

# Sheltering them from the storm

Helping injured animals back on to their feet has become a way of life for Michele Phillips. CAMERON LUCADOU-WELLS reports.

LONG, sleepless nights and no funding or pay fail to deter Oakleigh South's Michele Phillips from tending to injured animals.

Her home, the only animal shelter in Monash, has been a refuge for possums and native birds for 10 years.

On call around the clock, the self-taught animal healer is up every two to three hours through the night feeding orphaned or abandoned baby possums.

She feeds them for up to six or seven months before releasing them back into the wild in groups of four or five at about this time of year.

However, this year has been different.

At a time when she would

usually be releasing possums, the intake of their orphans has not abated.

Ms Phillips said the drought seemed to have extended the breeding season.

Two weeks ago, she took in 17 baby possums.

Aside from possums, her yard teems with birdlife.

Nursed rainbow lorikeets twitter in fox-proof cages next to wards of galah and magpie patients and one seagull.

One of the galahs, a shaking specimen devoid of breast feathers, is a former pet that was traumatised by its owner's actions.

"People get them and don't respect them," Ms Phillips said.

"They'll teach the bird to



**Animal saviour:** Michele Phillips tends to one of her baby ringtail possums.

**Picture:** Melissa Banks

talk but not nurture them as wild animals."

Every morning at 7, 60 feeding ducks from nearby golf course lakes crowd upon her front lawn.

Ms Phillips' catchment area stretches from Melbourne's central business district to Frankston, but she is unwilling to give up her voluntary role.

"I love animals and there is a need for it.

"You get a lot back from it

when you see them running free."

Her passion started when she took an injured lorikeet to a vet 10 years ago.

"They said, 'We'll look after it' and when I checked up on it the next day, they said they'd euthanased it straight away."

Since then, she's been building relations with vets to encourage them to call her as soon as they are presented with an injured animal.

Most of her animal patients are victims of cat attacks. She said cats were able to prey on sleeping birds and feeding possums, particularly at night.

"There should be a cat curfew in Monash.

"It's just a part of responsible ownership.

"If a possum gets bitten or scratched and is given no antibiotics within 24 hours, it normally has to be euthanased."

Foxes and disappearing habi-

tat were the greatest threats to wildlife, she said.

When South Oakleigh College removed tall gum trees beside her fence line, homes for possums and native birds were also lost.

"If you cut down trees, where are they going to go?"

**For help for injured animals phone Michele, 0411 600 591, or Help for Wildlife, 0417 380 687.**