

WLDLIFE
VCTORIA

POUCH CHECKING GUIDE

How you can help orphaned
Australian Wildlife



BASIC 'ROADSIDE RESCUE KIT'



RIO BASKET



HIGH VIS VEST



CARDBOARD BOX



TOWELS



GLOVES - DISPOSABLE AND GARDENING



TORCH



HEAT PACKS



SCISSORS - POUCH CHECKS



POUCHES - DIFFERENT SIZES



SAFETY PINS AND ELASTIC BANDS



HAND SANITISER



THICK BLANKET



SPRAY PAINT



PILLOW SLIPS - FOR BIGGER JOEYS



INTRODUCTION



Thank you for your interest in helping Australia's unique native wildlife.

This pouch checking guide is designed to empower Victorians to feel prepared and confident in conducting a pouch check when they come across a deceased marsupial.

Australians are lucky to share a home with a wonderfully diverse and unique range of native wildlife, many of which are found nowhere else in the world. Most of the world's marsupials are endemic to Australia, including, but not limited to, kangaroos, wallabies, possums, wombats, koalas and gliders.

Marsupials are mammals which give birth to undeveloped ('jellybean') young after only a few days of gestation. Joeys are born blind, hairless, with undeveloped limbs, and in some species, may be smaller than your fingertip. The young complete the remainder of their maturation in their mother's pouch. For this reason, it is important to always check the pouch of a deceased marsupial, as joeys can survive in their mother's pouch for days after the mother has passed.

Sadly, tens of thousands of native animals are hit or killed on Victorian roads each year. For many marsupial species, joeys are carried in their mother's pouch for multiple months after birth, so at any time of year, a large proportion of female marsupials will be carrying a joey.

Completing a pouch check is an essential way to reduce the road toll and suffering of native marsupials. It is common for joeys to survive a vehicle collision that has killed their mother, and they may survive for up to 10 days in the pouch of their deceased mother. If a pouch check is not completed, these joeys may die of starvation or exposure to the elements. A pouch check can save the life of a joey, who may have a good chance of survival in the care of an experienced wildlife rehabilitator.

Wildlife Victoria's Emergency Response Service is on call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to help in a wildlife emergency. While this guide outlines the steps involved in conducting a pouch check, we strongly encourage you to call our Emergency Response Service on **03 8400 7300** so one of our experienced Emergency Response Operators can assist you.





Check for Hazards

Assess if it is safe to pull over to conduct a pouch check. If the animal is lying on the road causing a traffic hazard or is on the side of a busy road with nowhere to stop, please put your safety first.

If it is not safe for you to stop or if the animal is still alive, note your location (and get GPS coordinates if possible) and call our Emergency Response Service on **03 8400 7300**. One of our Emergency Response Operators will be able to dispatch a trained wildlife rescuer or engage another organisation (e.g. Victoria Police or VicRoads) to rescue the animal and/or conduct a pouch check.

Safety First

If it is safe to pull over, make sure that your car is well off the road. Put on your hazard lights and headlights to stay visible to other cars, or to help see the animal if it is dark. Wear a high visibility vest to increase your visibility to other motorists.

Equipment

We recommend keeping a few items in your car in case a pouch check needs to be conducted. This includes disposable gloves, hand sanitiser, towels, an appropriate container to place any joeys, a torch, and spray paint (for marking the animal post pouch check). Please see the full list at the end of this guide to build a comprehensive roadside rescue kit.

Check for signs of life

If you suspect the animal is unconscious but still alive, observe if the chest is rising and falling or if there is eye movement when you tap gently in the corner of its eye. If you believe the animal is still alive, give it space, note your location (get GPS coordinates on your smartphone's map application if possible) and call our Emergency Response Service on **03 8400 7300**.

Moving off the road

If the animal is deceased and it is safe to do so, move it off the road or as far off the roadside as possible. For kangaroos and wallabies, the best way to do this is by dragging the body by the tail. Do not walk out in front of traffic or onto the road near a corner if you have low visibility of oncoming traffic. If you feel unsafe at any time, please call our Emergency Response Service on **03 8400 7300** and do not attempt to move or pouch check the animal.

STOPPING TO HELP



Check the animal's sex

Only female marsupials have pouches, so you will only need to conduct a pouch check if the animal is female. The best way to check the sex of an animal is to look for testicles. If the animal is a male, spray paint with a large cross so other passersby know they do not need to stop.



Make sure you have safely pulled the body off the road before checking the sex and spraying the 'x'

5.



Please call Wildlife Victoria's Emergency Response Service on 03 8400 7300 if you come across an orphaned joey and require advice. Our experienced Emergency Response Operators will be able to talk you through removing the joey from the pouch and find a veterinary clinic or wildlife rescuer who will assist you.

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- **Locate the Pouch**

Most female marsupials have a small pouch opening in their abdomen, around the point where you would expect a belly button to be. You may have to roll the animal over onto their back or side and lift a leg to access the pouch. Wombats have backward-facing pouches, so the opening will be lower and facing the rear end of the animal. Echidnas do not have a permanent pouch but can contract their muscles into a pouch-like fold.

- **Escape Proof**

Have a towel ready at the entrance of the pouch to prevent older joeys from escaping as you open it. This is essential because if a joey can escape the pouch, they may move quickly, and risk being hit by a vehicle.

- **Open the Pouch**

Use your hands to pinch the fur or skin and lift to stretch the opening of the pouch so you can see inside. Use a torch to look right to the bottom. Newborn joeys may be smaller than a jellybean and be hard to spot. Some species (e.g. ringtail possums) may have more than one joey.



WHAT TO DO IF YOU FIND A JOEY



Do not immediately try and pull the joey out of the pouch: hairless ('pinky') joeys are fused to their mother's teat during the first few months of development.

If joey is attached to teat:

Either contain the deceased mother's whole body and transport to a local veterinary clinic (e.g. for smaller marsupials like possums) or if this is not possible, use round-tipped scissors to cut the teat as close to the mother's body as possible and remove the joey from the pouch with the end of the teat remaining in the joey's mouth. You may want to attach a large safety pin or peg to the end of the teat to ensure the joey does not swallow and choke on the teat.

Important note: Always be 100% certain that the mother is deceased before cutting anything around their pouch. This can be done by tapping close to the mother's eye and checking for a reflexive blinking response. *If you do not wish to do this or do not have the necessary equipment, please call our Emergency Response Service on 03 8400 7300.*

If joey is not attached to the teat:

If the joey is not attached to the teat (generally 'velvet' or 'furred' joeys), gently remove it from the pouch. Be very careful to avoid snagging delicate limbs. Never force the joey out. If the pouch is too tight, you may need to cut the pouch entrance with round-tipped scissors. Make sure your hand is between the joey and the scissor blades inside the pouch to avoid any accidental injuries. Do not pull the joey out by the legs or tail, instead, gently place your palm behind their head to support its neck as you guide them out.

Contain the joey

Immediately wrap the joey in the towel and place them in a secure container. Young joeys cannot regulate their body temperature so, if possible, warm them with additional towels and keep them in a warm place inside your vehicle.

Transport the joey

Take the joey to the nearest veterinary clinic, who will be able to assess the joey free of charge, or **call our Emergency Response Service on 03 8400 7300 for advice.** While you are transporting it, keep it in a warm, dark, quiet place. The joey will likely be cold, dehydrated and may be injured or in shock. Keep children and pets away. Do not feed the joey or give it water – at this age they have a highly specialised diet, anything else may be fatal.

WHAT TO DO IF THE POUCH IS EMPTY



- **Check for an elongated teat**

If you can see one teat that is longer than the other (it may be protruding from the pouch), it usually means the pouch is 'active' and there may be a joey nearby. In comparison, if there is no elongated teat, it is unlikely that the female is currently nursing a joey.

- **Call our Emergency Response Service**

There may be an injured or hiding joey in nearby bushland. Leave the mother's body in a safe place away from the road. Older joeys will often return to their mother's deceased body later when they feel less threatened and can be captured then. Call our Emergency Response Service on **03 8400 7300** and we can alert local rescuers that there may be a joey in the area of the mother's deceased body. Capturing an escaped joey can sometimes take rescuers several days.



Example of a wombat's elongated teat



Our Emergency Response Service is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

WHAT TO DO AFTER THE POUCH CHECK



Marking the deceased body

Once you have finished checking the animal's pouch, or if it is a male, use brightly coloured spray paint to mark the body with a large cross so that other passersby know the pouch has been checked.



Removing the deceased body

Especially in high-traffic areas, Wildlife Victoria's Emergency Response Service often receives multiple reports of the same deceased animal. If you have pouch checked an animal on the side of a road, report it to us via our website wildlifevictoria.org.au or call our Emergency Response Service on **03 8400 7300**. This helps us to collect data about the wildlife road toll and makes sure precious volunteer resources are not wasted travelling to an animal that has already been checked.

Wildlife Victoria volunteers are unable to remove deceased wildlife from roadsides. Call your local council to organise their waste team or the Department of Transport and Planning to remove the deceased animal.



POUCH CHECK STARTER KIT



- Disposable gloves:** gloves should be worn throughout the pouch check to reduce any health risks to yourself and the animal.
- Pillowcases or makeshift pouches:** perfect for containing joeys. If you are feeling crafty, see our website for a pouch-making guide (<https://www.wildlifelifevictoria.org.au/learn/fact-sheets/joey-pouch-making-guide>). For smaller joeys like possums, a beanie can also work.
- Old towels/blankets:** good for wrapping animals in if you do not have a makeshift pouch or pillowcase, enabling you to keep them in a warm, dark place.
- Torch:** pouches can be large and dark, and newborn joeys are tiny.
- Pair of round-tipped scissors:** sometimes the female's pouch needs to be cut to remove larger joeys or for smaller joeys attached to their mother's teat, the teat may need to be cut.
- High visibility vest:** you should always keep your safety first when on the roadside. A fluorescent vest with reflector strips works well to alert passing cars to your position on the road.
- Hand sanitiser:** to clean your hands afterwards.
- Fluorescent spray paint:** marking a deceased marsupial with a cross communicates to others that the pouch has been checked.
- Safety pins or pegs:** if the joey is still attached to the teat and the teat must be cut, use a safety pin or a peg to attach to the end of the teat so that the joey does not swallow it and choke.

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ON CALL TO HELP
03 8400 7300

Wildlife Victoria is a registered charity

To make a donation to support our statewide Wildlife
Emergency Response Service or to learn more about our work
visit www.wildlifevictoria.org.au

