




## Wild about Seatrees



December 2013

Issue 2: Boo the Boobook Owl



All of us at  
Seatrees, including  
our furry and  
feathered friends,  
wish you  
a joyful Christmas  
and a happy  
and peaceful  
New Year!

P.S. Please accept this Newsletter as  
our Christmas card to you this year.

An animal's eyes have the power  
to speak a great language.

Martin Buber

Boo was found wandering in a dazed and disorientated state along the Great Ocean Road at Aire River one night in early August. We assumed she had been hit by a car and was suffering concussion, and subsequently had developed a haemorrhage in her right eye that impaired her vision.

She is a young, beautiful brown bird streaked and spotted with white who has now been in care for over 16 weeks. She spent the first 10 weeks at Seatrees Shelter and was then transferred to Aire River for a supervised soft release when Wim, her new carer, deems she is able to hunt and catch her own food.

The main hunting technique for a Boobook Owl is perch-and-pounce but they also have the ability to manoeuvre rapidly when pursuing prey or hawking for insects. Almost any suitably sized prey is taken, particularly small birds, mice, rats, moths, beetles, grasshoppers and spiders.

Boo has large fierce eyes that look straight ahead as owls cannot turn their eyes like we do but they can swivel their head around 250 degrees. In the wild the ability to fly silently allows Boobooks to catch unaware prey. Their facial disks help direct what little light there is into their eyes but they still need some light to see. It has been proven however that they can still successfully catch prey even when there is no light at all – by using their ears! It is in fact their offset ears that allow them to successfully hunt at night. These offset



### Fattie Rattie

Fattie Rattie has taken up residence in a burrow he dug just outside the entrance to our wildlife enclosure. Excavations went on for weeks resulting in a huge pile of clay, rock and soil dumped outside a hole underneath a tree root.

We have become very fond of this now identified Bush Rat who also made friends with our released Swamp Wallaby Ingelby. When Ingelby arrives to eat his pellets Fattie Rattie waits at his feet for the odd dropped pellet.

Bush Rats are common in Coastal Eastern Victoria and have a mixed diet, which includes insects and vegetation such as leaves, fruit, seeds and fungi.

Native rats can be distinguished from the introduced European black and brown rats as their tail length is shorter than the head and body length and they are more rounded and fluffy in appearance.

He may now be a she as in November we spotted Fattie with a much smaller rattie in tow. The usual litter size is around five so we may now have a whole family living on our doorstep.

*Boo, continued. . .*

ears enable them to judge distance and locate prey using sound alone - a useful adaptation when it's too dark to see! It also enables them to hear and locate prey hidden under leaf litter – very handy when a large proportion of your diet is creepy crawlies that live out of sight or when one eye has suffered some sight damage.

Whilst in care Boo has been enjoying two dead mice left for her daily, which she pounces on and eats at night. Believe it or not dead mice prices are high – ranging from \$1 - \$2.50 a mouse!!!

The Boobook owl is Australia's smallest owl and the name originates from their 'boo-book' call. It is also known as the "mopoke", due to its other distinctive call which sounds like 'mo-poke'.

**Stop Press! Goodbye Boo.** Boo made the decision herself that she had recovered sufficiently to return to the wild. She self-released last Monday by flying confidently out of her enclosure, past her carer and on to a garden branch. She then flew off into the distance. Her bad eye had recovered its colour and Wim and I believe she will be perfectly able to survive out in her world. The Mopoke call has been heard nearby.



A Barn Owl who came into care in August but died from internal injuries.

*Right on our doorstep –*

**An exciting sighting of an endangered species**

There it was one evening on the grass under a fern just near our wildlife enclosure: the carnivorous **Otway Black Snail**. This rare snail is only found in wet forests and cool temperate rainforests in the Otway Ranges, Victoria.



It eats other snails, worms and insect larvae. To eat its prey the snail uses its long, sharp, backward pointing teeth arranged in v-shaped rows on the radula (underside of the foot of the snail) which holds the prey while being eaten.

The *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Scientific Committee* states that the Otway Black Snail is vulnerable to population decline resulting from damage and loss of the preferred habitat types as a result of Myrtle Wilt and activities by man that disturb the forest floor and over storey vegetation (timber harvesting, road construction, etc). The narrow distributional range of the species makes it prone to extinction and is listed as endangered globally.

So how lucky were we to spot one right on our doorstep!

**How clever is this?**

Two ringtail possums – Basil and Bell – had been in care with Wim and Michelle, our carers out at Aire River, for around 9 months. They were released in August and for the first few nights they returned to their enclosure and to their nearby feeding station for fruit and oats snacks.

The weather became really cold and very wet. Bell was in her box but there was no sign of her male mate Basil.

Wim and Michelle became worried and braved the weather to see if they could spot him. Nothing – so they became a bit despondent thinking the worst as all carers do when when we can't find our new releasees.

Until... a dinner guest arrived a couple of nights later and ventured out on the verandah for a smoke. Sitting on the couch he noticed a pile of clothing on the couch moving. Warm, snug and dry wrapped up inside it was Basil! He had returned to a site where his intermediary cage had been before he and Bell had been moved to their larger outside enclosure in the garden!



Happiness flows from caring for all sentient beings as if they were your own family, because in essence they are. We are all connected to each other and to the Earth.

Sylvia Dolson, *Joy of Bears*

## Belinda, Blue Tongue

In mid November I looked out of our second storey kitchen window and saw a strange moving mass in the middle of the road. I thought it might be a snake. But on closer inspection it turned out to be intertwined mating blue tongue lizards. The mating, which was a bit rough, lasted at least 20 minutes with the male latching onto the female's back with his teeth.



Birth of the young occurs five months after mating. The embryos develop in the female's oviduct with the help of a placenta, which is as well developed as that of many mammals. At birth, the young eat the placental membranes, and within a few days shed their skin for the first time. The young are ready to look after themselves straight after birth, and disperse within a few days. So around mid-April we will be on the look out for her bubs.

Belinda now has the habit of sunning herself on our road as she, like all lizards, does not produce her own body heat. She relies on the warmth of her surroundings to raise her body temperature. This means we have to be ever alert when driving our cars in and out, as Belinda is very slow moving and often refuses to budge. Sometimes when we need to move her off the road for her own safety she turns towards us, opens her mouth wide and sticks out her broad blue tongue that contrasts vividly with her pink mouth. This display, together with the large size of the head, is used to frighten off predators and yes, it is quite daunting.

## Our resident Rufous Bristlebird has had a chick



We are indeed privileged at Seatrees to have a large population of the endangered Rufous Bristlebird who are often seen and heard around our houses and the cottages. They come out to peck on seeds on the edges of the bush and scurry rapidly back to cover. Their little run reminds you of that cartoon character the road runner and they can become quite friendly.

The mother bristlebird has taken to visiting Ingelby's feeding station to partake of a few pellets herself. She has been captured on camera feeding her chick.

Bristlebirds are medium-size primarily ground-dwelling songbirds. They are predominantly dark greybrown above, with a long tail, rich rufous nape and a pale patch around the eyes. They have a loud, distinctive, exquisite call.

Nests are built close to the ground, in tussocks or low shrubs. The Rufous Bristlebird feeds primarily on ground dwelling invertebrates, although details of its diet are not well known.

The bristlebird is a weak flyer and is therefore vulnerable to introduced predators such as feral cats and foxes.

## Bellows, Grunts, Bumps and Squeals in the Night

Doze koala was raised and released at Seatrees in 2007 after he was rescued from a throng of tourists who were photographing him on a very low sapling overlapping the Great Ocean Road. He was a cute little fellow as you can see from the photo on the front of this newsletter. He often frequents the deckings around our houses and is seen in his favourite gumtrees nearby.

He is a very big boy now with a haunting bellow and loud grunt. These ensure he maintains his home range, and other koalas in the vicinity know to stay away. Even after a koala dies, others won't invade its home range for at least a year, which is about how long it takes for the scent markings and scratches of the previous occupant to disappear.

Doze has of late been busy making amorous overtures to our female koalas.

Some of them don't sound too pleased about it and we are often woken by their squeals.

Heaven knows what the early settlers thought of these quite strange and ferocious noises.



### *Did you know?*

Koalas eat up to 1kg gum leaves and do up to 150 poos each day.



## White-rumped Swifts arrive

I first noticed them in mid-November, just inside the Coast Cottages entrance gate. Hundreds of them. At first I thought they were swallows, but they seemed a touch bigger and their aerial display was like nothing I had seen before. Besides, they had white bottoms, easily seen as they dived, soared and swept at breakneck speed. It turns out they were the white-rumped swifts, also known as the Australian swift or fork-tailed swift. They breed in northern Asia, eat only insects, can sleep on the wing as they fly high in the air and gift us with an annual visit.

[www.coastcottages.com.au/wildlifeshelter.html](http://www.coastcottages.com.au/wildlifeshelter.html)

Donations to our Seatrees wildlife shelter are greatly appreciated.