TREE OF COMPASSION
ABN 65331932350

Finding a Burnt Animal

Tree of Compassion

WHAT TO DO IF YOU FIND A BURNT ANIMAL

If you spot an injured or orphaned animal and you are not able to safely capture it, then you should report it to a wildlife care group. The information below assumes you have caught the animal and is only meant as a brief guide. It is not in any way comprehensive nor a substitute for veterinary attention.

Handling

An injured or orphaned animal, especially wildlife, will be stressed and frightened. It is also likely to be in pain. Even if the animal is a domestic pet, if it is in pain or scared, it can potentially bite or scratch you. Should you be bitten or scratched, make sure you flush the area immediately with clean running water then apply antiseptic. You may also need to seek medical attention as some bites can become infected quickly.

Restraint

You must restrain the animal adequately first prior to examining it or giving first aid. Make sure that any movement you make is calm so as not to scare the animal. Using towels can be most useful. With some species, such as echidnas, you may need to wear thick gloves but be aware that gloves can reduce your dexterity and are not recommended with some species. With birds, carefully wrap the towel around the bird so that the wings are gently folded against the body so it does not flap. Be careful not to wrap or hold too tightly, especially birds. Some animals may be less stressed if you put a covering over their head. Always be aware of where the animals feet and mouth/beak is so that you are not injured by them.

Examination

Carefully examine the animal looking for signs of injury. You are first looking for life threatening problems including head injury, haemorrhage, spinal injury, fractures, breathing difficulties, major soft tissue injure, eye injury.

Take note of the animal's vital signs such as respiratory, pulse, heart rate, and body temperature if you can.

BASIC FIRST AID

All of the following situations require immediate veterinary attention.

Heat Exhaustion and Heat Stroke

Heat exhaustion can be extremely dangerous as it can rapidly escalate to heat stroke which is life threatening. Initial signs can include failure to drink (noticeable in domestic animals more than wildlife) and disorientation. Advanced signs include heavy panting, difficulty breathing, rapid pulse and high body temperature. The animal must be cooled immediately but not too quickly as tissues can be damaged by rapid changes to temperature. Cooling too quickly can induce hypothalamic overreaction that leads to shivering and further heating. Cooling methods can include moving to a cool environment, taking blankets off, providing cool fluids (not cold), putting on a fan although not directly blowing on the animal. In some cases you may actually need to submerge the animal in cool water (not ice water) for brief periods. Animals cool more quickly using areas where there is little fat and where veins run close – eg. legs, head, and chest. Placing a wet towel on these areas can help. Keep checking body temperature. Encourage the animal to drink, but do not force. If the animal has collapsed from heat stroke, veterinary attention is needed as severe metabolic disturbances may have occurred.

Fractures

Do not attempt to set the fracture. A veterinarian will need to do this. Remember that fractures are painful so make sure that someone restrains the animal so it does not injure you prior to securing the break. If a limb is broken, being careful to avoid further injury, wrap it in cotton padding (eg. Soffban), then wrap something like a rolled newspaper, towel or two sticks as the splint. The splint should extend one joint above and one joint below the fracture. Secure with tape (eg. micropore). Make sure you haven't wrapped it so tight that it constricts blood flow.

If it is a broken wing, using tape which is easy to remove such as Mircopore, tape the broken wing to the body. You can secure both wings if it is easier. You may also find it easier to slip the bird into a sock with the toe cut out. If a bird has a broken leg, splint the leg with two pieces of adhesive tape placed perpendicular to leg across break site. In small birds, you could also try splinting with a cotton bud.

If the spine, ribs, hip, etc. appear injured or broken, gently place the animal on a stretcher (a firm, flat support like a piece of plywood or similar). Try and keep the back and neck straight (for spinal injuries) when moving the animal onto the stretcher. Immobilize it if possible. You may need to tie or tape the animal to the board. Keep the animal calm.

If the animal is unconscious, position the head in normal alignment with the body. It should not flex abnormally downward nor extend excessively

upward as this can cause decreased blood drainage from the brain and cause serious damage. If the animal has vomited or appears likely to vomit (not likely in wildlife but often in pets particularly those with head injuries even if they are unconscious) put the head down below the level of the heart. This will allow the vomitus to run out of the mouth and not down into the windpipe and the lungs.

All fractures will need pain relief.

External Bleeding

You will need to stop the bleeding by applying pressure. Press a thick sterile gauze pad over the wound. If you do not have sterile gauze, use any clean cloth available. Do not use cotton wool as this will stick to the wound. Consistent pressure is best. Hold firmly until clotting occurs. Do not disturb the blood clot after it has formed. If blood soaks through, do not remove the pad but simply add additional layers and continue to direct pressure.
Apply bandage over the gauze.

If a bird has a broken new feather which is bleeding, gently pull the feather out. The bleeding should decrease. Press your finger over the removal site until the bleeding stops.

If there is severe bleeding on the foot or leg, if the animal will allow it, gently elevate the limb so it is above the level of the heart. This is usually more effective in larger animals with longer limbs. Maintain direct pressure throughout.

If external bleeding continues following the use of direct pressure and elevation, finger or thumb pressure over the main artery to the wound is needed. If you know where the following arteries are in the animals, you can: apply pressure to the femoral artery in the groin for severe bleeding of a rear leg; to the brachial artery in the inside part of the upper front leg for bleeding of a front leg; or to the caudal artery at the base of the tail if the wound is on the tail. Continue the application of direct pressure.

You can also try applying pressure above and below the bleeding wound. This can also be used in together with direct pressure. Pressure above the wound will help control arterial bleeding whereas pressure below the wound will help control bleeding from veins.

If the bleeding in a leg or tail is severe and life threatening and there is no immediate veterinary treatment available, apply a tourniquet between the wound and the heart. This can be done by wrapping a wide cloth around the limb twice, then tying a knot. A short stick or similar can then be tied into the knot and twisted to tighten the tourniquet until bleeding stops. Loosen the tourniquet for 20 seconds every 15-20 minutes. Keep note of when the tourniquet was applied. Note: this should only ever be used in life-threatening haemorrhaging of a limb. A tourniquet is dangerous and could result in amputation or disability of the limb. It should only be used as a last resort to save a life.

Internal bleeding

Symptoms to indicate this include: bleeding from the nose, mouth, rectum; coughing blood; blood in urine; pale gums; collapse; rapid or weak pulse; cool on the legs, ears or tail. The animal should be kept warm and quiet as possible and veterinary attention immediately sought.

Eye injury

Avoid further damage. Flush the eye out with saline or Eye Stream or even clean water if saline or equivalent is not available. If there is a foreign body embedded in the eye, leave it in place for the veterinarian to deal with. If it is not embedded, rinse it out. If the eye has been burnt or affected by smoke, again rinse the eye and keep it moist with drops and gels (careful that they do not contain steroids). If you are not sure, just use normal saline.

Burns

All burns are painful and pain relief will be required. The animal is likely to be in shock and would have lost a considerable amount of fluid. Treatment will depend on the stage and state of the burn. Initial first aid can avoid further tissue damage.

Flush the area with normal saline for up to 10 minutes if the animal will tolerate it. This will help to cool the burn and prevent further damage, provide relief to the animal and will also remove some of the debris. The affected area will need to be cleaned and debrided. Wear disposable gloves. Trim away any burnt fur or hair. If no veterinary help is immediately available, trim away any dead skin. Gently clean the area by bathing in saline or diluted Betadine solution for several minutes.

Creams and ointments will need to be liberally applied such as Flamazine which contains silver to promote the healing (Flamazine is a good ointment to use for burns). An appropriate sterile dressing should then be applied. First apply a non-stick layer to avoid removal of healing tissue, eg. Melonin. Then apply a layer of padding such as a Soffban bandage. The outer layer should be something like Vetwrap. Secure the top of the bandage to the fur using surgical tape such as Micropore but not tape like Elastoplast which is difficult to remove. A veterinarian will need to treat the burns as soon as possible.

Shock

Many animals caught in a bushfire will be suffering form shock. Symptoms: weak pulse, shallow breathing, nervousness, dazed appearance.

Signs: Early stages of shock: Bright red gums. Very rapid capillary refill time (press the gums to see how long the colour takes to come back to them). The animal may be either excited or subdued. Rapid heart rate. Pulse is not difficult

to find.

Middle stages of shock: Gums appear pale or "muddy". Abnormally long capillary refill time. The heart rate is frequently faster than normal. The pulse weakens and may be difficult to locate. The animal will most likely be subdued, depressed and weak. Respiration is often shallow and rapid (but may be normal). Rectal temperature often below normal (may be normal or even elevated).

Late stages of shock: Gums extremely pale or show a bluish discoloration, and are often "blotchy" in appearance. Capillary refill time is longer (sometimes longer than 3-4 seconds). Heart rate is often elevated and irregular, but may be normal or below normal as heart muscle begins to fail. The pulse will be very weak and difficult or impossible to locate. Respiration may be slow or rapid, shallow or deep. The eyes may take on a glazed appearance and appear not to focus normally. Mental condition deteriorates from depression to stupor to coma. Rectal temperature will be below normal.

Treatment: After recognizing the signs of shock, immediate first aid is necessary. Ensure breathing is adequate, stop any blood loss, protect fractures from further injury, prevent loss of body heat by keeping the patient warm with blanket or something else appropriate and transport to veterinarian. Keep the animal warm, in a quiet and dark place keeping other animals and children away. Generally for wildlife, you will want to keep ambient temperature between 24 – 30^{o}C.

Dehydration

A bushfire victim is very likely to be dehydrated. The type and amount of fluid given to the animal will depend on the state of the patient. Try to encourage the animal to drink. You can try giving fluids via a syringe to the mouth. If oral administration is not successful, fluids will need to be given subcutaneously (or intravenously if more urgent and a veterinarian is present). This should not be attempted unless you have been trained.

Pain relief

Providing timely and appropriate pain relief will not only make the animal more comfortable, but will aid with healing and recovery. The most accessible pain relief for mammals (not to be given to birds or reptiles) is Pain Stop 'Daytime' which can be bought at the chemist. The oral fluid can be given to animals such as possums, kangaroos, etc at a dose rate of 10mg per kg of bodyweight every 12 hours (note this is in mg not ml). You must first check which preparation you have before dosing as it comes in different strengths.

For example, Pain Stop (day time) = paracetamol (24 mg) plus codeine (5mg) / ml. The dose rate is 1ml per 2.4kg of body weight.
