

## **The Wallabies of AACE**

By Jane Stanfield

I selected the Wallaby Rehabilitation Centre through I-to-I because I wanted to get very close to the wildlife. Project Kial works with the endangered Bridled Nailtail Wallaby that are approximately three feet high, with distinctive dark “bridle” markings on their head and upper torso and a nail, or hard growth, at the very tip of their tail.

This was my first volunteer experience with the I-to-I agency and as the name implies, it focuses on small, individualized placements instead of the usual team approach. I-to-I also allows for fluid start and end dates.

My pick up was in Rockhampton, about 60 miles south east of the town of Marlborough. Tina Jansen runs the program and met me with an animal at her side holding on to her pants. It was Sugar, an orphan kangaroo and anytime Tina would stand still, he would suck on her pants.

As Tina is a certified wildlife rehabilitator, in addition to the wallabies, Project Kial also temporarily houses other injured Australian wildlife including possums, kangaroos, other wallabies, wallaroos, sugar gliders, bettongs, and a wombat. I was introduced to Wiggles, a Southern Hairy Nosed Wombat and fell instantly in love. I was thrilled to have the chance to hold her as she slept in my lap. She was a one-year old of 10 pounds and when fully mature, she will be closer to 80 pounds.

The farm had five buildings that were shared by the owners and volunteers; bunkhouse, kitchen/lounge/toilet/bathroom under one roof, office & infirmary, walk-in cooler, and a barn/shed for food storage.

There were six large enclosures that held the wallabies and other animals sorted by sex and age. In front of the main enclosures were ten small pens where individual animals were kept for monitoring. Every enclosure had at least one area that was covered or shaded, and a protected feeding station. The feeding stations had water sources and food troughs that were raised 12 inches off the ground. Most enclosures were constructed around stands of trees for shade and the natural grass was waist high at times.

### **A Day at Project Kial**

The day usually started at 7 am and ended around 5 pm. Volunteers fixed their own breakfast and lunch from the food supplied and dinner was a group meal. Because we were remote, ALL FOOD had to be stored in plastic or metal boxes, a fridge, or metal cabinets.

Daily chores were similar to other volunteer placements working with wildlife.

**PEN CLEANING/MAINTENANCE** – With three volunteers, we were each assigned several enclosures for daily cleaning. Normally it began with a perimeter check to make sure the fence was secure and that the water source was functioning. Cleaning the feeding station required washing the food troughs and raking up the discarded hay and wallaby poo (a dry, dark brown pellet about the size of an almond). All of the waste/hay was carried out in a bucket and added to the flowerbeds as mulch and fertilizer. The most time consuming process was walking through the entire enclosure hand picking up poo with plastic gloves. During the hot days, the water

would pour out of my gloves as I changed them between pens. After my first days, I could anticipate where the poo was located which sped up the process.

**FOOD PREP** – The diet of the mature wallaby was chopped hay, barley and sliced sweet potatoes. The hay was chopped with a machine and the mulch was stored in buckets or large burlap bags. The sweet potatoes had to be peeled and hand sliced at least every other day. Once sliced, they were stored in the walk-in cooler to keep them moist.

**ANIMAL ORPHAN CARE** – I learned that each different marsupial required a special type of formula. We made up various types of formulas on a daily basis and put them in specific bottles with teats that ranged from one to four inches in length. Tina and her daughters fed most of the youngest animals as it definitely took some time to perfect the technique.

In addition to bottle-feeding, a young marsupial also needs assistance using the bathroom. They have only one opening, called a coaca, where both urine and poo are expelled. In the wild, the mother would lick the area to encourage the young. In her absence the human caregiver used a moist tissue to begin the process. Until we got the technique down, we could be peed and pooped on daily.

Young roos or joeys normally sleep in their mothers pouch until they were quite large. With the orphans, canvas or cloth pouches were provided and after a meal, they would nap in the pouches that hung on the wall in the lounge. A volunteer would hold the pouch open and the joey would do a forward somersault dive into the pouch. Because some of the joeys would pee during their sleep, we also did daily animal laundry.

**HEALTH TREATMENTS** – We were instructed to keep an eye out for general health of all the animals. Once while cleaning a pan, a wallaby came right up to me. She staggered a bit and then flopped on her side. Luckily one of the family was near and she was carried to Tina. It was Molly, a hand-raised wallaby and the smallest in her enclosure. She had mild pneumonia and was dehydrated and underweight. It was determined that she hadn't been getting enough food. She spent a few days in the infirmary for close monitoring and treatments, and eventually went outside into one of the small enclosures.

**OFFICE WORK** – At times, we worked on fund raising and grant writing ideas for the centre in addition to some tidying of supplies and general office cleaning.

### **What was it like to work at Project KIAL?**

I was in Marlborough in May, or late fall in Australia. The weather was predominantly warm during the day, but the evenings could get chilly. During my first week, it was very hot each day. Because of the brilliant sun, I was generally comfortable in long sleeve shirts and jeans. I wore gaiters over my boots and depending on the pen, I normally exited covered in foyxtails. The best part about this time of year is that there weren't many bugs. The second week brought lots of rain and strong winds that threatened to take down some of the shade sails and roofs off the feeding stations.

The physical work included stooping and bending to clean the pens and chopping up the sweet potatoes. I adored being remote enough to listen to the Australian birds and watch the free-roaming wildlife around the farm.

When working with wildlife, not every animal makes it. Early in my time, Tina received a female Western Grey Kangaroo with tetanus. She also had a four-month old joey called a pinkie in her pouch. Because the mother had not been able to adequately care for the joey, the pouch was filthy and the baby, hungry and dehydrated. The mother died overnight, so Tina became the foster mom to the young female joey. During my stay, the joey spent most of her time in the incubator or buddled up for warmth, as she was essentially hairless. Another time, I came across a shade area and found a dead wallaby. I picked her up by the base of the tail and took her to the infirmary. The female was from the original group that arrived with tick infested ears and malnourished. When an animal has been compromised early in life, any stress can cause death.

As we lived outside of the town, our evening entertainment usually involved reading (they had a good lending library) or conversation. However, one evening, the Marlborough Fair was in town. It was similar to a county fair in the US with livestock exhibits, competitions, greasy food, a midway with games and rides, and even camel races.

I interacted with only two other volunteers. The first was an Australian man who, in addition to his wallaby work, managed the nursery of plants to be transplanted into the enclosures. Second was a young woman from England, who had come to the project through Green Volunteers. I learned that based on the agency used, the fee paid by the volunteers could be considerably different.

I enjoyed my time at Project Kial. I loved getting to know Wiggles, the assortment of marsupial orphans, and being allowed and encouraged to handle them daily. After only two weeks, I was attached to the animals and was sad to leave. If you love wildlife and want a relaxed, laid back work experience with Australian wildlife, I can highly recommend Project Kial.

**2010 update** – Thanks to a grant, AACE now has a vegetable chopper that reduces piles of sweet potatoes into slices in a matter of minutes. I am happy to report that Wiggles is now a full-grown wombat and they are searching for a mate for her. The volunteers now have individual rooms and the wallaby-breeding program is progressing with 30 additional pens underway.

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**AACE, Inc.** and **Project Kial** is located near Marlborough, a town Northwest of Rockhampton in Queensland. Australia.

Project Kial is a rehabilitation center for injured wildlife and captive breeding program for the Bridled Nailtail Wallaby. These wallabies were considered extinct until 1973 when a small colony was found in Central Queensland. Project Kial was established in 2003, when they received 130 wallabies from a former quarry. Since then, Project Kial has rehabilitated over 150 animals and begun a breeding program to increase the number of Bridled Nailtail Wallabies. The intention is for them to be released back into the bush providing that a supporting environment can be found where they be will protected from predators and be able to thrive.

For availability and current rates contact:

**AACE, Inc.** – *Project Kial at Australian Animals Care and Education* [www.aace.org.au](http://www.aace.org.au)  
P.O. Box 47, Marlborough, Queensland 4705 Australia  
email - [info@aace.org.au](mailto:info@aace.org.au) The contact is Tina Jansen.

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These agencies also place volunteers at Project Kial and may offer different amenities. Make sure you understand what their pricing covers and options offered.

**Green Volunteers** – [www.greenvolunteers.com](http://www.greenvolunteers.com) email – [green@greenvolunteers.org](mailto:green@greenvolunteers.org)  
340 Central Ave #304, Dover, NH 03820 USA  
Phone 800-525-9379  
603-742-1290 Fax

**Helper Exchange** – [www.helpx.net](http://www.helpx.net) over 275 conservations projects

**Idealist** – [www.idealists.org](http://www.idealists.org) - allows you to sort by multiple categories at one time.

**World Wildlife Fund** – [www.wwf.org.au/act/volunteer](http://www.wwf.org.au/act/volunteer)

Additional books with resources when searching for projects with animals or wildlife

*Green Volunteers* – We Care Guides

*The Voluntary Traveler* – Nola Lee Kelsey – Dogs Eye View Media

*Wildlife & Conservation Volunteering, The Complete Guide* – Peter Lynch - Brandt