

Community Conflict - when all the good will goes bad.mp3

[00:00:10] Hello there and welcome to Wildlife Heroes Caring for the Carers. The podcast that takes care of wildlife volunteers. There are over 15000 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. Being a climate warrior, personal wellbeing, supporting others, catastrophic events and today, community conflict when all the goodwill goes bad.

Gretchen [00:00:47] In each episode of Caring for the Carers, we'll get to know an individual wildlife volunteer around the theme. And then with a guest psychologist, we'll look at how that situation might reflect broader experiences in the care community and what we can do about it. I'm Gretchen Miller. I'm an audio documentary maker and podcast there with a longstanding passion for discussing how we as humans intersect with our natural world.

Gretchen [00:01:14] And we're recording this during an unprecedented time for the world, for Australians and for wildlife carers on the frontline. Coping after a terrible summer of droughts and fires and floods and now dealing with the COVID-19 corona virus. With us in the studio, psychologist Lyn Page, up from the Illawarra on the New South Wales south coast where she runs a practice.

Gretchen [00:01:37] She's also a volunteer field psychologist with the Red Cross and a member of the Disaster Response Network with the Australian Psychological Society. And on the line, we have Jess Birrell, a reptile rescue volunteer. Now, this is a really tricky topic to address community conflict. So the following content might challenge you and we may not cover everything you'd like us to in the time that we've got. But perhaps there will be tools you can think about putting into play. What we do know is that conflict is a major concern for wildlife carers. Chances are, though, that person over there who frustrates and upsets you feels just as upset as you do. So while we can't come up with definitive answers, we can at least acknowledge the issue and look for some ways through. And I'd like to start with you, Jess. Tell me a little of your history as a wildlife care volunteer.

Jess [00:02:30] So when it comes to reptiles, it's not something that I initially set out to specialise in at all. When I did my university studies, I actually studied human wildlife conflict in Southeast Asia with elephants. But how I came about reptiles is working with a wildlife organisation. It was one thing that seemed to be really misunderstood represented. I found them to be a group of species, especially when it comes to venomous snakes. They really misunderstood both in their behaviour in ecology and how the community perceives them. And that makes them, to me, a little bit more interesting because I wanted to understand a bit more about them and the fear behind things like brand snakes and red belly black snakes and why people were so afraid of them. So I've been a wildlife rescuer and carer and I've worked in the wildlife training industry volunteers over the last eight years, with the last two being dedicated to training venomous snake handling courses alongside a dedicated team of other experienced reptile handlers. I've also got six years of experience in managing operational components of wildlife organisations. And now in the last two years, I've just recently moved over into threatened species program management. So I have seen a lot of conflict throughout my almost decade of working within the industry. And one key component that I do keep coming back to when I think about conflict within the organisations and within the sector itself, is that the wildlife rescue and rehabilitation as an industry is driven completely by passion and by those wanting to help those who can't help themselves. And where there's passion, there's tends to be an

increase of conflict and also volunteer burnout. So that's one thing. I guess a resonating concept that always keeps coming to mind when I think of conflict within the community, within groups or within individuals in this industry.

Gretchen [00:04:34] What we're going to talk about today in this conversation is three different kinds of conflict. One is interpersonal, just between two individuals. One is organisation under pressure. So it might be a really small local carer group or it might be a larger organisation with a lot of conflict within it. And one is conflict between a collection of carers and the wider community. So to. With interpersonal conflict, just what have you seen happen? Can you give us some examples of some of the things that can go on?

Jess [00:05:08] Yeah, absolutely. One of the things that does come up as a continual point of conflict between individuals within the same organisation can be something just as simple as differing care practises that two volunteers may employ. And they can come around through a couple of different ways. It could be an experienced volunteer who's been doing rescue rehabilitation for 20 odd years and not being willing to attain new training practises or refresh their training skills because they believed their decades of experience outweighs what could be learnt in a course. Or it can also, on the flip side of that, arise from a younger university graduate, who has studied extensively a particular species, but doesn't take on the advice from those who have got that 20 years experience and hands on rehabilitation of that same species. Or it could arise from just two carers having two completely different experiences with the same animal. Now, where that can create a conflict, in a practical sense, is if, say, for instance, there's a breakdown of communication and two of these rescuers turn up to the same rescue for a single species where there's a disagreement on their care practises. This could then in turn caused a bit of a disagreement. And who takes on the rescue and care of that animal, especially if it's a significant species such as a koala or a threatened species that can then create a conflict within two individual carers. And one of the things that I've seen how organisations have dealt with things like this is making sure they've got conflict resolution management policies and support systems in place to help individuals navigate these types of conflicts that they may come across or they'll have committees in place to help discuss and resolve some of these or come to decisions that are documented and monitored and distributed to the group. And that's some ways in which I've seen some groups actually deal with these types of conflicts. Not to say that it always works. I think when it comes down to it - as an individual, we always need to make sure that we are encouraging that open, honest and calm communication to resolve conflict and ensuring that we're listening to others perspectives, because listening is just as as key or as important as speaking or communicating outwardly itself, being a good listener.

Gretchen [00:07:29] I think that's a really good point, is how does one learn to listen? And we might go into that a bit later on. Lyn, as Jess says, as an organisation, you need to put things in place, and I suspect you need to do that right from the outset. You need to really think about, okay, everybody's getting along so well right now. But what happens if two members fall out or new members fall out with old members? What should an organisation think about as it sets itself up?

Lyn [00:07:59] I think what Jes said is absolutely right. And I think that needs to be done, not around a disaster. It reminds me coming into these events with the wildlife carers was very similar to 10 years ago after Cyclone Yasi, when there was an incredible increase in events. And the whole system, which was ticking on reasonably well, was suddenly put under strain. And then everyone started to fight with each other. And that's when you noticed the cracks starting. So the lessons learnt from 10 years ago down the track. Now,

again, the transparency of practises, the training, that consistency. You don't write the rules for an evacuation while you're doing it. You've got the drills, you know it, and it's agreed on in peacetime, so to speak. And as I just said, it doesn't always work at an individual level. I'd be looking at training in exactly that, in specifically in listening skills, in an ability of small C counselling skills, be present, some empathy for the other person, what it must be like for them. If they think that there's another way of or a better way of assisting the wildlife that's in distress. They won't be thinking about you because they're focussed, as we spoke before, with adrenaline. And you're not focussed on caring and sharing and making everyone feel okay. You'll go in there and fight.

Gretchen [00:09:17] So if there's two people in that state, both in a state of adrenaline and wanting to save a life, we need to remember that both parties are going to be in that state. Coming to that animal and therefore to take that breath and step back and go, okay, I'm revved up. They're revved up. This could be a recipe for disaster. How can I take a step back? Could you describe what good listening is?

Lyn [00:09:43] The first part of it is being able to be present and not being caught up in the dialogue in your own head. Even though this is getting into a real conflict, the bigger picture is this is going to save the animal. That's what I'm really here for. That's my primary purpose. So just that ability to be really present and say, okay, our bigger picture, mutual purpose here is caring for the wildlife. It's not about me winning the argument.

Gretchen [00:10:06] And again, you don't do it while the crisis is in place. So if, say, you're going to a meeting of your group, Jess, you might have some thoughts on this, you're going to a meeting. There's somebody there with whom you conflict. What preparation might you do before going to the meeting in order not to escalate a disagreement or a dispute? And that's a question for you. Just what experience have you had in that?

Jess [00:10:31] One of the things it's key to remember into coming into any conflict with another carer or rescuer or any sort of situation where conflict may arise is to remember why you joined in the first place by having a common understanding, because the other person joined for probably the same reasons as you. And that's pretty key. To have that understanding before coming into any situation where conflict may arise because it may help to de-escalate those feelings of conflict or the heightened sense of stress coming into it. If you sort of break it down into, you know what, they're just trying to help the animal too, it's not personal against me as an individual. We're just trying to do the best we can for that single animal or that group of species. And being able to go in with those sort of glasses on will really sort of help the situation, because at the end of the day, it's about supporting the wildlife that we've got and making sure that we put the steps in place that we can do that in a safe and stress free environment. Now, some of the things obviously, when you're going into that situation, you can come into that. But the other person may not. I always find it really helps to actually write down what your end goal is. What are you trying to achieve? And that could be just as simple as understanding where the other person is coming from. Understanding what their problem is. I think it's really important that we have open communication with other individuals because it's really important that this is a supportive network and that just as I said before, we're all there for a certain reason and that's to help the animals. But we also need to help support each other as individuals, but also within the organisation.

Gretchen [00:12:18] So, Lyn, what do you think? Does it really matter if the other person does things differently? At what point does it matter enough to have conflict that causes you both stress?

Lyn [00:12:29] Look, I think that's a really good question for the carer to be asking, does this matter? Because I think they when in a calmer situation, could make that distinction. But at the time, it's difficult. It's difficult to think at all. So trying to granulate what's more important than something else may not be the time. But I think that's one of the really important questions. And what I was meaning before by being very present, if you can, allows you to be able to say, well, you know, which bit do I want to use here? What are the important parts? And that's something that I think would be invaluable to work through, really at an individual level, even down to a role playing in training kind of thing.

Gretchen [00:13:12] What do you think about that? Just. I mean, I guess if it really matters, the question is, is an animal being abused?

Jess [00:13:19] It matters to a point. If there's a negative or adverse impact on the welfare of the animal, however, if they are getting the same outcome and they're not breaching any codes of practises or policies, whether it be training or care policies, to achieve the same outcome and that outcome being a release of a healthy animal, then the carer does, if they have time to kind of break down what is important and what isn't. I think Lynn made a really good point in terms of the training side of things. And that's something I think a lot of coming from a training background in this industry. We can resolve a lot of conflict with training and having their support systems in place and having that role play type of approach. Case study with a conflict, whether it being managing hard conversations between individuals or any other situation. That's a really good thing for an organisation to put in place to help support their individual volunteers because it gives them the tools and strategies to be able to call upon should they ever find themselves in that situation again or it doesn't even need to be a training situation. It could be as simple as that. They've got a meeting coming up with their group or organisation or committee, and they ask or invite a person from a mental health organisation or someone to actually come in as a speaker on strategies in helping resolving conflict, difficult communication with other individuals. So there's a lot that organisations can do to help resolve these situations before it occurs.

Gretchen [00:14:52] Lyn, I wanted to ask if someone recognises themselves in the conversation we're having so far, more generally, what can they do to check themselves? And I wonder if you're a tough on yourself type. Might that mean you're tough on others as well?

Lyn [00:15:06] That is a really difficult question, because firstly, many don't see it that way. They don't see themselves like that. They see them as advocates for wildlife and that's the purpose.

Gretchen [00:15:17] And so therefore, they'll put themselves second, third, fourth and fifth in relation to the animals.

Lyn [00:15:23] And say, well, you know, this is for the animals. The ends justify how they're behaving and sometimes not realising they're having the impact on the other people that they're having. So recognising it in yourself is the first part of the recovery or the strategy. And that's sometimes the hardest part. So just this conversation of raising that is maybe someone, you know, listening could reflect on, gee, you know, I seem to be pretty much by myself and arguing a lot. Maybe it isn't completely everybody else I might have some part of it. And especially if you're feeling physical symptoms, you're not very relaxed. You may be you're on that real fight flight the whole time. So there could be some signs and it's just not a very healthy, sustainable place to be.

Gretchen [00:16:11] So basically, as a carer, you are in high stakes scenarios. A lot of the time, which might mean heightened and perhaps exaggerated emotional responses, as you say, flight fight. If you think all that's me, then what's the next step from there? That's me. And therefore, I'm always fighting. I'm fighting for the life of the animal. I'm also fighting with others. What could I do next?

Lyn [00:16:38] I mean, obviously, from what I do, I'd be saying, talk to somebody. Get someone to talk to. Many volunteer organisations have got an employee assistance programme that they have access to as well as paid people. So that's there. And some people may not even know that. So that's the very first thing. If that's not the sort of thing that you do, talk to one of your friends, perhaps, or just try and get it, friend, that you trust and say, what are you seeing? You know, can give it to me. I can take it. Someone that you really trust, that you can take it from.

Gretchen [00:17:07] I wonder if you could give us a perspective of how wildlife carers are actually a pretty special bunch. As we've talked about, they're deeply passionate and deeply committed and will often say that they love animals more than they love humans. How might that actually be a clue to what goes wrong in interpersonal conflict? That proud statement of. I don't really like humans. I like animals more.

Lyn [00:17:35] Yes. It may be that their preference is to spend time with animals. And certainly after doing private practise, I can totally relate to that. So I've had days where I prefer animals as well. So that's probably why it's a privilege to be assisting. There is a downside. The downside is that we are fairly tribal. We do get support and recovery through connection with other people. So there lies the tension.

Gretchen [00:18:00] So what you have to understand is as a carer, you may find other humans quite difficult, but at the same time, you need other humans to be a part of a group. You need to be registered as a carer. You need to comply with certain regulations. You do need to engage with humans. Aside from a bit of self reflection, what can you do if you're having conflict with someone? If, for example, you're feeling bullied or if you're feeling dismissed?

Jess [00:18:28] Yes. So I think from an individual perspective, if you are in a situation where you feeling bullied, are dismissed by another individual carer, is to arrange a time to perhaps have a conversation about it and lay it out in the table, making sure that the communication is happening in a calm manner and that the end goal is to resolve what the situation is and identifying for you and yourself what support systems you might be able to tap into to help you on that path.

Gretchen [00:18:56] Lynn, if you're feeling that you're frustrated with me constantly because we're not agreeing about the ways to approach, say, a podcast or the care of animals on a individual basis, what do you recommend doing?

Lyn [00:19:12] I agree with Jess. Initially there's a level of stepping back and saying, okay, is there something else going on here, especially if it's going along a lot? I think carers that are largely on their own are high risk for that and are often the bullies, not the bullied, and are not avoiding the groups because they're being bullied. They're often avoiding groups because of their own behaviour. Let's bring it back to the individual. So. Yeah. So bringing it back to the individual. I mean, you could certainly, as Jess said, try and look at the issues and have a conversation with the person that takes a fair bit of skill. Often, if you're

that sort of person, you don't get there, maybe asking someone else in the organisation to come in and help sort of moderate that. And if you're really finding it's not getting anywhere. Maybe talk to a professional. Talk to a psychologist.

Gretchen [00:20:01] If you have disagreements about approach the approach of care to animals. Is it a matter of both parties stepping back to see the bigger picture. Does someone have to be right? And I'll start with you, Jess.

Jess [00:20:15] I think on the topic of differing approaches, I think it's really important to look at historically what the end outcome has been. And provided there hasn't been any breaches of codes of conduct or codes of practise or animal welfare legislation. And there probably isn't really any point in pursuing a conflict based on a different approach. And we all want the end outcome being the release of a healthy animal. Obviously, if there is a situation where a differing approach is leading to address animal welfare outcomes, there is options to instigate or investigate that further. And that could be policies within your own organisation or it could be escalated to reports of cases through the RSPCA.

Gretchen [00:21:02] And I'm reflecting on something that I've observed a couple of times, actually, in different groups where one person cares for the animal in a very intimate way, will take the animal to bed with them because the animal is never apart from its mother in the wild. So they're playing that role in the care situation. And another group of people are just like, this is horrific. You don't do that. You've taken it too far. Lyn, what do you think about that? Again, is it a matter of. Well, what's the outcome going to be here?

Lyn [00:21:32] Well, I think it's a combination of the things. I think you're absolutely right with the outcome. Is there really two totally opposing ways that are the best way? I don't know. But I'd be trying to get an expert that did. And I don't necessarily mean a professional expert, but I'd be looking for some a bit more objective information on that and make sure that that was out there. And could it be that those two approaches can coexist? Well, exactly. And I'd be looking at that, too. But often with a conflict and you see this in sadly in family law, those kinds of things, it doesn't take much to put people into a conflict situation where they've lost any sense of what the contents about. And it's just the conflict itself takes on the energy of its own. And that's where to be very present and mindful of your own processes and to see whether you haven't lost the typical example is spending hundred thousand dollars fighting over the ten thousand dollar car.

Gretchen [00:22:26] Exactly. Okay, so what's the cost here? Let's move on to talking about conflict within groups. And this is where Jess what you were saying, that notion of the group sort of stepping in to resolve things and the group setting up healthy processes and Lyn as well. Of course, individual conflict can badly affect group dynamics if you are part of the leadership of a group. What can you do to minimise disagreement between individuals? Lynn?

Lyn [00:22:59] Yes, I'd really like to address that. I saw examples of that with the wonderful carers group that I visited in October. It was a room full of incredibly different people, and it was a privilege to watch the processing of quite different views. And it actually played out in front of me. Somebody said that I'm exhausted, but I can't say no. And somebody else said, well, you have to learn to say no. And just watching how the group dealt with it and what did the group do to deal with that? Different people had different views. People go in to seeing both sides will go in and if they feel somebody is being talked down, will come in and back them. And the group moderates itself, groups are incredibly powerful. And to run one well is a great skill. And I've run many groups where

sometimes I felt I could walk out the door and just leave them to it after a while. It's a very powerful thing. And that's why people that aren't engaged with a group, especially in this context, I believe it, are a much higher risk.

Gretchen [00:24:01] And so there's really healthy ways that a group can work things out. Jess, let's talk about some of the practical things that a group can do in order to ensure that it stays healthy. And I'm thinking here of transparency of budgets, cycling roles each year, having clear conflict resolution policies. Could you list the practical things and some of your ideas?

Jess [00:24:24] Yeah, absolutely. There's a number of things that groups can do to ensure that they retain level of harmony within their groups and maintain good dynamics within their volunteers, and that could be through regular meetings, could be at an organisational level or within local groups or buddies of volunteers making sure that any decisions that are held and decided upon within a committee or organisation is documented and also distributed to the wider network of volunteers. That applies to making sure that there's clear policies and support systems in place to help groups, individuals navigate conflicts. And that could be conflict resolution processes. Could be training courses, it could be having an individual staff member. For individuals to contact should they not be able to resolve a conflict within a group.

Gretchen [00:25:18] What about things in the executive? Because sometimes groups will start with a group of friends who really are passionate and have a commonality of goals. When that group gets bigger, that I think is when sometimes conflict can arise. So what can they set in place? And this is where I'm thinking of really simple things like budget transparency. People changing roles each year. Could you articulate those things?

Jess [00:25:44] Yes. So I guess when you are looking at organisations that expand and need to have a more rigid or defined structure in place, it is those policies and roles and responsibilities, documents and positions could be species coordinators or it could be treasurers, or it could be chairs and vice chairs and secretaries of various groups. And that could be within a defined area. You could have an executive group such as a branch. So you could have say, a mammal's management group that manage the coordination of mammals rescue and care across the organisation. So it can be broken up in a number of ways.

Gretchen [00:26:28] And is it important that those roles get shared around over time?

Jess [00:26:33] Yeah, I think it's really important so that you see upskilling of new carers that are coming into the organisation, especially those younger, really keeping people coming straight out of university wanting to to learn. And and it's really great to see when you do have those more experienced members that are potentially sort of getting a little bit more tired or not able to keep up with the administrative or executive components of the organisation and want to kind of hand on to someone and they take them under their wing and provided that person's willing to take on the advice of that more experienced person that can really help in creating a really harmonious organisation and relationships between individuals.

Gretchen [00:27:15] And I imagine a freshness to the organisation as well. Lyn, what do you do if, say, you've had Fred and he's been treasurer for 25 years? Is it healthy to have Fred as treasurer for 25 years?

Lyn [00:27:28] It depends on Fred. Usually if you're looking at just a seniority, then not necessarily because you've got a whole group of people that are running the organisation or the branch that a similar vintage with similar views. And particularly around mental health, they've got views that aren't necessarily in the interests of the group and particularly younger people coming through.

Gretchen [00:27:52] So therefore, an executive needs to keep itself fresh in order to keep up with current thinking around mental health, conflict resolution, but also the basics of money management. A lot of arguments can come about because of money management and one person holding the reins. I think, Jess, would you say that that's the case?

Jess [00:28:13] I think when it comes to finances in a organisation such as wildlife volunteer organisations and not for profits in general, transparency is the biggest key to ensuring a limited conflict in this space. If people aren't aware of how the money is being spent or feel that they don't have a say, especially if it's a large sum, say, if someone's donated a huge amount of money, this can be a source of conflict. However, in large organisations, it may not be the opportunity to allow every single individual person to have a say around it. But provided there are having a transparent platform in which they're communicating back with their members in terms of how those finances are there to support them and in what ways of which they can access them or how that's helping the organisation.

Lyn [00:28:59] Yes, I think overt differences in how money should be spent is one of the really big areas where there's conflict. I think the transparency and also just an opportunity for people to just feel that somehow they can participate somehow that, you know, you can't vote on everything but at least have some sort of a contribution. And again, going back to mixing up the executive, the people that are making the decisions. So you've got a mixture of values, because if you've got a group of people whose values are that you spend money on food for animals and that if you don't spend it on that. But if you're losing all your volunteers because they need some more support, then it doesn't make any difference. So it's actually looking at broadening the focus and looking at where everything fits together. And it may be what supports the younger group is necessary. And it's a different thing for a younger group getting mental health supporters a strength. That's how they see it.

Gretchen [00:29:57] Yeah. So in order to keep the group going long term, some of the money which is so hard fought for, as we know, needs to be put aside for mental health care and for training and for conflict resolution, even though there's a desperate need to buy food for the koala's or to buy equipment or fencing, that you do have to quarantine some money for human care.

Lyn [00:30:24] Yes, I mean, there's been a lot of discussion around that very publicly around whether money should be spent straight away or down the track. There's been a lot of very public debate in the media around that very recently. But we know that after about six to 12 months, when the events are not on the news anymore and the supports have gone. That's when the conflicts happen. Home mental health issues increase. And that's when we really do need to start to look at pouring resources in at that point to support people - bigger picture - so they can keep doing it.

Gretchen [00:30:56] So even small groups can quarantine some money for that. So we've talked about individuals and what to do with two people who are having conflict. We've talked about conflict within the group and we know that we need to quarantine money to

take care of mental health. And we also need to have really strong practises in place to resolve conflict within the group. I'd like to talk now about when groups find that they're in conflict with their larger community. So many wildlife carers work in the country and are part of small communities. Let's say you're a bat carer, but the local farmers and the local householders don't appreciate that a bat colony has moved in, perhaps even into the rainforest gully that the community's been revegetating. Jess, have you observed this kind of thing happen or heard about this happening when a community itself is divided?

Jess [00:31:49] Yeah, absolutely. Australian flying foxes and microbats. They are becoming more urbanised as we are sort of facing more habitat fragmentation and just simple things like the noise, smell and droppings from flying fox roosts can have huge impacts on local residents. And one of the things that we need to keep in mind is that flying foxes are extremely mobile so they can fly 120 kilometres in a single night and cover thousands of kilometres in a single year. Based on the way that they move around the landscape to find food and large colonies can be drawn into an area for several weeks at a time just because there's been some local flowerings of eucalyptus, such as spotted gum, which can produce huge amount of next year, and pollen, which is food for these these animals. And they may not be there for that long. But just the influx of having them there can be enough for the community to think that the population has boomed and they start calling for culling of these animals. And as individual carers or groups in that location, that can cause a huge amount of distress and conflict between the group or individual carers with that community who are calling for the culling of those animals.

Gretchen [00:33:02] And carers know the value of the animals. They know their value in pollination. But the wider community may not or might find them a threat. The other animal, which is one you're really passionate about, of course, is reptiles, a wider community, find them to be a terrifying threat. But a reptile carer like yourself knows the role that they play in biodiversity. Can you discuss, I guess, more broadly how one goes about resolving those conflicts?

Jess [00:33:33] Yeah, absolutely. So a really big component to rescuing and caring for wildlife is your interaction with the community and individual members of public within the community when you attend a rescue nine times out of ten, when you go out to rescue something like a snake that someone has spotted in their backyard, most of the time it's actually disappeared by the time you get there. And what you're left with is a member of the public, a member of the community who's absolutely terrified, is afraid that it's going to come back, has no idea on what to do if they do see that snake again, especially in rural areas where they are going to come across them more frequently.

Jess [00:34:11] And a huge element of rescue and rehabilitation of wildlife is community education. Every single time that you are attending a rescue and you're communicating with the public. It's our job. It's our role to educate the community in factors such as various wildlife behaviours and and the interactions and what they can do to help either reduce the risk if they're dealing with a high risk species, such as a flying fox, which we've got lyssavirus that can be transmitted to humans or we've got venomous snakes.

Jess [00:34:42] They're high risk to people who don't know how to handle them or aren't vaccinated to handle them. And so it's our role to educate the community on these animals and how they can deal with them when they do come into close quarters with them.

Gretchen [00:34:56] Lynn, if you've got parts of a small community at loggerheads with each other, what would be your recommended approach in that situation? So if you had

farmers worried about flying foxes affecting their crops, for example. What would you do to resolve that conflict and to help change the way people are communicating with each other and perhaps shift attitudes and understandings?

Lyn [00:35:21] I think there's another aspect to that which has been very beautifully illustrated publicly when it can work for bad but can also work for good. We're tribal again.

Jess [00:35:30] Yeah, absolutely. And I think this is where those volunteers and carers can actually be a catalyst for change here using education they can give them the resources that they need to change their farming practises so that they're still farming be it an orchard or whatever isn't impacted. They could change their say, for instance, they're netting, reducing a lot of injuries coming in both the flying foxes and snakes that are trapped in netting.

Gretchen [00:35:56] So farmers may want to protect their crops by netting, but they don't have to use the netting that damages the animals, for example.

Jess [00:36:04] So they might throw netting across the ground for a ground crop or have them over fruit trees for flying foxes. And one of the things that is available now is wildlife friendly netting, which has a much smaller gauge, and it prevents wildlife getting trapped or getting caught and tangled up inside them. So that's one thing that can be done. And others have seen this in the more recent years is sustainable farming practises, for instance, microbats in some farms are being used to control insects that may be a pest within their farm. So by educating, we can actually show that some of these animals are actually a real benefit to farming practises.

Gretchen [00:36:45] So what you're talking about here is education, which allows groups outside of the caring groups to understand the role of the animal in the ecology of the area, in the ecosystems and how they can really play a really positive role within their farming. Okay, so let's say that you've got town hall meetings starting to happen where you've got two groups at loggerheads. Lyn, if you were managing one of those town hall meetings, you know, come to the point where everybody's disagreeing, the communities at war with each other, neighbours aren't talking to each other. If you're managing one of those meetings, what might you put in place to help people start to understand one another?

Lyn [00:37:27] It needs to come from other farmers that this is effective and that's what they're doing.

Gretchen [00:37:32] So what you need to do as a wildlife group is to find your advocates and your sympathisers in the group which you're currently having a disagreement with.

Lyn [00:37:43] That's the first part. And that's where with the education that Jess is talking about, once you've created some advocates, then you use those advocates to deliver the message to the others and that turbocharges it, it's just more powerful.

Gretchen [00:37:55] To bring us to a close both, we've covered a lot of territory here around a lot of tricky areas. So what do you need to bear in mind as a carer and always remember about the positives to do with being part of a group that cares for animals? Lyn?

Lyn [00:38:13] Look, I think it's one of the best things you can do for your own health. Forget about the rest of it. It's really good for you to focus outwards. Look after someone or something else. Be part of a group that's got some purpose and meaning is very good for

your own health. We tend to notice the bad things and a lot of that's what we've been talking about, how to manage bringing that down. But one of the absolute best solutions for reducing our focus on the bad is to spend some more time thinking about that joy of seeing that animal run away, but really embody it. Just enjoy it. Stay with it as long as you can. Notice how you're feeling it and really savour it.

Gretchen [00:38:52] Wonderful. Jess.

Jess [00:38:54] I think you've got to think of what the reward is. And there's nothing more rewarding than being able to release a healthy animal back into the wild and see it hop or slither or scuttle away or fly away from you, knowing that you're the reason that that animal is now back in the wild.

Gretchen [00:39:13] Wonderful. Thank you both so much for contributing to such an interesting and deep topic. Jess Birrell, conservationist and psychologist, Lyn Page and listeners. Again, if the discussion today has brought up strong feelings, do 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.

[00:39:50] Do check out our other episodes. Share this with your friends and community. Of course we'd love to hear from you on the website or leave us a review on Apple podcasts.

[00:40:00] I'm Gretchen Miller and from us at Wildlife Heroes. I'll catch you next time.