



Bushfire Wildlife Heroes: Sarah

It's easy to think that a bushfire crisis is over once the flames are out, but in reality thousands of surviving animals are still at risk of starvation.

Sarah is a forest campaigner whose determination to help surviving wildlife turned into an enormous support feeding program that spanned hundreds of kilometres and saved countless lives.

Tell us about why you decided to start feeding wildlife after the bushfires?

"I have a background in forest conservation. I'd just spent 6 weeks writing a report about how our Greater Gliders have lost a huge proportion of their habitat to logging when the fires started."

"I lived in one of the worst hit towns in Gippsland, up in the hills in a little wooden cabin that miraculously survived, but everything around was burnt and there was nothing for wildlife to eat. So the first thing I did was get pellets (special food for large marsupials) for the property I was on."

"I was trying to figure out what local groups were feeding wildlife, but everyone I got in touch with was waiting for DELWP to tell them when they were allowed, which never happened, so I'm really glad we didn't wait for that."

"Someone had to do something, so I emailed all my neighbours saying if you need any food for wildlife I can deliver it. 13 people got involved straight away. I went on Facebook asking for donations to buy food, and people around East Gippsland got in touch wanting to help out. We contacted Wildlife Victoria and you set us up an account at the local Grain Store to buy all the food we needed, then we knew we could really put the word out."

"We started by posting on Facebook asking people if they had or were next to burned land, and offering to deliver food. People had so many questions about what to feed the animals, and were feeding them the wrong stuff, so we had a fact sheet made up with Wildlife Victoria for people to use as a guide."



Sarah & volunteers delivered food to starving wildlife all over Victoria

"We set up hubs and that really helped to decentralise and get more people involved. We ended up with about 10 properties that acted as a hub for people to pick up food and share advice as well. Eventually we started setting up feeding stations around forests too."

"We were travelling an hour or two to drop off food. Then, people further out started meeting us, and they would travel hours further, so we covered a huge area of Gippsland."

How did you decide which species to feed?

"At first we focused on the ones that were easiest to explain to people, so pellets and hay for large marsupials like wallabies, wombats and kangaroos, but some people were feeding possums and birds around their house and were asking for specific food so we made sure they got that too."

What were the biggest challenges?

"It was psychologically difficult thinking about how much forest was out there, and that so many animals were in trouble, but also so good to just be able to do something. I think it saved my mental health!"

"It's just so stressful living in a firezone, you're just surviving and trying to be OK, the smoke makes you feel sick, and even when the grass and everything starts growing back it feels different to how it did before. When the smoke got too much, at least I could go inside: those poor animals were still out there."

"All the people wanting to get involved was tricky, we even had people internationally wanting to help, but we couldn't send a bunch of people who've never been to Australia, out into the forest. It felt sad to not be able to take advantage of all the enthusiasm and generosity. Eventually Friends of the Earth helped us make webpages to find ways to help people get involved."

Was there anything that surprised you?

"It was amazing how long people hung in there. It's not like we just chucked food out once: we were feeding for more than two months before the rain came. Even after grass started growing back, people were still feeding specific animals in some areas. Some of these people had lost homes in the fires themselves. The fire danger continued for weeks so people were having to evacuate their house, go back, and then leave again, but they were still so committed to the animals."

Can you tell Wildlife Victoria's supporters how their donations helped your work?

"It totally changed what we could do. Instead of having to spend our time begging for money, we could spend all of our time feeding wildlife, and teaching other people how to feed wildlife, exponentially increasing how much food we could get out there."

"Knowing we had access to an unlimited amount of food was really motivating to go as far and distribute as much food as we could. If we'd had a limited supply we'd have been constantly worried about running out."

A message from the CEO

We were warned to expect a horror bushfire season this summer, but the first few months of 2020 were beyond anything we could ever possibly have been prepared for – and that was before the Coronavirus disrupted the world as we know it.

Houses and communities went up in flames, 34 people were killed and, by conservative estimates, at least a billion of our unique Australian animals perished. Many of them were critically endangered species that may never fully recover. In Victoria alone, more than 1.5 million hectares were destroyed, mostly forest.

It has been a hectic few months since.

Images of suffering wildlife broke hearts around the world, and the outpouring of generosity and concern was truly humbling.

In the first 6 days of January we received over 3,000 volunteer applications from people wanting to help, even offering to fly in from the other side of the world. Hundreds of people called us every day, many in tears, with offers to donate knitted pouches and medical supplies. Celebrities contacted us to see how they could lend their names to help. Businesses, individuals and community groups donated money, created amazing artworks, held events, raised funds, raised awareness and sent messages of support from all over the world.

Our first priority has been getting support to the wildlife shelters and foster carers in the firezones, especially those that lost some or all of their facilities, so they could continue to care for all the animals that needed them. But we also know that recovery from a disaster like this requires a long term commitment: wildlife that escaped the flames will need our continued support for many, many months until their habitat regenerates.

I was invited by the Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning (DELWP) to fly over the firezones in late February to see the extent of the damage. It was shocking to see vast expanses of forest gone, burned to bare earth and black sticks. Rivers ran black with ash and topsoil. But at the same time, I could already see signs of recovery: black trees sprouting leaves, grass returning and stretches of forest inexplicably spared, creating safe havens for surviving wildlife.

Australia's wildlife has been in serious trouble for some time. Even before the fires we had the highest loss of biodiversity, and the second highest mammal extinction rate in the whole world. But with world-wide attention comes hope for their future, and never before have we seen so much interest in the plight of Australia's wildlife.

There's still a long road to recovery ahead, but thanks to you, and your generosity, we will be there for Victoria's wildlife, and the people who rescue and rehabilitate them, for as long as it takes.

Thank you for caring, for acting, for helping to make a lifesaving difference to our precious wildlife.

Best wishes,



Dr Megan Davidson,
CEO



Megan visits wildlife carer
Bev at her shelter in East Gippsland





This koala mum and joey were very lucky to survive the fires

How Bushfire Appeal donations have helped

While our first priority has been getting wildlife shelters and carers affected by bushfires the financial support they needed to rebuild and care for animals, we are also keenly aware of the need to support projects that will contribute to the longer term recovery of Victoria's wildlife.

Bushfire appeal donations are:

- Financially supporting wildlife shelters and carers to rebuild what they have lost
- Financially supporting wildlife shelters to care for animals rescued or evacuated from bushfire regions
- Financially supporting local wildlife rescue groups to rescue and support feed starving animals in areas where natural habitat has been destroyed
- Equipping wildlife triage vans & facilities around the state, including Wildlife Victoria's own triage van
- Supporting flying-fox carers to care for record numbers of orphans after their parents were killed in extreme heat

events this year. These animals are a threatened species and our long-range forest pollinators, so we need all of them to regenerate the forests that have been destroyed in the fires

- Partnering with local habitat regeneration groups to ensure rehabilitated animals have somewhere to return to when they are ready to be released.
- Providing grants for wildlife shelters to:
 - Mitigate risks (to the wildlife in care) of fire, flood, drought, storm or extreme heat
 - Increase their capacity to care for sick, injured and orphaned wildlife
 - Improve the quality of care for sick, injured and orphaned wildlife
 - Improve their capacity to attract, train and equip shelter volunteers



Wildlife Victoria's triage trailer

Wildlife Victoria's Triage Trailer

Wildlife Victoria's triage trailer was purchased after the 2009 bushfires, but had not had a lot of use in recent years so the first thing we did was get it back up and running, and stocked with new veterinarian grade equipment so that we could get it out to bushfire affected areas where triage facilities were lacking.

The triage trailer has since also been used to support Grey-headed Flying-fox rescuers and vets at extreme heat events throughout the summer, which are occurring at an increasing rate, and enabled rescuers to save hundreds of this incredible species that is so vital to ecosystem recovery.

We are now seeking a corporate or philanthropic sponsor interested in helping us to keep the triage trailer on the road all year round to support rescuers, vets and triage teams at major wildlife emergencies and events. If you, or your company is interested please get in touch.

Supporting Wildlife Shelters & Carers

Thanks to your support, we have been able to assist over 30 wildlife shelters, and counting. Here are just a few of their stories.

Wallabia Wildlife Shelter

Wallabia wildlife shelter was in the direct path of the bushfires. Shelter owners Joe and Rena not only lost their enclosures, sheds and facilities: they also lost their home. Fortunately, they were able to evacuate all of the animals in their care ahead of the flames and they and all of the animals survived.

Thanks to bushfire appeal donations, we were able to give Joe and Rena immediate financial assistance to get back on their feet and start rebuilding what they'd lost. Amazingly, this dedicated couple continued to care for all of their orphans while living in a tent for those first few weeks.

As you can see, the orphans have been helping out with the rebuilding work too!



A young koala joey in his new outdoor enclosure

Extra help for koala carers

With hundreds of Aussie species, all with very different needs, wildlife carers often specialise in just one or two species. There are only a handful of highly experienced koala carers in the state, so making sure they have adequate facilities to care for them is essential for the future of this species.

Most Victorian koala shelters were not directly in the path of the bushfires, but thanks to bushfire appeal donations, we were able to help out with new koala enclosures so they could care for the koalas affected by this year's fires, and even more koalas in the future.

The koala joey pictured here in his new outdoor enclosures is actually a drought survivor. A koala's diet consists solely of very specific varieties of eucalyptus leaves, but after years of drought, the leaves contain less moisture and some mother koalas have been unable to produce enough milk to feed their joeys. This little one had been abandoned and spent 3 days on the ground alone before rescuers found him.

Saving our forest pollinators

It wasn't just the bushfires that devastated our wildlife this year: Grey-headed Flying-foxes were horribly affected by the extreme heat events throughout the summer. In one colony more than 4,500 animals died of heat stress in a single day, despite rescuers' best efforts to save them. 300 orphans were rescued, but needed round-the-clock care until they were old enough for release, stretching flying fox carer resources to the absolute limit: one carer had over 20 babies, all needing bottle feeds!

Grey-headed Flying-foxes are a threatened species and vitally important to Victoria's ecosystems: they're our native forest pollinators, so we need them to help regenerate the forests destroyed by the fires.

Pictured is flying fox foster carer Lynne, who is one of over a dozen flying fox carers that we were able to assist with the costs of caring for orphans. Lynne is pictured with some of the new water sprayers that were also purchased with bushfire donations. These water sprayers saved the lives of hundreds of flying foxes this summer alone by helping rescuers to cool distressed animals down before they became too exhausted.



300 flying fox pups were orphaned in the first summer heatwave



Photo: Gimesy Douglas

Rena with surviving joeys in their burned out enclosures

Below: Joe and kangaroo joey survey what's left of their shelter after the fire



Photo: Gimesy Douglas



Wildlife Tips & Advice: When to stop support feeding wildlife

We don't usually recommend feeding wildlife as becoming reliant on humans can often do more harm than good. However, with the scale of this year's bushfire crisis and alarming reports of starving animals we put out urgent calls to the public asking them to help out by temporarily support feeding wildlife in their area that had lost their habitat and food sources.

So how do you know when it's time to stop?

Know the signs

Once significant vegetation has returned, it's time to think about slowing and eventually stopping your support feeding activities.

Signs that it's time to reduce food supply:

- a reliable source of green grass or ground cover is available for native browsers such as wombats, kangaroos and wallabies

- there is some canopy cover or new growth on trees
- a seasonal source of nectar and fruit is available for nectar feeders such as possums, flying foxes and gliders
- foraging native animals are active at times you would usually expect to see them.

Signs that you can reduce water supply:

- a reliable source of water has been running in creeks and rivers for at least a month
- dams are at least 20% full
- seasonal flowers or fruit are available for nectar feeders as a source of moisture.

How to reduce your support feeding

It's best to reduce the amount of food slowly, rather than stopping abruptly.



A surviving kangaroo enjoys some fresh hay

Animals that are a little hungry will then start to seek out more natural food sources. Aim to cut down the amount you're feeding over a couple of weeks.

We always recommend putting water out for wildlife in summer, regardless of whether there has been a bushfire, so this is something you may wish to continue to provide all year round. However, if that's not possible, you should reduce the water you're supplying gradually over a month or so. If you do continue to provide water, it is important that you keep all water sources clean to prevent the spread of disease between animals.

Please make sure you remove any leftover equipment from your feeding activities – the last thing we need are abandoned plastic food or water stations littering our forests.

We recommend leaving water out for wildlife all year round





Fundraisers of all ages and backgrounds gave their time and energy to help wildlife

Taliban persecution in Afghanistan, the association raised tens of thousands of dollars for several bushfire relief charities, including Wildlife Victoria, from their members, many of whom are financially struggling themselves. They've even been spending their weekends helping farmers to repair fire damage to their properties.

When we asked why they had done so much to support others when they had so many genuine needs of their own, they said they wanted to give back to the Australian community to show how grateful they are to be here, where they and their children will be safe.

Fundraiser Spotlight: Close the Loop

You may have noticed some Simply Cups disposable coffee cup recycling stations popping up around the state in recent years: in response to the bushfires, Closed Loop pledged 1c for every cup recycled to wildlife causes. In just two months they saved more than 1.5 million coffee cups from landfill - and raised over \$15,000 in the process!

Thank you fundraisers!

Since January, over 700 individuals and companies around the world have taken the time to raise funds to assist our bushfire-affected wildlife. We have been amazed by the creativity, passion and commitment to helping wildlife and we want to thank every single fundraiser for all of their hard work, and all of the supporters who made their efforts a success.

We wish we could mention you all here, but we simply don't have enough space! Some notable mentions go out to:

- Madman/Sony Entertainment's Anime community, who raised over \$190,000!
- Essendon Football Club Skipper Dyson Heppell who publicly shaved his distinctive dreadlocks
- Primary school aged brother and sister duo Zac & Tilly who set up a lemonade stand - and raised \$2,200! (They still haven't revealed their secret recipe, but it must have been pretty good!)
- Talented Aussie musicians, their managers & promoters who put on benefit gigs and auctioned off money-can't-buy experiences
- Melbourne band King Gizzard and the Lizard Wizard who donated all proceeds from their Live in Paris album release
- Gippsland duo Harmony who wrote and produced their song 'Lights' about the bushfires, and donated proceeds to Wildlife Victoria

- The Australian community in Mexico, who put on quite the shindig at the embassy in Mexico City
- All of the schools whose students held every fundraising event imaginable, from bake sales to 24-hour treadmill challenges
- So many workplaces and small businesses that held collections, whose staff donated their tips, who hosted donation tins or donated a portion of sales to bushfire relief

Fundraiser Spotlight: Hazara Shamama Association

One of the more humbling fundraising stories was that of the Hazara Shamama Association. A group established to support ethnic Hazara refugees to assimilate in Australia after fleeing



Keep an eye out for these coffee cup recycling stations



The association presents Wildlife Victoria with a \$10,000 donation

WILDLIFE
VICTORIA
ON CALL TO HELP



A Wildlife Victoria volunteer with rescued Brushtail Possum

Did you know?

While so much of the world's attention has been on our Koalas, so many other equally unique and beautiful Australian animals have been largely ignored so we thought it was time to introduce you to some of them!

Greater Glider

The Greater Glider is the world's largest glider, and also a marsupial, which means it raises its young in a pouch. Although they look a little like a koala, they're no relation. They're found in forest areas only on the East coast of Australia, and were vulnerable to extinction in Victoria due to wide-spread destruction of their habitat from logging, even before their remaining habitat was hit by the bushfires.



Greater Gliders are famous for their clumsiness on the ground

? Who is Wildlife Victoria?

Many of you may never have heard of Wildlife Victoria before the bushfires, so we thought we'd better let you know a little more about who we are, and what we do!

Wildlife Victoria has been providing a state-wide emergency response service to Victoria's sick, injured and orphaned wildlife for over 30 years. With the incredible assistance of over 1100

volunteer rescuers, transporters, wildlife shelters, foster carers and vets, we receive over 88,000 calls for help each year, and directly assist more than 50,000 animals in need – even in years when there are no bushfires.

We also work to educate the public on living harmoniously with our unique wildlife, and advocate on behalf of our native creatures.

Wombat

Many of you may recognise the koala's closest living relative: the wombat! These warm-blooded bulldozers are nocturnal marsupials, and live in burrows. As a result, many wombats in the direct path of the bushfires survived as they were able to hide underground. There were even reports of them sharing their burrows with other species. Wombats have evolved with a backward facing pouch to stop it filling up with dirt when they dig.

Wildlife Victoria assists around 1,000 wombats every year



Wildlife Victoria's emergency service depends on the help of over 1100 volunteers



How is the Covid-19 crisis affecting Victoria's wildlife?

The good news is that Wildlife Victoria is still on call to help wildlife as usual throughout the crisis. Our phone operators are working from home and our emergency phone lines are still working. However, sometimes the quickest way to report a wildlife issue is by submitting a report via our website or via the Snap Send Solve mobile app and the next available operator will call you back.

There has been some concern about the risk of wildlife, particularly bats, to humans. There is absolutely no evidence that any Australian wildlife carries the new Coronavirus, and at this stage, it is a greater concern that humans could pass it on to *them* rather than the other way around.

Please follow us on social media for regular updates on our response to the situation.

A huge thanks to all of the rescuers, shelters and carers who are continuing to help wildlife and to all of you who are continuing to support our work through these trying times.

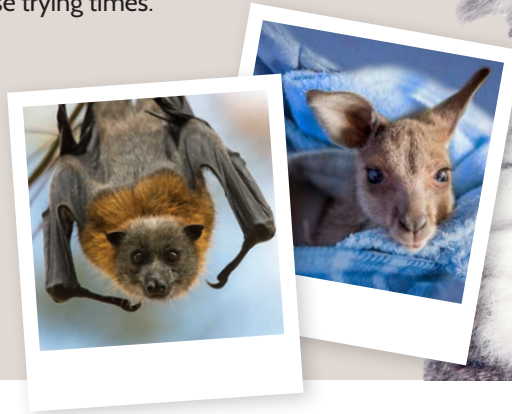


Photo: Gimesy Douglas

Grants for Wildlife Carers & Shelters are now open

With the added impacts of droughts, heat, floods and now the COVID-19 crisis that has brought its own set of challenges to wildlife rescuers and carers, we have made emergency grants available to wildlife shelters and carers across Victoria to help get them through the next few months.

We are also offering large infrastructure grants to help established shelters to increase their capacity so that they can

care for even more sick, injured and orphaned animals in the future.

If you know a wildlife shelter or foster carer in Victoria who is not part of our network, please encourage them to get in touch: these grants are available to all authorised shelters and carers in Victoria. Please have a look at our website or email grants@wildlifelifevictoria.org.au

Grants are open to all authorised Victorian wildlife shelters and carers

Yes, I want to help sick, injured and orphaned native wildlife!

I will give:

\$25 \$50 \$100 My gift of \$ _____

I would like to make this a regular monthly donation

Donations \$2 and over are tax deductible.

ABN 27 753 478 012

Name _____

Address _____

Email _____

Phone _____

I will give by:

Cheque or Credit card: Visa Mastercard Amex

Card number

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Cardholder's name _____

Signature _____

Please post this form to:

Wildlife Victoria, Reply Paid 86041, Abbotsford VIC 3067

or call (03) 9445 0310 to make a donation. *Thank you for your support.*

Donate online at www.wildlifelifevictoria.org.au/donations