



Wildlife Diseases

People who wish to be involved with caring for or helping wildlife should be aware of diseases wild animals can carry. Any disease that can be transferred from an animal to a human is called a zoonotic disease. Many diseases can be transferred to humans by breathing in dust from dried faeces and more directly through broken skin caused by bites and scratches. Tetanus is carried in the soil and whenever your skin is broken there is a risk of contamination. Causing agents can be viruses, bacteria, fungi and parasites. Most of them are species specific and easily avoided if you know about them.

Common wildlife diseases that can affect humans are:

From birds:

Psittacosis. It is caused by bacteria like organism (*Chlamydia psittaci*) common in parrots, lorikeets, budgerigars, cockatoos, pigeons and other species of birds. The mode of transmission is by inhalation of contaminated air with dried faeces, secretions or feather dust.

Avian Tuberculosis. It is caused by bacteria, is spread by faeces and is transmitted by ingestion and inhalation. It can remain in the ground for years.

From wombats:

Mange. It is caused by a parasite (*Sarcoptes scabiei*) which burrows into the upper skin layers to lay eggs. The animal skin becomes very itchy, then dry and crusty from scratching with hair loss. Mange is mainly spread by direct contact.

From reptiles:

Salmonellosis. It is an infection of the digestive system caused the bacteria *Salmonella*. Reptiles and especially turtles harbour *Salmonella* on their skin. Other animals that carry it are dogs, cats, monkeys, rodents, chickens, fish and herd animals. The disease is spread by direct contact as well as consumption of contaminated food.

From bats:

Australian Bat Lyssavirus. It is caused by a rabies-like virus. It is transmitted to humans only if bitten or scratched or if bat saliva touches mucous membranes such as eyes, nose. or mouth. Only a small percentage of bats may carry this virus.



What to do to avoid these diseases:

- **ALWAYS** wash your hands thoroughly with soap or use a hand disinfectant after handling wildlife.
- Use safety equipment like thick gloves, masks, lab coat, thick towels, glasses, etc.
- Be very careful when cleaning bird cages. Do not breathe into contaminated air and wet the cage first with a cleaning agent then proceed to scrub. Have a good ventilation system.
- Do not touch your face when cleaning cages and handling animals.
- Always wash your hands after handling all reptiles.
- Do not handle bats unless you are vaccinated with the rabies vaccine and take precaution when handling all bats.



Did you know?

- Birds don't sweat; they maintain body temperature of 41 deg. centigrade by raising and lowering their feathers.
- Sarcoptic mange affects predominantly the Bare-Nosed wombat but all wombat species potentially have mange.
- Male turtles have long tails and it is normal for a turtle shell to be covered in algae.

For more information on wildlife diseases follow the link:

<http://www.depi.vic.gov.au/agriculture-and-food/pests-diseases-and-weeds/animal-diseases/zoonoses/zoonoses-animal-diseases-that-may-also-affect-humans>

For more information or advice contact ACT Wildlife on **0432 300 033** or visit our website www.actwildlife.net