THE GREAT EASTERN RANGES
connecting people...connecting nature


Photo ©Paul Fahy and Taronga Zoo

# Delivering a coordinated restoration response to the 2019-2020 bushfire crisis

The sheer magnitude and intensity of the current bushfire crisis requires coordinated and complementary efforts to restore habitat and assist wildlife across eastern Australia. The Great Eastern Ranges Initiative (GER) is in a unique position to be able to respond to the fires through a staged approach that reacts quickly to the immediate threat, whilst ensuring the long-term restoration, resilience and connectivity of our land, wildlife and communities post-fire.

Since 2007, GER has been bringing people and organisations together to find innovative solutions that address environmental challenges just like these; stemming the loss of native plants and animals, providing natural solutions to climate change, protecting precious resources and ensuring a healthy, resilient landscape for wildlife and people.

Our well-established network of regionally based partnerships, involving more than 250 organisations, collaborate on locally-led projects and initiatives across 11 key landscapes spanning the length of Australia's Great Eastern Ranges. GER provides the common vision, science, geographic focus and shared priorities that bring people together to achieve results that are far greater than the sum of their parts.

We know where habitat needs to be urgently restored in response to the fires and where unburnt habitat can be enhanced to help sustain wildlife. We already have the people and structures in place to enable us to coordinate complementary restoration efforts across organisations, land tenures and regions in a way that has a much greater impact at the continental scale.


## A phased approach to help restore and reconnect:

**Phase 1 - Emergency relief:** The first phase of recovery will involve the immediate support of wildlife carer groups who are working to keep animals and birds impacted by the fires alive. People are being increasingly coordinated through WIRES and other local care groups to put food and water out in unburnt areas and immediately adjacent to burn scars, whilst others are focused on the search for and recovery of animals. To support these efforts, we will work with the Land For Wildlife network to distribute information to landholders about practical things they can do to help and point them towards local experts who can provide advice.

**Phase 2 - Restoration and recovery:** We are already rapidly gearing up to follow with a second phase of recovery and restoration that involves three different types of project:

- **Restoration of feed areas:** Coordinated replanting of key feed areas with high volume nectar-producing shrubs and trees to support nomadic species such as flying foxes and honeyeaters, who will increasingly rely on these landscapes for survival in the next few years.
- **Creation of habitat:** The establishment of supplementary habitat for small, tree-dependent mammals such as gliding possums, phascogales and microbats through the installation of nest boxes to replace the natural tree hollows that have been lost. Projects will also include the restoration of native understorey to increase insect prey numbers and improve general habitat structure, as well as strategic management of feral predators.
- **Facilitating wildlife movement:** The creation and enhancement of climate change corridors to enable movement, adaptation and recovery of koalas and other mobile, forest-dependent native animals that need to disperse and recolonise habitat patches as they recover.

**Phase 3 - Building long-term resilience:** The third phase of long-term recovery efforts will focus on strengthening the health and value of habitat in unburnt regions to assist wildlife in the short term whilst helping to protect these areas from future fire events. Despite the enormity of the losses, substantial parts of the ranges remain unburnt and will be critical to the survival of a host of birds, mammals, reptiles and insects that have been pushed close to the edge of extinction through loss of core populations. In the case of areas that have been intensely devastated by the fires, we will work to re-age and re-wild these in the future to increase the diversity of plant species and support a greater range of wildlife.

## What are the Great Eastern Ranges

The Great Eastern Ranges is a mountainous spine that runs the length of eastern Australia, separating the moist coastal hinterland from the arid interior. They are a biodiversity hotspot, supporting 60% of Australia's threatened animals and 70% of its plants. The ranges also form the watersheds for the major river catchments of eastern Australia, providing clean water for over two-thirds of the population, whilst their diverse forests are the most carbon-rich on the continent. But this spectacular landscape is under pressure from habitat loss, rapid development, population growth and a changing climate.

The unprecedented bushfires of 2019 to 2020 have seen more than 6 million hectares of bush, grassland and farming country across eastern Australia devastated and an estimated one billion animals lost or injured. Vast swathes of the Great Eastern Ranges have been impacted, including ancient Gondwana rainforests that have not burned for over 1,000 years. The fires follow a prolonged period of drought that has already significantly affected habitat and wildlife and will further exacerbate the impact of the fires. Traditionally these species would have sought refuge in the forests and woodlands of the Great Eastern Ranges – the same areas that have been heavily impacted by the fires.

Significant areas of the ranges' biodiverse woodland and forest habitat, however, remain unburnt and these areas will become even more vital for the survival of our wildlife in the short term while we work to restore and reconnect habitat across the burnt sections.

## How you can help

GER and our partners have identified several restoration and conservation projects, along with essential research and capacity-building activities, that you can support in response to the bushfire crisis:

| Project | Focus | Program | Summary Description |
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| **Restoring the nectar flyways of the Great Eastern Ranges** | Migratory birds and bats | Flyways | Populations of nectar-dependent birds and bats are suffering from widespread loss of vital feeding habitat due to the fires and drought. This will have short-term, regional impacts on biodiversity and ecosystem health, and longer-term, national impacts on the ability of species to adapt to climate change. Alongside partners including Birdlife Australia, GER will work to resolve the food shortage through targeted, infill plantings in key habitat used by nomadic and migratory honeyeaters.<br><br>Using preferred nectar feed tree species, we will:<br>○ Coordinate restoration activities across priority winter feed areas;<br>○ Mobilise volunteers to assist with seed collection, plant propagation, feed area restoration mapping; and<br>○ Coordinate monitoring of tree and shrub flowering events to guide future cross-regional planning. |

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| **Koala Climate Connectivity Restoration** | Koalas and gliding possums | Stepping Stones | GER will work with its partners and others to encourage a series of linked, complementary projects that combine at scale to deliver credible post-fire recovery and future climate adaptation solutions for koala conservation.<br><br>Activities will target locations and approaches that aggregate to:<br>o Protect, buffer and enhance the resilience of core koala habitat areas to provide populations with vital drought refuge;<br>o Target koala habitat remnants on the adjacent north-west slopes and altitudinal gradients to the east coast where connectivity with the main range needs to be consolidated;<br>o Support conservation advocacy efforts and private land conservancy partners to ensure the continued protection of intact forest areas and the corridors that connect them; and<br>o Work with an existing network of Landcare groups, landholders and connectivity conservation alliances to deliver cross-tenure, multi-property corridor restoration. |
| **Connecting people with nature to manage the Glideways of the Great Eastern Ranges** | Gliding possums and microbats | Glideways | Targeted interventions in strategic locations post-fire will help to prevent further population declines of gliding possums and microbats. By coordinating projects across tenures in priority districts, Glideways will help to ensure that existing populations of gliders persist, while also supporting the habitat and movement needs of a host of other local wildlife.<br><br>As part of this, GER will work with local schools and Landcare groups to carry out reconnaissance surveys in key areas to assess the impacts of the fires on glider populations and their habitat, train local community groups to assess and restore habitat, and achieve greater local awareness of glider conservation issues.<br><br>Other key interventions include:<br>o Delivering local field events such as night surveys to raise community awareness of the significance of landholders' properties in contributing to natural 'glideways';<br>o Strengthening the capacity and coordination of individuals, landholder groups and partner organisations to link glider conservation efforts within and across land tenures and districts; and<br>o Increasing the area of restored or enhanced habitat available to gliders through the restoration of functional connectivity or priority linkages. |
| **Mapping the impacts of fire on the migratory flyways of eastern Australia** | Migratory birds | Flyways | GER will conduct research to develop a better understanding of the impact of the fires and drought on habitat used by long-distance, migratory species including native birds, bats, butterflies and other flying insects. We will also take stock of priority areas that support the seasonal movement of wildlife to ascertain whether they have been burnt or remain intact. This will help to prioritise areas for restoration and revegetation.<br><br>This work will:<br>o Provide vital information for connectivity conservation practitioners;<br>o Inspire community action in key areas throughout the ranges; and<br>o Generate data that helps inform future planning and policy, including long-term, climate change adaptation. |

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| **Strengthening the capacity of GER to mobilise and coordinate its network of regional alliances** | Supporting the catalytic role of the GER | Program Coordination | Maintaining the network of connectivity conservation practitioners working across the GER will be vital to ensuring a well-coordinated bushfire recovery effort.<br><br>To ensure this happens GER will:<br>○ Develop new relationships with emerging and prospective new regional alliances;<br>○ Support regional alliance coordinators through strategic planning, training and knowledge sharing;<br>○ Refresh existing web communications content, and communications and engagement plans, to better communicate the work of GER and our regional alliances, and support internal network communications; and<br>○ Promote the benefits of connectivity conservation and GER to the whole-of-community. |

## For more information on GER's bushfire response, contact:


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## How to donate

**Australian Residents:** Tax-deductible donations to the GER Bushfire Recovery Effort can be made via our fundraising partner, the National Parks Association of NSW:

Name: National Parks Association of NSW
BSB: 062-016
Account: 00904951

Please be sure to indicate that the funds are for the 'GER Bushfire Recovery'

**Overseas residents:** Financial contributions can be made either by contacting us, or made in Australian Dollars directly to our account using the following details:

**BANK DETAILS**

Currency: Australian Dollars (AUD) only
Swift Code: CUSCAU2SXXX
BIC Code: AU//313140
Bank Name: Bank Australia
Bank Address: c/o – CUSCAL Limited, 1 Margaret Street, SYDNEY NSW 2000, Australia

**BENEFICIARY DETAILS**

Account Name: Great Eastern Ranges Limited
BSB: 313-140
Account: 12190287
GER Address: Suite 107, 55 Miller Street, Pyrmont NSW 2009
Reference: BIC AU//313140