



Wildlife friendly fencing

This greater glider was one of the lucky ones—released with fairly minor scratches (to glider and rescuer). Photo L. Turton

The wildlife friendly fencing project

From <http://www.wildlifefriendlyfencing.com/WFF/Home.html>

“The wildlife friendly fencing project is raising awareness of the impact of fencing on Australian wildlife, and developing guidelines for good practice. Barbed wire in particular is a major hazard for wildlife. Each year thousands of animals face a cruel death or permanent injury from entanglement on barbs, usually on the top strand. More than 75 wildlife species have been identified in Australia as occasional or regular victims of barbed wire fences, especially nocturnal animals such as bats, gliders and owls. Many fail to see the fence, or cannot clear the height under windy conditions. Most of those rescued are too severely damaged to return to the wild.

There are also other fencing hazards. Kangaroos get hung up in fences that are too high, whether plain or barbed, a situation made worse by the bottom strand of the fence being too low. Wetlands fenced too close to the waterline prevent wetland birds from landing or taking off, especially cranes.

Barbed wire is both an animal welfare and conservation issue. It is recognised as a threatening process in the draft recovery plans for a number of species. These include the Yellow-bellied glider (*Petaurus australis*), the Mahogany glider (*Petaurus gracilis*), the Spectacled flying fox (*Pteropus conspicillatus*) and Grey-headed flying fox (*Pteropus poliocephalis*).

We seek a fundamental change in the approach to fencing, a change that considers the welfare of wildlife in the landscape. The project is looking to establish partnerships with a wide range of organisations to help promote and implement wildlife friendly fencing. These include wildlife rescue groups, natural resource management groups, all levels of government, fencing manufacturers, contractors and suppliers.

Damage results not only from entanglement on the barbs, but also from dehydration, attempts by the animal to untangle itself, and impact with the fence and fence posts. The forces involved at impact are quite significant especially for an animal that is moving at speed. The longer the animal is on the fence, the less likely it is to ever return to the wild”.

Barbed wire fencing over water is dangerous to wildlife for several reasons:

- bats fly over water to drink at night and do not see the fence
- many water birds need a fair length of water to take off and land, and as waterholes shrink find they can no longer do this without entanglement
- barbed wire fences are dislodged in waterways in flood, and become a hazard to wildlife in the water like turtles

In their leaflet *Bats and Barbed Wire*, Bat Care Brisbane points out that “In urban environments barbed wire is still being erected along railway lines, in car parks and industrial estates and much of it is being planted with wildlife attracting native plants.

Barbed-wire is erected as a human deterrent and our nocturnal wildlife are rarely considered.

These fences are a constant death trap and every year thousands of animals are caught and suffer horrid deaths or face months of rehabilitation with wildlife organizations”.

http://www.bats.org.au/wp-content/uploads/batcarebrisbane_barb-wire.pdf

Wildlife friendly fencing tips

- replace barbed wire fences with plain wire, nylon, timber, or electric fencing—or at least replace the top strand
- cover the top strand with split poly pipe
- make the fence more visible—particularly at night—by using bright tape, flags or CDs
- as a priority, modify or remove any fence:
 - with a known history of entanglement
 - that is new
 - in a recognised hotspot i.e. over water, on ridge lines, near feed trees
 - near fruiting or flowering plants
- remove redundant barbed-wire as quickly as possible from the landscape
- provide macropod access by leaving a 50 cm gap below the lowest strand
- place wombat gates in fence lines to allow access without damage