



## President's Message: Wildfires Burning

The inescapable environmental news of late are the wildfires. Most notable recently are the fires in Australia. They have sadly destroyed more than 12 million acres of land and likely killed more than a billion wild animals. Before this, of course, there were the Brazilian fires that destroyed more than 4.5 million acres of valuable rainforest. Siberia lost 2.6 million acres, California: 260,000 acres and numerous other smaller wildfires were recorded. Among the animals affected in these disasters, numerous reptiles and amphibians likely face extinction as a result of these fires.

Seeing these disasters unfold breaks my heart and I feel helpless as I wish I could do something to help. I'm sure many of our members share these feelings. Care for animals is what led us to this profession, and we all feel saddened as professionals for both animal and human health. I want to respond to these areas; I want to fight climate change; I want to end plastic pollution. While I can't leave my job to do these things, as an organization we are able to help. We collectively have a great deal of knowledge and resources to offer the veterinary community worldwide.

One of our members, Dr. Todd Driggers from Arizona, has recently started raising funds and has needed to increase the goal amount numerous times due to the overwhelming outpouring of support. He will be traveling to Australia to offer support in person. I'll let his words speak:

On January 3rd, I posted a fundraiser for Australian wildlife to assist veterinary colleagues and wildlife caregivers (rehabilitators) thinking we would raise perhaps 2000 dollars. I underestimated the public concern and compassion and likely will be able to donate nearly 30 times that initial amount. Shortly after the fundraiser began, I was offered temporary licensure in 3 Australian states.

While specific details where and when we are leaving have not determined due to the overwhelmed infrastructure in a wildfire, we anticipate directives shortly. It is likely we will be working in Victoria in the lower Southeast of Australia on the coast. They have an abundance of Koala's, kangaroos, wombats, possum, birds, and reptiles. A team of five self-funded individuals will be renting a car upon landing, visiting a feed store for animal supplies, and enroute to a series of temporary wildlife care stations. We are assisting and working alongside small animal vets in diagnosing, treating, and determining releasable chances for the wildlife. We are also speaking to caregivers on would management and smoke inhalation. Additionally, we will be listening for local caregiver needs and ways to effectively donate to increase the number of non-found wildlife from the fire-stricken areas. One of our team members is an excellent drone operator. We will be making feeding stations where wildlife is known or seen to congregate. We will be observing for injured wildlife with drones and binoculars. Captured patients will be transported for care after sedation and pain medication are given and then will be transported to a stabilization facility nearby. We will load up and drive down the coast to the next days' scheduled facility for two weeks. We are funding the individual caregivers based upon both the numbers of animals in their care and their facility. Much of the food in the bush is gone. Food may not be available for

releasable patients into the wild until a month or so after rain season has come due to the fire impact. Currently, it is their hot summer, and little rain has helped quell the fire.

Our funding philosophy and priority is focused on short term finding the unfound and potentially suffering wildlife at the level of the caregivers. Mental fatigue and financial stress is said to be exhausting these dedicated helpers. The Australian government has organized some donations for care of patients, but like any government may lag with the distribution of funds at the time when the wildlife's health and caregivers' financial needs limit the survivability of the patient. Thus far, we have made financial commitments based upon boots on the ground suggested needs to Central Coast Flying Foxes (fruit bats) and Adelaide Koala Rescue. We are funding an orphan milk program through Wombaroo for caregivers with baby marsupials and ongoing needs. We are negotiating with great companies for exotic animal care products both here in the United States and in Australia to make their products available as a donation or discounted fees. Thank you Oxbow, Wombaroo, and Vetafarm in advance for all you are doing. At the end of our mission and if any funding is left, we will make appropriate donations based upon our better understanding of the direst needs. Obviously, lots of funding has been given and needed to fight the fires as a priority, because without an environment to release them back into, the future is bleak. At the same time, we are marching on to do what we can, to save all we can, to ease pain/suffering when necessary, and to create a tomorrow for this wildlife.

It's amazing what compassion this group has. If you are in Australia, Brazil, Siberia or other areas where there are threats to wild populations of reptiles or amphibians, reach out. ARAV is a very compassionate and resourceful group.

If you would like to contribute to Dr. Drigger's fundraising, you can find the link here: <https://www.facebook.com/donate/1546686808813600/10219279468471533/>

We will also post this on the public and members-only Facebook pages.

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