



# Koala News



Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland Bayside Branch

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## KOALA VACCINATION NEWS



Only a few years ago the damaging Koala Retrovirus (KoRV) and Chlamydia were not well understood, although deaths from these diseases are a very significant threat to the Koala populations of Queensland and New South Wales. In 2008 a research team, led by Professor Peter Timms, Professor of Microbiology at the Institute of Health and Biomedical Innovation at the Queensland University of Technology, successfully sequenced the Koala genome, and has subsequently been developing and trialling vaccines.

As an insight into the seriousness of the situation some estimates are that around half of all Australia's Koalas are infected with a strain of Chlamydia which can cause infertility as well as urinary and respiratory infections and blindness. The impact of Chlamydia is known to be exacerbated by the KoRV virus which can also make infected animals vulnerable to lung conditions and some forms of cancer. Last year a study by researchers at the University of Queensland had predicted that ultimately all of Australia's koalas may eventually be infected with the virus.

In an interview with ABC Science in 2012 Professor Timms reported that the first trials of a Chlamydia vaccine, performed on animals living in koala sanctuaries, showed that they started to make a strong immune response to the vaccine

within 60 days, and a year later they still had a good immune response. The results also showed that the vaccine was safe to administer to both healthy and diseased koalas.

While it is not possible to vaccinate every Koala, Professor Timms has indicated that vaccinating the hundreds of Koalas that are treated each year at animal hospitals and in other care facilities will provide a benefit to the overall population.

In June last year the project received \$465,000 funding from the Australian Research Council's Linkage Projects scheme to develop and test a multi-strain Chlamydia vaccine on Koalas in the wild, with the assistance of several partner organisations, including Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary, Gold Coast City Council, Moreton Bay Regional Council Department of Transport and Main Roads and the then Queensland Department of Environment and Resource Management.

In June 2013, the Queensland Government announced \$800,000 funding for university Koala disease research projects.

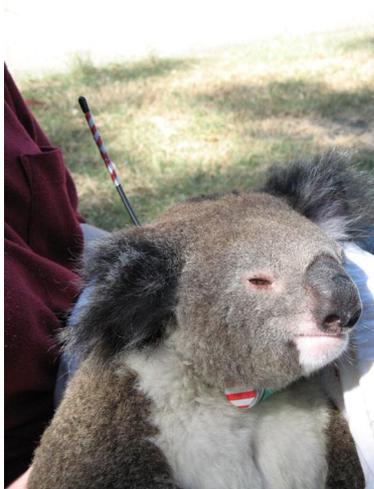
Koala populations in Queensland are subject to threats other than disease – in particular habitat loss. Some ecologists believe that the stress of habitat loss contributes to the susceptibility of individuals to disease. A Koala that loses significant trees from its home range, most obviously in urban situations where there may be few alternatives, will show signs of stress and disorientation.

While the scientists are busy looking for a solution to the disease issue, planners and other government officials must continue to seriously address habitat loss in order to salvage and rebuild threatened Koala populations. All the right words may sit in planning documentation, but actions certainly speak louder than words.

## NO MORE SUNSHINE..... THE SAD TALE OF AN URBAN KOALA

A report on Koala population size in the Koala Coast by the Queensland Government in 2009 found that “in the absence of conserving a viable urban koala population, adjacent bushland koala populations will continue to decline with consequences for the viability of the entire Koala Coast koala population”. Urban Koala populations are important.

Within the Redlands urban Koalas are a common sight, even within the Cleveland CBD. The Koala News had a story on one such Koala a few years ago – Little Miss Sunshine. Her home range included the Black Swamp, Norfolk Park, the Cleveland Railway line and trees outside the RPAC centre and restaurants in Waterloo Street. For seven years she defied the traffic to feed on the trees in the Shore St roundabout, and she was even known to visit the Cleveland Markets. Little Miss was part of an Environment & Heritage Protection (EHP) urban koala tracking program which started in 2007. She was known to have successfully raised four offspring and was quite a local character.



In October last year, Redlands Senior Extension Officer Jenny David reported (with great sadness) that Little Miss Sunshine had passed away from injuries sustained after being hit by a car on Shore Street West. Ironically the accident occurred at 7.00am on a Saturday morning – not a busy time on the road – and just near a sign warning that Koalas cross in that location.

Many people are unaware that the Cleveland CBD area is part of the home range of a number of koalas and an important movement area for their dispersing young. This time of year is when the young are leaving their mother's home range and searching for one of their own. The female offspring will stay close by, but the boys will disperse further.

It is quite common for these young ones to turn up in unusual places, including shopping centre car parks and once even on stage, up a microphone stand at the old Cleveland RSL!

While Koalas are dispersing it is important not to interfere with them, but keep a watch out to make sure they can move safely. You can notify Jenny Davis at RCC on 3820 1103 during office hours and she will investigate further.



Breeding season starts in August, so the males will be on the move. Be sure to drive with this in mind, especially during the evening or early morning. Scan the verges regularly as you drive. Koalas do not show any signs of avoiding traffic (although Little Miss Sunshine must have been an exception – or exceptionally lucky), so it is up to us to avoid them when we can do so safely.

Locations where yellow signs showing a walking Koala have been placed are generally a good indication of where you are most likely to encounter a Koala on a main road, although Koalas can be anywhere in the Redlands and neighbouring areas, and are often hit by cars in suburban back streets.

**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.