**6 January 2020 - Australia’s bushfires and some of their impacts on mammals species (so far)…**

Although it will be some time until proper surveys can be undertaken to quantify the true impact of the current fires on Australia’s mammal species, early reports from media suggest that the situation is bleak. Many of Australia’s top ecologists, including members of the Australian Mammal Society have provided their knowledge to media outlets covering the current bushfire crisis and its impact on species.

Perhaps the most widely reported statistic so far has been that an estimated half a billion animals have been killed in these fires. This figure, initially published in a news.com.au [article](https://www.news.com.au/technology/science/animals/half-a-billion-animals-perish-in-bushfires/news-story/b316adb4f3af7b1c8464cf186ab9f52c), was based on estimates by Professor Chris Dickman at the University of Sydney. A [statement published by Professor Dickman](https://sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2020/01/03/a-statement-about-the-480-million-animals-killed-in-nsw-bushfire.html) provides a valuable insight into this figure, as does an [article from the BBC](https://www.bbc.com/news/50986293). In is important to note that this figure was based on estimates for New South Wales only, although much of Victoria and areas in almost all other states are being been affected by fire. This estimate also does not account for bats, frogs, invertebrates, plants or fungi species so the true number of species impacted is certainly higher and growing every day as the crisis continues.

Professors Sarah Legge, John Woinarski, Brendan Wintle and Richard Kingsford provided valuable insights in a [recent Guardian article](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jan/04/ecologists-warn-silent-death-australia-bushfires-endangered-species-extinction), on the impacts of these fires on numerous Australian mammal species, including Kangaroo Island dunnart, koalas, great glider, long-footed potoroo, silver-headed antechinus, Hasting River mouse and pygmy possum. They do well to articulate the scale and complexity of the impacts of these fires on species, which goes well beyond the immediate impact of death from the fire. For those individuals that survive the initial fire, loss of shelter and habitat, starvation and (for critical weight range ground dwelling mammals) increased predation risk from cats and foxes become significant threats to these individual’s survival.

The current federal environment minister, Susan Ley, was quoted in another [Guardian article](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/dec/27/australias-environment-minister-says-up-to-30-of-koalas-killed-in-nsw-mid-north-coast-fires), that 30% of the koala population on the NSW mid-north coast had likely been killed by fires. The [koala population on Kangaroo Island](https://www.smh.com.au/environment/conservation/bushfires-take-a-devastating-toll-on-kangaroo-island-s-unique-wildlife-20200106-p53p33.html), in South Australia, has also been devastated. Considered a stronghold for the species, as the Kangaroo Island population remains free from chlamydia which affects mainland populations. Current estimates are that [25,000](https://www.adelaidenow.com.au/news/south-australia/kangaroo-island-bushfire-pristine-wildlife-including-koalas-dunnarts-feared-lost/news-story/9a5cbde8e5e4643a93035d12110204e9) koalas have been killed in fires that have burned over [one-third](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-01-05/firefighting-continues-on-kangaroo-island-on-sunday/11841610) of the islands area.

Although it is hard to not be overwhelmed by the scale of this catastrophe, an [article by The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/dec/24/heartbreaking-and-heartwarming-animals-rescued-from-australias-bushfires-devastation) provided some positivity in such a dark time for Australia’s wildlife. The work of wildlife carers, volunteer fire fighters, koala detection dogs and ecologists all give some good news during the unfolding bushfire crisis.