

Influencer Who Stole a Screaming Baby Wombat from Its Mom Leaves Australia After Facing Backlash

Sam Jones, who refers to herself as a "wildlife biologist and environmental scientist," has reportedly fled the country amid the ongoing criticism over the now-deleted clip

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A stock photo of a bare-nosed wombat. Photo: mastersky/Getty

- **U.S. influencer Sam Jones has left Australia after facing criticism over a now-deleted video she posted of herself taking a baby wombat from its mother**
- **"I can't wait for Australia to see the back of this individual, I don't expect she will return," Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke said, per the Associated Press**
- **The content creator previously referred to herself as a "wildlife biologist and environmental scientist" on her Instagram account**

An American influencer has left Australia after facing backlash over a video she posted of herself taking a screaming baby wombat from its mother.

On Friday, March 14, Sam Jones — who previously referred to herself as a "wildlife biologist and environmental scientist" on her Instagram account — fled the country after the since-deleted video showed her picking up the animal on the side of a dark road at night and running away with it, per footage shared by local news outlet 10 News First.

"There's never been a better day to be a baby wombat in Australia," Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke said, according to the Associated Press. Burke's office confirmed to PEOPLE in an email that Jones had voluntarily left Australia on Friday.

Burke had previously said earlier that day that the conditions of the social media user's visa were being reviewed. "I can't wait for Australia to see the back of this individual, I don't expect she will return," he said in a statement obtained by AP.

The country's Prime Minister, Anthony Albanese, called Jones' video an "outrage," insisting of wombats, "They are gentle, lovely creatures ... I suggest to this so-called influencer, maybe she should try some other Australian animals, maybe she should try a crocodile," according to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC).

"Take a baby crocodile from its mother and see how you go there," Albanese added, according to the outlet. "Take another animal that can actually fight back rather than stealing a baby wombat from its mother."

The animal appeared to be a common wombat, also known as a bare-nosed wombat, per AP.

In the video, a laughing Jones — who also uses the name Samantha Strable — carried the native Australian animal away as it was heard screeching for its mother. The mama wombat then ran across the street, seemingly in an attempt to protect its baby, per the 10 News First footage.

All the while, the influencer played to the camera as the person recording her narrated what was happening at the scene. "Look at the mother, it's chasing after her!" the cameraman said, while also laughing.

"I caught a baby wombat!" said Jones, who has nearly 92,000 followers on the social media site.

"OK mama's right there and she is pissed, let's let him go," she added, before walking across the road to release the baby, who was making distress noises while airborne.

The video received backlash from the public, who condemned her act after it was posted online. The content creator has since made her Instagram private and appears to have deactivated her TikTok (samstrays_somewhere) account.

Animals native to Australia are protected by law under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. Wildlife rescue organization Wires confirmed to news.com.au that Jones' act documented in the video was illegal.

Wildlife Vet Dr. Tania Bishop told the outlet that the joey in the clip looked "around eight months old" and noted that it's in its stage of life where it would be relying on its mom "at all times."

Dr. Bishop also told the site that the animal could have been injured due to the way the influencer was holding it.

"When she's running, it's not supported underneath, and wombats are incredibly solid, especially in their back end," she told news.com.au. "So there's every chance she could have fractured the upper humerus, or the top of the arms, or caused damage to the shoulders."

"You can see the joey swinging, but it's also hissing and crying out, which is a sign of extreme distress," Dr. Bishop added to the outlet.

The non-profit organization Wombat Rescue suggested the baby could have a skin disease, urging Jones to reveal where the video was filmed.

Charity founder, Yolandi Vermaak, said, "The baby has mange and it's a matter of time before it dies of mange, so it's important for us to find where this happened and to get this baby and its mom treated as soon as possible," adding that her "biggest concern" was that "we didn't actually see mom and baby getting reunited," per the AP.

Vermaak added to PEOPLE in an email, "Mange is deadly and causes incredible suffering."

"The sad reality is that we are frustrated with our hands tied, seeing this manged and sick baby wombat and not knowing where she is so we can treat her," Vermaak added.

In Australia, penalties for animal cruelty offenses vary in each jurisdiction, with fines reaching as high as \$235,600 for individuals and \$250,000 for corporations. Jail time can be up to seven years.