

# Turtles nursed back to wild

## Rosanna Candler

TURTLES may appear resilient with their rock-like shells and strong webbed feet, but wildlife rehabilitation carer Ruth Haight says they are very fragile.

Having worked as a veterinary nurse and carer at Kanyana Wildlife Centre for 20 years, Mrs Haight said she found it impossible to give up caring for turtles when facing retirement two years ago.

She and her husband decided to expand the shed in the garden of their Kalamunda home into a custom turtle rehab clinic, taking in up to nine oblong (long-necked) turtles at a time.

"When they first arrive, most of the injured turtles are quite shell-shocked – so to speak," she said.

"They're wild and can become easily stressed, so it's always a challenge to nurse the intensive care patients back to health."

She said one of her special patients this month was Gobble, who earned his name for the speed at which he gobbled up his fish dinners.

"He came to me with a cracked shell which I've now repaired, and one day soon he'll be re-

leased back into the wild," she said.

"They are wonderful creatures, so inquisitive and intelligent. It is a joy to care for them."

With World Turtle Day just around the corner on May 23, Mrs Haight said people needed to look out for the threatened oblong turtle.

"The severity of the problem really hit home in 2011, when Blue Gum Lake in Mt Pleasant dried up and more than 100 turtles were left stranded," she said.

"With global warming and building development destroying their natural habitats, the problems are only going to get worse."

Mrs Haight said oblong turtles were fortunate to even make it to the hatchling stage, let alone become adults.

"The eggs are dug up by urban foxes and dogs," she said.

"Even if they do hatch, they have a long trek to the water, and the ravens sit in the trees and wait for them."

Mrs Haight is a co-author of the newly-released *Turtle Oblonga Rehabilitation Manual* and chair-secretary of the Turtle Oblonga Rescue & Rehabilitation Network.

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**Ruth Haight with one of her patients.**

Picture: Bruce Hunt

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