

AFTER THE EVENT: WILDLIFE + HABITAT

A practical field guide for State Emergency Service (SES), Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ), Council field crews and recovery teams working after bushfire, flood and severe storm.

Scene safety comes first. Work only within your agency's incident and site controls. Do not enter floodwater, unstable fireground or unsafe vegetation to search for wildlife. If a wildlife or habitat issue is not an immediate safety threat, flag it before it is removed.

1 LOOK

Check hollows, nests, dreys, logs, dense foliage and sheltered ground before cutting, chipping or moving vegetation.

2 RECORD

If safe: species or description, number, location/GPS and a photo. Include deceased wildlife and habitat damage.

3 REPORT

Injured, heavily waterlogged, disoriented or displaced wildlife should be reported promptly to trained wildlife responders or a veterinarian.

4 RETAIN

Where safe and practical, keep hollow-bearing timber, logs, branches, litter and unburnt refuge in the landscape.

BUSHFIRE

Keep refuge on the ground

- Retain standing hollow-bearing trees and dead stags where they have been assessed as structurally safe. Natural hollows can take many decades - and in some landscapes more than a century - to form.
- Leave large logs, hollow-bearing branches, bark, leaf litter and unburnt refuge patches in place where operationally possible. These provide immediate shelter and foraging structure.
- Loss of vegetation cover after fire can increase wildlife vulnerability to predators, including foxes and feral cats. Retained logs and refuge provide cover during recovery.
- If a hollow-bearing tree must be removed, do not automatically chip or burn the hollow section. Preserve and flag suitable hollow sections for habitat salvage or re-installation.
- Record and report injured wildlife and deceased wildlife where this fits agency procedures. A deceased female marsupial may still have dependent young.

Post-fire wildlife searches or "blackwalks" should only occur after the area is declared safe and under the relevant incident/site access arrangements.

FLOOD

Water can hide injuries

- Never enter floodwater to rescue wildlife. Report the location and seek specialist assistance.
- Heavily waterlogged, distressed, disoriented or unexpectedly displaced wildlife should be assessed by a trained wildlife responder or veterinarian.
- Animals may have taken water into their lungs or suffered internal injuries even when obvious external wounds are not visible.
- If an adult marsupial has been submerged or heavily waterlogged, dependent pouch young may also have been affected. Report promptly.
- Where floodwater has stripped riparian cover, retain suitable native logs and branches already deposited on site where drainage, access, infrastructure and bank stability allow. Repositioning material within a waterway should be planned with the appropriate environmental or waterway staff.

Keep culverts, drains, roads and critical infrastructure clear. Habitat placement should never create a new flood, erosion or public-safety hazard.

SEVERE STORM

Check before you cut

- Before chainsaw, chipper or loader work, inspect downed vegetation for hollows, nests, dreys, roosts and sheltered animals.
- Fallen hollow-bearing trunks and branches can remain valuable habitat. Leave them in place where they do not create an operational or public-safety hazard.
- Where removal is necessary, suitable hollow sections can be retained in manageable pieces for habitat restoration or use in wildlife rehabilitation enclosures.
- Salvaged hollow sections may be securely re-installed as habitat hollows or incorporated into habitat poles by competent staff where appropriate.
- Wildlife may be injured, waterlogged, displaced or separated from young. Storms can coincide with breeding seasons, so check for nests, roosts and dependent young before vegetation is processed.

If there is no immediate hazard, a quick photo and call before disposal can preserve habitat that would otherwise take many decades to replace.

DON'T "CLEAN UP" THE HABITAT

A burnt, flooded or storm-fallen tree may look like debris. For wildlife, it can still be shelter, a den, a nest site, a feeding surface or protection from predators.



Wildlife found?

Scan for WDRR's practical "Helping Injured Wildlife" guide, including species-specific first-response advice.

wdr.org.au

RETAIN

Keep safe hollow-bearing trees, dead stags, fallen logs, coarse woody debris, leaf litter, rocks and unburnt refuge. Avoid unnecessary "tidying" of habitat.

REPURPOSE

Salvage suitable hollow trunk and branch sections. Re-use timber in habitat restoration, brush/log refuges, secure habitat hollows or wildlife rehabilitation enclosures.

RECORD

Note wildlife seen, injured or deceased; tracks and signs; damaged hollows; den sites; feral predator evidence; GPS/location and photos where safe.

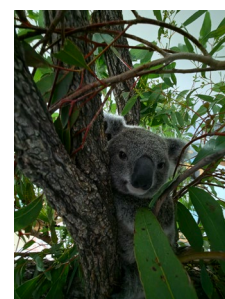
RESTORE

Use habitat inspection to guide temporary refuge, woody structure, revegetation, weed and feral-predator response, and longer-term monitoring.

Where WDRR fits

Wildlife Disaster Rescue & Recovery supports wildlife response and environmental recovery during and after disaster events, working alongside local disaster management, emergency services, councils, veterinarians, wildlife carers and land managers.

- Disaster-management trained volunteers and field safety systems.
- Deployable Emergency Response Unit with wildlife rescue, containment and transport equipment.
- Wildlife search and rescue once operational access is approved.
- Post-fire wildlife searches ("blackwalks") and habitat impact inspections once access is approved.
- Wildlife observations, deceased wildlife counts and impact recording.
- Triage and transport coordination with vets, hospitals and licensed carers.
- Habitat salvage: hollows, logs and woody structure that can remain or be reused.
- Recovery works including physical habitat restoration, revegetation and follow-up monitoring.
- Escalation of emerging environmental issues such as feral predator activity or habitat loss.
- Practical advice to crews before habitat-rich material is removed from a site.



Before a hollow-bearing tree or log is disposed of...

If it is not an immediate safety hazard, photograph it and contact the environmental lead or WDRR before disposal. It may be able to remain in place, be made safe, or be salvaged for habitat rather than chipped, burnt or sent off-site.

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Wildlife assistance: Contact WDRR or, where wildlife is safely contained, your local veterinarian.

**Immediate threat to people/public safety:
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