

# Warning over possum 'pets'

■ Jon Solmundson

Geraldton residents are being warned not to adopt native animals, after a possum was found emaciated and close to death when a family tried to raise it as a pet.

Macy Grey the brushtail possum was found in September last year in her dead mother's pouch, and the family rescued her.

Unfortunately, they did not take her to a wildlife carer and instead let her grow up with the family dogs, sleeping with humans and becoming friendly with the other pets.

When the family left for a trip in December last year, they "released her into the wild", putting her outside their suburban Geraldton house and leaving her to fend for herself.

Now reliant on human care, Macy was found in a neighbour's roof 10 days later, nearly starved to death.

She was taken to a licensed carer and brought back to health, but the behavioural damage was done.

Macy now shows no interest in other possums and actively pursues attention from humans and dogs.

Greenough Wildlife and Bird Park co-owner Michelle Jones said this familiarised native animals with their enemies.

"In the wild, cats and dogs are a possum's enemy and they will damage them, so when you familiarise them with that environment they lose their fight or flight response," she said.



Macy Grey will never return to the wild. Picture: Michelle Jones

"These animals are beautiful, they are unusual, we love our native wildlife but people have to understand the difference between rescuing an animal for your own benefit and rescuing an animal for their benefit.

"If I kept every animal I rescued I'd have over 1000 at this point, and you fall in love with every one of them it's true, but you have to consider what's best for the animal."

Ms Jones said now Macy is accustomed to humans, she would never be able to return to the wild, but she would become an educational animal.

"She's literally failed every test the Department of Parks and Wildlife had to have her reintroduced in the wild," she said. "I had to apply for a lot of paperwork to get her marked as an educational animal, but she will now be able to be used to teach people to care and respect our native wildlife."

Locals who find wildlife in trouble can call Greenough Wildlife Park on 9926 1171, or take the animal to a vet.

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