



“Everything dead to the root”²

“Koala numbers have plunged over the past 20 years. And if we don’t turn the trend, they won’t be functionally extinct – they will be actually extinct.”⁹

Australia’s Minister for the Environment, Susan Cey, announced that up to 30% of koalas may have been killed in the 2019-2020 bush fires.²⁶ The real figure may never be known - but one thing is for sure, local populations of koala are heading towards functional extinction¹- this is when a species population is so reduced that it no longer has enough members to provide a future generation. So, although not technically extinct – yet - the koala is under dire threat.²⁶



“It’s events like this that may well hasten the extinction process for a range of other species.”²⁷

Many other endangered and vulnerable animals were also affected by the fires. These included the Western Ground Parrot, Kangaroo Island Dunnot,²⁶ Hastings River Mouse and Bush-tailed rock Wallaby.²⁷

“More than one billion animals.”¹⁸

Professor Chris Dickman of the University of Sydney estimated that more than a billion animals had died across Australia in the 2019-20 bushfires.¹⁸ This figure excludes bats, birds reptiles frogs, insects or other invertebrates. The calculation also used conservative estimates so the actual losses would have been substantially higher.¹⁸ The final number may never be known due to the vast extent of the fires and their intensity.²⁷ But whatever the final count it is a tragic loss to the biodiversity of Australia – and to life on Earth as a whole. All such creatures play vital roles in their communities and all are important.

“We’re probably witnessing what Climate Change will look like in other parts of the world in Australia – now.”¹⁸

“[This] should be a wake-up call for the government.”²⁸

The wildlife of Australia is seriously threatened from a range of threats including land clearance, exotic pests and more recently Climate Change and wide-scale bushfires.

The wildfires of 2019-20 demonstrated to the world their potential for enormous and rapid destruction. They can kill trees within hours, drastically alter landscapes on a broad scale and have profound impacts on biodiversity. There is urgent need to the Australian government – for humanity as a whole – to recognize the risks of rapid broad-scale change associated with Climate Change caused by anthropometric greenhouse gas emissions.²⁹

“There is no scientific evidence that cutting carbon emissions could reduce the severity of the fires.”⁴

Yet, even as the fires raged across Australia killing people and destroying communities Australian Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, declared that there was no direct link between the wildfires and the nations carbon emissions.⁴ Even as vast areas of Australia were destroyed and millions of animals killed, he argued against any reduction of Australia’s greenhouse gas emissions.²³ Well – quite simply – he is wrong. What’s urgently needed is coordinated action to try and stem the loss of biodiversity. This should include vastly improved conservation actions and the creation of immense protected areas.³⁰ Above all action is required to stem the damage caused by Climate Change. This needs to include the reduction, and ultimate elimination, of all greenhouse gas emissions and the transition to a renewable energy economy. Australia – humanity as a whole - needs to act to reverse the causes of Climate Change and fast.

“Climate change is expected to lead to an increased rate of [koala] population reduction over the next 20-30 years.”⁷

The bushfires that ravaged extensive areas of Australia over the 2019-20 fire season took an enormous toll on wildlife with huge numbers of mammals, birds, insects and other species killed.²⁷ Koalas cannot outrun fires and unknown thousands died. We are lucky that there are populations in other parts of the country that were unaffected by the fires, so this iconic species is not yet forced into extinction. The koala only exists in Australia and once gone this distinctive species will be lost forever.²⁷





But perhaps the most moving image to emerge from the bushfire crisis was of injured and distressed Lewis. His plaintive whimpering received international coverage and became the symbol for the plight of wildlife across the continent.²⁷ Maybe - just maybe - the people of Australia and humanity as a whole might take notice and act to save the remnants of his species.

“As the embers cool, and the smoke begins to clear the harsh reality sets in.

This is far worse than we could have ever imagined.”¹

Dean

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