



If you see a sick, injured or dead koala, call the rescue hotline: 6622 1233

# Treetops

The Newsletter of Friends of the Koala Inc.

March 2011

Patron: Margot Sweeney (CEO, Summerland Credit Union)

## Bold, Brave Tonga

I don't know much about the circumstances that saw **Tonga** come into care last August. He had been hit by a car at Rappville in Richmond Valley Shire and taken to the Casino Central Veterinary Clinic. The Clinic contacted WIRES and they contacted us. He was already named when Phyllis Matthews took delivery of him and brought him back to the Care Centre.



*Tonga on his chair talking to John*

ate plans were made for Loretta Younger and I to drive him to the Australian Wildlife Hospital.

We learned that he had a fractured sacrum (where the pelvis joins the spine), internal bleeding and very serious grazing on both back legs. He couldn't walk but apart from

assorted chairs, benches, equipment and a lot more.

**Tonga's** curiosity became legendary. Regardless of impediment he established a routine, wending his way through chair and table legs, trolleys, under desk and table, into the laundry and, if the door was left open, into the toilet as well. I heard a noise one morning and found him lifting the lid to see what was there.

**Tonga** developed a fascination for chairs and would do his best to climb up on them and succeeding. His favourite was an orange one on which he would take a nap after his exercise. That chair is now known as **Tonga's** chair.

**Tonga** sounds a strong name; the name for a fighter and so this sociable animal turned out to be. His injuries clearly required surgical investigation so immedi-

his injuries he was a healthy adult. Definitely worth being given a chance and the vet team decided on two weeks' grace to see how he went.

**Tonga** beat the odds, regaining movement and walking with difficulty. He continued to improve and returned to us in late September.

A big boofy boy, he soon won everyone's heart and we all liked to look after him. Part of his treatment was walking exercise twice weekly. I have to admit that when I read this I had a mental picture of taking him a walk and I wondered where we might do that. In reality we brought him into the Care Centre and let him loose.

It was a special time for us as well as **Tonga**. We could see him improving and he seemed to really enjoy his exercise, investigating every nook and cranny.

Those of you familiar with the Care Centre know that its open areas are small and crowded with a work station, a table and

Koala talk between John Holland and **Tonga** (who John called Dude) kept us all entertained. John would call and **Tonga** would chortle back, building in to a full bellow, much to everyone's delight. But we all had to keep our wits about us and keep out of his way. If we stood still for too long we ran the risk of him making a beeline for our legs. I'm sure he thought we were rather odd looking trees.

The strength in **Tonga's** back legs was looking pretty good but we still had to make sure that he could climb a tree and be able to look after himself. Reluctantly we had to say goodbye. He was put into pre-release on a member's property and released after some weeks.

For Care Centre regulars **Tonga**, so big and full of character, is a very special boy (*a real cool cat* according to Nat Wunsch). While we miss him, we are all happy that he has gone back to the wild and is doing what koalas are meant to do.

—Lola Whitney

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## President's Message

Despite the horrendous start to the year I have high hopes for 2011. A new sense of urgency for Koala conservation is in the air or perhaps I've been spending too much time skimming the submissions to the Senate Inquiry: [www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/ec\\_ctte/koalas/submissions.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/ec_ctte/koalas/submissions.htm)

The mere fact of the Inquiry and its 70-odd submissions (ours is no.58) is encouraging. We can only trust that by June the Senate will be hit with a hard-nosed report that will then force Minister Burke to make the right decision.



Lorraine Vass

In early February he took the easy option and extended the due date for his decision to October in order to take into account the findings from the Inquiry. The Threatened Species Scientific Committee apparently advised that there was not enough data about the koala population to inform a decision.

In his media release the Minister said "Koalas are an iconic Australian animal, they hold a special place in the hearts of Australians and I have taken this decision carefully. The Committee found that the national koala population is variable with too many in some areas and declining populations in others. Information on koala populations is sparse and patchy, which makes estimating national population size and trends challenging. The Committee noted that existing data on koala populations is patchy at best and inadequate to make this judgement at this time. That's why the Gillard Government supports the Senate Inquiry to assess the threats to and management of koalas across the country."

Call me naïve perhaps?? Closer to home, my optimism is based in part on the commitment of four North Coast councils to the preparation of comprehensive koala plans of management. I've written about this previously but in recent weeks Byron Shire Council has also requested staff to prepare a report/scoping study for a shire-wide plan. You can read more about progress on these plans on p. 11.

Another reason is that we are hearing more about koala habitat destruction in the media. The investigative work of North East Forest Alliance (NEFA) and North Coast Environment Council (NCEC) members, for example, has brought before the public

government's perpetration of approving private native forestry licences to log mapped core koala habitat around Coffs Harbour. Seventy-five licences have been issued since 2007 enabling logging of 2,277ha of the 19,000ha of core koala habitat mapped in the Coffs Harbour local government area (LGA).

This issue has received both regional and state-wide media attention. It is the focus of several submissions to the Senate Inquiry and included in many more. The Minister is reported to be furious, as he should be. Will heads roll? I shouldn't think so. Logging on private land is essential in a fundamentally unsustainable industry. We hear of one or two 'best practice' operations here on the Northern Rivers but they are exceptional. Government continues to extend into new areas with field days providing 'participants with an awareness of the opportunities and regulatory obligations of good Private Native Forestry management and operations on their farm'. The Mt Burrell area in Tweed Shire, a well known locality for koalas, and Coombell in Richmond Valley Shire are the latest target.

Growing acknowledgement by the scientific community and by government of the impact of disease on koala populations is also encouraging. Our position is unequivocal. Disease is the number one cause of mortalities here on the Northern Rivers. In our view its incidence is way beyond being a natural population regulator.

In their timely study, just published, quantifying the implications of multiple threatening processes on Queensland's Koala Coast koalas, Jonathan Rhodes and others\* confirm that koala recovery plans need to encompass actions to address multiple threats. Habitat restoration alone will not be sufficient. Nor will mitigation of road strikes and dog attacks. Disease-induced mortality is identified as the single cause which, if reduced by 59%, could stabilise the Koala Coast population. You can catch up on some of the current research initiatives into disease in koalas as well as a summary of Peter Timms's beautiful seminar on Chlamydia on pps. 8-9.

There are other good things happening. In regard to koala and other wildlife rehabilitation DECCW has released the *Rehabilitation of Protected Fauna Policy* and *Code of Practice for Injured, Sick and Orphaned Protected Fauna*. We expect that a draft

code for the care of koalas will be distributed for comment in the next few weeks.

Just a while back the contribution made by rehab groups to wildlife conservation science and especially utilisation of their data '...to identify potentially threatening processes, explore species behaviour, examine the success of wildlife rehabilitation and monitor infectious diseases' was given a big wrap by DECCW's Biodiversity Conservation Science Section.\*\*

Another encouragement has been the inclusion in the final *Far North Coast Regional Conservation Plan* released in January of several points we raised in our submission. At the individual level, FOK member and SCU Honours student, Sam Kendal, has been awarded one of two scholarships from Lismore City Council to undertake a population size and density study of koalas for the south-east part of the Lismore LGA.

As I write the NSW government is going into caretaker mode. Taking the Koala Recovery Plan as an indicator, Labor's performance in Koala conservation has been poor. We are now in the five-year Plan's third year and we cannot see that there has been much progress on its 52 actions. Indeed missed opportunity springs to mind on those actions related to land-use planning. Together with the emasculation of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act* and inaction on the reform of SEPP 44 (Koala Habitat Protection), plus the aforementioned ineffectual regulation of private forestry (as well as breaches in habitat protection identified in several state forests), performance would have to be sliding towards appalling. Can we expect the Coalition to do any better? Not without very serious pressure from us and even then they would probably succumb to post-election amnesia.

I suppose most of all it is the collective capacity of koala conservationists everywhere, in whatever their particular field of endeavour, to lead and encourage public opinion that keeps me optimistic that 2011 will be the year in which we see real changes for the better in Koala recovery.

\* Rhodes, JR., Ng, CF., de Villiers, DL., Preece, HJ., McAlpine, CA., Possingham, HP. 2011. Using integrated population modelling to quantify the implications of multiple threatening processes for a rapidly declining population. *Biological Conservation* **144**: 1081-1088. (doi:10.1016/j.biocon.2010.12.027).

\*\*Lunney, D., Orscheg, C., Shannon, I. 2010. The crucial role of community contributions to the science of wildlife conservation. *Bush Matters: Newsletter of the Conservation Partners Program of the Dept. of Environment, Climate Change and Water NSW* **13**: 8-9.

## Care Coordinator's Report

Thank goodness it has become quieter. This year's busy season seemed to start earlier than normal and finished later.

Thank you to all the volunteers who have done a bit extra to help out over the Summer.

The year is proving to be another busy one with infant koalas. This poses two issues for Friends of the Koala. First is having enough koala infant carers. It is a huge commitment to care for an infant koala. To become a home carer a person must first have extensive experience in caring for other marsupial orphans such as macropods or possums. This takes time – so if anyone is thinking they would like to be a koala home-carer the time to start getting ready is now.



Barb Dobner

Friends of the Koala is strict on the re-

quirements of who we place orphans with but because of this we have a very good success rate with our koalas – it is worth it.

Our second issue is making sure we have appropriate release sites and that we do not overload any of our release sites. Currently Friends of the Koala has four soft release sites for orphans with another in the process of being built. They are spread out across the region we cover which is good as we try to release the orphans at a site that is closest to their original point of rescue. Adult koalas are always released back at or as close as possible to their exact rescue site.

The Friends of the Koala manual has more thorough notes on what is required of a release site but basically it must be in an

area that has koala food trees, an existing koala population but not in high numbers, a low incidence of disease, and be as void of threats as possible i.e. not be right next to a road or have a dog problem. The person who lives on the release site must have some experience with koalas or other marsupials. Next step is to find a stand alone tree to put an enclosure around. This can be harder than it sounds as the tree also needs to be relatively close to the house otherwise it is too hard to keep an eye on the koalas. It must also be close to water so leaf pots can be

cleaned and refilled easily each day.

We prefer to only release a few koalas from each site each year so as to avoid overloading an area. Our system of releasing orphans has so far proven to be successful with quite a few charges being spotted years after release and with young.

If there is anyone who feels becoming a release site is something they aspire to



Regina Keszler bathes Esther's bottom



Sam Kendal feeding Joanna her paste

please let me know. The best first step is to then visit some of our current sites and talk to carers about their enclosures and experiences. Each site is slightly different as the carers have built facilities that suit them and their properties using materials that were available at the time. Orphans may be at their release site for an extended period of time or only a few weeks depending on the carer's capabilities. There are lots of options and lots of variables.

Till next time.

—Barb Dobner

### Koala Care Statistics 11 November 2010 – 24 February 2011 Friends of the Koala attended to or provided advice on a total of 185 koalas

	In Care	Released	Died	Dead on Arrival	Euth.	Unable to find/capture	Advice
Injured (2)			1	1			
HBC – Road Strike (15)	2	1	6	4	2		
Dog attack (7)	2				4	1	
Diseased/Sick (87)	15	5	6	1	38	14	8
Health status unknown /unrecorded (28)		1	2	7	1	6	11
Healthy/Assumed Healthy (41)	4	3					34
Orphans/joey(s)	4				1		
<b>Totals (185)</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>53</b>

## What's in a bellow?

Bill Ellis of the University of Queensland and his St Bees Island research team have found that female koalas judge their potential mate's desirability and size by the strength of their bellow.

Koala males "emit a sonorous bellow call during the breeding season" which is their "sexual advertisement". Apparently larger males are able to bellow for longer, so "the females might be able to tell which males are bigger by the bellows", Dr Ellis told the BBC.

From the study's abstract we learn that the team used a novel remote sound detection network to monitor koala bellowing while simultaneously collecting koala behavioural data using collar-mounted GPS units



The solar panel has a microphone extension attached at right, a battery on the ground. A phone is tucked under in waterproof casing.

The number of bellow vocalizations recorded during an annual period mirrored breeding activity, with nearly all male bellows recorded during peak mating season. The distance travelled by koalas and the occurrence of koala bellows both peaked around midnight, but only female travel distance during the breeding season was temporally correlated with bellow occurrence. ...

The investigation of koala language is being taken one step further, with the team working with an acoustics expert from the University of Vienna, Dr Ben Charlton, who is studying the recordings of each koala's voice to find out what information the females may be extracting from a male's bellow.

The report appears to be the first detailed study of the context of Koala's calls to have been published.

See:  
Ellis, W., Bercovitch, F., FitzGibbon, S., Roe, P., Wimmer, J., Melzer, A., and Wilson, R. 2011, Koala bellows and their association with the spatial dynamics of free-ranging koalas. *Behavioral Ecology*. doi:10.1093/beheco/arq216

## Another day at AWJH

*Friends of the Koala's association with the Australian Wildlife Hospital goes back to the days when the Hospital operated out of a converted avocado packing shed. Those of us around at the time thought the facility was pretty good. Newer members are familiar with today's purpose-built Hospital which clearly never ceases to command their admiration.*

*Treasurer Gwenda Lawther gives us her first-time impressions...*

In January I got to spend two days working at Australian Wildlife Hospital to help with the clean-up after the heavy rains. They had 80 koalas in care which was more than the usual seventeen daily volunteers could cope with.



Koala enclosures at AWH

It was my first visit and I was so impressed with the operation; better than some public hospitals I've worked in!

The co-ordinator, like our Lola, was considerate and organised, very hands on and caring, whilst the vet staff were calm and professional throughout the day.

The shifts were organised much like ours so I was privileged to administer medication in the morning which I did in what is known as the 'bachelor pad'. This is a large enclosure housing all the juvenile males who expectantly lined up

on the one log for their morning paste. So cute! Then in the afternoons I worked alongside the other volunteers to clean pens and change leaf. I also helped out in the bird aviary, turtle enclosure and cleaning gutters that had become clogged with excessive leaf and water.

Meanwhile in the central building, vets worked non-stop with students to manage the constant variety of animals coming in. At one point there were three surgical procedures happening at once; a kookaburra, a koala and an echidna. There was a long line of cages in the triage area waiting to be seen and the day's white board was covered in lists of animals with procedures all priorities and time estimated.

In the carers' room, cages lined the walls with animals in the care of the day's volunteers so feeding time was really fun. My baby flying fox watched with interest as a larger male chomped on an apple and as a water monitor sat and, well, sat.

Other rooms in the building include the food preparation area, venomous snake room (out of bounds to volunteers), staff room, volunteers' room and intensive care room. There's even a full x-ray set up and I have to say it was really funny seeing a tiny animal laying on the bed big enough for a person.

Most of this can be viewed by the public which is really great. It only costs \$2 to go into the public viewing area which has huge glass windows looking into the building and out the back to the runs, as well as lots of information and pictures. If you want the full monty, you can book a personalised tour for \$50.

Even though I was exhausted when I got home, it was so great to meet everyone and see where our koalas go. I'd highly recommend you pay a visit if you get the chance.

—Gwenda Lawther

## Nursery News

The plants are all flourishing in the nursery at the moment so if you are looking to do a bit of Autumn gardening, or maybe your friends and neighbours are too, then come on down and make some purchases. The current stocklist can be downloaded from the FOK website or I can email it out to anyone.

We lost a lot of plants in the big wet

over Xmas however the installation of new benches will provide better growing conditions for the plants. The benches (see opposite page) have been expertly constructed by a new volunteer, Richard White. Many thanks Richard!

The next step is to get the automatic irrigation system installed. The plan is completion within the month.

—Mark Wilson  
Trees Officer

## Care Centre Co-ordinator's Report

Summer is always busy but this one has been a bobby-dazzler with up to seventeen koalas at the Care Centre at any one time. Although the number is down to ten at present, now that we have additional space I'm sure it will continue to be utilised. Unfortunately there is no sign of declining numbers of sick and injured koalas.

Over the past two months we have had fifteen new volunteers join the Care Centre Roster which has helped share the workload created by the increased number of koalas. It's not just treating the animals; it's feeding them as well. The leaf-cutters have really had their work cut out for them. The weather has been humid and although we enjoy the luxury of air-conditioning inside, working outside has been very trying.

All of the enclosures have new name signs thanks to the generosity of sign-maker John Ennever. John hand-carved eleven signs, donating his time and expertise. They have been admired by all. Thank you John.

We have benefited from the National Green Jobs Corps Clarence Valley Community Koala Education and Awareness project initiated by NewTrain Grafton under the sponsorship of Clarence Valley Council. The Team is working to protect and recover koala habitat on the Lower Clarence, conducting vegetation surveys and replacing weeds with local native species. Koala food trees for some properties are being sourced from FOK's plant nursery

Once a week the Team, under the super-



The Plant Nursery's new benches

vision of leader, Marne Conderman, has been working with Leaf Collecting Co-ordinator, Rick Stewart, to plant koala food trees at sites on which fodder plantations are being established. They have also put new sand in most of the enclosures at the Care Centre. The work was hard and the day was very hot. A big thank you to them.



Lola Whitney

The grounds around the Care Centre are getting back to looking good thanks to the hard work of Craig Hardy and Ray Mezieres. Relying on volunteers as we do, the work that gets done is conditional on the talents and preferences of those who volunteer. Our 'odd job' volunteers tend to come and go so we feel particularly appreciative when they come and stay for a while. To make their job easier we have recently purchased a leaf blower to keep the driveway and footpaths clean and safe. We love the trees but they are constantly shedding their leaves and it is a hopeless and tiring task relying on only a broom. The new merchandise sold very well at Christmas time, the drink bottles and travelling mugs proving most popular.



Hon. Life Member, Marg Russell and Lola Whitney at the Byron Volunteer Expo

The Volunteer Expo held at the Byron Bay Community Centre last month was fun and a successful day. Marg Russell and I were particularly grateful for the assistance of Jenny and John Downs. I'm not sure how we would have negotiated the stairs with all our equipment without them. We were awarded two prizes for our stall. One award was for the Naughtiest Stall (joke) and the other for Cutest Stall. I guess we had a head start in Stuff, the Koala.

Some of us attended the seminar pre-

sented by Professor Peter Timms who is researching Chlamydia in koalas and developing and trialling a vaccine. He was very informative and we learned a lot.

Finally, the Friends of the Koala's New Year Party held at the end of January in the University's Herb Garden Pavilion was good fun. The venue was great, the food terrific and the skit hilarious (photos on page 7).

As usual I would like to thank everyone for their hard work and commitment. You are all very important to me. More important, our koalas need you.

—Lola Whitney



Hera, Zeus (her back young) and Rosalie taking it easy

## International Year of Forests—2011



The United Nations has declared 2011 to be the International Year of Forests. Forests provide shelter to people and habitat to biodiversity; are a source of food, medicine and clean water; and play a vital role in maintaining a stable global climate and environment. We are invited to take action in 2011 to celebrate our forests and to safeguard their sustainable management, conservation and development.

## Tracking Project Update

The urban tracking project in Lismore has been running for two years now. Two of the tracked koalas, **Mathew** and **Ashley**, were collared for the full period, had their collars removed and have been re-released. **Mathew's** home range, which encompasses the semi-rural outskirts of Lismore is probably safe enough. **Ashley**, who regularly crosses Ballina Road (the Bruxner Highway) may well be living on borrowed time.

**Amaya** and **Elizabeth** both slipped their collars in March 2009 after only a few weeks of tracking. **Amaya** was found in November 2010 suffering from cystitis and was euthanased. **Bonnie** had been recaptured in December 2009 because she had developed cystitis and a necrosis in the mouth. She was later euthanased. **Oscar** was the victim of a dog attack just a few weeks ago and **Ankana's** remains were found during January.

**Carrie** also lost her collar in mid-2010. She was brought in soon after because it was feared she had been nipped by a dog. All was well however and she was released. A tagged animal is frequently sighted in the area and we suspect it is her.

**Ruby** and her backyoung, **Pineapple**, **Indigo** and good old **Pinnocchio** are still being tracked.



*Indigo in care ....and in her release tree (right)*

While not a particularly happy story we cannot be surprised that four animals in the program are known to have died. Two females succumbing to cystitis and a male to dog attack must be considered typical. That **Mathew** and **Ashley**, the first two animals to be collared, are still out and about is bordering on the miraculous, as is **Ruby's** backyoung.

We don't know **Elizabeth's** fate. **Pinnocchio** has been tracked since August 2009, **Pineapple** and **Ruby** since February 2010.

**Indigo** only joined the program in January this year. Her trackers, John and

Trish report she is in the Hillcrest Reserve in Goonellabah only 50 metres from her release tree having led them a merry dance through the undergrowth between Carramar Drive, Redwood Grove, Hillcrest Ave and Sanctuary Court. John reckoned they hadn't had a koala move around so much in its first month or so post-release. It would also appear, from talking to residents, that she is attracting some male interest.



**Pineapple** has moved from Kadina Park and has now taken up home in the Camelot Court area. **Ashley's** home range includes Camelot, Windsor and Crandon; so both boys are very close.

SCU's Animal Care and Ethics Committee has recently authorised continuation of the research project for a further twelve months.

—Lorraine Vass

## Sargent and the Road's Residents

It is a warm Sunday morning and some friends of mine are cycling around Sargents Road, they like this



*Sargent inaction*

road as it is a picturesque loop with great views to the mountains and it has its share of challenging hills.

On this particular morning they also have their eyes on the trees to see if they can spot one of the koalas that are rumoured to hang about beside the road.

The loop is about 16 km of gravel road with some mean potholes that make

cycling with your eyes to the trees more than a little treacherous. They have almost completed the loop and one of the group has decided they have more chance of seeing a camel than a koala when the cry goes up, "There's one". I hear their tale the next morning and from the description of where the koala was: "Not too far from your place", I guess it might be my favourite boy **Sargent**. I am thrilled at this thought as I haven't seen him for months and I have been wondering where he has been.

It is a couple of weeks before I head up the road to see if I can find my boy, I am not too worried about the trail being cold as **Sargent** has always been a lazy boy, even by a koalas standards and sure enough he is just where I expect to find him. I get the same disinterested glance as always before he curls back into a ball to pass away the day in a hazy, sleepy, koala kind of way.

**Sargent** is not the only koala on the roadside verge this morning, my own two resident koalas have moved out onto

the verge for some noisy koala love making. **Sleepy** headed up the hill first, following a narrow track through the weeds that leads to our lookout where she took up residence in a tree with a view. **Mr Invisible** was quick to follow her and he joined her on Valentine's evening, I don't think from the sound of her banshee screams that **Sleepy** was too happy about this, she spent the following days sitting on tiny twigs in the least tree like trees that she could find, maybe this is her way to try and keep her lover at a safe distance.

I feel very fortunate to share my backyard with koalas, to know that I can walk out my front gate and with a keen eye and a degree of patience I can spot them as they go about their daily lives. I love having the opportunity to photograph this iconic species especially as they usually sit perfectly still for me, although often curled into a tight featureless furred sleeping ball, every now and then there are moments when they show themselves off and reveal to me the beautiful beasts that they are.

—Kathryn Kermode

## 2011 Party Pics



Great Venue; Terrific food



Rick Vass, Fiona Dawson and Stephen Wood



Elizabeth (r), Vanessa and Stacie



Lu Ye and Pat Barnidge tuck in



Helen and Roy Johnson



Melanie Duncan and Michael



Phyllis Matthews, Sam Kendall and Liz Reimer



Lola Whitney, Shannon and Heather Simpson



Rick Stewart and Dot Cockburn share a joke



Gwenda Lawther doing her koala walk



Lorraine Vass and Pat Barnidge hamming it up



Marr and Terry Russell

## Managing disease in koalas — the ongoing challenge

As we reported in last June's *Treetops*, the Queensland government is taking the disease issue seriously enough to have established the Koala Disease Research Fund, providing \$400,000 to support research which will directly assist in halting the decline of koala populations in south-east Queensland.

The research priorities identified for funding were:

- Assess and develop appropriate methods to reduce vulnerability of wild populations to disease;
- Establish the relationship between habitat loss (and other environmental stressors) to disease in koalas;
- Quantify the impacts of disease on breeding and fecundity rate;
- Develop tools that result in improved management outcomes.

Projects had to be completed within twelve months. We understand that competition was quite fierce. Four projects are to share in the funding.

Two projects are being undertaken by researchers at Queensland University. Building on previous and current research on the effect of habitat loss, fragmentation and climate variability on Queensland's koala populations, one project will target selected koala populations in urban and rural areas to provide new insights. The second aims to establish the relationship between stress, disease and infertility as well as developing tools that will improve conservation outcomes for koalas.

The third project is a component of QUT's on-going project to develop a vaccine against Chlamydia in koalas (see next column), specifically to evaluate a prototype Chlamydia vaccine by measuring the immune response of koalas and the level of protection achieved.

The fourth project, by researchers at the University of Melbourne and Melbourne Zoo will assess Chlamydia infection and identify factors which determine the prevalence of clinical diseases resulting from infection. As we know, these factors are not well understood.

In light of the amount and diversity of disease we see in our Northern Rivers koalas we welcome any research initiative that might contribute to improvements in disease management.

—Lorraine Vass

## *Chlamydia seminar — well worth the wait*

About 35 Friends of the Koala members and others attended Professor Peter Timms' long-awaited seminar *Koalas and their Chlamydiae: the long and winding road*, last month.

Peter is Professor of Microbiology at the Queensland University of Technology's Institute of Health and Biomedical Innovation. His research encompasses *Chlamydia* in humans as well as animals, including koalas.

The first part of the seminar focused on the *Chlamydia* bacteria, a constantly changing field of investigation.

When it comes to *Chlamydia* in koalas, to date nine strains of *Chlamydia* bacteria have been identified, and we now know that *C. psittaci*, the strain that infects birds, doesn't in fact infect this host. The most common strain found in koalas is *C. pecorum* which can cause both low and high-grade infections accounting for both infertility and mortality. The other strain found in koalas is *C. pneumoniae* which occurs in humans as well.



Peter Timms with Care Centre co-ordinator, Lola Whitney

Discussion of the different *Chlamydia* strains included their likely lines of evolution. Based on Peter's work, *C. pecorum* pre-dated European settlement. His personal belief is that different strains of *Chlamydia* have been evolving through various host species for perhaps millions of years.

In koalas *Chlamydia* is transmitted sexually. Some other means of transmission were discussed, including transmission from mother to joey through birth and/or pap feeding. This appears likely given

that some infected animals have been found not to be sexually mature.

Finally, we were reminded that not all infected animals display clinical signs of the disease, i.e. that some animals which look healthy may actually be infected. It is not clear whether infected animals will become clinically diseased, or if some animals never get the disease, despite being infected. Peter also stated that it is likely that the organism remains present in the animal after treatment.

The second part of the seminar was devoted to updating us on the vaccine research project being carried out by Peter's research team in collaboration with the Australian Wildlife Hospital and other industry partners including Friends of the Koala.

The good news is that results to date, from work on captive animals at the Lone Pine Sanctuary, are promising as the vaccine doesn't seem to exacerbate the disease. There have been good cell-mediated and antibody responses in all vaccinated koalas, even those suffering the advanced stages of the disease. Thus the vaccine is considered safe to give koalas including those with chlamydial disease.

At this stage none of our Northern Rivers koalas have been included in the research project, mainly for administrative reasons. When they are the vaccine may need to be adapted to the local *Chlamydia* strains.

Peter reiterated that while the research is going well there is still a long way to go and progress is sometimes slow. The immune responses of vaccinated koalas are measured over months, and numerous questions must be considered and tested before a vaccine can be released.

Future considerations will include whether to vaccinate male koalas, how to deliver the vaccine, the vaccination of translocated animals, and the development and packaging of the vaccine itself.

—Gwen Seznec

## Koala retrovirus and disease:

Research into the Koala Retrovirus (KoRV) is continuing, with a new joint study led by Drs Joanne Meers and Paul Young of University of Queensland and Damien Higgins of the University of Sydney. The project involves two PhD candidates, and is funded by the Australian Research Council and supported by Australia Zoo Wildlife Warriors and the Queensland Environmental Protection Agency.

Understanding the significance of KoRV is critical to planning koala conservation, especially in Queensland and Northern New South Wales. Past research suggests that all koalas north of Port Macquarie, and significant numbers of southern koalas, carry the virus. Though it is widespread, little is known of how the virus is transmitted, where it came from, how long it has been in koalas, or what effect it has.

The retroviruses are a group of viruses that insert themselves into the animal's DNA and use the animal's normal cell factories to multiply themselves. Though not all retroviruses cause disease, some of them can cause cancers (especially leukemia or lymphoma) and immune suppression (which can predispose to other diseases such as chlamydial disease). Examples of this include Feline Leukaemia Virus and Bovine Leukaemia Virus.

Koalas with leukaemia/ lymphoma and, to a lesser extent, chlamydial disease tend to have more KoRV in their blood but the question of whether or not the virus is causing these diseases is like the "chicken or egg" scenario. The high levels of virus in the blood might be causing these diseases but, because both of these diseases stimulate the animal's cells to use their DNA to multiply and to do their work, it might be the diseases that are causing cells to produce more of the virus.

This new project will build on the pioneering work done at University of Queensland by Drs Jon Hanger, Rachael Tarlinton and Greg Simonds and will investigate the distribution of the virus, how it is spread, and what effect it has on the immune system of koalas.

With the ever increasing pressures on koalas, their ever dwindling numbers, and the obvious impact of disease, an immunosuppressive virus would be a catastrophic blow. Stay tuned....

—Damien Higgins

## Native Fauna and Animal Welfare

Over the past 18 months or so I have occasionally mentioned FOK's involvement in the Northern Rivers Animal Law & Welfare Project, auspiced by the Northern Rivers Community Legal Centre.

The Project's mission is:

*To assist the Northern Rivers community to access legal advice and representation to advance animal welfare through the legal system, and engage in law reform and community education activities to improve the legal protections for animals.*

Animal rights and welfare is growing very quickly as a social justice issue in Australia - it is already well established in the US. A branch of Animal Liberation has recently been established here in Lismore (after Newcastle only the second out of Sydney).

As licensed wildlife rehabilitators we operate in a regulated framework. DECCW's new *Code of Practice for Injured, Sick and Orphaned Protected Fauna* was prepared in consultation with RSPCA NSW and is endorsed by the NSW Animal Welfare Council as well as the NSW Wildlife Council and Taronga Conservation Council. Its preface points out that compliance does not remove the need to abide by the requirements of the *Prevention of Cruelty to*

*Animals Act 1979 (POCTA Act)* and any other laws and regulations, such as the *Local Government Act 1993*.

It is not apparent that other aspects of harmful behaviour towards wildlife are adequately regulated. For example clearing vegetation while animals are present can inflict painful, distressing or prolonged deaths to those not killed instantaneously. We know through experience that surviving, displaced animals may be subject to misadventure, road strike, starvation or attack by other animals or predators.

Recent reporting of approval of a scientific licence by DECCW's Wildlife Licensing & Management Unit to Wollongong University to keep six kangaroos in cages 1 metre x 1.3 meters x 1.7 meters for up to nine months to ascertain the amount of methane gas expelled by them has caused a public outcry. At this point the matter is still under consideration by the University's Ethics Committee.

While there is undoubtedly a focus on farmed and companion animals in animal welfare which will probably continue, it is up to those of us who care about the welfare of native wildlife to ensure that those interests are brought to the fore and addressed.

—Lorraine Vass

## Dates for your Diary

**21 March 2011: World Forestry Day & Private Native Forestry gathering,** 11am, Grafton (for further information contact President)

**22 March 2011: NCC/NCEC Pre-election Environmental Forum,** 6-8pm, Red Dove, Lismore

**24 March 2011: Friends of the Koala Supervisors' Meeting,** 5.00pm, Koala Care Centre

**26 March 2011: Friends of the Koala Committee Meeting,** 4.00pm, Southern Cross University

**9 April 2011: FOK Basic Training,** 9.30 am SCU, Rifle Range Road, Lismore

**16 April 2011: Our Wildlife, Our Pets, - Managing their Co-existence,** NR AL&EP Workshop, 9.30am-12.30pm, Lismore Workers Club

**23-24 April 2011: Vintage Retro &**

**Recycled Clothing Fair, Brunswick Heads Fundraiser**

**6-7 May 2011: Land for Wildlife NSW Forum & Field Trip,** Hutley Hall, North Sydney

**12 May 2011: Volunteer Expo,** Lismore, City Hall

**21 May 2011: Koala Care Centre Workshop,** details TBA

**22 May 2011: International Day for Biological Diversity**

**24 May 2011: Treetops June issue deadline**

**28 May 2011: Friends of the Koala Committee Meeting,** 3.00pm, Southern Cross University

**NSW Wildlife Council General Meeting no. 20,** 9.30am The Centre, Randwick

## From the Mailbox

### If You Dream Them...

FOK member and Lower Clarence koala campaigner Cath Clark's posting on Larnook resident Joy Window's 'A-Roving' blog December 17, 2010. <http://arovingiwillgo.wordpress.com/>

Hallelujah! I was treated to a koala sighting at my neighbor Peter's place in Ashby today. He had rung before I left to shop this morning to report excitedly that there was one up his red gum. I wanted to race right over, but it would have to wait 'til later. After lunch. I rang up Peter to see if I could go with him and his dog on his afternoon walk in case the koala was still there. He said it was, so I dusted off my camera with the 400 mm lens and roused-up my monopod (a one-legged tripod that doubles as a walking stick). Urf, that thing is heavy, so into my good padded backpack it all went with binocs and water.

It was 29 degrees and humid just ahead of a rainstorm by about 4:00 p.m. when I joined Peter at his place down near the Broadwater. The land is more level there, with much bigger trees than here in Ashby Heights, and more lush vegetation. Peter had koalas 20 years ago in noticeable numbers, but they'd stopped coming when the "tree changers" started arriving in droves with their ride-ons and chain saws. But just in the past couple of years, the koalas have been quietly making their presence known again.

Peter regularly walks his old dog, "Bronte," on his large wooded block, and she had alerted him to the presence of the koala. "She can smell a koala a mile away," said Peter—remarkable since this one was probably 10 meters up a large, beautiful old red gum. The koala was resting in the upper branches, and without the dog, Peter thought he'd have never seen it. I pulled out my camera and screwed on the monopod, but no matter how far back I tilted it, the angle was just wrong. So I un-did it, threw down some newspapers, and laid on the ground. I took a few pics, but as is usually the case for me, what I got was a lovely photo of a furry bum and sprawled legs, but no head. Consoled myself with a couple shots of Peter and the Red gum, especially the fresh scratch marks that help mark a koala tree. He also pointed out the "scat" at the base of

the tree, which is about the size of a plump kalamata olive pit. I sniffed and thought It did NOT smell like nice eucalypt leaves, but rather more like poo. Peter knows I'm trying to learn more about koalas, so had collected a prime scat sample earlier, which he proudly deposited in the palm of my hand in his kitchen later on. (I had him put it in some tin foil for the trip home).

Koalas have been very much on my mind lately. At the start of this week, I submitted my 20 pages of comment on Council's draft Koala Management Plan for Ashby, something I'd spent four days solid preparing. It's important to me that they get it right. When I was on the Valley Watch executive a couple years back, we lobbied hard for this, and we, along with other local environment groups persevered to keep it on Council's radar.

Since my own land has been identified within Core Koala Habitat, I've been looking into agencies that can assist with conservation efforts. Last week I got a letter from the Catchment Management Authority saying my request to have them prepare a property management plan for koala habitat on my land had been approved. (Yay! they do the work for free, and when the plan gets recognised, I'm eligible for grant funding).



Marnie Conderman (back left) and her Green Jobs Corp

Sometimes people who can help will even find you themselves! Just yesterday, I had the NewTrain green corps group out to inspect our land. Since we're in "Core" koala habitat, one of their crew managers had gotten in touch with me through Valley Watch. Now Marnee Conderman and her crew of 8-10 strapping young men are scheduled to come and spend about 6 days removing noxious lantana weeds, and planting koala food trees, with advice from Friends of the Koala.

I haven't seen a koala on or near our

property for four years now, but long to see one again. In the movie "Field of Dreams," Kevin Costner built a baseball diamond in the middle of a Kansas wheat field and said "If you build it, they will come." My theory as regards koalas is, if you dream them, they will come. If not to me, to my friends, which is just as good!

—Cath Clark

*Around the same time we heard directly from Joy Window who emailed her friend, Committee member Rick Stewart with her own story of a koala sighting.*

Hi Rick

The most amazing thing happened last night. Andrew was computerizing away in the studio as is his habit. The night was warm, the moon bright, and I couldn't sleep, so I was practising my harmony part for a song about midnight.

I heard Andrew open his door, then exclaim, then a pause, then he came racing over. Good job he had heard me singing as it meant I was awake, but he would have woken me up anyway:

A KOALA WAS TRYING TO CLIMB THE CORNER OF HIS STUDIO. AAAAAAAAAAH!

It was one of the most thrilling moments of my life - what a privilege to be visited by a wild koala. We often hear them at this time of year, calling out for mates over the hills. Andrew had heard a scratching, scratching at the southern door of



Startled koala at Larnook

the studio. He went out the main door (the northern side) and around the front with a torch to investigate, to discover the koala at the corner. It dashed down the path behind the studio, clambered up his Aphrodite statue which leans against the slope, and then stopped on the track above the studio.

It was at that point, he went and got me. We watched it by torchlight for 5 minutes or so, then left it in peace. WOW WOW WOW WOW!

—Joy

## Advocacy and Policy Reform Report

As you may have gathered from my Message, the end of the year wind down over Christmas and the Summer holidays seems to be a thing of the past. Sure, there was a hiatus in DAs but the exposé of shonky PNF activity around Coffs Harbour plus koala-related issues we are wanting to highlight in the up-coming state elections at the end of the month has ensured that this quarter has been as busy as any other.

The two major undertakings for the period have been dissemination of the Environmental Defender's Office's (EDO) advice on the reform of SEPP 44 and preparing our submission to the Senate Inquiry. There's not much to add about the latter so I will focus on SEPP 44.

### Immediate reform of SEPP44

The urgency of the SEPP's reform was identified at the Koala Conservation Conference we held in May 2009. One of the actions from the Conference was to seek the EDO's advice on identifying and promoting key reforms which can be implemented in the short-term pending the SEPP's comprehensive review.

The three immediate recommendations are to revise Schedule 2 and the definition of 'koala habitat' in SEPP 44 to reflect the current knowledge regarding tree species and koala habitat; remove the one hectare trigger requiring a site specific Koala Plan of Management to be developed; and insert detailed requirements relating to monitoring, review, reporting and compliance for individual Koala Plans of Management within the SEPP.

A draft of the EDO's advice was received in early December and soon finalised. Distribution of the advice to ministers, local members and MLCs, members of the Opposition, candidates, bureaucrats and stakeholders commenced in mid-December. To date there has been no response at all from the Minister for Planning (not even an acknowledgement).

### General

Over the quarter my nomination as FOK's representative on the Lismore Draft Koala Plan of Management Stakeholder Reference Group was lodged, we wrote submissions

supporting the proposal to add 34,600 hectares of wilderness to the national parks estate at Curracabundi, between Gloucester and Walcha, provided input into the Draft Code of Practice for Injured Sick and Orphaned Koalas, the Clarence Valley Council's Draft Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management for the Ashby, Woombah and Iluka localities of the Clarence Valley Local Government Area, and the Draft NSW Biodiversity Strategy 2010-2015.

We've also written to the NSW Minister for the Environment about our concerns regarding the issuing of private native



North Coast Environment Council Meeting at Coffs Harbour. (l-r) Pepe Clark, (Nature Cons. Council NSW), Ashley Love (Jetty Action Group), Neil Denison (NPA Far North Coast), Lyn Walker (Ballina Environment Soc.), Lorraine Vass (FOK), James Tedder, (NPA Three Valleys), Ian Radcliffe (EDO), Jim Morrison (Pikapene and Cherry Tree EC), John Edwards (Clarence Env. & Justice Centre), John Jayes (Crescent Heads Ratepayers and Residents Association).

forestry licences in areas of mapped koala habitat and we have requested that he provide a comprehensive report on progress of the 5-year Koala Recovery Plan.

We are corresponding with Byron Shire Council and the Director of Bluesfest regarding compliance with the consent conditions governing management of the koalas on the Festival site at Tyagarah about which we wrote a letter to the Editor to the *Byron Echo* and to Council.

I attended Meetings of the North Coast Environment Council, the NSW Wildlife Council during February and monthly meetings of the Northern Rivers Animal Law and Education Project. Several members participated in the Lismore City Council's Community Information and Consultation Workshop for the Draft Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management for south-east Lismore.

### Tweed Coast Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management

The first stage of the Plan of Management,

the Tweed Coast Koala Habitat Study, was received by Tweed Shire Council at its February meeting, just a week after the consultant presented a workshop to Council and the Advisory Group Committee on his findings.

The Study demonstrated that coastal koalas have declined dramatically over the last decade, the greater proportion of the koala population now largely restricted to three isolated sub-populations between Bogangar and Pottsville.

It emphasised that Tweed Coast koalas will succumb to localised extinction, if existing land management and planning processes continue as they are. Indeed the consultant believes the current status of the population would likely meet the criteria for listing as an Endangered population under the NSW *Threatened Species Conservation Act*.

Council unanimously agreed to make the study available to the community and to support interim protection of koala habitat on the Tweed Coast recommended in the study and to proceed with preparation of the Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management (CKPoM). One of the interim protection measures for the immediate future is a tree preservation order (TPO) over the Study Area which seeks to protect in particular Swamp Mahogany, Forest Red Gum Tallowwood and Grey Gum.

The Habitat Study is available at: <http://tweed.nsw.gov.au/YourEnvironment/KoalaManagement.aspx>

and the TPO is at:

<http://tweed.nsw.gov.au/PlanDevBuild/TreePreservationOrder.aspx>

The Tweed Coast Koala Advisory Group's next meeting is scheduled for 22 March by which time the brief for the CKPoM will be drafted.

Lismore Council has decided on a governance model including a Scientific Work Group, a Stakeholder Reference Group, a Policy & Planning Work Group, and the Sustainable Environment Policy Advisory Group. Membership of the Stakeholders Reference Group will be announced next week.

More about Lismore and Byron Shire's plans next time. Discussion on Clarence Valley's Draft Plan follows on p. 12.

—Lorraine Vass

## Clarence Valley – ahead of the game

*The Draft Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management for the Ashby, Woombah and Iluka localities of the Clarence Valley Local Government Area (LGA) was exhibited late last year. Friends of the Koala lodged a brief submission, broadly supporting the submissions made by Valley Watch Inc. and Pat Edwards, FOK member and Koala Co-ordinator for WIRES Clarence Valley. When all the submissions have been reviewed the Plan will be finalised for Council's consideration.*

*A summary of Pat's report on the Draft Plan to her WIRES colleagues follows.*

Although the Plan is restricted to the Lower Clarence, it appears sound enough, and reflects Council's aim to maintain and improve koala populations within the study area. It also recognises the urgent need for immediate action.

The minimum recommended necessities are to protect preferred koala food trees within areas both occupied and unoccupied by koalas and encourage their movement and re-colonisation from Bundjalung National Park and Richmond Valley to the north

For Ashby the management objectives are to mitigate impacts by development and infrastructure, road strike and dog attacks. Where a viable resident koala population exists in areas of development, then habitat fragmentation must be minimised and habitat quality and extent increased.

Under the LEP some properties in Ashby currently can be subdivided into very small 1.5ha lots. If the Draft's proposals are upheld, some subdivision might not be allowable to this extent.

For Woombah, which is considered a dispersal zone for animals from the Bundjalung National Park and where koala numbers are extremely low, the Plan merely seeks to protect koala habitat and individual koalas within the current population. This has already been pre-empted by the LEP, which proposes a rezoning of 17 portions of land within the area to RU(2) (Rural Landscape), to prevent further fragmentation of koala habitat.

For both Ashby and Woombah there is to be a planned development 'envelope', within which developments such as

sheds and houses can occur, in consideration of other associated factors such as bushfire management, effluent management etc.

While this may sound like business as usual, these envelopes are not to be feared. Google Earth shows that within the development envelopes lie all those areas that are *already* cleared, even the very tiny ones, on bushy parcels of land. All new buildings must stay within that envelope to minimise vegetation clearing; be located as closely as possible to existing roads (not new ones), and will be also controlled jointly by Council's Biodiversity Management Strategy (2010) and existing threatened species legislation.

Again, if the Draft gets through the envelopes could eliminate any further land clearing from Ashby and Woombah.

Where removal of any koala food tree is unavoidable in building a house etc, then 2 trees of the same species must be planted on the same property for every one removed. These must be grown from local seed stock, be a minimum 60cm tall, and be planted in a location that provides/maintains koala habitat linkages. These young trees then must be tended for two years to ensure their survival. If they die, they must be replaced, and the nurturing starts again. There also must be a management plan submitted in each case for the care of the new young trees, such as stock exclusion, fencing, weed control and removal etc, and a register will be kept so Council can keep an eye on compliance, and on the trees themselves.

Council has now enforced the Tree Preservation Order (TPO), previously approved by Maclean Shire Council in 1998. This TPO now applies to all locally-recognised preferred koala food tree species, forest red-gum; swamp mahogany; tallowwood and grey gum. WIRES' input into the Plan and liaison with Council over its development will bring our hotline contact details on signs in various places – in Ashby, one on the Ashby-Tullymorgan Road just north of the township for traffic heading west, and one on the A-T road just east of Crisp Drive. For traffic headed south into town, there will be one on the Murrayville Road about where the Ashby Channel starts to run alongside the road. These strategic locations were judged

best to catch all traffic moving around the main koala-cum-wildlife movement locations.

Also in Ashby, koala awareness signs will be erected just to the north of the Murrayville/Tullymorgan Road junction, and one on Crisp Drive not far from the Tullymorgan junction. These signs could possibly be added to at a later date, and placed at regular intervals along all of these roads.

Restricting traffic speed limit along Murrayville Road to 80kmph is also being considered, but needs cooperation from the RTA. Also a maximum speed limit of 60kmph is suggested through areas of preferred koala habitat, and 40kmph through core habitat (and in this they stick to the SEPP44 definition). These lower speeds will have to involve traffic calming devices such as speed humps.

Dogs are another problem, and for Ashby there could be a covenant on new subdivisions within koala habitat, such as on Crisp Drive, prohibiting the keeping of domestic dogs. Roaming dogs will be impounded, with council rangers specifically targeting koala habitat, while a curfew will prohibit dogs being out at night, enforced by after-hours rangers. There will also be encouragement of appropriate koala-proof fencing to keep dogs in and koalas out of danger from attack, and strict leash-restraint for dogs in public koala habitat areas.

Section 2.3.3.11 of the Plan deals with WIRES' care and rehabilitation of sick, injured and orphaned koalas. Suggestions of how we might be supported in our work to ensure adequate koala welfare are limited to working with National Parks in tagging and record-keeping, which of course we already do by ourselves. Apart from possibly supporting the suggestion of a centralised register for all koalas in care, to be set up by DECCW, which might be useful if it extended from the Queensland border to Port Macquarie, there is little that can be done with this section. My submission included the comment that as koalas are rarely if ever kept in long-term care within our branch, the only way to add to our care processes is to provide local vets with specialised training and equipment to enable full koala assessment procedures,

*Cont'd on page 13*

*Cont'd from page 12*

including ultrasound and euthanasia under full anaesthetic, to save koala carers those many hours of excessive travelling time that invariably results in a euthanased animal.

Sadly Iluka is not included in the Plan at this stage, because its koalas are deemed extinct under the NSW Recovery Plan. However, our records of animals coming into care from Iluka are taken seriously and Iluka is to be monitored. If results prove positive, then the Plan is likely to be revised. In the meantime Section 79 of the EP & A Act, and Council's own Biodiversity Management Strategy, are the only development controls available to protect existing habitat and offset any clearing.

WIRES contact signs will be erected about 6.8km east of the Esk River Crossing on the Iluka Road, for the benefit of travellers into Iluka, and approximately 0.5km north of Hickey Street on the Iluka Road for people leaving town. Monitoring and reporting will also be undertaken around Iluka, and for this the public can get involved. This is expected to help protect any remnant koala population by promoting awareness and educating the public about koalas needs, the threats they face, and how best to help mitigate them.

It is also suggested that WIRES and DECCW should get together to undertake a community education program, such as information sessions at schools, to raise awareness of koalas and the measures that can be taken to protect and enhance their habitat.

The Draft Plan is not all great, but under our current legislation it's probably the best we can expect. Indeed its moderation may ensure the support it will need to get through Council and to be signed off by the Minister for Planning. Should implementation proceed I personally look forward to witnessing the results, because I feel that, with compliance and cooperation, they could just be astonishing.

—Pat Edwards,  
Koala Coordinator,  
Clarence Valley WIRES

*Treetops is printed on recycled paper.*



## Bulletin Board

### New Members

A warm welcome is extended to the following new members who have been formally accepted into Friends of the Koala over recent months: Maya King-Prime of Tweed Heads, Michelle Moran of Cudgen, Jo Cabale of Crabbs Creek, Anneliese Hillyer-Thanke of Ballina, Loretta Younger of Rosebank, Lyn Baker of Goonellabah, Lin Cao (Lynne), Wenjun Yu, Jasten Phiri, Victor Rolston of Lismore, Sophie Shoemsmith of Lismore Heights and Dennis Page of Goonellabah rejoined.

### Lola and Pat Take a Bow

Lismore's Australia Day celebrations were again held at the Goonellabah Sports & Aquatic Centre. We nominated Lola Whitney in the Citizen and Services in Community categories and Pat Barnidge in the Services in Community category of the Awards.



*Pat Barnidge and Lola Whitney proudly display their recognition certificates*

### Policy and Code Signed Off

After a long approval process the Rehabilitation of Protected Fauna Policy and the Code of Practice for Injured, Sick and Orphaned Protected Fauna have finally been posted on the DECCW website at: [www.environment.nsw.gov.au/wildlifelicences/RehabFauna.htm](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/wildlifelicences/RehabFauna.htm)

The NSW Wildlife Council is negotiating with DECCW to provide print runs of both documents sufficient to enable distribution to active rehabbers across the state. A copy of each document is available at the Koala Care Centre.

### Lucky Find

Emily Mao of Thornlands near Brisbane was walking along a bush path at Daisy Hill Koala Sanctuary. She and her friend spotted a koala in a tree and stopped to take its photo. Afterwards they discov-

ered a \$20 and \$10 note in the grass under the tree the koala was in and sent it to us as a donation. As Emily wrote, "If we hadn't seen the koala we would never have seen the money, so we thought it only fitting that the money goes back to the koalas." Many thanks Emily.

### Old Mother Merriki

Victoria's Phillip Island's Koala Conservation Centre caters for thirty-eight koalas. The annual catch to assess their health and to microchip young born since the previous catch, takes place in November. Merriki, their oldest koala is 18 years of age and mother of one of the five joeys found in the 2010 count. Ranger Ashley Reed commented, "She is a testament to how the safe habitat provided at the KCC enables koalas to live long and (re)productive lives." How very true.

### Jon Hangar leaves AWH

It has been many years since we heard that Jon Hanger and Gail Gipp had been head-hunted to set up a wildlife hospital for Steve Irwin. What a fantastic job they both did and how we have benefited from their endeavour. But nothing lasts forever and Jon has moved on taking up the position of Manager, Wildlife Operations, for RSPCA Queensland. We understand Jon's involvement in several research projects undertaken by Wildlife Warriors, including the Chlamydia vaccine, is continuing. Perhaps the change is more apparent than real?

### Only in SA

The South Australian government recently announced the results of a campaign that offered "Bored Brits" an awe-inspiring list of job vacancies to attract back-packers, including a shark-personality profiler and tagger at Port Lincoln, and a koala catcher and penguin home-remodeller on Kangaroo Island. The publicity drive attracted thousands of internet hits and enquiries from across Europe.

### Stop Press:

The NSW Coalition has promised better protection for koalas and other threatened species if they are elected on 26th March. It will be up to all of us to ensure that this promise is kept.

## Unsung Hero — Regina Keszler

Caring for koalas was never on Regina Keszler's 'must try' list. Why would it be? She grew up in a small village near Zurich in Switzerland. Later she studied Medicine and then Psychiatry and Psychotherapy at universities in Zurich, Berne and Montpellier in southern France.



Regina Keszler

Sure, Regina lived her early years close to nature, surrounded by forest and wildlife. She remembers hand-feeding birds with her father during the hard Swiss winters of the 1950s and growing up with a ménage of household pets and farmyard animals. For most of her adult life however, she was an urban professional, marrying and bringing up her own family in and around cosmopolitan Zurich.

When Regina's younger son married an Aussie, Regina's life too began to change. After a couple of years living in Zurich, Daniel and Lisa decided they wanted to settle in Australia and found a property at Coffee Camp. Regina visited for a month in 2005 and again in 2006. She knew then that she would join them.

Regina sold her house and her practice; shipped the furniture and household goods she would need and put her dog Odrey in quarantine. She arrived in April 2007. A month or so later she had bought her eight acres of paradise at Stoney Chute (which she had seen in 2006), moving in for a cold winter while her gear was traversing the globe.

Regina first visited the Koala Care Centre on a rainy day in mid-November 2007. She was entertaining Swiss visitors and they wanted to see koalas. Regina found out about the Care Centre

and rang to book a tour. She remembers that Lola and Kay were nursing a back-young and she couldn't take her eyes off him. Although her English was not that good she understood enough of what was being said about Friends of the Koala's work and the constant need for volunteers for her to file away for future consideration.

By December Regina had joined the Koala Care Centre Roster and was cleaning out the runs, turning the leaf and doing her best to tune her ear to those weird Aussie accents. It wasn't long before she was encouraged to feed and to give injections. Regina had had plenty of practice with a needle but she was also wisely cautious about being scratched or bitten by her wild charges.

Three years later she has attended to many koalas and is entirely confident around them, assisting with vet visits and the occasional rescue. Regina knows she has koalas at Stoney Chute. They have been heard in the forest but she hasn't seen them. She must wait for the weekly drive she and her dogs, Odrey and Pete make into the Care Centre each Friday for an encounter with the animals for which she has developed such an affection. "Koalas are so communicative and curious" she says. "They have quite individual personalities. I love their little faces and feel very privileged to work with them. People come from all over the world to see what so many of us have the opportunity to see every day".

Regina's voluntary work has also helped her settle in to her new life. Immigrating to a country so far away from all that was home and familiar to be near family and close to retirement age requires resolve and more than a little courage.

Regina is undoubtedly the group's most linguistically endowed member. She speaks German, Swiss German, French some Spanish and has studied Latin, Ancient Greek and Hebrew. Her English was learned during a bit more than a year before coming to Australia.

Three years at the Koala Care Centre and Regina's conversation is like any other Aussie's. What with her grandchildren, new friends, koalas and the warmth of the sub-tropics, she wouldn't be anywhere else.

—Lorraine Vass

## Member Profile — Craig Handy

Craig is a relative newcomer to FOK having joined last August. He found out about us through NR Volunteering. He cares on Mondays and leaf collects with Dot Cockburn on Wednesdays. He also tidies up around the Care Centre whenever he has spare time. Craig says that he really enjoys working with such a great group of people.



Craig Handy

**What's the best thing about where you live?** The climate. That's the reason I moved to Lismore from Melbourne.

**What are you reading?** At present I'm reading *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran.

**What is your favourite movie?** *Donnie Darko*

**What's your favourite hobby/pastime?** Rock Climbing

**Your idea of a perfect Sunday?** Just spending time doing anything with my two children.

**Your most memorable travel experience?** When I was 17 I hitch-hiked around Australia. It took me five months to get all the way around and was one of the best things I've ever done.

**What would you most like to be doing in five year's time?** I would like to have my own business rendering houses.

**Who is the person you'd most like to meet?** Bono from the band U2.

**What has been your favourite koala moment?** I don't really have a favourite moment. I enjoy all the time I've spent with FOK.



**countryenergy**

**We live here too.**



81 Molesworth St, Lismore  
Enquiries 13 23 56  
Interruptions 13 20 80  
[www.countryenergy.com.au](http://www.countryenergy.com.au)

IF UNDELIVERABLE RETURN TO:  
'FRIENDS OF THE KOALA' INC  
PO BOX 5034  
EAST LISMORE NSW 2480  
PRINT POST APPROVED  
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AUSTRALIA



If you see a sick, injured or dead  
koala, call the rescue hotline:

**6622 1233**

Deadline for next newsletter: Tuesday 24th May 2011

Contributions gratefully accepted – please post to FOK or email [info@friendsofthekoala.org](mailto:info@friendsofthekoala.org)

