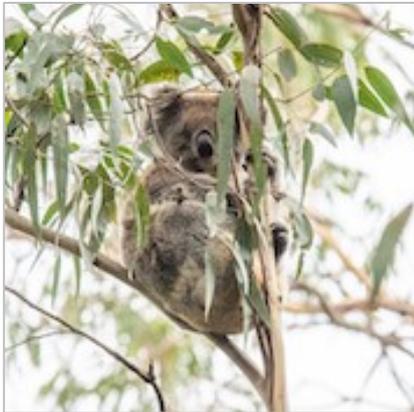


KOALAS ... Kaye Traynor. Photos... Margaret Lacey



KOALA, *Phascolarctos cinereus*

Koala is a name used by Aborigines. The scientific name, *Phascolarctos cinereus*, means 'pouched bear that is ash-coloured'.

There is only one species. Koalas share a common ancestor with wombats and it is the only arboreal marsupial that lacks a tail.

The devastating bushfires earlier this year highlighted the vulnerability of native wildlife living in fire-prone eucalyptus forests. Koala populations were among the species worst affected by the 2020 bushfires. It is well known that thousands of individuals perished, with survivors suffering burns and smoke inhalation.

Apart from the risks of fire, koalas are threatened by land clearing, urban encroachment, road traffic, dogs, etc. Their populations become fragmented, they face starvation from over-browsing and are susceptible to diseases such as chlamydia, a serious disease affecting koalas. It usually manifests when

they are in a stressed condition and can cause blindness and reproductive tract infections. Given the many threats to their existence, we are faced with the prospect of losing one of our most loved native animals. However, there are also dedicated groups and organisations, as well as much goodwill in the community committed to saving this species by restoring vegetation and protecting habitat.

The Great Otway National Park is home to a population of koalas. The Friends of Eastern Otways conduct an annual survey of koalas in the Grey River area of the national park. Over time we have seen numbers decline, however efforts at population management are endeavouring to secure a healthy and sustainable local population.

Over the years, koalas have been translocated across Victoria. In November 1977, to alleviate the population explosion of koalas on French Island, 50 koalas were released in Angahook Forest Park. A further 50 were released the following day in the Grey River area behind Kennett River in the Otways.

In October 1993, a further 41 koalas from French Island, 14 males and 15 females—ten with young on their backs and two with pouch young—were released in the Angahook/Lorne State Park. Fourteen adults were also released at Distillery Creek picnic ground. On March 26, 1999, 11 koalas from Mt Eccles were released at Moggs Creek picnic ground and a further nine at Wensleydale. While colonies have not formed in the area, we do from time to time see one of these fascinating creatures in our eucalypts and observers are always excited to locate them.



More recently, trial translocation of small numbers of koalas from Manna Gum woodland at Cape Otway to a habitat of mixed Eucalyptus tree species in the national park have been carried out. Each koala is fitted with a collar carrying a radio transmitter and GPS tracker. Monitoring will help determine if in the future large-scale translocations can take place—all with the aim of safeguarding the animals' long-term health and well-being.

It is imperative that all efforts are made to provide a safe future for this very special native marsupial.



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