

Easy Reference Sheet

Caring for Echidnas

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There are only two species of echidna with only one being found on the Australian mainland, the Short-beaked Echidna. In South-east Queensland, the echidna is mostly nocturnal but during the colder months it is more active during the day. It has a highly specialised diet consisting of termites, ants, worms and larvae.

Do I need a Permit to care for echidnas?

Yes. You will need a REHABILITATION PERMIT to care for echidnas. Echidnas are considered a 'specialised species' in Queensland and are excluded from a General Rehabilitation Permit. A Rehabilitation Permit can be obtained from a licensed wildlife care group such as Wildcare. There is a higher assessment criterion required and permits for echidnas will only be issued to wildlife volunteers that have had extensive experience with caring for at least 2-3 other wildlife species over several years and who display a good understanding of their anatomy and biology.

Remember all Australian native wildlife is protected in Queensland. You cannot keep them without an appropriate Permit.

Do I have to do any training to care for echidnas?

Yes. Echidnas have very specialised dietary, housing and handling requirements. They often come into care due to injury, loss of habitat, illness, or as a result of being orphaned. You must have a good understanding of their biology, be able to recognise signs of illness and injury and be able to provide emergency care to them.

In Wildcare you will need to complete the following training workshops in order to care for echidnas:

- Orientation – compulsory for all members
- Rescue and First Aid for Wildlife (Basic) – compulsory for all members
- Caring for Orphaned Mammals
- Echidnas

Is caring for echidnas difficult?

Caring for echidnas is a highly specialised area of wildlife rehabilitation. They are difficult animals to house adequately and require a large purpose-built outdoor enclosure for their final stages of rehabilitation. They can be difficult to handle and are very secretive, making assessment and monitoring difficult. They are not suitable for new wildlife carers.

Remember:

- Echidnas are **nocturnal** – they require feeding, cleaning and monitoring at night.
- They have a **highly specialised diet** – you must be able to source live termites for them regularly.
- Their **predators** are domestic dogs – they cannot be housed in close contact to pets.
- Echidnas are classified as a **specialised species** – you would be appointed a mentor to assist you with getting started with echidnas and you would need to stay in close contact with them.
- Orphaned echidnas rarely come into care and are cared by echidna carers that have at least several years' experience.
- The final stages of their rehabilitation require a **large purpose-built outdoor enclosure** (see requirements overleaf).

Echidna rehabilitation is an area that you may like to consider once you have been caring for a variety of species for a few years.

Remember, we raise to RELEASE!

We must care for wildlife in a way that ensures their survival once returned to the wild.

What equipment do I need to care for echidnas?

Echidnas need to be housed and cared for during rehabilitation to prevent further injury, prevent escape, minimise stress and to allow them to display their natural behaviour.

A few things we must consider when housing echidnas include:

- They are very strong and can easily break through standard types of animal enclosures
- They can climb extremely well and therefore require solid, deep enclosures
- They must never be housed in wire cages/enclosures
- Injured and sick echidnas are housed indoors and require a large number of clean towels which are changed 1-2 times a day
- They have a particularly strong smell which at times can be quite offensive
- Their final stages of rehabilitation require a large purpose-built outdoor enclosure

Below is a brief overview of some of the equipment that echidnas require. The Wildcare echidna training workshop and manual covers their requirements in more detail.

Rescue Equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deep plastic rubbish bin with secured lid with holes drilled in the lid and around top of bin for ventilation • Clean, second-hand towels to line bin
Orphaned Echidnas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeding equipment (specialised feeding tubes, sterilising equipment, syringes, disposable pipettes, small feeding bowls) • Small blankets/bunny rugs and sheets • Solid, deep plastic containers of various sizes to accommodate the baby as it grows
Adult Echidnas <i>Critical Care Stage</i> <i>Intermediate Care Stage</i> <i>Pre-Release and Final Rehabilitation Stage</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deep, solid plastic container (1.2m L x 0.8m W x 0.8m H) • Solid, heavy ceramic bowls for water and food • Large quantity of clean, second-hand towels for lining enclosure • Thermometer to monitor ambient temperature • Ice/cool packs (for hot weather) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deep, solid plastic container (1.5m L x 1.5mW x 1.0m H) • Solid, heavy ceramic bowls for water and food • Large quantity of clean, second-hand towels for lining enclosure • Thermometer to monitor ambient temperature • Ice/cool packs (for hot weather) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large outdoor enclosure (minimum size 5.0m L x 5.0m W x 1.0m H) • Sides must be constructed from tin/colourbond to prevent escape and be dug into ground at least 60cm to prevent digging underneath • Enclosure must have substantial amounts of shade with some areas where access to sun is possible • Substrate must include large amounts of natural leaf litter and dirt to encourage foraging and low shrubs/vegetation to provide cover • Large logs to provide areas to sleep and hide • Solid, heavy ceramic bowls for water and food

Critical Care Stage – designed to reduce an animal’s level of physical activity for a short period of time and to provide easy access for monitoring, treatment and feeding.

Intermediate Care Stage – allows sufficient space for some physical activity while enabling the animal to be readily caught for monitoring and treatment.

Pre-Release/Final Rehabilitation Stage – allows an animal to regain better physical condition, display natural behaviour, acclimatise to normal weather conditions and reduce human contact.

The measurements for enclosures listed above are sourced from the *Code of Practice – Care of Sick, Injured and Orphaned Protected Animals in Queensland* (EHP). In some circumstances, Wildcare’s housing requirements exceed the CoP suggestions.