



Koala News



Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland Bayside Branch
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Murphy aka Douglas

(Story courtesy of Sam Longman)

Murphy came to me from a Koala carer on the Gold Coast on the 3rd May 2010. He was 1.2 kilos when he was found on a screen door at a possum carer's house in Rathdowney. He was very dehydrated and exhausted. The carer picked him up and went for a walk with him to try and locate his mum but could not find her.

I took him to the Australian Wildlife Hospital for an assessment and he was given the all clear. His vet was a little concerned with his eyes as they are really close together and slightly turned in but otherwise all seemed good.

After a couple of days in care I noticed he was really clumsy when climbing, particularly on smooth-barked tree forks. On the 9th May his left eye started to water and his left nostril was runny when he ate leaf and his left ear drooped so I took to back to the Wildlife Hospital the next day.

The vet found a long prickle inside his ear canal which she removed and she suspected a blocked tear duct. The tear duct was flushed and was found to be not blocked up. Now we have to wait and see what happens.



Murphy enjoying a bit of leaf

It's been 10 days since his last check up and in this time he has been eating leaf like a crazy man and drinking his bottle with so much enthusiasm that he helps me hold it.

Went back to the Hospital for another check up on his eyes and his vet found he was getting a cataract in his right eye. She also suspected glaucoma in his left eye as it has swollen up and was a lot larger than the other eye. The decision was made to give him up to 2 weeks to see what happens with his eyes but I was under strict orders that if the left eye got any bigger I was to take him straight back and that they would have to possibly euthanize him.

So for the next two weeks we hoped and prayed and his eye didn't get any worse and thankfully it got a lot better but the vets are pretty sure he is at least ½ blind. He does have slight vision as he can grab your hand if you put it in front of him.

It hasn't seemed to slow him down a great deal that's for sure. Murphy is doing really well he is now just under three kilos and eating me out of house and home. He has also started practising how to be a big boy by trying to bellow like one which is hilarious. He is an absolute pleasure to care for and I hope his life is a long one.

Glaucoma in Animals

Glaucoma is increased pressure within the eye in association with damage to the optic nerve that transmits signals from the retina to the brain. It is a painful and sight-threatening disease which usually presents with redness of the tissue surrounding the eye and cloudiness of the surface of the eye.

Reference: Eye Care for Animals (2010). Specialist Eye Care for All Animals. Can be viewed online at <http://www.eyecareforanimals.com.au/>

You're only as old as your teeth

Extract from article by Rachael Attard

For koalas, tooth wear and damage is a result of their natural diet and has a major influence on how long they can live.



Photo: @ Doreen Payne

The Koala (*Phascolarctos cinereus*), the largest arboreal marsupial found in Australia, feeds almost exclusively on Eucalyptus foliage. This is not an easy diet as Eucalyptus foliage contains low levels of nutrients, a high fibre content and toxic oils which are potentially harmful to other animals. Leaf material is abrasive and physically difficult to break down while high tannin and lignin concentrations may affect the availability of other nutrients and interfere with digestion.

The Koala cannot digest fibre (the cellulose cell-wall component of the leaf) and rely on symbiotic micro-organisms in the gut. These micro-organisms digest the leaf cell-walls and ferment the more easily digestible, non-fibre leaf components from which the animal derives its energy.

The Koala is a hindgut fermenter, with microbial fermentation taking place in the caecum, a specialised cavity in the large intestine near its juncture with the small intestine.

The Koala's caecum is the largest of any mammal's, reaching up to four times the animal's body length.

The rate and extent of fermentation that occurs in the caecum is affected by the size of the food particles. This is ultimately dependent on the effectiveness of the Koala's teeth. Chewing mechanically breaks down fibrous cell walls allowing cell contents to be digested.

Thus, tooth condition plays an important role in determining the quantity of nutrient available to the gut micro flora for further digestion. With age the Koalas molars become worn and less able to efficiently break down plant material into small particles so fewer cell contents are released. This means there is less microbial fermentation and less nutrient and energy uptake by the digestive tract.

For the full article with details of research methods used and conclusions reached please refer to Wildlife Australia Magazine Autumn 2010.

Reference:

Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland (2010) *Wildlife Australia Magazine Autumn 2010*. Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland, Brisbane.

Koala Tooth Condition

Tooth condition may be the final arbiter of a koala's lifespan though many animals do not live long enough to wear out their teeth. Natural disasters such as fire as well as habitat loss, traffic injuries, dog attacks and infectious diseases all take their toll.

If you would like to contribute to future editions of the Koala News, please contact Paulette Jones paulette@biodiversity.tv

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