

Making possum magic

Like most superheroes, mild mannered nurse Donna Rundle has a not-so secret identity.

By night, she is the After Hours Operational Nurse Manager at Canterbury Hospital. By day, she is a volunteer for WIRES – the NSW Wildlife Information and Rescue Service, providing foster care for injured and orphaned possums.

Donna joined WIRES 15 years ago, after answering an advertisement looking for foster carers for native wildlife that had been injured in recent bushfires, and hasn't looked back since.

"I have rescued and cared for over 100 animals," she said, "I care for all native animals... except the reptiles. My specialty is the marsupials, especially *Trichosorus Vulpecula*, or brushtail possums. They are delightful and highly intelligent."

WIRES was established in 1985, when an injured Ibis was found in Hyde Park. At the time, no government or conservation organisation could take responsibility for its care, and animal groups such as the RSPCA were unequipped to rehabilitate native animals.

Since then WIRES has grown to a network of 27 branches with more than 2,000 volunteers statewide. Over 50,000 native birds, marsupials, reptiles and other animals are rescued each year, with approximately 130 threatened species cared for each month. It provides specialist training courses as well as support for its members.



Donna Rundle with an orphan possum joey and (inset) at his weekly weighing.

Donna takes photographs and records of growth and development of the animals in her care, to use for teaching other WIRES members. In 2012 Donna's dedication to caring for native wildlife was recognised when she was awarded the Premier of NSW Community Service Award.

For Donna, the demands of her alter egos, nurse manager and foster carer, are not so different.

"My nursing and midwifery skills transfer easily into caring for injured or orphaned joeys," Donna said. "The same principles of care apply – except that you're dealing with a marsupial, so the anatomy and physiology is totally different."

Currently Donna has two brushtail possums in her care, one that was orphaned, and an older one recovering from a head injury and ligament damage sustained in a fall.

A baby possum or 'joey' can often be in Donna's care for up to six months before moving on to the next stage, called soft release, where they live in a semi-wild enclosure and learn how to socialise and adapt to bush conditions in a safe environment before being finally released back into the wild.

If you find an injured or orphaned native animal, keep it in a warm dark place and take it to the nearest veterinary clinic or call WIRES on 1800 641 188.