

You can't tell a wallaby by its moniker (or it's what's inside that counts)

By SANDRA ARMBRUSTER

Bob Mullins and Anne Lerchen are looking for a new name for their wallaby.

A wallaby — a native Australian animal — is like a downed kangaroo. But the name Wally doesn't seem appropriate now that he has become a mother.

"Well, Wally is all I could think of," said Anne's mother, Ruth. "What do you think about Walhelmina?"

Wally or, if you prefer, Walhelmina, adopted Westland last May.

"I got a good deal on it," said Mullins, ignoring the gender problem for the moment. "I went into the House of Pets on Ford Road in Garden City and it caught my eye."

"The owner is a friend of mine. He was going to trade it to a pet farm for a black bear. So I got it for the price of the bear," Mullins said. "He told me it was about 3 months old."

"We didn't know she was pregnant when we bought her," said Mullins.

The surprise came when Wally's mother, Miss Lerchen, was showing Wally to a group of neighborhood children. Like all curious kids, they peeked inside Wally's pouch.

A wallaby's pouch is sort of an enclosed front porch, where its young hang out until Mom says "Pack your bags."



Mom and the youngster are doing fine despite the confusion over gender and the surprise that followed. (Photo by Bill Bresler)

"Talk about having your mouth hang open," said Miss Lerchen. "When we found the baby, it was all pink with no hair, and it's eyes were shut."

"We had noticed that her pouch was getting larger," she added.

Mullins said that he has had an offer to buy back the wallaby with her youngster. He said that one estimate has placed the value of the pair at

two dogs, a cat, two tarantulas, a hermit crab and some tropical fish. Now Mullins is considering the addition of a couple of peacocks.

Wally is kept in a 4-by-4-by-12-foot cage which used to be home for Mullins' 8-foot lizard. The cage is insulated and heated to about 70 degrees with a space heater and heat lamp.

Wally, who is about 2 1/2 feet tall plus tail, romps in her cage and nibbles at a selection of hay, rabbit pellets, alfalfa, vitamins greens and bananas.

"They eat everything except meat," said Mullins. "They're like rabbits. You can litter train rabbits like cats, so when her baby is old enough, we're going to try to litter train it."

Wally is unaware of such amenities. Miss Lerchen said they used to wrap a diaper around the animal, with a hole cut out for the tail, when she was inside. Now Wally spends much of her free time hopping around the backyard with the family dogs instead of inside the house.

Together with her youngster, Wally weighs about 35 pounds, according to Mullins. The baby, also a female, is about eight inches tall plus tail. Wally is considered an exotic animal, Mullins adds, and requires no shots or license.

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