



Mammal Survey Group of Victoria NEWSLETTER

November 2006

Next Meeting : Will be the Christmas get together and has been scheduled for December Friday 8th and probably the same park as in previous years. To be confirmed with an email the week before.

Last Meeting : Held at the Howards on October 10th and after setting of future camp dates etc we were entertained with Chris Wilson's slides from a Simpson desert trip in June this year.

Last Camp: Was held in the Mullingdung State Forest South east of Tralagon. The Forest was very dry and no animals were trapped. Spotlighting was a little better but density was down on previous visits, a Koala and some ringtails were all that were seen. Swamp Wallabys and Easter Grey Kangaroos also seen as chance sightings.



Next Camp: November 4th-7th 2006 Cup Weekend, Camp is to be held at a new site for the group in a reserve near Redbank (Avoca – Stuart Mill area) Details how to get there are in the following email.

Future Camps and Dates:

Date	Proposed Location
Xmas 2005 – New Year 2006	Have a new campsite in the Suggan Buggan area
January 26–28 th	South of Providence Ponds
February 17-18 th	Tonimbuk, Helmeted Honey eater site
March 10-12 th	Cape Liptrap
April 6-9 th Easter	To be decided
May 5-6 th	To be decided
June 9-11 th	To be decided.

Howard's Way: VULNERABLE KOALAS

The well-known environmental group based in Queensland, is about to renew its push again to list the koala as a vulnerable species nationally, amid fear it could be extinct within ten years. The Australian Koala Foundation in 2004 nominated to list the koala as threatened, under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. But the Federal Environment Minister Ian Campbell after months of deliberation rejected the application in June this year. The foundation says at the present time Australia wide only 100-000 koalas are remaining in the wild.

The koalas' distribution range extends across parts of eastern and southeastern Australia, roughly from Cairns to Adelaide but is not continuous. Their preferred habitats are the open eucalypt forests and woodlands, where they can enjoy a diet of a wide variety of 150 different eucalypt species which are high in fibre and low in protein, it is has long been recognized they are fussy eaters, one day they relish one variety and reject it the next, their choice is influenced by the location and fertility of the that area. They are typically solitary animals and spend about 20percent of their time feeding, the other 80percent sleeping, grooming, traveling and seeking mates. The koalas' home range varies in size depending on the animal concerned and the quality of the habitat. Males have larger home ranges than females they have been recorded of roaming up to 20 kilometers. Body weight and body size in koalas' differ between the sexes, along with their colour and length of fur it changes with latitude. Our Victorian animals tend to be brown and larger than their silvery grey Queensland relatives, in spite of the difference they are all one species that have adapted to the climate and colour of their preferred forest habitat.

Historically the koala's principle predators were probably Aboriginal man and dingoes. Unfortunately the legal protection that koalas are now afforded does not include their forest habitat, which has been degraded so extensively that koala populations

MEETINGS: 2ND Tuesday of Feb, April, June, August, October at 6 Alphington St, Fairfield

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throughout Australia are diseased and often infertile. The problem is acute because their natural food is almost totally limited to gum leaves, and only a handful of species of eucalypts provide their favoured diet. The strong local preference they show for certain eucalypt trees is allied with the acquired tolerance of chemical content. This tolerance is one of several ways the koala has become adapted to eucalypt foliage, a diet of very low nutritive value. An adult has to consume more than a kilogram of foliage each day to obtain the necessary nutrients for survival. The leaves contain a considerable fibre high in lignin, which is difficult to digest so the koala has evolved with a passage of digested material, allowing microbes (gut flora) in the hindgut maximum opportunity to attack fibre. Chemical analysis of gum leaves has shown that young eucalypt leaves at certain times especially spring growth contain a volatile poison, the cumulative effect of which may be fatal. The chemical action following chewing of the leaves releases prussic (hydro-cyanic) acid. Koalas that are forced into living outside their habitat of favoured trees will eat gum leaves for which they have not developed a toxic resistance.

As suburbs continue to grow encroaching on koala habitat, cars and dogs pose the next greatest threat. Australian Koala Foundation estimates suggest up to 4000 animals are killed by these two factors every year. It has taken a long time for us Australians to realize that as custodians of one of the world's most endeared animals they have to date, done an atrocious job of looking after them. Today propelled by ever increasing community concern there is just a chance this problem will be rectified, so that the live koalas that Jessie and I have had encounters within their forest habitats during our life time, can also be enjoyed by our grandchildren and those for ever after. At the present time the koala's habitat that stretches from Australia's northeast, south to Victoria and west into South Australia is diminishing each day. A united push to save them will also benefit hundreds of other, even more vulnerable, native species. These creatures may be less popular than koalas, but they are equally important. In the end if we Australians can't get it right for the Koalas, there is probable not much hope for all the other unique mammals with which they share their home.

ARTHUR HOWARD

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