Where do koalas live in the Northern Rivers?

Koalas are widely distributed across the Northern Rivers of New South Wales although their numbers vary depending on available habitat. There are regular sightings in all the local government areas of Ballina, Byron, Kyogle, Lismore, Richmond Valley and Tweed.

Koalas are found in areas with extensive bushland such as Horseshoe Creek, Bonalbo, the Border Ranges, Goonengerry, Myocum, Larnook and the Blackwall Range. They also survive in urban areas.

Koalas are known to use people’s yards and even the streets of some towns and villages. Such sightings occur in Byron Bay, Kyogle, Clunes, Dunoon, Federal, Pottsville and Wyrahill, to name a few. In most parts of urban Lismore koalas are commonplace.

There are concerns however that koala numbers have decreased in recent times as habitat has been greatly reduced and that which remains is fragmented.

In many parts of the Northern Rivers koalas can be seen just about anywhere.
How long do koalas live?
The oldest wild koala recorded by Friends of the Koala was a female over 18 years old. Generally, their lifespan is 8 to 15 years. Koalas are aged by assessing the condition of their teeth.

How big are koalas?
Northern Rivers' koalas are similar in appearance and size to Queensland koalas. They have a short, thick, grey coat and are smaller than their southern counterparts. A male koala's average weight is 7-8kg and a female's 6-7kg. That is a bit bigger than a basketball when they are curled up in a tree.

What do they eat?
Koalas survive mainly on a diet of eucalyptus leaves but they do not eat all species of eucalyptus. Their preferred trees in the Northern Rivers are Forest Red Gum, Tallowwood and Swamp Mahogany although they eat many other eucalypts as well.

A full list of koala food trees is available on the Friends of the Koala website - www.friendsofthekoala.org

The trees koalas prefer to eat and use for shelter depend on the particular area and its surrounding habitat. For the Northern Rivers non-eucalypts such as Paperbarks and She Oaks are often used.

A koala's metabolism is finely balanced between nutritional needs and energy requirements. Habitat disturbance upsets the balance because koalas must range further afield for their food.

Coming into the world?
Across the region, koalas mate throughout the year. The mating season peaks between May and September.

Koalas are the size of a small jelly bean when born; their eyes are shut, ears stuck to their head and they have no fur. They take a precarious journey, crawling into their mother's pouch and attaching themselves to one of her two teats.

Koala joeys spend 6-8 months in their mother's pouch. During this time they grow fur and their eyes open. From 9-12 months they spend their days on their mum's tummy, back or close by, learning how to navigate the treetops and adjusting to a diet of eucalyptus leaves. The next few months are spent in the same vicinity as their mother as they become fully independent and weaned. Females often stay in the same area as their mothers. Young males usually disperse.

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Looking for koalas?
Koalas are known to live in an area by:
• scratch marks on tree trunks
• scats on the ground
• calls or sounds
• sightings

Watch out for all the signs of koala activity. Report all sightings of koalas to Friends of the Koala so accurate records of activity and sightings can be maintained.

Male or female?
Male koalas are larger than females and their genitals are visible. They have a longer, broader face and as adults are more muscular. At sexual maturity (2-3 years) they develop a scent gland on their chest which looks like a dirty, vertical mark down the middle of their upper chest.

Females are smaller, with fluffier ears. They have a rounder, softer face and are less robust.