



# Tackling Australian Wildlife Entanglement

Leonard Fitzpatrick

It is no secret that our native wildlife is battling a range of threats from human activities. One of the most consistent and distressing scenarios that wildlife rescuers and veterinarians face is entangled wildlife. The scale and diversity of terrestrial and aquatic wildlife maimed and killed through entanglement is of great concern. Flying-foxes, birds, lizards, snakes, macropods, turtles, platypus (*Ornithorhynchus anatinus*), and rakali (*Hydromys chrysogaster*), an Australian native rodent, are the species that fall victim to entanglement. The causes of wildlife entanglement are diverse and include barbed wire, fruit netting, fishing line and tackle, fishing nets, twine, face masks, plastic rings, and general rubbish. Although the causes of wildlife entanglement are directly linked to the choices we make, we also have the ability to make positive changes through our behaviour e.g., erecting wildlife-friendly fencing, snipping through plastic rings and the loops of face masks, and appropriately disposing of fishing line and netting.

Raising awareness of the threat of entanglement to native wildlife and the simple measures we can implement to help protect them is vital, including efforts implemented by local councils and other authorities. However, when wildlife groups or advocates approach local councils and other bodies to seek a change in regulations minimising the threat of wildlife entanglement, the availability of reliable and compelling data is often limited.

Volunteer wildlife groups and wildlife hospitals all have different methods and approaches to collecting and recording wildlife entanglement data. In July 2020, intending to help passionate wildlife advocates and groups, I collaborated with a team from the Atlas of Living Australia (hosted by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation) to launch an Australian-wide citizen science project – Entangled Wildlife Australia. Entangled Wildlife Australia is a database accessible via the Web, mobile device, or BioCollect application. Wildlife rescuers or the public can use these platforms to record sightings of entangled wildlife

(living or deceased, rescued or escaped) in the Entangled Wildlife Australia database. Other information can also be uploaded, such as species, age group (if known), location, type of entanglement, and the option to include a photo. Users can view or download the data and the geographical distribution of different species at local and national levels, identifying wildlife entanglement hotspots.

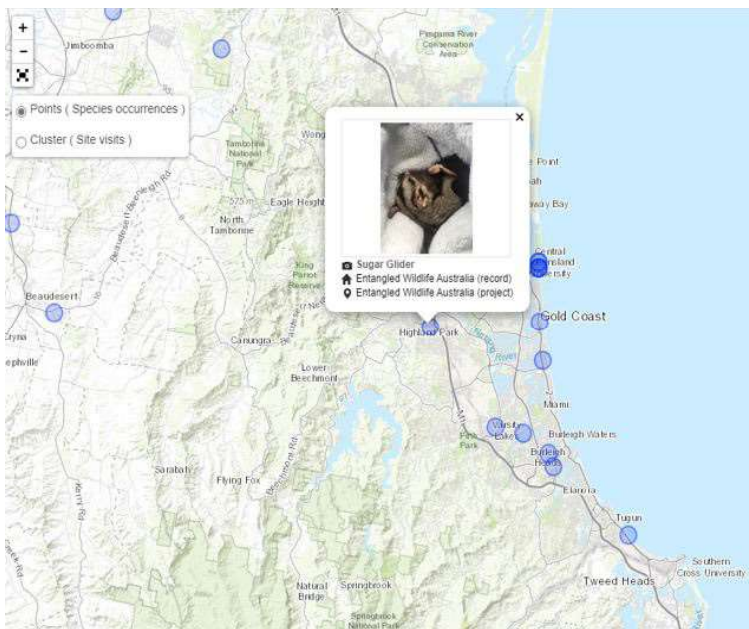
The Entangled Wildlife Australia database has over 1,460 records. As more people become aware of Entangled Wildlife Australia and contribute much-needed data, I hope

**Top Left:** A little red flying-fox (*Pteropus scapulatus*) found entangled on a barbed wire fence. Image: Michael Wilson, Bats Qld.

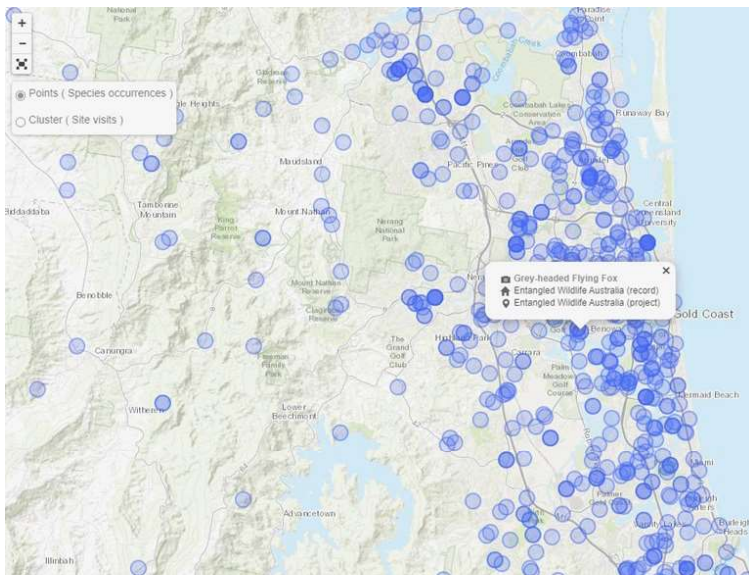
**Top Right:** A pelican (*Pelecanus conspicillatus*) found entangled in fishing line and a hook at Woody Point, Queensland. Image: Pelican and Seabird Rescue Inc.

**Bottom Right:** A bush stone-curlew (*Burhinus grallarius*) found entangled in a fishing line and a coat hanger at MacLeay Island, Queensland. Image: Pelican and Seabird Rescue Inc.





A screenshot from the Entangled Wildlife Australia website showing a geographic sample of sugar glider (*Petaurus breviceps*) entanglements in south-east Queensland.



A screenshot from the Entangled Wildlife Australia website showing a geographic sample of grey-headed flying-fox (*Pteropus poliocephalus*) entanglements in south-east Queensland.



Leonard Fitzpatrick, the founder of Entangled Wildlife Australia.

that the valuable body of information will support wildlife conservation efforts and bring about positive changes for native wildlife. I also hope the data helps to reduce the stress and demands on veterinarian staff, wildlife rescuers, and rehabilitators. Lastly, I hope the data will assist wildlife groups and

other professionals in educating the community on the threat of wildlife entanglement and advocating for wildlife-friendly practices.

In 2017, I joined the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Queensland as a volunteer animal transport driver. I witnessed, first-hand, the direct and indirect impacts of human activities and how precious our native wildlife truly is. Within a short amount of time, I was inspired by the rescuers, veterinarian staff, and wildlife rehabilitators. Through them, I came to know about the following local wildlife rescue organisations: Wildcare, Bats Queensland, Bat Conservation and Rescue Queensland, and Reptile Rehabilitation Queensland. I also volunteered my time to these organisations to help where I could. The frequency and distressing outcomes of wildlife entanglements had a significant impact on me. Consequently, I vowed to be part of a solution to protect native wildlife. My inspiration behind developing Entangled Wildlife Australia was what I learnt from the Wildlife Friendly Fencing Project, the connections I made with people passionate about wildlife entanglements, and the diverse array of extraordinary native wildlife in Australia.

## To Access Entangled Wildlife Australia

Please visit [bit.ly/3q1EHPH](https://bit.ly/3q1EHPH), scan the QR code, or email [entangledwildlifeaustralia@ihug.com.au](mailto:entangledwildlifeaustralia@ihug.com.au)



A platypus (*Ornithorhynchus anatinus*) found entangled in fishing line. Image: Denise Illing, Australian Platypus Conservancy.