

Central Queensland Koala Volunteers



WINTER EDITION 2016

St Bees Islands Earthwatch Field Trip July 2016



Earthwatch team from the July 2016 field trip at the Research Shed in Beverley Bay. From left: Martha, Cody, John, Kathy, Wayne (from CQU), Paula and Jackie. Alistair is holding the camera.

(Photo A. Melzer 2016)

The July field team was a small but enthusiastic crew – four of whom were Earthwatch veterans. Notably, Paula (back right) was on her third visit to St Bees Island. This team brought a wealth of experience and knowledge to our trip.

We had three objectives. The first was to undertake the baseline monitoring on vegetation plots and transects set up during the previous Earthwatch trip in spring 2015. The second was to initiate the assessment of the island invertebrate

assemblages. This is Wayne Houston's area of expertise. Wayne is in the centre at the back of the above photo. He is the Co-PI on these trips. The third objective was to install the first of the weather stations; this one on Keswick Island.

The third objective was the easiest to achieve, and this station is now up and running. You can look at the Keswick Island weather by logging onto the Davis Instruments Weather Link site (<http://www.weatherlink.com/map.php>) and typing *Keswick Island* into the search box. Expand the image until you can see Keswick Island north east of Mackay. Click on the orange dot and you get a snapshot of the current weather. Click again on the *Keswick Island* name and you will get an expanded summary.

We will eventually have stations on St Bees Island, probably by next year.

The first objective, monitoring the plots was the hardest task. This was due to the density of the lantana. First the team had to locate the corners of each plot, and then cut, and clear a path around the perimeter of each plot. Once that was done, transects were run through the plots and the vegetation measured. This involved much crawling under the dense lantana. Long clothes and gloves were the order of the day.



Kathy and Paula measuring the density of lantana plants. (Photo A. Melzer 2016)



Cody and Martha measuring the overstorey on one of the many vegetation transects. (Photo A. Melzer 2016)

The second objective was to collect invertebrates to understand how these

assemblages might change as the plant communities on St Bees Island change. Wayne and the team set up three types of traps. There were two types of intercept traps to capture flying insects generally and beetles specifically. The third type of trap was a pitfall trap to capture ground invertebrates.

The weather was not favourable and we were confined to quarters for four days with strong winds, rain and rough seas preventing our transfer to St Bees Island. However, some of the time was spent sorting some of the collected invertebrates.

Despite the inclement weather the team was rewarded by the koalas in the trees and the whales cavorting in the adjacent waters. One female and joey provided the classic cute show – distracting the team while transects at Honeymoon Bay were monitored. July is in the middle of the humpback whale migration to the barrier reef waters where the females give birth. We spent quite a bit of time watching whales leap and splash. The team was also rewarded by the sight of whales moving through the 600m wide channel between St Bees and Keswick Islands.

Our next trip is in October 2016.

Alistair Melzer



From the left, John, Wayne and Jackie installing an intercept trap. (Photo A. Melzer 2016)



Wayne (left) and John installing pitfall traps (Photo A. Melzer)

Queensland Government sets up a koala expert panel

Associate Professor Jonathan Rhodes, Dr Alistair Melzer and Mr Al Mucci have been appointed to a State Government Expert Panel to advise the Government on options to conserve south east Queensland's koalas.

Below are extracts from statements by the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef, The Honourable Steven Miles. These were issued on May 07 and July 04, 2016.

07 May 2016

The Queensland Government will appoint a panel of experts to explore ways to better protect koalas in the wake of a new report confirming populations continue to decline in the State's south-east. Environment Minister Steven Miles said the Government would consult with a range of specialists with a "diversity of expertise" relevant to koala conservation.

These included population dynamics, behavioural science, genetics, captive breeding, translocation, disease management, threat mitigation, rescue and rehabilitation, and town planning.

"We will be setting up a panel of experts as a matter of urgency to help determine the most appropriate and realistic options to respond to the available science," Dr Miles said.

"The Queensland Government takes the protection of the State's iconic and much loved koalas very seriously," he said.

"We will review all koala programs in light of these findings to develop a plan that will support our koala population.

"Since receiving the report from UniQuest, I have also directed the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection to come up with realistic short-term options to better protect koalas," he said.

The UniQuest report, "South East Queensland Koala Population Modelling Study", was commissioned under the LNP and prepared by the University of Queensland. Its purpose was to analyse and make conclusions on all known koala population data in SEQ.

The report concluded there was clear statistical evidence of a decline in koala population densities of around 80% in the Koala Coast and 54% in Pine Rivers between 1996 and 2014 – despite current protection measures.

"It is clear from the science that we cannot just assume that the koala protection strategies put in place over the past two decades are going to stop populations of this iconic species continuing to decline".

The State Government has invested over \$150 million since 1996 in programs to map and restore koala habitat, address the impacts of car strike, dog attacks and disease, rehabilitating injured animals,

surveying animals and investing in science. Considerably more has been invested by other parties including local governments.

Dr Miles said the Government expected to announce the members of the new expert panel next month, and he anticipated receiving its advice within three months of it being convened.

04 July 2016

The Palaszczuk Government today (Monday) convened an expert workshop in Brisbane to plan initiatives aimed at improving koala conservation in south-east Queensland.

Environment Minister Dr Steven Miles said the workshop marked the government's initial consultation with experts in koala conservation and other fields, to consider future strategies to ensure the long-term survival of koalas in the wild in the state's south-east.

"This workshop and the important work that will follow will be instrumental in determining the most appropriate actions for koala conservation from this point," Dr Miles said.

"We had experts attending from various areas of conservation science, the conservation sector, and land use planning - including Associate Professor Jonathan Rhodes, a recognised koala expert from the University of Queensland, who has already assisted us with koala research," he said.

A recent UQ report by a team led by Associate Professor Rhodes found koala population densities along Brisbane's south-eastern suburbs dropped around 80% between 1996 and 2014.

To Brisbane's north, in the Pine Rivers region, koala population densities fell around 54% over the same period.

Dr Miles said the "uncomfortable but clear message" from these statistics was that work to date had not guaranteed the koalas' future in south-east Queensland.

Associate Professor Rhodes, who will chair the panel, will be joined by Dr Alistair Melzer, from the Central Queensland University's Koala Research Centre; and Dreamworld Wildlife Foundation general manager/director, Mr Al Mucci.

Dr Miles said last month's State Budget delivered an additional \$12 million to boost koala conservation measures and improve population surveys over the next four years.

"Koalas in south-east Queensland continue to face threats including increasing urban development encroaching on koala habitat, rising incidences of vehicle strike and attack from dogs and other animals, and disease.

"These are the driving reasons we ensured there was increased funding in the budget to enhance our koala conservation initiatives," he said.

**Research project at Mt Goondicum
grazing property
Flavia Santamaria**

The importance of farmland for wildlife habitat is not to underestimate. Much of the vegetation that constitutes habitat for wildlife in Queensland has been cleared for farming and other human related activities.

This was the reason for the Koala Research team to carry out a project at a financially viable grazing property at Mt Goondicum, owned by Rob and Nadia, to survey the vegetation community and arboreal marsupials, koalas in particular, present at the farm. Mt Goondicum is located to the south-west of Rockhampton near Monto.



I was very lucky to have a fantastic team composed by two French intern students, Jennifer and Julia, from the Institut Polytechnique LaSalle Beauvais, a PhD student, Rolf (who also happens to be my husband) and a Masters student, Nicholas. Obviously, the property owners and proud farmers, Rob and Nadia, were absolutely precious, as they didn't just host us and helped during survey, but also fed us with very nice meals! Most of all, Rob and Nadia are very enthusiastic farmers with a strong interest in conserving their beautiful property for

wildlife for future generations. Rob is continuing the passionate work initiated by his parents, and is particularly thankful to his mother who has taught him to be sustainable in his use of the land.

During eleven days we looked for koala scats (poo!), we identified tree species, we measured tree density and, after dusk, we went spotlighting to look for 'eyes in the night' through the tree canopy. It was hard work, very cold, a lot of fun and so tiring to be a cure for insomnia!



Unfortunately, we didn't find any koalas, but we found a number of possums, gliders, flying foxes and many species of birds. We saw and handled many types of scats, which are now being tested for DNA to ascertain if any were koalas.

We also saw kangaroos, very much loved by the two passionate Julia and Jennifer. These were the reason to stop at the call 'Ohhh look, KANGAROOS (which, by the way, included all species of hopparoons) to the left, to the right!!' every few hundred metres, to shoot tens of pictures (they are lucky we live in the digital era!).

We know that koalas have been on the property because Rob has given us an historical recount. Who knows where koalas were hiding? We didn't find them, but it would be ideal to go back when the mating season is around, and males, with their loud grunting voices, define their territory for everyone to know.

Now we are working on the data which was collected, we have been producing maps of the property and soon an article will follow.

As far as Jennifer and Julia's disappointment at not seeing any koalas...well, they made up for it on St. Bees Island, but that's another story for Alistair to tell.



Visit to the Gladstone Envirofest

In June Alistair, Rhonda and I took our 'orphaned koalas' to the Gladstone Envirofest. Our orphans consist of a large variety of shapes and sizes of



preloved toy koalas each with its own character and personality. To make them appear cute and cuddly each orphaned baby koala has a nappy pinned on along with a tag with its name and the sad story of how they became orphaned.

The children take the time to read all the stories before they select an orphan to purchase. By the end of the day we had sold almost all of the orphan koalas.

The Gladstone Envirofest gets better each year with displays, talks, stalls and entertainment for all ages.

Rhonda and I did manage to leave our stall for a short while and buy several native trees, shrubs and grasses. A very enjoyable day.

Carmen Drake

Mission

CQ Koala Volunteers seek the conservation of the koala and other tree living mammals in Central Queensland by

- *Supporting research into koalas, other arboreal mammals and their habitat through (a) providing volunteer support to research projects, and (b) assisting in the raising of funds for research and the volunteer teams;*
- *Developing public awareness of the needs of koalas, tree living mammals and their habitat requirements generally;*
- *Fostering community support for koalas and tree living mammals generally;*
- *Encouraging and assisting with the development of habitat rehabilitation projects where necessary through the region;*
- *Supporting the rehabilitation and release of sick, injured or displaced koalas and tree living mammals.*

The Central Queensland Koala Volunteers are not about stopping development. They seek to encourage planned development, which allows for the co-existence of koalas and other tree living mammals with human activity.

Funds are used to buy equipment for the researchers, to fund volunteer field teams and provide limited support for animal carers. Donations may also be made to the Koala Research Centre of Central Queensland and are tax deductible.

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CQ KOALA VOLUNTEERS

Annual Statement 1 Jan 15 – 31 Dec 15

S5 Savings Account at 31 Dec 14 **\$3,042.13**

Income		Expenditure	
Membership	\$225.00	Deposit	\$12,000.00
Donations	\$65.00		\$5,000.00
Fundraising	\$125.00	Bank Chrg	\$4.30
Interest	\$101.42		
Refund ATO	\$1,276.07		
	\$17,906.35		
TOTAL	\$19,698.84		\$17,004.30
	\$2,694.54		

Credit Bal 31 Dec 15 **\$5,736.67**

S26 Club Chq at 31 Dec 14 **\$735.70**

Income		Expenditure	
Tran S5	\$5,000.00	Domain name	\$38.00
Interest	\$2.34		\$5,000.00
TOTAL	\$5,002.34		\$5,038.00

Loss for year **\$35.66**
Credit Bal 31 Dec 15 **\$700.04**

ASSETS

S5 Savings	\$5,736.67
S26	\$700.04
Term Deposit	\$12,184.50
TOTAL	\$18,621.21

Term Deposit of \$12184.50 reinvested for 12 months 24 March 16 at 2.5%

