

Cedar Creek Wombat Rescue Inc. & Hospital

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Cedar Creek Wombat Rescue Inc. and Wombat Hospital is dedicated to rescuing not just orphaned joey wombats but also sub-adults and adults that are in need of medical care – whether it be from car accident or many other illnesses – and also wombats being raised by a member of the public! But mainly we concentrate on wombats that are affected by mange that are in need of more than routine care to get them to the point of release. We also take on mange young from other wildlife rehabilitation groups that don't have the facilities to do so!

I was born and bred into wildlife and have been doing my mange work for over 36 odd years. I am also working under a scientific licence on a mange paper with PhD student Tamiaka Fraser which is still ongoing. We also go into the field on other people's properties here in the Hunter Valley and treat wild wombats, achieving great outcomes of clearing up mange.

What is mange?

Mange is a terrible, debilitating disease in wombats. It is caused by a mite called *Sarcoptes scabiei*.

The mites mate on the skin and then the females tunnel into the skin causing a honeycomb of tunnels and laying eggs as they go. This process causes a severe inflammatory reaction and intense itching. Scratching as well as the burrowing of the mites causes damage to the skin. When the skin is damaged, a bacterial infection can take hold and produce pus. Large patches of skin can be affected. These patches form crusts that then crack leaving large open wounds that become fly-blown. The mites feed on serum, the liquid component of blood, and this, along with the bacterial infection, contributes to the overall decline of the wombat's health. Thick crusts form around the eyes and ears as well leading to blindness and loss of hearing. This makes it more difficult for the wombats to forage for food, further weakening them. As the disease advances, it can affect the organs including the liver, kidneys, heart and lungs.

Eventually, if untreated, the mange leads to system failure and death.

If a female with a joey is affected, she may reject the joey because she is unable to cope. The joey will likely also be affected and if not found and treated, will be unable to survive. Joeys should only be taken into care by a licensed experienced carer who is trained and knowledgeable in the treatment of mange. These joeys have many special needs and require a huge effort to rehabilitate them to the point of release.

Mange treatment

Mange can be treated successfully if caught early enough. Any wombat that is seen out during the day should be suspected of having mange. The sooner they are treated, the better chance they have to survive. They must be treated correctly and not harmed further by the treatment, so it's best to be done by someone experienced in not only handling wombats but also treating mange. Here at Cedar Creek Wombat Rescue Inc. & Hospital, we have treated many adults in the field and joeys in care for mange. The treatment involves applying a topical medication such as an ivermectin pour-on. Smaller wombats, which can be more easily handled, are given injections. The crusting prevents absorption of the medication and also leads to the severe cracking and damage to the skin. Treatment works best if it is done weekly and can take six to eight weeks or longer in some animals depending on the overall condition and health of the wombat. It takes persistence and perseverance, especially with the young ones,

providing the support that they need to build some resistance.

Treating mange is an ongoing and important battle and must be continued, or we face the loss of one of Australia's most iconic animals.



Tonka before treatment



Tonka during treatment



Tonka