

## Koalas

### Koalas and cars

- Koala hospital records show that about 300 koalas are killed on the roads in South East Queensland each year.
- Many more deaths are likely to go unreported.
- More than 85 per cent of koalas hit by a car die.
- Too many koalas are dying.
- Koalas are hard to see on the road so drive slowly wherever you see a koala crossing sign.
- Keep the number of a wildlife ambulance or local wildlife rescue group with you in the car or on your mobile phone in case you find an injured koala or other native animal.

**Phone the RSPCA on**  
1300 ANIMAL (1300 264 625)

*'I just saw it come out from behind a parked car and my wheel went right over it.*

*I quickly pulled over and looked back. I thought it must be dead but then I saw it move. I ran back along the road. Another car had stopped.*

*The driver had an old towel and wrapped it up and carried it to the roadside.*

*We could see blood soaking through the towel. The koala just lay there blinking. We didn't know what to do...'*



## Koalas

### Each koala is important

Seeing a dog or a cat that has been killed by a car is an unpleasant experience. If you own a pet, you might think about how horrible it would be if it was yours. And then comes the uncomfortable feeling that this pet does belong to someone and that someone will soon find out that it's gone. This pet had a name. It was someone's companion, a part of a family. It was a unique individual.

Now, what happens when you drive past a wild animal, say a koala that's been killed by a car? Is the feeling the same? Is it just as sad, or is it somehow easier to dismiss as less disturbing? This koala has no name, it belongs to no one and it's not really anyone's responsibility, it's just part of a species—not an individual—with other koalas, just like it, out there somewhere in the gum trees.

But these wild animals are a lot more like our pets than we realise—especially in the case of the koala. The koala that is seen regularly in a neighbourhood probably has been given a name. It's distinguished from other koalas by its looks, its habits and where it lives. Locals enjoy seeing it and wonder if anything's happened to it when it disappears for a few days. It does become an individual that is part of the community and cared for by those who plant trees, control their dogs and do whatever they can for the wellbeing of their local koalas—and this can include taking care while driving through areas where koalas live.

### Keeping koalas alive: wildlife-friendly driving

While it is sad to see a dead koala on the roadside, the shock of actually hitting a koala can be sickening.

In many cases there is little that can be done if an animal rushes out onto a road in front of your car. If a koala is struck by a vehicle, it can be killed outright or suffer serious injuries. The risk of hitting a koala may be reduced by driving more slowly and scanning the roadsides for signs of movement—or by trying to avoid driving in areas where koalas occur at those times when they are most active. While these precautions will reduce the risk of encountering a koala on the road, it will always be important to know what to do if an accident does happen.

### A driver's questions: How can I steer clear of koalas?

#### *When are koalas most likely to be moving across roads?*

Even though koalas can sleep for much of the day, they still come to the ground to move between trees. Where their habitat is fragmented by development they often have to cross roads to reach some of the food trees within their home range. Their on-ground movements can take place at any time of day but usually occur at night.

Koalas become more active between July and September in the lead up to the breeding season. At this time breeding males are establishing their home ranges and young animals may be moving out into new areas.

If you are driving through koala habitat you should slow down and scan the roadsides for koalas (and other wildlife). Get passengers in the car involved in 'wildlife watching' (this can become an activity for children).

You will probably see dead wildlife on the road at times and where it occurs regularly will indicate the 'black spots' where 'wildlife-friendly driving' is needed. Koala and wildlife crossing signs are also good indicators of where you need to be aware of wildlife on the road.

#### *What do you mean by 'wildlife-friendly driving'?*

In many ways wildlife-friendly driving is just like driving through a school zone when school gets out. It involves driving well within the speed limit (but without becoming a traffic hazard yourself), and scanning the roadside for anything that may move onto the road in front of your car.

When driving at night, watch out for the eye shine from animals that are crossing the road. Eye shine is the reflection of your headlights shining in an animal's eyes. Animals that are active at night have a special mirror-like structure on the retinas at the back of their eyes that allows their eyes to concentrate the available light, helping the animal see in the dark. Animals can act unpredictably when confronted by bright headlights or can be temporarily blinded. Slowing down will give the animal more time to react and get off the road. If you have a passenger in the car, ask them to look out for wildlife too.

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### ***What do I do if I see a koala on the road?***

Slow down and allow it to move off the road. If you get too close you may 'spook' it and it could freeze or run back in front of the car. If it is a young animal, its mother may be nearby and could also run out on to the road. Even if you can safely pass a koala that's beside the road, slow down so that your brake lights catch the attention of other drivers, making them more likely to notice the koala if it moves on to the road (you can also use your hazard lights).

### ***What can I do if I accidentally hit a koala or find an injured koala on the road?***

If you drive through an area where koalas (or other wildlife) live, you may find an injured animal. You should be prepared by having the phone numbers of your local wildlife care groups or wildlife ambulance and the location of your nearest vet surgery in your car or on your mobile phone (these numbers can be found in community service directories or by looking under 'Animal welfare organisations' in the Yellow Pages). You can also ring the RSPCA on 1300 ANIMAL (1300 264 625).

Carry an old towel or blanket in your car to wrap an injured animal in case you need to carry one off the road and to keep it restrained. This will stop the animal from moving and further injuring itself—and from biting or scratching. If the animal is already on the roadside and is safe, avoid moving it and only restrain it to stop it from escaping or injuring itself further.

You always need to consider your personal safety before attempting to help an injured koala. Park your car safely and use the hazard lights to alert the drivers of other cars. Contact your local wildlife care or rescue group for advice. If you are interested in becoming a wildlife carer you should contact a local wildlife care group or the RSPCA. They can advise you about suitable training programs on wildlife rehabilitation and permit requirements.

### ***What if the koala is dead?***

It is still important to notify the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (EHP) or a local wildlife care group about a koala even if it is dead. These koalas provide valuable information on the occurrence of diseases and the health of local koala populations. Keeping records of the number of koalas killed on roads also allows wildlife managers to identify problem areas where strategies to reduce the number of koala deaths can be put in place (e.g. koala crossing signs and devices such as culverts). If you find a dead koala report it to the department (phone 3202 0231) during work hours or the RSPCA (1300 ANIMAL) after hours.

If a live pouch young is found, it should be kept warm and given to a wildlife carer as quickly as possible. Do not attempt to feed it or give it a drink. If an almost fully grown joey is seen near the dead koala, a wildlife carer should be contacted. The carer will decide whether the koala is old enough to survive on its own or will need to be caught. Only trained and authorised wildlife carers or wildlife rescuers should attempt to catch healthy koalas, as it can be a dangerous procedure for both the koala and the person involved.

### ***How many koalas are killed in Queensland each year?***

The number of koalas killed by vehicles each year in Queensland is not known. Since 1997, vehicles have killed or injured an average of about 360 koalas each year in South East Queensland. This makes up about 20 per cent of all koalas brought into wildlife hospitals in this area and makes it the most significant impact on koalas after habitat clearing, and is comparable to the impact of disease.

### ***What the statistics don't tell us***

The statistics about koala deaths and injuries don't tell the full story. For example, not all koala deaths and injuries are reported. Further, a koala listed as a 'road kill' may have been more vulnerable to vehicle strike because it was already diseased or stressed, or injured from a previous car strike or recent dog attack. It may have been crossing the road to get to the last patch of gum trees in an area or get away from a dog. A koala's death or injury may be the result of a combination of impacts but a 'statistic' only lists a single cause. What the statistics really say are that too many koalas are dying.

### ***Do we need to worry about the number of koalas being killed on the roads when habitat clearing is having a greater impact?***

Wildlife conservation issues rarely have single causes or single solutions and it is no different with koalas. Each threat, whether it is habitat clearing, vehicle strike or dog attack, is being addressed by the State Government as part of a combined approach to conserving koalas.

## Koalas

### Maybe koalas are more like our pets than we realised

We need to think about koalas both as members of a species but also as unique individual—just like we do with our pets. We should also recognise that these animals do belong to someone—in fact they belong to all of us (and our children—and theirs) and we all need to care for them. Thinking about koalas as individuals is particularly important in the case of vehicle strikes because it affects individual koalas—and involves individual drivers.

If a koala ever walks out onto a road in front of your car, the information that you've read here may help you to avoid it. If an accident happens, this fact sheet can also help you to deal with the consequences. An injured koala on the road is no longer just another animal, it is an individual requiring special attention.

And by caring for the individual, you will be caring for the species at the same time.

For contact details of wildlife care and rescue groups, call the RSPCA on 1300 ANIMAL (1300 264 625) or check your local Yellow Pages under 'Animal welfare organisations'.

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**Further information**  
Visit [www.ehp.qld.gov.au](http://www.ehp.qld.gov.au).

**For general enquiries related to wildlife**  
call 13 QGOV (13 74 68).

**To report sick, injured or orphaned wildlife**  
call RSPCA Queensland  
on 1300 ANIMAL (1300 264 625).

For licensed wildlife relocators in your area or advice about wildlife around your home or business please call the department on 1300 130 372.

