



# Koala Relocation at Snake Island Continues

## Information Bulletin July 2003

Visitors to Snake Island in Nooramunga Marine and Coastal Park, this year may notice a team of Parks Victoria Rangers undertaking koala relocation program to help protect the natural ecosystems of the island.

### Snake Island koalas

Koalas were introduced to Snake Island in 1945, with 69 animals from Phillip Island and a further 64 from French Island. In 2001, the koala population was estimated to be 2,860 animals. These high koala densities have caused significant defoliation of Manna Gums and the death of thousands of trees in specific areas.

Over 1700 animals have been relocated from Snake Island since 1992, to mainland areas with suitable habitat. Koalas are captured, sterilised and released back on the island for a recovery period. Koalas are sterilised to ensure that over-population does not occur at the release sites. This year up to 450 previously sterilised female and male koalas will be relocated to similar mainland habitat. Released koalas will be monitored to see how they adjust to their new home ranges.

Coupled with specific ecoburns to promote growth and reseeding actions, the program will assist in restoring the composition and age class mix of the Eucalypt woodlands and floristic diversity of vegetation communities on the island.



### Catching koalas

Trained rangers are experienced in managing koalas. Handling any native species such as the koala should be by, or under the supervision of, an authorised officer under the Wildlife Act 1975.

Visitors to the park should take care not to disturb the rangers at their work. When visiting the park office please feel free to ask any questions in relation to the koala program.

Rangers are committed to minimising any discomfort to the koalas when catching them. They will also check if the koalas are carrying any young and prepare them for transport. Koalas are weighed, tagged and identified before being sent to veterinary staff for their records.



*"Victoria has all the outdoors you could wish for - mountains, forests, beaches, and bushland, all preserved in our parks. Our natural landscapes have been here longer than anyone knows, and together we can make sure they're here forever".*

**For more information  
call the Parks Victoria  
Information Centre  
on 13 1963**

**or visit our website at  
<http://www.parkweb.vic.gov.au>**

## Further information

Parks Victoria  
Information Centre  
Phone 13 1963  
or visit the website  
[www.parkweb.vic.gov.au](http://www.parkweb.vic.gov.au)

### Caring for the Environment

Help us look after your parks by remembering these guidelines:

Please take all rubbish away with you for disposal or recycling

All native plants and animals, archaeological sites and geographic features are protected by law

Dogs and other pets are not permitted

Firearms are prohibited

Light fires only in fire places provided  
No fires, including barbecues, may be lit on a day of Total Fire Ban

Collect only dead wood from the ground for campfires

Reduce trampling by keeping to the walking tracks

Handling of native animals should only occur by, or under the supervision of, an authorised officer of the Wildlife Act 1975.

## In the past and today

Prior to European settlement, koalas (*Phascolarctos cinereus*) were widespread, ranging from north Queensland to South Australia. Hunting by aborigines, dingoes, owls and Wedge-tailed Eagles plus bushfire impacts contributed to controlling population numbers. Disease is also a factor that locally impacts on koala numbers.

With the arrival of Europeans, vast areas of forests were cleared resulting in decline in habitat. Koalas were also hunted for their fur, increasing the risk to their long-term survival.

By 1934 the estimated Victorian wild koala population was 1000 and it was feared they were endangered. Since then koala translocation has occurred from French and Phillip Islands where over-population had become a problem. As a result, koalas have been effectively re-established within Victoria and now occur over much of their former range.



## Locating koalas

Although difficult to glimpse in the tree canopy, koalas can be identified from their droppings, male grunting and snoring-like calls, high-pitched wailing cries of the females and from scratch marks left on tree trunks.

Koalas prefer open forests and woodlands. Although renowned as 'fussy eaters' due to a preference for only a few eucalypt species, they occasionally eat non-eucalypt species including tea trees and wattles. Here in Victoria, the following eucalypt species are diet favourites: Manna Gum (*Eucalyptus viminalis*), Swamp Gum (*E.ovata*), Blue Gum (*E.globulus*), River Red Gum (*E.camaldulensis*) and Long-leaved Box (*E. goniocalyx*).

## Koala lifecycle

Koalas live a largely solitary life although males seek out females during the breeding season. Healthy females are able to breed each year and a single young is born during the summer months. Young are weaned by twelve months although they will stay near the mother for a further year.

Female young often establish a home range near their mother. As with most young marsupials, young males are evicted from the maternal group. They lead a nomadic life for three years or so until they are big enough to establish their own home range - usually less than three hectares. This can vary with koala densities and food availability.

## Did you know.....?

Adult koalas weigh between 4 and 14 kg, Males can weigh up to 50% more than females. A 10 kg koala can eat up to 220 kg of leaf matter per year. The koala spends the first half of the night feeding, in bouts ranging anything from 5 – 80 minutes. They tend to rest in their feeding trees and only spend about 4 hours a day on the move. Koalas can live to 18-19 years of age.

## Conservation and the Koala

*"The species which make up the world of koalas are many and varied. The possums and gliders and many insectivorous bats seek refuge in and feed from and around the eucalypts preferred by koalas. Owls and parrots and a host of tiny insect-eating birds are also concentrated in these areas. Many migrating honeyeaters move along rivers and streams, feeding and resting in the trees of the banks and adjoining woodlands. Lyrebirds, bowerbirds and echidnas scurry amongst the leaf litter on the forest floor and platypus burrow into the banks secured by the roots of river red gums. Snakes, goannas and water dragons bask in the sun as wombats snooze in their burrows and wallabies cautiously graze on grass-shoots. This, but superficial, look at the complex ecosystem which koalas sit quietly representing, should serve to remind us that conservation needs to be about habitats and not just individual species. If habitats are protected so too will be their occupants."* (Phillips, 1990)

## Further Information:

DNRE, Land for Wildlife Notes- ISSN 1440- 2106, How you can help koalas on private land.  
Phillips, B., ( 1990), Koalas- The Little Australians we'd hate to lose. Aust. Nat. Park. And Wildlife Service, AGPS Press  
Lewis, F., (1934), The koala in Victoria, The Victorian Naturalist, Vol. LI, July 1934, pp 73-77.  
Costerman's, L., (1983), Native Trees and Shrubs of South-eastern Australia, 2nd ed., Rigby publ.  
Triggs, B., (1984), Mammal Tracks and Signs;a field guide for south-eastern Australia, Oxford Uni. Press.