

# Five years on from the Black Summer bushfires



**ifaw**

Tyson Mayr / © IFAW

Photo: Handler Riana Gardiner sitting with Bear during a break from their black walk through a forest burnt by the Swanfels Fire.

# Thank you! Your support helped to save lives!

In late 2019 the sky went black in many parts of Australia. In the following months, unprecedented bushfires killed 33 people, destroyed thousands of homes, and impacted approximately three billion animals and 24 million hectares of habitat.

Thanks to your support, IFAW was able to deploy members of our local and global disaster response team to provide on-the-ground support around the clock for more than a month during January 2020, the most devastating period of the event.

We also provided almost half a million dollars worth of supplies, such as enclosures, fire gear, and water stations, to wildlife groups in NSW, Queensland and Victoria. Team members worked alongside wildlife carers to provide hands-on support for rescued animals such as koalas, wallabies, flying foxes, birds, and kangaroos. We also looked after the carers themselves through our Caring4Carers initiative.

In the years that followed, we remained by the side of many organisations, providing practical support, advice, and financial assistance. We also took steps to address the bigger picture: we may not be able to prevent this from happening again, but we can help emergency response sectors be better prepared to rescue and care for injured animals, and work to help wildlife adapt to climate change by ensuring safe and connected habitats across the landscape.

Reflecting on the last five years, the dedication and support from you and other IFAW supporters has enabled us to achieve so much when it comes to saving animals, people, and the places they call home. We can't thank you enough for standing by our side and believing in our work to help our native wildlife. Your support helped to save thousands of lives! It also allowed us to contribute to critical scientific research and restore habitats across the country.



As we look ahead, we remain dedicated to saving more lives and safeguarding habitats across the country, ensuring a brighter future for Australian wildlife.

In this update, we have highlighted some of our key priority areas as we move forward. These focus areas are essential in driving our mission and making a lasting impact. We deeply appreciate your ongoing support, which enables us to continue this important work, expand our reach, and create meaningful change. Together, we can ensure that our efforts remain strong and that our vision for the future becomes a reality. Thank you for being a valued member of the IFAW family!

*Rebecca Keeble*

Rebecca Keeble  
Oceania Regional Director

# Reinforcing the importance of proactive preparedness



Photo: The Northern Rivers Wildlife Network took part in a simulated 'black walk' training session organised by IFAW in 2023.

In the wake of the fires, it was apparent that many people, including the wildlife sector, were not prepared for such a disaster. We know that effective bushfire preparedness and response cannot be achieved by one individual or sole group. When we all work together, we can strengthen a well-coordinated emergency response plan for wildlife across multiple levels of government and regional networks.

IFAW recognised the need to take significant steps to prepare for future disasters. One key priority was providing essential training and equipment for the wildlife sector, such as personal protective equipment (PPE). We also focused on ensuring wildlife was included in emergency response plans to better protect them during crises. Supporting wildlife carers was another crucial goal, recognising their important role in rescuing and rehabilitating animals. We also aimed to improve collaboration between non-governmental organisations and response agencies by strengthening coordination, sharing resources, and enhancing communication. These efforts were designed to create a more effective and unified approach to protecting wildlife during disasters.

## Collaboration and Training

Since the fires, IFAW has worked with NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service and many

**It's been five years since the Black Summer Bushfires. You were there for us then, and you have been with us every step of the way on the incredible journey of rescue, rehabilitation, recovery and resilience. Thank you.**

other key wildlife organisations and experts to improve the capacity and coordination of wildlife rescue response during bushfires. We have also used our vast network and expertise to upskill and train multiple wildlife rescue groups in disaster preparedness and search and rescue, including how to search firegrounds safely. IFAW also now serves as a conduit between rescue groups and government agencies in Australia. After the fires, a debrief with the Victorian and NSW Governments also led to IFAW's instrumental role in developing Wildlife Emergency Response Teams (WERTs).

Since 2021, we have also delivered training at numerous industry conferences and specialist workshops. We have provided training in disaster planning, post-fire 'Blackwalk' search and rescue training, and specialised first aid treatment to several groups to build capacity and improve the skills of wildlife carers.

## The Disaster Toolkit for wildlife carers and groups

We know that when the black summer fires happened, the lives of many wildlife carers and their animals were at risk due to the extreme nature of the emergency, compounded by the overwhelming number of injured animals and limited resources or knowledge to handle such situations safely.

To address this gap, we developed tools specifically for wildlife carers. With disasters in Australia becoming increasingly unpredictable and severe, fuelled by climate change, these tools are essential to help wildlife carers and rescue groups prepare for extreme weather events in the future.

The IFAW disaster toolkit is an international online resource with guidelines and tools for animal carers and groups to prepare for and respond to disasters.

To learn more, read the manual on our website: <https://www.ifaw.org/au/resources/evacuation-planning-kit-au> or use the QR code below.

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Photo: IFAW Animal Rescue Officer Rob Leach during a blackwalk in Lamington, QLD.

# Recognising the value of individual animals

Individual animals matter in conservation. When populations—or even entire species—near a tipping point, as was the case with koalas after the fires, saving one animal can mean the difference between existence and extinction.

Your support during and after the fires allowed us to build specialist veterinary capacity to treat injured wildlife, while also providing critical infrastructure, equipment, and supplies—the lack of which was sorely evident during the fires.

IFAW provided much-needed help to several veterinary teams nationwide, including Friends of the Koala and Byron Bay Wildlife Hospital in NSW, WA Wildlife in WA and Mosswood Wildlife in Victoria.; our support resulted in thousands of animals receiving the care they needed. In total, we provided vital veterinary and rescue equipment to boost the capacity of 13 groups across Australia to deal with fires and then subsequent floods.

**Individual animals matter in conservation. In some cases where populations are at a tipping point individual animals can mean the difference between the survival of the population or species.**

One of those groups was our long-standing partner, Bonorong Wildlife Sanctuary and Hospital in Tasmania. With our support, they were able to operate a full-time, seven-days-a-week wildlife veterinary service for the first time. Since the fires, they have treated over 6,000 animals, including threatened species such as Tasmanian Devils, wedge-tailed eagles, eastern barred bandicoots, and eastern quolls. Thanks to your kind donations, IFAW has also contributed towards a major hospital expansion at the sanctuary, which is due to open its doors in the autumn of 2025.

We have also continued our long-term partnership with the University of the Sunshine Coast's Detection Dogs for Conservation (DDC), which allowed us to deploy Team Bear to firegrounds to help find koala survivors. Bear's deployment to find live koalas post-fire was the first of its kind and resulted in more than 150 koalas being sighted post-fire. 36 of those were rescued and in need of medical attention.

**Your support allowed us to build specialist veterinary capacity to treat sick and injured wildlife whilst also providing critical infrastructure, equipment and supplies.**

# Implementing a holistic approach is vital



© Bangalow Koalas

Photo: First photo is community planting August 20th 2022 at a property in Bangalow planting 6000 koala and rainforest trees over July/August. The second photo was taken in Feb 2025, just over two years later. We are thrilled to see this corridor for koalas flourishing!

Rescuing wild animals from disasters as quickly as possible whilst also ensuring fast access to treatment is critical to achieving best possible welfare and release outcomes. However, these efforts are for naught if there is no safe space for them to be released to thrive.

IFAW has always used a full-circle approach to conservation however, the value of a truly integrated approach became even more apparent after the fires. One that incorporates rescue, rehabilitation, release, securing habitat: and subsequent monitoring and research of both animals and habitats. A vital part of this cycle is empowering the local community to increase their resilience to climate change effects.

As we continue to apply a holistic approach in our work, we are also tackling other critical challenges, including the pressing and inextricably linked issues of climate change and biodiversity loss.

Over the last five years, thanks to the generosity of IFAW supporters, we have helped plant almost 100,000 trees, creating more than 60 hectares of habitat with 31 partners across 21 communities. These activities involved collaboration with partners including Bangalow Koalas, Koala Clancy Foundation and Great Eastern Ranges (GER). Hundreds of community planting days were organised, attracting thousands of volunteers nationwide. We have also supported several in-depth research and post-release monitoring and research projects.

Together, with Bangalow we planted 22,365 trees since 2019 across six different properties which form part of the Bangalow Koalas Community Wildlife Corridor.

One of the properties in Bangalow had 4040 trees planted in April 2021 and after just two years in the ground, has already been used by koalas. Koala scats were found on the property, which sits on the border of Byron Shire Council land, and there was also evidence of koala scratches on trees. Evidence of echidnas and native birds has also been recorded.

Other plantings in partnership with Bangalow Koalas have also flourished in just a few years, and we are thrilled to share these before and after shots from plantings held in July/August 2022.

Working with our partners has also allowed us to empower local communities through workshops with landowners, teaching them how to identify species and create suitable habitats. Partnering with GER, we supported three communities, facilitating workshops in fire and weed management and environmental restoration efforts along waterways and surrounding land.

**Over the last five years we have:**  
- planted over 100,000 trees  
- created 60 hectares of habitat  
- collaborated with 31 partners

## Koala Climate Corridors

Since 2020, this long-term partnership with GER has enabled us to collaborate with regional partners to strengthen community resilience. The project also creates biodiverse natural corridors, offering wildlife safe passages as they adapt to shifting conditions and food sources, caused by climate change.

By 2024, the first phase of the Koala Climate Corridors: Bunyas to Border project was complete in southeast Queensland in partnership with LUCI (Lockyer Uplands Catchment Inc.) As part of the first in a planned series of projects, local landholders came together to plant over 3,500 trees and install dozens of nest boxes and wildlife water stations across 53 properties. This effort aims to create a Koala Climate Corridor, benefiting not only koalas but also eight other priority species. We also actively built community capacity by hosting workshops and events like Koala Fest, fostering engagement and awareness to support local conservation efforts.



Justine Rice & Dale Martin / © IFAW-GER.

Photo: One of the tree plantings as part of the GER-IFAW Koala Climate Corridors Bunyas to Borders project with Lockyer Uplands Catchment Inc in Queensland's south-east.

To learn more about Koala Climate corridors, use the QR code and watch a video.

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© Tyson Mayr

Photo: A koala spotted at Two Thumbs Wildlife Sanctuary Trust in December 2024.

**So far, the Koala Climate Corridors project across Bunyas to Border has resulted in:**

**4,000 trees planted**

**47 wildlife drinkers installed across 28 properties to provide water for wildlife**

**20 nest boxes installed to provide additional homes for greater gliders**

**3 public workshops held to empower and educate the local community to help wildlife**

**6 target species benefitted**

## Innovative conservation projects

Science, technology, and research are central to IFAW's mission, and we are at the forefront of innovation, utilising drones and trained detection dogs to locate and study koalas and other wildlife.

At Two Thumbs Wildlife Sanctuary (which was completely destroyed when a fire engulfed the property on January 23rd, 2020), we installed 125 innovative nest boxes. Each is designed to mimic natural tree hollows, providing ready-made homes for wildlife such as gliders, possums, and birds. In a groundbreaking initiative, 20 dual-chamber nest boxes, tailored to support multiple species like birds and microbats, were also installed in May 2023, accelerating the recovery of hollow-dwelling wildlife.

These activities were complemented by the carving of 20 hollows existing trees, the construction of five raptor platforms, and the planting of 2,000 native grasses and trees.

During a recent visit to Two Thumbs, we were thrilled to see the nest boxes in use alongside the 20 marsupial dens designed to replicate the natural hollow logs that many animals relied on before the fires. These dens feature a unique built-in 'mezzanine' level, offering smaller animals a safe refuge off the ground, away from predators.

Recently 29 different native species have been captured on film checking out the marsupial dens,

**29 different native species have been captured recently on film checking out the dens with half actually using them.**



© Tyson Mayr

Photo: A ringtail possum looking out from its new home at Two Thumbs Wildlife Sanctuary Trust.

with half actually using them. Our camera traps also recorded a host of other species present at Two Thumbs, including koalas and wombats. It's incredible that five years on, life is finally returning to the sanctuary and on the path to recovery. We also installed wildlife water stations on the sanctuary to provide fresh water to animals during times of heat and drought. Many animals including birds and gliders have already been spotted drinking from the water stations.

Witnessing these innovations driving meaningful progress in wildlife restoration is truly inspiring. We remain hopeful that these habitats will continue to serve as a safe haven for wildlife, offering them a chance to thrive for generations to come.



© Habitat Innovation and Management

Photo: An echidna captured on film using one of the specially designed marsupial dens installed at Two Thumbs Wildlife Sanctuary.

# Protecting our flora and fauna requires a joint effort



© Louisa James Photography / © Koala Clancy Foundation

Photo: An IFAW x Koala Clancy tree planting by the Moorabool river in Victoria where koalas have been spotted for the first time in decades, helping to further encourage their return.

During the fires, Australia had the world's attention as people mourned the millions of animals lost. It was a wake-up call for the government, but sadly, it hasn't been enough to prompt real action.

Australia's unique nature is vital to our economy, with some estimates suggesting half of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP) depends on nature-related activities. Yet when it comes to protecting our native animals and the places they call home, charities and volunteer organisations bear much of the workload, relying on donations that are drying up as the memory of Black Summer fades. Government support for protecting wildlife and habitats is thin on the ground, despite the value of the sector's contributions to protecting the species that define our country. In NSW alone the wildlife volunteer contribution is estimated to save the government more than \$27 million per annum and is growing. (NSW Volunteer Wildlife Rehabilitation Sector Strategy 2020-2023, NSW Government)

Advocacy and campaigning is central to IFAW's work. We recognise that reforms are urgently needed to improve the capacity to care for sick and injured wildlife and secure habitats for populations to thrive. That's why IFAW has prioritised addressing these challenges and protecting endangered species.

We know we can't do this alone, and we value collaborating with other organisations to succeed. As part of Places You Love, a national alliance of over 70 conservation organisations, we continue to lobby the Australian government to pass stronger nature laws, including an overhaul of *Australia's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act)*. Learn more at [www.placesyoulove.org](http://www.placesyoulove.org)

We also understand the importance of presenting strong evidence to secure the support and funding necessary to make a difference. This is why we've been deeply involved in ongoing koala research since the fires.

In 2020, we undertook a joint research project with the University of the Sunshine Coast Detection Dogs for Conservation team (UNiSC DDC) to study the health and resilience of koalas post fire, and provide recommendations to improve koala conservation and management across their range.

The multi-year project, combined research, engagement, and welfare efforts. The results are encouraging, revealing that koalas, while vulnerable to fire are also remarkably resilient and, in some areas, koala populations have maintained stable density and health in the post-

fire landscapes. However, the long-term effects of the fires may extend beyond the study period. The project emphasised the importance of ongoing landscape monitoring to understand how cumulative threats impact population and species survival during this period of rapid environmental change.

We have also worked in partnership with Ngunya Jargoan Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) in Northern NSW since it was devastated by fires in 2019. This biodiversity and cultural hotspot is home to a significant koala population and we deployed IFAW x UniSC koala detection dog Bear in the immediate aftermath to search for koala survivors.

We were able to rescue and treat fire-impacted koalas and installed wildlife drinking stations to provide a lifeline to koalas and other wildlife post-fire.

We continue to monitor the health of the resident koalas in collaboration with Jali Local Aboriginal Land Council and rangers, NSW Government's Saving our Species programme, Detection Dogs for Conservation and Friends of the Koala.

During the last survey, we detected 32 koalas with the help of a drone-mounted thermal camera, Bear and his team-mate Austin. This is a promising sign of recovery, and we look forward to reporting more good news as we continue our collaborative surveys. We thank the Nyangbul people of the Bundjalung nation for kindly inviting us onto their land.

Our ongoing work at Two Thumbs Wildlife Sanctuary has also allowed us to continue to monitor koala habitats. In the immediate aftermath of the fire, IFAW x UniSC koala detection dog Bear was deployed to locate surviving koalas on the property. You may remember how Team Bear joined 'Black walks' of the fire grounds

and was able to locate and rescue eight koalas, including mum and joey, Jessie and Amelia, and surprise bub Jazz, bringing a glimmer of hope to the devastation.

In December 2024, IFAW and Team Bear, along with IFAW Ambassador Tyson Mayr, re-visited Two Thumbs Wildlife Sanctuary to see how the local koala population was doing almost five years on. During the visit, the team spotted 18 koalas, including four healthy joeys, which is truly remarkable given we only surveyed a small section of the sanctuary and a promising sign that the population is bouncing back.

James Fitzgerald, the owner of Two Thumbs Wildlife Sanctuary and a dedicated advocate for koalas, shared how deeply meaningful this experience has been for him. The devastating fires of January 2020 completely destroyed the sanctuary and his home. For years, the emotional toll of the loss prevented him from walking through his property, as the sight of the damaged landscape was too heartbreaking.

*"I used to love bushwalking and spent so much time in the bush, both day and night. But for the past five years, it's been too painful. After seeing what you discovered in December 2024, I finally feel I can return to the bush with a sense of hope and excitement for what I might find, rather than dreading the 'ghost forest' left behind after the fires."*

**James Fitzgerald, December 2024.**

Watch this new video and see Bear in action at Two Thumbs Wildlife Sanctuary (December 2024).

▶ **Scan me**



© Tyson Mayr

Photo: IFAW x UniSC koala detection dog, Bear at Two Thumbs Wildlife Sanctuary in December 2024.

# We can't ignore climate change warnings



© Sue Ashton

Photo: A koala drenched from the rainfall assessed during wildlife search and rescue deployments following ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred March 2025.

Black Summer thrust Australia into the global spotlight as a dire example of what can happen when climate change warnings are ignored.

Severe weather events are becoming more frequent, unpredictable, and severe, bringing disruption and danger to communities and ecosystems. Events like storms, hurricanes, floods, and bushfires damage wildlife habitats and the natural resources on which we rely.

Unfortunately, these warnings continue to go unheeded. Our landscapes are becoming increasingly fragmented, with rampant land clearing destroying habitats at an alarming rate. This pushes wildlife into closer contact with humans, often with tragic outcomes. Precious patches of untouched bushland, which became vital refuges for wildlife during the fires, are now under threat.

Australia's unique & iconic species continue to be added to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List. We are dangerously close to losing more than 740 animals and plants, holding the unfortunate title of the country with the highest mammal extinction rate in the world.

We need to act urgently to heed the warnings and implement the learnings from Black Summer.

Looking ahead, we remain steadfast in our commitment to advocating for greater recognition of the undeniable connection between people, animals, and the climate. By safeguarding our wildlife and wild places, we can empower natural ecosystems to play a vital role in addressing climate change.

Our efforts will focus on protecting, restoring, and connecting landscapes, while also empowering local communities to create climate-resilient conservation plans. We are dedicated to strengthening the wildlife sector's capacity to rescue, rehabilitate, and release animals, helping them return to their natural homes.

At the same time, we draw on the global expertise of our colleagues who lead rescue, rehabilitation, and release efforts worldwide. This knowledge is shared through local collaborations with an ever-growing network of environmentally committed individuals and groups, including the traditional custodians of our land.

We still face huge challenges, here and globally, but we can all contribute to solutions with actions as simple as volunteering for a tree-planting event or signing petitions to protect nature and work together for the health of our country and planet.

If anything good came from the heartbreak of Black Summer, it reinforced that by saving nature, we can help save ourselves.

Together we will continue our efforts to ensure the wildlife sector gains the recognition and reinforcement it deserves. This will, in turn, give our animals better protection and care, and the opportunity to thrive in the places they call home.

**Thank you for your incredible support. Your generosity and compassion for our mission makes all the difference!**

# Incredible rescues at Bonorong Wildlife Sanctuary – thanks to your support!

## Ripley's Rescue and Recovery

Ripley the platypus was found wandering along a busy road, injured and disoriented. Upon assessment, Ripley was found to have multiple puncture wounds, likely from a dog attack, including injuries to his back, neck, and eyelid. Despite these challenges, Ripley remained active and alert, and the Bonorong critical care team provided expert treatment and nourishment—feeding him 500g of earthworms daily. Wild platypuses often struggle in captivity, but Ripley's resilience, combined with the skilled care staff at Bonorong, allowed his wounds to heal within days. Less than a week later, Ripley was successfully released back into the wild, a testament to Bonorong Wildlife Sanctuary's incredible efforts and its community's support.



Photo: Ripley the platypus recovering at Bonorong.

© Bonorong Wildlife Sanctuary

## Raindrop the Echidna

Poor Raindrop, a short-beaked echidna, was stuck under a deck for three days before being rescued. On arrival at the Bonorong Wildlife Hospital Raindrop was skinny and lethargic but luckily, she had only minor superficial wounds. Her wounds healed quickly, but it took some time for Raindrop to slowly grow to a healthy weight for her age. After nearly a month in care, Bonorong's veterinary team were pleased with the size and condition of little Raindrop so she was released into the wild close to where she was found.



Photo: Raindrop the Echidna.

© Bonorong Wildlife Sanctuary



© Bonorong Wildlife Sanctuary

Photo: Jacinta in care at Bonorong.

## Jacinta's story

Jacinta, a masked owl, was found grounded in a paddock, unable to fly and being attacked by ravens. She was safely brought to Bonorong Wildlife Hospital, where the team discovered her flight and tail feathers were broken or missing, likely from prolonged contact with the ground. Jacinta also had minor injuries to her feet from the raven attacks. While her treatment is ongoing as tests determine the cause of her grounding, Jacinta is making progress in rehabilitation with a strong appetite and spirited personality. Though it will take time for her feathers to regrow, the team is optimistic about her full recovery and eventual return to the wild.

# What you can do to help animals right now

- Sign petitions and take action. Take a look at all of the current petitions we have running on our website. Scan the QR code or visit : [ifaw.org/au/take-action](https://ifaw.org/au/take-action)
- Plant trees in your backyard or attend local planting events
- Put drinking water out for birds and small mammals
- Download the free IFAW Wildlife Rescue app to help wildlife in need by scanning the QR code here:

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**Did you know 1 in 5 animals are rescued thanks to Gifts in Wills? For more information about how you can leave a gift in your will to the animals, go to: [ifaw https://www.ifaw.org/au/take-action/wills-and-trust](https://www.ifaw.org/au/take-action/wills-and-trust)**

## A tribute to the wonderful Audrey Koosman (OAM)

IFAW had the pleasure of working with Audrey in a variety of capacities for over 20 years. Firstly, as founder and President of the Native Animal Trust Fund (NATF), and later under its new name of Hunter Wildlife Rescue (HWR).

Audrey's ability to bring people together, to share her knowledge and passion for wildlife and her expertise in wildlife rescue and rehabilitation was second to none. She was a dear friend to IFAW and one of our greatest ambassadors, attending numerous events.

While Audrey's passing is a devastating loss to so many, we hope that her passion and dedication inspires the sector to continue the incredible work that they do – as individual carers and as rescue groups collectively.



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IFAW acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country and their connection to land, waters and culture. We pay our respects to their Elders, past and present

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