

Quarterly Koala Report - February 2019

Myall Koala & Environment Group



Breeding Pair



Female

(Photos – George Madani)

Koala Survey

Last October, the Koala Group commissioned a survey of koala habitat and activity in the Myall Coast region. The survey was carried out over three nights by one paid professional ecologist, two volunteer ecologists and about 6 volunteer field assistants. Some of the sites surveyed were on public land and the national park but many were on private land offered by landholders.

The survey was a great success with ten koalas found across 87 sites. This may not seem like many. However, it is a density of about 1 koala per 20 hectares which is actually quite high. It is very much comparable to populations with a far higher profile, that are considered to be doing very well.

Koalas were spotted at Myall Lakes NP, Yagon Firetrail (1), Myall Lakes NP, Old Mining Road (2), Hawks Nest, Pelican Ave (1), Shearwater, Toonang Drive (1), Pindimar, several private properties (3) and Karuah Nature Reserve (2). Two of the animals were a breeding pair. Some high quality habitat was identified.

This means that there were koalas from one end of the Myall Coast to the other and in all locations females were found, meaning there is breeding habitat, not just movement corridors throughout. This is a very important finding.

We must thank the survey co-ordinator Senior Ecologist Kylie Madden, ably supported by experienced wildlife ecologists George Madani and Martin Schulz for their fantastic efforts to carry out the survey.

As a result of the survey, the Koala Group has lodged a proposal with the Department of Environment and Heritage to purchase local land to be added to the National Park estate as part of the NSW Koala Strategy.

Princess is Back!

Princess (the one koala in town with a green ear-tag in her right ear) has been recently sighted on a few occasions in Monterra Avenue. We first came across her in 2009 when we were called out to rescue her seriously ill baby, who sadly

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died. We were asked to capture mum so she could be tested for any illness too. She was given a clean bill of health, was ear tagged and we released her back into the Swan Bay area where she came from. She has been spotted many times since then and has produced at least 3 more babies. However, she hadn't been seen for a couple of years so we feared she had passed away. But on Boxing Day last year there was a confirmed sighting. She has now been seen twice since. Hopefully, she has mated with the male koala also seen in Swan Bay recently.

Please report your koala sightings on our hotline answering machine 4997 0878 so we can bring you more stories like this one.

Gail & Ian Morphett (4997 1550)

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Traversing a Koala Friendly Wooden Fence
(Photos – Kathy Poldmaa)

Koala Survey – Part 2

In November, Koala ecologist George Madani will be back in our towns to do further koala surveying to add to the wealth of information he gathered last year. As well as that, George will present to the entire community the results of his surveys in a public meeting on the afternoon of 7 November. Details of exact time and place will be announced a bit closer to the date.

30th Anniversary Coming Up

Now in its thirtieth year, the Myall Koala and Environment Group has decided it is a good time to re-evaluate the work it has done in the past and develop a "Strategy for the Future". One of our members, David Ingram, who is a skilled business strategy facilitator, recently lead our members in a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis of the Group's activities. Many of our members were surprised at how many activities the Koala Group is involved in but also were concerned about some of the challenges we face in the future. The result of the session was a list of many activities we do well, some not so well but, more importantly, new ideas we can embark on. The next stage will be to prioritise the tasks needing action and then establish small working groups to address immediate concerns.

Winter Koala Sightings

As is usually the case, koala activity has been very quiet over winter. In fact, only 5 koalas were reported to us in the last three months, including the one in the photo who was using the top of a timber fence to traverse from Yamba to Binda Streets.

If you see a koala in the upcoming spring breeding season, we'd love to hear about it on our hotline answering machine 4997 0878.

Gail & Ian Morphet (4997 1550)

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First Child December 2009



Capturing Princess



Baby Louise June 2016



Kingfisher Ave NYE 2016



Albatross Ave November 2019

"Princess" – an Iconic Local Koala

Female koalas can live up to 12 or 14 years of age and can continue breeding until their final days. Male koalas typically live a couple of years less due to their constant hunt for female partners and fights with other males in the process. Females tend not to roam far from their "home range", whereas males wander much greater distances searching for females.

We have one female koala in Hawks Nest that we have been following since 2009. She was a mother then, so at least two years old. She is therefore now 12 or more. In 2009 we were called out to a sick juvenile koala in Karthena Crescent, Swan Bay and took her to Koalas in Care, Taree, who are currently in the news because they are caring for so many koalas burnt in the bushfires. Sadly, the juvenile died of unknown causes and the carers asked us to catch the mother so she could be checked out. She was OK and returned to us with a green tag in her right ear. The residents from the house where we returned her named her "Princess".

Since then, she has frequently been seen and recognised because of the green ear tag. Sightings have mostly been in Swan Bay but for a while she ventured across Kingfisher Avenue as far as Mermaid Avenue. Since 2009 she has born at least three more babies including "Louise" who became famous on national TV because she was so tiny when rescued. Princess is still very active and has frequently been seen in Swan Bay this spring, including some mating activity in Koonawarra Drive and Monterra Avenue.

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Spring Koala Sightings

Spring is the start of the breeding season for koalas which brings a dramatic increase in activity as males are on the lookout seeking females. This is reflected in the number of sightings reported us. Whereas only 5 koalas were reported to us in the three months over winter, there were 29 sightings in the following three months.

Please report all koala sightings on our hotline answering machine 4997 0878. The information we glean from these reports such as location, time of year, frequency of koala use, sex (if known) goes into our database. From these statistics we can extrapolate koala number trends, movement corridors and home ranges. We then have a better chance of protecting and hopefully increasing our small endangered koala population. Periodically we send our data on to the relevant authorities, e.g. Council, NPWS and peak koala bodies.

In our area, help for sick or injured koalas and other wildlife can be obtained by calling Wildlife in Need of Care (WINC) on 1300WINCWL (1300 946 295). We have a new koala rescuer in town, Glen Stevenson who is a member of WINC and the Koala Group.

Gail & Ian Morphett (4997 1550)