



Koala News



Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland Bayside Branch
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CLEVELAND KOALAS

You may be surprised to know that Cleveland, including the CBD, forms part of the home range of a number of Koalas.

RCC and QPWS regularly track these city-dwellers, watching them grow, breed, thrive and more often than not, eventually fall victim to traffic on the busy roads that they must negotiate each day.

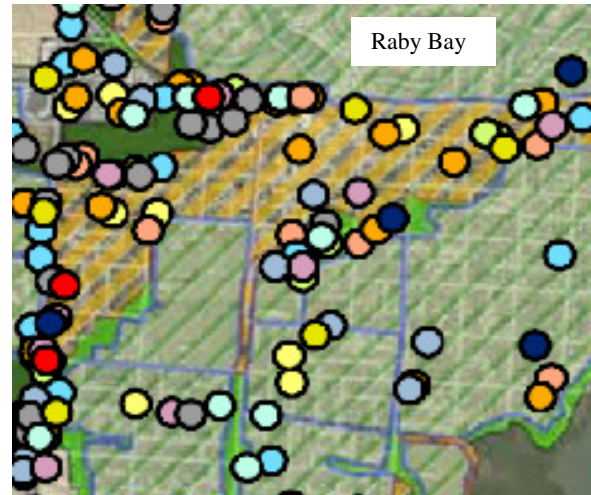
“Little Miss Sunshine” moves between trees in the Redlands Performing Arts Centre gardens, across Shore Street to the railway station, to behind the Cleveland library and even spends some time resting or browsing on a small eucalypt in the middle of a Shore Street roundabout. She successfully raised a little one last season, and continues to amaze with her death-defying feats of day to day survival.

Koalas are not known for their road savvy, and are unique among mammals in that they show no avoidance behaviour at all when it comes to vehicles. Maybe Little Miss Sunshine is smarter than the average bear!

Not so lucky was a tracked Koala lost to vehicle strike in Cleveland this week.

Pan Da, the now famous facebook Koala was released back home at Hilliard Street in Ormiston on 8th April and will be tracked to check his progress. Best of luck to him, perhaps we could all slow down a bit when driving around the Redlands, and keep an eye on the road verges for Koalas on a mission to find the next tree.

There is a sad history of Koala deaths from vehicle strike in Cleveland (as well as in the rest of Redland City). The following map shows Koala strikes in Cleveland between 1997 and 2008.



In particular Shore Street and Wellington Street take a significant toll on the local population.

The problem is that as long as there are Koalas in the Redlands they will live in and travel through Cleveland. As we take them out, more will come, until finally there are no more. In ecological terms this is known as a “sink”, a place where population attrition exceeds population renewal. There are many places like this in the Redlands and it is not sustainable.

You are reading this publication, so you are very likely to be well aware of this problem. Make sure that you talk to friends and family about what we can do to curb the attrition rate and give Koalas and humans a chance to co-exist in the urban environment with less risk.

SLOW DOWN. Speeding is dangerous for a number of reasons, but certainly it is a major cause of Koala death in Cleveland. It is up to each individual to maintain awareness that we are sharing our roads with Koalas.

LOCK UP DOGS AT NIGHT. Don't allow your dogs to harass Koalas, the harassment alone leads to stress which exacerbates disease. Dog attacks on Koalas are also often fatal.

MAINTAIN HABITAT. It is up to all of us to ensure that our political leaders achieve this.

It's a Sign

You may have noticed some fairly high-tech LED signs about the Redlands in recent times. These signs have been purchased by RCC for the specific purpose of raising awareness of the presence of Koalas and the effect that vehicles are having on the local Koala population. Council purchased six units from an Austrian firm for a price of \$8000-\$9000 each, and is in the process of ironing out the glitches that come with such technology.

To date they have been deployed on Clifford Perske Drive, Sturgeon Street and Wellington Street. The signs log vehicle speed and provide feedback to the driver, such as "slow down" or "too fast" for those travelling 15-20km over the speed limit, or "driving champion" for those at or below the speed limit. The data logger allows Council to analyse traffic volume and vehicle speeds. Initial data indicates there is a driver reaction to the signs where the number of vehicles travelling over the speed limit is reduced.

This driver reaction is also seen with fixed wildlife warning signs, although driver behaviour returns to pre-sign patterns after 2-3 months. It is likely that drivers become accustomed to the signs and eventually ignore them.



This is the beauty of the mobile and highly visible signs. They can be deployed for short periods, attracting attention and raising awareness.

While they provide feedback to drivers on their speed, they are also used as an educational tool, providing information about Koalas in the local area. There will not be time for drivers to become "immune" to their presence.

RCC Environment Manager Dan Carter says that feedback to Council from residents in the Clifford Perske Drive area indicates that local drivers have a new awareness of the likelihood of encountering Koalas whereas previously many did not realise that there were Koalas in the local area. Sadly, a Koala was hit and killed in this same area recently, so too much awareness is obviously never enough!



There have been the standard technical hitches associated with new gear. When deployed on higher traffic volume roads, the battery life is only 2-3 days. The signs are ordinarily used for school crossing areas in Europe, and therefore are only switched on for limited periods. Council is currently investigating a new battery set up that lasts for 3-4 weeks to reduce maintenance requirements. This is the first time that the technology has been applied to this purpose and it has generated interest locally, nationally and internationally.

While at present they can only be deployed on Council-controlled roads, RCC is collecting data on their effectiveness and will present the state government with the results. Hopefully Main Roads will consider use of the signs on main roads as these roads are the greatest cause of Koala road deaths in the Redlands.

If you would like to contribute to future editions of the Koala News, please contact Paulette Jones
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Opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the author and/or contributors and are not necessarily those of the Society.