-scale forestry will undermine the lifeblood of our region. The last thing we want is to threaten tourism and aquaculture with a polluting noisy woodchip industry.

Tourists come here to explore the natural beauty of Esperance Camp, Duckhole Lake, Cockle Creek and Adamson's Peak. They don't want to share roads with logging trucks that drive past them every seven minutes, day and night, five days a week. You expect 180,000 truck movements a year when you are at full capacity, feeding your chipper at the back of Geeveston, then through to our bay to build your pile of smashed trees.

The material on your website shows this project will drastically degrade the lifestyle and stunning beauty of Dover, the Far South and the Huon Valley. Your woodchip export site and

the pile will dominate the bay, looming higher than Hope Island.

Your acoustic data pretend the continual dozer and loader noises will have almost no impact on town residents and tourists. Please visit us on a crisp still winter's morning and test whether we can still hear the bird song, lapping waves, and distant chatting of people around the bay, over the sound of your diesel engines and generators in the 45,000 tonne vessel.

People on Bruny Island would also like you to model the noise they will hear from the ships that motor past to queue in the D'Entrecasteaux Channel.

What are your long term plans for our bay? Will you sub-lease to other exporters who further industrialise our foreshore? What will you do with our port once you have set a precedent and made the site into a 'loading facility'?

You have significant financial assets across Australia. Your profits mean you have put serious funding into planning and lobbying. We are a small working community with limited resources.

More than 200 Dover residents came to speak with you before Christmas. You made a commitment to consult with the community closely. You said you wanted a development that locals want too.

The 28 day public advertising period when your plans go to council is too short for us to properly respond to the impacts of this massive

development. You promised the public meeting you'd share the 500 pages of assessment data you've already given council staff to work through – but said you needed council permission. We checked with Council – it's your material, you own it, and you can give it to us to look at.

We know this woodchip export facility will change our peaceful, quiet town forever because your CEO told the people of Dover "the world's gotta move on" (ABC Radio). He's a wealthy man who chooses to relax in his Queensland Castaways resort. We live and work in the Far South, and we don't want to be anywhere else.

Release the 500 pages of your impact assessments, so Huon Valley residents have enough time to consider the full costs and impacts of your exploitative development.

Postpone your development application until we have elected councillors that live among us, have property here, and intimately know how we live and what we value.

Or better still – do the residents of the Far South, and the tourists who come to visit us, a favour. We don't want your divisive, noisy, damaging woodchip export facility. Pack up your bags and YOU 'move on'. It won't be worth your effort.

**Best wishes,**  
**The Residents of Dover and**  
**Far South Tasmania**