

2023 Wildlife Rehabilitation Award

The Wildlife Rehabilitation Award is awarded to an individual or a wildlife conservation group contributing to preserving Australia's wildlife. The award is intended to acknowledge and commemorate the individuals or wildlife conservation groups working tirelessly to rescue, rehabilitate, and conserve Australia's native wildlife. Many people find the experience of rehabilitating native wildlife rewarding; however, it is time-consuming and can be very expensive.

The award for 2023 was presented to **Warrumbungle Wildlife Rescue & Rehabilitation Inc.** of Mendooran, New South Wales.

Founded by Tanya O'Donoghue in December 2022, Warrumbungle Wildlife Rescue & Rehabilitation Inc. is a small group of passionate and dedicated volunteer wildlife carers specialising in rescuing and rehabilitating Australian native animals in the beautiful Warrumbungles area of New South Wales.

Tanya, a retired vet nurse with over 30 years of experience as a wildlife carer, previously managed Warrumbungle Wildlife Shelter for nearly a decade before establishing Warrumbungle Wildlife Rescue & Rehabilitation.

Despite operating in a remote, poorly serviced area, the group tirelessly works to assist a variety of native wildlife year after year, from birds and kangaroos to snakes and platypuses. Their primary goal is to nurse these animals back to health and release them back into their natural habitats whenever possible. They are building a triage centre, complete with a special humidity crib for pinkie animals that come into care.

With decades of knowledge and experience, their small network is rich in skills and abilities, making them a highly qualified and deserving candidate for the Wildlife Rehabilitation Award.

Acceptance Speech from Warrumbungle Wildlife Rescue & Rehabilitation Inc.

After caring for wildlife for many years here, it became apparent early on that animals in remote locations were not prioritised for rescue because of the vast distances needed to travel. Often, these animals died or suffered because of the

lack of effort or the distance required to be covered to rescue them. That was not good enough for me. They were equally deserving of rescue, as animals closer to our major regional towns and communities. So, I decided to make very long trips to save these animals and get them the best care. I often drove through the night and straight into Dubbo, New South Wales, to the Wildlife Hospital at Taronga Western Plains Zoo.

While most times this worked out well, there were other times when I realised that the animals were too unwell to continue the journey, or I could not get them to the zoo before closing hours. Then, I decided to apply for funding through the Humane Society International Australia to build a small Triage Clinic. When finished, I hope it will also attract and facilitate researchers, vets, and other conservationists interested in our Arid zone wildlife. The Triage Clinic is still a work in progress, and hopefully soon, with more funding, it will finally be finished and kitted out. The Triage Clinic will treat our injured and orphaned wildlife and provide a safe area for larger animals who come into care for other reasons.

My other great concern is safe release sites. We, as carers, spend enormous amounts of time and effort caring for these animals with one goal in mind – to release the animals back into the bush. These animals need a safe place to orient themselves and readjust to their new environment. Sadly, release sites are becoming few and far between. I feel there needs

to be funding from governments and other animal and conservation bodies to help find solutions to this very worrying problem.

Our Arid zone animals do it pretty tough out here. More so in recent years. The recent drought, powered by climate change, decimated entire populations of kangaroos in some areas. Commercial shooting, inclusion fencing, and a lot more heavy vehicles on the roads only added to population crashes. Water sources were also fenced off. I have seen droughts before, but nothing on the scale like the death and suffering I saw through this last drought. Millions of lives were lost, but no one seemed to notice because we are a fair way west of the Great Dividing Range.

We are extremely honoured to receive this recognition. I hope it will give us a louder voice and a higher platform to speak out for our native wildlife, especially our kangaroos. I hope, too, that from now on, my voice is louder on their behalf. If it is, and someone listens, then I have succeeded.

When I drive out here now in certain places, the silence of their absence is deafening. I hope that we can change that. I am very humbled to receive this award. It was quite a shock, albeit a very pleasant one.

In finishing, to quote Joy Murphy Wandin, an Aboriginal Elder:

*"I am a Boorai of this Country.
The old ones tell me I belong here.
I walk this land like no other.
Following my dreaming tracks."*



2023 Wildlife Rehabilitation Award Recipient. L to R: Dr Robin Crisman, Heather Stephens, and Patrick Medway AM.



Tanya O'Donoghue holding a swamp wallaby (*Wallabia bicolor*) joey.