

HelpOUT supports native wildlife renewal after Wye River bushfires

Volunteering Victoria's HelpOUT emergency volunteering service has made its first volunteer match in the Wye River community. Two volunteers, Neil Fisher and Brendon Brackin, partnered with Southern Otway Landcare Network to help distribute habitat kits to the area impacted by bushfires last Christmas.

The habitat kits, also known as 'bird boxes', will provide essential relief to the birdlife that lost food and shelter in the blaze which also destroyed 116 homes. A total of 50 boxes were couriered from Monbulk in Melbourne's East to Wye River by the HelpOUT volunteers. Neil said the process was simple and well organised, and his volunteering activity "went like a well-oiled machine". He is now encouraging others to [register with HelpOUT](#) which was developed to connect Victorians with communities impacted by an emergency.

Upon receiving Landcare's request for a volunteer driver, Volunteering Victoria searched its HelpOUT database for a volunteer who had offered to assist in both eastern Melbourne and the Colac Otway Shire area. Neil was the perfect fit – he lives in Melbourne's eastern suburbs and has a holiday home in Wye River which survived the recent fires. Neil registered as a HelpOUT volunteer because he wanted to support the Wye community's recovery, saying HelpOUT is "such a great idea". He recruited his Wye River neighbour Brendon and the pair delivered the boxes to Wye River CFA in time for the local Easter fete.

Mike Nurse from Southern Otway Landcare also had full praise for the deployment, commending Volunteering Victoria's speed in coordinating the project and sourcing the volunteers.

The boxes are part of an initiative launched by Monbulk Landcare after the Black Saturday fires in February 2009. Monbulk Landcare volunteer, Sue Wansbrough said the kits are designed to remedy the loss of large habitat trees and vegetation in areas affected by fire and aim to act as substitute nests. Almost 500 boxes have been built to date, through fundraising and donations. A number of local colleges, secondary schools and organisations have helped compile tailored kits for a range of species, including yellow-tailed black cockatoos, parrots, possums and owls. The boxes donated to Wye River were built by students at Monbulk College and Ranges Trade Educational College. Bunnings Scoresby also generously supported with some costs of the rosella kits.

The bird boxes are available from the Wye Weed Warriors, a group of local landowners lobbying to restore the natural environment in Wye River. Please contact Rex Brown at rexmbrown@gmail.com if you are interested in one for your property. The Warriors will also run a workshop on how to help endangered wildlife and plants over the Queen's birthday weekend in June.

Volunteering Victoria's HelpOUT emergency volunteering service operates year-round, registering offers of volunteer assistance from every day Victorians, and linking them to organisations working in affected communities when help is needed. Registration only takes a few minutes – visit www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/helpout and sign up today.

HelpOUT supports identified community needs by partnering with the organisations working on the ground in affected communities. Organisations can contact Volunteering Victoria to find out more: helpout@volunteeringvictoria.org.au

HelpOUT is an initiative of Volunteering Victoria in partnership with Volunteering Geelong and Volunteering Queensland. Volunteering Victoria acknowledges the support of the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments through the National Disaster Resilience Grants Scheme.

Photo caption

Displaying the habitat kits to local residents at the Wye River CFA Fete, March 2016. L-R: HelpOUT volunteer Brendon Brackin (with baby Brackin), Volunteering Victoria's HelpOUT Coordinator Alison Duff, and Rex Brown of the Wye Weed Warriors.