

An Eight-year Survey of Wildlife Presented to a Tasmanian Veterinary Clinic



James M. Harris, OAM, BS, DVM, FRSPH
Lauren Rose, BS.
Mayfair Veterinary Clinic,
Sandy Bay, Tasmania 7005
jmhdvm34@gmail.com

Introduction

The Mayfair Veterinary Clinic has treated wildlife cases as a pro bono public service for state and local governments over the past 12 years. This paper summarizes sick and orphaned wildlife presented at the Mayfair Veterinary Clinic between 2006 and 2014, during which 3759 animals were received, 56.6% birds, 40.5% mammals and 2.8% reptiles.

Materials and Methods

At arrival, each animal was fully documented according to Tasmanian Government Regulations. Members of the public, rehabilitators and government employees presented the animals and the species, date when found, personal contact information of the finder, location where found and presenting observations were entered on an "Injured and Orphaned Wildlife Record Form". Each animal was assessed by a veterinarian and a decision made on whether it could be humanely treated, qualify for release after treatment, or whether euthanasia was appropriate. Government permission must be obtained for treatment of endangered species, unless the veterinarian decides that on humane grounds a decision needs to be made immediately. On occasion, information was not available as the presenting individual was not the finder, or had departed after delivering the animal and had not left contact information. Each month, cases were tabulated on a "Native Wildlife Monthly Report" and submitted to the office of the Chief Veterinarian of Tasmania. With permission, interesting cases or cases of exotic disease concern could be submitted to the State Animal Health Laboratory for pathological evaluation.

Results and Discussion

The number of wildlife presented during 2006-2014

was 3759. Of these, avian species were 56.61% (2128), mammalian species were 40.51% (1522) and reptiles 2.8% (107). There was an increasing then descending yearly number of cases starting in 2007 with 269 cases, reaching a high point in 2012 with 920 cases and then declining by 2014 to 274 cases. We are unable to explain the rise and fall of numbers during these eight years but are continuing to collect data and will compare future years with the years presented in this report.

The avian species (2128) were divided into feral 6.9% (147), mainland Australian 4% (86), Tasmanian native 88% (1873) and species unknown 1% (22). Disposition was as follows: died 16.6% (354), euthanized 33.5% (713), released 11.4% (242), transferred to care 26.8% (517) and unknown or not recorded 14.2% (302) (Figure 1).

Mammalian species (1522) were divided into bats 1% (16), Tasmanian Devils 2.7% (42), echidna 2.7% (41), feral 0.26% (4), kangaroo 0.85% (13), marine mammals 0.065% (1), other Dasyurids 3.0% (45), other small marsupials 12% (184), platypus 0.26% (4), possum 27.4% (417), wallaby 45.9% (698), wombat 3.0% (50), and species unknown 0.5% (7). Disposition was as follows: Died 12.1% (185), euthanized 42.6% (649), released 5% (77), transferred to care 26.8% (409) and unknown or not recorded 13.2% (202) (Figure 2).

Reptiles (107) were divided into: feral 1.0% (1), (Not native to Tasmania). Lizards and Skinks 72% (77), snake 24% (26) and unknown 3% (3). Disposition was as follows: died 4.7% (5), euthanized 28% (30), released 18.7% (20), transferred 29.9% (32) and unknown 18.7% (20) (Figure 3).

Two amphibians, a banana box frog and a brown tree frog, were presented over the eight years. Both were feral species and were subsequently euthanized.

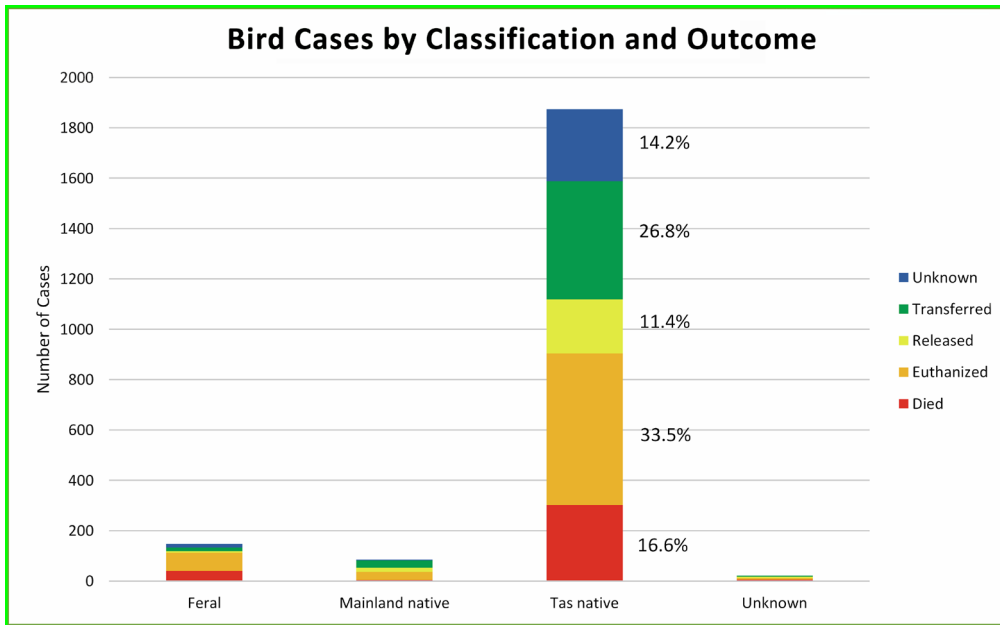


Figure 1

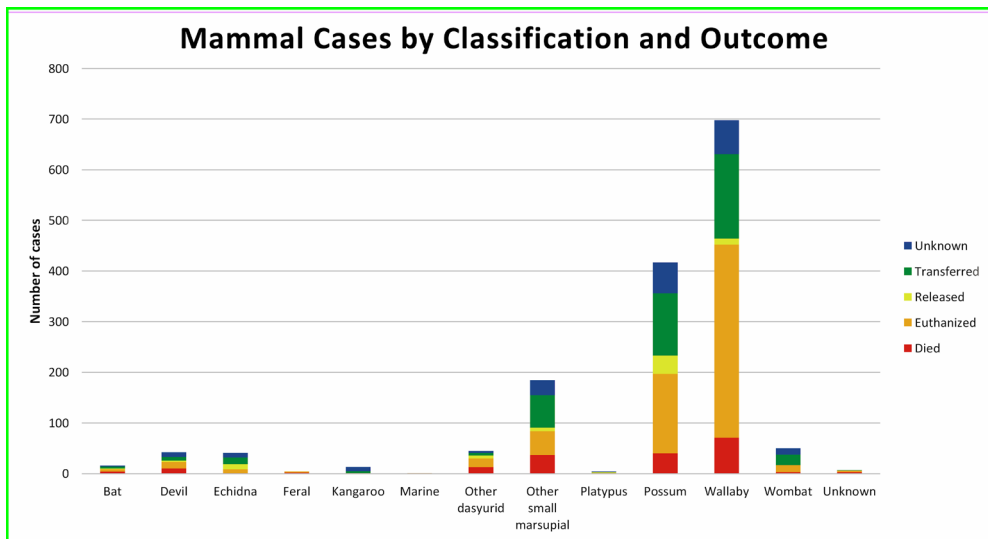


Figure 2

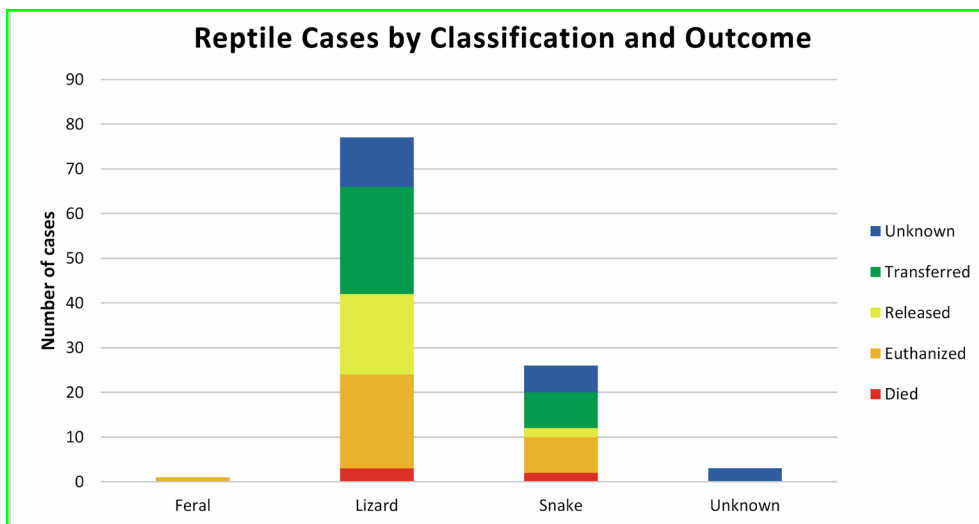


Figure 3

The mammals were divided into the same dispositions with a higher number euthanized. Most deaths/euthanasia were because of trauma. Injuries that were not practical or realistic to repair and in the case of avian species would result in an inability to fly, even with successful healing, were euthanized. Cat and dog attacks were seen but not in the numbers expected. It is presumed that many of the birds, small mammals and reptiles caught by cats were eaten and never reached the practice. Macropods are more prone to have motor vehicle trauma and the second most common problem involved the central nervous system or ocular pathology (cataracts and blindness), with toxoplasmosis a possible reason. Early in the survey period, permission was given to submit brains and blood to test for toxoplasmosis. Once it was proven that macropods had toxoplasmosis we were advised that no more cases were to be submitted. 42.6% of all the mammals were euthanased.

The number of unknown dispositions, ranging from 13.2% to 18.7%, (in the case of the 107 reptile species), unfortunately was the result of lack of concentration, commitment and attention on the part of staff. This information was not recorded on the records which were tabulated in some cases eight years after the wildlife was seen. We are now more mindful of the need to detail information on the records.

Conclusion

Veterinarians in private clinical practice have a place in wildlife monitoring and care. They can monitor wildlife for the presence of exotic or new diseases, and receiving wildlife and orphaned creatures is a public service that attracts clients to a practice. Good record keeping, as is the case with any and all patients, is essential. These records should be shared with the appropriate agencies and individuals involved with the wildlife populations in the area. It would be ideal to have one national collection location to which all data could be submitted, and this could highlight the interaction of wildlife with human activities. The interface between humans, the environment, and the wild habitat that surrounds us is not kind to the other species we share this planet with. Documenting our interactions with wild species is hopefully helpful in forming mitigation strategies.

References and Further Reading

Casey, A.M., Casey, S.J. 2000. A Survey of Conditions seen in Wildlife Admitted for Wildlife Rehabilitation. *Wildlife Rehabilitation*. 18, 143-160.

Code of Practice for Injured Sick and Orphaned Protected Fauna. NSW Government Office of Environment and Heritage. ISBN 978 1 74293 080 0

<http://bit.ly/2a3VBFY>

Code of Practice. 2013: Care of Sick, Injured or Orphaned Protected Animals in Queensland. Nature Conservation Act 1992. Department of Environment and Heritage Protection.

<http://bit.ly/29R79R6>

Wildlife Management: General Requirements for the Care and Rehabilitation of Injured and Orphaned Wildlife in Tasmania. <http://bit.ly/29R7IZE>

Agriculture Victoria: Code of Practice for the Welfare of Wildlife During Rehabilitation.

<http://bit.ly/29R7bHa>