GLOBAL WILDLIFE CONSERVATION
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A Report to Focused on Nature

from Global Wildlife Conservation
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GWC's partner in Australia, Aussie Ark, in the process of rescuing and transporting more than 1,000 animals from fire and drought/© Aussie Ark

This year has proven to be an unprecedented one. The global COVID-19 pandemic has brought the world to a literal standstill, affecting every corner of the Earth from urban centers such as New York City to the heart of Indigenous communities deep in the Amazon. And, in the absence of protected area management such as ranger patrols, the pandemic has led to vulnerable wildlife becoming even more susceptible to a myriad of threats. We therefore remain ever grateful for the generous support of Focused on Nature, which has generously donated $165,000 toward our conservation endeavors in priority areas across the world at a most critical time. We are pleased to provide an update on the achievements that Focused on Nature has helped make possible. **Thank you**.

Borneo

In the largest unfragmented lowland rainforest remaining in Borneo, your support is helping to protect the home of the world's largest population of Critically Endangered Orangutans of approximately 6,000 individuals, and many other threatened species. The peat swamp forest of Sebangau is one of the world's largest terrestrial carbon stores, with peat deposits exceeding 15 meters deep. Sebangau Forest is home to tremendous diversity including 172 bird species, 65 mammal species, and 57 reptile and amphibian species and local communities living around the forest. In 2004, 600,000 hectares of the forest were declared as a national park, called Sebangau National Park. Despite this status, like many other protected areas in the world, this national park faces a number of threats.

Annually, peatland fires threaten the forest, predominantly associated with peat drainage via ex-illegal logging canals, and often ignited by local fishermen in the surrounding areas. But in 2015, the long dry season made Sebangau even more susceptible to fire. In that year, massive peatland fires raged for months and destroyed much of the forest, burning over 2.2 meters per hectare in Kalimantan and creating a toxic smoke haze to which 69 million people were exposed, causing the premature death of up to 17,000 people. In 2019 fires returned to Kalimantan, with 298 of them raging in Sebangau.

GWC is pleased to be working with Borneo Nature Foundation, which engages in a holistic approach to Sebangau's rewilding through reforestation, research, community support, and firefighting preparedness in Sebangau. As part of its peat forest recovery efforts, Borneo Nature Foundation engages in community empowerment by purchasing the seedlings grown in community nurseries in nearby villages and planting them in the areas burned by the 2015 fires, thus reforesting Orangutan habitat. This year, the communities have grown 50,000 seedlings of native tree species. To confront the peatland fire crisis, Borneo Nature Foundation is: (1) Building dams to block ex-illegal logging canals to re-wet the forest, which in combination with seedling plantings prevents further forest loss; (2) Improving local fire-fighting capacity for rapid response to peatland fires in Sebangau Forest and surrounding districts; and (3) Working with local communities to develop plans to adopt more "peat-friendly" farming and fishing practices that avoid peat drainage and use of fire.

Indonesia's forests are currently under increased threat due to a reduction in law enforcement and protected area monitoring as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The rate of forest loss increased by 50% in the first half of 2020, and reports indicate that livelihoods are shifting back to hunting and logging in rural areas. An increase in forest use, and decrease in monitoring, has raised the risk of peat forest fires, making Borneo Nature Foundation's work supporting forest patrols and firefighting preparedness even more critical.

Colombia

In the southern Orinoco region of Colombia, the traditional, semi-nomadic tribe called the Aliwa-Cupepe have historically inhabited an area of approximately 100,000 hectares of forest-savannah habitat in the region. However, cattle ranching, illegal mining, and agricultural activities have been encroaching upon their ancestral territory.

Focused on Nature had provided support this project that will strengthen the Aliwa – Cupepe community's capacity to govern and manage their lands, as well as assist in biological surveys to help demonstrate the great importance of this forest to encourage the government to grant them title to this area. Working in partnership with Wildlife Conservation Society, the Associations of Traditional Indigenous Authorities of Colombia, and the Alexander von Humboldt Biological Resources Research Institute, this project aims to develop a bio-cultural conservation strategy for the Aliwa-Cupepe's territory and devise sustainable management practices of natural resources toward to overarching goal of reducing deforestation and habitat degradation and protect the Orinoquian and Amazonian ecosystems of Colombia.

The project has been significantly delayed by the pandemic, and the risk of infecting the traditional Indigenous communities of Aliwa-Cupepe is high. To adapt to this new situation, partners have developed a COVID-19 biosecurity protocol to work with ethnic communities. Given that access to the Aliwa-Cupepe territory is restricted due to COVID-19, all of the biological surveys and in person workshops will be carried out in the first part of 2021. However, remote work progress has been made, including the generation of a list of species of seven of the best-known taxonomic groups and an assessment of their conservation threat category, endemism, and CITES Appendix listing based on national and global biological databases. Six virtual meetings were held with stakeholders (Etnollano, Fundación Gaia, Agencia Nacional de Tierras y Parques Nacionales Naturales) to conduct an analysis of territorial disputes and conflicts between the main stakeholders in the Aliwa-Cupepe territory.

The project has also reviewed spatial data from 2018 to 2019 regarding forest loss trends in the Aliwa-Cupepe territory, including stable forest (forest area that did not change), deforestation (forest lost), regeneration (forest gained), and other non-forest types of cover, such as natural savannahs, that remained stable (no loss/gain) over the two-year period. The data indicate an increase in deforestation of 0.3% per year.

Participatory mapping of land use in the Aliwa-Cupepe territory

The Amazon

Your generous support of our efforts in the Amazon has helped the Kayapo Indigenous people of the southeastern Amazon in Brazil in their struggle to acquire and protect their land rights, a struggle they have been engaged in for over 40 years since the frontier of settlement and resource extraction began to explode around their territories.

In the Amazon, Kayapo territories have proven a formidable barrier to forest destruction thanks to *de facto* protection services – their 9000+ Indigenous inhabitants who have fiercely defended their lands – almost 10 million hectares of their contiguous ratified territories – for generations. This vast area has high conservation significance, being rich in biodiversity and extensive enough to protect large-scale ecological processes. As well as Amazonian rainforest, the Kayapo territories span portions of the threatened *cerrado* (savannah-woodland) biome and conserve high numbers of endemic fauna and flora species. Preventing tropical deforestation is the most cost-effective way that we can mitigate climate change. Kayapo lands contain (above and below ground) an estimated 2.5 billion tons of carbon, or nine billion tons of CO_2, the equivalent of 1.7 years of total the U.S.'s CO_2 emissions. The cost of avoided emissions is just a few cents per ton of CO_2.

The Kayapo, as other Indigenous people in Brazil, are on their own and cannot rely on the government to help them defend their constitutional rights and ratified territories. Illegal logging, gold mining, and land grabbing are rampant in the region. Loggers and gold miners are unceasing in their attempts to gain entry to Kayapo land and when they do, the destructive impacts of their activities on the environment and culture are dire and quickly overwhelm any possibility for control.

Guard posts are effective because their presence signals to frontier society that the Kayapo communities of an area are organized to enforce their territorial rights. Without this presence, predatory actors flood into indigenous territory thereby ruining any chance for sustainable development, trampling indigenous society, and taking over their land. Guard posts have proven highly effective at controlling access to Kayapo territory and forming the shield necessary for other conservation and development programs to thrive.

Hyacinth macaws measure 3.3 feet in length, making them the largest parrot. These intelligent birds use tools for feeding and have a complex social life. Kayapo territories, where this photo was taken in 2018, protect this threatened species/© John Meisner

Additionally, guard posts provide paid work that benefits all families. Shifts of six men rotate through a guard post every week with the number of shifts allocated to each community in proportion to population size. This rotation ensures equitable distribution of income within and among communities that constitutes a powerful antidote against unrelenting attempts by goldminers and loggers to buy off individuals to gain entry. Equitably shared benefits promote unity and community organization against illegal activity even when of their own might be led astray. This August, for example, guards at the Pukatoti post stopped two loggers with a backpack full of cash on their way to try and bribe the chief of one of the villages.

Your generous donation has supported the establishment and running of Kayapo guard posts. New guard posts opened three months late this year due to COVID-19 and the need to develop sanitary protocols and obtain official authorizations. But since the end of May, the Kayapo have activated 11 border guard posts at strategic locations along the border to block illegal and unauthorized entry by outsiders (Figure 1). GIS monitoring in 2020 demonstrates that more than 9 million hectares of Kayapo territory remains intact; loggers have been blocked by the Krimei, Pykatoti and Kakakuben guard posts from points where they had been entering along the western border, but there is the worrisome blight of goldmining expanding along part of the northwestern border.

The past year has shown us that the fight for the Amazon is a fight that we can win. Yet we still have a long way to go. Many of the threats to the Amazon have surged in 2020 as environmental criminals have pushed further into the forest during COVID-19 government shutdowns; national debts created by the pandemic have encouraged governments to expand destructive economic models based on cattle ranching, mining, and oil exploration that provide quick but unsustainable influxes of cash; and COVID-19 continues to infect indigenous communities and hinder their ability to protect their lands.

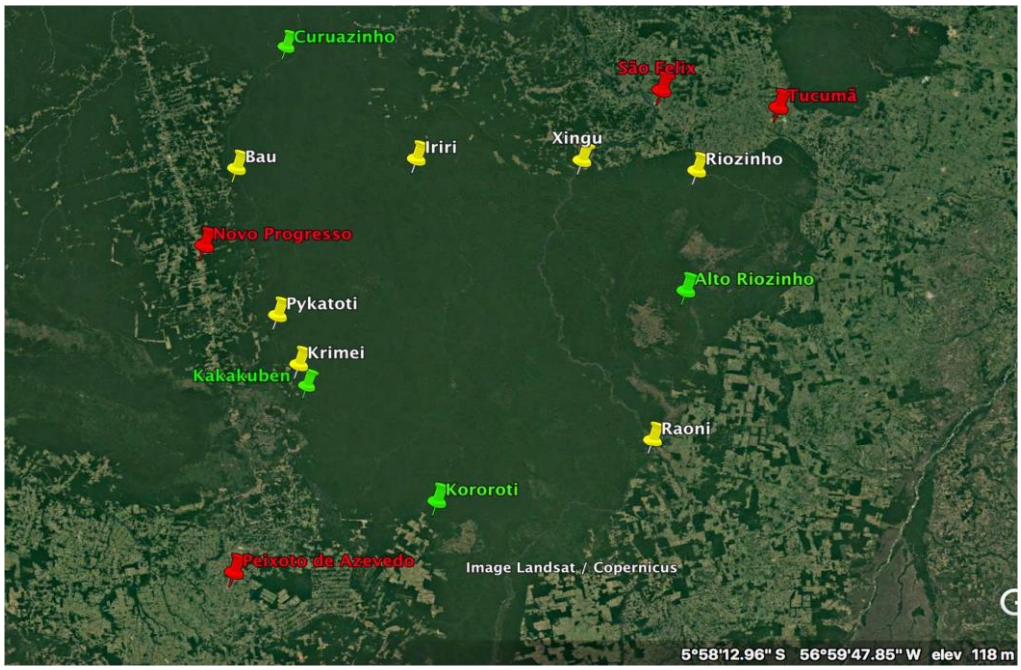


Figure 1. The yellow and green pins indicate the locations of 11 Kayapo guard posts that control access to 9.4 million hectares of Kayapo territory. The yellow pins mark guard posts operational since 2019 and the green pins are additions established in 2020. The light green areas indicate deforestation that surrounds the green block of Kayapo territory.

Australia

The devastating outbreak in late 2019 of the Australian wildfires destroyed 20 million acres of habitat and killed more than one billion animals. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck Australia, although its wildlife crisis was still in full effect, donations came to an abrupt end to Aussie Ark and other wildlife groups that were still working at full capacity to save the animals that were imperiled by drought and fires. For this reason, we are especially grateful for the support of Focused on Nature, which helped make the difference between literally life and death for at least 1,000 animals, and made possible the important follow up of restoring their populations and their habitats so that they may one day thrive again in the wild.

In New South Wales, many of the affected species were already imperiled and had been suffering due to drought conditions and the introduction of non-native predators since European settlement. Your support meant that our long-standing partner, Aussie Ark, was able to respond swiftly with targeted actions that saved thousands of animals and prevented loss of the last individuals from populations of some of Earth's rarest and most threatened wildlife species.

Several of the most endangered species that Aussie Ark transported to safety include the Koala, Brush-tailed Rock-Wallaby, Manning River Turtle, Hunter River Turtle, and Platypus. These species faced local and possibly global extinction without rapid intervention. Other species that were transported to safety include Potoroos, Wombats, Quolls, and Parma Wallabies, totaling more than 1,000 animals. In addition, conservatively 10,000 individuals of these species and many smaller animals were saved as Aussie Ark guided federal, state, and local fire fighters to the locations of wildlife populations that were most threatened by the fires. Aussie Ark accompanied these crews in order to directly save animals fleeing from the flames. The sites with the most endangered animals were prioritized for these frontline rescue and transport operations.

Of the more than 1,000 animals that needed to be transported from the threat of fire, nearly 500 were able to be released in safe sites such as in the Barrington Wildlife Sanctuary pictured here. They are being monitored by the Aussie Ark team to ensure that they are thriving in their new homes.

Aussie Ark reacted quickly, and staff spent over 800 hours in the field working to relocate, rescue, and rehabilitate wildlife. In addition, Aussie Ark organized volunteers to contribute thousands of additional hours to the life-saving efforts. Many of the rescued animals were juveniles, often still alive in the pouch of their mother who had died or soon perished due to starvation from the drought or stress from fleeing the fires. It was clear that these mothers gave the last ounce of their lives to saving their young. Aussie Ark took over caring for the young to ensure that these animals can once again return to their forest homes when it is safe.

Aussie Ark worked to protect displaced populations of the Brush-tailed Rock-Wallaby. This species was quite literally herded out of its natural home range by flames. As a result, individuals found themselves in an area that increased their risk of predation, had a limited water supply, and a near non-existent food supply. Over the course of six months, team members continued to monitor the species and provide additional food sources so as to sustain animals long enough for them to return to their former home range. Aussie Ark encountered many dead animals, but they have also begun to witness a return. Observations of joeys in and out of their mothers' pouches and the return of lush green to the landscape are promising signs.

The species took such a large hit to an already dwindling population that Aussie Ark has also begun construction on a secondary facility to house Brush-tailed Rock Wallabies. This was done as an assurance for the species' survival. The facility will provide protection from feral predators, as well as assure that they have appropriate protection from fire and drought.

River Rescues

One group of animals that suffered greatly during the past year were those that depend on rivers for their survival. The drought that contributed to the ferocity of the fires also led to entire rivers running dry. Of particular concern were the species that are found only in areas affected by the drought and fires. These included two species of turtle and the unique Platypus.

Aussie Ark team saving surviving Platypus and endangered Manning River Turtles from a nearly dried river

Hunter River Turtles *Emydura macquarii unaburra* are found in only one river system – the Hunter River. This river rapidly turned from a flowing, crystal clear waterway to a mud wallow that was incapable of sustaining life. Aussie Ark relocated over 200 turtles from this area to deeper pools, and rescued 40 individuals to bring them in for further veterinary care and rehabilitation. These turtles remain in the care of Aussie Ark, and an insurance population has been deemed necessary to ensure their long-term survival. As a result, Aussie Ark has begun construction of a state-of-the-art facility in which to house and breed this disappearing species before they are lost. The facility will allow for the turtles to breed, creating a large enough population for reintroduction back to the wild. Aussie Ark hopes to conduct the first return-to-wild of these endangered turtles in the spring of 2021.

Also found in the Hunter River is Australia's unique Platypus. The same mud wallows that the Hunter River Turtle called home were inhabited by these Platypus. Notoriously shy creatures, Aussie Ark was astounded to find dozens of Platypus floating on the surface of these pools desperate for food. For some individuals, relocation was an option, but for many others it was not. Aussie Ark brought these animals into care, providing them with ample veterinary care and food. The animals were suffering from malnutrition as well as intestinal issues from being subject to pools filled with mud, debris, ash, and faecal matter. The platypus remained in care with Aussie Ark for over half a year, but have now been returned to the wild after months of water quality testing of the rivers to ensure that they are safe.

Koalas, Forest Conservation, and Reforestation—Koala Ark

Your support of Koala Ark is also helping rewilding efforts for another iconic Australian species, the Koala. Overall, the fires took a massive toll on Koalas across their range, but many were also transported to safety (62 by Aussie Ark) and are being nursed back to health. Aussie Ark is ensuring that key wild populations that represent important genetic diversity in the Barrington Tops Region are protected from fire in the future. Furthermore, Koalas produced in newly constructed facilities will be reintroduced into the wild within newly established sanctuaries, and in other broader areas once large-scale reforestation efforts are completed and forests have regrown. Aussie Ark has begun collaboration with the state of New South Wales to reforest over 2,000 acres of Crown land for Koalas and other wildlife. In order to facilitate the early return-to-wild of some Koalas that lost their homes, Aussie Ark secured an additional 620 acres that is partially forested. These lands are being carefully managed to prevent fires. Specific fire-prevention activities include removal of introduced, non-native weeds and bushes, such as Scotch Broom, that are highly flammable and do not provide good food or shelter for native wildlife.

This is Elsa. She was found fleeing from a fire by the Aussie Ark team and is now thriving after 10 months of recovery and rehabilitation.

Papua

Considered one of the last great biological reserves on Earth, the island of New Guinea harbors the greatest plant diversity of any island in the world, and its forests constitute the third largest expanse of tropical rainforest on the planet, after the forests of the Amazon and the Congo Basin. Despite representing only 1% of the world's land area, it harbors an estimated 5% of the world's species, many of which are incredibly unique endemic animals.

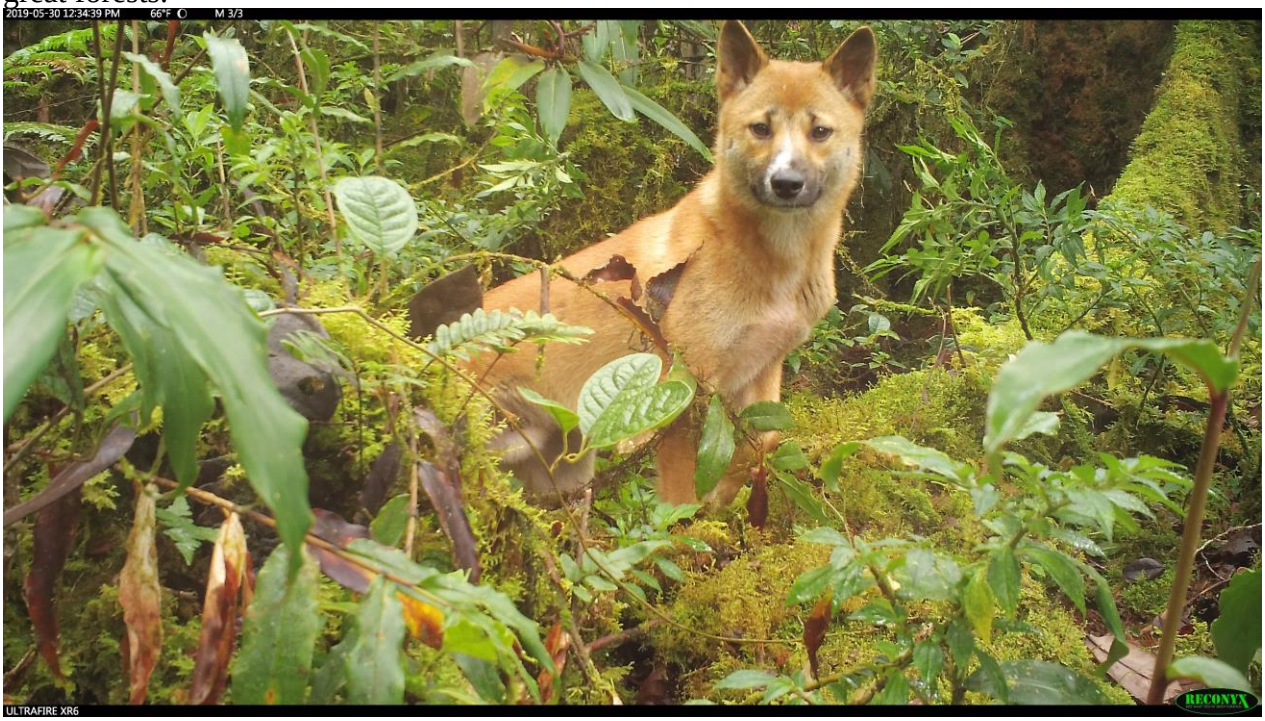
Blessed with tremendous diversity and endemism, New Guinea is famous for its orchid species, 750 species of birds (360 species of which are endemic) including the iconic birds-of-paradise species, marsupial species, and the world's largest pigeon, smallest parrot, and longest lizard. It is a biodiversity treasure. Cultural diversity also runs deep, with the Indigenous Papuans speaking more than 700 different languages.

Unfortunately, this wealth of natural resources has not gone unnoticed, and extensive logging, palm oil plantations, mineral extraction, and illegal wildlife trade seriously threaten the island, in particular Papua, on the west side of the island. As a means of countering these threats, through camera trapping our project sought to try and establish the existence of rare and unusual species that could draw the international support needed to bring about a political solution and lead to

greater preservation. Prior to the pandemic reaching the project site in the Papua province, we had been experiencing some difficulties including the project manager falling gravely ill as well as some tribal and political sensitivities. Before Papua completely shut down due to the pandemic, we were able to retrieve some of the camera traps for analysis.

The data from the cameras revealed a number of species caught on film, but three were most exciting finds. The first was the photo of a bird for which we are awaiting confirmation of a species name. The second was the capture of a was a spiny anteater or echidna species, which we believe may be the rare and elusive Sir David's Long-beaked Echidna *Zaglossus attenboroughi*, which is Critically Endangered. The films (both still and motion) have been sent to expert zoologists for confirmation and positive identification. Third, we are also delighted that the project captured the incredibly rare New Guinea Singing Dog on film in the project area, and we are very pleased to be able to share a still with you here.

We look forward to being able to return to continue our research work in Papua, so we can determine the range and vulnerability of both the New Guinea Singing Dog and echidna species to climate change and human population growth, and also better understand ecological effects of the seeming increase in the number of deer captured on film. Most of all, we seek to continue our efforts to catalogue the unique and irreplaceable species that depend upon this area for their long-term viability toward the designation of new protected areas in one of the world's last remaining great forests.



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Global Wildlife Conservation remains deeply grateful to the dedicated support of Focused on Nature.