



FROM SOME OF OUR 'WILDLIFE AFFECTED BY FIRES' RECIPIENTS

The scale and severity of Australia's recent bushfires, which swept through the country from December 2019 to mid-March 2020, tested the strength and resources of many wildlife rescue groups across Australia. The extent of native wildlife that lost their lives and the amount of wildlife habitat that was destroyed was utterly disheartening. The total amount of land affected across the country reached more than ten million hectares and it was estimated that over 1.25 billion native wildlife lost their lives. In the wake of the bushfires, many wildlife rescue groups issued public pleas for financial support and donated goods to help them meet the needs of native wildlife that were suffering from the impact of these fires. As a result, the Society established an initiative to assist nine wildlife rescue groups across Australia that were treating bushfire-affected wildlife. These groups worked around the clock to rescue and rehabilitate what wildlife was remaining and some of their stories are shared below. This is one traumatic moment in history that will never be forgotten and will leave a long-term impact on many individuals for years to come.

Following the Needs of the Wombat: Battling on for Australia's Wildlife Through the Aftermath of the Local Bushfires

John Creighton - Wombat Care Bundanoon

The suffering and devastating effects of mange on Australia's native wildlife prompted John Creighton, Wombat Care Bundanoon (WCB) founder, to place all his efforts and energy exclusively into addressing mange in the Southern Highlands region of New South Wales. The change in direction was a long, educational, challenging and complex journey, which brought with it many lessons and new knowledge. John was studying and tracking wombats in the wild and treating them for mange. While doing so, John gained a greater understanding of the local wildlife and the places where many of the wombats

dwelled. It also brought John real insight into the devastating effects of the ongoing drought. Many dams and streams had dried up and other water sources ceased to exist.

As drought and mange tightened its grip and bushfires ravaged throughout the region, it became apparent that action was called for and that it needed to happen quickly and with the greatest impact. WCB began a difficult process of supplementary feeding and watering in all the areas where wildlife was present. Feed by the trailer-load and water stations were delivered and set up in these spots. WCB put out meadow hay

and some 'Extra Cool' pellets as well as fruit for the possums. All was consumed within days and so they doubled the delivery. The job became so big, and the need so great, that in late December WCB put out a plea to the local community for support. The response was enormous. Parents and children came together to gather feed, united in the desire to do something positive for Australia's wildlife. WCB offered wildlife feed at no cost and asked residents to distribute the feed to places where they knew wildlife were struggling. By early January 2020, the supplementary feed station idea was gaining momentum and animal lives were being saved.



John Creighton installing a water station tube in a remote bushfire-affected region to assist the wildlife in re-establishing itself.



A resident wombat emerging from the burnt forest seeking food.

Sadly, these efforts were abruptly interrupted by the Morton bushfire that swept through the region soon afterwards. The Southern Highlands towns of Bundanoon, Penrose and Wingello came into direct contact with the force of the fire that tore through so much dry drought-affected bushland. The fire had been threatening and approaching for weeks but it was around midnight on 5th January that it arrived. Many homes were lost, lives were disrupted and the landscape of Morton National Park was drastically reduced to large areas of burnt bushland. The fire swept through wide kilometres of land leaving very little alive in its wake.

As the sun rose upon the devastated landscape, John loaded up his truck and trailer with cages, blankets and first aid supplies, not quite knowing what to expect or what he would encounter. John drove as small fires were still burning in isolation and smoke filled the air. He knew the area very well after years of tracking and regularly treating manged wombats that lived in the area. He walked through the local forests many times and was very familiar with the lay of the land, where many of the wombat burrows were and where the possums and other animals were most plentiful. However, what he witnessed was unlike anything he had seen before. All that was once thick verdant bushland with multi-layered shrubs, bushes and trees, had been devastated and was nearly all gone. The ground was grey with ash, still warm and smouldering, and only the blackened remains of the trees remained. Land that he once knew so well was now unrecognisable, laid bare of all life, or so it seemed. As John and the volunteers walked through this now strangely quiet and foreign landscape, it became clear the magnitude of the loss that had been suffered. The entire area, for as far as the eye could see, was blackened and bare. There were no birds to be heard or possums to be seen.

As the days progressed, and as they walked through the area, they saw several wombats quietly sitting at the entrance of their burrows. They saw an echidna and a goanna too. Some animals had survived and WCB resolved then and there to do their best to ensure their ongoing survival. To sustain the life that remained, supplementary feeding would be needed, as would a reliable supply of water. The introduction of the water station tubes was a real lifesaver. Each tube holds nine litres of water. The

tubes are cheap and easy to produce and are greatly effective in getting water to remote locations and allowing it to remain clean and available for as long as possible. WCB quickly made over 60 of these water stations and, with another 50 donated, they filled the fire-fields with desperately needed water and feed to sustain life and assist the wildlife in re-establishing itself.

Once again, the local community stepped up and took on the challenge to keep Australia's wildlife survivors fed and provided with water through the most difficult of times. Word spread and soon they had the help of over 160 volunteers. These volunteers, from far and wide, assisted by doing their bit, watching over their chosen fire-affected area and taking ownership of their water and food stations by monitoring and maintaining them. These locations were all mapped and all feed was supplied to volunteers at no cost. WCB quickly saw positive results happening for the wildlife; feed and water were being consumed and the wildlife was able to sustain themselves whilst the landscape healed. Once again, people were enabled and empowered to bring real and lasting change to the wildlife that they love and so deeply appreciate.

It has been six months since the Morton bushfire swept through the region and what was once bare is now regenerating. However, with winter approaching, there is little chance for much further growth in these areas. WCB feed drops continue three times a week and are well consumed at each visit. These fire-fields that spread across kilometres are still in great need of support and attention. In many locations, WCB food drops are the only feed these animals will have to survive. Providing food and water is such a simple solution and WCB is so happy to be able to provide this support to the survivors. WCB will continue to care for Australia's bushfire-affected wildlife throughout winter and into spring, to ensure their survival.

Key outcome and impact of the funding provided: Funds provided by the Society were allocated to supplementary feed and water stations. Funding will also assist Wombat Care Bundanoon to continue supplementary feeding throughout winter and will contribute towards their important work to protect Australia's wombats.



John Creighton walking through the burnt forest absorbing the impact of the fires.



Dispersing carrots and hay in the fire fields for local wildlife.



Distributing free feed to residents of the Southern Highlands.

The Development of a New Wildlife Hospital as a Result of the Devastating Bushfires

Gayle Chappell - Hepburn Wildlife Shelter

Hepburn Wildlife Shelter, founded in 2005, is a 24-hour, self-funded volunteer wildlife rescue and treatment centre, established to assist and care for injured, orphaned, sick and distressed wildlife in and around the forested shire of Hepburn in central Victoria. The shelter is an incorporated non-profit association run by the founders, Gayle Chappell and Jon Rowdon, from their home just outside Daylesford in the Wombat Forest.

In response to Australia's bushfires, Hepburn Wildlife Shelter decided to establish a new wildlife hospital – Central Victoria Wildlife Hospital. Unlike the eastern side of Melbourne, which has access to the wonderful facilities at Healesville Sanctuary, the region has no dedicated wildlife treatment centre or facility that can cater for wildlife disasters or provide professional training for wildlife carers. The new wildlife hospital will build on and significantly expand the work of Hepburn Wildlife Shelter,

by establishing better facilities for wildlife care in the central Victoria region and western Victoria. A triage and rehabilitation centre will be established, particularly for open wounds and nerve injuries (mostly kangaroos), adult injured wombats, and a burns centre for treating wildlife affected by any regional bushfires. It will include onsite facilities that will allow the assessment and response to injuries immediately and with greater effectiveness. The hospital will also act as a wildlife ambulance base and a 24-hour depot for injured wildlife.

The hospital is also destined to become a research and teaching centre. It will provide specialist care and rehabilitation on a regional basis where vets, vet nurses and volunteer wildlife carers can gain essential hands-on experience. The hospital will have dedicated facilities and well-trained people to perform necropsies, blood sampling and faecal floats. While the new wildlife hospital does not replace the need for wildlife

shelters, it will provide an added resource for them and the wildlife that they care for. It will also nurture and expand the wildlife rescue community that already exists and provide more volunteer and community involvement opportunities. The 24-hour aspect also means that wildlife rescuers can immediately take injured animals for treatment, rather than sit by the side of the road with the animal in their car, making multiple calls to shelters to find a placement for them, which will reduce stress for both the animal and the rescuer. The new wildlife hospital is to be completed during the 2020/2021 summer.

Key outcome and impact of the funding provided: Funding from the Society will go towards the development of the new wildlife hospital and will assist Gayle Chappell and Jon Rowdon to continue their important work to save Australia's precious native wildlife for future generations.



Sarah Dalby, Assistant Manager, with a resident koala.

Providing Wildlife With Refuge and Relief from the Frequency and Intensity of Australia's Bushfires

Dr Rachel Westcott - South Australian Veterinary Emergency Management Inc.

South Australian Veterinary Emergency Management Inc. (SAVEM) was founded in 2009 and has been part of the State Emergency Management Plan since 2010. A decade of effective response has built SAVEM's reputation and credibility with Tier 1 Emergency Services such as the Country Fire Service and South Australia Police. This fire season, SAVEM was active on the fire ground since 20 December 2019 at the Cudlee Creek (Adelaide Hills; 25,000 hectares) and the Ravine (Kangaroo Island; 200,000 hectares) fires. SAVEM was quickly activated for the Cudlee Creek fire five days before Christmas.

Their tasks over the first few days of the fire largely involved 'pet' livestock. However, by day four of the response, in persistently hot weather, wildlife began to emerge, seeking water and food and, as a result, their focus shifted to assessment and triage of kangaroos and koalas, with the occasional possum, bird or reptile. Many kangaroos suffered severe hind limb burns and were euthanised on animal welfare grounds. Koalas presented in three main groups: 1. Those with minor burns to face or to two limbs were able to be sent into care with a competent licensed carer after veterinary assessment and initial treatment; 2. Those requiring



Rescue of 'Charlie' the koala at the Cudlee Creek fire, with the assistance of Charlie the cherry-picker operator. SAVEM volunteers, Nurse Belinda (L) and Dr Rachel (R). There were very few unburnt food trees for Charlie nearby. Charlie had very minor burns on two feet and was well enough not to need hospitalisation; instead, he was able to be rehabilitated by a licensed koala carer. He made a full recovery.

hospitalisation were given veterinary first aid and transported to the nearby Cleland Wildlife Park into the care of senior veterinarian, Dr Ian Hough; and 3. Those triaged as being too badly injured and with poor prognosis were euthanised.

SAVEM's professional experience over ten years has taught them that triage must be rigorous. The highest standards of animal welfare must be maintained and there is no benefit in keeping and treating a badly injured wild animal in a hospital, only to find that euthanasia is required after the animal has endured several weeks of captivity and frequent anaesthesia and handling. Another important consideration is that South Australian koalas often succumb to renal disease following stress – especially the stress of hospitalisation.

The Kangaroo Island fires began at the same time as Cudlee Creek, however, escalated rapidly when a south-westerly change with dry lightning caused the fire to spread catastrophically. Two-thirds of the island (which is about 150 kilometres long and 60 kilometres wide; area 4,500 square kilometres) burned out of control for 22 days. Vast numbers of livestock were lost or were euthanised by farmers or Primary Industries veterinarians. Wildlife losses were shocking – early estimates ranged from between 50 and 70 percent lost.



Operation teams working from SAVEM's inflatable six x nine metre air shelter triage and treatment center. SAVEM volunteers in red overalls are Dr Peter and Dr Sue.



'Simon's' rescue team: SAVEM volunteers L to R: koala carer Sally, Dr Peter and Capt. Garnett, Joint Task Force (Army) veterinarian.



'Simon' the koala, rescued on Kangaroo Island. He had very minor injuries and was soon able to be released in unburnt habitat near Parndana on KI. Simon was found by a fire crew on the highway roadside between Kingscote and Parndana. He was brought into the care of the SAVEM team, who assessed and treated him for two weeks, and was released into an approved release site in the middle of the island near Parndana.

SAVEM's first response team was on the ground on 4 January, and teams were rotated through the fire ground over the next six weeks. Teams working from SAVEM's inflatable six by nine metre air shelter triage and treatment centre received admissions of many different wildlife species, though predominantly koalas. Other agencies working from their centre alongside SAVEM included Kangaroo Island vets, Army (Joint Task Force), Zoos SA, RSPCA and Department of Environment. The world's media flocked to Kangaroo Island and the SAVEM 'tent' as it is affectionately known. The second half of SAVEM's Kangaroo Island deployment involved revisiting sites where injured animals had been seen and relocating some if the food was scarce. In addition, an important part of the fieldwork included establishing connections with local people who were able to assist them to locate injured wildlife, often observed by fencing, utility or arborist teams.

During the sixth week, SAVEM spotted a koala sitting in the middle of a burnt paddock, surrounded by burnt vegetation. Their first thought was the animal would be at least emaciated if not burnt. As they approached him, a large male, he bounded across the paddock to a tree near a dam, which he quickly climbed. On closer examination, he was not injured and was in very good body condition. They were delighted and amazed and theorised as to how this animal had survived so well. This was their hypothesis:

- The tree he was in was adjacent to a well-filled dam in the middle of a bare paddock, surrounded by burnt large trees varying between 50 to 200 metres away;
- At the time of the fire, the tree's foliage was well loaded with water from the dam;
- The tree was scorched but not badly burnt;
- New leaf was shooting after good rain two weeks prior and the nearby water source filled;
- The koala could have survived on desiccated leaf given an adjacent drinking water source, which was clean; and
- Now with green leaf available he was in a very good place.

The 2019/2020 fire season has been very confronting, and wildlife recovery will be ongoing for some time on both firegrounds.

Key outcome and impact of the funding provided:

Funding from the Society assisted SAVEM to treat and rehabilitate bushfire-affected wildlife via the use of funding medical supplies. In SAVEM's 50+ day summer deployment, the field teams and hospital activities involved the expenditure of a little above \$160,000 in consumables.

Shocking Photos Reveal the Devastating Impacts of the Bushfires at Kuark Forest, East Gippsland

Chris Schuringa – Goongerah Environment Centre Office

After a five-year-long community campaign, the iconic Kuark forest in East Gippsland was finally protected by the Victorian government, partly in 2017, then expanded in 2019. Tragically, Kuark was severely impacted by this summer's horrific bushfires. Kuark forest was one of the most biodiverse forests in Victoria, rich in wildlife, rare rainforest and old-growth forests. After months of wondering with hope and fear of how Kuark had been impacted by the fires, Tasmanian nature photographer Rob Blakers and Goongerah Environment Centre Office (GECO) campaigners returned to the area to document the devastation. Sadly, the scale and intensity of the destruction wrought by the fires was profoundly devastating. Unfortunately, all of Mount Kuark was severely burnt, with extensive stands of fire-sensitive warm and cool temperate rainforest destroyed. The old-growth rainforest areas will take centuries to recover and with climate change fuelled fires more likely to occur in the coming decades, it is unlikely these rainforests will ever recover.

Kuark was identified by the Victorian government as making one of the highest contributions to biodiversity values in the state, according to the Environment Department's *Nature Print* data set maps. Kuark forest was a flagship area for biodiversity conservation. Its rainforests provided a rare window of insight into what Australia's forests looked like millions of years ago. The forests of Kuark were once filled with birdsong. Now the silence is deafening, and the grief overwhelming. It is hard to imagine that the forests of Kuark will ever be the same. But there are still very important forests in East Gippsland that did not burn and are threatened by logging. These forests need urgent protection.

It is hard to reconcile with the scale and extent of impacts from the bushfires. Initial assessments of bushfire impacts have been detailed in a Victorian government report. According to the report:

- Over 40 percent of Victoria's sooty owl habitat is within the burnt zone;



Greens Road, slopes of Mount Kuark to the right.

- Over 25 percent of Victoria's greater glider habitat is within the burnt zone;
- 70 percent of Victoria's warm temperate rainforest is within the burnt zone;
- 30 percent of Victoria's cool temperate rainforests are within the burnt zone; and
- 100 percent of the habitat for the East Gippsland galaxias (*Galaxias aequipinnis*) is within the burnt

zone, this critically endangered species of fish is found nowhere else on earth, other than the Kuark forest.

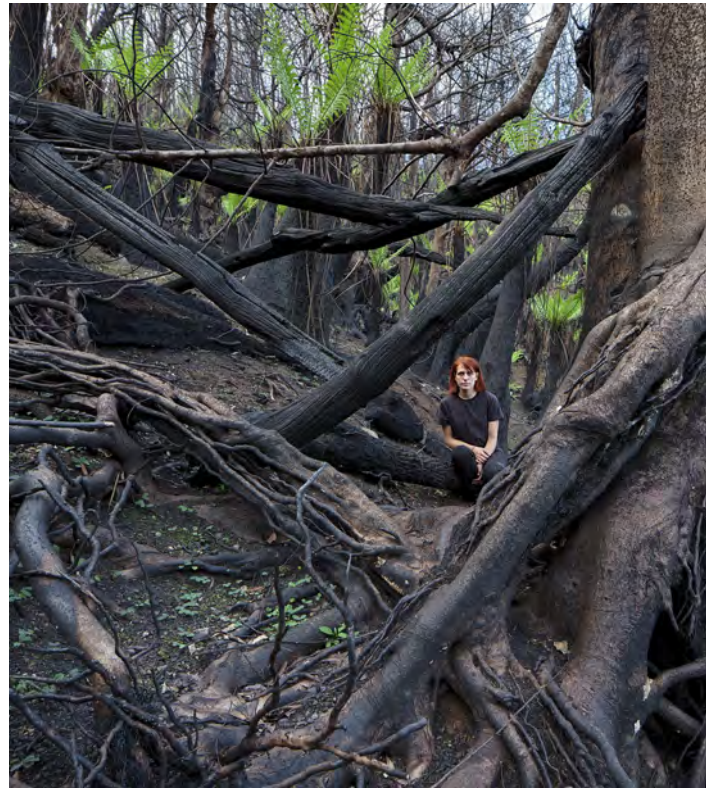
In November 2019, the Victorian Labor government announced protection for 96,000 hectares of forest across Victoria, with 48,500 in East Gippsland. These forests were designated as 'Immediate Protection Areas (IPAs)' and were part of a forestry package that attempted to address Victoria's dwindling timber resources supply



Old-growth forests on Mount Kuark, incinerated.



Ancient old-growth tree, Mount Kuark.



Burnt sassafras in what was cool temperate rainforest, Kuark.



Old-growth forest, Mount Kuark.

crisis with a \$120 million-dollar industry assistance package, a stepping down of native timber volumes from 2024 and a complete end of native forest logging by 2030.

The IPAs were a key component of the *Greater Glider Action Statement* that was released as part of the government forests package. The IPAs are supposed to provide habitat for the glider while logging in unprotected areas occurs. However, the action statement weakened existing protections for the greater glider in East Gippsland and, according to an analysis of government data regarding the fire extent, over 90 percent of the forests in the IPAs in East Gippsland have burnt, including Kuark.

Laws must function to protect the glider, not continue to allow logging in key unburnt areas of habitat where greater gliders are found. The protections in the government's plan are based on landscape protections that fail to protect the most important hot spot areas for greater gliders and will allow logging in areas where these animals are found. Logging in East Gippsland has been temporarily suspended, but the Victorian government must bring forward their native forest transition plan for workers and protect precious unburnt areas, so wildlife and ecosystems have a chance to recover.

We will not see the recovery of some fire-affected forests in our lifetime. But, the government can take immediate action to protect unburnt forests and wildlife. They protected Kuark after years of dedicated community campaigning. Now they must take action to protect what remains. Given the extensive impacts of the fires, the government must rule out logging in unburnt forests and so-called 'salvage logging' in burnt areas to ensure wildlife and forests can recover.

Key outcome and impact of the funding provided: Funding from the Society assisted Goongerah Environment Centre Office (GECO) campaigners to return to Kuark forest to document the devastation caused by the bushfires, which will assist with their ongoing campaigns to protect Victoria's biodiverse forests and wildlife habitats.

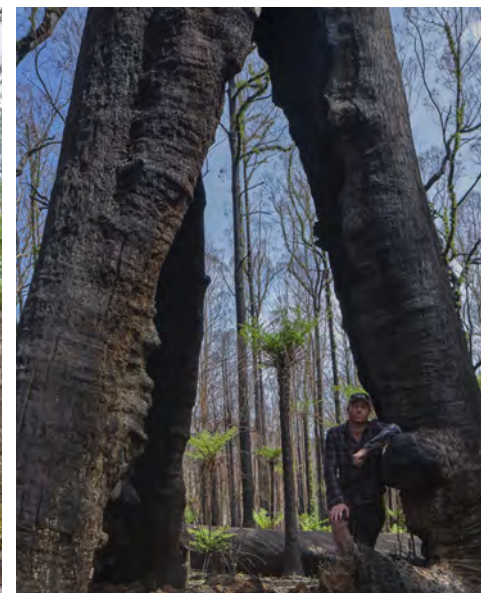
The Society would like to thank everyone who contributed to the initiative. We are extremely grateful for your generosity and support.



Ancient mountain grey gum, burnt at Larissa Lane.



Ancient rainforest gullies incinerated, Larissa Lane.



Logging was halted in Kuark forest by a legal injunction and the forest later protected.