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Hand rearing Joey kangaroos

Department of environment requires careers to be licensed and to have a permit for each animal in their care.

All joeys should be checked and assessed by a veterinarian, veterinary nurse or qualified career as soon as possible.

A Joey needs warmth, quiet, security and nourishment.

A newly orphaned Joey will be suffering from stress and shock as a result of the events leading to its rescue. Injuries such as bites, fractures will require immediate veterinary attention. Stress will be suffered as a result of separation from the mother, loss of warmth and loss of nourishment.

Make the Joey secure in a substitute pouch and warm it appropriately.

Leave the Joey alone until it has settled and restrict initial handling to one person. Handling, particularly by children can be stressful and lead to death. Any cuddling or handling should be done with the Joey in the pouch, where it feels safe. The Joey needs the same care as a premature baby and should not be treated as a cuddly toy.

Substitute pouches

Pouches are ideally made of soft washable material, such as blankets, sheets, jumpers and windcheaters. Avoid materials such as hessian and wool fleeces as joeys will suck and chew on these, ingesting pieces.

The Joey should be placed in a natural position in the pouch. The pouch should be just big enough to allow the Joey to move around in but keep it snug.

The joeys pouch will need to be kept inside a large bag or pouch which can be suspended without the bottom of the bag touching the ground.

When the Joey reaches the stage when it is starting to emerge from the pouch, the pouch should be lowered closer to the ground to allow the joey to enter and exit the pouch unaided.

Heat source

A Joey is unable to regulate its own body temperature when young, so needs an external heat source. Until the Joey is well furred and can leave the pouch, a pouch temp of 30-32 degrees should be maintained. An electric mat hung on the side of the pouch is the most reliable method. If there isn't a thermostat, the correct temperature can be maintained by adding or removing layers of padding between the mat and the Joey. A thermometer should be placed with the Joey to allowing checking that the temperature is maintained constantly.

It is possible to harm joeys by overheating them, so make sure the pouch temp is monitored. A Joey is unable to lower its temp by sweating although as it gets older it will lick its paws to cool off.

When warming up a cold Joey, this should be done slowly so as not to induce shock.

Diet

Joeys cannot be fed cow milk or milk replacer with lactose. They are lactose intolerant and will become sick and possibly die.

Marsupial milk changes in composition during lactation to provide the nourishment required for different stages of a joeys development.

Wombaroo milk replacer is recommended and the Joey should be weighted and measured to determine the age of the Joey and the correct stage and amount of milk to be fed. The milk should be mixed according to instructions and the amount strictly adhered to.

Before feeding warm the required amount of milk, checking the temp is lukewarm. Joeys should be fed in the pouch with a bottle and teat to reduce stress.

If the Joey struggles at first, hold it securely into your body, cup your hand gently under its chin and over its eye. This usually quietens the Joey, making it easier to feed.

Teats

A Joey's mouth is easily damaged. It will need a soft marsupial teat to avoid ulcers or irritations forming in the mouth.

Water

Joeys should be offered water from a young age. Milk replacers provide nourishment but it is probable that the Joey will also get thirsty. Do not mix the water with the milk but offer in-between feed

Cleanliness

Joeys are normally stimulated to defecate and urinate by their mother licking them. After each feed you will need to gently but firmly rub the genital area with a damp tissue to stimulate the Joey. Failure to do this may result in urinary tract, kidney or bowel disease.

If diarrhoea occurs seek advice from a qualified carer or vet.

Pouches should be regularly changed.

Introducing solids

Intermediate kangaroos which are emerging from the pouch should be offered grass with soil attached to the roots, apple, rolled oats and kangaroo pellets.

The pouch should always be available for the Joey to return to in case it feels threatened or cold.

You will need to provide shelter and warmth for your Joey until it is at least 2 years old.

Preferably perimeter fences should be 2.4m high and be dog and fox proof. Adequate shelter from elements is essential.

Troubleshooting

- *Diarrhoea*

Newly acquired joeys can take 24-48 hrs to settle due to stress and adjusting to milk formula.

Once established on Wombaroo diarrhoea should not be a diet related problem unless being fed incorrect amounts. Avoid chills, stress and handling by strangers. Once diarrhoea has started it can be difficult to stop. If it continues over 12 hrs seek professional help. Joeys may dehydrate and become seriously ill quickly.

- *Illness*

Wild animals do not show symptoms as plainly as cats and dogs and when they do it usually means they are very ill so immediate attention is needed. Symptoms may include loss of appetite, drinking less, weakness, falling over. Coughing or raspy breathing or anything different from normal behavior.

- *Chewing cud*

Kangaroos chew their cud in the same way as a sheep or cow. It can appear as though the animal is choking or vomiting but this is usually very quick and the animal will start swallowing again.

Antibiotics

Due to their intestinal gut flora, kangaroos should never be given antibiotics by mouth only by injection

Castration

No matter how gentle he has been, a tame buck is dangerous and unreliable and one day will treat people as a mate or a rival. A male kangaroo should be castrated before he is completely out of the pouch. This is a veterinary procedure.