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Labour of love gets wildlife back on track

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They might not evoke the same sympathy as cute and cuddly animals in need, but native wildlife also need a little bit of TLC when they are injured, sick or orphaned.

That is when the volunteers at Darling Range Wildlife Shelter come to the rescue.

Perth's wildlife warriors have rescued and rehabilitated at least 4500 native animals in five years of operation — no mean feat for a group run entirely by volunteers.

The sanctuary's main admissions are wildlife injured in road accidents, in cat or dog attacks or that become sick for a variety of reasons, including eating bait.

Co-ordinator Michelle Hazelwood said their most common patients included kangaroos, possums, bandicoots and birds.

She said not all their rescued creatures had a happy ending, with about a 60 per cent rehabilitation success rate.



Ms Hazelwood said the best thing about the job was to release a healthy animal back into the wild. One special happy ending involved a sick joey that was rescued from his dead mother's pouch after three days and was named "Chopper" because birds or foxes had mutilated his ears. After three weeks' recuperation he was released.

Ms Hazelwood said everyone should do all they could to protect Australia's precious wildlife, which was often overlooked in favour of domesticated animals.

"I think we have a responsibility to make sure they're OK, they are kind of like our neighbours and we need to live alongside one another," she said.

The shelter, located in the foothills suburb of Martin, is supported by more than 100 volunteers. Ms Hazelwood said they received about 15 injured kangaroos a year from WA's north, either flown in by mine sites or picked up by travellers, that were treated and taken back home.

Ms Hazelwood, a mother of one, is also a full-time volunteer. "I think that people should definitely find an area they are passionate about and look at volunteering ... it's worthwhile to invest some time even if it's once a month for a few hours."

KATE CAMPBELL

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