

## Wildlife Victoria's response to the 2009 Victorian Bushfire season

Presenter: Sandy Fernée BA(Hons)  
CEO  
Wildlife Victoria

*Sandy Fernée commenced her journey with Wildlife Victoria as a volunteer over ten years ago when her dog Basil caught a baby bird in their backyard and she made a call to the emergency phone. Sandy subsequently became a rescuer, an Emergency Phone Operator, Emergency Phone Manager, Office Manager and also moved into Committee and Executive Committee roles before commencing in 2005 as Wildlife Victoria's first paid employee. She now works with a staff of 24 like-minded and passionate people and enjoys most of the challenges that managing Wildlife Victoria brings.*

**Abstract:** Early in 2009 Victoria was devastated by wildfires, tragically 173 human fatalities occurred on Black Saturday and others died in fires preceding and following that dark day.  
The loss did not end there, thousands of other animals including pets, and farm animals were killed and millions of wild animals.

Wildlife Victoria's response to that disaster was manifold and the resultant public recognition and donations were extraordinary. The wildlife industry has subsequently been interested in the details of one of the largest wildlife rescue operations by Victorian wildlife groups in the history of the state, and also interested in the magnitude of the response by members of the public who gave financially.

That the interest continues is indicated by an invitation from the conference conveners to present on this subject.

This paper will present:

1. Wildlife Victoria's response to the disaster including:
  - a. Managing the disaster
  - b. Search and rescue
  - c. Supporting shelters caring for wildlife
  - d. Grants for shelters whose equipment, enclosures and other rehabilitation structures were destroyed
  - e. Food drop program
  - f. Media management
  - g. Relationship with the AVA
2. Financial overview of the disaster – income and expenditure
  - a. How much? Clarifying the rumours
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    - i. Equipment
    - ii. Supplies
    - iii. Shelter Support
    - iv. Volunteer Support
    - v. Shelter Grants for those burnt
    - vi. Preparing for the future
  - c. Other major sponsorships
  - d. Ethical considerations and responsibilities with public money
3. Wildlife Victoria's planning response
  - a. Review and feedback of the 2009 operations
  - b. Formulating new methodology based on feedback

- c. Continuing development of key relationships
  - i. AVA
  - ii. DSE
  - iii. RSPCA/Lort Smith
- 4. Subsequent 2010 season analysis
- 5. The broader effects on Wildlife Victoria as an organisation

## Wildlife Victoria’s response to the 2009 Victorian Bushfire season

Early in 2009 Victoria was devastated by wildfires, tragically 173 human fatalities occurred on Black Saturday (7<sup>th</sup> February 2009) (Wikipedia contributors n.d.). The loss did not end there, thousands of other animals including pets, farm animals and millions of wild animals also perished.

Wildlife Victoria has had some experience in managing wildfire responses in previous years, however nothing could prepare the organisation for these events.

This paper will give a brief overview of the processes, challenges and events that Wildlife Victoria experienced immediately following 7<sup>th</sup> Feb 2010. It is designed to be an informative narrative rather than a detailed analysis and will focus on areas that have generally been indicated as ‘of interest’ to people outside the organisation.



Picture shows areas burnt on Black Saturday in Victoria

(Wikipedia contributors n.d.)

### Managing the disaster

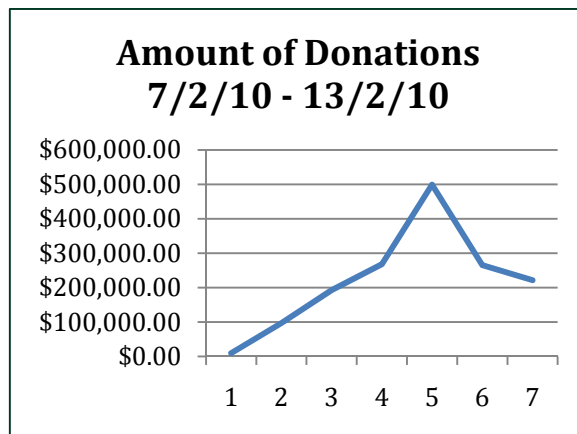
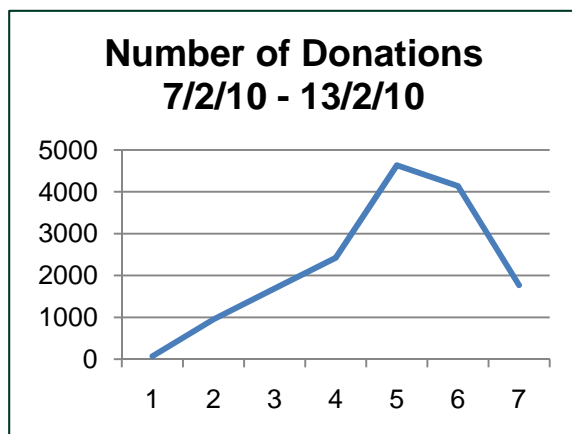
#### Staffing Levels

Wildlife Victoria immediately engaged Manfred Zabinkas as the Disaster Response Manager (DRM). Manfred had previously managed Wildlife Victoria’s disaster responses and was able to take up the reigns quickly and efficiently.

At that point the only other staff were the Chief Executive Officer – Sandy Fernée, and the Volunteer Services Manager who had been in the role for little more than one month (Shaun DeSilva).

It became necessary for a reallocation of roles and Shaun increased his role to include managing the office while the Executive Officer’s role became entirely focused on the response to the disaster.

By the 7<sup>th</sup> day we had 15,680 donations totaling \$1,553,127.98 which allowed us to respond, not only to the cost of arranging rescuers, but also to the necessary staffing requirements including three staff members just taking and receipting donations and managing the donor care.



Other staff brought in included a Media and Communications Manager and later an Office Manager, a role that was initially filled by various volunteers until it became obvious that we needed continuity and accountability in the role.

Volunteer levels at the office also escalated with up to 10 volunteers per day just managing phone calls, opening mail, recording donations and undertaking banking. The office was open 7 days a week, usually from 9am till after 10pm each day.

### *Communications*

Communications became an enormous problem – the CEO and DRM were getting over 1000 emails per day which meant that important messages were being overlooked. Mobile phones were also difficult to manage, each call we took would result in ten missed calls which we had no time to listen to. This caused a multitude of problems, not including that field operatives were not able to get through to the office to call for support. To mitigate this problem various key personnel were issued with new, prepaid phones whose numbers were only given to people who were key field operatives. These new phones were always answered as a priority.

Communications continued to be a problem throughout the incident, we were used to dealing with one incident at a time and during this period we had crews working in 14 different places around the state.

### *Emergency Phone Service*

Another major problem during this period was the number of calls being made to our Emergency Phone Service; at this stage the phone was staffed by volunteers with most shifts covered by just one volunteer at a time. Almost all phone calls to the Emergency Phone were from people wanting to volunteer, donate or were seeking information about the fires. This meant that people with a genuine need to seek help for an injured animal were not able to get through to an operator.

We endeavoured to address this by ensuring that the first message in all our communications to public, especially through the media who were very cooperative in this, was to ask people not to call the emergency number unless they had an injured animal. Even with this strong message, we did not seem to be able to overcome this problem and unfortunately we expect that a number of animals were possibly not attended to in a timely manner because of this. Later in this paper I will talk about our progress as far as preparing for another future event in which we have addressed this issue as a priority.

### **Search and rescue**

#### *Sites*

Pomberneit	Daylesford
Reedesdale	Kilmore
Taggerty	Yea
Whittlesea	St Andrews
Wilson's Prom	
Franskton	Myrtleford
Beechworth	Upwey
Yarram	Woodend
Malmesbury	

### *Volunteers*

One of our key roles was to get volunteers on the field as soon as possible. With sites all over Victoria it was a monumental task to get teams out with enough experience and suitable skills to each site. While every team had experienced members in it, most were also made up with one or two new volunteers who, although had undergone some theory training, had never been on a fire ground before. We made sure we never sent a team out without experienced members who could manage the requirements and training of the new recruits.

Another management challenge was the number of people putting their hand up to volunteer, from Belgium to the USA we had people willing to fly over and undertake search and rescue. We took up offers from very few interstate people with a couple of exceptions. Most offers we received were made hastily and without much thought and because each day hundreds of offers were being made, most were ignored as it was not possible to respond. An offer from Lisa Bailey from Qld was an exception to the rule, it was made with attention to detail, was very professionally presented and was sent with a resume that outlined some very key skill-sets that we could make use of. For that reason only it received a second glance, then a thorough read and in the end an agreement for her to take on the role of volunteer management during the fires. Lisa's contribution to the success of the undertaking was significant. Lisa's tasks included liaising with fire officials to seek permission to enter sites, putting out calls to volunteers and placing them in teams, ensuring that volunteers had information regarding appropriate routes to take to get to sites (this was important as so many roads were blocked and volunteers often had to take circuitous routes), arranging accommodation for volunteers and a multitude of other tasks. A debt of gratitude is owed to the Redlands City Council in Qld for supporting Lisa's volunteer work with us in Victoria.

With so many sites to cover we found we did not have enough team leaders to direct the teams. When WIRES rang to offer support we took them up by requesting they send down team leaders. This proved extraordinarily successful. WIRES leaders led our teams at various times through the Marysville and Beechworth areas. This was our first introduction to Nationally Accredited trained team leaders and I will later outline how this relationship formed part of our future planning.

### *Equipment*

Purchase of equipment was made difficult by the lack of supply and the sometimes urgent need. However because there were no financial issues we were able to respond to urgent requirements immediately. Accounts were set up where equipment was being bought on a regular basis and most other items were bought on credit card with a reimbursement process.

## **Supporting shelters caring for wildlife**

### *Supplies Coordination*

One of the greatest challenges of the time was managing the supplies donations, purchases and distribution. Jan Mattraw undertook this task in a voluntary capacity. Due to the overwhelming flood of donations of goods in kind it became apparent very early that we needed to communicate our needs to the public and limit the generous, yet unusable items that were arriving. We posted to our website a list of items that we could use and limited the number of towels, blankets and pillowslips that each person could donate. Jan set up satellite stations that were given as drop off points for donations. These volunteers would do an initial sort and then box up and send all items to our major distribution centre. The distribution centre was a residential rehabilitation centre whose clients repackaged and sent out to shelters according to the requests coming in.

### *Shelter liaison*

WV has been involved in supporting shelter operators during disasters for many years and in every case there have been no requirements for that shelter to be a member of Wildlife Victoria, nor are queries about membership of other groups ever raised as a criteria for decisions around support. WV considers that the public who make donations during disasters are placing in the organisation a great deal of faith to distribute and support equitably and our organisation is gratified by that faith. We also recognise that the injured wildlife is the focus and to limit our support to non-members directly effects the wildlife.

Having said that, WV does not have a full list of shelters in Victoria. Those shelters who were listed with us, and were in the fire areas, we made every effort to contact and ascertain their status and requirements. We also asked people to pass messages to their local networks to let them know that WV could support them and requesting that they contact us if they needed help. We are very proud of our achievements in this area in that every person who made contact with us for support was given support.

### *Distribution*

WV's focus was on supplying goods rather than money. In many cases this was what was most needed as shelters were too busy to go out and make purchases themselves. We delivered, either via a system of volunteer couriers or by post, thousands of dollars in stock that had been donated, and we purchased items that were required that had not been donated.

Distributed items ranged from heat pads, formula, burns kits, teats, and mealworms to small aviaries and enclosures and at one point, when the Ashwood Wildlife Shelter made contact because they had no more room to house koalas we had on stand-by a \$30,000.00 shipping container with windows, air conditioning and functioning sink, although in the end it was not required.

WV also funded a number of new enclosures for carers who were taking on an increased load due to the fires. Wombat, koala and macropod enclosures were the main requests and I am no longer sure how many we funded during this time.

## **Grants for shelters whose equipment, enclosures and other rehabilitation structures were destroyed**

### *Contact*

The first notification of a loss of a wildlife shelter was Stella Reid from Wildhaven who rang the day after the fires had destroyed her home and her enclosures. From that point we were notified over time about another 17 shelters that had been effected or destroyed by the fires.

In most cases we were notified either by the shelter operator themselves or by friends or the network. WV supported both member shelters and non-member shelters equally, no questions were asked about group affiliations and every shelter was granted enough to replace all equipment and structures that were not covered by insurance.

Sensitivity around contacting needed to be considered, some shelters no longer had a mail box for us to send forms and requests or pens to even fill in a form, and some only had a mobile phone supplied by Telstra or the Red Cross for contact. To support these shelters sensitively the shelter support team rang them and we filled in the forms required as we talked with the shelters about what had been lost and what type of funding they needed. In many cases they needed prompting and we developed questions to help us ensure that we gathered as much information as possible. These included asking them to recall their enclosures, through to stocks of formulas and even

replacement of fridges that may have been used solely for the purposes of wildlife food. One shelter operator had lost his vehicle that he used for his rescues and it turned out to be uninsured for fire and we were able to help fund a replacement vehicle for him.

### Food drop program

In the early stages of the response it was recognised that a large scale Food Drop Program was going to be needed to “assist the surviving -non injured- native animals still living in their home ranges but with little or no natural food, due to the fires’ devastation” (Simmonds 2009, 2). With the enormous work load currently being undertaken by Wildlife Victoria volunteers and staff it was agreed to outsource this project to another agency including a \$50,000.00 grant to cover costs. Two suitable agencies were approached however neither responded to the request and the timeliness of the project was put in jeopardy. It was decided to bring back in-house and WV advertised for and employed a Food Drop Coordinator, Adriana Simmonds, to manage the project.

The main objective of this program was to provide to the starving wildlife a balanced, nutritious and environmentally safe food source until their habitats recovered enough to support them again.

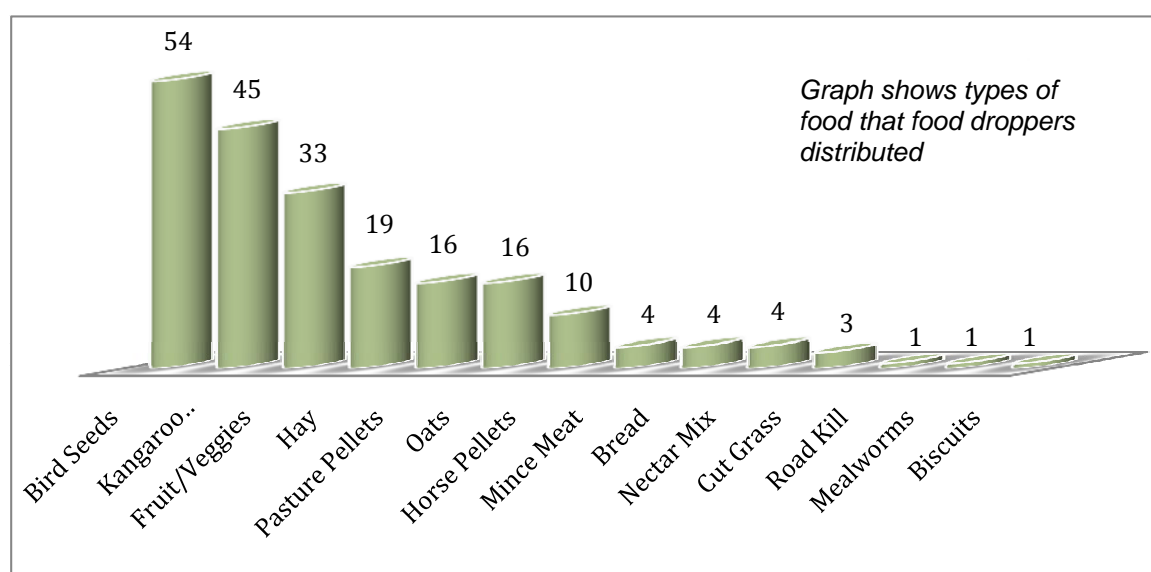
The food and equipment needed during this program was provided free of charge to registered volunteers (food droppers), through accounts opened by WV in different supplies stores, across the State, in fire affected areas.

In this way, the benefits were not only for the wildlife, but for the food droppers and the local businesses as well.

(Simmonds 2009, 2)

Guidelines for types of food were developed in conjunction with the Australian Veterinary Association (Simmonds 2009, 3). The guide gave information about nutrition and also about the potential environmental hazards in some food sources such as seed-laden hay.

An assessment sheet was also created to assist each food dropper to consider their own particular area and needs (Simmonds 2009, 3).



(Simmonds 2009, 14)

Advertisements went out about the food drop program including in the newspapers that serviced the areas where fires had gone through (Simmonds 2009, 3).

In the beginning of the program food droppers were predominantly local people who already had a link to wildlife in some way. Increasingly we had other local people join for whom the process became almost therapeutic (Simmonds 2009, 4). By the end of the program 24 stores across the state had Wildlife Victoria Accounts open where registered food droppers would pick up food. This was also helpful in that we could keep an eye on the types of food being offered and revisit the guidelines with people if the accounts came in with the wrong types of food (Simmonds 2009, 6).

137 food droppers were involved in the task, two detailed surveys were sent to them to gather important data to learn what worked and what did not work (Simmonds 2009, 9-10). The full report is available from Wildlife Victoria.

### **Media management**

A key area of management in the incident was the management of the media. The media were constant in their enquiries and disruptive to the functioning of the operations because both the DRM and CEO were constantly taking calls. It became apparent very early that we needed someone to manage that full time and Fiona Corke was engaged. Fiona had experience with media and was also already cognizant of the requirements of the role, coming with a strong knowledge of the wildlife rehabilitation industry and also of Wildlife Victoria.



David Tree and Sam the Koala really catapulted the plight of the wildlife in the fires to an international audience. There is no way of estimating the value of this image to the wildlife industry, however there is no doubt it was enormous. It is also without doubt the key motivator in the response by the public to give to the Wildlife Bushfire Appeal run by Wildlife Victoria.

From that one photo was born a media frenzy to seek more and more information about what was occurring for wildlife in the fires. Traditionally media have sought wildlife stories after the initial story of the fire runs a course of about two weeks. Sam and David gave wildlife an immediate spotlight and we were able to use that to educate the public about what to look for when seeing wildlife around the burnt areas and to then action an experienced assessor to go out to reports of injuries.

### **Relationship with the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA)**

The AVA set up an emergency task force to help support veterinarians in the fire regions (most of whom were offering pro bono service to any fire victims at an enormous cost to their practice), to support the staffing of wildlife triage at staging areas and to facilitate home visits to busy shelters who were dealing with enormous numbers of wildlife. The AVA also arranged vets with darting capabilities to attend search and rescue where needed. Wildlife needs were represented on the task force by myself, Dr Elaine Ong, Dr Chris Barton and Dr Helen McCracken (Melb Zoo).

The AVA has continued to develop their disaster response plan which is likely to be available nationally. In Victoria we were fortunate indeed for their support of the wildlife needs and I was honoured to be invited as the only non-vet member of that team.



## Financial overview of the disaster – income and expenditure

### How much? Clarifying the rumours

There has been much speculation about the amount of money that was donated to Wildlife Victoria during the fires. This is surprising as there was never any need for speculation, we published interim reports during the fires and our accounts, including a detailed analysis of the funds received for the Wildlife Bushfire Appeal (2009) have now been on our website for sometime.

Wildlife Victoria received 24,681 donations to the bushfire appeal totaling \$3,324,888.81. A further one million dollars was donated with no explicit directive given by the donor.

### Cost analysis:

#### Equipment

\$58,481.00 was spent on search and rescue equipment and volunteers' expenses

#### Supplies

\$162,096.00 was spent on purchasing items for shelters including food for wildlife, medical supplies, drugs and enclosures.

#### Volunteer Support

Following the lead of the Red Cross Appeal we decided to get immediate financial support to as many shelters as were affected by the fires that we were aware of. A grant of \$1000.00 was made to each shelter with no requirements for reporting back. This matched the actions of the Red Cross' response for people who were victims of this tragedy.

We decided also to support the efforts of our volunteers each search and rescue volunteer was given a gratuity of \$250.00 each to help cover the costs involved including purchase of their fire boots. WV also covered any other costs that volunteers claimed back through the reimbursement process.

\$83,154.00 in total was given out through this program.

#### Shelter Grants for those burnt

\$206,435.00 was granted to the shelters who were directly affected by the fires to help them replace and rebuild their shelter.

A total of nearly half a million dollars was directly spent on responding to the fire. Approximately 44% of Wildlife Victoria's total expenses for 2008-09 financial year.



### Other major sponsorships

Kindness House – use of expanded office area free of charge

Petstock: Grant \$29,000 for building 5 emergency response trailers

Australian Geographic: \$25,418.91 raised through donations taken via stores

Mazda: 6 Vehicles

Newman's Own Foundation: \$50,000USD

### Ethical considerations and responsibilities with public money

I have alluded to the fact that WV considered the moral responsibility in being entrusted by the public with their donation. There was never any question about the support to any person who had been directly effected by the fires, were undertaking rehabilitation of wildlife or were participating in search and rescue. WV never included queries regarding membership with WV or with any other groups.

The donations were given to us by the public simply to facilitate someone help to the suffering wildlife, we hope that we kept that focus, we were determined to do so and we certainly did our best.

There were mistakes made, there were people unintentionally overlooked, some people were reluctant to come forward for help either because they felt themselves fortunate not to have been in the path of the fire and wanted the focus to be on those less fortunate shelters or because inevitably there were people who just did not hear about our commitment to help, however at the end of the day we were satisfied with meeting that moral obligation to the best of our ability and we are still happy to take feedback on areas where people noticed we may have failed because we believe that feedback leads to better practices for the future.

### **Wildlife Victoria's planning response**

Having received 3.3 million dollars and requiring only \$500,000.00 to respond to the 2009 fires means that we are in the fortunate situation where we are able to invest further in creating better processes and plans for future responses to disasters with the knowledge that we will be able to sustain a high level response with financial security for some time.

An example of this was the response to the 2010 season where a relatively small incident was called to manage the wildlife coming out of the Northern Grampians fires. This incident was entirely funded by the monies donated in the 2009 fires.

As part of the planning for disaster responses we engaged a project manager to put together a formalised process that gives clear guidelines and roles for responding to any wildlife incident. The role (Disaster Response Project Manager - DRPM) was undertaken by Philip Clark. His direction in this project has seen some incredibly positive changes in the Department of Sustainability and Environment's (DSE) attitude to wildlife rescue in wildfire resulting in some positive updates to the Wildlife Rescue in Wildfire Protocols (DSE Revised 2009).

### **Review and feedback of the 2009 operations**

A number of methodologies were used to gather feedback from various stakeholders who were involved in the fire response. A session was held for volunteers to meet and outline key areas for improvement for our response. Surveys were used as a tool to gather feedback from shelter operators. Meetings either by phone or in person were taken with other key personnel.

### **Formulating new methodologies based on feedback**

#### *Team Leaders*

One of the most significant improvements coming out of the 2009 experience was the commitment to train team leaders. WIRES introduced us to the National Accreditation Course for team leaders and allowed two of our people to participate in one of their 4 day courses in New South Wales. The feedback from attendees was extremely positive and we made arrangements for the trainers to run the same course in Victoria for 20 key people. Nominations were made by various sources including Wildlife Victoria Regional Coordinators, DRM and CEO. 40 nominations were made and each person was asked to submit an application to fill one of the 20 positions. Those 20 people then undertook the 4 day accredited course, 4WD training and Level 2 first aid and around half have also completed the Robert Gordon Personal Support – Professional Development training.

Wildlife Victoria also trained another 20 people in Senior First Aid and 10 people were also trained and accredited as tree climbers.

We are looking at other possible opportunities to up-skill our volunteer base including national accreditation for firearms use. Furthermore we are building a plan of continual training opportunities to allow for succession and increase in these key roles.

#### *Improved Volunteer Registration System*

Volunteer registration is done automatically via a web-based system and more details are requested now of applicants to give us a better indication of their skill level. The volunteer registration was automated as much as possible and people could register via our website and give some very detailed data about their experience, what type of volunteering they wanted to participate in, their availability, their equipment and their contact details. This data is automatically updated to our data management system, Salesforce, and this enables the DRM to do searches on specific skills needed to make up a functioning team.

#### **5 New Mobile Response Units fully equipped for immediate deployment**



A grant from Petstock of \$29,000.00 dollars was matched by Wildlife Victoria to develop 5 quick response trailers. Each trailer is kitted with PPE, rescue equipment and emergency triage kits to deploy 2 full teams. These

trailers will be stationed in key regions around the state to enable immediate response to disasters anywhere across the state. Two of these trailers were deployed for the Roses Gap fires with mixed success and further improvements are being made based on new feedback from the field operatives.

#### **Continuing development of key relationships**

##### *Australian Veterinary Association*

We have continued to have strategic meetings with the AVA and have supported their process development by supplying them with a communications database based on the system we use for our own data management and working on record keeping forms including a rescue and a triage recording system (see below).

We also worked with the AVA to set up an appropriate management system for dissemination of drugs; an account was opened with a drug company in Wildlife Victoria's name and we authorised a voluntary veterinarian to access that account and manage the drug requirements for the response. He then liaised with local vets who were supporting wildlife carers to supply drugs free of charge to them for the purposes of treating wildlife from the fires. These local vets then prescribed to their local shelter operators according to their usual process. We are working with the AVA to refine this process but for the most part it worked well.

##### *Department of Sustainability and Environment*

A detailed set of protocols (DSE Revised 2009) were in place for the 2009 fires however there was limited success due to the DSE and CFA officers having little training, or in

some cases even any knowledge of these protocols. The protocols also had limiting procedures including areas like fire-arms usage and the need for teams to be accompanied by an authorised DSE officer at all times. Since the 2009 fires a lot of work was undertaken with the DRPM liaising regularly with the DSE resulting in an updated set of protocols that meant that most of the limiting protocols were revised or removed.

Meetings with DSE following the Roses Gap Fires have also been held to update DSE on the success of these new protocols. The key area of concern this time was that DSE field officers were still not aware or briefed in the protocols. This caused misunderstanding and a slower response by rescuers who sometimes were not permitted to enter the fire grounds despite meeting the protocol requirement. DSE have recognised this as a key area of concern and are focusing their efforts on communicating and training their officers in the protocols.

### RSPCA/Lort Smith

Meetings with RSPCA (Vic), AVA and Lort Smith have resulted in a standardised record keeping method that will be rolled out to all animal groups in fire grounds. These record forms are designed so that field rescuers can affix a copy of their record to the triage sheet which, being in triplicate will enable vets to take a record to support auditing of their drug stocks, the carer takes the copy with the rescue record attached in order that they have information regarding the provenance of the animal and one copy remains with the record book for the organisation managing the station.

Each page is uniquely coded and each page has a place for the unique code of the corresponding rescue and triage form respectively. The design is not specifically for wildlife – it is purposely designed to facilitate all animals in order to allow consistency across all agencies. It was not rare for our wildlife rescuers to pick up an injured domestic animal and for the RSPCA to rescue wildlife during these fires. To have a standardised form allows for easier transfer to the appropriate organisation (note that in Victoria RSPCA do not generally rescue wildlife – they refer those rescues to Wildlife Victoria or another wildlife group).

Triage code transferred from triage record



Uniquely numbered capture code printed on each sheet

Clear instructions are printed on each sheet

When complete write in Triage code, tear off and affix cover sheet to Triage sheet for animal, and return carbon copy.

**WHITE COPY - TRIAGE, GREEN COPY - HEAD OFFICE**

Capture code: <span style="color: red; font-weight: bold;">12345678</span>	
Triage code: <span style="background-color: black; color: black;">XXXXXXXXXX</span>	
Species: _____	Date: <small>dd / mm / yr</small> / /
Captured: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Time: <small>am pm</small> : :
Team Leader name: _____	Contact number: _____
GPS/Map reference: _____	
Location description: _____	
Reported injury / Condition: _____	<b>TRIAGE URGENCY</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Immediate <b>1</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Urgent <b>2</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Minor <b>3</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Euthanase <b>4</b>
Drugs Administered / Additional Details: _____	
Fate of animal: _____	

<b>Animal Triage Record</b>		Capture code transferred from capture record Triage code. <b>TR</b> <b>00001</b> Capture code.		Uniquely numbered triage code printed on each sheet			
<b>1300 094 535</b>							
Species.		Date acquired. / / Time.					
Animal Name:		Triage Vet name.					
Sex	Age	Weight	Contact number.				
<b>INITIAL PHYSICAL ASSESSMENT</b>							
Head	Ears Eyes Nostrils Mouth	<div style="display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> <div style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg); font-weight: bold; margin-right: 5px;">FRONT</div>  </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> <div style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg); font-weight: bold; margin-right: 5px;">BACK</div>  </div>					
Body	Fur/Skin Body Condition Pouch Genitals						
Limbs	Left Forelimb Right Forelimb Left Hindlimb Right Hindlimb						
<b>INITIAL PHYSICAL PARAMETERS</b>							
Heart Rate							
Temperature							
Respiration					Tarsus - Unswollen - Open nostrils		
Hydration Status					Tarsus - 1/2 cupped - 1/2 cupped - 1/2 cupped		
Mucous Membranes					Color. CRT		
Other comments.							
<b>INITIAL MEDICATION</b>							
	Medication	Dosage rate & volume					
Sedation							
Antibiotics							
Fluids							
Pain relief							
<b>TRANSFER INFO</b>			<b>OUTCOME</b>				
Shelter name.	Date.	Time.	<input type="checkbox"/> Euthanased <input type="checkbox"/> Dice <input type="checkbox"/> Released <input type="checkbox"/> Transferred				
Contact name.							
Shelter permit no.							
Transporter.							
<i>Allix Records Record for animal to Triage Record. If animal is transferred ensure Triage Record cover sheet is given to animal caretaker.</i>							
<b>WHITE COPY - SHELTER, BLUE COPY - TRIAGE VET, YELLOW COPY - HEAD OFFICE</b>							

Clear instructions are printed on each sheet

These record books are available at cost price from Wildlife Victoria. Wildlife Victoria will keep records of codes so that lost/misplaced information can be more easily tracked/returned to the original group. No branding has been made on these books – Wildlife Victoria’s Emergency Phone number is the only identifying feature – however without labeling.



## The broader effects on Wildlife Victoria as an organisation

### Emergency Phone Service

One of the key areas of concern during the 2009 fires was the break down of the Emergency Phone Service. It was deemed imperative that this service be given immediate attention to ensure that future events did not cause this type of failure again.

The Emergency Phone Service was being operated by a series of volunteers rostered over the week. The phone line was directed to their home numbers at specific times each week. The phone service had only one line and this system failed with the number of calls coming in during February.

Following the fires we investigated how to ensure the system would not fail again. A key component of the investigation was to develop an Emergency Phone Service that would be scalable. It was agreed that to create a best-practice operation we needed to bring in paid staff to allow monitoring of information, better training and skill sets and an improved overall functionality. Aisha Reynolds, engaged as Emergency Phone Manager developed the project and eventually engaged twelve part time staff with the service commencing operations on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2009.

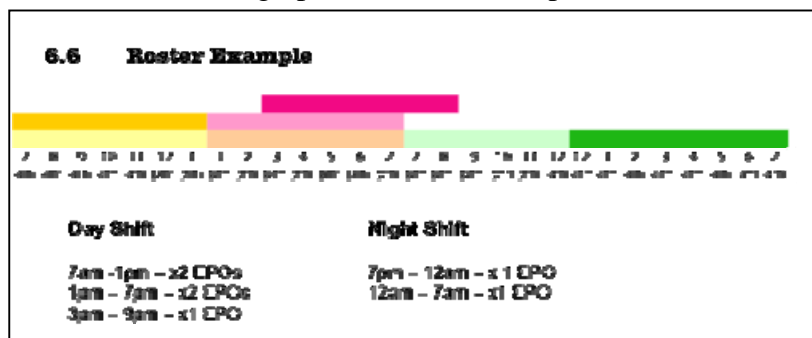


Figure shows shift levels during summer. 3pm-9pm shift does not operate during slower months. 7pm-7am are covered by staff members at their homes, all others are from the call centre in Fitzroy.

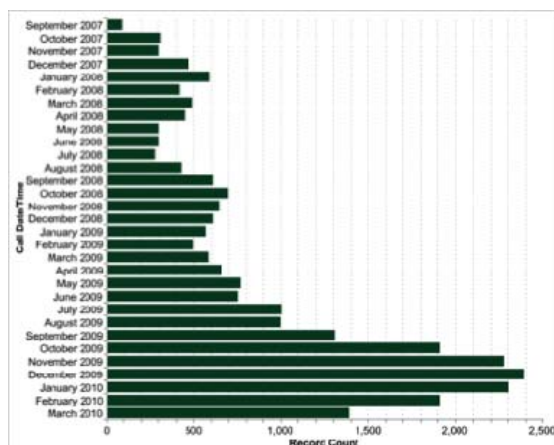
(Reynolds 2010, 38)

A six month review of the service show the improvements from the volunteer-based system. Not only have we increased our call from an estimated 30,000 per annum to a confirmed 79,419 in the first 6 months (Reynolds 2010, 4), we also have the capacity to upscale to 10 simultaneous operators immediately.

There has been some positive and negative feedback around engaging staff to operate the phones, however even without the burden of the fires Wildlife Victoria's volunteer

system no longer had the capacity to take the current call load. We were also experiencing a high level of turnover in our volunteer staff towards the end of the volunteer service due to the stress and large workload required of them. Now with a minimum of two staff at all times during the day we are consequently servicing more wildlife rescues daily and the staff are supported by the professional environment and team work.

### 3.3 Cases Entered Comparison 2007 - 2010



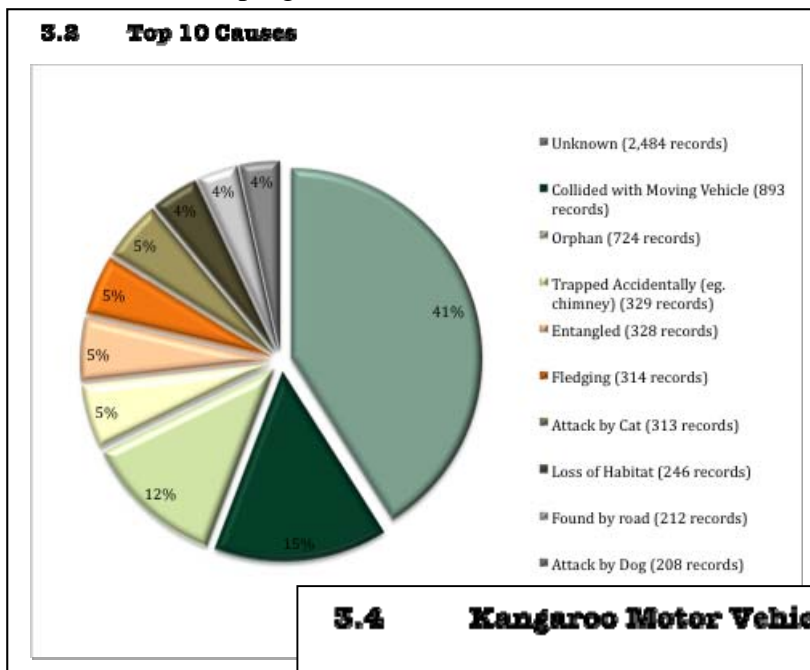
• 2007/08 to 2009/10 increase - 367.8%

Taking the system to a professional level has also been acknowledged and commended as a great step forward by key stakeholders like DSE, Councils, Zoos Vic and others. (Reynolds 2010, 14)

There are other significant improvements in the quality and quantity of data collection and entry (see figure above).

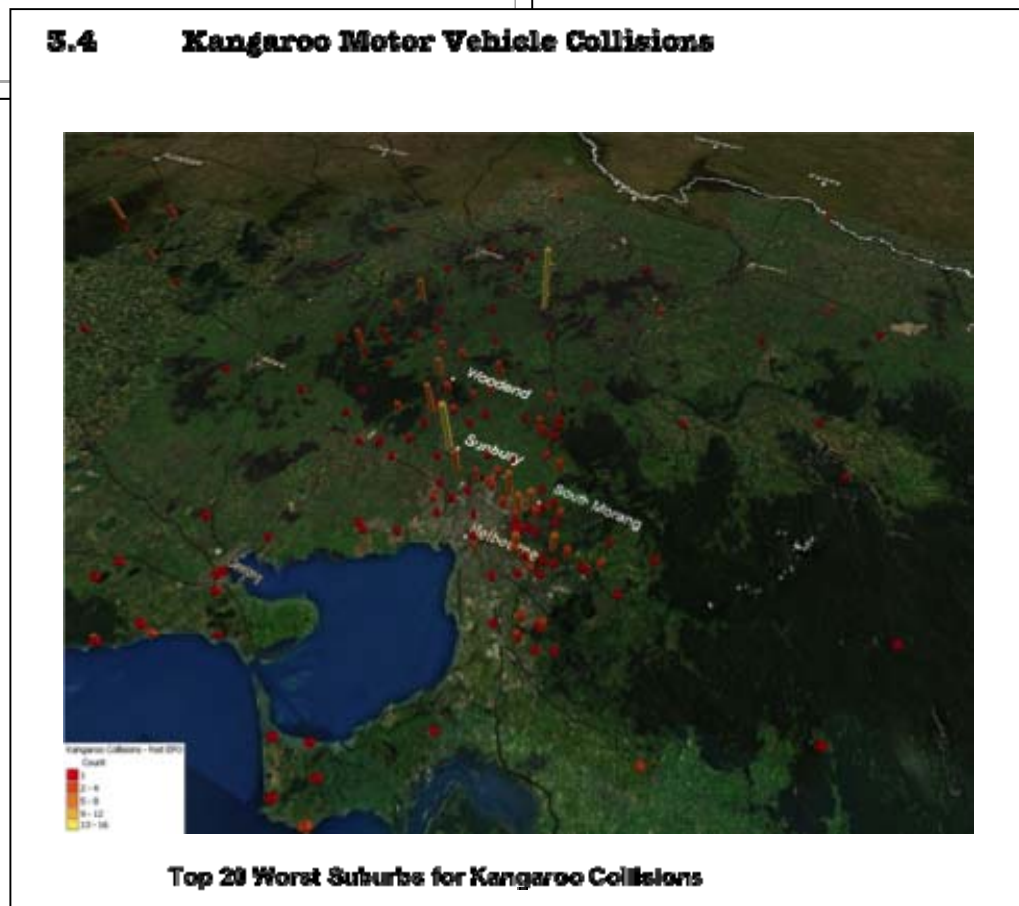
This improvement means better report building and capacity. Better reporting helps in lobbying and planning, for example our data shows that the top species reported to the Emergency Phone are the Brushtail and the Ringtail (Reynolds 2010, 16) which helps us purchase resources that support this finding and planning training events that will meet the greatest need.

By understanding the top causes of injured wildlife we can also focus our community education programs.



With the information about worst areas for collisions between cars and kangaroos we are able to resource areas better with road signs, roo nets and support tailored training for those areas.

With information on where kangaroos mostly get hit we can also lobby government for better awareness programs including more signage about wildlife on roads. (Reynolds 2010, 17)



(Reynolds 2010, 20)

### *Fundraising*

We are also investing in fundraising to ensure that the organisation can continue to fund not only disaster response but also the Emergency Phone, the volunteer and member support and our education and community awareness programs.

With around 23,000 new donors it was important that we sought professional help in managing this particular science. We were fortunate to engage Amy Amato, a marketing and fundraising professional, whose commitment to wildlife rescue commenced as a volunteer during the 2009 fires.

Fundraising is an intricate and multi-faceted discipline and Amy is presenting at this conference on that topic. With the know-how of the experts Wildlife Victoria is now in a financial position to maintain its current commitment to support the wildlife volunteers, facilitate quick and effective rescues via the Emergency Phone and respond to disasters better and more efficiently than ever.

### **Conclusion**

This journey has been a series of diverse experiences, deep sadness for the loss that the State suffered, in human life, but also in the loss of shelters, many of which had injured wildlife present when the fires destroyed their premises. Talking with these folk was heartbreaking at times, but also uplifting as they reassessed their commitment to the animals and came out determined to create a better future.

We were devastated by the thought of the suffering of millions of animals killed by the fires and the thought of those remaining, suffering with injuries or starvation or both, and we were proud of the way in which our volunteers responded, with enthusiasm, deep commitment and a seemingly tireless effort over weeks of punishing circumstances. These people were the heart of the operation, without a doubt, and I take my hat off to them and am humbled by their efforts.

Finally we were astonished by the way in which the public opened their hearts and wallets with such generosity that meant that financially we were not limited in how we responded.

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