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The information supplied in this booklet is intended to assist veterinary practitioners in providing initial care and first aid to wild wombats. The information provided has been sourced from and reviewed by qualified veterinarians. Wombats requiring ongoing hospitalisation will require input from experienced rehabilitators to address husbandry and housing needs. Wombats no longer requiring veterinary care should be transferred to an appropriate rehabilitator as soon as possible.

Supported by:



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Wombats Veterinary Triage & Assessment



Triage & Assessment of WOMBATS

Handling

- Take care to avoid stress for the wombat during capture and handling. Keep handling to an absolute minimum.
- Subadult and adult wombats should only be handled by someone experienced.
- To handle a subadult or adult wombat, pick it up from behind and hold the wombat under its front arms, holding it against your body while supporting its weight under its bottom. Covering the body and head with a blanket / pouch can help reduce stress.
- Pouch young or young-at-heel should be placed in a bag (pouch) and placed into a carry cage for transport. Avoid overheating.
- Vocalising and teeth grinding are indicators of severe stress or pain in wombats.



Fluid therapy

- For dehydrated wombats, fluids can be offered orally, but subcutaneous fluids should be avoided in subadult and adult wombats which have very little loose skin. It is painful for them.
- Subcutaneous fluids for unfurred joeys is OK.
- Cephalic or tarsal veins can be used for IV fluid administration.
- Suitable fluids include: 0.9% NaCl, 0.45% NaCl + 2.5% glucose, Hartmann's.
- Very young wombats may need glucose.

Housing

- Provide a dark, quiet place away from activity/noise and domestic animals.
- Provide a pouch or container the wombat can 'hide' in which provides security and helps minimise stress.
- For sick and injured wombats maintain the correct body temperature with a heat pad if cold, or air conditioning if hot.
- Wombat body temperature ranges between 32°C and 36°C.
- Place unfurred joeys in a cotton or polar fleece pouch (avoid other synthetics) within a container lined with towels.
- Unfurred joeys should be warm to the touch but not have pink feet which indicates stress or overheating.
- Unfurred joeys should ideally be housed in a humidicrib.
- Place furred joeys in a polar fleece pouch (avoid other synthetics) and then in a padded, secure (escape proof), top opening carrier if possible.
- Regularly monitor the ambient temperature and temperature within a pouch.



Be aware

- Be careful of bites and scratches. Wombats have a powerful bite.
- Wombats have a rear opening pouch. Always check pouches for joeys – never pull a joey off the teat of a deceased mother, cut the teat and secure the teat with a forceps clamp or similar to avoid it being swallowed and transport teat and joey together.
- Minimise stress and maintain a quiet environment at the correct temperature.
- For unfurred joeys ("pinkies"), consult with an experienced veterinarian to confirm viability and locate an appropriate wildlife rehabilitator.

Examination

- Only a brief examination of adult wombats is possible without sedation or anaesthesia.
- Pouch young can be examined consciously while in the pouch by exteriorising the part of the body you want to examine to reduce stress. Be sure to examine the entire wombat.
- Aging the joey (see growth charts) will assist with prognosis, treatment, and feeding.
- Check eyes for discharge and to ensure pupils are equal. Fixed, dilated pupils can be a sign of cerebral injury, myopathy or shock.
- Check for any blood or discharge coming from the mouth, nostrils or ears.
- Check for symmetry of the head, jaw and limbs. Look for swelling, wounds or bruises and broken teeth.
- Check for bone fractures (use deformity, physical examination, gentle weight-bearing assessment and gait assessment).
- Assess the cardiovascular system, paying careful attention to the heart and lung sounds. Aspiration pneumonia is not uncommon.
- Appropriate radiographs should be part of the minimum database for any animal involved in any trauma.
- Check the fur/skin for alopecia, ectoparasites (e.g., mange mites), bacterial/fungal infections and trauma. A heavy burden of ticks can indicate a more serious problem.
- Consider taking a faecal sample for further assessment of bacteria and parasites (including coccidia and other protozoa).
- Body temperature should be **32-36°C. Heart rate 60-120 bpm.**



Feeding

- Only offer food once the animal has been warmed and rehydrated. Contact an experienced wombat rehabilitator for advice if unsure.
- Adult wombats can be offered picked grass or grassy hay. Do not offer native vegetation unless you can confidently identify plant species. Avoid vegetation that has been sprayed with chemicals or found beside roads. Do not feed bread, sweet potato, carrot or Vitamin D containing supplements.
- Orphans can be given warmed water and glucose/glucodin or oral electrolytes for first two feeds, then suitable milk replacer (for example Biolac® or Wombaroo® or DiVetelact). This can be given either via a syringe with catheter tip, or bottle and appropriately sized teat and hole, being careful to avoid inhalation / aspiration.
- Unfurred joeys require feeding every 2-3 hours, and stimulation for defecation and urination is not necessary for wombats.
- Sterilise teats and bottles. Excellent hygiene during feeding is critical.

Anaesthesia

- Mask induction and gaseous anaesthetic can be used for simple procedures as intubation can be difficult.
- Alfaxan / Diazepam / Ketamine/ Zoletil (5mg/kg) IM which sedates them well enough to be able to place an IV cannula.
- The cephalic vein can be used but the cannula is often removed by the wombat. The tarsal vein is a viable option.
- For longer or more major procedures, intubation is safer. To intubate a wombat, use a sterile introducer in the ET tube to guide the tube through the vocal cords.
- The size of the ET tube will vary with the size of the patient, noting that for wombats, the airway is smaller than for the equivalent sized dog.
- For a subadult wombat, a 3.5 - 4 ET tube may be appropriate.
- To avoid high ETCO2 levels, the wombat can be ventilated if they are intubated.

Euthanasia

Wombats must be euthanised immediately when:

- Death is imminent or highly likely, regardless of the treatment provided.
- It is suffering from chronic, un-relievable pain or distress.
- If they are permanently unable to consume food unaided.
- It has significant unrecoverable burns to the face, eyes, genitals, digits, nail beds, or feet.

For euthanasia, injection of sodium pentobarbitone should be administered under anaesthesia by intravenous or intracardiac routes.

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