

2019 Wildlife Rehabilitation Award

The Wildlife Rehabilitation Award is awarded to an individual or a conservation group that is contributing to the preservation of Australia's wildlife. The Society is aware that many organisations and thousands of volunteers are working tirelessly to save Australia's wildlife and the habitat in which they live. Many people find the experience of rehabilitating native wildlife rewarding; however, it is time-consuming and can be very expensive. The award is intended to acknowledge and commemorate, on behalf of the whole community, the individuals or conservation groups working tirelessly to support, rehabilitate and conserve Australia's native wildlife.

The award for 2019 was presented to John Creighton of Bundanoon, New South Wales. John cares for orphaned, injured and manged wombats and educates the community about the common wombat or bare-nosed wombat (*Vombatus ursinus*). In the field, John follows wombats and installs medicated burrow flaps. The wombats become treated for mange when they enter or leave their burrows. John is the founder of Wombat Care Bundanoon (WCB) and is dedicated to looking after wombat populations in the Southern Highlands of New South Wales.

John runs community workshops, attends conferences and manages volunteers. A group of 16 university students, and their teacher, were inspired by John's work and flew over from California to volunteer their time at WCB. John has an in-depth understanding of the implications of mange for wombat populations on a broader ecological scale. John educates children about wombat care and biology at local schools. John also engages with and encourages the wider community to take action on all aspects of wombat conservation and hopes to preserve the Australian icon for future generations.

Acceptance speech from John Creighton

Thank you to the Australian Wildlife Society for presenting me with the Wildlife Rehabilitation Award for 2019. I am truly touched, humbled and honoured. To be the recipient of such an award is motivating, it is not an end-point, box-ticked, or goal-achieved. Receiving this award confirms that I am on the right path and encourages me to push forward. Personally, receiving this award marks a new chapter, in an ongoing journey, in wildlife care and community education.

Thank you to the Society for all you do to preserve Australia's wildlife and empower and educate so many individuals. The support, guidance, and knowledge the Society provides are vital for a successful outcome for Australia's wildlife. Simply, the Society empowers and inspires many individuals to achieve wildlife preservation, and for that, I am most grateful.

Each wildlife conservation organisation, in its unique way, is working together to achieve the same vision, intent, and action for Australia's wildlife. Personally, to be acknowledged for doing what I love, for those I love (the wombats), in their time of great need (mange, drought, and bushfires) is a powerful and affirming feeling. I am appreciative that my efforts have been recognised as valuable, vital and worthwhile. Thank you. Being the recipient of this prestigious award sends a message to other wildlife rehabilitators, that work in similar ways and achieving positive results for wildlife, that we are on the right path. Our work is noticed, and it matters!

When I think of the work wildlife rehabilitators do, I think of words such as sacrifice, dedication, commitment, challenge, struggle, and selflessness. Wildlife rehabilitation is hard work. It is physically and emotionally demanding, but it is also affirming, uniting and beautiful. As wildlife rehabilitators, we give so much of ourselves for the wildlife in our care, and as every good carer knows, wildlife rehabilitation demands nothing less than our very best.

Caring for and being in such a position to make a positive change in the lives of Australia's wildlife is a privilege. The more you give, the more you get out of it. Their successes become our successes and together, we and the wildlife in our care and in the wild, all move forward. We are so fortunate to have so many hard-working wildlife rehabilitators across Australia. The goals and accomplishments being achieved, nationwide, is inspiring.

Attending a Wombat Protection Society of Australia conference on mange in 2015 was a key turning point for Wombat Care Bundanoon. It was one of those points where a specific need dictated our work. My focus went from rescuing and rehabilitating wombats to treating wombats for mange. Over the years, Wombat Care Bundanoon treating wombats for mange has saved hundreds of wombats from pain, misery, and death. However, this work is far from over, and we have so much still to do.

Receiving the 2019 Wildlife Rehabilitation Award is a real personal milestone, a great honour, and a motivator. I would like to thank my family, my extended family, and my friends. Without their love and support, I would simply not be here myself. To the Australian Wildlife Society, thank you for all you do. I will honour this award with great work in the future and do my best for Australia's wombats and wildlife. Thank you.



President, Suzanne Medway AM, presenting the Wildlife Rehabilitation Award to John Creighton.