

Bring back the bats

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The Wellington Caves in the central west of NSW, managed by Dubbo Regional Council, is developing an environmental program to 'Bring back the bats.' This has been backed with funding from the NSW Government Environmental Trust Grants for Environmental Restoration and Rehabilitation.

The program is multilayered:

- A disused concrete water tank is to be repurposed as a human-made habitat for microbats.
- Plant rescue, seed collection, propagation and planting of local trees to improve habitat on the reserve.
- A transportable 'Bat Box', an educational display, will be made to engage children and the public to be ambassadors for bats at home.

The Cathedral Cave rarely has microbats these days, however history tells us that a chamber off this cave once had reasonable numbers of microbats in it and guano was sold off as fertiliser. On top of the Cathedral is an old disused, concrete water tank which we intend to enclose again and monitor the atmosphere adding water to adjust the humidity. Effectively we will reproduce an ideal habitat for microbats.

Inspiration for human-made habitat for wildlife is the artificial Glow Worm Cave at Mt Tamborine, Queensland.
<https://www.tamborineglowworms.com.au/contact.html>

Inspiration of the scientific monitoring of microbats is the Bat Centre at Naracoorte Caves, South Australia.
<https://www.naracoortecaves.sa.gov.au/discover/under-the-ground/bat-centre-and-blanche-cave>

We are striving to help all bat species in our region with a particular aim to help the vulnerable Eastern Bentwing Bat *Miniopterus orianae oceanensis*. Our educational activities include events at Wellington Caves, with community events in Wellington and visiting local schools. We recently conducted a talk for a small regional school at the local library in Wellington. In conjunction with Mid Macquarie Landcare we had a display at the Wellington Agricultural show. More public talks are scheduled including Bat Night at Wellington Caves. These educational activities strive to destigmatise myths about bats and create 'Bat Ambassadors'.

Currently we are refining our planning and briefing our trades. The next three years will see different stages of the program being implemented.



Photo credit: Natacha Grace. Tiny 'Terry' rescued and relocated from a Wellington Café.



Photo: Bring back the bats disused concrete water tank on top of Cathedral cave.



Image credit: Ross Barwick. Design of the converted water tank into a hi-tech, multi chambered habitat.