

“My First Possum” by Theresa

I had been a member of the GBWC for a few months when I got THE CALL.... I was to receive my first animal - a male Brushtail possum, Alfie was his name. This was in January 2013.



I got a medium cage ready - put in branches for him to run around on, flowers which included a possum’s favourite (roses), some native flowers and gum leaves and set it up inside the shed we were living in at the time.

I brought home a little bundle of grey fur with big eyes and really, really sharp little claws. I fell in love. Little did I know that his hissing would keep me up some nights. And they hiss *very* loudly. I would have to collect fresh branches with different leaves for him to eat every day, rain hail or shine. I had to buy him fresh fruit to eat - Kiwi fruit, strawberries, apple, berries. Of course, being my first, I called my mentor, Betty, nearly every day to make sure I was doing everything right.

I had to mix up specialist possum milk for him every night too. He was so small, I had to dip my finger in the milk and put it on his mouth, then hold his head near the milk to encourage him to lap it up. He finally got it right after lots of spills and a few bites of my finger. He used to run up and down my arm and dig his claws in. I didn’t really mind until the night he ran up onto my face, his arms and legs splayed, and dug into my face. My husband had to gingerly pull him off me. Ah, true love... I still bear the scars of little Alfie.

As he grew bigger, we put him in a larger cage outside. I still gathered the fresh leaf and branches for him every day. My husband tied ropes between the trees and put up possum boxes everywhere around where we were living, and finally, we left the cage door open at night for Alfie to come and go. He would go in and out of his cage for a few nights and then he left home, moving into one of the possum boxes. He would visit us now and again, coming through the window for a treat, and then one day he left for good.

I have cared for many possums since then, but Alfie still remains my favourite. Now I mainly look after macropods (wallabies, kangaroos etc) specialising in wallaroos, although we do care for red-necked wallabies also. My husband cares for lizards and turtles, and our daughter cares for birds.

My husband and I love being wildlife carers - it’s rewarding and fun, but hard work too. The reality can be heartbreaking, especially when you have cared for an animal for months only for it to die unexpectedly. Watching your animals grow into healthy adults is fantastic though. Wildlife caring is hard and it’s worth it.