



Wendy's dedication to wildlife began as a child in India with elephants and big cats on her doorstep.

So you want to be a WILDLIFE CARER?

***Crikey! Magazine* knows many readers want to be wildlife carers when they grow up, so we spoke to a long-time registered carer about what it takes to it to raise and rehabilitate vulnerable wildlife.**

Starting out

For 25 years Wendy Lawrence has been saving birds, particularly owls and raptors, in northern New South Wales. Her dedication springs from a childhood growing up on tea and

coffee estates in India. Surrounded by dense jungle this "magical" paradise of elephants, tigers, leopards, bears, bison, pangolins, porcupines as well as birds and reptiles, including the king cobra, gave Wendy a lasting passion for wildlife.

As an adult, Wendy worked for the World Wildlife Fund in India. Once she moved to Australia she became a volunteer rehabilitator for NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service and became a founding member of the Northern Rivers Wildlife Carers Inc.

Wildlife rehabilitation was in its infancy when Wendy started out so she drew on her experiences and had also done a falconry course that covered raptor rehabilitation in England. "I read as much as possible, contacted raptor specialists, vets, sanctuaries, birds of prey centres and a raptor rehabilitation group in England."

Compulsory compassion

Nowadays anyone keen to do this work needs to check with their local wildlife authorities to find out what the requirements are. These will vary in every state and country but are a legal requirement, so it pays to do your research.

Anywhere you live though, it also helps to volunteer or get work experience at a zoo, wildlife sanctuary, wildlife hospital or a vet who treats wildlife.

Wendy believes an ongoing interest in wildlife in general and a genuine desire to help sick, injured or orphaned ones is a must. "Later you can decide if one species interests you more than others," she advised. "Compassion is very important. Sometimes an animal needs to be euthanised. This is sad but you have to accept it. And, as far as raptors are concerned, you can't be squeamish! Rats or mice may have to



be chopped into bite size pieces for very young or sick birds."

Cost in time and money

Wildlife rehabilitation is done on a voluntary basis so you need to be able to support yourself financially. Caring for wildlife can be costly but depends on how you want to help. For instance, volunteering in administration or answering a phone hotline, and fundraising and publicity work incurs different costs to those for hands-on caring, which requires fuel for rescue and release work and a budget for food supplies, equipment and cages.

"For raptors, you need a number of aviaries of varying sizes and a large flight aviary where the birds can regain their strength and agility before release," Wendy commented. "Some wildlife groups help with cage, aviary and equipment costs.

Rescue and release often involves driving quite a way and there may be more than one visit to the vet with the bird. Rehabilitation can be time consuming."

Some veterinarians may not charge for their time but most will charge for medications. It is also important to know that the vet is experienced in treating wildlife – many of our native animals require specialised care and medications. The Australia Zoo Wildlife Hospital assists the many carers and wildlife in the area. All time and expertise is free of charge to carers and their wildlife patients that otherwise may have to pay for the services elsewhere. Australia Zoo donates millions of dollars every year to help the wildlife and the wildlife carers in the region.

If you would like to help us out you can donate to help wildlife at:

www.wildlifewarriors.org.au



WIN!

Win a copy of children's picture book *Boo and the Big Storm*, written by Wendy Lawrence and illustrated by Glen Vause. It's the story of a southern boobook owl, the smallest and most common of the nine species of Australian owls, which is blown out of the hollow during a storm.

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