

Plant-related injuries drive carers batty

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BATS play an important role in our society by seeding forests and keeping down insect numbers. These native animals are increasingly under pressure from a rise in urbanisation, as bat carer Louise Saunders tells Margaret Slocombe. Bat carers are stretched to their limits untangling an average of four bats a day from barbed wire after the animals have become trapped while trying to eat flowering melaleucas.

Brisbane Bat Care president Louise Saunders said a common practice of planting melaleucas alongside industrial fencing had created a death trap for bats as half the animals retrieved were so badly injured trying to escape the barbed

wire atop the fences they had to be euthanased.

Ms Saunders heads a team of dedicated registered bat carers from their Cleveland base who take in injured and orphaned bats with the aim to release them back into the wild.

Not only are they loving, gentle creatures, flying foxes seed our forests and insectivorous bats keep insect populations in check.

“Without them we’d be in serious trouble. Research shows bats are vital,” she said.

Ms Saunders said bats were often disliked and even hated by members of the community.

Part of her work includes educating the public about the animals and their place in our society.

She said bats had become more urbanised in recent years with droughts forcing them into backyards for food.

There are 20 bat colonies within 20km of Brisbane CBD.

There are 25 Brisbane bat carers who are called on whenever a bat needs help because of their knowledge of the animals. The staff have been immunised against lyssavirus, a disease which has been found in flying foxes and insectivorous bats.

“Bats have a remarkable love for people who are their carers. When they’re orphans they think they’re humans,” she said.

“When you see them up close they’re like a dog and they come when you call.”

She said bats existed in a dynamic social structure.

For their first six months they are suckled by their mothers who form close, loving bonds strengthened by continual grooming.

After that time the young bats move to a creche where they are looked after and taught to fly and feed by young non-breeding males.

Ms Saunders said before their release back to the wild, bats in care were placed in group enclosures to help them adjust back into their community.

To become a bat carer phone 38212341.

Brisbane Bat Care will have a display at the Spectacular Petacular from 9am-4pm on March 14 and 15 at the RNA Showgrounds. Phone Louise Laurens on 0438179166.