

# What happened to Hilly the koala?

IN our last report I told how Sue Moore and Peter rescued Hilly the koala from high in a tree at Bald Hills Wetlands after he was observed not moving for 6 days. He had an infected hand and could not feed himself or climb and would have died of thirst and starvation. He is a 13kg feisty male, to be handled with caution. Koalas of course are wild animals and they do not care for being taken out of the bush, picked up, put in cages and confined. They have long, sharp and strong claws which they need for climbing and living in trees, and they bite. A friend of mine, Helen, was bitten on the hand by a koala she was trying to rescue from her dog. The tooth went through the knuckle and she spent days in hospital on an antibiotic drip, in great pain. So this rescue work takes courage and skill.

Hilly was strong and unhappy. Sue put him in a small cage in what used to be her spare bedroom and is now an animal hospital. She looks after the baby creatures, wombats, echidnas, koalas, joeys, and lizards in the spare bedroom in her house because they have to be kept warm and quiet and some need feeding through the night.

For 10 days Sue gave Hilly sub-cutaneous antibiotics via injection, cleaned his wounded hand and put antibiotic ointment on his injury. He had to be willing to give her his hand and let her do this without grabbing or biting her.

Sue built trust by talking koala with him. She knows their grunts and behaviours and reflected that back to him. She put her nose to his so he could get to know her, was slow and deliberate in her movements, and did not rush into handling him. She tempted him with fresh new gum leaves. Animals learn quickly to trust her.

Once Hilly no longer needed treatment she released him into a large outdoor space with tree branches he could climb, with shelter and enough room to move around. He stayed there while the skin on his hand healed.

Each day, rain, hail or gale, Sue goes searching for gum leaves to feed the koalas she is caring for. They eat the leaves of specific trees and she relies on the thoughtfulness of local farmers for access to these trees.



It took another week for Hilly's wound to heal and then he became restless. This was a sign he was ready for release. Koalas are territorial so it was important he be released back to the same tree rather than have to fight for territory in another part of the bush.

Sue has a 'koala catching' bag and she took this into the cage, talking quietly to Hilly. She put it over his head, then had to get him to release his grip on the branch without grabbing her. Once in the bag he relaxed and we put him in the washing basket Sue uses for koalas, and drove him back to his tree. This then was the thrilling moment of release. Sue made sure the basket was pointing at the right tree, took the lid off and he was out like a shot and up the tree. When high enough to feel safe he stopped, looked back and thanked Sue for her care. Last seen he was sitting in the fork of a branch, happy to be home.

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