



## Wildcare Queanbeyan

By Alissa Willacott



Mobile Release Aviary – ready for relocating

As the Small Mammals Co-ordinator for Wildcare, I had concluded that Wildcare needed to have increased options and flexibility for release sites within our area of operations. We also needed better flexibility in our support to rehabilitators. Wildcare Queanbeyan Inc was therefore grateful to be awarded one of the NWC grants for FY21/22.

My vision was to design and develop a custom-made mobile release aviary that could be positioned in temporary release-sites and moved between rehabilitators. This would also enable us to rest and better rotate permanent release-sites by significantly broadening the range of suitable habitat-areas that could be used.

The primary intended use was to house & soft-release Brushtail Possums. Secondary uses included other small mammals and birds. Both intentions have been met.

The full cost of this project was \$5300 (plus road-registration costs) with the NWC Grant contributing \$2500.

### Design

A single-axle trailer was made to Australian Standards and a cage fitted. The trailer and cage were commercially constructed using a solid steel frame with galvanized walls, mesh & floor. Its features include a spare tyre, jockey wheel, rear stabilizer legs & drainage holes in the floor. The roof and walls of half the aviary are weather protected, with the other half enclosed by open mesh, to allow natural exposure to air and the weather. The cage incorporates a full height door, release hatch in the roof, and reinforced frame sections to allow for the fitting of accessories to attach perches, ropes, and possum boxes.



Internal set up – ready for first tenant

The aviary was designed and built to comply with the relevant NSW OEH Code-of-Practice for aviary sizes, and on a suitable sized trailer that meets NSW road registration requirements. The aviary's dimensions are length 3m, width 2m and height 2m.

Artificial turf has been used to cover the floor. This can be easily removed for cleaning & sanitising between tenants. There are also drain holes in the front corners of the floor to allow for rain-water to dissipate quickly.

Other features include:

- four browse holders made from stormwater pipe (with removable bottoms for releasing any water);
- two corner shelves (for water and food bowls);
- upper and lower perches with connecting perches to allow for climbing options;
- wheel chocks to stop trailer movement when in location; and a handle to use to lower the stabiliser legs.

A caravan-step is being fitted at the rear to enable easier access by rehabilitators.

## Purpose

Many of our rehabilitators have large properties available as release sites, however we often find that there are not enough suitable sized aviaries to go around, and not enough rehabilitators in a financial position to purchase aviaries.

The mobile release aviary enables more options for pre-release sites without compromising accessibility by rehabilitators. It also provides better release sites for hand-raised orphans.

As the Small Mammals Co-ordinator, this now gives me significantly improved flexibility for our rehabilitation and release planning. It will also help increase our overall number of possum rehabilitators without placing an undue financial burden upon them.



First tenants are in – some minor adjustments to branch set up

## Results

Since delivery in November 2021, our new mobile release aviary has not been empty for more than a few weeks, and has already successfully released a both Brushtail Possums & birds. The roof hatch has worked perfectly with connecting branches to trees, and all the members who have used it to date have been extremely happy with the results.

The aviary's very first tenants were two orphaned female Brushtail Possums who were successfully raised & released together. Millie & Heidi loved this trailer so much, that they initially were reluctant to leave! They were eventually encouraged out to boxes in the trees, and the trailer was swiftly relocated to take in its next tenant.



First tenants: Millie & Heidi

## Summary

This project has been an enormous success & valuable asset for our Wildlife group, and we are extremely grateful to the NWC for their generous contribution. Thank you!



A home among the gum trees