

# Helping wildlife affected by bushfires

## Introduction

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) is the lead agency for managing wildlife welfare issues arising from bushfires. We are working in partnership with a range of government and non-government organisations that are instrumental in helping to respond to both animal welfare and threatened species impacts.

The extent of the bushfire impacts on wildlife is still being assessed. DELWP is working alongside species experts, academics and land managers to develop strategies for fire-affected threatened species and habitats. This includes a focus on immediate action as well as medium- and longer-term actions required to support fire affected species.

This fact sheet has been developed to provide guidance to members of the Victorian community who want to help wildlife affected by bushfires.

## What you can do to help

DELWP understands the concerns members of the public have in relation to wildlife impacted by Victoria's fires. The welfare of wildlife injured by fires is a key priority in both the short and long term for us. We have received many generous offers of help and support from organisations and individuals that is greatly appreciated at this time.

The best way for you to contribute at this time is to donate to the wildlife recovery effort via the official Zoos Victoria Bushfire Emergency Wildlife Fund here: <https://donate.zoo.org.au/donation>.

## Injured wildlife

DELWP, with support from the RSPCA, Zoos Victoria, the Australian Veterinary Association veterinarians and Wildlife Victoria, has deployed Wildlife Triage Units to assess and treat animals affected by the fires. More information on the location of these units can be found at <https://www.wildlife.vic.gov.au/>.

You cannot care for wildlife at home unless you are authorised shelter or foster carer under the *Wildlife Act 1975* or you are a registered vet. For the safety and wellbeing of both our wildlife and yourself, it is important that you comply with this requirement.

Firegrounds are extremely dangerous and we urge all members of the public not to enter firegrounds to look for injured wildlife.

## Uninjured wildlife

If you find uninjured wildlife on your property it is important that you do not disturb the wildlife and keep pets away. Taking uninjured wildlife to triage centres ties up resources that could be used to treat injured wildlife.

## Providing water

Dehydration is a major threat for wildlife during drought and bushfires. You can help uninjured wildlife by providing a safe supply of clean water which should be changed daily to prevent spread of disease.

If you choose to provide water for wildlife:

- Where possible, select shaded areas or clearings with a small amount of clear area around the water station, to encourage timid species and reduce predator risk.

# Helping wildlife affected by bushfires

- Ensure water containers are shallow, robust and stable. Avoid metal containers as they become too hot. Add a rock, stick or other material to give safe access for smaller animals, such as lizards.
- Provide water at both ground level (suitable for most mammals, birds and reptiles) and elevated in trees for animals which are reluctant to visit the ground (e.g. possums, gliders, some birds).
- Place water and feed away from public roads, and in several small stations of low volume. A distance of 500m between water stations is recommended. Providing water in excessive amounts can attract too many animals to the one resource, resulting in increased predation risk.
- Regularly clean and refill water stations.
- Never add sugar, honey or electrolytes to the water.
- Phase out water stations as conditions improve.

Swimming pools can present a drowning danger to thirsty wildlife without alternative water sources. Try to keep swimming pools covered or provide plenty of climb out points using ropes and flotation devices like pool noodles or bodyboards. Try to check swimming pools daily.

## Providing food

Feeding wildlife is generally not recommended as it can cause a range of problems for wildlife and people including:

- Wildlife becoming dependent on people for food and not dispersing away from fire-affected areas or undertaking normal foraging behaviours.
- Dietary deficiencies or harmful foods impacting animal welfare.
- Transferring diseases between wildlife.
- Creating weed problems from unsterilised feed.
- Attracting predators and pests to feeding sites. This can have negative impacts on wildlife through predation and competition for resources.
- Feeding can favour aggressive species leading to unnatural densities and disadvantaging more threatened species.
- Wildlife becoming a nuisance and acting aggressively towards people to obtain food.

Provision of water is always recommended as the preferred way to help wildlife, particularly when vegetation remains in the landscape. In times of extreme natural disaster, however, it may be appropriate to aid wildlife by providing supplementary food sources. Prior to providing food for wildlife, it is important that you consider the above risks and if you do choose to provide food for wildlife, take all necessary steps to minimise the risks.

Ensure you obtain landholder permission prior to feeding wildlife on someone else's property. Don't provide food in public areas such as National Parks or conservation reserves as this can compromise the protection of these areas from impacts of pests, diseases, predators and exotic weeds.

If you do choose to provide food for wildlife:

- Choosing the right food is very important as different species have different requirements and the preferred food of one species may be hazardous to others. Over-feeding can also be fatal to animals.
- Remove uneaten food and clean all food containers daily to prevent spread of disease and attraction of unwanted pests.
- Never feed bread, baked goods, avocado, rice, banana, onion, chocolate, sugar, honey, brassicas or dairy products. Also avoid wildlife mixtures of peanut butter, honey and rolled oats as they are harmful to some animals.
- Feed should be left in shaded areas and where wildlife is safer from predators.

# Helping wildlife affected by bushfires

- Never throw bird seed directly onto the ground.
- Avoid providing food where feral animals (e.g. pigs, deer, goats) may dominate.
- Unsterilised hay should not be provided due to the risk of spreading weeds.

## Suitable food for wildlife

Animals	Use in small amounts	Don't use	Tips
Kangaroos, wallabies and wombats	Macropod pellets (available from rural supply stores)  Horse pellets (not high performance) or macropod muesli if macropod pellets are not available	Pony mixes with rice, seeds or pollard-based ingredients  Lucerne  Brassicas, such as cabbage, broccoli, kale, cauliflower	Do not hand feed  Scatter food early morning and evening in small amounts – only replace as needed  Provide fresh water
Brush-tail and eastern pygmy possums  Sugar, squirrel, feather-tail and yellow-bellied gliders	Starchy vegetables such as sweet potato, corn, pumpkin.  Some pear, red apples or melons  Insect meal (from pet food store)	Sugary foods  Rolled oats, peanut butter or honey.	These are omnivores, so need a varied diet.  Place in fork of tree after sunset.  Do not encourage arboreal mammals to come to the ground to feed. They are vulnerable to predation.
Ringtail possums	Native plants and flowers  Small amounts of starchy vegetables such as sweet potato or corn	Fruit or too much starchy vegetable is harmful	Place in fork of tree after sunset  Ringtail possums are primarily folivores (leaf eating).
Greater gliders	Rabbit pellets	Rolled oats, peanut butter or honey.	Place food in fork of tree after sunset
Carnivorous and insectivorous marsupials such as:  Antechinus, bandicoots, native rats and other rodents	Insect meal (pet food shops)  Finely chopped starchy vegetables	Meat  Rolled oats or honey	Scatter beneath the leaf litter or place under logs where nothing larger than a bandicoot can reach  Provide water
Seed and grain eating birds including parrots, cockatoos, galahs, finches	Good quality wild bird blocks with large and small seeds hung in trees  Fruit such as apples, pears, melons hung in trees	Black or grey sunflower seeds as they can make birds sick  Seed mixes other than wild bird mix or blocks	Do not scatter seed on the ground – attract predators and make other species sick  Dispose of decomposing fruit, soiled seed before replacing
Honeyeaters	Insect meal or nectar mix placed in fork of tree	Do not offer water and sugar or honey mixes	Do not leave foods on the ground as birds may be attacked by predators

# Helping wildlife affected by bushfires

Animals	Use in small amounts	Don't use	Tips
Reptiles (lizards)	Insect meal or finely chopped vegetables placed in the fork of a tree		Create habitat by placing logs, rocks and leaf litter.  Provide a shallow dish of water with a stick to escape if they fall in