



They say a picture is worth a 1000 words. If so, this article is made up of 50,000 words!

The Bushfire Season started earlier than ever in 2019/20 and was completely relentless. After nearly 3 years of fundraising for it, buying and re-fitting it, our Sydney Wildlife Mobile Care Unit was ready just in time to be deployed to the South Coast fire grounds, only days after the blaze had swept through. In the days leading up to our deployment, we had volunteers swarming all over the van - fitting cages, installing equipment, stocking it with medical supplies. It was a crazy few days - all whilst hosting many film crews and doing interviews with Fox News, SBS, ABC, Japanese TV, Georgia TV, even MTV!



## OUR YEAR IN PICTURES – SYDNEY WILDLIFE MOBILE CARE UNIT



The film crew from Fox News interviewing us the night before our deployment into the fire grounds.



Readying the van – Tony Philips (from the Mens Shed) installing the treatment table (bolting it in from below). Volunteers Joan, Dr Margot, Margaret, Lynleigh and Tony stocking the van.



Imogen from Worldwide Veterinary Services (WVS) donated a microscope, a nebuliser and a centrifuge and Anne Jackson from MediDivert (also a Sydney Wildlife volunteer) delivered much-needed medical supplies.





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We had planned to have a Launch Party for the brand new Mobile Care Unit but unfortunately the universe had other plans... Our 'launch party' ended up consisting of holding a ribbon across the van, cutting it and then driving directly to the fire grounds!



Toni Barnes, Dr Lewis and Dr John holding the ribbon whilst Joan, Dr Margot (head veterinarian) and Lynleigh cut it with a pair of medical scissors!

As we drove down Booralie Rd in Terrey Hills, we were lead by a couple of our volunteers on horseback - Georgie and Grace headed up the procession - and we were flanked by some of the amazing firefighting team from the Terrey Hills Rural Fire Station! Members of the public, Sydney Wildlife volunteers and our family and friends lined the streets to wave us off! It was a very emotional send-off...





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On arrival, we hit the ground running. We were stationed at the property of Wildlife Rescue South Coast member – Adrina Selles. She hosted not only all of us, but a number of other volunteers from WRSC who came to assist with feeding and cleaning all the kangaroo joeys streaming in from the fires. And after we moved to the next area in the Blue Mountains, we were tag-teamed by the amazing crew from HUHA NZ (Helping U Help Animals NZ).



Our 6 volunteer vets saw countless fire-affected animals – ranging from kangaroos and echidnas to goannas and tiger snakes. We sent out Search & Rescue parties to find injured animals. In each party was a vet, a vet nurse, a darter/shooter and a 'runner'. When an injured kangaroo was located, it was darted for on-site assessment and then taken by the 'runner' to the van for treatment.

Many organisations worked together! Sydney Wildlife Rescue worked with Animals Australia, Vets for Compassion, the ARC, WRSC, RSPCA, World Vets, HUHA, LAOKO, Wires, Southern Cross Wildlife Care, Tree of Compassion, Total Fauna Solutions etc. We had veterinary teams joining us from Canada, America and many other countries as well as from interstate. Together, we used drones to search for injured animals, as well as thermal imaging cameras for night searches. We each had radios to stay in contact with each other whilst tracking injured – yet mobile – animals, such as kangaroos and wallabies. In certain areas, we were joined by tree-climbers who were skilled in scampering up trees to retrieve fire-affected koalas.



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Multiple organisations all working together for the wildlife – pictured together are: Animals Australia, Vets For Compassion, Sydney Wildlife Rescue, World Vets, the ARC, WIRES, RSPCA



Big Mike kangaroo with LAOKO volunteers in the Snowy-Monaro region after being darted for x-rays and treatment.

Photo of Sandy the tree-climber rescuing a koala was supplied by an unknown source.





Dr Michelle Oakley - Yukon Vet - and her vet nurses, working alongside our veterinary team in the Mobile Care Unit.





We were in the fire grounds for around 3-4 months at the beginning of the year. Once Covid took hold, we were all sent home to isolate - only undertaking 'normal' rescues.



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Now that the ashes have settled, so to speak, the Mobile Care Unit is open weekly, run by a team of volunteer vets and carers. On an average clinic day, the team treats anywhere between eight and thirteen patients, ranging from turtles with fractured shells to birds with collision-related injuries, blue tongue lizards with crush injuries and a number of other animals with injuries sustained through trauma. And then, of course, there are the orphaned wildlife babies who turn up with their carers for regular check-ups.

Sydney Wildlife's Mobile Care Unit is not only 100% run by volunteers, but it's also funded entirely through donations. In fact, it took Joan and Lynleigh several years of fundraising to reach the \$200,000 needed to buy and commission the unit. And whilst from the outside it may look like an ordinary van, inside it's a state-of-the-art veterinary facility packed with diagnostic equipment of every kind, including x-ray and ultrasound capabilities.

The wildlife van is the perfect setup for the dedicated wildlife vets who volunteer their time. Not only do they get to work across a diverse range of species, but they also get to use some cool equipment while they're doing it. Some days we have THREE expert veterinarians volunteering their time in the van!



Dr Lou, Dr Margot and Dr Izi – our 3 amazing volunteer veterinarians in the van.



Our team: Susan, Dr Lou, Lynleigh, Margaret, Joan, Dr Margot, Dr Izi (missing are: Fran, Anne, Bec and Kath).



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The van is fondly referred to as 'The Hub' attracting all kinds of amazing visitors – not just of the wild variety. Our favourite 'treat-bringer' and rescuer extraordinaire – Georgie from Addiction Food; Councillors Penny Philpott and Kylie Ferguson, Debb Kerr from our South West branch, aspiring veterinarian, Dylan; The Hon. Mark Pearson MP; our founding member, Sonja Elwood; Ian and Jacqui Marlow; our friends and hosts from the Coastal Environment Centre (CEC).





## OUR YEAR IN PICTURES – SYDNEY WILDLIFE MOBILE CARE UNIT



We can x-ray, microchip, do physical rehabilitation (thanks to Fran Wilcox), ultrasound etc.





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So many people have helped us along the way! Kids having doggie-treat fundraisers, Tony from the Men's Shed has built cages and bolted equipment down for travel, Terrey Hills Swim School, Par 3 Golf, Peter and Sue Glasson, Worldwide Veterinary Services, the team that built the cover for the van, Anne from MediDivert and all the hospitals and vet practises that have contributed supplies; our amazing sponsors and the wonderful Coastal Environment Centre and Northern Beaches Council for hosting us every week!



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The van is hosted every week by the Coastal Environment Centre in Narrabeen, thanks to the Northern Beaches Council.

Extra special thanks must go to Peter and Nicola Sharp of Tame and Wild Studio and Clayton and Troy from Pivot Creative for making our van look incredible!



What a year it has been! And we are certain there are many more adventures awaiting us in 2021!





Photos by Margaret G Woods