

Bilgola couple's high WIRES act

Lyn and Dave Millett have been up feeding their rescued animals and birds since 7.30 this morning and will go to bed tonight around 11.30pm after feeding the last of them.

Their house and garden in elevated Bilgola Plateau is like no other you'll find in Sydney.

"We have seven aviaries and around 20 possum cages which Dave built, and a couple of lizard enclosures," Lyn explains on a guided tour which includes more rescue retreats in their garage and home office where it is warmer for infant animals. "We also have very understanding neighbours."

Both joined WIRES (Wildlife Information, Rescue and Education Services) 27 years ago in 1994; last month (September) Lyn was awarded the senior award in the Northern Beaches section of the NSW Volunteer of the Year event run by The Centre for Volunteering.

Now her name and achievements have been forwarded to the state final.

Today Lyn is halfway through mid-morning feeding.

A young corella was brought to WIRES because it was incapable of standing. Subsequent X-rays proved the paralysis didn't have a physical cause. "Now look at him, he can perch on a branch," Lyn points out.

In the next aviary, around 40 young rainbow lorikeets hungrily await morning tea. Undernourished as babies because of depleting nectar sources, most are now ready to be released back into the wild.

A third aviary reveals a particularly cantankerous cockatoo. "A car was coming down the approach to Spit Bridge when it hit this cockatoo," Lyn explains. "But it was raining, so the cockie's wing got trapped under the windscreen wiper."

"The driver couldn't stop until he'd got to the other side of Spit Bridge. The cockie is bruised, though nothing is broken. But he's a cranky old thing. I would be too if I'd been trapped under a windscreen wiper."

This particular morning there are "only" 60 or 70 birds and animals being cared for at this unassuming Bilgola Plateau home. However, the Milletts have learned to read the WIRES 'seasons'.

"Baby flying foxes will start coming in soon. They're like babies. We give them dummies and nappies. We keep them for 10 weeks, then they

go to 'creche' to learn how to become flying foxes."

The bandicoots the Milletts cared for in winter have now all been released back into the wild, but it's too early for blue-tongued lizards and other native reptiles.

Suddenly the interview is interrupted by a text message.

Dave takes it.

A baby ring-tailed possum has been found in Avalon's Patrick Street.

Dave rushes off in his ute to rescue it, but not before he hears the next question - what is the most memorable rescue you've ever done?

"Tell him the Paul the pelican story," Dave says.

Paul the pelican was an adult bird spotted on Narrabeen lagoon with multiple fishing hooks stuck in its side, creating an infectious wound that prevented him from flying.

Dave raced down to Narrabeen with just a garbage bin for the rescue. By the time he arrived, Paul was on a sandbar in the lagoon.

Dave commandeered a kayak, but naturally the pelican returned to the

water.

Two kids, Dave says, were innocently canoeing by when he asked them to help corner the injured pelican. The trio succeeded.

But with Dave trying to keep Paul in the garbage bin, he couldn't paddle to shore, so the two kids had to tow him.

Lyn looked after Paul the pelican for six weeks, feeding him fish three times a day in a purpose-built shaded confine Dave constructed in their back garden.

When Paul's wound was sufficiently healed, Lyn took him back to Narrabeen lagoon with her daughter and grandchildren.

"I opened the cage and Paul waddled out," Lyn recalls. "Immediately his female mate flew to meet him and they went happily into the water together."

"But as we were about to leave, Paul came and stood right in front of me."

"I said to my daughter, 'Isn't that nice? He's saying, 'Thanks for looking after me.'"

"And my daughter said: 'Don't be so silly, mum. He's saying, 'Feed me more free fish before you go!'"

- Steve Meacham



Vet warns about masks and dogs

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought many changes, including the mandatory wearing of face masks.

As our facial features and reactions play an important role in how we communicate, having a face mask obscure our face can impact how easily we can read a person's body language or demeanour - such as, is something being said with a smile, or a frown?

Local vet Ben Brown is reminding us to have a think about how our mask-wearing is affecting dogs, who also look to our faces when interacting with us or seeking direction from us.

"If we're wearing a face mask, dogs may be noticeably hesitant or sometimes even potentially a little aggressive," Ben said.

"The face mask is affecting the dog's ability to read our expression, so there's a few things we can do to familiarise dogs with us, to make the dog more comfortable."

He advises owners to practice slowly putting on their face mask with their dog present, rewarding the pet for staying calm and relaxed, and only progressing to putting on the face mask completely when the dog appears comfortable.

"Remember to keep these sessions short and positive so that the dog positively associates with you wearing a mask," Ben said.

"Once you're wearing a face mask, don't stare at your dog or lean over them as that may appear threatening to them."

"Speak to them in a reassuring tone, and provide lots of rewards such as gentle pats or the occasional treat."

Ben's teams at Sydney Animal Hospitals (Avalon and Newport) are ready to give advice about any behavioural changes you may notice. - Nigel Wall



HELLO POSSUM: Lyn with a rescued brushtail.