

Climate Change - the grief we feel.mp3

Gretchen [00:00:10] Hello there and welcome to Wildlife Heroes Caring for the Carers, the podcast that takes care of wildlife volunteers.

Gretchen [00:00:19] There are over 15,000 wildlife volunteers around the country. So the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife is aiming to start a mental health conversation around the five key topics that worry you the most. Community conflict, catastrophic events, personal wellbeing, supporting others. And today, are you a climate worrier and a climate warrior? Is what's happening with climate change in the world outside wildlife caring, making you wonder what the point is? In each episode of Caring for the Carers we get to know an individual wildlife volunteer around our main theme and then with a guest expert from the mental health disciplines, we talk about how that situation might reflect broader experiences in the care community. I'm Gretchen Miller. I'm an audio documentary maker, and I've long been talking about these ideas with humans from all walks of life. With us in the studio is Ros Irwin, a veteran carer and president of Friends of the Koala from Lismore in New South Wales. And she works very closely with her husband, Bill, in the work that she does.

Gretchen [00:01:34] Also on the line is Sally Gillespie, who's a member of Psychology for Safe Climate, the Climate Wellbeing Network and the Climate Psychology Alliance. Former psychotherapist Sally presents talks and workshops on climate psychology and eco psychology and has written the book Climate Crisis and Consciousness: Reimagining Our World and Ourselves and listeners I want to acknowledge at this point that we're coming out of a really challenging summer for Australians with the bushfires and the drought across the country, but also that we're in the middle of an unprecedented crisis with the novel Coronavirus. And that's why we're recording with our guests remotely. We felt that it's really important to get this podcast out to you as soon as possible, because our mental health, all of us, is being challenged right now. Ros, let's start with you. Can you tell us a little bit about yourself? You actually came to wildlife rescue a bit differently to most. When did you start?

Ros [00:02:36] I really started in about 2009. Up until then, I had been in full time employment, first teaching at university and also being on the local council for a number of years. So it wasn't really until I retired from the university that I actually had the time. I mean, I had the interest in our speciality, which is koalas, for a number of years and been involved in trying to get a koala plan of management in our local area, was elected to council back in nineteen ninety one and I was on the council until 2008 when I decided it was about time for me to have a different life and it's after that really that I became more actively involved in Friends of the Koala and the activities that were licenced to carry out in this region.

Gretchen [00:03:30] And having been a senior public servant in the city and then an academic very much in the headspace. What moved you to want to actually get hands on with koalas?

Ros [00:03:40] Yeah, it was really around in a sense of retiring. It gave me the space and the time to think about what I wanted to do. And it was very clear to me that koalas were in trouble around Australia and it was something that my husband and I could share together. We do a lot of hands-on work with koalas in terms of rescues. We monitor the rescue phone, which is a 24 hour rescue phone. We do that from six o'clock at night until eight o'clock in the morning, two nights a week and do rescues ourselves. We go out and rescue

koalas in our area and we also become involved in a lot of the practical activities around the care centre where we're based.

Gretchen [00:04:26] So tell me what it's like for you to discover this physical connection. To do this caring work with the animals. What's it like when you look into a koala's eyes?

Ros [00:04:37] Well, it's very emotional in a sense, because they are amazing animals. I mean, my husband and I both think we're privileged to be able to work with this animal and to try and save it at this stage of our lives. So it gives us purpose and meaning. And working with the volunteers has been particularly wonderful. We have a lot of volunteers. We have over 100 active volunteers every week, and it's been a really interesting process, extending our skills and learning more about the animal and its complexity, because it is one of the most complex wildlife that we have in Australia. It's got a very complex bowel system and other things about it. So it's a learning experience. And when I look at a koala, what I can see is depending on particularly the time. I mean, often when we go to rescue a koala, you can absolutely see fear. And in its eyes, they are very aware, I'm sure, that humans generally are not okay for them. But what does happen is that given the horrendous time we've had with the drought, we've had a lot of koalas that it seems to us although there's no scientific basis for saying it but our own observation is this. Is that when the koalas become too dehydrated and malnourished to continue, they simply come down from the tree, often sit at the base of the tree, but also do the weirdest things like approaching humans, their houses. People will report in that they're actually the koala is sitting on my husband's knee at the moment. It is a comment that we've had and it's almost as though the koala is saying, I give up, I can't do anything to help myself. So you people have to help me. So it is that the fear is very, very acute, and particularly, I think, with small koalas, with young ones.

Gretchen [00:06:31] So if you put your good work into the context of global climate change, the global climate crisis. What does that do to you physically? How do you viscerally respond to the thought of these animals you're raising, your rescuing, you're releasing, in the bigger picture of the climate crisis?

Ros [00:06:52] Well, what I would say is that it's a very emotional experience for us. And often when I'm doing an interview about the koalas, it is difficult for that emotion not to come through, because from my perspective, we absolutely need to have politicians who are going to protect our wildlife. And at the moment, that certainly has not been the way it is. And everything that happens seems to be one more move towards extinction.

Gretchen [00:07:21] And I just want to acknowledge that, that when we talk about drought in this context of this conversation, what we're talking about is something much bigger than a local experience. Sally, I'd like to come to you now.

Gretchen [00:07:33] Can you define what is climate grief for us?

Sally [00:07:39] Well, it's a number of things. I mean, I certainly feel climate grief listening to Ros and really reflecting on that experience of the bushfires. But most people, those images of koalas and the thought that the koalas might become extinct or move further towards that possibility as a result of catastrophic bushfires, which are undoubtedly driven by climate change. So it's both about the losses we see happening at the moment. And it's also the anticipated losses, terrible to see the decimation of the koala population as it is. And on top of that, the grief of knowing the enormity of the struggle ahead as climate gets

further disrupted and we have more droughts and more intense bushfires, there's so many losses as the climate changes, we lose often place.

Sally [00:08:35] Glen Albert wrote about this when he talks about solastalgia. The grief we feel when a place we have known and loved is changed beyond recognition and all the losses, often a decimation of the biodiversity that's gone there. And with that can go a sense of identity and hope and expectations, many things. And also another part of climate grief is the kind of losses that we have, because the life we thought we might be going to live is not the life we will be living, because as the climate disruption intensifies and we've not seen sufficient response in terms of mitigation, there's many losses there.

Sally [00:09:18] The other thing I want to say about the climate grief is it's not just one emotion. It's a whole range of emotions. And often we get asked in the organisations I work with to run a climate grief workshop and what we find as soon as people get together and start having their grief acknowledged and express the feelings that come up with that. There is a really full range of feelings there, from sadness to powerlessness to despair to guilt to rage, all kinds of things. So it's a very intense and moving. You know, it moves about these emotions of climate grief into all sorts of different kinds of responses and I think it's very hard to keep it all in consciousness, but I think all of us are carrying it at some level with us all the time. Unconsciously, not consciously.

Gretchen [00:10:09] And the size of this threat has been called a wicked problem, a hyper object. What does that mean?

Sally [00:10:16] Yes, that was a term of Timothy Morton, an environmental philosopher. What he's really saying is this is something that is so enormous in both its phenomena and its implications and its experience that we can't really get our heads around it.

Sally [00:10:31] We've never found a term that really fits for us in terms of talking about what's going on. Climate crisis, climate emergency, climate disruption, global heating, global warming. It's very hard to even find a term and very hard to know how to come and get a hold on this because it feels so much bigger than anything that we have experienced.

Gretchen [00:10:53] It's so large and so complex, isn't it? Why is it important, do you think, that we have a term or a series of terms for these feelings? And I'm thinking there's eco grief, climate distress, climate anxiety. Why is naming so important?

Sally [00:11:08] Because their new feelings and we haven't really worked out how to acknowledge them. And in fact, because, unfortunately, especially in Australia, we've had very polarised discussions around ecological collapse and climate crisis. A lot of people feel they can't either talk freely about how they feel or they can't even access their feelings. So this is when we talk about grief which has disenfranchised. In other words, it's not culturally and socially acknowledged. So often people sit on their climate grief, not really even fully understanding the impact it's having on them. And of course, when it can't be acknowledged and shared, that can lead to feelings of isolation or depression or numbness. It's not good for us on the level our psychological well-being.

Gretchen [00:11:58] Ros back to you. Do you feel that you can access and acknowledge your grief?

Ros [00:12:04] Yes, I do. And I think it's probably just because of the people that I have around me. I mean, I absolutely acknowledge my grief. And I also acknowledge the grief of a lot of our volunteers some of who simply will not acknowledge it. And if you ask them how they are, they say 'fine'. And you know that it's not the case. But, you know, for us here, two years with a drought, can I say that everything here in this part of the world and Australia, which was well known for being, if you like, the green corner of New South Wales, went brown and black. And that meant all of our properties, homes, everything. There was no grass. The trees were dying. Everything was dying.

Ros [00:12:49] So, you know, there was a huge amount of grief around just that issue without dealing with the grief that we were feeling about what was happening to the wildlife and and to the planet. I mean, I have great grandchildren. My concerns always, well, what kind of a world are we really leaving for them. And at times you can feel that it's fairly hopeless. I'm just hoping that as a result of this new virus that we have and the new way, we are going to have to live our lives, that maybe the politicians will start moving on climate change and do what is absolutely essential for people to be able to feel some sense of hope about the future rather than thinking this is the future that we're locked into.

Gretchen [00:13:32] So that's really interesting, because what you're talking about, there is an acknowledgement of your personal grief, but also a desire to address it through a larger democratic process. I'm wondering whether your community is expressing its grief, not just about the landscape and the suffering of the animals and the ecology, but about climate change. Is it being acknowledged in your community?

Ros [00:14:02] Absolutely. And I could say that because this is the home of Nimbib and this is the home of alternative lifestyles. So there is a huge amount of opportunity for people to actually share their concerns about climate change. And it's very much in the community. Everybody is now talking about it and looking for some sort of solutions and taking action to try to get our politicians to listen to the scientists and to do things that are in the best interest of the planet, really, not just our part of the world.

Gretchen [00:14:38] So climate grief can turn to democratic determination, if you like.

Ros [00:14:43] Absolutely. And I find that myself, the more that we actually know that the wildlife is suffering, the more determined we are to make sure that doesn't happen. I mean, that's something that I think we can affect. And you have to have hope. And from myself. Even though at times when I look at it and think this is not going to be an easy path for generations in the future, you have to have hope and you can look forward in all sorts of things. So, for example, when we were looking for places in the burnt landscape to actually release our koalas when we saw the epicormic growth on some of the trees. It looked as though they were absolutely not going to recover and that was awful.

Gretchen [00:15:31] Sally, Ros is particularly lucky in a way because she lives in a very empowered and active community, a strong community that is generally united in its understanding of the climate crisis. But there may be individual carers out there who live in communities which still very much deny that there's an issue, even despite the fires and droughts that we've all been experiencing across Australia. For those people who live in communities that don't acknowledge climate change, but themselves really feel very anxious about it. What can they do to strengthen themselves?

Sally [00:16:11] Well, absolutely finding and connecting with those who do understand that level of the crisis. And I think we have to be very careful here because we know from

surveys that, in fact, the vast majority of Australians are concerned about climate issues. But there is a very noisy, small under 10 per cent of influential climate deniers. But that doesn't mean that in your particular area, you might have a higher proportion of people who sit in that camp or who may not deny the climate issues, but don't see it as something that's particularly urgent or fall for that argument that the economy is more important as if the economy wasn't actually grounded in ecology. Now, for those people, the support is incredibly important. Climate is a collective issue. It cannot be tackled individually. So we need to be in groups and communities. And though, yes, Lismore is one most wonderful example, I think we have in Australia of a very empowered, switched on community around climate. I don't think there's any communities now in Australia that don't have significant pockets of people who are concerned with climate. And it's about realising how important it is in those communities where it's not so much the status quo to be concerned to form your groups of support. Now, some of that, I think, will flow out of the bushfire crisis. We've seen a lot of communities form in terms of responding to the disasters and how to pick themselves up from the disasters. But I think fighting increasingly and as an organisation called Survivors of Bushfires is that that conversation flows very readily into climate issues for many people. So sometimes it's been a little bit old and having to be, if you feel isolated, check people out as you meet them. But in other cases, I think if you're a wildlife carer, you might know about the bushcare people in your area and so on, and being willing to raise the topic yourself a bit. As Ros said, you know, she'll ask people how you're feeling. They feel fine. That's because people say that until they're really invited in and feel very safe and perhaps have a little bit of role modelling of someone else saying, well, you know, I don't feel so fine. I find I wake up in the middle of the night worrying about this. I find sometimes I burst into tears looking at the paper or whatever. And that generally invites people then to go. Yeah, well, actually, yes, there are these moments for me, too.

Gretchen [00:18:39] So it seems to me that the approach is firstly to acknowledge your own feelings and secondly, to reach out to others. There's not much we can do as individuals to turn the world around, but there's a lot we can do if we come together as a community. I think that's the message that is coming across. So what I'm thinking about now, though, is for wildlife carers, particularly roles in a community, you are on the front line. You're observing the impacts of the climate changing around us. Do you feel, Ros, that you're actually more attuned to what the climate crisis actually means than say somebody else who's not doing that hands-on care?

Ros [00:19:23] Well, I think so. And should I say, one of the things that happened in the drought that was really interesting for us as carers ourselves is that we found wallabies who we had always had them here, but they were absolutely starving. There was no grass for them to eat or anything. So we bought macropod pellets and we had an amazing number of wallabies that just came everyday, knew exactly where it was and had their water and everything, and also we are particularly fortunate. We live on 4.65 hectares of land which has got a rainforest in it as well. But what we found was that the birds were also starving. So, of course we focussed particularly on koalas because that's the nature of wildlife caring. But suddenly we started doing things that we had never had to do before, including feeding birds, giving them black sunflower seeds. And so we were surrounded by all of these wildlife that we aren't usually responsible for that became so and it was a wonderful process. But can I say that the point that was made earlier about grief. I have experienced it on many occasions. It comes at the oddest times. And it does come sometimes at night. When I'm awake, and talking with our carers. I have absolutely made it clear to them that this is something that is shared by all of us, that this grief is something that I'm experiencing and I'm sure that they're experiencing it. And I think that acknowledging that you are really sad about what's happening is a healthy thing to do. It's

been an eye opening experience for us because usually we're just extremely optimistic glass half full people. And at times there, when we saw the land dying around us, it was shocking.

Gretchen [00:21:24] So in acknowledging what Ros is talking about here, that it's important for carers to admit to their concerns to one another. I wonder if, as wildlife carers, we noticed more than the average population, the effects of climate change. Like climate scientists, we're attuned to the subtle changes in our landscape, to our home ground. And we're familiar with what sorts of threats face our animals. But this is quite different. Can you talk about how activists tend to be more emotionally resilient and have better support networks so carers might learn from from them?

Sally [00:22:02] Sure I mean, first of all, I want to talk to the whole thing about being much more aware of the climate impacts. I think if you're a wildlife care or you're working in bush regen or any of those sorts of hands-on on the ground things, you are both scientists and you're doing what indigenous people have done over millennia, which is knowing and mapping your ecological home and observing very finely all those changes and the losses.

Sally [00:22:30] And I feel it's very important that not only we can talk about it to one another, but that we also when we have gatherings, just as we acknowledge the land that we meet upon and indigenous custodianship of that land and care and sovereignty of that land that we might also pause to observe the losses that are ongoing and that we are so intimately experiencing and which are not being observed by the larger mainstream culture because it is so disconnected and disassociated from the natural world.

Gretchen [00:23:03] So perhaps that ritual of acknowledgement every time we gather might help carers in that particular position therein of being the ones who are on the frontline, who are really observing these changes and perhaps which might make them feel quite fearful.

Sally [00:23:23] I think so. I think it is bonding. It's nurturing, and it enables an energy to flow out that might be blocked otherwise because we're sitting on grief.

Gretchen [00:23:33] So that acknowledgement is terribly important. If we are to look at ourselves as wildlife carers, if our listeners were to consider thinking about themselves as a carer, I wonder what it is about carers that makes us empathic to the larger world around us. What makes this the kind of person who is burdened by grief when others just get on with their day and barely give the climate crisis a thought? I think it's really important to think about what kind of person am I? And to pay attention to that and acknowledge that. So Ros and Sally, what makes us empathic to the larger world around us? And let's start with you, Ros.

Ros [00:24:13] Well, I would say I think that that comes from many things and probably back to your upbringing, the sort of parents you heard. Their attitude towards the natural world, their values in terms of looking after country. All of those things that certainly are look around and I can see that there are people there who have had that long experience of thinking about the world around them. But I think for many of the carers, it has come later in times and there is nothing like caring for wildlife that actually rams home the messages, it's about what we're doing to the planet and what the price will be if we don't actually step up and make sure all the climate change is addressed appropriately.

Gretchen [00:25:05] And Sally, what makes us empathic to the larger world around us? What kind of people are we?

Sally [00:25:11] I think that's what kind of people do we become as we do this. I mean, I think, you know, anyone who has an experience of young children know that it's pretty natural to young children to be very empathic and connected to the natural world and curious and look for forms of bonding there. But our cultural conditioning is all about disconnection from the natural world and seeing it as some sort of backdrop to us. So often for people, it's a process of waking up. And sometimes it can be quite a startling waking up of that empathy and connection and without a sense of urgency to do something about it. Researchers Paul Hoggett and Rosemary Randall talk about the climate activist cycle, which I think applies to all people here who become very engaged in ecological issues and what they talk about is there is a trajectory, an emotional trajectory you go through. And that involves, yes, the kind of shocks of waking up to it and often living very immersed and educating ourselves and basically removing that conditioning, which leaves us so disconnected and disassociated from the natural world. And with that comes the feelings of grief and loss. And some of that might be personal sense of grief and loss that we haven't noticed before, that we haven't really understood how our life deeply embedded in natural ecosystems and processes. But what we become through that engagement is we come a lot more alive to the world and we become more resilient too, partly because to be a campaigner, you need to work within a group of people who feel like you. And so you are part of that is to build social networks of support.

Sally [00:26:54] So there's also joy in it. But you did talk the beginning, Ros, about the joy of looking after koalas and the privilege of that and all you've learnt about them. And often it is an animal or a place or a species or an ecosystem that particularly calls us. And we need to go where we feel passion and we you feel love and we want that kind of learning and sharing to go on. And we also I think if we just tune into the natural world, learn how to pace ourselves according to some of the natural rhythms. This is very important for campaigners and carers that we know when we need to retreat a bit and have that resting fallow period, which is so important to natural cycles and how to nurture our connections, which is also very much a part of understanding that we belong within social and biological ecosystems. So there's a whole way of, we change our view of ourselves as well as our view of our world as we've become more immersed and knowledgeable and actively engaged in understanding how to care and be with this world.

Gretchen [00:28:02] Sally, you have suggested Worden's model for grieving. What is that? And listeners, it's spelt w o r d e n if you want to Google it. So Worden's model for grieving.

Sally [00:28:15] Okay. This model actually was suggested and being pertinent for climate grief by Rosemary Randall, my reference before, an English psychotherapist who began the carbon conversations and she wrote about various models for grieving and thought that William Worden's worked best because it specifies four tasks which can be used ongoingly, because the grief of climate is not like a bereavement where we lose someone and we go through that tremendous loss and we grieve them and then we move on. Climate grief is something which is here for the rest of our lives, and we need to develop skills and resilience about how to work with that. Now, the tasks he suggests are 1. First of all, just accepting the reality of climate loss. And as we know, that can be quite a prolonged process. And we might know quite a lot of people who are still trying to part deny part bargain part say, well, it's not so bad or someone will fix it or we will get an amazing technology. So there's all that bargaining process that can go on as we work out whether we can, in fact, accept this daunting reality of the losses that are coming about

through climate disruption. 2. The next task is working through all the emotions of the grief. And as I said before, the grief emotions can be very wide ranging and usually do involve things like anger, sadness, powerlessness, guilt, melancholia, hopelessness, the resentment, all kinds of things that we can feel. And this is where we really need to have our conversations and reflections with others to understand it's a collective process that we're going through.

Sally [00:29:54] 3. Then there's the task of adjusting to the new reality of climate disruption. When Ros speaks I hear how much she has taken this in, is the reality and her life has changed as a result. And this is the thing about Lismore as a community, here's a whole community, which is adjusting and which is talking about, well, how will we work with trying to both push for greater mitigation, as well as look at what adaptation we need to do in order to become more resilient as these various challenges and catastrophes intensify. And so it involves seeking out different kinds of groups, different kinds of ways of living. It changes who we are and how we are and how we be in the world. And 4. the final task is reinvesting our energy in this climate future. So that's part of what I was already talking about there. Having that full acceptance of acknowledgement and being able to be with it and to hold that in a way which is loving and actively engaged rather than if you don't do this task, you might just shut down and withdraw or become deeply sort of cynical. So it's about staying engaged and really feeling how precious our world is and the love we have for it and the hope that we get through acting, not because we know we will necessarily turn it all around, but because we know we're acting for a way of being in the world which comes from that love, which has felt all the more intensely because we have experienced the grief of looking into the losses.

Sally [00:31:27] So these tasks are not something you do once, they are sort of like a spiral. So we go through the many times, there's new realities to accept. There's times where our grief may intensify, we may have to work more on those emotions and other times we become very engaged and energised in the way we're investing in this new way of living and engagement. So it's an ongoing process which we spiral around.

Gretchen [00:31:54] Thank you. Thank you, Sally. Ros, as you have observed your local landscape over time. Are you seeing changes happen in front of you?

Ros [00:32:05] Yes. Indeed. I mean, for example, was we now have dams fall. We now have a green environment again. There are still trees that are gone and won't ever recover. There are still animals that are still suffering. We know with koalas that they're just on the brink and we have to keep on doing everything we can. And that includes campaigning, activism. One of the most powerful things that I think happened in Lismore was the Bentley Blockade that we were involved in. And that was really reformative in the sense that people just came together and said, we will not have this.

Gretchen [00:32:48] So activism for you is an incredibly powerful and potent means to cope, I think. Do you feel that solastalgia that Sally was talking about, the grief of watching your landscape change in front of you?

Ros [00:33:03] Absolutely.

Gretchen [00:33:04] How does that manifest for you? What feelings come up as you see those changes?

Ros [00:33:09] I think the first is really sadness because it shouldn't have been this way. It is what we have done as a human race that have actually got us where we are now. So that sadness is there, but it also does breed that even more determination of doing something about it, knowing that you can, because here we did. We stopped coal seam gas. And that was really powerful.

Gretchen [00:33:36] You've also been doing a lot of land conservation work. Revegetating rainforest on your own property. And I wonder how that personal relationship. We've talked a lot about politics here, but I'd like to hear also about how that makes you feel when you do that work, when you stick your fingers in that soil. Tell me about that feeling of taking action just in your own small patch.

Ros [00:34:02] Look, that's incredibly powerful. And I mean, sometimes when I look around or see some things happening that I think are just incredibly confronting, it's time that I go and put my hands in the soil and do some regen work, which is what we do on a regular basis. Our property is a wildlife sanctuary. And so that in itself has been really powerful. And can I say that one of the things that always impresses me is listening to our indigenous people, talking about country. And I think that when you become involved with the land in such a basic way as we do, the meaning of country is very powerful, even for us, even though we're not indigenous. But I absolutely have that connection with the land and we have a connection with the land. And it's a very powerful motivator.

Gretchen [00:34:58] We know that climate grief can come on at any moment as an individual, you might be reading a newspaper and see yet another report about how dire it is. It might be a series of losses in your caring work. It might be a wave of grief that makes you need to sit down or a slow onset of depression that you don't realise you're in until it's been a couple of days. What do you recommend as practical steps for individuals who are feeling it keenly in the moment?

Sally [00:35:28] Yeah, it's very important to respond to your climate grief. And part of it will be trial and error, finding out for you what works best. I think some of it is acknowledging you need to go to ground a little bit and have a breather. We have to be very careful monitoring how much we look at in terms of news reports and social media, because that can just become so swamping and overwhelming sadness in a way that's not able to be processed. So sometimes for me, when I notice I'm starting to feel the grief, or I am starting to go a bit numb. I would withdraw from some of that. I reach out to my friends. I have two or three ongoing groups where I can talk comfortably about my climate grief or even just feel it. Just sit there and be sad with others. So I think those sorts of support groups, where you can really name the feelings and feel them together is really important to have an ongoing background. A time in the natural world is really important. I garden, I go to the garden and you need the joy, you know, because part of the grief can be overwhelmed by the sadness of so many losses. So it really touched me when Ros talked about going into the forest and seeing that growth with that new shooting where was not expected to be. So it's really reaching out to those resources that do nourish you, as well as being able to even just the gentle. I say to someone who really understands I'm really feeling the grief a lot at the moment. You may or may not want to put a lot of that into words at that time with that person, but sometimes just being able to acknowledge it and you need to go very gently with yourself and connect to what is loving for you and brings love, because grief is the other side of love. And we need to feel that love alongside the grief to be able to hold that.

Gretchen [00:37:17] And if you're having a moment like right now, let's say you're feeling a little bit triggered. The Australian Psychological Society says things like identify the physical location of the stress. Like for me right now, it's my shoulders. I'm certainly feeling it in my shoulders. So that allows me to go. I'm just going to move them a little and breathe into them a bit and try and identify what kind of distress you're feeling so that you can work out the best way to then deal with it. If it's immediate anxiety, it could be breathing. If it's depression, it might be making sure that you get out into the world. If it's exhaustion, make sure you get enough sleep. Really simple, practical things that you can do. But first of all, you have to identify what the problem is and how it's expressing itself. Ros, do you have things that you do when you feel the choking in the throat?

Ros [00:38:08] Absolutely. And I have refused to watch any of the articles really on the bushfire loss of wildlife, because that just gets too much for me. So I go away from that. I do read a lot, I listen to music that makes me happy. We go out into the garden and work there and down in the rainforest. Those are all things that can actually ameliorate the feelings that we have. And it's a form of self protection for me very much, because if I were to get into a downward spiral, it would be really hard to come out of it, I think. And so we try and laugh. We try and find things together that we enjoy and we do limit. I mean, I don't do the social media. And I'd have to say that whilst I'm sure I miss out on many things. I think I'm protected in a way from a lot of issues that perhaps are not really ones that I want to become involved with. So, yeah, it is about having strategies for when I'm feeling really sad to simply say, right, I have to go out and do something about this now that will actually make me start feeling more secure. I guess and more hopeful.

Gretchen [00:39:26] And what about as wildlife carers? Of course. Sally, the love or the calming we can feel about spending time with animals.

Sally [00:39:36] That's so important because animals are so in their moment and in the present. And if your animal is comfortable and you're comfortable with your animal, whether it be your domestic pet or the wildlife you're caring for. That focus is so much on what is sustaining life now. What brings joy? What enlivens my world? So, yeah. And for animals as part of life will go through their losses, their challenges, their tragedies and ultimately death. And we're a death denying society. We're not very good at being able to just acknowledged that life does have this process of loss and suffering as well as its joys and connections, and it's flourishing. So I think just being with the animal in that moment, life is what it is right then and there. And that can be very centring and grounding and bring us back again into the love that we're talking as has being the other side of grief.

Gretchen [00:40:37] Ros, we spoke at the beginning about looking into the eyes of a koala who is frightened and fearful. Can you talk a bit about what it's like to spend time with an animal that is actually recovering and that you've helped recover and, you know, soon will be going back to the natural environment?

Ros [00:40:54] We actually have a koala in our kindergarten, which we have here which has about 57 trees in it. And so when the koalas have been in care for some time, we need to put them in with particularly the young ones in an area where they can climb trees as opposed to just being confined in our runs. And so we have at the moment young Ember, who is the last of the ones that we rescued. And my husband and I were the ones who had the joy of rescuing her. And she's now in our kindy and she's doing well. There was a lot of fear with her fitness about the fact that she had had her paws burnt so badly that the claws seem to curl upwards rather than down. And there was a real fear when we tried to release her that she wouldn't be able to climb the tree so just last Friday when she

was brought out here we opened the cage and she just went straight up to the top of the tree. And she's been coming down and going to another tree each day. And so the joy that we all feel about that, we know that, yes, we will be very soon releasing her. And that comes with relief and joy and also fear because you just cross your fingers and hope - here you are back to your environment and let's just hope you're there and that we never have to rescue you again.

Gretchen [00:42:23] Can you talk to me about the times you've spent with Ember sitting with her when you are feeling climate grief? What does Ember do for you?

Ros [00:42:31] So what we certainly do is if we're feeling grief, then we go looking for the wild koalas, because if you aren't looking for them, chances are you won't even know that they're there. And when we see them and we know who they are and yes, they're back, then you get a sense of things are really okay at the moment for these animals. And that's a great joy, frankly.

Gretchen [00:42:58] Wonderful. Ros Irwin and Sally Gillespie, I'd like to thank you both so much for coming on Caring for the Carers, which is a podcast of Wildlife Heroes. And I hope that this is the beginning of a structured conversation for all of us in this fast changing world about our responses to the climate crisis. Listeners, if the discussion today has brought up strong feelings, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14. And you can find a range of mental health resources and support on the Two Green Threads website twogreenthreads.org and keep up to date with what's happening with wildlife heroes at wildlifeheroes.org.au.

Gretchen [00:43:40] Don't forget there's lots of other episodes in this series, so do go looking there. And while you're at it, share it with your friends and with your wildlife carer colleagues. Leave us a review on Apple podcasts, we'd love to hear from you. I'm Gretchen Miller and from us at Wildlife Heroes: Caring for the Carers. See you next time.