Easy Reference Sheet

Protocol for transporting bats

Introduction

Australian bats are known to carry Australian Bat Lyssavirus (ABL). Although only a very small percentage of bats are known to be infected, all wildlife rescue groups must abide by current Queensland Health guidelines in the rescue and handling of all bat species.

Only wildlife volunteers who have been vaccinated against ABL, and who maintain an adequate titre level of over 2.0, are permitted to rescue and handle bats.

Whilst the rescue and rehabilitation of bats in South-east Queensland is generally undertaken through one of the dedicated bat groups (such as Bats Qld, BCRQ or Sunshine Coast Bat Rescue), there may be times when a non-vaccinated Wildcare volunteer offers to assist in the transport of a rescued bat to a wildlife hospital for immediate veterinary treatment. In these instances, it is imperative that appropriate safety procedures are adopted to ensure the safety of both the transporter and the bat. This ERS aims to document the minimal standard required in instances where a non-vaccinated person transports a bat.

For the purpose of this ERS, a non-vaccinated member includes a person who has previously been vaccinated against ABL but has not had their titre levels checked in the previous 2 years, or whose level is below 2.0.

The responsibility for ensuring the correct housing of bats is the responsibility of the vaccinated member. It is their responsibility to provide all appropriate equipment and signage for the carriers. Whilst the transporter is not responsible for providing the equipment or packing the animal safely for transport, they must still be aware of this protocol and check that the conditions are being met to ensure their own safety.

Suspected ABL cases

Under no circumstances is a non-vaccinated member to transport a bat which is showing clinical signs of Australian Bat Lyssavirus. **These cases must only be transported by a vaccinated member.**

Bats requiring artificial heat

All bats which require artificial warmth such as a heat pad or Snugglesafe heat disk, must only be transported by a vaccinated member. These bats will require regular monitoring to ensure that they do not overheat, and a non-vaccinated member will not be able to do so. Even trips which are not expected to take long can be delayed in heavy traffic, particularly on the M1 in peak hour or in the event of an accident.

Bats which require artificial heat include orphans and some adults suffering from severe trauma.

General housing requirements

All bats must be secured in an appropriate transport carrier which:

- is in good repair with working locking mechanisms;
- includes signage affixed securely to the carrier noting that it contains a live bat;
- will prevent accidental escape of the bat;
- will prevent accidental contact with the transporter (e.g. a claw reaching through a carrier);
- will protect the bat and prevent escape in the event the carrier is dropped, or the transporter has a motor vehicle accident;
- is of a suitable size that it can be easily placed in a vehicle and secured either with a seat belt or in the rear of the vehicle (for SUV's) and secured in such a way that it will not tip over; and
- is clearly marked with the name and phone number of the person who owns the transport carrier.

Microbats

Microbats must be securely contained as follows:

- Microbats must be housed in a cotton pouch and closed securely with an elastic band or cable tie.
- The cotton pouch containing the microbat must be placed into a secure container which:
  - should be rigid in design (e.g. a sturdy cardboard box or plastic container);
  - should include small holes sufficient to allow adequate ventilation but not large enough that the bat could escape if for some reason it gets out of the pouch;
  - should be securely closed with a small amount of packing/duct tape as an added protection.

Flying Foxes - Adults

Adult flying foxes pose the most significant risk of accidental contact during transporting. Whilst it is ideal for adult bats to be 'wrapped' in a towel for transport, they will often work themselves free and end up clinging to the carrier. This is when their claws may become exposed and accidental contact may occur.

Adult bats should be contained in the following manner for transport by non-vaccinated members:

- The bat must be placed in a secure container and positioned/wrapped according to its injuries as per standard bat group protocols. The manner in which the bat is housed will depend upon the bat's size, injuries and/or general condition. An experienced bat rescuer must ensure that the bat is housed in such a way as to prevent unnecessary stress or pain.
- The transport carrier must be securely closed to prevent the locking mechanisms from accidentally opening during transport, the cage is dropped or the vehicle is involved in an accident. This might include taping the closure with a small piece of packing/duct tape or securing with cable-ties (as appropriate).
- The transport carrier should be covered with a towel or similar to reduce stress.
- The transport carrier should then be placed into a second, larger carrier as a double layer of protection and to prevent the transporter from accidentally coming into contact with a claw. This second carrier could be a large soft pet crate or large wire transport cage.

Notes

The transporting of bats by non-vaccinated Wildcare members is strictly for the purpose of ensuring that **injured rescued bats** can receive veterinary attention as soon as possible. The preferred method of transporting is by a vaccinated bat rescuer/carer however where a bat group may require some assistance in this regard, Wildcare non-vaccinated volunteers may be able to assist.

Bats which are being rehabbed by a bat carer and which require transporting to a wildlife hospital for re-checks, must be organised by the bat carer themselves or within their own bat group. The Wildcare network should not be used in these instances.

Examples of suitable housing for transport by non-vaccinated members are given on the following pages.

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