



Jingle Bats!

Parklands Project Proposal

A project proposal has been written by the President of Bat Rescue Inc. to restore the original Parklands flying-fox campsite. The aim is to entice the bats to move back to their original site east of the Bruce Highway, away from the western side behind residents in Tallangatta Street. Although the area is for nature conservation, the current roost site is causing a lot of anxiety amongst the small residential community that backs onto the reserve.

Sunshine Coast Regional Council are currently putting together a Species Management Program, which entails creating a buffer zone between the reserve and the residential boundaries. However the program has not included any consideration of the former campsite on the eastern side of the Bruce Highway, largely due to the fact that the land is State-owned and therefore not under their immediate control.

Bat Rescue members conducted a routine count on October 15 at the Parklands camp, which coincided with a residents' meeting with local MP Peter Wellington. We immediately wrote to Mr Wellington explaining the issues about dispersals (which the residents are demanding), and suggesting an alternative plan as per the project proposal that would meet everyone's needs were it to succeed.

Wishing all our
members, supporters
and their families
a very
Merry Christmas
&
Happy New Year



We received an invitation to attend a meeting with Mr Wellington on November 30, the outcome of which was very positive.

Three days later a meeting was held with Mr Peter Nagel and Mr Greg Jones from Sunshine Coast Regional Council to discuss our proposal. Unfortunately the proposal cannot be progressed through Council as the land is State-owned, however Council did indicate they would be supportive and considered it to be an important element in the solution for the Tallangatta Street campsite. Furthermore, Bat Rescue Inc. would be supported in undertaking education and community liaison work if a grant application was submitted to enhance such a project.

Sylvia Hood then met onsite with revegetation specialists from Maroochy Water to discuss the site in question. It was very evident why the bats failed to return to this site. The Morning Glory and other weed species have invaded the area to the extent that the vines are moving up tree trunks to the canopy in some places which makes it simply too difficult and risky for bats to roost in these trees.

However just when we thought it was the only issue regarding this camp, Bat Rescue received a phone call from Energex who need

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BAT RESCUE INC.

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

PRESIDENT & SECRETARY president@batrescue.org.au
Sylvia Hood Ph. 5447 0413

TREASURER treasurer@batrescue.org.au
Carmel Givens Ph. 5494 3140

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Leanne Baird
Danielle Dedman

Group Email Address committee@batrescue.org.au
(goes to all Management Committee members)

OTHER OFFICE BEARERS/POSITIONS

CARE CO-ORDINATOR fullmoon@aapt.net.au
Carmel Givens Ph. 5494 3140

DISPLAYS & FUNDRAISING
Lyn Boston Ph. 5448 3070

GRANTS OFFICER grants@batrescue.org.au
Jennifer Singfield Ph. 3869 0359

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY membership@batrescue.org.au
Sammy Ringer Ph. 5494 3812

MINUTE SECRETARY d.mair@optusnet.com.au
Danielle Dedman Ph. 5437 6246

NEWSLETTER & WEBSITE admin@batrescue.org.au
Vicki Bressan

SPONSORSHIP TEAM sponsorship@batrescue.org.au
Danielle Dedman Ph. 5437 6246
Vicki Bressan

HONORARY OFFICE BEARERS

HONORARY MEDIA CONSULTANT
Valerie Jones

HONORARY SOLICITOR
Ray Barber



CONTACT INFORMATION

POSTAL ADDRESS P.O. Box 2660
Nambour West Qld 4560

Rescue Hotline (WILVOS) Ph. 5441 6200



Deadlines: 1st March, 1st June, 1st September, 1st December
Please send comments/contributions to: admin@batrescue.org.au

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Well it has been the most unusual of bat seasons! The orphans trickled in quite slowly, despite the fact that the campsites on the Sunshine Coast are bursting at the seams. The rehabs coming in seem to be in good shape which indicates food is plentiful locally, otherwise we would be seeing many more in poor condition. The recent persistent rains however may have thrown a spanner in the works there.

Recent reports of mass abandonment of babies within the Gympie and Canungra camps has raised concern over how to assess, respond to, and act in such situations.

After Bat Rescue was contacted by DERM and given approval, 18 orphans were retrieved from the perimeter of the Gympie camp. Carmel was in attendance at the time and reported that there were many baby flying-foxes that appeared to be in a very bad way and nothing like she had ever seen before. After treatment and assessment at Australian Wildlife Hospital a number of these orphans were placed in care with Bat Rescue members

Work is currently underway to develop guidelines for wildlife care groups who are often compelled to respond to the welfare of animals before an approval process is followed and the situation is officially assessed. Camp observations from Sue at Peachester indicate that storm activity can separate mothers and babies, but rarely in the numbers that have been reported in this latest incident.

A letter from the Operational Manager- Southern Area, Craig Walker was received by Bat Rescue Inc. outlining that what was occurring in these two colonies was a natural process and carers were directed "that no person enters into a flying fox colony without the situation being first assessed by a QPWS Wildlife Officer and being given approval by that officer to enter the site for the purpose of rescuing a flying fox."

With guidelines under development, once agreement is reached amongst carer organisations and input and endorsement can be obtained from DERM, the protocol will be communicated widely. It is a scenario that wildlife care groups in other States have dealt with over the years—in the heat stress events for example.

Creche dates and sites will be announced very soon after we know the full extent of the numbers of orphans in care.

On behalf of Bat Rescue, we wish you and your families a very Merry Christmas and New Year.

Sylvia Hood
President



TREASURER'S REPORT

I am pleased to report that the accounts are looking pretty healthy, with just over \$3000 in our general account. Half of this is quarantined for a WPSQ grant, so we should be able to cover crèche and release this year without having to access the fund account.

We are also waiting to receive a date for our Bunnings fundraising sizzle. The sizzles are booked out until February apparently, however we generally do one in March/April which better suits us after all orphans are settled into the release program. Once we have a date, we will be seeking volunteers to help out on the stand.

We have a couple of grant applications that we are waiting to hear the results of. Many thanks to Jennifer Singfield for her hard work compiling and submitting these applications.

Putting my Care Co-Ordinator hat on for a moment, if anyone requires High Protein Supplement for their orphans or any other supplies, please contact me so we can arrange to get it to you before Christmas.

Carmel Givens
Treasurer & Care Co-Ordinator

TITRE LEVEL TESTING

Carers will by now have received advice that titre levels need to be tested on an annual basis according to the Travel Doctor, Dr Deb. We will be organising this testing every August, for those who have renewed their memberships by 31 July. Carer's names will be forwarded on to the Travel Doctor to receive their Pathology Request Form. New members will be sent a form to forward on to the Travel Doctor containing all their details.

Anyone who was tested earlier this year will not have received a new Request Form, but your details will be kept on file for future testing.

2010 Sponsorship Program



This year's sponsorship program kicked off to a good start with four orphans sponsored at the time of this newsletter going to print.

2010 Syndicate Baby Archie already has two sponsors—Corrie Verbeeten, and regular supporter Morag Bruce from Tugun (who has sponsored Bat Rescue babies for the last three years!)

Joanne Adams, from ACT, is also a repeat sponsor who has waited patiently all year for her orphan, Joy, to make her appearance.

We welcome five year old Lily Warner to our world of bat caring. Lily is following the progress of her bat, Dora (pictured left) with great interest.

We thank all our sponsors for their support, and also the carers who participate and willingly provide photos and updates of the individual bats involved.

The sponsorship program is administered by Danielle Dedman and Vicki Bressan.

A gallery of all past and present sponsored bats can be found on the website under the HOW TO HELP section.





ACTIVITIES AROUND THE ROOST



From left: Phoebe, Lyn, Sylvia, Carmel and Rid at Noosa Biosphere

Noosa Biosphere Day

This was a well attended festival held in the Noosa Woods area on 19th September 2010 to celebrate the Noosa Biosphere. The Bat Rescue display stand had a wonderful location just near the river, and education flying-fox Phoebe enjoyed her day out as usual as did the many visitors who came to say hello.

Many thanks to Lyn, Carmel, Rid, Sylvia for help on the stall and the not-so-willing helpers Angus and Tammy. A fun day was had by all—with the exception perhaps of the small not-so-willing helpers!

RnR Training Workshop

The Rescue & Rehabilitation Workshop conducted by Dave Pinson and Connie Kerr at Nambour on September 18 was a great day for those who attended.



There are still some members who are yet to attend an R&R workshop, but we are trying to schedule this on an annual basis.

It is compulsory for members to attend at least one face-to-face workshop each year, as per the Code of Practice, and which DERM will be following up on. There is a lot of information to take in at these sessions, but there is always something new even for experienced carers. For example, the latest treatment for membrane damage is the use of Aspro Clear. It seems to really help the blood flow and prevent the extensive die-back we used to experience. Please discuss this treatment with the Care Coordinator and/or your vet before use as there are strict guidelines for administration.



BAT RESCUE AGM 2009-2010

A combination of wet weather, a major sporting event on TV and wildlife training workshops on the same day were all factors affecting the attendance at this year's Annual General Meeting on 10th October. However those who did attend enjoyed the opportunity for a get-together.

We would like to thank Lyn Boston, long-serving committee member, for her contribution to the organisation over many years. Although she is retiring from the Management Committee, we are delighted that Lyn will continue her display and fundraising role with Bat Rescue. Lyn's catering expertise is always a hit at events and we thank her for going to the trouble of making one of her famous pavlovas especially for the AGM lunch!

The latest Annual Report is now available on the user's side of the Bat Rescue website, and can also be provided in hard copy for any members who would like to receive one.

A list of the newly-elected Management Committee and other office bearers can be found on Page 2 of this newsletter. We welcome Danielle and Sammy to their new roles, and look forward to sharing with them the joys and challenges of running a volunteer organisation!



Little Miss Smarty-Pants



I was collared early one morning in my driveway by a gentleman who—after he had composed his expression sufficiently at my appearance—said he had a bat caught in his fruit netting.

Aware that my attire didn't exactly enhance

my credibility as an intrepid rescuer of bats, I drew what dignity I could muster in my favourite gorgeous doggy print jammies (a much loved gift from the BR President), and agreed to collect the offender. I was glad I had dispensed with the usual tactful lecture about netting trees correctly, as I discovered that this particular gentleman had the only decently netted tree in the entire area. Turns out he is a retired farmer from Stanthorpe and he proba-

bly could have taught me a thing or two about netting! He did however, teach me a thing or two about fruit flies.

He pointed to the securely netted tree and muttered "It must've been there a couple of days."

Hanging smugly above a scatter of fallen fruit was a perfectly healthy Black Flying fox. With the rain, the shade and the food, she was not even marginally dehydrated and appeared to be suffering only boredom from captivity. Graeme took off a couple of netting clips, I slipped a towel through the gap, wrapped and removed the compliant bat, and gave her a lift home for release at the camp.

Obviously 'Smarty Pants' had managed to slide through a tiny gap to get in, but couldn't get back out, and ended up in the perfect 'no harm' cage. It was a bit ironic that the one person who has probably had a battle with bats his whole fruit-growing career did the right thing – and still lost his summer table fruit!

It must be said – a massive THANK YOU to Graeme of Peachester for 'doing the right thing' and sending the little opportunist home uninjured and in good health. She took to her undamaged wings beautifully without a backward glance. Maybe one day all netting rescues will be like this... Thanks Graeme!

—Sue R.

Flyblow — the YUK side of caring

Flyblow is a common problem we see in bat season whereby bats (either orphan or adult) that have been exposed to the elements can be attacked by blow flies. They lay eggs on their host and when the eggs hatch, we can have a major maggot problem. Not a nice situation to find or have to deal with.

I recently rescued an orphan hanging in a tree fern for three days. When I saw the blow flies hanging around it I knew it was not going to be a pretty sight. The little black girl was dehydrated and exhausted and covered in fly-blow, so she was wrapped in a towel without heat and transported home immediately. It took about 20 minutes to remove all the maggot eggs, which look like 2mm long pieces of white cotton thread usually clumped together.

The reason the bat was not immediately put on heat is because that can accelerate the hatching of the maggots, and the worst thing to deal with other than fly-blow is the fly-blow when it hatches!!! Far easier to remove the eggs—gross as it is, but live maggots can crawl into any orifice on your bat and internal maggots can be very serious. The tools of choice are lice or eyebrow combs, and the eggs can be wiped onto a paper towel and then disposed of.



Annabat (pictured) is now a wonderful bright-eyed baby in the capable hands of Carmel who took her into care.

—Sylvia Hood

TOP TIP FOR A FLY-BLOWN ORPHAN

Remove fly-blow **BEFORE** warming to prevent early hatching of maggots. Carefully inspect orphan all over (particularly orifices and wing pits) for any that have already hatched. Warm orphan, then begin rehydration process if rehydrating orally.

Novel new release methods!

The onset of good Spring weather enabled us to hard release a number of rehabs that had been in care for varying amounts of time.

First to go was Sammy's bat, Zuma, a black male that had been in care for a couple of weeks. He was so keen to go he scrambled to the highest point on Sammy.... her head, and took off from there!! We thought this was an innovative but rather startling (for Sammy at least) way to release a bat, and we would not recommend the 'head release' as it could give the old myth of getting bats caught in your hair some credibility!

Sylvia and Sue then released the two Grey-headed sub-adults that had been wintering over at the *Bat Be&B*, Jackie and Aile. They took off beautifully too, with good power flights up to the trees. The last one of the day was Suki, a Grey-headed adult who had also been held over the lean winter months, however she failed to get enough height so was retrieved for further rehab.

While standing discussing the release, all of a sudden one of the sub-adults flew out of the tree, was startled by a crow and hit the ground. Sylvia and Sue went running down the paddock to catch it, Sylvia armed with a nappy and Sue ripping off the only thing she could think of—her shirt.

It appears that boob-flashing had some miraculous effect as the bat took one look and dodged the attempted retrieval, taking off again and heading straight into the next group of trees to tell the other bats the hot news that humans apparently don't keep theirs under their arms!

Our second release of two Grey-Headed adults was held on November 12, 2010. Firstly Connie went off in the totally wrong direction, over a fence, the horse, the chicken coop (inspiring them to lay their second egg for the day) and after making it through that obstacle course, made it successfully to the trees. Next was Suki who was held up high on a 'release stick'. The first attempt she failed to gain enough height, but on the second attempt she managed to get a power flight up to the trees.

That evening Sue watched to make sure neither of these releases came to any grief, and reported that just after flyout, a bat flew in from behind where Suki was positioned and landed in the same tree. She also reported seeing the silhouette of two bats touching noses, and then one bat flew to the next tree and a few seconds later another followed, and so on,. It seems these two friends were making their way together out in the wild.

The release phase is always a little nerve-racking, often successful and usually gratifying but certainly never dull!

SAMMY'S 'BAT HAT' RELEASE METHOD



First remove your glasses. If this is difficult, your bat will help.

Once bat is properly in position, turn head to desired position facing trees....and release.

SUE'S SOFT RELEASE 'BOOB' METHOD



ideal for sookie bats who try to return to a cushy rehab situation



Method: Engage ageing housewife to remove clothing rapidly. Exposing chest in this manner will shock bat into returning hastily to the wild.



Dora the Black flying-fox baby practices her best Dracula pose for Halloween.



MEET A MEMBER

Zoe Jung

Zoe lives in Conondale and is a horticulturist by trade. She has done landscaping, propagation, regeneration and revegetation of forest and bushland for years, although is currently recovering from a bout of Ross River Fever caught on her last job!

Bat Rescue welcomed Zoe as a new Active member in August 2010.

- **How did you become interested in bats?**

I have always loved bats but until now have only adored them from afar. I first saw them while caving and thought they were exquisite.

- **Prior to bats, have you cared for any other wildlife?**

I have always loved animals and nature, caring for many different ones, large and small, native and exotic.

- **How does the rest of your household feel about bats?**

Fortunately my husband and family think they are very cool!

- **Any furry/feathered family members?**

At the moment I have two bobucks (Jarrah and Miss Rosa), Four ringtail possums—Rocket, Stella, Astro Boy and Venus, a very lively colony of 9 squirrel gliders and one very special little Black Flying-fox called Jet.

- **Any hidden talents?**

I love dancing and combine it with fire twirling. I was happily doing Zumba until I damaged my knee badly. This has halted my Latin dance adventure for now. Actually it has put a stop to just about all movement altogether (sigh!)

- **Tell us about yourself**

I always seem to have an animal hanging off me during the day or night. We do the housework together, the weeding, the washing and computer work. It's a normal part of my world, but visitors are often taken aback when I answer the front door with a few possums or gliders contentedly perched on each shoulder, or a bat hanging from the front of my dress!



- **Any little secrets? Spill the beans!**

People are always surprised to discover my assortment of dead things. I especially love my acquisition of cicada shells collected from everywhere I travelled throughout Australia. I also have a rocks and bones collection which I added to on my journey around the countryside.

- **One final profound question.... what is the most unusual thing you carry about in your handbag?**

The environment of my handbag is a dark, mysterious place! Today's lucky dip yielded a piece of amber my husband's grandfather found as he walked a beach when he was a young man.

Thank you, Zoe, for giving us a small glimpse of your life. Now everybody is probably puzzling over what exactly 'Zumba' is, and wondering whether dance costumes have a standard pocket for a fire extinguisher!

Who will be under the microscope in the next edition? What little secrets will they spill? All will be revealed!

Parklands Project *continued from Page 1*

to upgrade powerlines through the area just near to where the colony is now.

On Thursday November 18, the President and Leanne Thomas from DERM met with representatives from ENERGEX at the Parklands campsite. There is a proposal to upgrade feeders which may impact on the bats at flyout. We discussed the various options, configurations, and also explained our project proposal regarding the restoration of the original campsite, which would then pose less of a problem in regards to the powerline upgrade.

We will be liaising with Energex over this project in order to minimise any impact to the colony, regardless of where they happen to be roosting at the time of the upgrade!

The very next day on November 19, 2010, Leanne Thomas from DERM called us in to rescue an orphan from Tallangatta Street. This was a good PR opportunity, as the resident who reported the orphan felt that not enough was being done and no one was listening to their concerns. DERM explained that they were doing all they could and that BR were also working on a plan to restore the original campsite. The resident was pleased to be informed of these developments.

In the Sunshine Coast Daily on December 4, 2010 an article appeared entitled *Driven Batty by Smelly Arrivals*. Not the most positive piece about bats, but our new proposal did get some publicity which was gratifying. As there are a number of Government agencies at different levels that need to approve the proposal, it may take a bit of time to organise and to secure the funding. However we are hopeful this project will be up and running in the New Year as there is widespread support to try this as part of the overall solution.



Widgee Crossing Bat Camp

You may recall a press release a couple years ago from Energex (11/6/2008) announcing a project to extend the power network from the proposed new Pine Street substation in Gympie. This would mean taking high voltage lines straight past the Widgee Crossing bat campsite. While overhead lines can be coated in PVC, they would however be in the direct flight path of the bats. The preferred option was to run the cables underground, even though it would cost significantly more to do so.

I was recently contacted by Energex Asset Manager Steve Fairless, who arranged for me to meet onsite with Energex Designer Rod Baldry on 9th September 2010 to discuss the options.

When we arrived the bats were occupying both sides of the road, which was the main concern for Rod. He explained that to install the lines underground would require heavy machinery, i.e. an excavator, on site for about one week to dig the trench and lay the pipe (which is done in stages) a couple metres in from the road. At most there may be only one tree that would be removed, but they would try to save it if possible. He was also concerned that one week of work may disturb the bats too much and cause them to leave the colony, whereas overhead poles would only take a couple of days to install and cause less disturbance.

I explained to Rod that the bats would tolerate the temporary disturbance as they are quite resilient and it is not easy to move a colony even when you are trying to! Doing the work continuously instead of stopping and starting would also mean the job is finished more quickly. Minimising vegetation disturbance, confining the work area strictly to where the machinery is required to be and where possible storing equipment, machinery and other workplace materials as far away from the colony as possible. If necessary Bat Rescue, in conjunction with a DERM representative, will come to the work site and give a briefing regarding the colony and the sensitivity of the site in which this work is being conducted.

The timing of the work is also important. Most camps thin out in winter or leave altogether for food sources elsewhere, so Energex are willing to schedule the work for around this time of year.

Figures from Mary Starky of DERM show that the population of this particular camp varies throughout the year, and counts during the months of May, June, July in 2008 and 2009 revealed that the camp was completely empty. However in 2010 the campsite has been occupied all year to date, with the lowest numbers in July at around the 10,000 mark.



*Above:
Rod Baldry on
site*



*Left: the Widgee
Crossing Bat
Colony is the site
of a previous
restoration pro-
ject by Burnett
Mary Regional
Group*

This is a major maternity site for both Black and Grey-headed flying-foxes with numbers in September 2010 of 100,000 comprising 70,000 Black and 30,000 Grey-headed. It is a significant site that needs all the protection it deserves.

Further discussions will be held in the new year with Energex, DERM, BMRG (Burnett Mary Regional Group), and other stakeholders in order to see this project through to completion with the least disruption to the camp as possible.

The concern shown by Energex to minimise the impact on the bats is extremely reassuring, and a credit to their environmentally responsible work practices. Although the substation and new network may not be the most popular project for Energex amongst affected residents, they are only responding to ever-increasing needs for power supply to expanding developments in areas like Gympie.

—Sylvia Hood

UPDATE FROM WEBSITE ADMIN

As many would already be aware, the Bat Rescue website went offline unexpectedly in early October. Apparently the server which hosts a number of websites, including ours, had been hacked into. The only way to get back online was to reconstruct the Bat Rescue website with a different, more secure Contents Management System.

Brett Warner of Figjam Design & Hosting, who has sponsored the Bat Rescue website for a number of years, immediately set to work on creating a more contemporary design, and getting us back up and running.

With orphan season looming, and the fact that Gary and I had only just moved from Qatar to the United Arab Emirates two days before, the timing could not have been worse! While waiting for furniture, curtains, dog and personal effects to arrive I spent several days at the empty villa cleaning the grub left by the previous tenants.

In between scrubbing sessions I perched awkwardly on the kitchen bench in front of the microscopic screen of our travel mini-laptop giving Brett feedback on his website tweaks, with my USB internet dropping in and out—usually at critical moments!

After some tearing of hair and gnashing of teeth on my part, and sleep deprivation and cheerful dedication on Brett's part, two weeks later our smart new look website was online.

Bat Rescue is very grateful to Brett, who has spent many hours of his own time not only redesigning the template, but also transferring the contents of the old site into the new one.

Brett says that he admires the work that Bat Rescue does and is happy to donate his time, expertise, and free hosting.

Figjam's in-kind support of our organisation over the years would surely

amount to the value of several thousand dollars. Having experienced the friendly and helpful service and prompt advice whenever we needed assistance, we can highly recommend Figjam Design to any organisation or small business wanting their own affordable website with excellent backup and technical support!

FIGJAM DESIGN & HOSTING

Figjam Design & Hosting is based on the Gold Coast, catering for small to medium-sized businesses. Figjam's web designers have created some of the best Gold Coast and Sydney web designs and have won many design awards over the last ten years.

Free web page design is offered to several not-for-profit organizations, as well as free web design templates for businesses looking to create a web presence. Cost is always a consideration and Figjam can provide webhosting from as little as \$5 per month and web design from \$99

Figjam offers web portal design as well as e-commerce web hosting and design services.

www.figjamdesign.com



Marhaba (hello) from the sandpit....



It was great catching up with Bat Rescue members at the AGM, which Gary and I attended while we were back home in early October. We also enjoyed a brief opportunity to stay and chill out at Brad and Sylvia's wonderful eco-cabin, Mary Valley Vista.

Since then, we (including Schnitzel the dog) have traded one Middle East outpost for another! We have taken up residence in Al Ain—a large town on the Oman border, which will be our last stop before returning to Australia in a year or so.

Having felt somewhat deprived during our stay in ultra-conservative Doha, a greater tolerance of western vices here in the UAE means that alcohol and bacon is readily available, plus the shopping paradise of Dubai is only 90 minutes down the desert highway. Already two Bat Rescue members are planning to visit us in 2011!

Being an oasis, Al Ain is comparatively lush and green with abundant birdlife. And there are BATS! Not just microbats which we have seen whizzing past neighbourhood street lights in pursuit of insects, but also a number of larger bats foraging in low vegetation and vocalizing to each other with the strangest screeching sounds. We're almost certain these are Egyptian Fruit Bats.

Thank you to those who regularly send me chatty updates about their orphans and other things. It is always nice to get a bat fix from afar. I am only ever an email away (and six hours behind you time-wise) if anyone has trouble accessing their online records, needs a new password etc. Have a great Christmas and Batty New Year!

—Vicki Bressan



BATS 'n' PIECES

'M' is for Megabat, Microbat & MAGGIEBAT!

Long-time Bat Rescue member Emily Power couldn't wait for birthing season to begin this year, so she had one of her own instead!

Just as impatient as her Mum, little Maggie arrived three weeks early on 27th September 2010 weighing a petite 2.7kg (no forearm measurement available—ha ha).

Congratulations to proud first-time parents Daniel and Emily from all of us at Bat Rescue.

Soft release is scheduled for around 2028!



YEAR OF THE BAT 2011-2012

Environmental experts increasingly regard bats as indicators of biodiversity and healthy ecosystems. Besides the Arctic, Antarctic and a few isolated oceanic regions, bats are found everywhere on Earth. Having inhabited the planet for the last 50+ million years, bats today make up nearly a quarter of the global mammal population although have declined alarmingly in recent decades.

Launched in Prague on 22nd September, the *Year of Bat 2011-2012* will celebrate the world's only flying mammals and promote conservation, research and education.

The Bat Conservation Trust is partnering on this joint campaign, led by the UN's Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals and the Agreement on the Conservation of Populations of European Bats (EUROBATS). The campaign will focus on the ecological benefits that bats provide, such as pest control and seed dispersal.

More than 1,100 bat species are now documented but are still being discovered in places as varied as Madagascar, the United Kingdom, the Philippines, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Comoros islands. Bat species disperse seeds and aid pollination in temperate and tropical forests, helping to regenerate and sustain almost a third of the Earth's land area. Fruit agriculture, central to tropical economies, depends to a large extent on the ecological contributions of fruit bats.

Despite intensified conservation efforts, over half of all bats species are now classified by the International Union for Conservation as 'threatened' or 'near threatened'. Habitat loss and destruction, human disturbance at hibernation sites, increasing urbanisation and epidemics such as White-nose Syndrome – which has killed more than half a million bats in the United States since 2006 – are putting bats increasingly in danger.

The honorary ambassador for the *Year of the Bat* is Dr. Merlin Tuttle, a leading ecologist and wildlife photographer and founder of Bat Conservation International.

According to Dr Tuttle, bats are the most misunderstood and intensely persecuted mammals on the planet. They are the primary predators of insects that fly at night, including those that cost farmers and foresters billions of dollars in losses annually. When these bat populations decline, demands for dangerous pesticides grow, as does the cost of growing essential crops like rice, corn and cotton.

Most people are unaware that bats are so economically beneficial to the farming industry, help sustain the world's forests and, in some countries, are a major tourist attraction.

One of the most spectacular and unusual tourist attractions is the Congress Bridge bat flight in Austin, Texas. From mid-March until November over a million Mexican free-tailed bats stream into the sky at dusk on their nightly forage for food. This spectacle generates millions of dollars for the city each year.

The *Year of the Bat* in 2011 will coincide with the United Nations' *International Year of Forests*. Sustainable forestry management is essential for maintaining healthy bat populations as well as balanced ecosystems in forests and woodland areas. With biodiversity as an integral part of the campaign, the *Year of the Bat* aims to encourage people across the world to get involved in bat conservation efforts.

See www.yearofthebat.org for more information.

IMPRESSIVE BATTY FACT:

An estimated 134 plants that yield products used by humans are partially or entirely reliant on bats for seed dispersal or pollination.