



# Koala News



Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland Bayside Branch

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## KOALA IMMUNE DEFICIENCY SYNDROME (KIDS)

Koala AIDS or 'KIDS', an AIDS-like retrovirus, is making news all over the world. Australian scientists studying the condition believe that the virus is killing Koalas at such a rate that it has the potential to send them into extinction.

The virus makes Koalas susceptible to other diseases which they may ordinarily be able to recover from.

Dr Jon Hangar of Australia Zoo, who first described the genetic makeup of the virus has likened it to the fatal facial tumour disease killing Tasmanian devils in terms of seriousness for the future of the Koala. He said the widespread retrovirus, which attacks the animal's immune system, causes leukaemia, blood cell abnormalities, an AIDS-like immune system collapse and pouch deaths of joeys. Dr Hangar has indicated that the virus is forcing some smaller Koala populations into extinction.

In a 4 May 2011 Courier Mail article, scientist Jo Loader said about 50 per cent of female koalas had reproductive tract disease that prevented them from breeding. This is a blow for populations recovering from drought.

In evidence to the Senate Inquiry on the status of Koalas on 3 May 2011, Dr Hangar indicated that the decline in Koala numbers was far more dramatic than could be explained by habitat loss.

The Australian Koala Foundation has recently estimated that Koala numbers in Australia are down to 43,000 from 100,000 six years ago. Habitat loss, disease and a long period of drought have taken their toll, with Mulga land Koala communities reported to have crashed by 95 percent.



## WHAT CAN WE DO?

The number one action has to be habitat protection. The Queensland Government is spending \$45 million on Koala projects, with almost all this amount going to buying or rehabilitating bushland.

The number two action has to be Koala disease research, for which there is currently very little State funding.

As citizens, we can lobby our local members and the relevant ministers to act on the issue of Koala disease. As individuals, we can donate to Koala disease research projects.

The Australian Wildlife Hospital is committed to advancing vital research into koala disease in association with the University of Queensland and the Queensland University of Technology. The hospital's immediate research priorities are to:

- Define distribution and prevalence of Koala Retrovirus (KoRV) in koala populations across Australia.
- Better define the koala AIDS syndrome clinically, its association with KoRV infection and better define the way the virus affects the immune system.
- Define the relationship between KoRV infection/koala AIDS and chlamydial infection in terms of clinical outcomes.
- Determine the factors that influence the development of high KoRV titres (which are associated with higher risk of disease) vs low KoRV titres. Are we able to selectively breed or manage koala populations for low KoRV viraemia, and therefore low incidence of disease? Do female koalas with high KoRV titres tend to give rise to offspring that have high KoRV titres?

The Australian Wildlife Hospital is calling on all Australians to help fund this research. The Australian Wildlife Hospital has the resources; all that is needed is the funding.

You can make a donation at:  
[www.wildlifewarriors.org.au/make\\_a\\_donation/index.html](http://www.wildlifewarriors.org.au/make_a_donation/index.html)

## Yogi's Story By Sam Longman



Little Yogi was on his own in a tree in Imbil for a week and a half with his mum nowhere in sight. Members of the public had watched him on his own for this time and when Yogi finally came to the ground they picked him up and he cuddled into them, so they decided to ring and tell someone.

Sunshine Coast Koala Rescue drove out to Imbil and picked Yogi up and took him back to Australia Zoo Wildlife Hospital for assessment. Yogi was found to be suffering severely from dehydration and was extremely thin with a low body score. They kept him in ICU overnight on fluids and I received him the next day on Mother's Day (the best present). He was 1.3kg and a sad little skinny boy.

I found he was having trouble keeping his body temperature regular on his own, so he was placed into a nice soft pouch with a hottie and he slept for the next 2 days straight. I would have to wake him up to offer him a feed which he willingly took, and then he would fall straight back asleep. I have had him for a couple of weeks now and he has really come out of his shell and gained over 400gms.

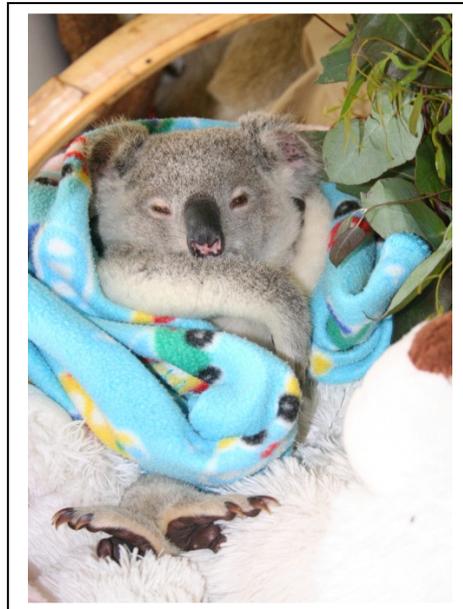
He wakes me up at 2am for a play and wrestle and believe me I am happy to get up and play with him as it is such a beautiful sight to see him happy and full of energy. He is a very cuddly boy and comes straight to me or his teddy if he gets the slightest fright, which is understandable after spending that much time on his own, when he would generally be still snuggling up with his mum.

## KOALA DEATHS IN CARE

It is a sad fact that many orphaned Koalas in care do not make it back to the wild. Some never recover from injuries inflicted when they were separated from their mother, be it by dog or vehicle collision, and some develop illnesses that cannot be treated.

It is difficult to know if a young one has been either tragically separated or deliberately abandoned by their mothers. Either way, carers give every abandoned young one a chance to make it.

The loss of these babies is certainly not from lack of care, concern and sheer effort on the part of the carers and Koala hospital staff, who suffer anew each time one of their charges is lost. Many tears are shed, and then another little one is put in their arms and they pick themselves up and start again.



**Yogi – doing it tough!**

**If you would like to contribute to future editions of the Koala News, please contact Paulette Jones [paulette@biodiversity.tv](mailto:paulette@biodiversity.tv)**

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