

# rescue and restoration after Australia's bushfires

**18+ million**

hectares of land was burnt across Australia – equivalent to the size of England and Wales

**5.1 million**

hectares of land burned in NSW

**3,000 +**

homes destroyed and 33 people who died

**3 billion**

animals killed or displaced and many threatened species and other ecological communities were extensively harmed

▶ Handler Riana Gardiner runs with IFAW x USC detection dog Bear during a black walk through burnt landscape in NSW.



The 'Black Summer' of 2019-20 was characterised by catastrophic bushfires which were completely unprecedented in their intensity and frequency. Years of severe drought and excessive heat exacerbated by climate change culminated in this summer disaster.

The fires came early in September 2019. Many of the blazes burning in New South Wales were of particular concern due to their proximity to key koala populations and areas of core habitat. **Thanks to more than three decades of committed partnership on the ground, IFAW was able to respond immediately** with veterinary equipment, supplies, medicine, food and more that was so urgently in demand. As the fires escalated in scale and intensity, IFAW's international Disaster Response and Risk Reduction team deployed to Australia to increase our capacity and expand our relief efforts – assisting with critical needs assessments and getting supplies to where they were needed most. **We hit the road and provided hands-on support to volunteers caring for rescued wildlife including koalas, wallabies, flying foxes, birds and kangaroos.** Core to our mission is the belief that every individual animal matters to the conservation of a species.

Global support and donations were used toward increased veterinary capacity to help our partners deliver the care and treatment these animals urgently needed. Sadly, some were too badly injured to recover. But **many animals have been released back into the wild where they belong.** This includes koalas Jessie, Amelia and surprise pouch joey Jazz, who were rescued with the help of IFAW x USC detection dog Bear. The trio were released after six months in rehabilitation in August 2020 together with two other bushfire orphans: koalas Jarrah and Mark.

IFAW is both global and local. Our experience across the world means we know that disaster doesn't end once the fires have been put out. **Recovery is long, and that's why IFAW is in it for the long haul.** We're committed to working with local communities across Australia to protect vital populations by planting trees and restoring the habitat for the future. There is vital impact to be made at the policy level. And we're determined to keep learning as we know bushfires will happen again in Australia. We'll continue working with government authorities, wildlife groups and carers to make sure they're prepared for the next disaster.



Photo: Tyson Mayr



Photo: iFAW

**100 +**

koalas found by Bear after the unprecedented bushfires of 2019-20

**25,000 +**

trees planted to date

**15%**

of the NSW koala population—at least 6,382 koalas—died in NSW during the bushfires

- ◀ Handler Riana Gardiner sitting with IFAW x USC detection dog Bear after searching for surviving koalas in bushfire-ravaged land in NSW.
- ▶ IFAW-contracted veterinarian, Dr. Paul Ramos, examines Billie, a four-year-old rescued koala, at a local triage clinic in Cooma, NSW.

▶ **see how at [ifaw.org](https://www.ifaw.org)**



**#GetThereInTime**

### Koala detection dog Bear

IFAW x USC koala detection dog Bear was an integral part of our search and rescue efforts to locate bushfire survivors. Trained by the University of the Sunshine Coast's Detection Dogs for Conservation team, Bear was deployed to fire grounds across Australia and was our secret weapon. Finding koalas can be a difficult task. They are cryptic animals and notoriously difficult to spot with the human eye. They camouflage well, they are quiet and usually sit very still, high in the tree-tops. Up to 80% of koalas are missed, even by professionally-trained spotters. But Bear can smell what we can't see. Trained on the scent of koala fur, he can track live koalas, which is critical in emergency situations. Bear, together with USC's drone, was equipped with a thermal camera and greatly increased koala detection rates. **Team Bear found 152 surviving koalas in bushfire-ravaged land, many of which were in need of rescue and taken to local wildlife groups and vets.**

### Policy

We know that to create effective change, we need to lobby and work with the government and policymakers to enhance environmental protections and conserve critical habitat and wildlife corridors.

This is why in March 2020, [IFAW published a first-of-its-kind scientific report](#) into the status of New South Wales koalas. The analysis, undertaken by Biolink, quantified the impacts of the recent fires on koalas. **Conservative estimates found that 6,382 koalas perished in the fires and that more**

**than 60% of the population has been lost over the past three generations.** The report concluded that koalas are facing an immediate and significant threat of extinction. This formed the basis of a nomination to the New South Wales Threatened Species Scientific Committee to provisionally up-list the species from Vulnerable to Endangered on an emergency basis in New South Wales.

This was followed by a separate push for the federal government to up-list koalas in Queensland, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory from Vulnerable to Endangered.

### Habitat restoration

Much of Australia's landscape was left charred and barren after the bushfires. Australia's landscape is resilient to bushfires—they are a part of the country's history—but fires are now happening at an unprecedented frequency and intensity, largely due to climate change. This doesn't give the land or the animals and ecosystems within it, the time they need to recover. That's why planting trees and helping the land restore itself is crucial. It's why we've worked with our partners and friends Bangalow Koalas and Zero Emissions Byron in the New South Wales Northern Rivers region to **plant about 8,000 trees in the six months after the bushfires.**

Our work continues as we partner with the Great Eastern Ranges to restore and reconnect 3,600km of land from Far North Queensland to Western Victoria.