

Critical Care for Herbivores® is produced by Oxbow and imported into Australia by Specialised Animal Nutrition. It is available from vet clinics that have an interest in pocket pets. It is not directly available from ebay, which is where timothy hay and rabbit/guinea pig pellets can be purchased.

The reason that I have thought that Critical Care would assist possums in particular is that possums have the same type of gut as our rabbits/guinea pigs - ie caecal fermenters. Critical Care® contains finely ground hay. Hay is high in fibre and thus promotes appropriate development of normal caecal flora, unlike fruit. There are other ingredients in Critical Care, such as vitamins and pectins, that may also play a beneficial role in digestion. When it is fed, by mixing it with water, it is about the consistency of pap. It can be added to milk feeds, but is fed at a lower concentration so that the formula can still pass through a catheter-tip syringe.

We also need to remember that for the brushtail possum (*Trichosaurus vulpecula*), up to 30% of the natural diet may include grasses and weeds (dandelion, dock, milk thistle), so a supplement based on grasses is approaching the 'normal' diet for this species.

It is fantastic that Sydney Wildlife have taken up the challenge to try something to bring wildlife rehabilitation forward, rather than have us repeating the same old, same old for another 20 years! Particularly as they are trying to use a product designed for herbivore digestion and nutrition, rather than human infant over-the-counter treatments. Even better is the success that they appear to have had. Would Critical Care be good for macropods? That has been the experience in the US to date. As the macropod is a grass-eating species, it would appear appropriate. Particularly when you consider that young kangaroos encourage merycism in their mother to ingest stomach contents (ie grass from the stomach) at the time of transitioning onto pasture. In my personal observation, sick joeys appear to prefer Critical Care to a bottle of milk. So, yes, it would be appropriate for macropods and certainly for wombats (as other grass-eating animals) as well.

I have used it with sick koalas and have seen some incredible weight gains when fed with supplementary milk. Again, it makes more sense than feeding them mashed up pumpkin! Leaves and grass are reasonably similar in nutrient profiles. Ideally, blended leaf would be added to the mixture to provide a more natural nutrient profile.

Potential uses in marsupials include:

1. Give around caecal colonisation times in healthy orphan possums, and when macropods and wombat joeys are starting to mouth and chew solid foods.
2. Give to sick orphans to assist with 'normalising gut flora' and providing a source of easily digestible energy - makes more sense to their gut than nutrigel, for example! This may be used for a 1 – 2 week period and weaned out of their diet. It may be left as a food type that is offered, along with leaf, veges with Wombaroo High Protein supplement sprinkled on them.
3. Give to sick/injured adults to either supplement their energy intake or wean them back onto solid food from a short starve or milk supplementation.

Anne Fowler

BSc (Vet) (Hons), BVSc, MACVSc (Avian Health, Wildlife Health)