The financial year to 30 June 2020 has been transformative, and tumultuous, for Science for Wildlife Ltd (S4W).

We started the year on an “operations as usual” basis with the main focus on progressing the Blue Mountains Koala Project (BMKP). We ended the year having had a very significant role in rescuing koalas from the worst bushfires Australia has ever experienced, and the organisation’s profile and financial standing and is now at a level we could not reasonably have expected only 12 months before. Not forgetting the Covid-19 overlay.

Due our extensive wildlife emergency response, our executive director Dr Kellie Leigh, who already had a significant standing in koala research and management, is now an even more highly respected name in the environmental community and been sharing our experience to inform numerous Federal and State government initiatives in relation to saving koalas. As subscribers to our website and Facebook page will know, Kellie is respected and ever increasingly sought-after commentator in the public media arena.

S4W has been the beneficiary of incredible support from local, regional and international communities. Details are provided below but I’d like to give special mention to San Diego Zoo, very long-standing supporters of S4W, who were extraordinarily generous in providing much-needed emergency funding for our koala rescue and bushfire response work, and also to the new Sydney Zoo who provided a fleet of water stations when it seemed that many Blue Mountains wildlife species who had survived the bushfires would then perish from dehydration.

As our latest financial statements show, S4W is now in a secure financial position thanks to the generosity of many people and organisations. We now have the challenge, and it is a good one, of using our solid financial foundation and leading reputation to build the capacity of the organisation to make a larger enduring impact across environmental fields in Australia and elsewhere.

A current major priority from the Board’s perspective is to build S4W’s professional administrative structure by expanding our human resources, and thereby to allow Kellie to devote her time to leading the organisation in the scientific and operational field. This process is well underway, and details of the human resources engaged are outlined below.

A very big thank you to all involved in S4W. We now have had over 400 volunteers involved in the BMKP, and their participation enables S4W to achieve so much more in terms of gaining data on koalas which can then be applied for evidence-based conservation. Thank you to all who have contributed to S4W in numerous ways – by donating in kind, by giving up their time and by financial assistance. Every contribution, of whatever kind and in whatever amount, is very gratefully received and it shows that there is widespread support for what S4W stands for as an organisation and what it seeks to achieve.

My sincere thanks to Pitcher Partners who have audited the accounts pro bono for the last several years and thereby enhance the credibility of S4W. Finally, thank you to my fellow board members who have selflessly served pro bono for several years and contributed to the exciting position in which S4W now finds itself.

I wish everyone a happy 2021 and hopefully we will be in a position to report even more exciting progress for S4W this time next year.
Our Mission

Our mission is to create and share scientific knowledge to empower wildlife conservation.

Our Promise
To contribute to effective wildlife conservation by developing innovative solutions based on science, and through genuine collaboration and community involvement.

Our Values
Innovation  Collaboration  Objectivity  Integrity  Accessibility

Our Future Plan

The word “unprecedented” has been overused lately, but we can’t find one that captures this last year more accurately. In this time of climate change, with more intense and more frequent fires expected, 2020 was a grim glimpse into our future.

That is a frightening thought, for people and for wildlife. We have to respond to this challenge. We have to adapt and change the way we manage the landscape and rethink the actions we take to conserve wildlife and habitats.

Heading into this new future, there is an increased need to understand more about how a changing climate will impact us. We can’t manage things effectively without science to show us the best way forward.

In response to this challenge, we will work to scale up our research and conservation efforts across more areas and more species, so that critical information gaps are filled and we are armed with the knowledge we need to have an increased impact. We will continue to work across land tenures using an approach without fences or barriers, that allows for recolonization and restoration of the landscape.

We will scale-up our efforts to engage communities in wildlife conservation. Many of the fire fronts were stopped outside of towns, leaving intact bushland in and around developed areas. These are important refuges out of which wildlife can recolonize burnt areas as habitats recover. Communities are integral to success.

“To meet the urgent need that our wildlife is facing, we plan to continue to scale-up.”
Year In Review
Summary 2019 - 2020

The year started quietly enough, but ongoing drought and rising temperatures brought a warning of the summer to come.

Bushfires began early and quickly grew, with over 100 burning across NSW at once by early summer. Our work in and around the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area was brought to a halt. We watched as fires consumed the areas where we had been mapping koalas and their habitats. Some of us evacuated our homes.

Then we rolled our sleeves up and moved across the burning landscape doing what we could to save wildlife, together with an incredible community of willing volunteers and experts.

As we took stock, COVID-19 hit, shutting down our volunteer work.

Despite everything, out of the ashes of 2020 we have grown stronger.

This was an unforgettable year. A year of challenges, of great loss, and of resilient community spirit.
How We Work
Our Core Activities in FY19/20

Our Projects have steadily grown in scope and number each year, and this year was no exception. In addition to taking on adaptive management of our existing projects in the face of the fires, we took on emergency response animal welfare work to help save as much wildlife as possible, plus a new study evaluating the success of koalas released after veterinary care and rehabilitation.

01 Blue Mountains Koala Project
This project is focused on mapping koalas and their habitats in the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area and understanding their ecology. We have uncovered a nationally significant koala population and our work now involves mapping fire refugia with a view to long term conservation planning.

02 Genomics for species conservation
In partnership with James Cook University and the Australian Museum, with funding under the NSW Koala Strategy, we are creating a new technology tool for assessing genetic diversity of koalas across the species range. This will inform management of both wild and captive koala populations.

03 Wildlife Emergency Response
This project grew out of necessity and involved search and rescue for burnt and injured animals, and deployment of water stations and food drops. We targeted threatened species colonies across remote areas, and put out resources to benefit arboreal (tree dwelling) species as well as ground species.

04 Monitoring the success of care
In partnership with the National Parks and Wildlife Service, we began tracking koalas that have been released from care to evaluate their survival rates and their success back in the wild. This project addresses a critical information gap and will inform protocols for the rehabilitation and release of koalas into the future.

05 Science for animal welfare
Much of the emergency response work had never been done before, including new designs for water stations. We deployed camera traps to measure the success of different water station designs and food drops, as well as to assess which species survived the fires in different areas.

06 Lower Zambezi Project
A trip to Zambia resulted in further development of the Program Proposal, as well as expressions of interest from major international donors. Covid-19 made it difficult to progress the Program any further due to travel restrictions, but we remain in discussions with partners to implement in 2021.
Highlights
Research and Conservation

Increase in the area we cover
Our Koala Project area now includes Greater Western Sydney, and due to the fires we are now working across all of our potential study sites at once to assess fire damage.

Increase in Projects
We added 2 new projects; the koala post-rehabilitation study, and the emergency response work project comprising 4 new activities.

- 700 Koala tree use data points
- 130 Koala surveys since The fires
- 58 Disease Tests

Increased understanding of koala ecology
The data we have collected from koalas is telling us which tree species they use, which habitats are most important, whether they carry disease, and which key threats they face.

How do koalas use the landscape after fire?
This critical work is telling us where koalas survived, helping us to understand any conditions that aided their survival during the fires and after, and will ultimately help us plan for a future for them under climate change.

How big a threat is chlamydia?
Disease can play a vital role in determining whether koala populations grow or decline. After drought and fire when koalas are displaced or stressed, disease can emerge and become more of a problem. We have started to monitor for changes by collecting and testing scats from different areas.
Tough start to 2020

Bushfire impact summary

The 2019/2020 bushfires demonstrated that nobody was prepared for a catastrophic event of that scale. We adapted on the run...

We are proud to have been a lead organization working for wildlife during and after the bushfires.

What we achieved:

1. We completed an emergency evacuation of koalas from an approaching fire front in Kanangra-Boyd National Park and returned months later when it was safe for them. This involved ongoing browse collection every week for 3 months to keep them fed at Taronga Zoo, and racing Covid-19 shut-downs to get them back into the wild. We are now tracking koalas at this site to work out how they use the landscape after fire.

2. At over 80 locations, across 3 sites that we know support koalas and other threatened species, we installed and maintained arboreal and ground water stations, food drop stations and remote camera surveys. A huge thanks to our dedicated ecologists, tree climbers (who installed the drinkers and cameras up in trees) and volunteers. The sites were between 70 to 100km apart, and it was no small feat to keep the water and food maintained on a regular basis for 3 months.

3. Search and rescue for burnt and injured koalas and other wildlife across 3 sites, working with WIRES and veterinarians.

4. Surveys for surviving koalas, including using our scat detection dog team plus volunteers doing visual surveys, plus capture and health assessments of koalas on and near the fire grounds.

13
Koalas rescued

We completed the first emergency evacuation of koalas from approaching fire, and kept them safe at Taronga Zoo

240
Equipment deployed

We deployed 240 water stations, food drops and camera traps – to prevent dehydration and starvation after fires and to monitor their effectiveness

116
Days

We undertook search and rescue for injured wildlife, collected food for the rescued koalas, and maintained water and food drops on a weekly basis after the fires
Measuring Bushfire Impact
Evaluating impact to plan for recovery

The extent of the fires was devastating. Our last hope lies in the varied fire intensity, with the steep terrain and diverse habitats potentially providing refugia from fire for koalas and other species. Our ongoing extensive surveys will tell us more.

80% Koala study sites burned

We had identified 5 study sites where we were uncovering koala populations in the Blue Mountains region. Four of them burned, only the lower Blue Mountains site was left intact.

75% Of SE Wollemi /Hawkesbury

We had mapped koala habitats in the SE Wollemi National Park and down into the Hawkesbury local government area. Roughly 75% of habitats were devastated by the Gospers Mountain Fire.

90% Of Kanangra-Boyd NP

We had almost finished mapping koalas in northern Kanangra-Boyd National Park to the Megalong Valley. The Green Wattle Fire massively impacted the habitats in this protected area.
Highlights
People Power

Blue Mountains Koala Project
Our rapid response to the bushfires was made possible by overwhelming support from volunteers, donors and partners. It was a huge team effort. We were able to train and then coordinate a growing army of volunteers. They enabled our large-scale emergency response for koalas and other wildlife and are also powering our ongoing work monitoring koalas and assessing the fire impacts.

2020 S4W Community growth

Our volunteers worked across a range of projects. A few examples:

- **470** Registered Volunteers
- **150** On emergency Response work
- **80** On surveys across firegrounds
- **45** On koala ecology after fire & care

- **4,420hr** Number of Volunteer hours for bushfire emergency response
- **1,280hr** Volunteer hours on Post-fire surveys
- **2,300hr** Volunteer hours monitoring koalas after the fires
Highlights
Sharing Knowledge

Many lessons were learnt this year, and they were shared to drive change at both government and community levels.

This year demonstrated beyond doubt that our wildlife is facing new challenges under climate change. While we were busy on the ground dealing with the impacts of the bushfires, we were also sharing our knowledge and experience to help plan for the future.

Our Executive Director, Dr Kellie Leigh, communicated our unique experience during the bushfires across a range of Government platforms that inform conservation management and policy. Those platforms included two NSW Government Inquiry hearings, a special bushfire meeting under the NSW Koala Strategy and a Federal Government Ministerial roundtable at Parliament House in Canberra. Dr Kellie’s testimony is included in the report from the NSW Upper House State Inquiry into Koala Populations and Habitats in New South Wales.

In addition to the state and federal government forums, we shared our expertise across a range of different forums and community settings in an effort to guide community action for positive change. This included presenting at a Recovering our Backyard Bushfire Expo in Blackheath to advise people on how to safely put out food and water for wildlife after the fires, undertaking multiple training days with volunteer groups, and sharing social media content and videos.

We also brought attention to the plight of koalas and other species, and the key conservation issues that need addressing, via a range of media platforms.

Messages in the Media

General awareness of the impacts of the fires, and ways to plan for the future are critical to drive effective conservation. Our reach included coverage in:

- 35 local and national online and print articles in magazines and newspapers
- 7 national and local news stories on TV and radio
- 9 international stories on TV, online and radio
- Coverage included National Geographic, Australian Geographic, ABC Radio National, BBC World News

34 Community events and training days
5 Govt. Planning and Policy workshops
60 Media articles
Science for Wildlife enjoyed significant growth this financial year. This was due to steadily growing project grant income, plus additional grants and donations raised during the bushfire crisis.

Our total income was $871,000 including grant income of $545,000 and donation income of $272,000.

Over $515,000 was spent on projects and bushfire related activities, with only 4% of that spent on administration. Approximately $356,000 was carried over into the next financial year with the majority of funds already committed to specific post-bushfire research and conservation activities, to inform planning for wildlife and habitat recovery. Our audited complete financial report is available on our website.

Key areas of growth
Summary 2019 - 2020

230%
2019-2020
Rate of Growth
Total Revenue

140%
2019-2020
Rate of Growth Grants

580%
2019-2020
Rate of Growth Donations

835
2019-2020
People who donated to help

11
2019-2020
Organisations - Partners, Collaborators
Our Governance
Board of Non-Executive Directors

For more information on our Board, see our website
www.scienceforwildlife.org
Main Team
Working alongside our CEO

Dr Victoria Inman (PhD)
Research Scientist (Full-time)

Victoria has a background in monitoring threatened wildlife (both in Australia and overseas) and land and forest management. Victoria joined Science for Wildlife in 2020 to lead the broad-scale koala scat surveys, investigating how koala populations in the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area have been affected by the bushfires.

Brie Sloggett
Project Coordinator (Part-time)

Brie completed a Masters of Wildlife Health and Population Management at the University of Sydney. Since 2018 she has worked with S4W as a field ecologist on surveys, ecological studies, koala capture and volunteer training and is now coordinating our project on koala post-rehabilitation monitoring.

Jessie Malpass
Communications Officer (Part-time)

Jessie has recently joined the Science for Wildlife team as Communications Officer. Previous to Science for Wildlife, Jessie worked at Multiple Sclerosis Limited, working across the fundraising and marketing teams. A key part of Jessie’s role is engaging the community in wildlife conservation to build capacity and enduring outcomes for wildlife.
Ben Richardson  
Arboreal Expert (Contractor/Casual)

Ben studied arboriculture at the University of Melbourne before moving to Katoomba in the Blue Mountains where he provides tree management services. While working with Science for Wildlife, Ben trained up in koala work and assists with anything tree related including tree hazard assessment in the fire zone, tree identification, koala browse collection, and tree climbing to capture koalas for health assessments and fitting tracking devices.

Lacey Hofweber  
Field Ecologist (Contractor/Casual)

Lacey has a BSc in Environmental Science and Policy from Southern Oregon University plus experience in post-fire plant studies and animal migration. Lacey is a volunteer coordinator and ecologist for Science for Wildlife. She helps coordinate our invaluable volunteers on our Kanangra-Boyd ecological studies and assists with vegetation identification on our koala scat surveys.

Ariane Weiss  
GIS Expert (Contractor/Casual)

Ariane is a GIS analyst (mapping whiz). She started out as a volunteer helping out during the bushfires, and now works with us using satellite imagery technology to help us plan surveys, by incorporating fire intensity and vegetation recovery rates. This helps us to assess the condition of any habitats where koalas have survived and predict other areas that might support them.
Partners, Collaborators, Supporters

Thank you to our partners and donors, large and small.

Our work would not be possible without our partners and collaborators. San Diego Zoo Global has been a long-term partner of our Blue Mountains Koala Project since it started, and this year they raised significant additional funds to help us scale up our work in response to the bushfires. We have also received funding from, and work in partnership with, the NSW Koala Strategy (NSW Dept. of Planning, Industry and Environment) and local National Parks and Wildlife Service branches. Our collaborations continue with James Cook University and the University of Sydney including the Koala Health Hub.

This year Science for Wildlife received support and donations from a range of individuals, businesses and organisations across Australia and internationally to support our bushfire work.

Special mention must be made to the following:

Sydney Zoo came on board as new partners and acted quickly during this time, giving us generous support and supplying us with large remote-area water towers, as well as support to expand our camera trap survey project.

Our partners WILD LIFE Sydney Zoo showed their support through fundraising efforts and on the ground assistance by sending their staff out as volunteers to help in the field on a regular basis.

We received: donations from Lisbon Zoo, Animals Australia, and the International Fund for Animal Welfare; equipment from Port Macquarie Koala Hospital; and a fundraising opportunity via 10x10 Philanthropy.

Thank you to all of the individuals and community groups who made donations and held fundraisers during the bushfire crisis for us.