

# Australian prison provides rehab for inmates and animals

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Kangaroos, emus, wombats, snakes and cockatoos are just some of the native creatures being nursed back to health by inmates at a wildlife centre based in the John Morony Correctional Complex outside Sydney.

Officials say the scheme helps instil a sense of responsibility and develops life skills for offenders preparing for the outside world.

"Animals show that (love and respect) unconditionally, they don't judge, so over time they (inmates) form relationships with the [animals](#)," the wildlife centre's senior officer Ian Mitchell told AFP.

"It is a real positive impact and the animals can actually sometimes help people heal."

Selected inmates are given responsibility for a particular enclosure and are expected to feed and build shelters for the animals, while being taught how to care for their injuries or condition.

Some animals never leave as they would be vulnerable to predators having become accustomed to the enclosure.

But most are later released back into the wild, or found a home via the animal rescue organisation that first brought them there.



Officer Ian Mitchell handles an emu inside an enclosure at John Morony Correctional Complex Wildlife Centre outside Sydney.

One of the more unlikely cases the centre handled was a python that was seized in a drug raid, with criminals holding the reptile as a deterrent.

The snake had become addicted to meth after absorbing the narcotic through its skin and required treatment before it was released back into the wild.

"To have watched an animal rehabilitate from something like that, it's just another dynamic," Mitchell says.

Some former offenders who have left prison continue to work with wildlife, with one teaching people how to handle [venomous snakes](#).



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Surrounded by about a dozen squawking white cockatoos—known for their ability to mimic speech—one inmate said he had discovered "a lot of caring I didn't know I had" working with the animals.

Tasked with feeding the nocturnal [wildlife](#), like the possums and wombats, he added he hopes to continue to care for animals after his jail term ends.

"I'm going to miss this place," he said.

"Each corner you turn, you are greeted—in their way.

"The ones that can talk will say 'hello' but the other ones that can't talk, they will make a sign to say g'day."



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