



Koala News



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Koala and the Road to Nowhere

Driving home late one night, only a couple of hundred metres from home, we saw what looked like a large ball in the middle of the footpath.

Strange! Apply brakes and back up the car.

A large furry ball? No, closer inspection revealed it was actually a Koala. He (it turned out to be a male) was sitting still with his head drooping right down, nose to the ground. This was obviously not a good sign!

He did put up his head when cautiously approached and showed a very attractive apparently clear eyed face framed by large fluffy ears.

Our next move was to pull out the phone. After a couple of calls we reached the volunteer who was looking after the Wildlife Ambulance. She took the details and said she would be 20 minutes. True to her word she and her partner arrived 20 minutes later. During the time we waited the Koala had raised his head a couple of times and swayed a bit but he didn't ever look like he was likely to move any where.

The Wildlife Ambulance volunteers had no trouble catching this particular Koala. They were able to simply circle behind him, Pick him up and place him straight in the carrier. Our details as the finders of the Koala were recorded and we were invited to name "our" Koala. We chose Venny because of the location in which he was found.

The volunteers examined our young man. The examination showed that he was very thin and malnourished and had a bit of 'dirty tail' (Chlamydia). But he had no problems with his eyes which were nice and clear. He didn't appear injured though there was a mark on one back leg that may have been some sort of injury.

Venny went off in the Ambulance and we finally got home. A few days later a phone call to

Daisy Hill elicited the information that Venny had been euthanised on arrival as his condition had been consider to be beyond hope. This was a sad ending for a beautiful animal.

After receiving this news I spoke to a few people about this koala. I was puzzled that he should be in such poor condition when he didn't appear to be injured. From these discussions I formed the opinion that Venny had been a road victim. Not in the sense that he had been run over. No, he was the victim of loss of habitat due to road building. Work was in progress to change the main road near our home into a 4 lane highway. In the process a huge area of roadside vegetation had been removed. It is likely that this vegetation had formed part of Venny's territory and when it was removed it took out some of his food source and much of the area he called home. This loss in turn would have caused him severe stress and we know that stress can be deadly to Koalas. Such is the terrible price of 'progress'.

Doreen Payne.

Redland Shire Council – Koala Crossings

Redland Shire Council is in the process of costing actions recommended in the Draft Action Plan to Reduce Koala Hits from Vehicles in Redland Shire (BAAM 2004). This document is available on the RSC website for anyone that has not had a look at it yet.

The current project involves investigations of local roads that are due for upgrades to assess the need for Koala crossing infrastructure. The types of infrastructure that will be installed are underpasses, fencing traffic calming, signage, lighting and verge treatment – depending on each road's history of Koala/vehicle strikes and the types of measures that can be installed to reduce the risks.

Costs for the recommended actions will be included in the coming infrastructure budget, which means that we should see some results on the ground soon.

The Framlington Fires, Victoria as told by Denise Garrett.

It is very difficult in dealing with any loss of wildlife, having all the hard work and heartbreak to deal with re the aftermath of such a devastating fire - it must be said that we were dealing with hundreds of koalas in this rescue operation. Many were burnt, many orphaned, and many severely dehydrated and starving.

However, if it may shed some light on what did happen during the fires, our teams (and others) were in the area for approximately 3 weeks and concentrated on search and rescue with and under the direction of the DSE (Victoria's Dept. of Sustainability and Environment) who did a magnificent job under a difficult and at times delicate situation. As instructed, all those koalas that were rescued, were immediately taken to the triage centre set up in the local hall. Teams of experienced volunteer vets and vet nurses were rehydrating every koala received, wounds were dressed, pain killers administered and the koalas were bedded down in baskets with a rolled up blanket to hold on to, covered and then transported in small groups to the local wildlife shelter who then took over and supervised all the ongoing treatment. The shelter advised that she was following a strict burns protocol set down by Dr. Anne Fowler. (Dr Anne Fowler (BSc(Vet)(Hons), BVSc, MACVSc (Avian Health) gives help and information to all wildlife carers who access this forum). Dr. Fowler herself travelled all the way to Warrnambool to the shelters' property and personally cared for scores of affected koalas in those early days - a heart-breaking and backbreaking job to say the least!

In the latter stage of the rescue operation the Vets from Healesville Sanctuary attended as did the incredible vet.team from the Australia Zoo - it was awesome seeing these Wildlife Warriors quietly and so efficiently go about their work and many lessons were learnt from them. The Australia Zoo vet team stayed on to work with the shelter and DSE for the latter stages of care and translocation.

Regulations as set down by DSE were that no koala be treated in the field unless by an attending vet - initially the vets were concentrated at the triage centre but in the latter stages each rescue team consisted of a vet team, the rescue personnel and a transporter which was a brilliant working model and enabled those koalas captured to be vet checked and treated immediately they were brought down from the trees prior to be taken to the triage centre.

What we need to take into account is that many of the koalas that were rescued had been sitting in

burnt trees for up to 3 weeks in searing heat without food, water or any nourishment. Many had been eating the dried up, burnt leaves in an attempt to survive.

We set up fresh leaf in the burnt trees for the koalas until we could get to them. We used the same system that we use in the aviaries but on a bigger scale, and this most certainly saved lives.

They were highly traumatised, had been through the most unimaginable horror, and many had lost their mothers. At one stage we saw a number of young ones sitting quietly in a tree without their mothers and they appeared to have been there for some time.

Taking into account the extreme stress they were going through from the fires, loss of their mother, no food, extreme temperatures, and the time they were out there in that forest, it's a miracle any of them survived.

We must also take into account that these conditions would have been a major factor in their ultimate fate regardless of any treatment which was administered to help them in the interim.

Once those still surviving and trapped in the devastated forest were attended to, an all out effort was undertaken to bring in those remaining koalas which were concentrated along the edge of the river bank directly opposite to the burnt area in trees not affected by the fire. The authorities felt that it was in their best interest to be relocated into more suitable habitat, hence they were rescued, assessed and relocated very quickly into selected areas not too far away where there was more suitable habitat to sustain them.

There were many, many people involved in all aspects of the Framlingham fire area and all did the most incredible job to the very best of their ability under heartbreaking circumstances. It was a very strong learning curve as Victoria had not seen a disaster on that scale and many lessons have been learnt. What we need to do is to take those lessons on board - and move forward with the knowledge gained. It certainly will stand us in good stead in the future if a disaster on this scale should (God forbid) happen again but we do need to be prepared.

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

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