



September 2017



Hello again Friends

In this issue we reveal a *birds-eye* view of the Shoalhaven Rock-wallaby colonies and celebrate Kangaroo Valley School's spectacularly fun *Wakakirri Story Dance* of the **Brush-Tailed ROCK Wallabz** performed at the Shoalhaven Entertainment Centre ... and proudly sponsored by the Friends of the Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby. The students announced to the entire audience that they enjoyed a close relationship with the Friends and to back that up several committee members joined the school once again for their special National Threatened Species Day activities. Illaroo Road School students were also paid a *Friendly* visit. Read on to get a taste of Jann's experience meeting Black-footed Rock-wallabies and Juliet's Jenolan encounter with Brushies and Spotted-tailed Quolls.

NPWS Report on the Shoalhaven Rock-wallabies

Two 'problem' foxes and two wild cats that have been stalking the Creek colony for a year or two were finally trapped last month. The male rock wallaby introduced last year to the Creek colony has been caught on camera showing interest in Pinot, Fiona, Nibbler and Rosie. Unfortunately the newer male, Dumbledore, passed away with no obvious cause of death. So it's up to Tyson to produce some joeys with these poor lonely ladies. We really need some good news at the Creek colony. Several foxes have also been trapped around the River and Mountain colonies. However, to our growing frustration, we have been unable to trap any of the wild dogs intermittently recorded on our network of predator monitoring cameras. One particular dog is doing the rounds of all three Shoalhaven rock wallaby colonies roughly once a month. This is of particular concern now that joeys are emerging. Irene at the Mountain colony has a very large 'bump' as does, Flower, her daughter Pebbles, Wirra, Bangarra and Pia at the River colony. Pebbles and Wirra's son Gingernut are still smitten with each other - Brigalow is content to share some of the younger ladies, but two younger males are fighting. It would be heartening to see some young males stay around the River colony as they do at the Mountain colony. We have approval from the NSW Ethics Committee to trap and radio-collar immature males at the River. Then, if they get ushered out by Brigalow or Gingernut, we can follow them and determine their fate. Before the rock wallabies were human-hunted and fox-predated to the brink of extinction many young males would disperse and find other females to breed with, thereby stemming genetic bottlenecks within colonies. It is unfortunate that we have not received approval to transfer 'excess' mature males from the River and Mountain colonies to the Creek colony. So although we have not downloaded any recent footage or photos of joeys from the rock wallaby monitoring cameras yet, please stay tune to the Friends Instagram – *Befriendrockwallaby* and You Tube channel for some cuteness expected soon. Drone footage of the River, Mountain and Creek colonies is available by searching *Friends of the Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby* on You Tube. Fox bait station underwent minor location additions and adjustments in Kangaroo Valley. A map detailing the location of the permanent 1080 sites can be found on the Friends website under *fox control*.

Thank you to the Kangaroo Valley landholders who have recently undertaken the free half day training for vertebrate pesticides through Local Land Services and are now implementing their own 1080 baiting on their property for the protection of the Brush-tailed Rock-wallabies ... as well as local chickens, lambs and calves. If you have a property in Kangaroo Valley, Budgong or Illaroo please consider contacting Evelyn at Local Land Services and becoming a Feral Fighter: evelyn.osborne@lls.nsw.gov.au or 0409 541131

If you are unable to help the Rock-wallabies through fox control please remember that all your donations, symbolic adoptions, membership and the purchase of merchandise from the Friends is directed towards monitoring cameras and the broad scale, humane fox shooting and trapping program and community education (160 extremely polite Stage 3 students at Illaroo Road Public School were the latest to receive a dose of the Friends School Ed Program).

Kangaroo Valley School goes 'Waki' over Rock Wallabies

Wakakirri, meaning 'to dance a story' in Aboriginal, is a long-running National *Story-Dance* Festival where schools aim to perform a story that changes the way people think about the world around them.

After days of preparation schools compete on stage within their region. Through a short performance students theatrically tell a story using a combination of dancing, acting, props, costumes and creative movement to pre-recorded music.

The Friends were impressed when Kangaroo Valley Public School entered *Wakakirri* for the first time and developed their *Story* around their local hero – the Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby. The Kangaroo Valley *Story Dance – The Brush-Tailed ROCK Wallabz* – was about *Rocky*, the punk rockin' Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby who feels all alone in the bush and is frowned upon by the other bush animals for loving Rock'n Roll. The National Park and Wildlife Rangers introduce a few more rock wallabies and soon a ROCK Wallaby band is formed and the bush animals can't help but join in.

Performing in *Wakakirri* is an experience students will never forget. Here is what the school principal, Andrew Smee, had to say about the show:

"Wakakirri Success WOW. What an amazing performance from our whole school for our first ever Wakakirri performance last Thursday night. I have to tell you that the students were buzzing with excitement from the time they stepped off the buses at the Shoalhaven Entertainment Centre until the final curtain after the performance. It was such a great display of creative arts/ dance for every one of our children on the stage. A massive thank you to every parent involved behind the scenes, especially our costume department, props and make up. The biggest thank you must go to Mrs Uptis for taking charge of all those logistics once we started the Wakakirri journey. Thank you Jacqui (our artist in residence choreographer), school staff, office staff, parents and carers for supporting our students on the night. Our Spirit of Wakakirri Award, Teamwork Award and Best Wildlife Story Award were very much deserved. I was so proud of them all."



The *big* performance brought so much joy to all the students, the parents and teachers and a number of Friends committee members who purchased tickets. What a wonderful wildlife story to share!

This sort of enthusiasm is just what the rock wallabies need in their future guardians. It seems the Friends school education program is money well spent!



Throughout 2016 and 2017 monthly working parties at Waterfall Springs have been organised and well attended by members of the Friends, maintaining and improving the NSW Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby Captive Breeding Facility.

Interested in getting involved and meeting the rock wallabies?

The next working bees at Waterfall Springs Sanctuary at Kulnura, Central Coast, are on:

Fri arvo 13 and Sat 14 October
Fri arvo 10 and Sat 11 November

If you are keen to participate please contact melinda.norton@environment.nsw.gov.au



New Friends member, , took up the offer to assist with trapping at Waterfall Springs (Photo courtesy of Gavin Swan)

In Search of the Black-footed Rock-wallaby

By Jann Mattick

Photos by Terry Dunlea

On our recent trip to Central Australia we first located Black-footed Rock-wallabies at Simpson Gap near Alice Springs. The most striking feature of the rock-wallabies is their distinctive colouring which blends into their environment. Standing 450-530mm tall, Black-footed Rock-wallabies are easily identifiable by their brownish-grey bodies, black tail and feet, and white cheek stripe.

As the stronghold of the Black-footed Rock-wallabies is the MacDonnell Range near Alice Springs we quickly identified many areas in the East and West MacDonnell Ranges with rock-wallabies. By scanning the beautiful rock formations with our binoculars we had many opportunities to watch their antics, especially their magnificent skill at rock hopping! Surprisingly we found them in the middle of Alice Springs at Olive Pink Botanical Gardens - 8-10 at a time (photo to the right).



Jessie Gap



Simpsons Gap



The Kangaroo Sanctuary Alice Springs

By Jann Mattick

Another highlight of our trip was a sunset tour of The Kangaroo Sanctuary located on the southern edge of Alice Springs. Started by Chris 'Brolga' Barns - his mission is to rescue red kangaroo joeys and raise them for release into the wild.

The main focus of the tour is educating people to look into the pouch of any dead kangaroos along the roadside and take any joeys to the nearest wildlife rescue centre. We also all had an opportunity to cuddle a red kangaroo joey.

He has now finished building his animal hospital and within the next year will be advertising for volunteers to help raise the joeys. Brolga has a very strong following in the UK and USA.

Brolga was very interested to learn about our endangered brush-tailed rock-wallabies in Kangaroo Valley.



Recent Photo Bombs by our favourite Kangaroo Valley Adoptees and Friends



Pinot the posser



Pinot the posser again



Nibbler doing yoga?



Tyson finally 'aroused'



Flower unwell from large tick



Wirra's Mia



Irene with a big pouch

Family meeting at the dinner table

Gingernut and Pebbles

Fox Control and ideal Habitat at Jenolan Caves has provided a Haven for Rock wallabies and Quolls

As a NPWS BTRW technical officer and contractor for the Kangaroo Valley colonies I have long anticipated a hands-on encounter with the famous Jenolan Caves Rock-wallabies. The site represents the most successful population recovery for this iconic species. Some of you may have childhood recollections of rock wallabies sunning themselves in the Grand Arch before the population crashed through fox predation. Thankfully the Jenolan Caves Trust sponsored a predator-proof enclosure around a portion of their core habitat. Inside, surviving individuals thrived and reproduced until rangers were forced to open the enclosure gates due to over-crowding. Unfortunately the foxes were served up another banquet and, once again, the rock wallabies were almost annihilated. Again the rock wallabies were rescued from the brink through predator exclusion, but this time the fox population was managed through intensive 1080 control *before* and *after* the enclosure gates were opened.

For many years the Jenolan caves NPWS crew have been utilising the *capture-mark-recapture* technique twice a year to estimate the population growth of this isolated colony. For two nights each in May and August cage traps are strategically deployed within the core rock wallaby habitat and lured with a favourite herbivore recipe of oats, peanut butter and tinned passionfruit. Save our Species officers Michaela Jones and Vera Wong lead the trapping, assisted by experienced field officers. Michaela has managed the rock wallaby recovery program at Jenolan for a decade, previously as the local NPWS ranger, while Vera undertook the comprehensive rock wallaby surveys across the state in the 1990s. I helped make up the three teams of two that recently climbed around the rocks (and over the Grand Arch!) checking a total of forty cage traps between 8pm and 11.30pm and again between 8am-11.30am over two days. The traps were closed until mid-afternoon when they were re-baited.

Captured rock wallabies are quietly ushered into a large bag and scanned for an existing microchip. They have their weight and condition recorded and females also have their pouch checked. 'New' individuals are microchipped and an ear sample collected for DNA. As these rock wallabies are relatively used to humans and traps they appear completely at ease with the whole process. Generally any 'new' individuals are *young-at-foot* and last years' young. Occasionally adults are trapped for the first time. Every individual is given a name beginning with 'T' 😊

Over this trapping session 45 rock wallabies were processed: 32 females and 13 males with 7 of these previously unrecorded. Most of the females harboured unfurred pouch young and all individuals were in good condition, especially considering the time of year and lack of rain and plant growth. To my absolute delight we also processed 4 spotted-tail quolls: 3 females (1 with two furless joeys) and 1 male. See ... Australia's endemic predators live in ecological balance with prey, unlike the introduced fox and cat which build up to high densities and lead to local (and mass) extinctions of native marsupials, birds and reptiles. In fact, after habit loss and fragmentation, the fox is the quolls worst enemy too.

By Juliet Dingle



Photos by Michaela Jones

Several other priority Save our Species (SoS) BTRW sites across NSW have recently had monitoring cameras set up at strategic locations within the colonies to assess trends in fox activity and rock wallaby population. Rock wallaby cameras are set up at refuge sites that are difficult for predators to access. Ten predator cameras are set up approximately 40m apart targeting easy access routes through that section of the colony. The fox data is statistically analysed to facilitate comparison between sites. Having visited several different BTRW SoS sites in NSW I can vouch for an incredible variety in habitat as well as the pest control challenges in surrounding lands. The old *scat plot survey* method is not an effective measure of population for small rock wallaby colonies. Michaela and Vera are interested in the population monitoring method we have been using in the Shoalhaven for almost a



decade – the individual identification of rock wallabies on remote cameras through a study and inventory of distinguishing features, such as ear clips, tail, blazes and face shape. Using this method I recently devised that there were at least four individuals at the Nattia colony on the Wollondilly River. Vera has initiated a register of individual rock wallabies at Jenolan Caves based primarily on ear clip patterns. Now when an individual's ear sample is collected for DNA, specific ear positions are selected, recorded and photographed for future identification on their network of monitoring cameras. I look forward to using my well-honed eyes to assist with the photo monitoring of some other rock wallaby colonies.

Friends of the Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby
rockwallaby.org.au



Sanctuary Curator, Celia Thomson,
demonstrating to Friends volunteers
the *ins and outs* of pouch checking at a
Waterfall Springs Captive Breeding
Facility Working Party

(Photo by Gavin Swan)

[CONTACT US](#) [BECOME A MEMBER](#) [TAX DEDUCTIBLE DONATION](#) [ADOPTION](#) [MERCANDISE](#) [DOCUMENTARY](#)