

A BITTER-SWEET BEGINNING

by John K. Babb

I have bred and raised pleasure Tennessee Walking Horses, Miniature Sicilian Donkeys, Pygmy Goats, Llamas, and African Serval Cats for about seven years now but just within the past year purchased my first Bennett's Wallaby. I was extremely ignorant of the species but had decided I definitely had to have one. After a month or so of speaking with everyone I could and reading all the information available I built my enclosure and mailed a check for a female gray out of the pouch for two months. I received her by Delta-Dash and was simply thrilled from the first moment I saw her. Her name was to be Kally-Roo. The intelligence and affection she offered me was utterly surprising to someone like myself with no hands-on experience with these lovable animals. She stole my heart from the very first day and the chore of bottle-feeding wasn't a chore at all but a great source of enjoyment! The seller was extremely helpful at all times, day and night, with answers to any and all my questions which calmed my inexperienced nerves often. HEY! ONE ISN'T ENOUGH!

A second check was placed in the mail and so I was also the proud owner a young bottle-fed male named Grumpy-Roo. They shared a baby's play-pen with their own flannel pouches until they both were fully weaned and eating plenty of Happy-Hopper food along with apples and other fruits. During this time they both had the full run (or HOP) of the house for several hours each day. All was right in the world.

The day finally came when I decided to wean them from my-self and the house and place them in the enclosure I had built and was certain they would enjoy. By the way, the enclosure is 150 ft. long and 56 ft. wide and made of chain-link fence 8 ft. tall. I also ran a 3 ft. black mesh screen around the bottom of the entire enclosure to help them see the fence and to keep any predators or pests from seeing the wallaby world inside. The orchard grass and clover inside is still as tall as they are and provides plenty of grazing as well as all the hiding places they could possibly want. There are two of the 200 lbs. dog size Dogloos in the enclosure as well as two pyramid shaped hutches to keep their food and water covered. I have since noticed that in the tall grass they make beds identical to those the local deer would make and use the same ones regularly.

Now here is the bitter part of the story. The very first day I took the pair out to play it began as I expected. I let them out of their pouches and they looked around then would hop away a short distance then return to me then hop a further distance away. Before long they were enjoying the entire space with gusto with no running into the fence which I had feared. Then, when Grumpy-Roo was returning to me from the other end of the enclosure, he made a loud sound I really can't describe and began thrashing about on the ground as if he was a fish that had just been tossed onto a dry bank. I ran to him, as did Kally-Roo, and saw his hind right leg folded in half and laying on his body towards his head. I got him in his pouch gently and started to the vet's office. I called the vet. on the way from my cellular phone as well as everyone I could get on the phone whose number was in the Jumping Pouch magazine I grabbed on the way to the car. I am very appreciative to all who answered my calls for help with encouragement and support. However, the advice I received sent me in several different directions. I was told to simply put him to sleep and I was told to "Go for it! He can make it!" Well, I chose the latter.

Thank God, I made the right decision! Grumpy-Roo still HOPS today! The vet. had never done surgery on a wallaby before but is a very experienced and confident small animal veterinarian, for which I am tremendously thankful. He never hesitated and with the information I gave him from the Kitty Mallory book concerning medication dosages and the like he began treatment immediately. First a dose of valium was injected and a x-ray was performed. The break was in the center of the leg far away from the growth plates and joints. This, if one must break a leg, is the place to do it as it is a break with a hopeful prognosis using the implantation of a pin which is what was done. He put him out using a mask and the general anesthesia Isoflorane. This worked well. His assistant would turn the gas up and down at the vet's direction to keep the level of gas at the lowest level necessary. The vet. allowed me to watch the entire surgery and I even cut the pin which the assistant couldn't quite do. It made me feel better to help rather than just stand there helpless.

I took Grumpy home after he aroused from his sleep. He rested calmly in his pouch on the way home. I placed him in the play-pen with his food and water, where he was to stay for approx. six weeks. One week later the sutures were removed without event and three weeks later his first x-ray showed excellent improvement. Three weeks later the second x-ray showed no sign of the break and I was allowed to turn Grumpy back out in the enclosure with Kally where they are HOPPING today! This made Kally happy as well for the entire time Grumpy was kept in the play-pen she had slept underneath or beside the pen. Her affection for Grumpy surprised me as her affection for myself did in the beginning. Recalling the day Grumpy broke his leg and shrieked, I really can't tell you if Kally or I got to him first. I am certainly glad I made my enclosure large enough to accommodate several more of these guys comfortably because more there will be.

In closing, I would like to state that certainly there are injuries to all animals which call for humane euthanasia and not all stories have happy endings, but this one does. It was a tough decision and I am glad I made the right one. I am also glad for those in the Wallaby Industry who were so willing to advise and encourage. So much concern was truly unexpected, however, very much appreciated.

John K. Babb
Valley Stables & Exotic Alternative Livestock
Berea, KY

(606) 925-2242