

# Wildlife recovery on Kangaroo Island

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With its rugged wilderness and unique native plants, it's no wonder some of Australia's most iconic wildlife species call Kangaroo Island home.

From the island's namesakes, the Kangaroo Island kangaroo and the endangered Kangaroo Island dunnart, right through to the legendary south coast Australian sea lions, the bold Rosenberg's goanna and the endangered glossy black-cockatoos, the abundance and diversity of the island's wildlife is a huge part of its attraction.

About 20 per cent of Kangaroo Island is made up of national and conservation parks, and it's in these parks that you can find some of the most special flora and fauna. Some so special that they're found nowhere else on earth.

## Bushfire-affected wildlife on Kangaroo Island

The recent bushfires that devastated Kangaroo Island burnt about 200,000 hectares of land – almost half of the island.

Thousands of hectares of native habitat have been lost and animals have perished. Several endangered species have been severely affected.

Some of the more widespread, abundant and mobile species, such as koalas, kangaroos and wallabies, have suffered significant mortalities, but their populations are expected to recover as habitat recovers.

The exact number of native animals affected by the bushfires is yet to be confirmed through modelling estimates and on-ground surveys.

Work is underway to help affected species, ranging from rapid assessment surveys and moving / relocating native animal to safer habitat, to the management of feral cats and pigs on the island.

National Parks and Wildlife Service South Australia (NPWSSA) with advice from the Wildlife and Habitat Bushfire Recovery Taskforce is developing a Wildlife and Habitat Bushfire Recovery Plan with the assistance of conservation and rescue organisations, as well as other community and volunteer groups.

Here's how some key individual species are faring, and the work being done to help them:

## Kangaroo Island dunnarts

Before the recent bushfires it was estimated that between 300 and 500 endangered Kangaroo Island dunnarts lived on the island. All recorded sightings of the marsupial since 1990 have been within the bushfire-impacted western end of the island.

Post-bushfires, initial assessments indicated a significant decline in this dunnart population, with more than 90 per cent of their habitat burnt.

To better understand whether the Kangaroo Island dunnart population has persisted and what native wildlife remains, NPWSSA ecologists are assessing small remnants of unburnt habitat on the western end of the island looking for signs of wildlife.

Since the bushfires, local private land conservation organisation Kangaroo Island Land for Wildlife has continued to work in partnership with private landholders on threatened species monitoring using motion sensing cameras. In the days after the bushfire ended, Kangaroo Island dunnarts were detected as they passed through privately owned conservation land.

NPWSSA is using the same monitoring approach in parks and has verified sightings of Kangaroo Island dunnarts in remnants of Flinders Chase National Park and Ravine des Casoars Wilderness Protection Area. Around 50 cameras have been set up in 10 of the larger unburnt patches of park land.

Feral cat management such as trapping is underway to support the recovery of native animals like the Kangaroo Island dunnart. The Australian Wildlife



Conservancy has also built a cat-proof fence around one known Kangaroo Island dunnart habitat to help lessen the threat of the remaining feral cat population.

## Glossy black-cockatoos

Before the bushfires, Kangaroo Island was estimated to have about 370 glossy black-cockatoos, congregating in seven main flocks.

Five of these flocks relied almost entirely on habitat in the bushfire-affected area for feeding and nesting, while another flock only has part of its habitat in the area. The seventh flock is based mostly on the eastern end of Kangaroo Island.

About 75 per cent of South Australia's endangered glossy black-cockatoo population, found only on Kangaroo Island, lived in the bushfire zone and a significant percentage of its known feeding habitat was burnt.

Long-term recovery actions are underway including building and installing new nest boxes and planting she-oak trees, as glossy blacks like to eat she-oak seeds. The remaining glossy-black cockatoo population is being monitored to better understand flock movements following the bushfires, and a glossy black population count will be carried out in spring 2020.

## Koalas

Before the bushfires, about 50,000 koalas were estimated to live on Kangaroo Island, having grown from a population of 18 that were introduced to the island in the 1920s.

About 85 per cent of their habitat was bushfire-affected, including most of the blue gum plantations where many koalas lived. Early estimations indicate that the Kangaroo Island koala population is now about 5,000 to 10,000.

Kangaroo Island's koala population is unique in that they are free of chlamydia, a disease that is widespread in Australian mainland populations.

In a partnership between Kangaroo Island's Hanson Bay Wildlife Sanctuary and Adelaide's Cleland Wildlife Park, about 30 koalas have been rescued and transferred to Cleland Wildlife Park to prevent them from dying of starvation and to help establish a special disease-free population on mainland South Australia.

## Kangaroo Island echidnas

Before the bushfires, and still today, about 4,000 to 6,000 Kangaroo Island short-beaked echidnas are estimated to live on the island. About 50 per cent of their habitat is bushfire-affected.

This special subspecies of echidna is endangered and has spines that are longer, thinner and a paler colour than those of South Australia's mainland species of short-beaked echidna.

Echidnas have a number of instincts that have allowed them to weather the impacts of the bushfires better than some other species. While they are slow-moving animals, they are able to burrow, giving them some protection during the bushfire.

Also the post-bushfire supply of their favourite insects to eat – termites and ants – may not have been as affected as the food supply of some other native species.

The Kangaroo Island echidna is one native species that continues to be seen in the bushfire-affected parts of the island. Be on the lookout for them in Flinders Chase National Park – they have already been spotted foraging roadside.

## Platypuses

There's really only one place in South Australia to see a platypus in the wild, and that's on Kangaroo Island.

They were one of many species introduced to Kangaroo Island in the 1920s when the island was identified as a refuge for threatened species.

Platypuses can still be found in and around the Platypus Waterholes in the Rocky River region of Flinders Chase National Park. Since the bushfires there have been a few sightings of them in their usual spots in Flinders Chase National Park.

Work is being done to support the survival of this semi-aquatic mammal, including installing aeration pumps to mimic ruffles or water movement, which encourages water circulation and provides better habitat for the invertebrates (like insects) that platypuses eat.

## Other initiatives underway to help Kangaroo Island's wildlife

### Creation of the Wildlife and Habitat Bushfire Recovery Taskforce

The Wildlife and Habitat Bushfire Recovery Taskforce has been established to provide advice on the coordination of activities to benefit wildlife and habitat recovery. While many community groups have mobilised to care for injured wildlife, the taskforce will focus on the effort to re-establish habitat, particularly for the most endangered and vulnerable species.

### Wildlife Recovery Fund

The Wildlife Recovery Fund is a partnership between NPWSSA and Nature Foundation SA to assist with the recovery and restoration of plants and animals. You can donate to the fund by visiting [www.naturefoundation.org.au/supportus/wildlife-recovery-fund](http://www.naturefoundation.org.au/supportus/wildlife-recovery-fund).

### Cameras to monitor wildlife

Cameras have been installed in unburnt areas of Kangaroo Island to monitor wildlife. Once it's better-known what has survived, options can be considered for how to protect these species.

### Feral animal management

A significant portion of the island's feral cat and pig populations are believed to have perished during the bushfires. However, feral cat and pig management continues on the island to support the recovery of native wildlife. Management actions include working with landholders to report sightings and then implementing control measures such as trapping and humane destruction.

### Food drops

While the usual recommendation is not to feed wildlife, the scale and intensity of the bushfires on Kangaroo Island has led to drops of supplementary food and water. NPWSSA is working with the RSPCA on aerial food drops and temporarily establishing ground food and water stations on park. These activities will be reduced as the burnt environment regenerates naturally and grasses grow to provide food.

