

## **Australia fires - Tonnes of carrots and sweet potatoes dropped by helicopter for starving animals**

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Thousands of kilos of sweet potato and carrots are being dropped by aircrafts to feed starving animals trapped in Australia's bushfires.

The New South Wales government commissioned the service called "Operation Rock Wallaby", which aims to send thousands of veggies down from the skies to feed the state's stranded colonies of brush-tailed rock-wallabies.

***'Operation Rock Wallaby' has been commissioned to combat the at-risk nature of the state's marsupial population in the midst of the bushfire crisis***

***Helicopters are being used to drop thousands of kilograms of sweet potato and carrots to the trapped native wildlife***

***The bushfires have been blamed on widespread drought and record temperatures as New South Wales experienced 50C heat last week***

Rock-wallabies were already considered endangered before the bushfires began as a result of habitat destruction.

The environment minister for New South Wales, Matt Kean, said although the native animals have managed to escape the fires, they're now forced to live outside of their natural habitat and are left without food.

He said: "The wallabies typically survive the fire itself, but are then left stranded with limited natural food as the fire takes out the vegetation around their rocky habitat."

"The wallabies were already under stress from the ongoing drought, making survival challenging for the wallabies without assistance."

Tragically, rock-wallabies are one of many Australian species under serious threat of extinction following the bushfire crisis.

***The food drops will now form part of a state-wide scheme addressing post-fire wildlife recovery***

***Although the surviving native animals managed to escape the fires, they're now forced to live outside of their natural habitat and are left without food***

As ongoing bushfires ravage Australia's national parks and fragile habitats, the animal toll from the disaster continues to

rise.

The World Wildlife Fund has estimated about 1.25 billion animals have died either directly or indirectly from the bushfires across Australia, with many pushed to the point of extinction.

WWF-Australia CEO Dermot O'Gorman said: "This heart-breaking loss includes thousands of precious koalas on the mid-north coast of NSW, along with other iconic species such as kangaroos, wallabies, gliders, potoroos, cockatoos and honeyeaters."

Efforts to save Australian wildlife are underway across the country, including on South Australia's Kangaroo Island where fires have decimated more than 215,000 hectares " and wiped out around 30,000 of its local koala population.

There are also serious concerns for the survival of Kangaroo Island's unique species, such as the dunnart, and the glossy black-cockatoo.

The Australian koala species are now declared "functionally extinct" having lost a third of their key habitat in New South Wales alone.

### ***Adelaide wildlife rescuer Simon Adamczyk holds a koala he rescued at a burning forest***

### ***A young koala being treated in Steve Irwin's Australia Zoo, after escaping the wildfire blaze***

Harrowing pictures have captured the charred bodies of thousands of koalas, scattered where their eucalyptus homes once stood.

Kangaroos have been seen desperately attempting to flee great walls of flames, often in vain.

Those fighting fires have reported seeing dead cockatoos falling out of trees.

Heartbroken farmers have been forced to flee their properties, only to return to their burned land and find it littered with the bodies of livestock.

It is feared entire species may be wiped out by the flames, which are expected to continue burning for months.

While bushfire conditions have eased over the weekend, Emergency Management Commissioner Andrew Crisp warned there was a "long way to go" before the fire season will end.

He said: "It is great to have some respite now, so we can reset and refocus in terms of our operational activities and what we can do to support community, but we will have more hot weather."

"We are planning through until the end of March."

Nationally, 28 people have now lost their lives.

***The koala species has been declared "functionally extinct" as a result of the wildfires***

***The heartbreaking image of a kangaroo unable to escape burning wildfires***

***It is feared entire species may be wiped out by the out of control wildfires***

- The Sun