

## Bobtail Flu: an emerging threat to local lizards

- Bobtail 'flu' is a **virus**, which has tentatively been named 'Shingleback nidovirus' by Murdoch researchers. This virus is increasingly becoming more prevalent and no-one knows whether it is an **emerging disease** that will spread to other reptiles.
- The symptoms are **similar to the symptoms humans get** when they have the flu – runny nose, weepy eyes, lethargy, weight loss and lots of sneezing (healthy bobtails will occasionally sneeze to clear salt deposits formed in the back of the throat). While symptoms are flu like, 'Shingleback nidovirus' itself is not an influenza virus.
- Bobtails with the virus will:
  - Have a **thin, flat tail**, protruding spine and pelvis bones and **look skinny**.
  - **Not respond quickly** to stimuli – if you can pick up a bobtail without it trying to get away, or they act like a pet, then there is most likely something wrong.
  - Have sticky, clear, sometimes bubbly, discharge from their eyes and nose, with their **eyes often glued shut**.
  - Have pale pink to white/grey mucous membranes and **thick, persistent mucous** in their throat (their tongue is normally blue).
  - If they are young, they may have lower respiratory rate, bloated torso and be **gasping for breath**.



Bobtails with Shingleback nidovirus. Photos: Kanyana Wildlife

- Bobtail flu is very **contagious to other bobtails** and can affect a whole area of bobtails.
- As their body heat comes from external sources like the sun, bobtails need **constant heat to get better** from the flu, so they need to be taken to a wildlife rehabilitation centre.
- Bobtails with the flu that are taken into a wildlife rehabilitation centre and placed on a special treatment program have a much **higher rate of survival** – if left in the wild they are more likely to die.



### What should you do if you find a bobtail with suspected flu?

- Bobtails with suspected flu **should be taken to a wildlife rehabilitation centre**, such as Kanyana Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre or Native Animal Rescue.
- You can pick up the bobtail with a towel and place it in a box to bring in to the wildlife rehabilitation centre.
- As bobtails are **monogamous** (they have one mate for life), note where the animal was found, so it can be returned there when it is well.
- Please **do not care for the bobtail yourself** – this is not going to help in any way as the animal will deteriorate if correct medication is not given. Bobtails with the flu may also carry a large amount of worms, which need to be treated as well.
- If you find a bobtail and you are **unsure** if it is sick or injured you can call Kanyana Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre on 9291 3900 and someone will go through the condition of the animal, ask the right questions, and let you know the best course of action.
- If there is **obvious signs of injury** please take the bobtail straight to your closest wildlife rehabilitation centre.

### Did you know:

- Bobtails can live for over 50 years.
- There is a sensor on top of the bobtail's head which is known as the 3rd eye. This lets them know the temperature so they know when they need more sun.
- Bobtails are good for your garden as they clean up fallen leaves, flowers and bugs.

### Find out more:

The information in this fact sheet was kindly provided by Kanyana Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre's Bobtail Co-ordinator and Native Animal Rescue. For more information please contact these wildlife rehabilitation centres on (08) 9291 3900 or (08) 9249 3434.

### About Healthy Wildlife

The 'Healthy Wildlife Healthy Lives' – A One Health project aims to educate the public about people's interaction with wildlife in urban areas, particularly how people and domestic animals spread diseases to wildlife, such as birds, quenda (bandicoots), native fish, bobtails and kangaroos. The project informs people about how to avoid harm to wildlife, create positive interactions and protect and conserve the environment. The aim is to keep wildlife healthy for a healthier world.

The project is a partnership between Eastern Metropolitan Regional Council and Murdoch University, supported by Lotterywest.

**VISIT:** [www.healthywildlife.com.au](http://www.healthywildlife.com.au)

