

Koala facts

Learn more about our furry friends



Description: Koalas (*Phascolarctos cinereus*) are a small to medium-sized mammal called marsupials. Koalas are often referred to as Koala bears, but they are not “bears”. Marsupials are a unique group of mammals native to Australia which give birth to underdeveloped young that mature in a pouch. All marsupial young are called joeys. Koalas share a number of characteristics with wombats, who are their closest living relatives, including a “backward-facing” pouch that lies vertically with one teat on each side. They have a stocky body with a large head, round ears, and a distinctive black nose. A unique adaptation of the Koala is their sharp claws and opposable thumbs on their hands and feet which allow them to climb tree trunks.

Habitat: Koalas are found in a range of eucalyptus forests and woodlands along the eastern coast of Australia, primarily in the states of Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. Although their habitat is extensive, Koala habitat is under considerable pressure from infrastructure, urban development, forestry, mining and agriculture.

Diet: Koalas are herbivores and their diet consists almost entirely of Eucalyptus leaves, which are low in nutrients and energy. Mothers pass on to their joeys a territory specific gut flora (microbiome) to digest the toxins in local Eucalyptus leaves, during a papping process prior to weaning. Koalas obtain most of their water needs from the leaves they consume.

Behaviour: Koalas are territorial animals and are arboreal, spending most of their time in the canopy of trees. They're also nocturnal, being most active between dusk and dawn. Koalas have a slow metabolic rate, sleeping for up to 20 hours a day, helping them digest their diet of Eucalyptus leaves.

Lifespan: In the wild, Koalas have an average lifespan of 10 to 15 years. However, in captivity, they can live up to 20 years or more.

Reproduction: Female Koalas reach sexual maturity at around 2 to 3 years of age, while males become sexually mature at around 3 to 4 years. Koalas have a relatively low reproductive rate, with females typically producing 1 joey per year. The

gestation period is around 34 to 36 days, and then the young Koala stays in its mother's pouch for approximately 6 months. Once out of the pouch, they remain close to her for at least another 6 months.

Unique adaptations: Koalas have several adaptations that help them survive in their habitat. Their paws have sharp claws to grip tree trunks and branches. They also have a tough pad on their rump which allows them to sit comfortably on branches for extended periods.

Conservation status: NSW Koalas have been listed as an Endangered Species under Australian Federal and NSW State laws since early 2022, and Vulnerable by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Habitat loss, bushfires, predation, vehicle strikes, climate change, and diseases, such as chlamydia, pose significant threats to their populations. Efforts are underway to protect and conserve Koalas and their habitats.

Population estimate: Koalas are a mobile and enigmatic species, often sheltering in dense or inaccessible vegetation; largely going unnoticed by humans. The exact population of Koalas in Port Stephens is difficult to determine. However, a rapid decrease in sighting and rescue numbers indicates that their numbers have significantly declined in our LGA. Remember, protecting and conserving the natural habitats of Koalas and other wildlife is crucial to ensuring their survival for future generations.