

# Over 1 billion animals feared dead in Australian bushfires

Brittney Deguara

10:59, Jan 08 2020

It's estimated over a billion animals have now died in [the bushfires ravaging Australia](#).

The original, conservative estimate of half a billion animal deaths in the state of [New South Wales](#) was recently raised by University of Sydney ecologist Chris Dickman.

"The original figure - the 480 million - was based on mammals, birds and reptiles for which we do have densities, and that figure is now a little bit out of date," he told [HuffPost](#).

The new prediction was 800 million, but even that wasn't completely accurate as it didn't include bats, frogs and invertebrates.

"If 800 million sounds a lot, it's not all the animals in the firing line," he told the publication.



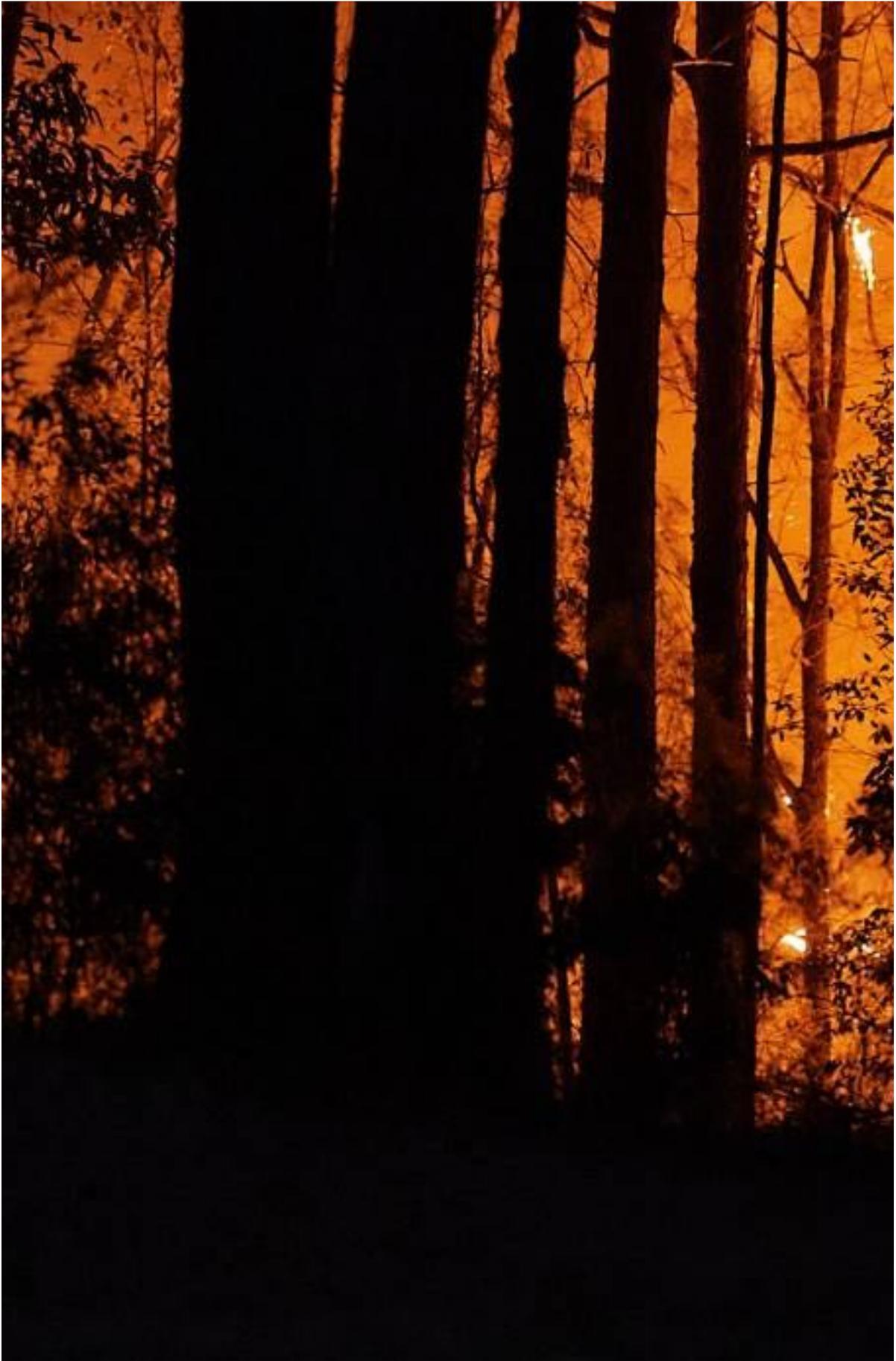
DANA MITCHELL/KANGAROO ISLAND WILDLIFE PARK VIA AP

Koalas could become locally extinct in some habitats across the North and South Coast in NSW.

Dickman had no doubt the loss of wildlife across the country was over one billion - even that would be a "very conservative figure", he said. This estimate was confirmed by World Wildlife Fund Australia's environmental scientist Stuart Blanch, who told *HuffPost* it would be a modest guess.

More than 8.4 million hectares of land had been scorched across numerous states, but the fires weren't the only cause of death.

A University of Sydney spokesperson previously said while many would have been directly killed by the fires, others were [dying of starvation, lack of shelter, and newly introduced predators](#) such as feral cats and red foxes.



BRETT HEMMINGS/GETTY IMAGES

A kangaroo escaped the fire as the fire front approached a property in Colo Heights, Australia.

While kangaroos and koalas have become the most recognisable wildlife victims of the fires, there were numerous, lesser-known species also in danger of being wiped out.

[Hundreds of baby flying foxes were abandoned](#) in NSW bushland by their mothers who fled burnt and drought-stricken areas due to a lack of food.

Wildlife Rescue South Coast were caring for the young animals, some just two weeks old.

"Last week we had 300 come in, and we've been flat out feeding since then," Wildlife Rescue South Coast secretary Jenny Packwood previously said.

AP

More than 900 homes in New South Wales have been confirmed destroyed this bushfire season.

Prior to the fires, an influx of grey-headed flying foxes had been admitted to Australia Zoo Wildlife Hospital due to drought conditions and a lack of food. Now that the fires were wiping out their habitats, more were being treated, [according to conservationist Bindi Irwin](#). The zoo on the Sunshine Coast was just one of many wildlife hospitals caring for injured wildlife affected by the fires, and had so far [treated 90,000 animals](#).

The zoo recently took in 600 bats that had to be evacuated from NSW, and had treated over 100 of them, Irwin

explained on social media.

NINE

Experts warn drought and bushfires have combined to create a new level of threat to local wildlife.

Some of the animals on the critically endangered list included the southern corroboree frog and mountain pygmy-possum. The existence of glossy black cockatoos and spotted-tail quolls was currently threatened.

The country's native koala population was also under threat, with half of the only disease-free population on Kangaroo Island in South Australia wiped out by the blaze.

Threatened Species Recovery Hub deputy director John Woinarski told [ABC](#) many species had their habitats decimated, which would potentially lead to "local extinction events".



Potoroos could become locally extinct in some habitats across the North and South Coast in NSW.

The fires, which burnt through almost one third of the 4400-square-kilometre island, could have potentially eliminated entire plant and animal species.

"Certainly, their population liability would have crashed for many of these species and their risk of extinction has been substantially increased."

Circumstances were similar on the mainland. [Koalas and potoroos](#) - a small marsupial and relative of the kangaroo - could become locally extinct in some habitats across the North and South Coast in NSW. Those that managed to survive the fires were still in danger. University of Sydney conservation biology professor Mike Letnic previously explained they too wouldn't have anywhere to live and more mobile predators could return to "start mopping up vulnerable animals".

[Locals touring charred townships already witnessed large concentrations of dead animals littering the roads, while others were going to the aid of injured wildlife struggling to find food and water.](#)

## Kangaroo Island bushfires: grave fears for unique wildlife after estimated 25,000 koalas killed

**Greatest concerns for endangered Kangaroo Island dunnart and glossy black-cockatoo after third of island burned**

## Graham Readfearn

@readfearn

Tue 7 Jan 2020 03.49 GMT

Last modified on Tue 7 Jan 2020 17.20 GMT



Adelaide wildlife rescuer Simon Adamczyk carries an injured koala on Kangaroo Island, South Australia. Half the island's 50,000 koalas are estimated to have perished in the bushfires. Photograph: David Mariuz/AAP

Ecologists have grave concerns for the future of unique and endangered wildlife on Kangaroo Island where bushfires have killed thousands of koalas.

Fires on the island, in **South Australia**, have so far burned through 155,000 hectares – about one third of the island's entire area – with blazes concentrated in the biodiversity-rich western areas.

Concerns are greatest for the unique and endangered mouse-like marsupial the Kangaroo Island dunnart, and the glossy black-cockatoo, which have both seen extensive areas of critical habitat burned.

The world loves kangaroos and koalas. Now we are watching them die in droves

*Elle Hunt*

The island's population of endangered glossy black-cockatoos – a unique subspecies – has been the subject of two decades of community conservation work to bring numbers from as low as 150 in the 1990s to as high as 400 in latest

counts.

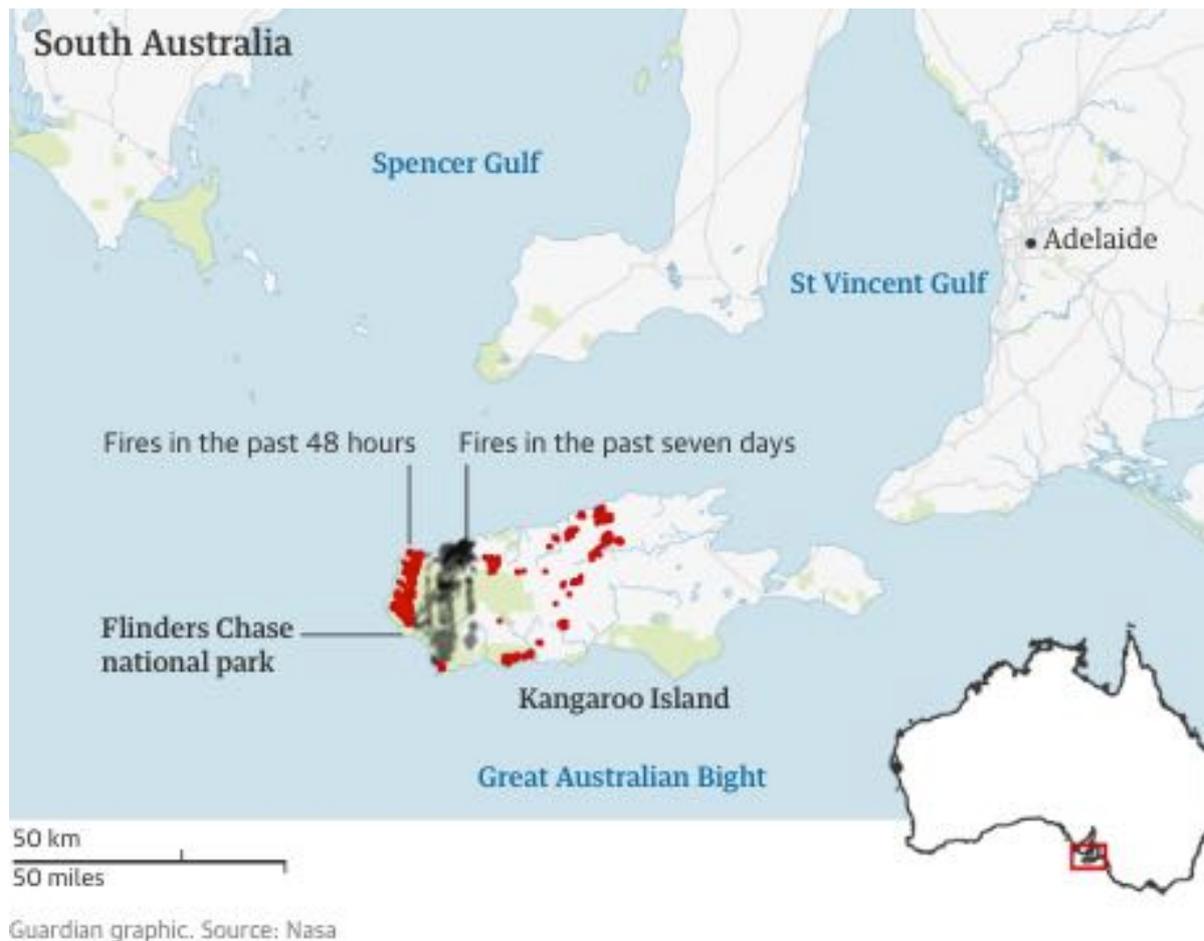
“A lot of the key feeding and breeding areas on the north coast [of Kangaroo Island] have been lost,” said Daniella Teixeira, a scientist researching the birds at the University of Queensland.



Kangaroo Island’s glossy black-cockatoo were endangered before the bushfires, and conservations fear extensive areas of its critical habitat have now been burned. Photograph: Daniella Teixeira

Dr Gabriel Crowley, of the Centre of Biodiversity and **Conservation** Science at the University of Queensland, has been working on the cockatoo project for 22 years.

She said there was hope at least one flock may have escaped the fires on to Dudley Peninsular in the north-east, but information was still coming in. Those birds may struggle to find food, she said.



The fires had come through at the start of the breeding season when some females would have been sitting on an egg and reluctant to fly away.

She told Guardian Australia: “They have few places to nest and have lost their food supply. Their survival will depend on an intensive recovery effort.

“I’m a bit desperate actually. It’s a very endearing species and each individual is different. Because there are so few, every bird lost is a tragedy. Every breeding female is so important.”



A kangaroo at the Flinder Chase national park on Kangaroo Island. Photograph: David Mariuz/EPA

The fires on Kangaroo Island started with lightning strikes in the Flinders Chase national park. Two people have been killed in the fires on the 160km long island, and its **farming and tourism industry will be hard hit.**



Post office turned into animal rescue centre in charred Australian village

The Kangaroo Island Land for **Wildlife** organisation has eight sites on private land protecting several endangered species, including dunnarts, goannas, echidnas, bandicoots and the glossy black-cockatoos.

Ecologist at Land for Wildlife, Heidi Groffen, said all eight sites were extensively burned. Cameras used for monitoring had melted.

“People call this place a little Noah’s Ark. The island is a refuge. This is the largest fire we have seen in a long time,” she said.

She said they were already trying to get to conservation sites to find if there were any unburned patches where dunnarts and other species might have survived.

“We are trying to be positive,” she added.



Ecologist Pat Hodgens hold up burned wildlife-monitoring cameras. Photograph: Kangaroo Island Land for Wildlife

Sam Mitchell, co-owner of the Kangaroo Island Wildlife Park, told Guardian Australia residents had been delivering injured animals to them, including about 50 koalas.

“At least a third of what has been brought in we’ve had to euthanise unfortunately,” he said. “We are seeing many burns to hands and feet – fingernails melted off. For some the burns are just too extreme.”

Injured kangaroos, wallabies and pygmy possums had also been brought to the park, which was in the process of setting up larger treatment areas for the injured animals.

Koalas were introduced to the island in the 1920s in response to a drop in numbers on the mainland from the fur trade. The introduced koalas were free from chlamydia – a disease prevalent among mainland populations that can cause blindness, infertility and death.

Koalas thrived on the island, and there is a **government program** to reduce their numbers.

Mitchell said some islanders had considered the koalas a pest as their numbers had grown as high as 50,000. He said “probably more than half” of the island’s koalas would have perished in the fires, but it was “a guessing game”.

Prof Corey Bradshaw, an ecologist at Flinders University, has been speaking to scientific colleagues on the ground and said they had grave concerns for the dunnarts and the cockatoos.



### Kangaroo Island fires: farmers shoot injured sheep after 'unfightable' bushfire ravages SA island

“How this is going to impact the long-term efforts is unknown,” he said, but added: “We have been predicting this for so long.

“It is extreme events – whether it’s drought, flood, cyclones or fires – that drives things to extinction.”



Bushfire tornado tears through Kangaroo Island in South Australia – video

Dr Richard Glatz, an entomologist at the University of Adelaide who lives on the island, said he was also concerned for the rare green carpenter bee.

“All that’s left of the bees are on Kangaroo Island and a few in the ranges near Sydney.”

He said the bees made nests in yacca trees and in the trunks of dead banksias and he was concerned that fire had burned many of the areas where the insect lives.

Glatz, chief editor of the journal *Austral Entomology*, said he had moved to the island because of its beauty and its stretches of virtually unspoilt habitats that had ancient lineages.

“I’m still processing all this,” he said. “In a way I’ve been thinking more about the people – we’ve lost something like 50 houses and for a small community, that’s huge.”