

MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday 22 April

Announcing Victoria's first travelling wildlife veterinary service

Wildlife Victoria, the State's wildlife emergency rescue service, today announced plans to launch a Wildlife Travelling Vet program which will fill a gap of great need in the State.

Wildlife Victoria Chair Catherine Macleod said the board was delighted to initiate the new service that would provide extra support for wildlife volunteers and enable native animals to get more timely expert medical treatment when they need it.

The Wildlife Travelling Veterinary program will focus entirely on supporting Wildlife Victoria's statewide network of volunteers. Specialist vets will make regular free 'house calls' to regional volunteer wildlife shelters and attend emergencies in the field to assist wildlife rescuers.

Wildlife Victoria CEO, Lisa Palma, said the organisation recognised volunteer wildlife shelter operators, rescuers and carers had been doing it tough when it came to getting access to skilled veterinary services for native animals.

Community based veterinary services typically operate very busy practices that focus on treating domestic pets. They might attempt to squeeze in native animals between other appointments as a pro bono service to the community, but this puts extra pressure on their clinic.

"There are only a small number of vets in the State that have extensive experience with native animals," Ms Palma said.

"Consequently, wildlife shelter operators often drive hours to access an appropriate veterinary resource with specific species expertise."

Travelling to the vet with a wild animal can be incredibly challenging and stressful both for the animal and the shelter operator, particularly when the animal may be confronted with the sights, smells and sounds of unfamiliar domestic pets at the clinic.

The stress can cause additional harm to the wild animal's wellbeing. For example, myopathy (caused by the experience of stress) can lead to death in kangaroos.

"On top of traveling long distances for veterinary care, the shelter operator is responsible for paying the vet fees including diagnostic services and medications, should the veterinarian choose to charge for those services," said Ms Palma.

The introduction of skilled Wildlife Travelling Veterinarians that provide services at no cost to volunteer wildlife rescuers and carers will resolve these issues whilst also reinforcing local expertise during times of significant wildlife emergency.

As a wildlife shelter operator herself, Ms Palma has sympathy for both native animals in need and the volunteers who rescue and care for them.

"The sad fact is that wildlife volunteers are often called out in the middle of the night to deal with an animal in pain and distress after a collision with a vehicle. The period between dusk and dawn is particularly hazardous when people are driving through the home of our wildlife," she said.

"In country Victoria, our volunteer rescuers have been pretty much on their own, with no hope of veterinary support until the local vet opens in the morning. It can be an agonising experience for the animal and traumatising for the volunteer, especially when it is clear that the animal needs to be humanely euthanised."

"By introducing this Wildlife Travelling Veterinary program, we will be providing our incredibly hard working and dedicated volunteer wildlife shelters, carers and rescuers with a vital resource that will strengthen the fabric of the wildlife welfare sector in their community," Ms Palma said.

Wildlife Travelling Vets will undertake an induction program, with placements in carefully selected multi-species wildlife shelters, before commencing their on the road practice.

Ms Palma said that Wildlife Victoria had appointed an experienced wildlife vet to oversee the program's implementation. Wildlife Victoria anticipates that the first vet will be on the road before Spring this year. Spring is one of the busiest times of the year for wildlife volunteers.

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For further information and enquiries contact: Wildlife Victoria media team on 0447 193 121 or media@wildlifevictoria.org.au

About Wildlife Victoria

- Wildlife Victoria is a not for profit wildlife Emergency Response Service that has been operating for more than 30 years as an independent, not-for-profit organisation focussed on the welfare of Australia's unique wildlife.
- Annually, Wildlife Victoria's Emergency Response Service receives more than 88,000 requests for assistance and assists over 50,000 sick, injured or orphaned animals.
- Wildlife Victoria educates the community about wildlife, and helps the community manage wildlife incidents.
- Wildlife Victoria advocates for wildlife whenever their welfare is under threat or compromised.