

Australian Bushfires

The Alpine wilderness area in North East Victoria is on fire and many of Australia's wildlife are feeling the heat

By Crystal Apilado

Posted: December 20, 2006, 5 a.m. EST

Four fires are blazing across the terrain in the state of Victoria in Australia.

Sandy Fernee, executive officer with Wildlife Victoria, said that while other fires in the state are burning on residential private land, the majority of area on fire in North East Victoria is wildlife parks and land.

Fernee said that parrots that make their home in the affected area include yellow-tailed black cockatoos, gang gangs, galahs, sulphur-crested cockatoos, rainbow lorikeets, king parrots, swift parrots, crimson rosellas, eastern rosellas, red-rumped parrots and blue-winged parrots. Other native birds and animals in danger of the fire include kookaburras, ibis', raptors, tawny frogmouths, koalas, kangaroos, wallabies, wombats, possums, gliders and many reptile species.

Fernee said that because the area that is burning is such a large area, there is a possibility that some of these species may become extinct. She said that another problem is the loss of so many animals and birds has a devastating affect on the gene pool, especially for endangered species. "And we are in the baby bird season so there will be a great loss this year of the juveniles," Fernee said.

Wildlife Victoria has helped shelters prepare for the incoming number of distressed wildlife. Fernee said that the organization has provided shelters with medical supplies, towels and blankets, plus are helping them with funding through a bushfire campaign. "People can donate to relieve the burden on the shelters and let them focus on rehabilitation of the wildlife," Fernee said.

Tracy Edwards, Emergency Coordination Centre information officer, said that "Help for Wildlife" is another volunteer based non-profit organization that has taken action to assist in the aid of wildlife affected by the fires.

Both organizations have established wildlife rescue units that go in search of injured animals once an area is safe to enter.

Edwards said that due to the active state of the fires, at this time there are no statistics on wildlife impact that has been released.

For information on these organizations and to find out how to help the bushfire animal victims, go to their websites: Wildlife Victoria www.wildlifevictoria.org.au and Help for Wildlife www.helpforwildlife.com.