The Cruelty of Trapping and Relocating Adult Wombats

Case Studies

Below is a summary of cases that demonstrate some of the life threatening territory wounds and illnesses we have overseen, with associated details and notes to follow.

Example 1

This wombat (image below) is covered in maggots that ate through the skull. The bright red is Cetrigen antibiotic topical spray. The wombat needed long acting antibiotic injections and close monitoring. The wombat was transferred from an inexperienced carer who kept her orphaned wombats for too long. They were adults at release time and were seen as a threat by the local wisdom. This wombat's male buddy was released at the same time but may not have survived his attacks. The victim here became emaciated after the attack and would have died if we hadn't found her in the paddock. Luckily Cydectin kills maggots because there was so many hatching and hidden in the crevices of the necrotic flesh.





You can see the maggots close-up and how deep they are inside the skull.

Example 2

We could smell her rotting flesh and retrieved this wombat from inside her burrow. We had to dig her out of the burrow. These are the remaining wounds after being in care for over a month (see photo below). She needed antibiotic cream and injections, heat pads and comfort due to being highly stressed from the territorial attacks. Without our intervention she would have died from an anaerobic infection, stress, and constant harassment. Her initial release was unsuccessful because she contracted mange. It took some time to recover and to find a new and appropriate release site. This put added pressure on this wombat as she was a young adult by the time she was released and therefore presented as a threat to the resident wombats.



Example 3

As seen in the photographs below we were trying to dig out a burrow to see if a wombat remained after the placement of a one way door at the entrance. Wombat burrows are like a human home with split levels, nurseries, bedding chambers and hallways. If a cage or door is at the entrance, a wombat will cautiously stay in the burrow for a period of time – up to five days – due to the interference to their home. They then emerge dehydrated, starving and exhausted, walking into the trap, hopefully with their baby at heel. Unfortunately they often get dumped in a new location to face the defensive and tribal onslaught of the resident wisdom (colony of wombats).





Most wombats will not survive being trapped and transported due to capture myopathy. The wombat will try endlessly to break out of the cage until all reserves of energy are gone, resulting in entropy of the heart and muscle cells.

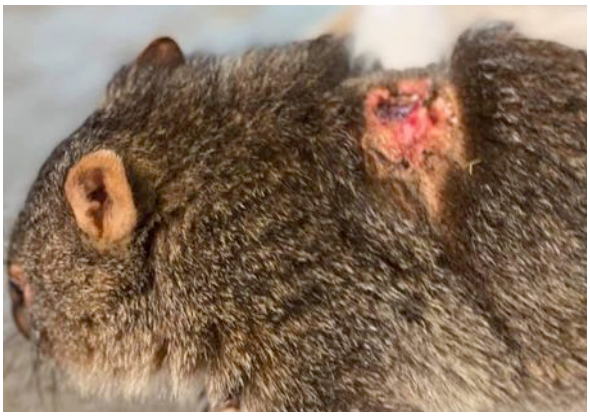
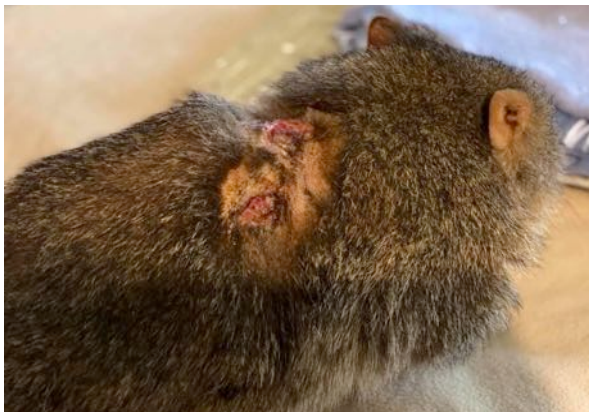
Wombats are intensely tribal, protective and defensive of their home, wisdom, partners, young, burrows and their grazing lands. If a wombat is dumped, this heartless action results in constant attacks and the removed wombat has no protection, no home and ultimately no rights for grazing, with often fatal consequences. It is also unethical to burden landholders with wombats who do not have a home. A wombat burrow is vital to their safety and their ultimate survival.

Below is a picture of a no return gate installed at the entrance of the burrow. Wombats will cautiously wait inside the burrow for days.



Example 4

Here are more examples of severe territory bites that would prove fatal if these animals did not come into care and receive extensive treatment.
These four photos were provided by John Creighton.



Example 5

The “running wombat” is a term for the very few wombats that survive all these traumas as they attempt to run home. This is fraught with many dangers including the crossing of highways, streets and farms. If they make it back to their home territory, they often find their burrow bulldozed in and spend their remaining energy trying to redig their subterranean village. This proves challenging for developers and is very cruel for the wombat who tries to reclaim their home.

Example 6

Attempts to fence a wombat out of a development site are impossible unless the fence is buried at least one metre deep.

Example 7

If wombats remain on land clearing sites they suffer from stress related illness and succumb to introduced diseases brought in by cattle, sheep and foxes in the form of multi-resistant bacteria and parasites. Due to their stoic nature, these wombats tirelessly try to exhume their burrows, creating great inconvenience to the developers.

7.1 This wombat (pictured below) was emaciated and dying due to a parasite overload caused by limited burrows. He was pushed out of his home, causing stress and looming mortality.

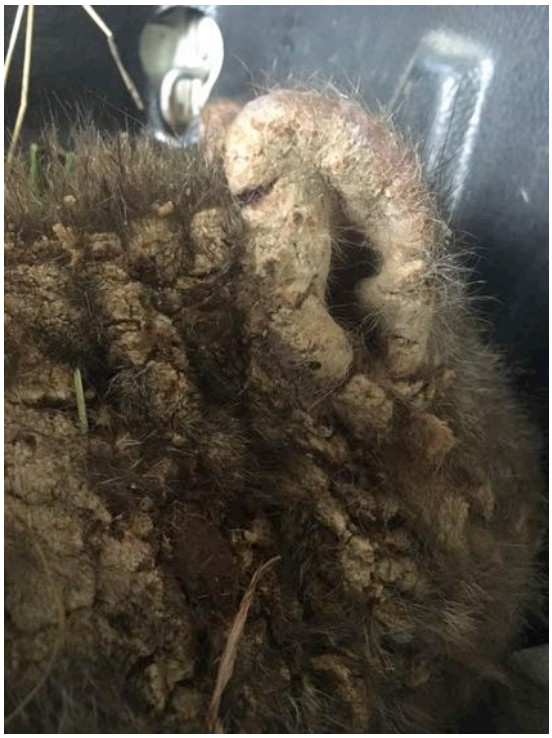


7.2 This wombat did not survive. He succumbed to an overload of parasites because his immune system was suppressed due to stress and inadequate safety from lack of burrows.



7.3 This wombat's immune system was highly compromised from stress and he succumbed to mange after losing his home and receiving territory bites. The infestation of mites begins under the epidermis and spreads throughout the body resulting in a long and painful death.







Example 8

The Bare Nosed Wombats are native to the waterways from the Great Dividing Range to the coast. Wombats have many burrows that are used for different purposes and for protection during various weather events. Burrows can be found near the flood plain so in times of drought they can access subterranean water from their burrows. Mainly burrows are dug above the flood plain which provides a dry home and protection during excessive rain events.

Below is an example of a wombat who was denied access to a burrow above the flood zone. He had to live in a flooded burrow because there was limited space to dig new burrows due to land clearing, development and human habitation.

Wombats instinctively remain in their safe burrow, even during floods. With a healthy riparian zone, the water will subside relatively quickly. However, due to poor land management from mowing, overgrazing and land clearing, the water does not subside effectively, causing silt to fill their burrow, leaving the wombat to drown. We have had cases where this has occurred and we have had to euthanase as the wombat was suffering from hypoxic convulsions.





Example 9

Baby wombats suffer immensely. After they leave the pouch (from 3-5 kg) they remain in the nursery burrow and will not emerge, innocently waiting for their mum to return. These babies either get buried alive by developers or starve because of their mothers absence. Another issue arises when the teenage wombat follows their mother at heel, they are often not strong enough to move through the one way door and are trapped inside the burrow.

Example 10

Shooting wombats presents yet another set of problems. The adult wombats are often shot and the surviving offspring dig multiple unskilled burrows or bolt holes, trying to stay safe as they graze. Burying wombat burrows is also problematic. If the wombats survive they will try to re-excavate their village.

The hypocrisy of the law

Wombats are supposed to be protected by law, but when it comes to development sites people are given a permit to destroy them. It is relatively easy to bulldoze trees and destroy the protective understory that is home to birds and small and arboreal animals, but wombats present an inconvenience in these situations. This is because the cruelty directed towards them is much more obvious and presents an inconvenient truth. Wombats have a way of being persistent and therefore highlight this cruelty imposed upon them.

The cruel harsh fact and the reality is that wombats generally get bulldozed into the ground. John Creighton from Wombat Care Bundanoon has witnessed camera footage of some wombats attacking the earthmoving machinery as their homes are being ploughed over. Other wombats are frightened, so they bunker in and are buried alive.

It's much easier to go to National Parks & Wildlife to apply for and be granted an unmonitored permit to destroy wombats than it is to gain the status of a licensed foster carer.

Never be fooled, these so-called ecocologists or on-site wombat removers, are NOT licensed carers and don't know what to do when it comes to relocating animals. This time of terrible vulnerability is part of the wildlife trade. If the government with their biodiversity funding can charge developers thousands of dollars to gain permission to destroy rare animals, then what hope do the more common wildlife species have with such an unfair system. Wombats are regarded by many people as worthless and as a result developers don't have to pay any biodiversity offsets for their persecution. So really, nothing is protected when it comes to this ridiculously superficial game of land, environment and wildlife protection. It is all about human's selfish possessiveness of land and money.

The real truth of affluence and prosperity is the preservation of fresh water, good health, enough food, resources and space to live freely. We continually deny ourselves of a prosperous future due to greed with little sentiment for our fellow species.

Final thoughts

Tragically there are so many complex and deeply cruel outcomes when people interfere with this selfish need to violate these innocent animals. There is a lot of documentation available about living with wombats, which should be the preferred option.

As humans, if our needs are not met, we become tenacious and even violent about protecting our patch. If there isn't enough friends, food, water, safety or shelter then one becomes more savage about defending our territory. If land and homes are destroyed then squabbles within their own colony prevail. The same can be said for wombats.

We bulldoze their burrows and make wombats live in squalor on the side of the road or on the periphery of built up areas. Farmland is often hostile toward our indigenous species, from degraded land to outright persecution. As a result safety becomes limited and wombats are forced to travel through precarious areas to graze. Bulldozing their burrows leaves wombats very vulnerable to predation and stress. Generally speaking, most of the wombats live under stressful conditions so they protect their patch ferociously.

There was a bounty on the wombats head in 1906 and they have been continually persecuted by the Australian people ever since, which is nothing short of ignorant cruelty. There is no humane way to land clear and develop over the site of a functioning forest where native animals live. These animals are either pulverised into wood chips, buried alive, or moved precariously out of the safety of their homes and into harsh human territory.

Tania Clancy
Conservationist, Citizen Scientist, Educator and registered Wildlife Carer
September 2021