

KOALAS (Map Ref 31)

KOALA PHOTOS (Map Ref 12)



LP, MP, LS, US

Koalas are probably Australia's most well known native animals. Koalas feed only on Eucalyptus leaves. To nearly all other animals, these leaves are toxic, Koalas have special bacteria in their stomachs which allow them to digest the leaves. (Interestingly, the Ringtail Possum is also able to eat Eucalypt leaves.) Koalas very rarely drink water, obtaining most of the moisture they require from the leaves.

Koalas are a member of the marsupial family which means they have a pouch. Like Wombats, their pouch faces backwards. Koalas will only produce one Joey at a time. The young are born approximately 32-38 days after conception where they instinctively make their way to the mother's pouch. They will spend the next six months in the pouch before they emerge to spend the next couple of months riding on the mother's back. Koalas become independent of their mother's when they are about one year old, they move away to a different territory at this age.

Koalas are now considered to be an endangered species. This is due to land clearing which means a loss of food and habitat for koalas.

Here at Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary we are part of a study into koala reproduction. We are affiliated with the University of Queensland and are working to find a way to transport koala semen for artificial insemination overseas. The main reason for this is to try and avoid the transport of live koalas as it is very stressful and detrimental to their health.

As with many endangered species, the animal might be protected but their habitat is not

Koalas require fresh leaves EVERY day so at Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary we have staff employed to go out each day to cut leaf for our koala population. Koalas will not eat all species of Eucalyptus and each has their particular favourites so our gumcutters have quite a task to feed our Koalas each day! The gumcutters can travel long distances (up to three hours driving in any direction from the Sanctuary) in order to get the freshest leaf and the greatest variety. We also have four of our own plantations which are home to around 40 000 eucalyptus trees.



Q1

How did the Koala get its name? (Use the signs.)

ORIGINATES FROM AN ABORIGINAL WORD WHICH MEANS 'NO WATER' AS KOALAS RARELY DRINK WATER, OBTAINING THE MOISTURE THEY NEED FROM EUCALYPT LEAVES.

Q2

Why do you think the Koala's pouch faces backwards?

MORE PRACTICAL FOR MOVING UP TREE BRANCHES, THE POUCH WILL NOT GET CAUGHT OR FULL OF BARK & LEAVES.

What are some natural threats to koalas?

COMPETITION FOR FOOD, DISEASE, PREDATORS, DROUGHT, BUSHFIRE.

Q3

Why do you think koalas have two thumbs?

ADDED GRIP.

Koalas have two toes fused together on each foot. What purpose do you think this has? What type of adaptation is this?

SCRATCHING, GROOMING - STRUCTURAL.

Have a look at a koala's head. What adaptations do they have for being a nocturnal animal with small eyes?

LARGE NOSE, EXCELLENT SENSE OF SMELL, LARGE EARS FOR EXCELLENT HEARING.



It is possible to identify a male koala by looking for the discolouration on their chest. This is as a result of a scent gland. Suggest some purposes of this scent gland.

MARKING TERRITORY, ATTRACTING FEMALES.

A3

A flagship species is an animal which people find appealing so it is then used as the focus of conservation efforts. The hope is that by conserving this animal and its habitat you will also conserve all the other plants and animals native to that area. Discuss why koalas have become a flagship species. Suggest some advantages of targeting conservation efforts towards flagship species. Suggest some disadvantages (consider the appeal of highly valuable and endangered species such as Queensland's Giant Burrowing Cockroach). Discuss alternate methods of promoting the conservation of all plant & animals species to the general public and overseas visitors.