Photo: James Woodford

Taronga Conservation Society Australia

# Animal Welfare Charter

*Taronga accepts the agreed international definition of animal welfare from the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE):*

*Animal welfare means how an animal is coping with the conditions in which it lives. An animal is in a good state of welfare if (as indicated by scientific evidence) it is healthy, comfortable, well nourished, safe, able to express innate behaviour, and if it is not suffering from unpleasant states such as pain, fear and distress. Good animal welfare requires disease prevention and veterinary treatment, appropriate shelter, management, nutrition, humane handling and humane slaughter/killing. Animal welfare refers to the state of the animal; the treatment an animal receives is covered by other terms such as animal care, animal husbandry, and humane treatment.*

TARONGA
CONSERVATION SOCIETY AUSTRALIA

Photo: Mark James

## Taronga Conservation Society Australia

# Animal Welfare Charter

Taronga Conservation Society Australia's (Taronga's) vision is to secure a shared future for wildlife and people. To achieve this vision Taronga believes that its role in conservation is to create direct and positive connections between people and wildlife; and to protect threatened species, increase understanding of wildlife and inspire community action.

As a conservation organisation with responsibility for the care of wildlife, we ensure that at all times the needs, interests and welfare of our animals is a primary consideration. We believe that good animal welfare is essential, and will also assist us to achieve our conservation goals.

## Taronga's commitment to animal welfare is:

To provide dignity, respect and the best care for our animals and strive to be a leader, an advocate and an authority on animal welfare.

Taronga recognises three categories of responsibilities to ensure we meet the welfare needs of our animals. These are psychological (mind), physical (body), and evolutionary adaptation (nature). We are committed to providing an environment that focuses on the well-being of the animal and provides circumstances that the animal's biology has evolved to experience and expect. We acknowledge that zoos cannot truly replicate the wild but, as far as possible, we reproduce the animal's natural environment taking into consideration the animal's behavioural and physiological needs.

Our aim is to ensure that the life experience of a zoo animal approximates the experiences of an individual living in the wild, in quality, repertoire and in relation to its species' natural history.

Photo: Lorinda Taylor

Photo: Lorinda Taylor

# Our Charter

Taronga is committed to providing excellent husbandry, veterinary management and housing that promotes good welfare to all animals in our care.

Taronga believes that optimal welfare is achieved when each animal has a life experience that approximates the quality of a life experienced by an equivalent member of that species living in the wild.[1]

This is achieved by ensuring that our animals experience species-appropriate stimuli, which may include some stimuli that will challenge. To enrich their lives, our animals will be given opportunities to react to those stimuli in species-appropriate ways.

1. A member of that species born into a relatively benign environment during a period of plenty.

*We will ensure that our staff have the resources, training, skills and experience necessary to their roles and responsibilities, and maintain staffing levels that enable our programs to be delivered effectively.*

Photo: Mandy Everett

# Our Commitments

## To ensure our animals have appropriate nutrition and drinking water, we:

- provide quality, hygienic food and water of the highest standards;
- provide the dietary and nutritional requirements for every animal in our care with special attention to individual needs and circumstances;
- provide food and water in presentations that satisfy both behavioural and health needs;
- reference wild diets and develop all zoo diets under the supervision of a veterinarian and/or nutritionist;
- maintain accurate records on the diets provided and the weight of individual animals;
- provide staff with on-the-job training on hygienic food storage, handling and preparation.

We ensure that our animals have enough space to move around freely, have comfortable resting places and thermal comfort by providing housing that:

- meets the wellbeing of the animals and is of generous size and meets or exceeds legislative requirements;
- is safe and provides protection from the elements, intruders, pests, predators, physical injury and disease;
- is secure and has compliant, effective and well-maintained barriers;
- minimises exposure to fear and distress, including opportunities to avoid aggression and seek sanctuary from enclosure-mates and visitors;
- provides choice and opportunities for a range of species-appropriate behaviours;
- is designed so that it may be readily maintained at appropriate hygiene standards, including water quality, is checked daily, cleaned and replenished as required;
- presents animals with dignity in a setting that provides effective learning experiences for visitors.

Photo: Chris Kara

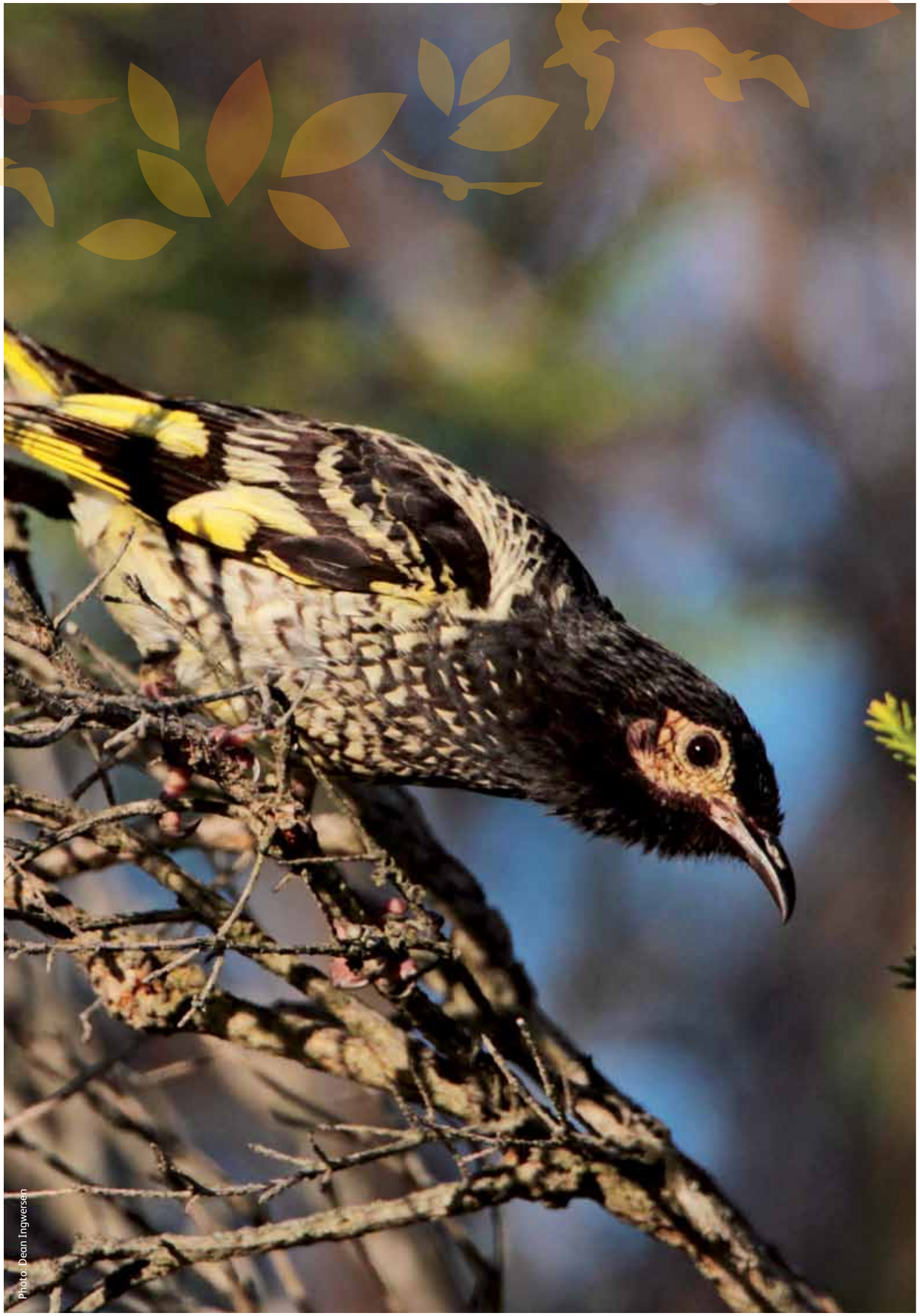


Photo: Dean Ingwersen

## In striving to keep our animals free of physical injuries and disease, we:

- deliver a comprehensive veterinary care program with the resources and capacity for high quality medicine, surgery, diagnostics and pathology, and meeting current international standards for zoo and wildlife health care;
- ensure that systems and knowledge on the status, health and wellbeing of all our animals are maintained and continually improved;
- regularly monitor each individual, appropriate to the health and wellbeing requirements for that species;
- provide prompt veterinary response to any injured or ill animal in our care;
- provide preventative health care programs, including effective quarantine for all incoming animals and the prevention of disease incursion from staff, visitors and free-ranging animals;
- ensure that wildlife responses and rehabilitation practices for animals in our care and injured or orphaned animals brought to us are ethically sound and ecologically responsible;
- ensure staff awareness and understanding of Taronga's policies, procedures and reporting processes, and training relating to animal health;
- maintain the highest professional standards of our life sciences staff and support and encourage staff to obtain qualifications in relevant disciplines;
- provide tailored health care and welfare programs to individual animals and populations that recognise the species' evolutionary biology;
- ensure that humane euthanasia can be implemented where necessary to bring about the best welfare outcome for an animal or a population as a whole.

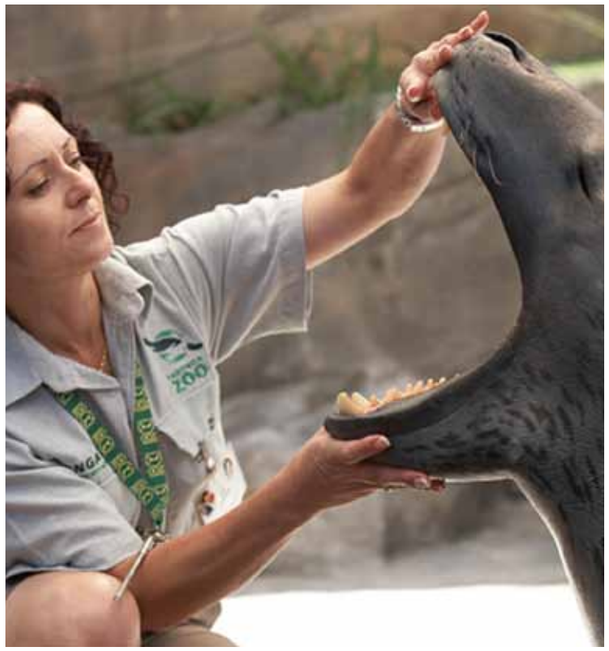
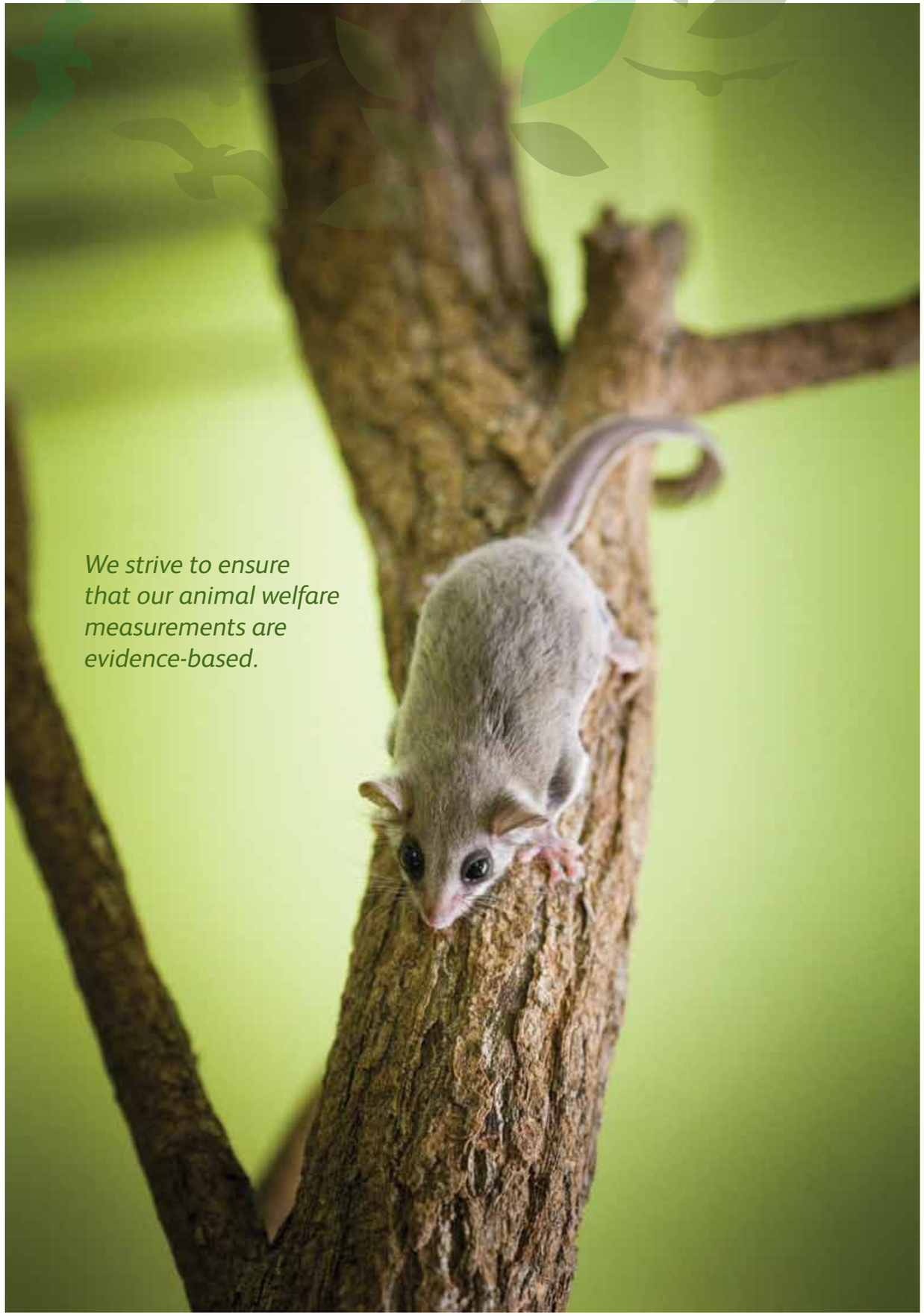


Photo: Rick Stevens

To ensure our animals do not suffer pain or distress from poor management or handling, we:

- provide training in animal management, handling, conditioning, transport; and animal welfare;
- uphold a life-long responsibility for animals in our care, ensuring that through-life plans are developed prior to acquisition and/or birth of animals, and accept that these plans may sometimes involve euthanasia;
- undertake only animal encounters and presentations that deliver Taronga's conservation messages in an appropriate context and focus on natural behaviour, whilst providing for the dignity of the animal and not compromising the welfare of the animal;
- only transfer animals to other recipients that demonstrate welfare values, policies and standards that meet or exceed national and state guidelines;
- carefully plan and properly prepare animals prior to transport and/or transfer to/from another zoo, exhibit, or presentation area;
- develop and deliver Taronga's formal in-house training programs; ongoing 'on the job' training and professional development;
- ensure that curatorial and animal population management decisions support the welfare of the individuals and the sustainability of populations;
- ensure staff awareness and understanding of Taronga's policies, procedures and reporting processes relating to animal handling.



*We strive to ensure that our animal welfare measurements are evidence-based.*

## To ensure our animals are able to express species-specific behaviours, we:

- aim to provide a life experience for each animal that approximates the quality of a life experienced by an equivalent member of that species living in the wild, including challenges where appropriate;
- undertake appropriate research, training and planning, and provide resources to support safe and effective environmental enrichment programs;
- conduct enrichment that stimulates mental and physical activity, promotes species-appropriate behaviours, and maintains behavioural diversity;
- provide environments and group structure and size that promote species appropriate social skills and supports the ability of an animal to breed or be integrated with its own kind;
- provide species-appropriate social opportunities, including opportunities for learning and maintenance of behaviours critical for social interactions and breeding;
- regularly review and change the enrichment programs appropriate for the species, to maximise stimulation, interest and learning;
- provide training and conditioning programs that develop confidence and trust and reduce stress, including programs to facilitate delivery of health care, encounters and presentations;
- provide enrichment items that stimulate and are safe to use and do not compromise the animals' nutrition;
- maintain and regularly update peer-reviewed husbandry manuals for diverse species.

Photo: Rick Stevens

*In considering Taronga's animal welfare responsibilities we acknowledge the wild nature of the animals in our care. This compels us to provide the type of environment and diverse experiences that the animal's biology has evolved to expect and to cope with. We understand that zoos cannot truly replicate the wild but, as far as possible, we can reproduce the animal's natural environment and take into consideration the animal's behavioural and physiological needs.*

*We recognise that no matter how good the facilities and care, life in a zoo does place some restrictions on animals. However there are also restrictions on animals in the wild. Many wild animals have their movements restricted by territorial boundaries.*

*Their 'freedom' in the wild is often radically restricted by the daily battle to survive. Wild animals do not make long journeys for pleasure, but to fulfil the daily needs for food, water, shelter and opportunities to mate.*

*The animals in Taronga's populations are cared for to a standard at least comparable to, but in most cases far exceeding the conditions that their wild counterparts would experience. The greatest repository of understanding of wild animals lies within the province of good zoos such as Taronga.*

Photo: Lorinda Taylor

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