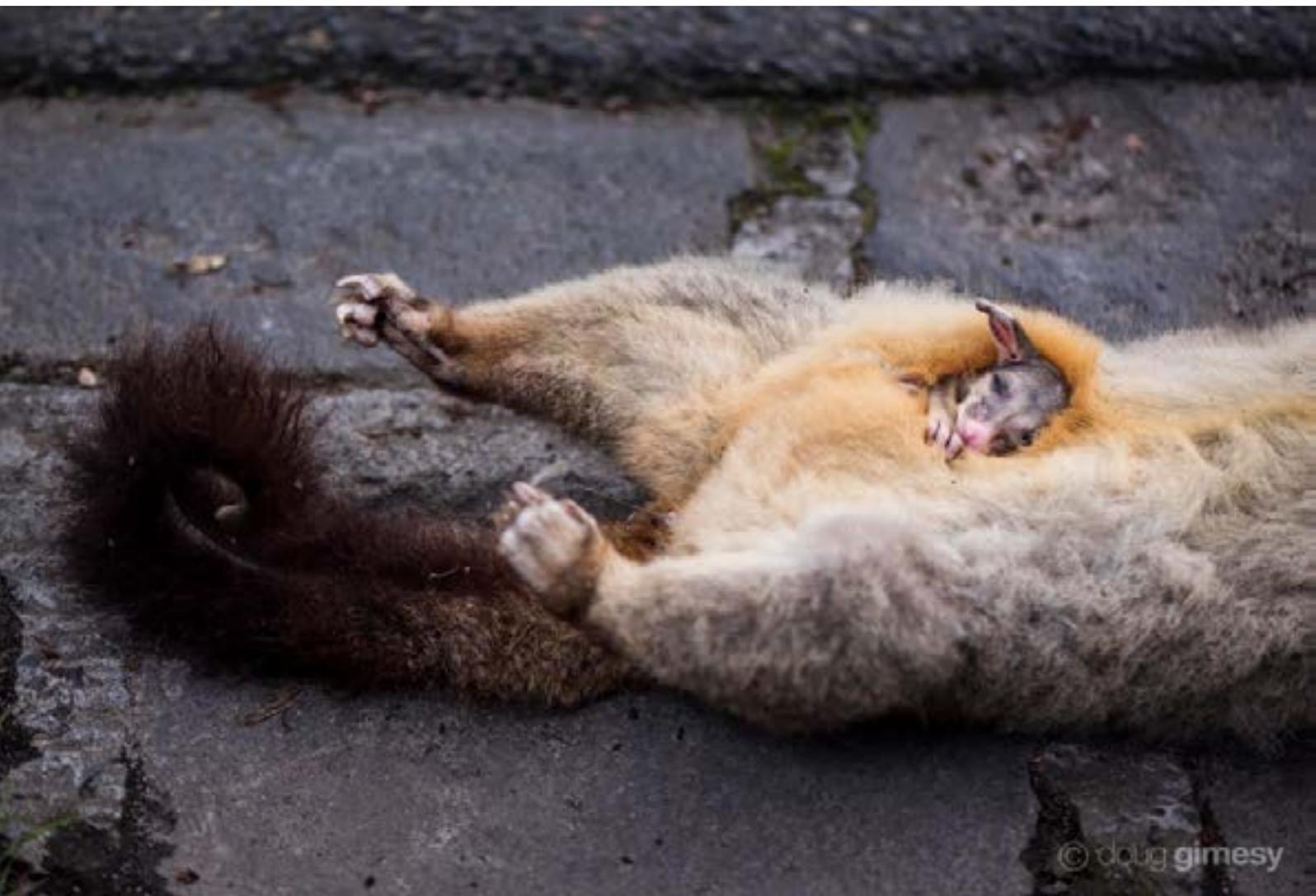


WLDLIFE
VCTORIA
ON CALL TO HELP
03 8400 7300



Pouch Checking Guide

How you can help orphaned Australian wildlife

A basic roadside rescue kit



Introduction

Thank you for your interest in helping Australia's unique wildlife.

This guide is designed to help you to put together your own wildlife rescue kit in case you come across injured or orphaned wildlife.

It will also give you some handy tips on how to check a dead marsupial's pouch, and what to do if you find a baby or 'joey' inside.

Australia is home to the majority of the planet's marsupials, most of them found nowhere else in the world. Marsupials give birth to young after only a few days gestation and joeys are born hairless, blind, with only partially formed limbs. Newborns weigh only a few grams and most of their development happens outside of the womb in Mum's pouch.

Australia is also home to the world's only two living species of monotremes – the Echidna and Platypus. These amazing creatures lay eggs but also produce milk and Echidnas carry their babies, known as 'puggles', around with them for the first few weeks after they hatch.

Sadly, every year tens of thousands of our native animals are victims of road accidents. Around half of the wildlife hit by cars are not killed outright on impact and our Wildlife Emergency Response Service receives more than 6,000 calls a year to assist the animals that are injured. Joeys are carried in the pouch for many months after birth so at any time of year a large proportion of female marsupials will also be carrying a joey.

We can dramatically reduce the road toll and suffering of wildlife simply by performing a 'pouch check' on any dead animals that we encounter. Joeys are well cushioned in the pouch and will often survive an accident that kills its mother, only to die of starvation or cold. Joeys have been known to live for up to 5 days in the pouch after the mother has died and many stand a good chance of survival in the care of experienced wildlife carers – but only if we find them in time.

Remember, our Wildlife Emergency Response Operators are here to help. Please call us on **03 8400 7300** if you need advice or assistance.



Stopping to help

Safety First - Make sure your car is well off the road. Use your headlights and hazard lights to stay visible to other cars, and to see the animal if it is dark. Remember: just because you can see a car doesn't mean it can see you; put on high-vis clothing with reflectors if you have it.

Know your location – Note nearby cross streets, landmarks, or take a photo of your GPS location on your smartphone's map. We'll need to know exactly where you are if you call us for help and you may also need to let wildlife carers know so that they can return the animal to its habitat if it needs rehabilitation.

Equipment - Grab your rescue kit and any other useful gear from your car and put on some disposable gloves.

Check for hazards - If an injured animal is hopping on the road and could be a hazard to other drivers, please call 000 immediately before calling us. If the animal is off the road but conscious please call us for advice before approaching it.

Stay well back from the road - If the animal is dead, move its body well away from the road if it is safe to do so. Don't ever walk out into traffic or near a corner if you can't see on-coming cars.



Move the body well away from the road before checking the pouch

Check for signs of life – Is the chest rising and falling? Is there eye movement if you tap gently in the corner of its eye? If you believe the animal is alive but unconscious, place a blanket over it and call us on **03 8400 7300**.

Check if the animal is female – Males don't have pouches. The best way to tell the sex of an animal is to look for testicles. Males should be spray painted with a large cross straight away so other wildlife rescuers know they don't need to stop.

Checking a pouch

Locate the pouch - Most female marsupials have a small pouch opening at about belly button level on the abdomen. Wombat pouches are lower as they open from the other direction.

Echidnas don't have a permanent pouch or teats but can contract their muscles into a pouch-like fold.



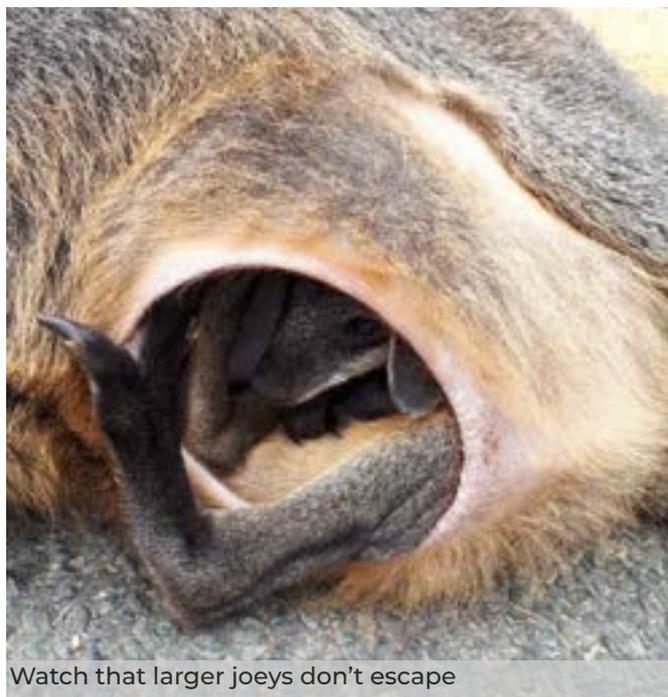
A Ringtail Possum with joey in the pouch

Escape proof – Get a towel or pillowcase ready at the entrance of the pouch to prevent older joeys from escaping when you open it. Once they're on the move they can be very hard to capture again and they're at risk of being hit by a car too.

Open the pouch – Use your hands to pinch the fur or skin and lift to stretch the opening of the pouch so that you can see inside. Use a torch to look right to the bottom. Newborn joeys are smaller than a jelly bean and weigh only a few grams so they can be hard to spot. Some species may have more than one joey.



Newborn joeys may be hard to see



Watch that larger joeys don't escape

What to do if there's a joey

Hairless 'Pinky' joeys

The mouths of very young joeys are fused to their mother's teat for the first few months of life and forcing the joey to let go can cause serious injury. If the joey is attached, it's best to transport the whole body of the dead mother with the joey still inside to the nearest vet. If that's not feasible, use round-tipped scissors to cut the teat as close to the mother's body as you can and remove the joey from the pouch with the end still in its mouth.

Always make **extra sure** the mother is dead before you cut anything and please call Wildlife Victoria if you need an operator to talk you through this.



A pinky still attached to the teat



Cut the teat as far from the joey as you can

Furred or 'Velvet' Joeys

If the joey has fur or is obviously no longer attached to the mother's teat, gently remove it from the pouch. Be very careful to avoid snagging delicate limbs. Never force the joey through the opening - if the pouch is too tight you may need to cut the pouch entrance open a little with round tipped scissors. If the joey is wriggly, make sure you put your hand between it and the scissor blades to avoid any accidental injuries.

Joeys may be reluctant to leave Mum and often cry out or make hissing noises: this is a good sign, it means the joey is alive and aware of what is happening. Please be patient and gentle.



Carefully encouraging the joey out



Extract the joey slowly and gently

What to do if there's a joey

Seek help

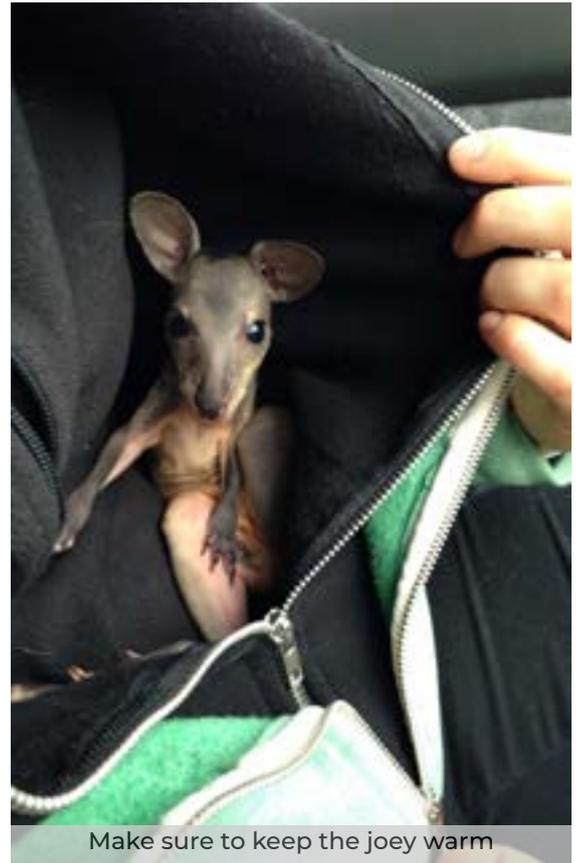
Put the joey into your makeshift pouch or wrap it up immediately.

Young joeys cannot regulate their own temperature so the best way to keep it warm is to use your own body heat. If possible, carry the makeshift pouch inside your jumper or jacket so that the joey can hear your heart-beat. Take the joey to the nearest vet, or contact us to help you locate one and alert them that you're coming.

Remember, the joey is likely cold, dehydrated, traumatised and possibly injured itself: it has just lost its mum and it may never even have been out of the pouch before so please resist the urge to take photos and keep pets and children away. Make sure the journey is warm, dark and quiet to minimise stress.

Do not try to feed the joey

Joeys can only have a special formula: anything else could kill it



Make sure to keep the joey warm



A possum joey in a makeshift pouch

Important things to know

In Victoria it is illegal to care for native wildlife without a license. Animals must be delivered to a vet or registered wildlife carer.

In Australia, all vets have a duty of care to assist native wildlife. You can visit any vet clinic with an injured native animal and they will take it free of charge. Make sure you tell them exactly where it was found so that it can be reunited with its family later.

The first thing the vet will do is assess and stabilise the animal. Once cleared for rehabilitation, they know to contact Wildlife Victoria so that we can match it up with a registered wildlife shelter with expertise in that species. We will also arrange transport from the vet to a shelter if it is a long way away.

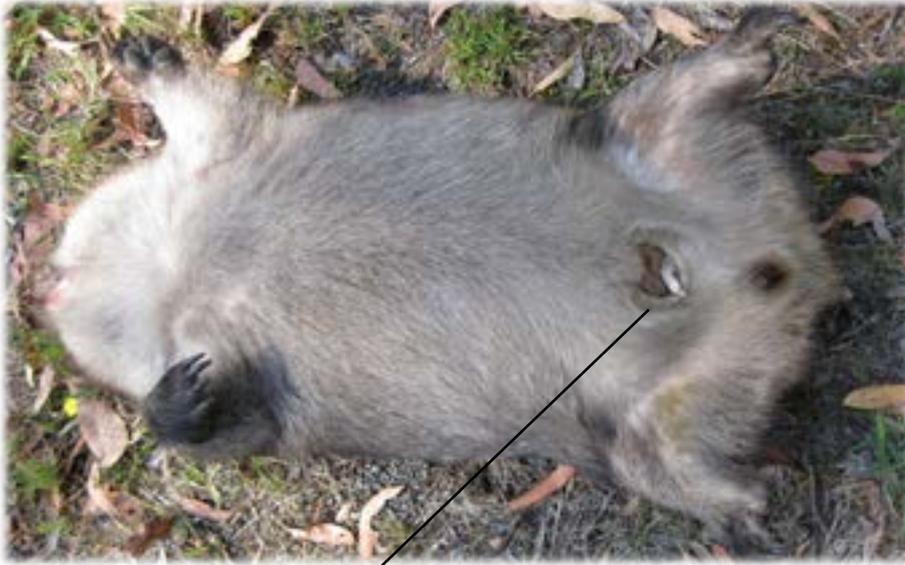
Every hour is critical

Joeys need feeding every few hours. Vets will have formula for different species on hand so the sooner it gets there, the greater its chance of survival

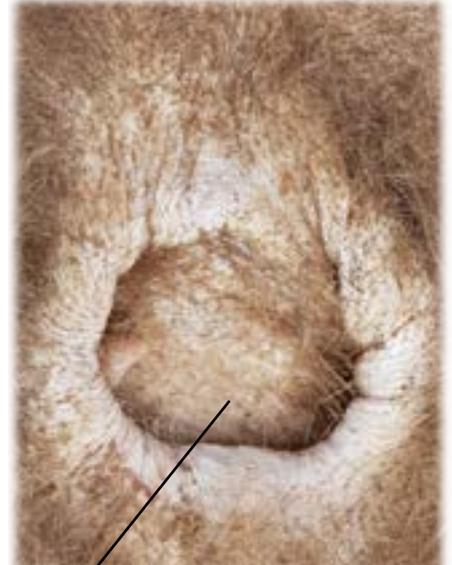
If there's no joey...

Check for an elongated teat

If the animal has one teat longer than the other it usually means that it is a nursing mother and a joey may be nearby. Joeys can sometimes be thrown up to 100 metres from the pouch on impact.



An 'active' wombat pouch
An elongated teat indicates that this wombat is feeding a joey



An 'inactive' wombat pouch
This wombat does not have a nursing joey

An 'active' kangaroo pouch
One teat longer than the other indicates that this kangaroo is feeding a joey.
Wallabies and possums look similar.



Kangaroos are capable of feeding a newborn in the pouch and an older 'at-foot' joey at the same time. Some possums, gliders and small marsupials may have several 'backrider' joeys that are too big to all fit in the pouch at once so ride around on Mum's back.

If the pouch is active but empty it is likely the joey is nearby, either injured or hiding and waiting to return to its mother's body when it thinks it is safe. Check the road, roadside and bushes around the body and keep an eye out for movement nearby.

Capturing an escaped joey can sometimes take rescuers several days.

Joeys that are still feeding from Mum are usually too young to fend for themselves. If you think there is a missing joey call Wildlife Victoria on **03 8400 7300**.

If there's no joey...

Paint a Cross

Once you've finished checking the animal's pouch – or if it is male - use paint to mark the body with a large cross to let other wildlife rescuers know that the pouch has already been checked. We recommend using a colour other than red so that it's not mistaken for blood.



A painted cross lets other wildlife rescuers know that the animal's pouch has already been checked

You can report dead animals on our website (www.wildlifelifevictoria.org.au) and let us know if they've already been checked.

Every report helps us to keep more accurate data about wildlife accident hotspots and the number of animals killed or injured on our roads.

How to help adult wildlife

Assisting injured adult wildlife

Exercise **extreme** caution when approaching larger animals such as kangaroos, wallabies, koalas or wombats as they can be dangerous when cornered or scared.

If you're not sure if an animal is alive or not, watch its chest for signs of breathing or gently tap the inner corner of its eye to see if there is any blink reflex.

The best way to calm an injured animal is to place a blanket or towel over its head so it can't see, but only try this if you think it is safe to do so. Nocturnal animals will welcome a dark place to hide.

Smaller animals can be contained and secured in a ventilated box before transporting them to the vet. A cardboard box is not strong enough to hold a cockatoo or an excellent digger like an echidna: try a pet carrier or basket with latch instead. Please don't ever let an animal loose in your car or try to transport it in your car boot.

Do not approach or try to handle a snake: many Australian snakes are venomous.

Don't ever touch any type of bat, including flying foxes. All of Wildlife Victoria's bat rescuers are vaccinated against a rare but fatal disease that can be transmitted to humans. If you are bitten or scratched the bat has to be euthanised, even if it is perfectly healthy, and you will need a series of post exposure shots. Place a basket or box over the bat and keep people and pets away until a rescuer arrives.

Please contact Wildlife Victoria on **03 8400 7300** to arrange for a trained and experienced rescuer to assist you



Exercise extreme caution when approaching larger animals

Useful resources - more information

More Wildlife Information

The [Wildlife Information section](http://www.wildlifevictoria.org.au) on Wildlife Victoria's website (www.wildlifevictoria.org.au) has many useful resources including:

- Fact sheets about common wildlife situations
- Fact sheets about Victoria's wildlife species
- Printable signs to warn others of wildlife situations such as swooping magpies

Instructional Videos

The [How to Help Videos](#) section of our website contains a series of instructional videos for common wildlife situations.

Pouch checking & road safety videos

- [How to check if a dead marsupial has a baby](#)
- [How to help an animal that has been hit by a car](#)
- [How to contain an injured bird or small animal](#)
- [Removing a possum joey from a pouch](#)
- [Road Safety & Wildlife](#) (Wildlife Victoria & RACV)

Other useful wildlife rescue videos

- [How to help a baby bird](#)
- [How to help heat stressed wildlife](#)
- [How to help ducklings](#)
- [How to build a simple makeshift nest](#)

Social Media

Follow us for latest wildlife news and updates

- Facebook - facebook.com/wildlifevictoria
- Instagram - instagram.com/wildlifevictoria
- Twitter - twitter.com/wildlife_vic
- You Tube - youtube.com/user/WildlifeVictoria

Permits and Licenses

In Victoria the Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning (DELWP) is responsible for wildlife permits, shelters and carers. [Visit their website](#) or call 136 186.

Volunteering with Wildlife

We are always in need of more volunteer wildlife rescuers and transporters. It's not for the faint-hearted but if you're a regular pouch-checker and think this might be for you, have a look at the [volunteer section on our website](#) for information on requirements and upcoming training sessions.



Useful Resources - getting help

Wildlife Assistance in Victoria

Wildlife Victoria's Emergency Response Service is here to assist sick, injured and orphaned native wildlife in Victoria. Our Operators are on call to help 7 days a week, 365 days a year and is connected to a statewide network of volunteer rescuers, transporters, vets, wildlife shelters and carers.

Phone

Call us to report a wildlife emergency on **03 8400 7300**

Website

Report a wildlife emergency or animal in need of a pouch check on our website at **www.wildlifelifevictoria.org.au**

Click the big yellow 'REPORT' button and fill in the form.

Emergencies reported via our website go into the same queue as phone calls and will be responded to as soon as an operator is free.

Snap Send Solve

From July 2019 you'll be able to use the Snap Send Solve app to report wildlife emergencies.

Download the app to your smartphone and you can take a photo of the situation, pinpoint your exact location on a map and submit it to us within seconds.

Emergencies reported via Snap Send Solve will go into the same queue as phone calls and website reports.

Wildnet

Registered Wildlife Victoria volunteers can report animals using Wildnet, our online volunteer portal.



A Wombat pinky

Wildlife Assistance in Other States & Territories

ACT - call RSPCA ACT on (02) 6287 8100

NSW - call WIRES on 1300 094 737

NT - call Wildcare on (08) 8988 6121

QLD - call RSPCA Queensland on 1300 264 625 or Wildcare Aust on (07) 5527 2444

SA - call RSPCA SA on 1300 477 722 or Fauna Rescue SA (08) 8289 0896

TAS - call the Wildlife Management Branch on 1300 827 727

WA - call the Wildcare Helpline on (08) 9474 9055

DIY Wildlife Rescue Kit Checklist

- Old towels or blankets** to place over injured wildlife to calm them and keep them warm.
- Makeshift pouches in a range of sizes** - beanies, socks, drawstring bags, old jumpers made from natural fibres make great makeshift pouches to keep joeys warm and secure. Alternatively, if you're feeling crafty, instructions for knitting your own pouches are available on our website.
- Box of disposable gloves** to keep your hands clean and protect wildlife from germs too.
- Gardening gloves** - a thicker pair of gloves will protect you from bites and scratches if you need to assist birds or larger animals or there's broken glass around.
- Torch** - pouches are very dark and new babies are tiny, you'll need extra light to see right down into an animal's pouch. A head-torch works best so your hands are free, but the torch on your mobile phone will do in a pinch.
- Pair of round-tipped scissors** - for cutting joeys out of the pouch if necessary. The round tipped ends are important to avoid further injury to the joey. Tweezers may also come in handy.
- Heat source** - a wheat bag, hand warmer or even just a water bottle filled with warm (not boiling) tap water can all help to keep a joey warm. If you don't have this, use your own body heat.
- High visibility clothing** - a vest with reflector strips works best for added safety when checking pouches on the roadside.
- Hand Sanitiser** - to clean your hands afterwards.
- A ventilated box** - to keep small animals and birds contained if you need to transport them in your car. A latchable plastic pet carrier is perfect as larger animals can't escape or dig through them.
- Elastic bands** - To loop around the opening of a pouch or pillowcase so that the animal inside cannot escape.
- Paint** - any bright colour other than red, to paint a large cross on the dead animal's body after you've finished checking its pouch - this will help other wildlife rescuers and Wildlife Victoria's operators to know the animal has already been checked. Note that paint spray cans may explode if they get very hot.



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Wildlife Victoria is a registered charity.

To make a donation to support our statewide Wildlife Emergency Response Service
or to learn more about our work visit www.wildlifestvictoria.org.au



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