



SanWild cared for Kaito until he was old enough to be released in the wild

Kaito – a special friend

The SanWild Wildlife Trust rescues
a young porcupine



Young Kaito when he arrived at the rehabilitation centre

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Working in wildlife rehabilitation is truly an honour and there is never a dull moment. Happiness and intense heartache is shared on an equal basis and over the years we have come to realise that there are so many misconceptions when it comes to certain species – especially those that we deem as the so-called 'problem animals'. Take Kaito for example – classified as a rodent one can only presume that this must be a pesky and problematic creature, but what a surprise we had!

In a pet shop

A good friend called from Johannesburg; she had just walked into a local pet shop and to her horror had found a number of indigenous wild animals for sale. In Gauteng many of these animals such as tree squirrels, suricates, banded and dwarf mongoose are not protected by law and may be sold as pets although it is very wrong and cruel. Most of the animals in question live in social groups and need their own kind to live a happy life. They do not want to be kept in 'safety' in a cage and do not want to be 'hugged and loved' by your children; they want their own friends and freedom.

On this occasion Sherryn found the most adorable baby porcupine in one of the cages with a For Sale sign and, despite knowing that some may say her purchase would fuel the trade in wild animals, she bought

Porcupines defend themselves against predators by raising their quills, stamping their feet and swinging their bodies with the quills raised in the direction of the threat

the young animal and took him to her house. She did this because she wanted to ensure that this young porcupine would not end up as a pet in someone's garden. Kaito would stand an excellent chance of being returned to the wild and needed to end up in the right hands.

A clever, friendly fellow

He arrived with us a day later. On a diet of milk, cereal, graded sweet potato and corn, Kaito thrived and grew rapidly. It was only when we worked with him that we realised the amazing intelligence that these rodents have.

He could recognise individual people and showed a clear dislike or pleasure at encountering certain people. He immediately realised when a new animal arrived at the centre and would

spend long periods of time visiting each enclosure where a new animal had arrived and watched intensely as if to get to know them.

He tolerated and made friends (so to speak) with some of the other animals and his bond with a hand-raised Grey Lourie (now also known as the Grey Go Away Bird) was quite amazing and almost impossible to believe. The two of them played a game of cat and mouse (catch me if you can) on numerous occasions and in the late afternoon Bushy (Grey Lourie) used to share a shady spot in our rehab centre with the porcupine – both of them lying side by side. Kaito eventually found a mate and was released successfully into the SanWild Wildlife Sanctuary where he from time to time, still passes by the rehab center with his newly acquired friends in tow. □



Kaito enjoyed the company of other animals, but Bushy the Grey Lourie (also known as the Grey Go Away Bird), soon became his best friend

The Cape Porcupine

Scientific name: *Hystrix africae australis*

Afrikaans: *Ystervark*

Life expectancy: 20 years

Food: Bullis, roots and fruit

Natural enemies: Caracal, lion, leopard and cheetah



Occurring commonly throughout South Africa, unfortunately many people regard porcupines as so-called problem animals. Locals hunt them for their meat and farmers have destroyed many porcupines quite indiscriminately.

Their distinctive appearance set them apart from other rodents and, despite popular belief, their quills cannot be ejected into a victim, neither are they barbed or poisonous. Porcupines will however defend themselves against predators by raising their quills, stamping their feet and swinging their bodies with the quills raised in the direction of the threat. Should a predator be stupid enough to engage the quills, their sharp points will lodge itself into flesh and pull out easily from the porcupines skin, becoming lodged into the predators body or face.

They shelter and breed in disused aardvark burrows, which are modified to their liking by digging. Chambers inside various burrows are multi-chambered to house an extended family group consisting of a monogamous breeding pair and their offspring of a number of years. Each group has their own distinctive territory. Porcupines are sexually active on a daily basis, but the female only conceives after living with her mate for at least 90 to 100 days. One or two offspring is produced after a gestation period of 93 to 94 days. The father is actively engaged in the raising of the young by escorting them on foraging excursions and protecting them from predators.

Over the last couple of years thousands of porcupines have sadly been deliberately killed to supply a growing demand in expensive interior decorating or jewelry shops. Quills are used to manufacture items like lamp shades, fashion accessories, wall decorations and tops of coffee tables to name a few. This new fashion trend needs to be opposed in the strongest way possible to ensure the protection of the porcupine. When any of the family members are killed, the entire group falls into disarray and it takes a long time for them to recover socially from this loss. Surely we can find it in our hearts to give them the protection and lives these very special rodents deserve?