

FOREWORD

For about a decade in the last century I had the delight and anguish of living with orphaned macropod joeys. My house was full of them; they spilled over into my office, creating chaos with the bureaucrats and ruining the university carpet! Such fascinating and frustrating creatures! I was fascinated by their behaviour, their anatomy, and their diseases. To help grow a squirming orphaned pinky, eyes closed, whiskers just appearing, to a sleek furred adolescent, full of energy and life, bounding around the paddock was so satisfying it still brings a smile to my lips. Sadly, in those times, such an outcome was rare. Hence the frustration and anguish! All too often, that orphaned joey grew poorly, became ill and died after several months usually from a bacterial infection. If it did survive, the joey slowly became a small juvenile and remained stunted as an adult. I decided to learn from these unfortunate events and to try to systematically understand why macropod joeys had such growth and disease problems. By the late 1980s I had a much better understanding of what their problems were and how to solve some. Lynda Staker's manual 'The Care of Macropods' is an amazingly comprehensive compilation of the problems faced by orphaned macropod joeys and their solutions. So much more advanced on our early attempts.

Raising a macropod joey is fighting against nature. Macropods are amazingly efficient animals that have evolved in an environment of unpredictable scarcity. The mother commits little energy into her offspring; it all flows through her from the environment. The tiny immature neonate is the first evidence for this strategy. The new born joey is a remarkably underdeveloped life form, well illustrated in Lynda's manual. If the environment is short of energy, usually due to pasture loss caused by droughts, but also fires and floods, the macropod milk supply decreases. The joey starves, its thymus glands involute, and since the thymi are critical for development of immunity, death is caused by bacterial infection, well before it would occur through starvation. The joey in the wild then disappears from the mother's pouch, and mum is left to cope with difficult times with no offspring draining her energy. When joeys are orphaned and come into captivity, the sudden fall in the quality of nutrition triggers the same response as occurs in the wild during drought. The thymus glands shrink and the joey becomes susceptible to bacterial infection. The macropod carer has to try to reverse this situation. Because of this inbuilt response, successfully raising macropod joeys is much more difficult than raising orphans from many other mammalian families, including other marsupials. Adequate nutrition is the key. Lynda's manual contains a wealth of valuable information on nutrition, formulas, practical techniques, equipment and protocols.

The manual is not confined to orphans. It also deals with husbandry and disease problems of juvenile and adult macropods. As for orphans the observations are detailed and the advice offered is practical and very useful. I particularly liked the fact that Lynda deals with individual species of macropods in this manual. Each species has its own unique characteristics which seem to be innate. Rock wallabies love heights and when they become mobile, create havoc on desks and shelves! The species differences seem to extend to susceptibility to particular diseases. No carer will forget the dismay and distress experienced when the beautiful eastern grey kangaroo they have grown through to adolescence sickens and dies from coccidiosis. Lynda's manual has detailed growth charts and descriptions for 24 macropod species. Very useful to find this information collated in a single volume. The field of caring for wildlife has always benefited from sharing and collaboration. Lynda has consulted widely and collected advice and had input from other expert carers, from veterinarians and from scientists. This input is clearly acknowledged.

The manual's pragmatic approach extends to advice on how to interact with officials from state parks and wildlife services and with veterinarians. It explains the critical roles of these professionals. The tips on training your veterinarian are valuable and will help carers to establish a mutually beneficial relationship that will improve their success rate.

Lynda is not just a competent macropod carer. This manual illustrates her skills as a poet, artist and author. And also as a philosopher. The sections that ask carers to reflect why they are carers, what they hope to achieve, on the quality of life of their charges and how to decide whether to euthanase are thoughtful and very relevant.

I am honored to have been asked to write the foreword for this manual. It is truly a remarkable production and will benefit wildlife carers, veterinarians and others who have an interest in macropods, particularly the successful rearing of orphaned joeys.



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