

Acknowledgements:

The idea of Mac Koala Club was envisaged in 1995 by Steven Ward and Robert Close from Western Sydney University and Jeff McGill, the editor of the Macarthur Advertiser. Jeff supported the project whole-heartedly throughout its 18 year life and deserves great credit for its success.

The project was planned as a way to involve the Campbelltown—Macarthur residents in contributing to a scientific project by reporting koala sightings in an area where koalas are relatively scarce and difficult to find and study. Once found and ear-tagged, the koalas could be studied when the community reported sightings. Mac Koala Club columns then allowed feedback to the community on the koalas' movements and life histories, and provided updates on the koala research. The columns involved the wider community with koalas and the unique bushland environment which borders the eastern edge of Campbelltown.

For the next 18 years (1995 to 2013), articles were written by Robert Close, Steven Ward and Tristan Lee. These stories convey scientific research in a way that everyone could follow. The articles included the life histories of generations of koalas living in the Campbelltown area. Starting with Molly's story and ending with St Helen, readers of the Macarthur Advertiser followed the Mac Koala Club column each week. In the early years, young members had their birthday wishes from Mac Koala printed in the column. However, not all columns featured koalas. For example, the first two official records of platypuses in the Georges River were reported on the Mac Koala Club hot-line and details were provided in the next Mac Koala Club columns.

Several people were involved in the making of this four volume set and they deserve credit for their dedication in storing, collating and indexing the columns: Thelma Bourke, Verlie Fowler, Georgia Close and the Campbelltown Library Staff especially Claire Lynch and Andrew Allen.

We don't know what the future of Campbelltown's koalas will be. The eventual arrival of the disease, chlamydia, is likely to have a major effect on them as will clearing of bushland. These columns, presented in the four volume set will allow historians, researchers, students and interested community members to picture the Campbelltown koalas at a time when their numbers and distribution were increasing.

Dedication:

This four volume set of Mac Koala columns is dedicated to the late Thelma Bourke who collected the columns in the early years and stored them for all of us to enjoy today and in the future.

Stephen J. Fellenberg (Insektus) and Lynette Bowden: Curators and Editors

4th February 2016

Campbelltown's Macarthur Advertiser

Mac's Koala Club

Volume 4. 2011—2013



This four (4) volume set of Campbelltown's Macarthur Advertiser Mac's Koala Club was compiled by Lynnette Bowden and Stephen Fellenberg. February 2016.

Campbelltown Macarthur Advertiser

Mac's Koala Club
2011- 2013

Date	Article Name	Author
11/09/2013	A fond farewell with our latest column	Dr Robert Close
4/09/2013	Cramar proves a survivor	Dr Robert Close
28/08/2013	Koala hit by Motorist	Dr Robert Close
21/08/2013	Sounds of mating season	Dr Robert Close
14/08/2013	No article	Dr Robert Close
7/08/2013	Sounds of mating season	Dr Robert Close
31/07/2013	Platypus sighted is rare	Dr Robert Close
24/07/2013	Keep a lookout for Pindara	Dr Robert Close
17/07/2013	Watch for koalas crossing	Dr Robert Close
10/07/2013	No article	Dr Robert Close
3/07/2013	Rain presents problems	Dr Robert Close
26/06/2013	Zoo conference on care	Dr Robert Close
19/06/2013	Marsupial in chook yard	Dr Robert Close
12/06/2013	Be on alert drivers	Dr Robert Close
5/06/2013	Eyes peeled for Pindari	Dr Robert Close
29/05/2013	Visitor in the chook yard	Dr Robert Close
22/05/2013	Pindari gains confidence	Dr Robert Close
15/05/2013	Pindari has his favourites	Dr Robert Close
8/05/2013	Pindari branches out	Dr Robert Close
1/05/2013	Rail line plans a concern	Dr Robert Close
24/04/2013	Vincent seemed fitting name	Dr Robert Close
17/04/2013	No column for this week	Dr Robert Close
10/04/2013	Try to note koala tags	Dr Robert Close
3/04/2013	Sightings are increasing	Dr Robert Close
27/03/2013	Pagers report sightings	Dr Robert Close
20/03/2013	Colourful snakes in area	Dr Robert Close
13/03/2013	Giving Pindara a chance	Dr Robert Close
6/03/2013	Vale to one our finest	Dr Robert Close
27/02/2013	Keeping track is tricky	Dr Robert Close
20/02/2013	More suburban sightings	Dr Robert Close
13/02/2013	Would it really be a koala	Dr Robert Close
6/02/2013	Platypus sighted in river	Dr Robert Close
30/01/2013	Extreme heat took its toll	Dr Robert Close
23/01/2013	No article	Dr Robert Close
16/01/2013	Helen was feeling the heat	
9/01/2013	No article	Dr Robert Close
2/01/2013	No article	

Date	Article Name	Author
26/12/2012	No article	
19/12/2012	Fight to save injured pair	Dr Robert Close
12/12/2012	Nature sometimes cruel	Dr Robert Close
5/12/2012	Researchers study leaves	Dr Robert Close
28/11/2012	Ashton another road victim	Dr Robert Close
21/11/2012	Good health hopeful sign	Dr Robert Close
14/11/2012	Sightings on Old Kent Road	Dr Robert Close
7/11/2012	Service open all hours	Dr Robert Close
31/10/2012	Mums on the move with joeys	Dr Robert Close
24/10/2012	GPS shows their Journey	Dr Robert Close
17/10/2012	Hard to catch mum, joey	Dr Robert Close
10/10/2012	No article	Dr Robert Close
3/10/2012	Bangor travelled long way	
26/09/2012	Just leave them alone	Dr Robert Close
19/09/2012	Breeding group at Wilton?	Dr Robert Close
12/09/2012	Platypus has moved in	Dr Robert Close
5/09/2012	Cramar may be on patrol	Dr Robert Close
29/08/2012	It's a weird, weird world	Dr Robert Close
22/08/2012	Cramar's a tough fellow	Dr Robert Close
15/08/2012	Many sightings reported	Dr Robert Close
8/08/2012	Meet Bangor, our new find	Dr Robert Close
1/08/2012	Koalas can't eat all gumleaves	Dr Robert Close
25/07/2012	Sad end for a joey's mum	Dr Robert Close
18/07/2012	Will airport threaten wildlife?	
11/07/2012	Skin disease can devastate	Dr Robert Close
4/07/2012	We loose two at the weekend	Dr Robert Close
27/06/2012	Focus on at-risk species	Dr Robert Close
20/06/2012	Courtney's death explained	Dr Robert Close
13/06/2012	Statue may have merit	Dr Robert Close
6/06/2012	Trees near water favoured	Dr Robert Close
30/05/2012	Isolation ends in cruel irony	Dr Robert Close
23/05/2012	19 years of tracking ends	Dr Robert Close
16/05/2012	Koala sightings details are always appreciated	Dr Robert Close
9/05/2012	Will airport affect koalas	Dr Robert Close
2/05/2012	Species listed as 'vulnerable	Dr Robert Close
25/04/2012	Joeys have been raised	Dr Robert Close
18/04/2012	Courtney's trips mystify	Dr Robert Close
11/04/2012	pellets can help track Bob	Dr Robert Close
4/04/2012	Park is a koala refuge	Dr Robert Close
28/03/2012	No article	Dr Robert Close
21/03/2012	Kids learnt to be spotters	
14/03/2012	Please take care on roads	Dr Robert Close
7/03/2012	Migration mesmerises	Dr Robert Close
29/2/2102	Young death tally rises	Dr Robert Close
22/02/2012	Fewer sightings for now	Dr Robert Close

15/02/2012	Hope despite grim findings	Dr Robert Close
8/02/2012	Our oldest tagged koala	Dr Robert Close
1/02/2012	Proof land is core habitat	Dr Robert Close
25/01/2012	Male leaves smelly mark	Dr Robert Close
18/01/2012	Bernie caught after chase	Dr Robert Close
11/01/2012	No article	Dr Robert Close
4/01/2012	No article	

Date	Article Name	Author
28/12/2011	No article	
21/12/2011	No article	
14/12/2011	Gorgeous Georges Gorge	Dr Robert Close
7/12/2011	Growing cubs a-leaping	Dr Robert Close
30/11/2011	Platypus sealed in a deadly embrace	Dr Robert Close
23/11/2011	Platypus drowns in trap	Dr Robert Close
16/11/2011	Fresh leaves are needed	Dr Robert Close
9/11/2011	Dog was taken for a ride	Dr Robert Close
2/11/2011	Bite wounds are infected	Dr Robert Close
26/10/2011	Missing ear tags puzzle	Dr Robert Close
19/10/2011	Tags a lot in anticipation	Dr Robert Close
12/10/2011	Pair taken to new home	Dr Robert Close
5/10/2011	Victim was vulnerable	Dr Robert Close
28/09/2011	Head count proves tricky	Dr Robert Close
21/09/2011	Wanderer lifted to safety	Dr Robert Close
14/09/2011	Invasion of the reserve	Dr Robert Close
7/09/2011	Trek ends up 700m away	Dr Robert Close
31/08/2011	Limit access to yards	Dr Robert Close
24/08/2011	Sound way to find a mate	Dr Robert Close
17/08/2011	New Direction on the road	Dr Robert Close
10/08/2011	Deaths match hypothesis	Dr Robert Close
3/08/2011	Check for proof of attack	Dr Robert Close
27/07/2011	Watch out, males about	Dr Robert Close
20/07/2011	Bellows interest the girls	Dr Robert Close
13/07/2011	Watch out for males on the move	Dr Robert Close
6/07/2011	Eye defect causes unease	Dr Robert Close
29/06/2011	Brace yourself for bellows	Dr Robert Close
22/06/2011	Girl breaks the mould	Dr Robert Close
15/06/2011	More dog attacks likely	Dr Robert Close
8/06/2011	Vaccine offers ray of light	Dr Robert Close
1/06/2011	Mysterious tree gouging	Dr Robert Close
25/05/2011	Critters killed by cars	Dr Robert Close
18/05/2011	Call for more volunteers	Dr Robert Close
11/05/2011	Identification can be tricky	Dr Robert Close
4/05/2011	Shooting sparks interest	Dr Robert Close
27/04/2011	Oh deer, it's a big problem	Dr Robert Close
20/04/2011	No article	
13/04/2011	Better way to track them	Dr Robert Close
6/04/2011	A sad end for Charlotte	Dr Robert Close

Date	Article Name	Author
30/03/2011	Brad spots water rat	Dr Robert Close
23/03/2011	Onwards and upwards	Dr Robert Close
16/03/2011	Tough life takes its toll	Dr Robert Close
9/03/2011	Scrapes, bumps fails to stop Amica on the move	Dr Robert Close & Tristan Lee
2/03/2011	Marlee begins to grow	Dr Robert Close & Tristan Lee
23/02/2011	Joey rescued from pouch	Dr Robert Close & Tristan Lee
16/02/2011	Look out for platypuses	Dr Robert Close & Tristan Lee
9/02/2011	Johnny set for new home	Dr Robert Close & Tristan Lee
2/02/2011	Surprise in the back yard	Dr Robert Close & Tristan Lee
26/01/2011	Held at the police station	Dr Robert Close & Tristan Lee
19/01/2011	No article	
12/01/2011	No article	
5/01/2011	No article	

Campbelltown Macarthur Advertiser, Wednesday, January 5, 2011

Campbelltown Macarthur Advertiser, Wednesday, January 12, 2011

Campbelltown Macarthur Advertiser, Wednesday, January 19, 2011

Note:

No column published on this date

Held at the police station

By Robert Close
and Tristan Lee

26/1/11
MAC KOALA

IN OUR last column, just before Christmas, we expressed our concern that a young female, Jemima, was heading for Appin Road, where several of our young koalas have perished.

Jemima – the daughter of June and granddaughter of Shirley – had walked from Kentlyn to Woodland Road, St Helens Park after leaving her mother.

A few days later, a call came from Campbelltown police station to report that they had Jemima in custody after residents had brought her in from the corner of Woodlands and Appin roads. The problem was now what to do with her.

If we released her in the nearest bushland (Spring Creek), the resident female koala, Courtney, would drive her back to Appin Road. Releasing her elsewhere in the Campbelltown bush would be likely to have a similar outcome.

We decided, therefore, to remove her completely from the danger of cars by releasing her at Tarlo River National Park, where three other Campbelltown koalas have been released.

First, however, Jemima's case had to be assessed by National Parks and Wildlife Services. This required that Jemima be held in captivity for five days during the assessment, so she went to the Wildlife Health and Conservation Centre at Cobbitty where she was a model guest.

She is now exploring Tarlo NP and is being tracked with a fantastic new radio-collar that transmits her position direct to our home computers.

■ Meanwhile, another female koala, Liz, and her unnamed but almost independent joey were visiting homes in Denison and Sirius streets in Ruse.

At 5.30 one morning the joey was almost run over when it

could not keep up with its mother while crossing the road.

Residents asked us about moving the pair to a safer locality such as Tarlo NP.

In this case, however, Liz has been living in suburban Ruse since at least December, 2005 when she was first captured with her joey Greg.

She moves between Darling Avenue and Cook Reserve and raises her cubs despite the dangers which she has clearly learnt to avoid.

Moving Liz from her established territory at her mature age would be a mistake and the current joey is better off staying with his mother as long as he can. The stage when the joey leaves or is left by its mother and starts to wander (as Jemima did) will be crucial.

Please report all koala sightings to the UWS pager 9962 9996.

Surprise in the backyard

By Robert Close
and Tristan Lee

MAC KOALA

IT WAS an unusual Australia Day experience for a family in Endeavour Street, Ruse, when a koala approached them in their backyard.

The koala turned out to be Liz's cub (now named Johnny) that we mentioned in last week's column in regard to the hazards he would face on leaving his mother.

That break has now taken place because we could find no immediate sign of Liz nearby, although she was spotted some days later in adjacent Cook Reserve. Unfortunately, Johnny did not appear to be coping well on his own; he was listless and just wanted to sprawl about in the shade.

Even had we been able to find Liz on the day, it was doubtful whether Johnny would have been capable of climbing a tree to rejoin her.

So we took him to the Wildlife Health and Conservation Centre at Cobbitty, where he was given a thorough inspection. He was found to be not only dehydrated but he also had a heart murmur and congenital cataracts.

While the murmur may be due to the dehydration, the cataracts meant that Johnny was effectively blind. No wonder, as described last week, that he became separated from his mother while crossing the road, and this week lost her completely.

While Johnny was travelling on his mother's back he wouldn't have needed his sight, because his excellent sense of smell would have guided him.

But as soon as Liz could no longer carry him, then his lack of sight would disadvantage him. His mother may even have abandoned him when his behaviour

was not what she expected.

Our problem is now what to do with him when he recovers.

Because he carries a genetic abnormality, he cannot be released into the bush. Nor can he be used for breeding in a wildlife park.

So he can only avoid euthanasia if we can find a wildlife park that is willing to look after him for the rest of his life.

The fact that he has the genetic abnormality may be a result of the inbreeding that Tristan identified from his study of DNA in the Campbelltown population. Johnny probably inherited one copy of the cataract-causing gene from Liz and the other copy from his father. Both copies would be needed to cause the cataracts.

Please report all koala sightings to the UWS pager, 9982 9996.

Johnny set for new home

By Robert Close
and Tristari Lee

9/12/11

MAC KOALA

JOHNNY (pictured), the young, blind koala described in last week's column — and featured on page 5 of this issue — adapted quickly to being handled and soon learned to move about his cage.

Presumably he can use his highly developed sense of smell to counteract his blindness.

Now that he is recovered, he will go to Symbio Wildlife Park at Waterfall where he will join a group of nine other koalas and can expect to live another care-free 14 years.

■ Johnny's wild relatives in Campbelltown had a difficult week dealing with the extreme heat. Koalas don't sweat so have to keep cool in other ways.

Their first option is to seek deep shade in a tree that is situated where it will pick up the slightest breeze.

The tree need not be a food source, in fact, Campbelltown koalas spend 50 per cent of their time in turpentine — tall, densely foliated trees that are related to eucalypts but are not eaten.

Charlotte, who lives beside Georges River Road and is the mother of Curls, loves to rest in a tall clump of interlocking pines where she is practically invisible

and uncatchable. She rests in the pines by day then travels by night to feed.

We had to change her fading radio-collar recently and spent almost two weeks waiting for her to spend the day in a tree from which we could catch her.

This example shows how our radio-tracking data can be misleading because for those two weeks our records would show that she was stationary whereas she may have moved several hundred metres every night. She tricked us cleverly one day when we found her in a smallish, isolated tree about 100m from her pine refuge.

While we were assembling a catching team, however, she

escaped in broad daylight back to her hide-out in the pines.

The koala's next option for keeping cool is to sprawl out in the shady tree to expose the greatest possible surface area from which to lose heat. The third option is to pant. This is effective but wasteful of water, a commodity that the koala extracts from the leaves.

Students at St Helen's Park Primary School saw two-year-old Sirius panting in a small tree in the school car park.

He was clearly suffering but we didn't want to stress him further by catching him.

Please report all koala sightings to the LWS pager, 9982 9996.



CNA 2010 Newspaper of the year

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Saving Johnny, a blind koala

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Look out for platypuses

By Robert Close
and Tristan Lee

16/2/11
MAC KOALA

KOALAS in Campbelltown have been quiet since the hot spell.

Only Price has been reported, bellowing in Wyangala Reserve.

This reserve is a corridor for koalas moving from Smiths Creek across Leumeah High School to Peter Meadows Creek. Unfortunately, the path crosses the busy Junction Road.

So far Price has been either lucky or smart.

Our three radio-collared females survived the heat, but we have received no subsequent reports of Sirius, the young male who was last reported in St Helens Park Primary School grounds panting from the heat.

Several years ago we asked readers to contact us if they had ever seen a platypus or a water rat in the Nepean or Georges river systems.

We were particularly interested in sightings in the Camden area but any sightings, recent or old,

of either species in the two rivers or their tributaries are valuable because they give us a better picture of the status of the animals.

From our previous survey we obtained several reports, old and recent, of platypuses in the Nepean but were unable to follow up the reports with actual sightings.

Since that time, there have been several verified sightings, including animals captured in the old convict-built water canal that runs from near the Cataract River, south of Appin, to the Prospect River near Blacktown.

The platypuses were found near the Appin end of the canal and presumably came from the Cataract River which joins the Nepean just downstream of the Douglas Park bridge.

One of the most hopeful reports of sightings in our previous survey came from near

that junction of the two rivers.

Verified sightings of two platypuses were also reported since our last survey from the Bargo River. The Bargo is also a tributary of the Nepean River, so may supply the Nepean with young platypuses as well as with water.

We are hoping that people, such as fishermen or photographers who regularly and quietly use the river and its tributaries, may have seen a platypus or a water rat. The latter weighs four times as much as a usual rat and has a 40mm white tip to its tail.

Prime habitat for platypuses is where the river banks consist of soil rather than rock and with vegetation to protect access to their tunnels.

Please report any sightings of platypuses, water rats or koalas on the UWS koala pager 9962 9396.

Joey rescued from pouch

By Robert Close
and Tristan Lee

MAC KOALA

A FLURRY of calls came in from Menai from highly excited residents unaware koalas were seen occasionally in their district.

In fact, we've had several reports of koalas crossing Heathcote Road including Bill who we had ear-tagged in Kentlyn. The other animals, we presume, came from within the Holsworthy Firing Range.

This huge area is an important reserve for koalas because there are few threats and human traffic is limited.

Although we know little about the number and distribution of koalas in the range we do know the type of soils that support the eucalypts on which our Campbelltown koalas thrive are not common on the range.

However, even if koalas are only one 10th as common on the range as at Campbelltown, then there might still be a population of 300 or so.

■ Another caller was weeping when we responded to the page. She had discovered a dead female koala in her Kentlyn garden and could see the movement of a joey in the pouch.

We immediately rang Kate from WIRES and arranged to meet her at the Hamilton Road property where we found the joey was unfurred but healthy and weighed about 250g.

It is about 12 weeks old and would have had another 16 weeks of pouch life to go.

Raising the joey, now named Marlee, will be a great labour of love for Kate as the young koala will need seven feeds a day until it starts to eat leaves and at that stage it will need a special diet to supply the required digestive enzymes.

Usually these are supplied by the mother in the form of a regurgitated, thick, green gruel called pap.

Determining the cause of death was problematic. The body was not there when the residents went out at 1pm but was discovered on their return at 3.30pm.

Its coat showed signs of dried saliva, so the residents' two dogs were obvious suspects – but how would they have caught the koala when it would have been unlikely to have changed trees during the heat of the day? Moreover, a post-mortem revealed a spear-like puncture in the koala's chest but no sign of the teeth marks and bruising that accompany dog attacks.

There were no maggots on the wound so it's unlikely the koala died the previous night.

The cause of death remains a mystery.

Please report any sightings of koalas on the UWS koala pager: 9962 9996.

Marlee begins to grow

By Robert Close
and Tristan Lee

MAC KOALA

MARLEE, the young koala rescued from the pouch of her dead mother and featured in last week's Advertiser, has survived her first week in care and has begun to put on weight.

My "guesstimate" of her weight was significantly greater than her actual weight of 100g. That weight initially dropped as the young koala adjusted to her new diet and surroundings, but now has begun to increase.

Kate Ryan, Marlee's WIRES carer is cautiously optimistic, but there is still a long road ahead.

Kate measured Marlee carefully and discovered that Marlee's head length to body weight ratio was significantly greater than it should be. That is, she should weigh a lot more than she did when we first found her. This observation helps to explain why our initial estimate of Marlee's weight based on the size of the

head was so inflated.

Marlee's low weight suggests that she was in trouble well before her mother was discovered dead on a garden path with a wound in her side.

Perhaps her mother suffered the injury from a fall the previous day and was unable to produce enough milk to prevent Marlee from dehydrating in the pouch.

Sometimes koalas choose a dead and fragile branch which breaks, causing them to fall. Usually they fall safely because of their several protective features, but occasionally one will fall onto rocks or sharp sticks.

■ Our other koala in care, Johnny, is doing well under the care of Sharon from the University of Sydney's Wildlife, Health and Conservation Centre.

Despite his congenital blindness he is eating well and adjusting to life in captivity. He is

ready for transfer to Symbio-Wildlife Park and will go as soon as caging is available for him.

Sharon reports that he loves eating young, green eucalyptus buds and also the buds at the stage when the flowers are about to emerge from under their little caps. This is understandable because nutrient levels would be high in the buds.

Because he is blind, Johnny has adopted the practice of walking backwards wherever possible, presumably to avoid bumping his head into obstacles. He is a good-tempered, adaptable animal and appears well-suited to a life in captivity.

■ Meanwhile, there has been no news of the koala that invaded Menai. We suspect he will turn up again shortly.

Please report any sightings of koalas on the UWS koala pager: 9962 9996.

By Robert Close
and Tristan Lee

AMICA, who lives beside the baseball park in Kellerman Drive, has had a chequered history.

He first appeared in November 2008 when residents of Kalyan Road, Bradbury, heard bellowing at 3am and found him in a street tree.

After his capture, which was watched by a fascinated class of pupils from the adjacent Woodland Road Primary School, we found he weighed 7.3kg and was probably three years old. Unfortunately, he had badly injured one of his front claws and so was taken to the University of Sydney's Wildlife Health and Conservation Centre at Cobbitty.

Vets there amputated the damaged digit, sewed up the wound and cared for him until the wound healed.

We were then faced with the problem of where to release him and decided on the bush beside Spring Creek which runs behind

houses on the southern side of Woodland Road.

This is the domain of Cramar and Courtney but we hoped Amica would be allowed to settle there or move through to the Georges River.

We next encountered Amica in December 2009 where he was again in a street tree and again beside a school, Ambarvale High.

He was only 3m from the ground yet pupils were passing underneath him oblivious to his presence.

Again a class of pupils watched his capture and found he had a serious injury to one eye.

So back he went to Cobbitty, where his eye was found to be so badly damaged that it was removed and the eyelid sewn over.

On his recovery we were again faced with the problem of where to release him. We think the eye was injured in fighting so were

reticent about returning him to Spring Creek.

On the other hand he knew the area and had increased in weight to 9kg so we considered releasing him there was the best option.

About nine months later he was discovered in bushland beside the baseball park on Kellerman Drive and has been reported from there several times since.

The latest was this weekend when he was seen limping across the park.

On capture we discovered that he had injuries that appeared to be from a dog or koala bite to his left ankle.

So it was back to Cobbitty for a third time!

We'll be able to give details next week.

Please report any sightings of koalas on the UWS koala pager: 9962 9996.

913111

MAC KOALA

Scrapes, bumps fail to stop Amica on the move

Tough life takes its toll

By Robert Close
and Tristan Lee

MAC KOALA

AS OUR column went to press last week, Amica, the one-eyed, digit-deficient battler of St Helens Park, was about to be X-rayed at the Wildlife Health and Conservation Centre at Cobbitty.

The examination revealed Amica had a freshly fractured fibula, one of the two parallel bones of the lower leg. Fortunately the other bone was sound and will act as a splint as the fibula heals.

The X-rays also revealed an older, healed injury to the same fibula. Clearly life has been tough on Amica and our intervention, on three occasions now, may be prolonging his suffering.

If, when he recovers this time, we release him back to his familiar territory, he may be at a disadvantage in fights with other males and suffer more injuries or be driven onto Appin Road.

So we've asked National Parks and Wildlife Service for permis-

sion to release him at Tarlo River National Park. There he won't be at risk from cars and other males are so scarce he's sure to find a secluded gully where he can recover full strength in his hind leg.

■ Co-incidentally, a female koala from Mittagong was brought in to Cobbitty from Mittagong suffering from what appears to be the dreaded chlamydia.

This is a debilitating bacterial infection that infects the reproductive and urinary tracts and also the eyes. So far we have not encountered clinical signs of the disease in Campbelltown koalas but with continued movement of southern koalas northward it is a potential problem.

■ Other sad news was the death of tiny Marlee from a lung infection. Raising any young, furless marsupial is an immensely difficult and arduous task and we thank Cate Ryan, of WIRES, for

her efforts and commiserate with her over her loss.

■ On a brighter note, a resident of Evelyn Street at Macquarie Fields, earned substantial scratches to his arms as he rescued a young male koala from the traffic and secured him in a blanket. Now named Steve junior, (Steve senior died on the Appin-Bulli Road), the two-year-old was in excellent condition and after tagging we released him nearby beside the Georges River.

Other sightings this week have been at the Cooks Reserve corridor and at the Lynwood Park soccer complex.

■ I urge you all to attend Jeff McGill's environmental heritage talk at Campbelltown Arts Centre at 7.30pm on Wednesday, February 23.

Please report any sightings of koalas on the UWS koala pager: 9962 9996.

Onwards and upwards

3/23/11

By Robert Close

MAC KOALA

TRISTAN Lee, the co-writer of this column for the past three years, has left Campbelltown for Canberra, where he now works as a research officer for the Prime Minister providing the latest scientific information on a variety of environmental topics.

Although Tristan has written two papers for scientific journals on koala DNA that will form a major part of his PhD thesis he still has a big task before him.

Tristan reports from Canberra that although his working days can be long he is given time in return for overtime hours and will use this time to finish his thesis.

■ News from the Wildlife Health and Conservation Centre at Cobbitty is that Johnny is now in residence at Symbio Wildlife Park, while Arnica is under the care of Gaylene Parker at Wingello until his fibula mends.

Gaylene has nursed several Campbelltown koalas, including Molly who had a broken femur —

a much more difficult break to mend. However, the femur healed and Molly survived for many years.

The centre also reports that the female koala brought in from Mittagong last week has reproductive cysts and a thickened bladder. This means almost certainly that she has chlamydia.

Although slight infections can sometimes be cured with antibiotics, serious infections are generally extremely painful and difficult to heal.

■ A young koala has been seen in Stromlo Reserve, Ruse, only 20 metres from the busy Junction Road. Motorists should be on the look-out.

Because Stromlo Reserve, Cook Reserve and James Ruse Park combine to make an important corridor and habitat for koalas, dog owners whose properties adjoin those reserves should take precautions such as

investigating unusual barking and providing some way a koala can escape from a garden.

Colorbond fences can be a real trap and require an escape route such as a trellis or a log placed vertically in a corner.

■ Another caller asked how to distinguish a native rat from the pest species (*Rattus rattus*). In general, the latter has a tail that is much longer than its body, while the commonest local native rats: the bush rat (*Rattus fuscipes*) or the swamp rat (*Rattus lutreolus*) have tails about the same length as their bodies.

The marvellous, large water rat (*Hydromys chrysogaster*) has a long white tip on its tail.

Please report this unusual rat if you see it.

Please report any sightings of koalas on the UWS koala pager: 9962 9996.

Brad spots a water rat

30/3/11

By Robert Close

MAC KOALA

SINCE last week's request in this column for sightings of water rats, Brad Staggs from Wollondilly Council sent me a recent report of this unusual mammal from near The Oaks.

This report was included, coincidentally, in a record of a platypus sighting at the same time and place. It is reassuring to know that both these unique, aquatic mammals are surviving in the district.

The creek involved is part of the Wollondilly River catchment and sightings of both species were also made last week in the Wollondilly River at Canyonleigh during a field camp that I attended for masters students from the University of Sydney.

The camp was held at the university's vast and historic Arthursleigh property. Students spent a day in the nearby Tarlo River National Park radio-tracking Jemima.

Readers will remember Jemima was rescued from Appin Road last Christmas and translocated to Tarlo River. She has since moved several kilometres and is looking in excellent condition. There's no sign, however, of a bulge in the pouch.

Jemima is sporting a classy radio collar that not only lets us track her on foot as the students did last week, but also plots its own position with a built-in GPS, then sends the co-ordinates to a global receiver that notifies us of her position each week by email.

So theoretically we need not track her manually at all.

However, the Landcare group that has obtained the funding for these collars tracks her every two weeks because there is a degree of error depending on how many satellites are accessible and their position at the time that the collar transmits its position.

The old one-eyed battler Amica will join Jemima as soon as his broken leg heals.

He is moving quite well on it and will be X-rayed this week before we release him in a secluded valley far from dogs and cars.

The release site is 25 kilometres from Arthursleigh, where the manager told the students that he'd not seen a koala on the property in the 20 years that he'd been working there. To the great delight of the students, they discovered a koala observing them while they were setting traps during a survey of small mammals.

Sightings of koalas elsewhere in Canyonleigh suggest a resurgence in numbers similar to that seen at Campbelltown.

Please report any sightings of koalas on the UWS koala pager: 9962 9996.

A sad end for Charlotte

McA 6/4/11

By Robert Close

MAC KOALA

DURING a routine, fortnightly check on radio-collared Charlotte – who has been living for the past few months beside Georges River Road just north of Darling Avenue, Ruse – the radio signal led us to the front garden of one of the roadside properties and towards the familiar koala silhouette five metres high in a fork of a eucalypt.

However, something didn't look right. Her fur was bedraggled and she was uncomfortably still.

Closer examination with binoculars confirmed my fears that Charlotte had died in the tree and had become wedged in the fork with her foreclaws still hooked in the bark.

Examination of the body revealed a small joey in the pouch but no obvious cause of death which must have occurred several days before, judging from the advanced state of decomposition of mother and joey.

We had first captured Charlotte in October 2005 in Dandenong Crescent at Ruse.

She was carrying a furred joey at the time but weighed only 5.15 kilograms and had a head-length of 128 millimetres, compared to her later adult measurements of 7.3 kilograms and 133 millimetres.

At the time of capture we estimate she was a "teenager", only about 2½ years old.

She was eight when she died – a relatively short lifespan compared to most of our other radio-tracked females, several of whom died at age 14 years.

Her home range was interesting as it included Georges River Road, Acacia and Darling avenues, Dandenong Crescent, the western end of Old Kent Road, James Ruse Park and Cook Reserve but very little natural bushland.

She was the first of our truly urban koalas but her unusual life did not affect her reproductive output as she produced a joey each year of her adult life. Unfortunately we were able to ear-tag only two of her six joeys that survived to weaning.

The first was named Darling (captured in Darling Avenue) who was last seen at Brindabella Street at the age of 18 months. The second was Curls who wandered through Ruse, Airds and St Helens Park for 18 months. Like her mother, she avoided the natural bush.

However, Curls was eventually killed by a vehicle on Appin Road. Hopefully, the other four joeys have survived to establish their own territories and pass on Charlotte's genes.

Please report any koala sightings on the UWS koala pager, 9962 9996.

Better way to track them

13/4/11

By Robert Close

MAC KOALA

BY the time this column goes to press, Amica, our one-eyed koala battler from St Helens Park, will be released into the comparative safety of Tarlo River National Park, 100 kilometres south of Campbelltown.

His broken leg is healed, thanks to the care of WIREs koala expert Gaylene Parker.

He has been held longer than we had expected because

~~Gaylene noticed that Amica would climb rough-barked trees in his compound, but avoided smooth-barked trees.~~

~~Apparently the latter take more effort to climb than the former, and put too much pressure on the damaged leg bone.~~

Now, however, he is climbing both types of eucalypt with equal enthusiasm.

Amica will be tracked daily for the first week and on alternate days for the second.

The radio-tracking will be conducted by two masters

students from the University of Sydney using a standard radio transmitter attached to Amica's collar.

The signal will be detected by a hand-held receiver.

A second transmitter is also attached to the collar which sends a signal via satellite to a global receiver which then sends the koala's co-ordinates to our computers.

Theoretically, the students could complete their tracking from the comfort of their homes.

However, the more frequent the signal, the greater the demand on the battery.

So, instead of daily signals, we have opted for weekly signals.

The advantage of the satellite transmitter is that we can't lose it.

■ Further to the record of the deer at Long Point last week, my colleague, George Madani, who was conducting our platypus

study on the Nepean, reported seeing two fallow deer between the Cobbitty and Brownlow weirs.

He also sent his photograph of a death adder found near a home at Minto Heights.

George reports that there is a lot of suitable habitat for death adders in Campbelltown, particularly in, but not limited to, the dry sclerophyll woodland associated with sandstone rock outcropping such as that found along the Georges River.

"Although not uncommon, they are seldom seen due to their cryptic nature and superb camouflage skills," he said.

"A highly venomous snake, it poses no threat to people if left alone."

George released the snake near the river, far away from homes.

Please report any koala sightings on the UWS koala pager, 9962 9996.

Campbelltown Macarthur Advertiser, Wednesday, April 20, 2011

Note:

No column published on this date

Oh deer, it's a big problem

27/4/11

By Robert Close

MAC KOALA

FOLLOWING our discussion in this column on deer sightings in the Macarthur district, Wollondilly Council's environmental services manager Brad Staggs (appropriately named) writes that lots of deer have been sighted at Werombi and Orangeville, often as road kills, and "probably escapees from local deer farms".

He has "seen a trio in Thirlmere Lakes National Park and others on Cedar Creek Rd at Thirlmere".

They are commonly seen in the west of Bargo.

At Hilltop Brad has recently seen them run across Wilson Drive.

"The catchment is full of them, especially along Picton Road areas and in the Burragorang Valley.

"They are regular road kills along Picton Rd and residents in Nattai see them regularly."

At Mt Ousley he has seen a pair and a fawn grazing at noon where

Picton Rd comes off Mt Ousley Road, while at Wallacia he has seen them in a paddock along Mulgoa Road, near the tip.

Brad concludes "they are fairly common out here already".

"I assume that the fallow variety are escapees and that the rusa variety are migrants from the Royal National Park."

If Brad is correct and the rusa are spreading from the Royal, it is bad news for the district.

Deer affect native plant species and their sharp hooves damage the banks of water courses and cause sedimentation in the water.

They would therefore put added pressure on platypus in the Nepean and Georges Rivers.

Research indicates 2000-3000 rusa in Royal National Park where a control program costs more than \$200 a deer.

It will be important to monitor sightings in the Campbelltown area.

Rusa are grey/red with stags weighing up to 120kg, while fallow deer are smaller (up to 90kg) with distinctive white spots.

■ Our one-eyed koala, Amica, was returned to veterinary care, dehydrated and with blood in his urine and refusing to eat or drink.

It was clear that he was unlikely to ever be able to survive in the wild, so we reluctantly decided that he would have to be euthanised.

Previous spells in hospital had given him two extra years of life in the wild, but in the end he was carrying too many handicaps.

Please report any koala sightings on the UWS koala pager, 9962 9996.

Shooting sparks interest

By Robert Close

MAC KOALA

IN THE past two weeks there have been sightings of an untagged koala near Aberfoyle Road, Wedderburn, a report of a tagged animal at St Helens Park Public School and an untagged koala in Smiths Creek Reserve off Brisbane Road, Campbelltown.

The Wedderburn site was part of the home-range of our first radio-collared koala in 1992.

In contrast, sightings in the latter two sites have only been common in the past few years. This change is consistent with our claim koala numbers are increasing. Another hypothesis is that koalas have always been in the three sites but were not reported. So we're always interested in historical references.

My ears pricked up when I read an article on Archduke Franz Ferdinand in the weekend press. The archduke, of course, is famous because his assassination in Sarajevo in 1914 sparked

World War I. The article, however, mentioned that in 1893 the Archduke had visited Moss Vale where he had shot 300 animals including "platypus with greatest joy and koala — disappointingly slow targets" as well as "wallaby, kangaroo, pademelon, hares, ducks and magpie".

Franz was not, apparently, a pleasant person and was once described as "a man of uninspired energy, dark in appearance and emotion, who radiated an aura of strangeness and cast a shadow of violence and recklessness".

Further research unearthed an article in *The Argus*, May 23, that identified the location of the Moss Vale shooting party as the sheep station Arthursleigh. This station, established by Hannibal Macarthur (John Macarthur's nephew), was bequeathed to the University of Sydney and

continues to run as a sheep property but also caters for field trips for students.

I recently took part in one of the field trips for Masters students and found, with great joy, a koala and a platypus as well as all but one of the species shot by Franz. It was a joy because the manager of Arthursleigh had not seen a koala on the property in his 20 years' experience and the sighting may mark a koala resurgence.

The missing species is the pademelon, a small wallaby of 4 kilos to 5 kilos generally found in dense vegetation. This little species used to be found closer to Campbelltown and I've not given-up hope that a small colony of them may yet be found.

Please report any koala sightings on the UWS koala pager, 9962 9996.

Identification can be tricky

By Robert Close

LAST week's column ended with the hope small wallaby species still survived in Macarthur.

Since then a photograph arrived sent by an officer of the National Parks and Wildlife Service of a small adult wallaby killed by a car in the Gardens of Stone National Park, 100 kilometres north-west of Sydney.

Although it is always difficult to identify a species from a photographed road kill, this particular photograph was quite good. The animal was most likely to be either a parma wallaby, or a red-necked pademelon, neither of which have been reported from the park before.

There were features of the dead animal that didn't match either of the candidate species, so we are rather perplexed.

Moreover, a Google Earth search of the site showed vegetation that appeared too sparse for animals that are normally found in thick forest. We are hoping the

MAC KOALA

photographer will be able to find the body so that we can make a positive identification.

Whatever the outcome, it is good to know that there are still surprises to be revealed and that the small wallabies are surviving in unexpected places.

■ Campbelltown koalas are now in their quiet period, which usually lasts until August. The only pager call was about an injured animal that turned out to be a brush-tailed possum.

We've had many misidentifications, mostly road-killed grey cats but occasionally possums whose tails were obscured from the observer.

One such error was made by a trained biologist.

The frequency of errors makes us cautious about accepting unusual records and some, at least, of the sightings of big black cats will actually be dogs, deer,

wallaroos or swamp wallabies.

So we are not yet ready to accept a reported sighting of a koala in the Australian Botanic Garden at Mount Annan even though I once made a bet with Allan Powell, education officer at the Gardens, that koalas would arrive within 10 years.

Another potential arrival at the Gardens is the wombat.

I heard of a sighting last week near the Macarthur Bridge, Elderslie, the second from there.

■ Come and hear Dr Phil Borchard talk about his research on wombats at the next Macarthur Heritage Nature talk run by the Macarthur branch of the National Parks Association at the Campbelltown Arts Centre tonight, Wednesday, at 7.30 pm.

Please report any koala sightings on the UWS koala pager, 9962 9996.

Call for more volunteers

By Robert Close

COURTNEY, long-term koala resident of Spring Creek, St Helens Park, looked down on the Spring Creek Streamcare volunteer group as its members laboured away removing olive and privet trees last Sunday.

We work on an area between Ironside Avenue and the creek and already the positive effects of our labour can be seen.

We can imagine clearly now what a marvellous place it would be if we could complete the work for the entire 2km path of the creek down to the Georges River at the Wedderburn Gorge causeway.

Courtney and her offspring would appreciate the work too, because it would open up the under storey and increase the chances of native plants germinating and growing.

On this morning, Courtney was in the crown of a favourite 20 metre Angophora. These trees don't last forever and need

specific conditions to germinate.

Sadly, our group numbered just two: me and the council supervisor, Joel Daniels. Normally there are six of us who meet monthly on Sundays at 8am to do battle with the weeds, but holidays and sickness and other commitments often deplete our numbers.

I confess it was my first appearance for some time. We desperately need a few more members so that there is always a useful working group.

Volunteers will learn about native and introduced plants and how to control the latter. It would be particularly convenient for residents of Ironside Avenue and nearby streets who would then be able to appreciate daily the improvements they would make to their immediate environment.

If local people appreciate their bushland areas there is likely to be less dumping of rubbish and

garden wastes. Besides the ill effects that such dumping have on the native vegetation, there is also a magnifying effect — encouraging others to dump.

The success of community activities such as Streamcare requires more than the labour of a few dedicated souls on a Sunday morning. Every bit of rubbish, including cigarette butts, that falls on the roads or gutters of the catchment area of Spring Creek ultimately washes down to Courtney's home range. That catchment includes most of Rosemeadow and half of Ambarvale and Bradbury.

To find out more about the Streamcare program or join one of the four groups, call Campbelltown Council's Environment Unit on 4645 4601.

Please report any koala sightings on the UWS koala pager, 9962 9996.

MAC KOALA

Critters killed by cars

By Robert Close

MAC KOALA

AN article in last week's Advertiser carried our prediction that koalas would eventually travel from their current breeding areas near the Georges River via bushland corridors to the Nepean River. Since then I have visited one of these corridors, the 60-hectare Beulah Forest featuring the stunningly beautiful spotted gums.

People travelling along Appin Road will have seen this forest which forms a 500-metre avenue of dappled shade.

The forest is linked to the Georges River on the eastern side by 500 metres of woodland. On the western side the forest runs 750 metres to the Heritage-listed Beulah Cottage built in 1835/6 and meets Woodhouse Creek, which joins Nepean and Menangle Creeks before draining into the Nepean River a few metres upstream of the south-western freeway bridge.

The forest substrate consists of

two soil types, shale and sandstone, which support two threatened ecological communities, Shale Sandstone Transition Forest and Cumberland Plain Woodland.

This combination means that there is a smorgasbord of leaves awaiting the plucky koala that successfully crosses Appin Road and heads to the Nepean River. Koalas eat spotted gum leaves but would probably prefer the occasional grey gum while in the Transition Forest and the river red gum while in the Cumberland Plain Woodland.

So far, unfortunately, the only koalas we have found in the vicinity have been killed by cars on Appin Road. In my brief walk through the forest I scanned the upper foliage of the 30-metre trees for koalas and searched for tell-tale scratch marks and faecal pellets, but in vain.

However, it will only be a matter

of time before koalas settle in the forest or use it as a path to the Nepean. We are fortunate that the forest is now protected by caveats negotiated with the Department of Environment and Heritage, and that Beulah Cottage is to be restored by the Historic Houses Trust.

■ Meanwhile, we received a call from Bronwyn and Daryl Hadkins, from Brisbane Road near Smiths Creek Reserve, to report the first joey for the season to appear out of the pouch.

Bronwyn's photographs of the pair showed no sign of ear-tags in the mother. If there are no tags (they are often obscured by the hairy ears) then we have at least two breeding females in the reserve. With luck koalas will become a regular feature of the reserve.

Report koala sightings on the UWS koala pager, 9962 9996.

Mysterious tree gouging

By Robert Close

MAC KOALA

NATIONAL Parks and Wildlife Service officers in southern NSW have long been intrigued by strange marks in smooth-barked eucalypts that look as though someone has gouged the bark for 4-6 centimetres with a small, curved chisel. Often the marks form a series of parallel lines.

We were asked for our opinions but our group has only seen stringy-bark eucalypts at Wedderburn from which the grey outer fibres have been ripped away leaving the orange-red inner fibres.

Now the NPWS officers, have caught the culprit in the act, a koala with a cub on its back.

(See canberratimes.com.au/news/local/news/general/the-koala-coup-that-changes-the-menu/2121980.aspx).

Bark contains a variety of minerals and biologically important compounds such as cinnamon and the anti-malarial drug, quinine. So the bark-eating mother may be supplementing

her leaf diet. Considerable amounts of bark were removed.

Toxic materials are also sometimes stored in the bark, but fortunately the koala's digestive system is capable of detoxifying many poisons.

It is fascinating that the koala's teeth are able to gouge the bark. Like all plant-eating marsupials (wallabies, kangaroos, possums, gliders, wombats), the lower jaw consists of two large, forward-pointing incisors behind which is a gap followed by a premolar, then a row of molars for cutting and crushing the food.

In kangaroos, the connection between the two sides of the lower jaw is reduced to an elastic link that allows the incisors to act together like a pair of scissors, cutting the grass stems at ground level.

In sheep, goats and cattle, by contrast, the lower incisors meet a toothless pad on the upper jaw.

Consequently, the animals grip the grass between incisors and pad and often pull the entire plant from the ground.

This is very destructive in fragile Australian ecosystems.

In koalas and wombats the two halves of the lower jaw have fused together to make a very sturdy connection that could cope with the pressure of chiselling bark off a tree.

I am not aware of wombats chiselling bark but it would seem likely provided their digestive systems could cope.

■ Meanwhile, Price has been visiting Ruse homes in Oberon Street and the western end of Old Kent Road, while at the eastern end a young koala spent a night in an autumnal plane tree. We don't know whether it fed on the yellowing leaves but its gut could probably cope!

Report koala sightings on the UWS koala pager, 9962 9996.

Vaccine offers ray of light

By Robert Close

MAC KOALA

ONE of the signs that Campbelltown koalas are doing well is that we have never seen one with the clinical symptoms of chlamydia, a disease caused by a bacterium that invades any moist exposed tissue with which it comes into contact.

Consequently, the disease can affect the eyes and the genital, respiratory and urinary tracts.

Obvious clinical signs are weeping eyes, and "wet bottom" where leakage of urine from the bladder dampens fur and produces a strong smell.

Fertility is affected and some infections cause great pain and eventual death. An estimated 73 per cent of koala populations now carry a low-grade infection of chlamydia, while another 10 per cent suffer a more severe life-threatening form of the disease.

Animals showing signs of the disease have been found at Mittagong in the south and in the Kurrajong area to the north.

Consequently, it is probably

just a matter of time before a migrant from one of these populations contacts our Campbelltown animals.

Previous studies have shown that when "clean" populations are exposed to diseased animals, the results can be catastrophic.

However, it may be that our Campbelltown koalas have already been exposed to the disease and the lack of clinical symptoms may reflect their general good health and absence of overcrowding.

Chlamydia occurs as nine species, two of which affect koalas. Within these species there are many strains.

An expert in this complex area is Professor Peter Timms from Queensland University of Technology who has produced a vaccine, delivered by capsule in two to three doses, that produces a strong immune response to chlamydial exposure, even in badly-infected animals.

Moreover, he has developed different vaccines to suit koalas in various geographic regions.

The disease has been difficult to cure with long-term injected antibiotics and the new vaccine appears more effective and less stressful.

Dr Timms is also developing an intranasal vaccine which he believes will further reduce the stress and length of time in care.

Unfortunately, if we wanted to vaccinate our Campbelltown koalas we would have to locate and capture each of the 300 koalas in the population.

This would be a huge task given that it has taken us 20 years to catch and tag 150 local koalas.

Nevertheless, Dr Timms' work will be hailed by all of the wildlife rescue groups that may now be able to cure and release affected koalas.

Report koala sightings on the UWS koala pager, 9962 9996.

8/6/11

MANAGER

More dog attacks likely

By Robert Close

15/6/11

MAC KOALA

A CALLER who reported a koala in her large Leumeah Heights garden said that she'd never seen a koala before, despite the many food trees available and the fact that her fence marked the edge of Amanda's home range.

We had radio-tracked Amanda for many years before her death last year from old age and found that she and her various suitors spent a lot of time in another garden within her home range, to the delight of the garden's owners.

The difference between the two gardens is that the former was home to three large dogs while the latter had none.

Sadly, the caller's first encounter with a koala was to find it dead in her garden with a ripped groin area and heavy bruising to its shoulders and neck. It was likely that one of the dogs had grabbed the seven-

kilogram, three-year-old male from the rear while another attacked its head.

It could have been a slow and terrifying death.

This death is the fourth dog-related incident this year and we have mentioned them in previous columns.

The first involved the death of a mother and subsequently her joey, Marlee, in a garden patrolled by two large dogs.

The second involved the same dogs. They had somehow grabbed a koala by the hand through a fence and were engaged in a tug-of-war until separated by the dogs' owners. The koala escaped but is likely to be severely damaged.

The third encounter was between a young koala and a young German shepherd. When the pair was seen by the dog's

owners, the koala was on its back displaying its formidable array of claws and teeth. The dog was poking the koala with its paw.

Such a dog may tire and retreat allowing the koala time to climb a tree to safety. However, the koala is most vulnerable when it turns and runs because the dog can grab it from behind before it can climb to safety.

As the Campbelltown koala population increases we will see more koalas in backyards and therefore more dog attacks.

Most homes in Ruse, Airds, Leumeah and St Helens Park are accessible to koalas. So we ask people who feel that they must purchase a dog to consider the suffering it can cause and buy only one small one.

Report koala sightings on the UWS koala pager, 9962 9996.

Girl breaks the mould

22/6/11

By Robert Close

SINCE the study of Campbelltown's koala colony began we have received almost 3000 reports of koalas from the community.

Clearly some koalas have been sighted many times and some observers have recorded multiple sightings. Last weekend we received calls from two of our regular callers.

The first was from Catherine and Stephen Grenfell who had originally reported Amica in 2008 outside their Bradbury home. This time they had discovered a young koala (pictured) near the soccer complex at Lynwood Park.

We are keen to fit eartags to animals in this area as it seems to be part of the dispersal route of young koalas travelling south beside the Georges River. Unfortunately the koala was in a tall stringybark and would have been very difficult to catch.

The second caller, Lou Melham, has recorded many sightings, chiefly from Wedderburn Gorge.

His family originally found and

MAC KOALA



named Nathan who lived for several years in Spring Creek. He also regularly spotted Hugh, an old male that lived near his home on Aberfoyle Road.

This road is interesting because we have captured several koalas nearby and all have been old males. We suspect that these old boys have been ousted by younger males from the more fertile gullies that run from Aberfoyle Road to the Georges River and O'Hares Creek.

This time the koala was near Lou's home in an accessible tree within reach of our longest pole.

So Lou, his son Ryan and I devised a plan. Lou would wield

the long pole and would flag the koala down to where I could reach it with a shorter, more manoeuvrable pole. Lou would then take the shorter pole while Ryan would bring me a smaller, looped pole with which I would bring the koala to a point where I could secure it. Ryan would then bring in the catching bag and he and Lou would help with the bagging.

The plan worked perfectly and an adult, female koala was soon in the bag. We named her Melham, weighed, measured and examined her, then fitted her with distinctive eartags and released her at her former tree.

Hopefully she's adopted the Melhams' property as part of her home range and the family will see her regularly. If she breeds, she will scrap our idea that the Aberfoyle area is only fertile enough to support an old boys' home.

Report koala sightings on the UWS koala pager, 9962 9996.

Brace yourself for bellows

29/6/11

By Robert Close

MAC KOALA

USUALLY, koalas go into a quiet phase in May and June before the start of bellowing in July and the mating season proper in August.

There has been some activity this week, though, which may herald an early start to the season.

First there was Price, a mature male, who was reported at 5am walking along Angle and O'Sullivan roads at Leumeah.

At one stage a dog was seen harassing him and a driver stopped, warning lights flashing, to let Price escape. Hopefully, Price is back in Smiths Creek Reserve, where he has spent the past three years roaming from Darling Avenue, Kentlyn, to the Georges River Road, Airs, to Pembroke Road, Leumeah, a distance of 5km, and encompassing an area of 500ha.

About a kilometre upstream, in Brisbane Road, a young female

was seen with a young cub that was making its first moves from its mother's back. The same pair had been reported in Brisbane Road on May 15, so it appears they are permanent residents of the adjacent part of Smiths Creek Reserve.

Over the next few months the joey will be vulnerable to cars and predators. Even cats and small dogs could grab the joey from its mother's back when she moves from tree to tree.

Even in the relative safety of the tree, the dangers are goannas by day and powerful owls by night.

We ask local residents to keep an eye out for the mother or joey. Neither is yet tagged.

■ Further north in Leumeah Heights, where we reported a dead koala two weeks ago, the householders awoke at 1am to the barking of their dogs and

found another koala, which was fortunately outside the fence. They immediately called the koala-pager number.

The pager company then texted three volunteer members of the Koala Research Unit.

Usually, one of us would then reply to the original caller to find out the details but on this occasion we all slept through the alarm. So we sincerely apologise to the householders who spent a sleepless morning waiting for us to reply.

■ The Lynwood Park koala that was pictured in last week's column was still in the same clump of trees that she'd been in for the previous two weeks. This is unusual, because Campbelltown koalas usually move each night.

Report koala sightings on the UWS koala pager: 9962 9996.

Eye defect causes unease

By Robert Close

STEPHEN Grenfell sent us this marvellous photograph, taken three months ago, clearly showing the eartags of another Lynwood Park koala (besides the one that was mentioned in the past two Mac Koala columns).

In fact, the photograph even showed the number stamped on one tag. The koala is Helen, whom we originally tagged in January 2002.

At the time, Helen was carrying a joey, Rhowan, so she must have been at least three years old then and therefore would be 12 now.

Her original capture site was close to where Stephen photographed her behind the soccer fields at Lynwood Park. This area is criss-crossed with fire trails that are well-used by walkers, but despite this she has not been reported to us previously.

It may be, however, that the eartags (light blue and purple) are too hard to see without the aid of a camera. Stephen's photograph also shows that

MAC KOALA



Helen's eye is damaged.

Readers of this column will remember another case of koala eye problems in the story of Johnny, the young koala from Ruse, who was taken down to Symbio Wildlife Park at Waterfall. He has microphthalmia, a condition that restricts vision severely.

His mother, Liz, was spotted recently in her favourite tree in Endeavour Street, Ruse. No new joey was visible, but it may still be in the pouch. We await the appearance of the new offspring with some trepidation to see whether it also has microphthalmia. The defect is

probably genetically based and would appear when the joey inherits one copy of the defective gene from Liz and another from the father. Because two copies are required to produce the effect, each parent with only one defective form would have normal eyes.

The chances of a second joey from the same parents having the defect would be one in four.

However, we know that there is at least one other male (untagged) besides Price that roams through suburban Ruse. Both potential fathers may not be carrying the defective gene.

Unfortunately, the Campbelltown koala population is more inbred than most other koala populations so far studied in NSW. That means that the defective gene for microphthalmia may well be more common in Campbelltown than elsewhere and both potential fathers may be carriers.

Report koala sightings on the UWS koala pager: 9962 9996.

CLASSIFIEDS PH: 13 24 25

Helen the koala spotted again after nine years

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Watch out for males on the move

By Robert Close 13/7/11

FROM June to December young male koalas leave the safety and familiarity of their mother's territory and head off into the unknown.

We still don't know what drives them. Perhaps their mothers are nudging them away so that they don't use up the food supply or perhaps they react to the smells left by the adult males as they rub their chest scent glands on tree trunks.

Or it might be the bellowing of the males or their physical presence. Or it may be some sort of inner drive that leads them into the unknown.

Two young koala males set off on their travels last Saturday and both came to grief. The first fell into a swimming pool in Greenway Street, Ruse, and drowned despite ledges in the

MAC KOALA

pool that should have allowed him to escape.

The other was hit by a car on Ben Lomond Road, Minto Heights, at a place known locally as "The Dipper" because of the dip in the road and the speed at which some motorists drive.

The young koala was still alive after the collision and several motorists stopped to assist, creating a traffic hazard on the dark road.

We recorded another kill within the same area last October, so we ask that drivers take care.

Both of these koalas, and the one killed by dogs that we reported last month, weighed about 6.5 kilograms. This means that they have been out of the pouch for about two years and so have had the benefit of extra time

with their mothers. Other young koalas will leave their mothers at the end of their first year when they weigh only four kilograms.

In a huge study near Brisbane, researchers followed the lives of 35 young male koalas.

Of the 23 that dispersed, 11 left at the end of the first year and 12 a year later. The late leavers had a better survival rate than early leavers.

A further five stayed with their mothers, three died and one left then returned.

Forty females were followed and 10 left early, four moved at the end of their second year, four at the end of the third and three at the end of the fourth. Nine died and two left then returned. Results for Campbelltown koalas have a similar pattern.

Please report all sightings on the UWS koala pager, 9962 9996.

Bellows interest the girls

By Robert Close

20/7/11

MAC KOALA

THREE weeks ago, Smiths Creek's resident male koala, Price, was being harassed by a dog and alarming motorists in Angle Road, Leumeah.

This week he was in nearby Abercrombie Street, from where residents reported his bellowing in the past two weeks. This photo was submitted to the *Advertiser* by Bernadette Cunneen.

A recent report has appeared in an online scientific journal that has shed some light on why koalas bellow.

When female koalas in a wildlife park were played tapes of the bellowing of familiar males from the same park, the females paid little attention. However, when the females were played the tapes of the bellowing unfamiliar males, they reacted immediately and with great apparent interest.

So it appears that the females are identifying some aspect of the bellowing that is unique to the bellower. The researchers



then analysed the various components of the bellow, which sounds a bit like a pig grunting and a trail bike revving, all rolled into one.

The amplitude and frequency of different parts of the call of several male koalas could be distinguished by the researchers.

Clearly then, individual koalas could be identified by other koalas from their calls. We have seen, and it has also been observed by others, that female koalas will move a kilometre or so out of their normal home-ranges to meet up with a male.

We now want to know what it is about a particular bellow that

attracts a female. Is it just novelty? Are the ladies interested to check out the new kid in the block or is there something in the bellow that allows the females to judge qualities in the male such as age, strength, stamina, size and energy?

These qualities if transferred to the female's young would help them survive and so would be sought after by the females.

If anyone wishes to read the article on bellowing, google "Charlton koala bellow open access".

Meanwhile, Price is likely to be heard up to 500 metres from where he is calling on the edge of Smiths Creek Reserve.

Koalas prefer calm evenings with a temperature inversion which apparently allows the sound to travel further.

Please report all koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996. We've been able to plot Price's movements around the suburbs because of residents calling in.

Watch out, males about

By Robert Close

27/7/11

MAC KOALA

AS THE dispersal period for male koalas continues, so does the toll of injured animals.

One was hit by a four-wheel drive on Junction Road, opposite Leumeah High School, at 8.30pm last Friday.

Fortunately, the koala was not hit by a tyre and the high clearance of the car may have saved it. It continued across Junction Road from the school and climbed a tree near the kerb.

I checked it and found it too high to attempt a catch and too obscured to see if it was tagged.

It is unlikely to have escaped injury completely, and will probably not move far while it's sore.

So we ask people living beside the northern end of Junction Road to keep an eye out for it.

Earlier in the day, students had noticed the koala high in a red-gum outside the school fence over-hanging Junction Road.

Judging from the size and number of faecal pellets underneath the tree, the animal was a male and had been in the tree for a day or so.

Several koalas have been seen at the school over the past few years and the school appears to be part of a corridor linking Smiths Creek and Cook Reserves and Peter Meadows Creek.

The animal could, in fact, be Price, the "Prince of Smiths Creek". His photograph was published in last week's column when he was in Abercrombie Reserve beside Smiths Creek only one kilometre from the school.

A koala could easily cover that distance and we know that Price has crossed Junction Road near the school before. However, we'd always suspected that he'd avoided cars before by only

crossing busy roads late at night.

Consequently, we would like to verify the identity of Friday's victim.

Also sighted recently was Tyjo, a male koala first captured near the corner of Darling Avenue and Georges River Road in November 2008, then seen one kilometre north in 2009.

Last week he was near the latter sighting but only 50 metres from a female.

So life goes on in Campbelltown's koala world where we hope that the equation of joeys born and weaned at least matches the deaths from cars, dogs and disease.

Felling of koala habitat, as occurred recently at a property on Georges River Road and at a new development at Wilton, should not be part of the equation.

Please report all koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Columns

Advertiser

Check for proof of attack

By Robert Close

MAC KOALA

WE ASKED people living near Junction Road to keep an eye out for a bruised koala that had passed under a four-wheel-drive vehicle while crossing from Leumeah High School recently.

We were worried that it might have been Price, a koala that many people have reported as he has travelled across Ruse, Airds, and Leumeah. Unfortunately, until Monday night (see page 7) nobody reported seeing a koala near Junction Road.

However, a resident near Abercrombie Reserve, Leumeah, reported that Price was still in the reserve on the Friday.

So I was pleased that Price was not injured because he has survived three years facing all the dangers of urban life. I suspect that more than luck alone has been on Price's side.

Price has probably developed a lot of survival knowledge. He

must have learned to handle dogs and he must have some sort of mental map that allows him to move around the suburbs.

Moreover, he may have learned to cross roads during only the early hours of the morning when car traffic is minimal.

Another koala was not so lucky in Hamilton Road, Kentlyn.

We were called to a house where a mature male was sprawled dead on a driveway; its neck and shoulders bruised and both ears entirely tipped off.

This animal weighed 10 kilograms and its worn teeth indicated a good age.

The residents do not keep dogs but their neighbours do. In fact, it was in the neighbour's garden that the small joey, Marlee, was recovered from its dead mother and also where their dogs had grabbed the arm of another koala

through the fence. The latter animal escaped and when the call came through we suspected that it and the recent casualty were the same.

However, there were no old injuries. So there have been three deaths (including Marlee) and one injury associated with one property in six months.

While it is possible that the koalas may have been killed on the road or by dogs roaming from elsewhere, the circumstantial evidence against the neighbour's dogs is significant.

Killing an old, experienced koala would have been hazardous for dogs and it's likely that one of them at least would have been scratched or bitten.

If any readers live near Hamilton Road and own untethered dogs they should check them for injuries.

Please report all koala sightings on the LMS page, 9962 9996.

Deaths match hypothesis

10/15/11

By Robert Close

ROATA

ANOTHER two koala fatalities were recently added to our rapidly growing list

both were young males and both were killed by motor vehicles.

Neither, however, were locals: one was killed on Heathcote Road and the other at Leppington in the lower Blue Mountains.

These deaths, and the several others reported earlier in this column, were not unexpected in a general sense: for some years now we have suspected that the numbers of koalas are increasing in several places across the Sydney basin.

An alternative proposal to this idea (our hypothesis) is that numbers have remained the same but are merely being seen or reported more often. The formulation of alternative ideas, or hypotheses, after making observations (in the case that koalas have been observed regularly) is a major component of the scientific

method, a method of seeking the truth which underlies the way most scientists work.

The next step is to make predictions from the hypothesis and conduct experiments to test the predictions. The hypothesis stands as long as the results of the experiments are consistent with it.

From the hypothesis "that koalas are increasing in number in the Sydney basin", we can make several predictions such as that the number of koala sightings will increase from year to year, that breeding females will be recorded from places where they have not been seen before, that sightings will be recorded from different sites across the basin, and that increasing numbers will be killed by cars, dogs and disease. All of the predictions, we believe, have been realised by our studies, including the recent deaths on

Heathcote Road and at Leppington and so our hypothesis stands. Unfortunately, the alternative hypothesis still stands as well because we don't know how many koalas there were at the start of our studies, nor how many people have sighted koalas and not reported them.

A complete census of koalas is required and that is an impossible task.

We did, however, once asked the Department of Defence if they wanted to test their helicopter-borne infrared camera on our radio-collared koalas to see if it could distinguish the lower body temperatures of koalas from those of other bushland animals.

If successful, we could have flown over the Campbelltown Bushland and Redworth Long range and counted all the koalas. Unfortunately, the department was not interested.

Please report all koala sightings on the URS page, 5262 9996

New direction on the road

By Robert Chase

DISPERSAL time continues for young koalas in Campbelltown with sightings from Kentlyn, Lynwood Park and Appin Road.

The Appin Road sighting was probably the most interesting because it involved a koala crossing the road from west to east just south of Beulah Forest.

This forest has beautiful spotted gums and we've predicted koalas and other animals will use the forest to travel from the Georges River to the Murrumbidgee River system.

Why is this koala going the other way? It may have already crossed Appin Road from west to east before retracing its steps. Roads have an attraction for koalas as shown recently by a young koala persisting on standing in the middle of the road at Wedderburn Gorge.

■ We frequently stress that Campbelltown koalas are doing

MAC KOALA

well despite media pronouncements of doom and gloom about the future of koalas elsewhere in Australia. There are several serious threats to the survival of koalas, however, and we need many populations such as ours to withstand them.

One such threat is the discovery of Myrtle Rust. This bright yellow fungus, that looks like powder on the leaves, affects members of the Myrtle family, Myrtaceae.

This is a huge family of plants that includes the eucalypts, bottle-brushes, paper-barks and many other well-known Australian plants. It causes stunting and death of young plants and is spreading rapidly along the east coast. It was discovered in the Gosford region in April 2010 and has now been found in coastal areas from the Shoalhaven to south-east Queensland.

Authorities have decided that it has spread so far that it can no longer be eradicated and efforts will now go into preventing its spread.

The list of species that the fungus is known to attack continues to grow as more research is undertaken.

One of the major hosts (and species) for Campbelltown koalas, the blue-headed stringybark, unfortunately is on the list, so the effects of the fungus here could be serious.

The rust, which is believed to have originated in South America, can be spread by tiny spores in the wind, on clothing and equipment and can even be carried by bees. It's very difficult, therefore, to control.

Anyone seeing this yellow fungus on native plants should report the sighting immediately on 1800 084 881.

Report all koala sightings: QNSW koala page, 5962 3336

Sound way to find a mate

By Robert Close

24/8/11
OUR two senior, tagged koalas, Price from Smiths Creek and Tyjo from Georges River Road, Kentyn, continue to be seen and reported.

We think the old males are setting themselves up in places where their bellowing will travel to cover the greatest distance and so advertise themselves to the greatest number of females.

The females, if they like the strength and timbre of the bellowing, will then follow the sound until they reach the male.

Mating should then occur and the female will return to her normal territory.

Such a pattern was displayed recently by Jemima, the female koala that we picked up from Campbelltown Police Station last Christmas after she had been rescued from Appin Road.

We then relocated her to Tarlo

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River National Park near Marulan.

Local Landcare members have been radio-tracking her every two weeks since her release and have found that she moved west, covering about a kilometre a month until appearing to settle down in early April.

However, she reached her furthest point north and west, about six kilometres west of her release point on July 24.

Then, suddenly, she turned around and moved back two kilometres south-east by August 7. By two weeks later she had moved 1.5 kilometres back towards what we thought was her established home range.

Our hypothesis is that her rapid move eastward was to find a mate.

Our prediction from that hypothesis is that she mated on or

about August 15 and after a pregnancy of about 35 days will have a joey in the pouch by mid September.

By the time we catch her in January 2012 to change her collar, the joey should be 3.5 months old.

It will lack fur and will have a head length of about 45 millimetres and will have another 2.5 months in the pouch.

It's possible that Jemima was pregnant at the time of translocation or mated shortly after her arrival at Tarlo.

If so, the ensuing young would be leaving the pouch before the expected birth of its sibling in September.

However, it's unlikely the radio-trackers would have missed seeing the bulge in the pouch no matter how hard Jemima tried to hide it.

Report all koala sightings: UWS koala pager, 9962 9996.

Limit access to yards

31/8/11

By Robert Close

MAC KOALA

IF ASKED to sketch a koala's face from memory, I expect most people would draw a flat mouth with a round set of teeth, rather like a human's, to match the large, black nose pad.

In fact, both the koala's upper and lower jaws come to a point where pairs of large incisors meet.

The large pair of sharp incisors on the upper jaw is flanked by two tiny pairs of possibly useless incisors.

There is then a gap in both jaws broken only by a small pair of canine teeth in the upper jaw before a row of five pairs comprising a blade pair for cutting leaf stalks and four pairs of molars for crushing leaves.

This teeth pattern is basically similar in all the Australian plant-eating marsupials.

Having the large pairs of incisors at the front means when koalas bite in anger they can concentrate tremendous pressure on a very small area.

Males, in particular, have large facial muscles that attach to a crest of bone that develops on top of the skull as they mature.

Consequently, a bite from an old koala can cause a deep and painful wound.

I was reminded this week just how hard koalas can bite when a 9.7 kilogram male, Reid, which we were catching, latched onto my finger and then onto the webbing of my hand.

Fortunately, I was wearing heavy leather welding gloves but the bites still drew blood and left a permanent impression in the glove.

Reid had been bailed up by dogs in a backyard in Dennison Avenue, Ruse, that backs onto bushland beside Peter Meadows Creek. It was the same house, in fact, where we last saw Susan after she'd been attacked last year by the same dogs.

To get access to the backyard both koalas must have climbed a tree growing beside Darling Avenue that barely made contact with a cocos palm in the garden. Then they climbed down the palm into the garden. Hopefully, by removing the palm further dog attacks will be prevented.

Dog-owners should check their gardens and remove all access to branches hanging over fences. They should also check neighbour's gardens as koalas can walk along fences.

Report all koala sightings: UWS koala pager, 9962 9996.

Trek ends up 700m away

By Robert Close

TWO weeks ago I reported Jennima, the young female we moved to Tario River National Park was moving back and forth across the park.

Her last radio-tracked location on September 2 was 2.6km south west of her previous fix on August 24. This means she has now zig-zagged eight kilometres between tracking points since July 24. Now she has returned to a point only 700m from where she was on February 8. We would love to know why she is moving about so much. Such activity would be using a lot of energy and koalas don't have much to spare because eucalypt leaves are not an easy food from which to extract nutrients. Our guess is she's seeking a suitable mate. These may not be plentiful as in the five years the park project has run our radio trackers have only spotted two local koalas

MAC KOALA

Meanwhile back in Campbelltown, Price has been challenged by an untagged male that turned up in a backyard in Carrington Circuit only 200m from Abercrombie Reserve where Price has been bawling for the past month.

Darling Avenue at Rusé has also been busy with a large mate, probably Reid, looking over the back fences of houses in Dandering Crescent.

Further down Darling Avenue at the junction with Georges River Road, an untagged juvenile had confused itself by climbing a phone pole.

Motorsists should be on the lookout for this youngster – and it won't be street-wise.

A kilometre down the road at Kerilyn Primary School, Vicki turned up after a long absence. She is the daughter of June and

the grand-daughter of Shirley and is now eight years old. Vicki is the older sister of Alice who also reappeared this week just around the corner in Old Kent Road.

A more unusual report was from near the boom gate at the Heathcote Road end of the Hols-worthy Army facility where a large male was being attacked by a crow.

The koala was ignoring the crow and it also ignored our flag, despite the assistance of the Regional Environmental Officer for the Department of Defence, Robbie Koland, and some visiting environmental enthusiasts.

Old male koalas are not easily disturbed and we were forced to leave him high in his tree.

Hopefully, he'll stay on the base and not try to cross Heathcote Road.

Report all koala sightings: UWS koala pager, 9962 9996.

Invasion of the reserve

By Robert Close

14/9/11

MAC KOALA

IT'S years now since I asked friends who lived in Nymboida Crescent (which adjoins Smiths Creek Reserve) at Ruse whether they had ever seen or heard koalas in the reserve.

They said they hadn't.

I then predicted that koalas would eventually become relatively common and that the loud grunting of the male koalas would be heard the length of the reserve.

That prediction is now reality.

A regular caller who has taken a special interest reported that Price was still calling from Abercrombie Reserve (an offshoot of Smiths Creek Reserve) and that she could hear a second male calling from a distance of about 200 metres.

This second animal was the one mentioned in last week's column, from near the shops on Carrington Circuit.

This untagged male was later recorded in adjacent Bailey Street and, finally, back in Carrington Circuit.

People who live in that area might like to listen for the amazing calls on still evenings about 10pm.

Another caller reported a large koala in Wyangala Crescent about 500 metres across the reserve. This animal had a scratch on its right rump that matched the mark we noticed the previous week on Reid after his fight with three dogs in Denison Street. If so, Reid has moved more than a kilometre since the fight.

About 2km further south along the creek at Canberra Crescent, a call that sounded like a scream rather than a grunt was reported.

Two koalas were observed, first on the ground then later in a tree,

where they were sitting two metres apart. We had previously seen a female with a large cub near Canberra Crescent, so one explanation for the scream is that the mother was trying to send the cub off on its own.

Another possibility is the cub had already departed and the mother was interacting with a male as part of the vigorous mating process.

At Wedderburn Gorge, a motorist reported she had struck a koala. Fortunately, she had slowed almost to a standstill.

This area is the home of Martine whom we last saw 12 months ago. She would now be 14 and the oldest of our tagged, living animals.

We would like to know if she is still alive so we ask motorists to watch out for her and to look for eartags.

Report all koala sightings: UWS koala pager, 9962 9996.

Wanderer lifted to safety

By Robert Close

21/9/11

MAC KOALA

SUNDAY morning at the Appin greyhound track, and the sleek dogs were training to the mechanical lure.

Not a good place for a koala, you'd think, but there it was, wandering through the gateway from Appin Road and down the fenced drive towards the track where the lure was speeding along its path.

The dog trainers were fearful for the koala's safety and rang me; but clearly immediate action was required so they wrapped the koala in a blanket and released it in a tree from which the koala could cross the fence to safety.

By the time I arrived, the koala had vanished into wattle thicket of the neighbouring development property.

The koala's presence raises some interesting questions. Firstly, why was the koala wandering about on the ground

on a sunny morning when it should have been sheltering?

Possibly it had been in a tree beside Appin Road but was disturbed by the increasing traffic noise.

However, as I searched for the koala, I could hear the growling sound of the trail bikes coming from the circuit just west of the greyhound track.

The distant sound of the bikes was rather like that of a bellowing male koala, and male koalas have been known to respond to a variety of sounds such as trail bikes, chainsaws and even aeroplanes, so perhaps the koala was investigating the source of the sound.

The greyhound owners said that the koala was not large, so it was probably a female and this is the month when female koalas may move a kilometre or so out of

their usual territory to mate with a male whose bellow takes their fancy. Appin trail bikers beware!

The second question is: Where did it come from? We have had several sightings of koalas in Appin, including a roadkill from just across Appin Road last year, but we don't have evidence of defined breeding areas such as those at Campbelltown.

However, we have not conducted systematic searches in the Appin area and this is a definite gap in our research.

My bet is that koalas are living all along the Georges River from St Helens Park to Appin, albeit at low densities, and sedentary, breeding females will be reported as numbers increase.

Other interesting sightings this week have been reported from Kirrawee, Macarthur Park and Wattle Grove.

Report all koala sightings: UWS koala pager, 9962 9996.

Head count proves tricky

28/9/11

By **Robert Close**

THIS week the Senate published the findings of its inquiry by the Environment and Communications Committee into "The koala – saving our national icon".

The 180 pages are a mere summary of the conclusions of dozens of submissions and results of public meetings.

The committee noted that the topic raised a passionate response from the public and that the public gallery was always full during committee meetings.

Apparently this is unusual.

People interested in the current status of the koala should read the Senate's document (Google Senate inquiry and koala) because it provides a detailed examination of the opinions of koala researchers about what needs to be done.

In fact, 19 recommendations were made.

One of the biggest concerns of the committee was that there was no agreement on actual

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numbers of koalas across the country.

Estimates ranged from the Australian Koala Foundation's conclusion of a minimum of 43,000 koalas and a maximum of 84,000.

This compared with the Threatened Species Scientific Committee's alternative estimate in 2010 of "about 300,000", with a "plausible lower bound" of about 200,000 individuals.

These recent figures compare with the same committee's 1990 estimate of 430,000 individuals.

The Senate committee noted, however, that there were some concerns about the methods used to obtain the Australian Koala Foundation's estimate and that no methods at all were provided by the Threatened Species Scientific Committee.

The Senate Committee concluded that "the exact koala population is unknown and that

there has been no comprehensive counting of koala numbers across the country".

The Threatened Species Scientific Committee then told the Senate inquiry that its estimate for the NSW koala population was at least 30,000 on public land.

My own speculation, based on the known distribution of koalas in NSW and assigning a low average density, would be considerably higher than 30,000.

Given that koalas are found across almost half the state, then a conservative area of koala habitat 500 kilometres square would be 25 million hectares.

Even at an extremely low density of one koala per 500 hectares, the total estimate would be 50,000 koalas.

In contrast we estimate Campbelltown's koala density to be a relatively low one koala per 10 hectares of suitable habitat.

**Report all koala sightings:
UWS koala pager, 9962 9996.**

Victim was vulnerable

By Robert Close

THERE have been a dozen little stories of koalas going about their business recently around Campbelltown. Each warrants its own column, but we have space only for two.

The first begins at Minto Heights, where residents Pat and Bob have lived for 37 years without ever seeing a koala in their bush-frontage garden.

So they were surprised to find a dead, young koala lying on the grass. Had it still been with its mother, it would have been carried on her back. They found that the entire skull was missing with the skin neatly peeled back and the fore-limbs completely stripped of meat. It looked like a surgical operation.

Possible perpetrators are dogs, foxes or owls.

Neither Pat and Bob nor their neighbours keep dogs, and there were no signs of teeth marks or

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saliva on the koala's fur. So we suspect that a Powerful Owl killed the joey and for some reason dropped the decapitated body in the garden. This is a case of one vulnerable species eating another.

The owl weighs up to 1.5kg (the same as the young koala) and has a wing span of 140cm. The koala is an obvious target sitting on its mother's back.

Consequently the mother will seek shelter during the day in dense foliage of tree species not necessarily used for food. As the koala population increases, the Powerful Owl will benefit.

Vehicle impacts will also increase as the population increases.

Cramar, a male koala we tagged in January 2007 as a three-year-old in Woodland Road, St Helens Park, was hit recently in

5140 11
nearby Fullarton Crescent. Since he was captured he has lived beside Spring Creek and is seen regularly in trees beside Ironside Avenue.

One resident, Robert Zollia, scans Cramar's favourite trees every morning and calls in whenever Cramar is visible.

After the accident, Cramar was checked over at the Wildlife Health and Conservation Centre at Cobbity and X-rays revealed no injuries, apart from bruising, but showed that Cramar had a healed, previously broken hip. Imagine the pain he must have suffered hauling himself up trees with such an injury.

When Robert and I released Cramar beside his favourite tree, he ignored it and limped off into the bush. Perhaps with his gammy hip and bruises he was looking for a smaller tree that was easier to climb.

Please report koala sightings on the UWS pager 9966 9996.

Pair taken to new home

By Robert Close

12/10/11

LYNWOOD Park rural fire station at St Helens Park was visited on Sunday by a young koala that climbed a tall stringy bark after scaling the station's two-metre fence.

Unfortunately, it climbed beyond reach of our flagging poles and now will have to work out by itself how to escape back over the fence.

It would then be on the same pathway that last year led Curls, Lindsay and Jemima along Woodlands Road to Appin Road.

Only Jemima survived that journey and we translocated her to Tarlo River National Park where she is doing well, although we suspect that she is having difficulty finding a suitable mate — she has been charging to and fro across the park since the start of the breeding season!

Two other young koalas found themselves in trouble two weeks

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ago. The first, a 7.5-kilogram male, was seen beside Smiths Creek in Cudgegong Road, Ruse, then two days later was in the backyard of a house in Bellinger Road, a stone's throw from busy Junction Road.

Fortunately the resident heard a commotion and was able to secure her dogs before any damage was done. We took the koala, now named Mattie, to the Wildlife Health and Conservation Centre at Cobbitty for a check-up and decided that it would be safer to release him at Tarlo River National Park.

This requires clearance from National Parks and Wildlife Service which assesses the koala's suitability for transfer.

The decision can take five days. Two days later, Neville Plumb from Sydney Wildlife Rescue saved a young female

koala (Katie) from dogs on Hansens Road, Minto Heights.

She too was taken to Cobbitty. Both were cleared for transfer and were released together last week at Tarlo River National Park.

They seem to be oblivious to each other and are busy exploring their new environment.

They are radio-tracked manually each day for the first week, then every two days for the second week.

They wear collars that also transmit their position to a satellite and this signal is received by a central station that then communicates to our computers every week. We hope to obtain special radio-collars that also store the daily locations in the collar.

When we eventually remove the collar all the additional information can be downloaded.

Please report koala sightings on the UWS pager 9966 9996.

Tags a lot in anticipation

Oct 19 2011

By Robert Close

MAC KOALA

SINCE last week we received 11 calls reporting koalas from Minto Heights to Appin – this must be a record.

The first was from one of our ace spotters, Lou Melham, who ushered a young koala off Wedderburn Gorge Road.

He noticed a yellow tag in the left ear but could not see one in the right. We have several possible candidates with a yellow tag, but think that the most likely is either Sirius, tagged in January 2010 in Sirius Street, Ruse or Harry, tagged in Riverside Drive, Airds in October 2010. Unfortunately we need to know the colour of the right ear's tag to be sure.

Very occasionally the tags tear out, but more usually the koala's ears are so hairy that the tag is difficult to see. We ask people who spot koalas to check carefully for both tags.

Another ace spotter, Julie Wasson, also reported a koala; this time at Lynwood Park next to the RFS station where we'd attempted a catch two days earlier. We tried again but also failed. Four days later, two koalas were seen 500m away, at the end of Potoroo Avenue. Then three days later two adult koalas and a juvenile were seen in the same tree. Unfortunately, because none of the koalas was tagged, we can't be sure what the story was.

Two untagged koalas were seen near the Hansens Road, one near the Ben Lomond Road intersection and the other near Myrtle Street. This area has been the site of several sightings and road kills, so motorists should be especially wary. Smiths Creek Reserve is also a popular spot for koalas with nearby residents

reporting koalas bellowing.

Students from nearby Campbelltown East Public School were also privileged to be visited by a young koala. We heard rumours that stones had been thrown at the youngster, but when we checked it was undamaged.

The second call this month from Appin came in this week when a koala was seen at Northamptondale Road. We predict that increasing numbers will be seen around Appin which will have koalas appearing from the Georges, Cataract and Nepean catchments.

Although Appin and Minto Heights may be the up-and-coming koala areas, Sirius Street and Darling Avenue remain the most frequently visited and reported streets. This week was no exception, and a young untagged koala being reported.

Please report koala sightings on the UWS pager 9966 9996.

Missing ear tags puzzle

By Robert Close

26/10/11

MAC KOALA

WHEN we catch a koala we insert a numbered, coloured tag in each ear. Each combination is unique so that we can identify the koala.

However, as mentioned last week, a tag can occasionally tear out, possibly through fighting. We must then rely on the number of the remaining tag to identify the animal.

A new twist came up this week when we captured a large koala, near the corner of Peter Meadows Road and Hansens Road, that had had a rip in its left ear. The rip looked as though it had torn out of a perfectly round puncture hole, the sort we make with a leather punch to obtain a DNA sample before we insert the ear tag.

Unfortunately, the right ear was unmarked. A search of our data base showed that one male, Mitch, in October 2008, had

been released at Kentlyn with a tag in only its left ear because a dog had damaged the right ear. What we need now is a photograph of Mitch so that we can compare the often distinctive patterns of pink and black skin around the nostrils beneath the black nose-pad.

Meanwhile, the mystery koala is being checked out at the Wildlife Health and Conservation Centre at Cobbitty. He had been found sitting on the ground, and scarcely reacted when we captured him. Yet in most other respects he appeared healthy.

Appin Road claimed another koala victim this week. The young male was taken to Bradbury Vets after it was hit 2 km south of Copperfield Drive but died on arrival. This animal had been reported walking along the road the previous evening by a

motorist who had driven to Wedderburn Gorge to obtain the pager number from the koala crossing sign.

Another sad story was the discovery of a dead male platypus in the Georges River at Kentlyn. Extensive searches of the river have previously failed to locate platypuses, although occasional, opportunistic sightings have kept our hopes alive.

Unfortunately, the platypus died through human carelessness.

It had swallowed a fishing hook from a snagged line then had wrapped the line around its bill. It eventually drowned because although its body was floating, its head was held below the surface by the line. Fishermen must be aware of the dangers of discarded lines and must not abandon them.

Please report koala sightings on the OWS pager 9966 9996.

Bite wounds are infected

2/11/11

By Robert Close

At the time of writing last week's column, the cause of the unusually quiet behaviour of a 10.5kg male koala that I'd taken to the Wildlife Health and Conservation Centre at Cobbitty had not been determined.

He'd been discovered sitting on the ground, usually an indication of injury or illness. In 20 years of study, we have found only one koala (Charlotte) that had died in a tree and remained wedged in a fork. Why they descend is a mystery because the tree provides all their short-term needs for food and shelter.

Perhaps the urge to change trees, which they normally do every night, is so strong that they descend then discover that they are too weak to climb another tree.

Whatever the case, our injured male, now named "Peter", was found to have infected bite

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wounds in his shoulder. He was put on a course of antibiotics but has not responded and will have the wound drained later today.

His wounds appear to be caused by dogs, although they may be due to fighting with another male koala.

■ On early Saturday morning a koala was reported trying to cross the Appin-Bull Road near where the road crosses the Georges River.

It was reported again on Saturday night trying to cross at the same spot and appears to have been successful.

We have had fatalities at the same spot including "Steve" who had been tagged as a juvenile near Wedderburn Gorge five years before. So Steve had travelled 10km, presumably following the river.

■ Another interesting set of calls

came in from residents in Airds reporting koalas at Moonbina Place and adjacent Kevin Wheatley Reserve.

One caller reported three koalas in the same tree!

We've had such multiple sightings before and they've consisted of a male, a female, and an almost independent juvenile.

Sometimes there is another adult female as well.

The females are attracted by the strength of the male's bellow.

Unfortunately, I was not able to check until the following day by which time the party was over.

However, the reserve was echoing to the raucous calls of three motorised bicycles.

These machines make a noise that is not unlike aspects of a koala's bellow.

Please report koala sightings on the UWS page 9966 9966.

Dog was taken for a ride

By Robert Close

The pager message was unusual: "Please phone Anne - koala attacked dog"

Annie, from O'Hares Road, Wedderburn, then told us that she had heard her large dog yelping and saw it running about with the koala riding it like a jockey at the Cup with its arms around the dog's neck.

Once the koala dismounted, the dog took to its bed in shame and fear, but physically unharmed.

The koala, likewise, was apparently unharmed.

■ Not so lucky was a young male koala that was killed on Junction Road, Ruse.

Such deaths will increase as Smiths Creek Reserve reaches its capacity.

One young male, Matt, that we rescued from Junction Road recently and moved to Tarlo River National Park, has been setting

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records, having travelled 10 kilometres north and seven kilometres west from his release point in the last month.

■ Ed from Eschol Park rang to say that he had a koala in his aviary. His daughter and her friends had seen cars swerving to avoid the animal in the middle of Georges River Road, Ruse and had rescued it.

The animal was identified from its ear tags as Bernie, originally caught in Acacia Avenue, Ruse, in August 2010.

I released her in the bush behind St Thomas More Church, near where she was initially captured.

This was part of the home range of Charlotte who died earlier this year.

■ Further up Georges River Road a caller reported a tagged mother with its cub.

The mother turned out to be Alice, daughter of June and grand-daughter of the matriarch, Shirley, whose home range adjoined that of Charlotte.

Like Charlotte, June and Shirley are now dead but their progeny live on.

■ Other callers reported sightings on Hansens Road and Wyangala Crescent, Leumeah, The Basin at Kentlyn and St Helens Park.

The latter was a very young cub in Dalkeith Place. It had become separated from its mother and took shelter in a kerbside tree.

The tree was too difficult to attempt a capture so I waited at its base hoping in vain for it to descend.

While I waited I saw several cats roaming the street. They are a threat to such a young cub, and should be kept inside.

Please report koala sightings on the LWS page 9966 9996.

Fresh leaves are needed

By Robert Close

I MUST apologise to any callers who have tried to contact me via the pager number given at the bottom of this column in recent weeks.

Unfortunately, I made a typographic error while writing the column and the error was continued in the following columns.

If anyone called the wrong number about a koala sighting I would be grateful if they could call back.

The error was pointed out to me by Guy Lachat who had discovered the second recent platypus corpse in the Georges River.

He had tried to ring the wrong number only to find a fax response.

Fortunately, he persevered and found the correct number.

Guy spends a lot of time walking in the Georges River

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bushland and has spotted koalas for us previously.

Likewise Catherine and Stephen Grenfell, who discovered the first dead platypus at Kentlyn recently, also spend a lot of time walking and cycling in the Georges River bush.

It was their photograph of the dead platypus attached to an abandoned fishing line that appeared in the *Advertiser* two weeks ago.

Stephen also reported a live platypus in the Georges River near Appin in about 2004.

Over the years the couple have seen and photographed much of the fauna of the Georges River bushland.

They regularly see and report koalas and are keeping a record of their sightings.

That includes Helen, who lives

near the soccer ground at Lynwood Park.

We hope that other Campbelltown residents will discover the pleasures of having the Georges River bushland at their back door and contribute to our local ecological knowledge.

■ One problem with having an expanding koala population is that increasing numbers of koalas need veterinary attention. The Wildlife Health and Conservation Centre at Sydney University's Vet School at Cobbitty has taken care of many of the koalas.

If anyone can help supply fresh leaves contact me via the koala pager. A recent arrival at Cobbitty was a koala from Minto Heights which had clinical signs similar to chlamydia. If so, it is of great concern.

Please report koala sightings on the correct UWS pager 9962 9996.

Columns

Advertiser

Platypus drowns in trap

By Robert Close

IN addition to the articles on the recent deaths of platypuses in the Georges River due to yabby traps and fishing lines, it must be stressed that it is illegal to use yabby traps in freshwater streams east of the Newell Highway.

These traps may be used legally only in farm dams and estuaries and require a fishing licence.

Unfortunately, a platypus was found drowned a few months ago in a crab trap at Maroota near Richmond, which is in the upper reaches of the tidal section of the Hawkesbury River, where crab traps can be legally used.

Once caught in a trap, platypuses have only two minutes to escape before they drown.

So people wanting to catch yabbies, should use the old manual methods.

The platypus is the world's most unique mammal and we have it in our local bushland; let's not risk its survival for the

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sake of a few yabbies.

See http://branches.npansw.org.au/br-macarthur/News_Campaigns/2011/platypus_kentlyn.shtml.

■ More bad news is that Peter, a mature male koala from Peter Meadows Creek that had infected bite wounds, had to be euthanised.

The infection had degraded the cartilage of one shoulder joint leaving bone rubbing on bone.

So any arm movement would have been painful.

Moreover, he had a heart condition that seriously affected blood flow.

Another koala, from Minto Heights, also had to be euthanised.

This animal was brought in to the Wildlife Health and Conservation Centre at Cobbitty looking very dishevelled and we feared that it might have chlamydia.

This would have been a major calamity for Campbelltown's

koalas because we are yet to see clinical signs of this painful and devastating disease.

Fortunately, the symptoms were not caused by chlamydia bacteria.

It was the work of a tiny mite, an eight-legged arthropod that causes mange.

This mite causes immense suffering among wombats, occurs occasionally on captive koalas, but is seldom seen on koalas in the wild.

■ On a happier note, a koala has been visiting St Helens Park Primary School over the past two weeks and has fascinated the students who love to find him every morning.

Not so pleased is the owner of an adjoining house who discovered that the koala likes to drop its faecal pellets on to her trampoline from an overhanging branch.

Koalas produce 70-130 pellets per day so this koala reaps the rewards of practice.

Please report koala sightings on UWS pager 9962 9996.

Platypus sealed in a deadly embrace

Robert Close

OTHER dead platypus has ended up in a Sydney basin creek, this time with a rubber seal firmly lodged around its neck.

It is now undergoing a post-mortem examination to verify the seal caused the death, but circumstantial evidence points to the seal — and whoever inserted it — as persuasive.

The platypus was found in Little Nepean Creek at Kurrajong, a tributary of the Nepean River, and it is clear that even simple rubbish can be fatal for platypuses. The creek is small and isolated, one would think, very little rubbish. There was enough, however, to cause the death of the platypus.

In contrast, the Georges River suffers from a huge influx of rubbish. Almost all the stormwater flowing along gutters east of the freeway in Campbelltown flows into creeks that eventually empty into the Georges River.

Consequently, any rubbish deposited in the streets will make

its way into these creeks. Although gross pollutant traps built at the bushland/suburban interface capture much of the garbage, searches downstream of these traps demonstrate that a lot of rubbish is not collected.

Small items such as the ring that killed the platypus are particularly difficult to capture.

To protect our platypuses, we need to stop all rubbish from entering our gutters in the first place.

This requires a dedicated and aware community.

In my street, cockatoos and crows pull rubbish out of wheely bins so over-filled that the lids don't close.

This problem, of course, is easily rectified, but may require cleaning up a neighbour's mess and then telling the neighbour of the problem.

On the koala scene, we've seen the first drop this year in koala sightings that indicates that the

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mating season is declining.

Only four sightings were recorded this week — two in Darling Avenue, Ruse, and one each in Wedderburn and Minto Heights.

The former two areas have been popular with koalas for many years and those in Wedderburn and Minto Heights have this year reported more sightings than usual.

We recently attached a radio collar to a young female koala that

was in danger from dogs near the junction of Peter Meadows and Georges River roads. The female, named Heather by her spotters, has a peanut-sized joey in the pouch. She has clearly not yet established her own home-range, because she has travelled a considerable distance from where she was captured.

Please report koala sightings on UWS pager 9962 9996.

Campbelltown Macarthur Advertiser, Wednesday, January 4, 2012

Campbelltown Macarthur Advertiser, Wednesday, January 11, 2012

Note:

No column published on this date

Bernie caught after chase

18/1/12

By Robert Close

MAC KOALA

RELATIVELY few calls came in to report koalas over the Christmas break.

There were the usual sightings of Liz from around Sirius Street in Ruse, and of males bellowing from Wyangala Crescent, Leumeah, and a sighting from Minto Heights. Then there were two calls from Georges River Road, Kentlyn, where koalas had entered gardens patrolled by dogs. Unfortunately the dogs killed one of the koalas which was carrying a tiny joey, no larger than my thumbnail.

Then last Thursday at midnight we received a call from Laurence reporting his fears that a koala beside Riverside Drive, Airds, was in danger from traffic.

I explained that we were receiving so many calls about koalas now that it was overwhelming our small research

group and we only rescued late at night now if the koala was in grave danger. So if they could drive the koala up a street tree then it should be safe.

A few minutes later a call came in from Lorraine about the same koala reporting that although they had driven the koala up a tree it was obviously uncomfortable. Moreover there were two dogs lurking nearby and she was afraid for the koala's life.

She was prepared to wait there with it until I arrived. So 30 minutes later I arrived to find several people clustered beneath an iron bark eucalypt with the koala about four metres up and two metres from Riverside Drive. I was just preparing my catching poles when Lorraine called "It's coming down".

Sure enough, despite the

onlookers, it climbed down and started running along the footpath. I grabbed my welding gloves and a bag and gave chase. We raced together for 40 metres with cars whizzing past us until it stopped momentarily to assess the situation. I was then able to grab the koala and bag it.

We then discovered that the koala was ear-tagged and it turned out to be Bernie, whom we had first captured in August 2010 in Acacia Avenue, Ruse.

Bernie was rescued a few months ago by a motorist on Georges River Road and released near Acacia Avenue. So she had moved two kilometres.

I released her again near the Woolwash, but if she moves along the same path that our young koalas are taking we'll see her again in St Helens Park.

Report koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

25/1/12

Male leaves smelly mark

By Robert Close

LAST week I predicted that we would receive a pager call from St Helens Park as the young female koala, Bernie, moves along what is becoming a regular pathway for the young koalas that are seeking territories.

Sure enough, calls came in from St Helens Park. But they weren't about Bernie.

Instead, they reported a young, untagged male who was first sighted in Cameron Place then the following day in Alyan Place.

We could tell that it was a male because it had a brown smear about the size of a 50¢ piece in the middle of its white chest.

The smear comes from a gland that produces an oily concoction of about 30 aromatic compounds that the male koalas rub onto the trunk and branches of trees they are climbing. They appear to mark unfamiliar trees more thoroughly than they do

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familiar ones and sometimes add a drop or two of urine.

Koalas will sniff the tree before climbing it but we don't know what information they are obtaining.

It is interesting that we know so little about communication between these iconic animals.

The male in Alyan Place had no other tree choices; he was in a lone Tallowood eucalypt. This species is not a local eucalypt but is an important food tree in northern NSW. In Alyan Place he was only 300 metres from Appin Road and was limited in where he could safely move because of fences and dogs.

We have heard nothing of him since January 18, so with luck he has returned to the bush near St Helens Park Public School from where he came.

Another call came from Sirius

Street, Rose, where the female koala Liz is usually reported.

The new animal, however, was apparently young and untagged.

Price, a mature male, is also occasionally reported from Cook Reserve which is adjacent to Sirius Street. Price, however, has been recently seen and heard in Abercrombie Reserve at the northern end of Smiths Creek.

Liz and Price are good examples of how koalas and humans can co-exist in suburban areas, provided there are sufficient local reserves. Young animals, leaving their mother's established territories, however, will always be in danger.

Report koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

The pager company incorrectly recorded the contact number of Michael who called on January 19. We would be grateful if he could call again.

Proof land is core habitat

1/2/12

By Robert Close

IN LAST week's *Advertiser*, reporter Alexandra Pleffer wrote an article "Developer refutes impact on koalas" which quoted a developer saying that a 30-hectare site at St Helens Park would have no effect on koalas.

It is obvious, however, that any 30-hectare development between the Georges River and the suburbs *will* have an effect on our koalas, the question is whether the effects are significant.

The state government, through its State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP 44), says that any development in an area which contains core koala habitat – that is, supports breeding female koalas – will have significant effects and so the developers must make special considerations in the planning of the site

■ Management plan needed

MAC KOALA

to minimise those adverse effects. They must prepare a plan of management according to specific guidelines.

Prior to this week, there were numerous sightings of koalas on the site but no one had seen a mother and cub, the ultimate proof that the site was core koala habitat. Then right on cue, mature female, St Helen, who has been living on the site since 2010 appeared to residents of adjacent Cameron Place carrying a cub.

This means that the developer will now have to follow the guidelines and prepare a plan of management to comply with SEPP 44. Measures taken by

other developers have included retaining the best habitat and corridors, vehicle speed restrictions and banning dog ownership on the site.

St Helen's appearance with a cub perhaps explains the presence, reported in last week's column, of another koala in Cameron Place and a male in nearby Alyan Place. The latter are probably suitors responding to St Helen's return to breeding following the cub's emergence from its mother's pouch.

Other sightings during the week were of a juvenile from Moonbria Place in Airds and a resident from Canberra Crescent in Ruse.

Report koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Our oldest tagged koala

By Robert Close

8/2/12

■ And a great find in Sydney park

MAC KOALA

TWO weeks ago I appealed to a caller, Michael, to call us again because the pager company had recorded an incorrect phone number for him.

As the days ticked by it appeared Michael had not read the column. However, a friend had seen it and eventually Michael called and reported a sighting of a koala in Wedderburn Gorge.

That's not unusual; Wedderburn Gorge is one of the most frequently reported sites of koala sightings.

However, I was excited by Michael's call because he'd recorded the koala's eartag colours which identified the animal as Martine, the oldest of our koalas known to be alive.

Martine had been rescued by a motorcyclist who had found her walking up the road at the Gorge

in October, 1998. She was small enough for the rescuer to put her in his gym bag and take her home, so she was probably about 18 months old at the time. She would have been born early in 1997, making her at least 15 now. For several years we'd fitted her with a radio-collar and during that time she had produced a cub each year. Eventually we removed the radio-collar as the terrain was too steep to work in easily and since then we've relied on callers like Michael to locate her. Such calls come in about once a year. It's miraculous that she has survived 15 years in the gorge where traffic is relatively heavy and some drivers drive faster than they should.

■ An interesting call came in from Hyde Park, Sydney, reporting a koala in the fork of a tree only two metres from the ground. The caller reported the animal was grey with its head tucked in and no tail visible.

The most likely candidate was a brush-tailed possum. I asked the caller to clap loudly as close to the animal as possible.

This brought no response from the animal. I then asked whether he could find a stick and give the animal a gentle prod. This time the animal lifted its head and peered at the intruder revealing itself as a possum.

What amazing animals they are to be able to survive in such a place!

Report koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Hope despite grim findings

By Robert Close

MAC KOALA

THE cover story in the February 12 *Good Weekend* magazine with *The Sydney Morning Herald* entitled "How much can a koala bear?" examined the status of koalas and concluded that the situation was grim.

A list of the current threats was presented and it was extensive: clearing and loss of habitat, the diseases chlamydia and koala retrovirus, bushfires, vehicle collisions, dog attacks, droughts, heatwaves and climate change.

Surprisingly, the author neglected to add the plant disease Myrtle Rust to the list.

This disease has recently been found in Victoria after first appearing in NSW in 2010.

It has also spread into Queensland. It is a fungal infection of leaves affecting many members of the myrtle family, including eucalypts.

Three species known to be affected by the fungus and used

by koalas in the Campbelltown region are blue-leaved stringy barks, river red gums and to a lesser extent blackbutts.

However, the list of affected species is expected to increase as scientists learn more about the disease. Because the disease is still so young in Australia, its long-term effects on koalas are unknown but likely to be serious.

Although the future appears grim, our studies of the Campbelltown koala population give cause for hope. Our population, despite considerable losses to dogs and vehicles, is healthy and expanding.

A vital feature seems to be the ability of some females to establish a stable home range that provides for them and their cubs all the resources to survive.

So last week we reported that 15-year-old Martine was still

doing well in the dangerous Wedderburn Gorge. This week we had a report that Liz, originally tagged as an adult in 2005 and therefore at least nine years old, was in one of her favourite trees in the median strip of Old Kent Road at Ruše.

We also got a report from Minto Heights of Debbie, tagged as a cub in July 2003 and therefore 10 years old. Her mother was Amanda who lived beside Peter Meadows Road for 15 years. Mother and daughter together have contributed many cubs to the population.

Another factor is the absence of chlamydiosis. Why we don't see signs of this dreadful disease is not known. A third factor is the unbroken connection to the bushland of Holsworthy and the Woronora catchment which provides a back-up reserve of animals.

Report koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Fewer sightings for now

By Robert Close

FROM a peak of a dozen calls a week to the pager to report koala sightings in September, we are now down to one (near the monastery on Minerva Road at Wedderburn) as the koalas' active season slows down.

Apart from some youngsters that may have dispersed out of the area and those killed by dogs or cars, most koalas will still be living in their usual areas but won't be as visible as they were in September and October.

The males won't be bellowing as much nor moving about their home ranges and the young animals won't be driven so often into backyards as they try to find new areas to set up their own territories.

■ Could Campbelltown's koalas become a focal tourist attraction? For this to occur the koalas must be dependably seen.

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For example, there are tourist sites in Victoria where several koalas in the wild can be seen from a single vantage point.

However, the density of koalas at such sites is probably three or more per hectare whereas at Campbelltown the density is one per 10 hectares – a 30-fold difference. Nevertheless, some of our experienced spotters can reliably locate koalas during their daily strolls through the bush. Their success requires familiarity with the bushland and developing a feel for what is a prime habitat for koalas. They also have become familiar with individual animals and their favourite spots.

What would be the chances of a bushwalker finding a koala on a first visit to Campbelltown's bush? That would depend on the ability, energy and concentration

of the person and the quality of the area searched. One suitable location among many along firetrails from Long Point to St Helens Park is the Peter Meadows Creek firetrail which runs 200m east of Darling Avenue on Old Kent Road and follows the creek northward for 1.5km to Peter Meadows Road.

Walkers can then follow the creek for 4km to where it meets the Georges River. I would guess a novice koala spotter would be successful on about every third venture along the creek.

However, it's a beautiful walk and a koala sighting would top off a good bushwalk. Check it out on Google Earth before setting out. Other potentially good walks where koalas are now being seen are along Smiths Creek and from Cooks Reserve to James Ruse Park.

Report koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Young deaths tally rises

By Robert Close 29/2/12

MAC KOALA

IN reporter Megan Gorrey's excellent feature article, "Future's bright for koalas", in last week's *Advertiser*, I am quoted as saying: "We've only had two [koalas] which have died of less than old age".

That quote applied only to the 23 Campbelltown koalas that we have put radio-collars on. Our wider study of another 140 ear-tagged koalas includes many animals that died prematurely.

Tristan Lee is currently sorting out all of these records as part of his PhD studies, but most of the premature deaths are due to dog attacks and roadkills.

We consider that if a koala reaches the age of 14 its subsequent death can be attributed to old age. However, I heard recently of a koala that died in a car collision at the age of 21!

I must also correct an error that I made in that initial quota-

tion. On checking our huge database, I discovered that a further three radio-collared animals died either from falls or unknown cause. Our radio-tracking records show that we have followed the 23 collared koalas for a combined total of approximately 170 years.

Thirteen have died with their collars on, and only five of these deaths were premature. In comparison, a 10-year study near Coffs Harbour that I've been involved in has had a far greater death rate.

In that study 34 koalas were radio-collared for a combined total of 33 years during which 14 died. Only one of those deaths was attributed to old age.

However, the circumstances of the two studies were very different. The Coffs Harbour study site was beside the Pacific

Highway during major roadworks. Surprisingly only two of the deaths were roadkills. Chlamydia is rife in the area and ticks and leeches abound.

■ Further to last week's discussion about the best places to look for koalas around Campbelltown, I was talking to Ray Whitmore, a local bushwalker who enjoys spotting koalas during his walks around Kentlyn and Ruse.

Ray reported that he'd located eight-year-old ear-tagged Lorraine for the 12th time and she was in the same tree that Ray had found her in five times previously. All sightings were within a radius of 300 metres. This gives a home-range of 28 hectares which is typical for Campbelltown. Once again Ray's work has shown the value of the community-based research program.

Report koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Migration mesmerises

7/3/12

By Robert Close

MAC KOALA

ONLY two calls have come in to the koala pager in the past 10 days: one from near the Ruse Tavern on Junction Road and the other from Hodgson Close, Wedderburn.

We were unable to organise a catching team for the Ruse koala, so confidently expected a call the following day after the koala had left the pub.

It would have been heading for, or coming from, the Smiths Creek Reserve probably via Nymboida Crescent which follows two creek lines that connect with Smiths Creek.

If it was heading for Smiths Creek, it would have come via Acacia Avenue, Oberon Road or Old Kent Road from the corridor comprised of James Ruse Park and Cook Reserve.

After the initial sighting near the pub, however, the koala seems to have vanished;

presumably it crossed Junction Road to the relative safety of Smiths Creek.

Two months previously we had rescued a young male, Matt, from a dog-filled backyard in Bellingen Road which connects with Nymboida Crescent.

We took Matt down to Tarlo River National Park and fitted him with a satellite radio collar which allows us to follow his movements without actually finding him physically.

However, we still track him each month in person.

Matt's movements have been astounding. First, he left the young female Katie with whom he had been released and moved 14 kilometres north through extremely rugged country then turned around and in one month returned almost to where we had originally released

him. He has travelled a distance of 28 kilometres as the crow flies in just 50 days!

Has he been merely exploring the district? Perhaps he's been checking for the presence of females. Katie may already have a joey in the pouch and therefore of little interest to Matt.

Or maybe resident males may have left subtle scent messages rubbed onto the bases of trees from the oily scent glands on their chests.

These messages may have warned Matt to keep moving. If so why did he come back and how did he navigate? Perhaps he used his own scent gland to mark a trail that he could follow back to Katie.

All these questions show how little we know about how koalas use the landscape and how they communicate with each other.

Report koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Please take care on roads

14/3/12

By Robert Close

MAC KOALA

ONLY one koala sighting was reported this week and it came from the Georges River Road and Smiths Street corner next to Kentlyn Primary School.

Koala sightings are not unusual in this area as we've followed the lives of several koalas in and around the school over the years. It's interesting, however, that June Thompson, principal of the school, can remember a time before koalas were seen there.

First of the koalas was Lyn and her easily remembered son, Kent. Lyn was pushed over Georges River Road by June, the daughter of Shirley.

June herself was nudged into the adjacent retirement village (for both humans and koalas) by her daughters Shy and Vicki who set up territories on either side of the school. Although we don't have radio collars on Shy and

Vicki we believe they are still there and ask people to look carefully for ear-tags on any koalas they see.

The most recently sighted koala, however, was a large animal and so was probably a male. This animal had a severe limp but was still able to cross the road and climb a tree.

His injuries were probably due to a collision with a car but could also have been from a dog bite or falling from a tree.

Life in the treetops is hazardous enough, through climbing on dead or rotten branches on windy days, without the habits that male koalas have of forcing their weaker opponents onto flimsy branches and risking falls.

We've found several koalas dead for no apparent reason beneath trees.

During our 22-year study we've collected over 100 dead koalas from around the Sydney basin and we've discovered several of them carried long-term injuries, some of which were broken leg bones that had healed.

The koala's lifestyle is such that it can allow a broken limb to hang and heal provided it can climb a suitable food tree using its three undamaged limbs.

One koala we discovered had such severe long-term arthritis in one wrist it must have been relying on its remaining limbs for several months at least before it was finally killed by a car.

So with a bit of luck this most recently sighted koala will recover despite its apparent habit of crossing Georges River Road.

We ask drivers to be particularly watchful.

Report koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Kids learn to be spotters

21/3/12

By Robert Close

MAC KOALA

NO koala sightings were reported on the UWS pager this week as the koalas continue their autumnal quiet time.

This gives us the opportunity to transfer all the previous reports from paper records to the database. This job, which entails entering several details for each sighting, is a large one and our list of sightings now exceeds 3000. Then we have another 3000 or so locations from our radio-collared animals and details of 400 captures.

Our public sightings include historical records, so before I gave a talk last week on koalas to the students of Cawdor Public School, Lynn, our database keeper, found a reference to koalas being killed for their pelts on Razorback Range, Cawdor, in the 1920s.

Koalas may still exist there given that koalas are very difficult to see and also that koalas are always

dispersing across the landscape. Any koalas moving beside the Nepean River could easily move into the Razorback Range.

The Cawdor students now know how to recognise koala scratch marks, faecal pellets and bellows so are hoping to find local koalas. They also raised money for the care of injured koalas at the Wildlife Health and Conservation Centre, Cobbitty.

This centre does a phenomenal job with local injured koalas. However, looking after injured koalas is a labour-intensive, expensive job and the centre needs all the financial help it can get.

Our database was also called on recently by the National Parks Association which is campaigning against a 2700-house development at Heathcote Ridge, West Menai.

The association wanted to know

if we had any records of koalas from the Menai site. We were able to supply three records of sightings from within 1.5 kilometres.

The Australian Koala Foundation then used their vegetation mapping knowledge to plot the areas of the site and surrounds that are most likely to support koalas. Then the foundation added to the map our three sightings and several sightings that were recorded in the Wildlife Atlas of sightings held by the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Three of these sightings were on the edge of the site's footprint and a further dozen were within one kilometre. Most of the actual clearing, however, will occur in lesser quality habitat but there will always be pressure on local wildlife from the combined effects of cars, dogs, arson and erosion that accompany such large ventures.

Report koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Campbelltown Macarthur Advertiser, Wednesday, March 28, 2012

Note:

No column published on this date

Park is a koala refuge

By Robert Close

LAST Sunday week, with the declaration of the Dhenau National Park, was a significant day because we believe the site is a refuge area for koalas.

Its protection will mean there will always be a source of koalas to recolonise areas damaged by fire — free from dogs and cars.

The site is linked by bushland to Holsworthy Firing Range, Woronora River water catchment area, Heathcote and Royal National Parks to the east, Cataract River catchment area and Morton National Park to the south and via bush corridors beside Appin Road to the Nepean River to the west.

So there will always be young koalas setting off across the countryside from our new national park to replenish existing populations or regenerate extinct ones.

Several interesting sightings

4/4/12

MAC KOALA

were reported this week, three local and two from further afield.

Two local ones were from the northern end of Smiths Creek. This has been a popular site for the old mate, Price, but our regular correspondent from that area, Bernadette, tells us the latest sighting was of a young, untagged animal. None of the koalas have yet been sighted trying to cross Pembroke Road near Wests League Club.

It makes us wonder whether some koalas, like some cats and dogs, develop road sense. The third local report was from the retirement village at Kentlyn, a favourite site for koalas.

One of the non-local reports was from Remembrance Drive, just north of Tahmoor. We know there is a population in the nearby Avon Dam catchment and that koalas are regularly

killed near the Pheasants Creek bridge on the F5, but we expect to find other sites in the area as well. We tagged one young female several years ago at Pheasants Nest and it was later reported from Tahmoor.

We would love to know where she is now. As she reaches the top to 15 years she may still be there. The second non-local report was from Comberoy Road at East Kurrajong.

Sightings from this area are relatively regular and suggest there is a reasonable population of koalas.

Instan's DNA study, in fact, showed koalas from this area had greater genetic variation than our Campbelltown animals.

This means the Campbelltown koalas are fewer in number or went through a large population crash in the past.

Report koala sightings on the [CMAA page](#), 3062 3334.

Pellets can help track Bob

By Robert Close

LAST week I reported two sightings of koalas from the northern end of Smiths Creek Reserve.

Since then, a young male koala has appeared in Burraneer Street, Leumeah, where, much to the delight of local residents, he sat on a fence and allowed himself to be patted.

This is unusual behaviour for a young koala, so Cate Ryan, local WIRES member with responsibility for koalas, took him in for inspection fearing that he might have been hit by a car.

Fortunately, however, he was not injured so after two days of monitoring we fitted him with ear-tags and released him back into Smiths Creek Reserve.

He weighs only five kilograms and so will be out-gunned by Price, the local male in the reserve who weighs 11 kilograms.

The youngster, named Bunnaroo Bob by the residents

MAC KOALA

who found him, will be keeping out of Price's way, so we can expect to find him sheltering in gardens beside the reserve.

While Bunnaroo Bob was in captivity he produced purplish faecal pellets.

Normally, Campbelltown koalas living in the bush produce pellets that are brown, so we expect that Bob has already been living in home gardens and feeding on eucalypts that are not local to the area.

Perhaps we can track Bob's movements by the distribution of his purple pellets!

If residents in the area could check around the base of trees in their gardens for the purple pellets which are like plump olive pips we could pioneer a new survey method and revive an old song "the purple pellet pooper".

■ On a sadder note, Courtney,

11/4/12
our radio-collared female from Spring Creek, died this week.

She had lived in the creek-side area between Ironside Drive and Woodland Road, St Helens Park, since her capture in March 2003. At the time she had a large joey, Brittany, and we estimated her age as four years.

So her age at her death was about 13 years.

A post-mortem revealed an empty stomach and a small but deep wound under the chin. She had only one kidney, a phenomenon that we have seen in another Campbelltown koala; perhaps an indication of inbreeding in the colony.

Courtney was unusual in that, besides Brittany, she only raised one other joey (in 2006), whereas all our other radio-collared females have produced several young.

Report koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Courtney's trips mystify

By Robert Close

LAST week I reported, briefly, the death of Courtney, a 13-year-old female koala that lived beside Spring Creek in St Helens Park.

We had radio-tracked her movements every two weeks or so since March 2003.

She was located on 200 occasions and we amassed a lot of information about the way she used her territory.

Spring Creek rises in Ambarvale and passes under Appin Road north of Ambarvale High School. It then enters bushland near the Woodland Road-St Helens Park Drive intersection and finally joins the Georges River near the Wedderburn Gorge causeway.

Courtney used only the western section of this bushland area and would range across both sides of the creek from the rear of the houses beside Woodlands Road and just east of Warring Place to Ironside

MAC KOALA

Avenue and Fullarton Crescent, an area of about 25 hectares.

Here she lived a quiet life; her daughter, Brittany, established a home range on Courtney's eastern border and both were attended by a series of males, first Nathan then Barney and Cramar and possibly Amica.

On one occasion we discovered Barney dying and Cramar injured and suspect that there had been a fierce battle between the two, possibly over Courtney.

We discovered Courtney outside her bushland home only twice. On both occasions she had crossed Woodland Road and then followed suburban streets into Bradbury.

On one occasion we captured her and released her back in her usual haunts, while on the other she returned of her own accord.

18/4/12
What was she doing on these excursions? Were they related to her poor reproductive record (only two joeys raised in nine years)?

Perhaps the resident males didn't cut the mustard or were too closely related to her, forcing Courtney to search for a more suitable suitor.

I will miss our radio-tracking sessions in the Spring Creek bushland which is very beautiful provided you don't notice the weeds and the rubbish that flows into the creek from the gutters of Rosemeadow and Ambarvale.

Our small Streamcare group that is working one Sunday morning a month in Spring Creek to rectify these problems is greatly in need of new members. Anyone interested in helping to restore this koala habitat should call the council's environment unit, 4645 4601.

Report koala sightings in the UWS paper, 9962 9966.

Joeys have been raised

25/4/12

By Robert Close

REGULAR readers will remember that we have been working since 2006 with a Landcare group to re-establish a population of koalas in Tarlo River National Park (100 kilometres south of Campbelltown).

Koalas had not been reported from the park for 40 years and the Landcare group was planting corridors of trees to link the park to existing bushland.

Our role was to rescue young Campbelltown koalas that were in danger from dogs or cars and translocate them to Tarlo RNP where we have been monitoring their movements via radio-collars. Over the past six years we have moved seven koalas and the project has been successful in that joeys have been born and raised, and the animals have provided much information on how young koalas adapt to new environments and establish home-ranges.

MAC KOALA

The two males have astounded us with their speed and the many kilometres they travel.

Before we began translocating koalas we considered all the pros and cons associated with moving koalas away from their mothers' territories.

One of the worries was the potential for carrying diseases into the park or for exposing the translocated animals to unfamiliar infective agents. The greatest threat was the bacterium, Chlamydia, two forms of which can affect koalas and damage urinary, genital and respiratory tracts and eyes.

In 20 years of study at Campbelltown, we have never seen clinical signs of chlamydia (urinary incontinence leading to "wet bottom", and weeping eyes). So we did not expect that our animals would carry the disease even though chlamydia

occurs in most mainland koala populations.

In our original planning we predicted that if koalas still survived at very low density at Tarlo River NP, then they may appear in response to the translocated animals.

Sure enough, a few weeks after the initial release in 2006, a local male was observed nearby. Only one other has been seen since. However, if the local koalas carried chlamydia, then they may then infect our translocated animals.

Recently we discovered that Jemima, rescued from Appin Road and released at Tarlo River at Christmas 2010, had "wet bottom". Swabs taken from the urinary tract were positive for chlamydia, whereas the tests taken before release were negative. We will report outcomes in due course.

Report koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Species listed 'vulnerable'

By Robert Close

LIAM Payne and Harry Styles from the British boy band, One Direction, were holding a koala in Australia recently when it piddled on them.

This then caused a stir when the boys were told that 80 per cent of koalas carried the bacterium, the human-infecting version of which is found in about 10 per cent of humans and damages the reproductive organs.

The 80 per cent figure is probably highly speculative because of the difficulties of surveying koalas. Most references merely report that "most populations are infected" and that "up to 50 per cent of each population carries the bacterium".

Fortunately, as far as we know, the two forms of koala chlamydia don't infect humans so Liam and

MAC KOALA

Harry are safe. However, the disease in koalas is certainly very serious and along with land-clearing and climate change is one of the greatest threats to the long-term survival of the species.

The threat from chlamydia was one of the reasons why federal Environment Minister Tony Bourke has just announced that the koala is now officially declared "vulnerable" despite the difficulties of estimating actual numbers.

The declaration does not extend to Victoria and South Australia, however, where numbers have been built up by translocation from Victorian islands. So the declaration actually covers only NSW, ACT and Queensland because koalas are not found naturally in Tasmania,

WA or the NT. This declaration will give the koala increased protection from land-clearing and will benefit not only the koalas but also all the multitude of plant and animal species that are not as well-known as the koala and carry less political weight.

Fortunately, our Campbelltown animals appear to be chlamydia-free. We hope that when the bacterium eventually arrives here via koalas dispersing from southern populations that our koalas won't be especially vulnerable. Because of this threat we take note of any of our koalas that appear ill, such as the koala seen by Stephen and Catherine Grenfell (see story on page 2). Please contact us if you spot it.

Report koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Will airport affect koalas?

By Robert Close

A CALL came in this week from the heart of Tahmoor reporting a koala near the corner of Thirlmere Way and York Street.

It was also seen the following day having crossed Remembrance Drive. This sighting is timely given the discussion in last week's Advertiser about the probability that koalas reside on land at Wilton that would be used for a second airport.

It is timely because Tahmoor is only 10 kilometres from Wilton and it also emphasises the fact that koalas are widely distributed south of Campbelltown but we know little about their status.

Before work could begin on the airport a thorough search would be required of the area to be cleared or affected by the construction. Then if breeding koalas were discovered or if dispersal corridors were identified, management plans would

MAC KOALA

have to be implemented. Such plans might include special fencing that would direct koalas around or under obstacles.

Such fencing, called "floppy top" because the top section swings down as the koala climbs up it, is widely and successfully used beside the Pacific Highway north of Newcastle.

In addition, plantings of koala feed trees to supplement potential dispersal corridors or to replace cleared land could be considered.

So how likely is it the Wilton site supports a koala population? We know from our work translocating koalas to Tarlo River National Park that young male koalas can move 20 kilometres in a few weeks so there is almost nowhere between Campbelltown and Mittagong where dispersing koalas won't turn up.

9/5/12

The crucial question is where have breeding females established themselves?

Prior to our studies, breeding females were known from the Avon Dam catchment. The Avon River joins the Cordeaux River just a few kilometres south of Wilton and a few kilometres east of Pheasants Nest bridge on the Hume Highway. So koalas would certainly be moving through Wilton from there.

Since 1989 we have been collecting details of koala sightings/roadkills in the area which include several from Broughton Gorge (six sightings) on the Cataract River, Pheasants Nest, Bargo/Avon Dam exit, Douglas Park, Yanderra and Picton Road (Allens Creek/Wilton bypass) and Mount Keira Road. All of these sightings are within 15 kilometres of Wilton.

Report koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Koala sighting details are always appreciated

16/5/12
By Robert Close

IT WAS interesting to read under "Some online feedback" in last week's Advertiser that two correspondents, Jacqui Clark and Sharon Karma, had reported seeing koalas in the Wilton area.

I would be very interested in obtaining the following details from Jacqui and Sharon, and anyone else who has seen koalas south of Campbelltown: dates of sightings, details of location, male or female, and presence of young.

Contact me via the koala pager (below) or the Advertiser.

In the article accompanying "Some online feedback" I was quoted as "expecting big numbers of koalas at Wilton".

In fact, I've done very little searching in the area and base my opinions on the number of sightings and roadkills reported to the public.

The bushland looks similar to koala areas near Campbelltown and similar food trees are available so I'd expect to find koalas at a similar density - that is, one koala per 10 to 20 hectares. This is a low density compared to some places in Victoria where densities can reach five per hectare.

MAC KOALA



Finding koalas in low-density populations is very difficult and we rely on local observers to report sightings.

If the Wilton airport goes ahead there may be pressure to build the long-proposed "Parkway" which would take traffic from Appin to Liverpool between the Georges River and suburban Campbelltown.

This is the peak area for the Campbelltown koala population

and construction of the road would be catastrophic for it.

■ One koala living near the Parkway road, Clonay, appeared to residents on Sunday at Fullarton Crescent in St Helens Park. Clonay was tagged in 2007 and has lived beside Spring Creek ever since. His eyes were clear and his coat healthy but he was only three metres off the ground and was not perturbed when I climbed up to check his ear tags. Perhaps he's been clipped by a car. If so, he'll probably not move far until he feels better. Residents in Fullarton Crescent should watch out for him.

■ Meanwhile, beside Smiths Creek in Leumeah another old male, Price, visited residents of Carrington Circuit and Bradfield Street by walking along the road. This was very near where a young untagged animal had been seen earlier in the week and where we'd released Buntaneer Bobby last month. Possibly, Price is moving these young upstarts out of his territory.

Report koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

19 years of tracking ends

By Robert Close

23/5/12

MAC KOALA

RECENTLY Lynn Bowden, Steve Fellenberg and I were radio-tracking a koala called St Helen, who lives to the east of St Helens Park Primary School.

It was hard work because much of her territory has a dense understorey of kunzea thicket. It was so tangled we often had to struggle through it on all fours.

Moreover, the thicket was high enough to restrict visibility to a few metres.

It would have been easy, however, for the koala to move from one emergent feed-tree to another via the runways in the thicket.

Lynn noticed the tone of the radio signal appeared to be slightly different from usual and wondered whether the mortality switch had been activated. This switch operates if the transmitter in the koala's collar does not move for a certain period.

So if the collar falls off or the animal dies, the switch activates and the tracker knows to look on the ground.

Sure enough, that was where we found the collar but there was no trace of its owner.

St Helen is the last of our radio-collared females and the loss of her collar marks the end of 19 years of radio-tracking which has enabled us to gather data on four generations of Campbelltown koalas.

None of these collared female koalas has been killed by cars or dogs.

Most have died of old age or cancer but we aren't sure what killed Courtney last month.

I recorded in this column at the time that she had only one kidney and a small ulcer under her chin.

Since then I have prepared her

skull for its new life in the Australian Museum and was eager to investigate the damaged chin.

Holding the skull now I can see a round hole in the chin about the dimensions of an airgun pellet. Beside that hole is another cavity surrounded by porous bone.

One of the lower incisor teeth is missing and the other is chipped and broken. Both upper large incisors are broken.

Although it is tempting to blame the wound on a shooter the damage is more likely to result from an infection after a fall.

I'll take the skull to David Phalen at the Wildlife Health and Conservation Centre at Cobbitty for a professional opinion.

Report koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Isolation ends in cruel irony

3015/12

By Robert Close

MAC KOALA

IN NOVEMBER, 2009, I was invited by Ray Andrews to inspect his property at Canyonleigh where a healthy colony of koalas had developed in roughly the same time-frame as Campbelltown's population.

Canyonleigh is in the Southern Highlands about 15 kilometres west of Moss Vale and Ray showed me two koalas during a quick drive around his property. However, he usually sees more than that on the same day and often they are mothers and cubs.

In March this year, a sick koala was brought in from Canyonleigh to the Wildlife Health and Conservation Centre at Cobbitty suffering from chlamydia, a dreadful disease that afflicts koalas across the country.

Then Ray Williams contacted us to report that many of the koalas on his property had "wet bottoms" and he hadn't seen a cub for several months. The wet bottom is caused by incont-

ence, a continual leakage of urine from the bladder which is infected by the chlamydial bacteria which also infects the reproductive organs causing infertility.

So it appears koalas have a significant problem in the Southern Highlands. The rapid rate at which the koalas on Ray's property appear to have been affected may mean the Canyonleigh animals are particularly susceptible.

Studies of other koala populations show the proportion of affected animals varies significantly. This suggests the less affected populations have developed a degree of resistance. However, we have never seen koalas in Campbelltown with the clinical signs of chlamydia so it's unlikely they will have any degree of resistance. Tristan Lee's DNA studies have shown that Campbelltown's

koalas have been isolated in the past from the Southern Highlands animals but there is now a point of contact around the Appin-Bulli Road. So contact of the Campbelltown animals with chlamydia is inevitable but may take some time because the first koalas to storm the barricades will be young males. Unless they have acquired the bacterium from their mothers they are unlikely to carry it because they would not yet have mated with females, the usual mode of transmission.

On the other hand, Campbelltown's koalas need contact with other populations to restore the genetic variation that they have lost during their period of isolation. It is a cruel paradox that the genetic cure brings with it disease and suffering.

Report koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Trees near water favoured

By Robert Close

OUR studies have shown that dispersing koalas tend to follow the general direction of water courses.

This makes sense because the trees growing beside creeks are likely to have their roots in contact with the water table. Their leaves, therefore, may have more succulent leaves, which would be easier for the koala to crush and release the sugars, fats and proteins on which it depends for energy and growth.

Well-watered trees may also produce fewer toxins because they can cope with the loss of leaves by leaf-eating animals merely by producing more leaves.

Whatever the case, koalas moving north beside the Georges River eventually encounter difficulties near Liverpool.

So, on May 19 we received a pager call that a youngish koala was crossing Cambridge Road infamous for its river crossing) near Moorebank Road.

MAC KOALA

Then, on May 30, we received an identical report from a caller who has lived in the area 28 years without seeing another koala. Unfortunately no ear-tags were seen so we don't know whether there were one or two koalas.

Over the years we have received several sightings of koalas on Moorebank Road. We expect this will increase. Koalas moving along the western side of the river eventually encounter Liverpool station but there is some good potential habitat in Leacock Regional Park just south of the Casula Powerhouse Art Centre. Have residents heard bellowing?

Another linked pair of calls came from St Helens Park. The first was to report a mother and large, almost independent, joey in Potoroo Avenue. This joey is either early for the new dispersal season or late for the last. The following day a largish

koala was observed in the adjacent Dalkeith Place.

So it appears that a male has joined the party. Normally mating season does not start until August. Local residents might hear the bellowing that accompanies this event.

Price also appears to be very active in his territory in Smiths Creek, Leumeah.

One caller, Donna, had the fright of her life when she nearly ran him over in Carrington Circuit. Price, with his yellow and blue ear-tags, has often been reported in the streets near Smiths Creek.

Donna would like to see koala crossing signs erected on some roads where drivers go too fast. Research has shown that when vehicle speed is reduced koala road deaths decrease.

Report koala sightings on the UMS pager, 9962 9996.

Statue may have merit

13/6/12

By Robert Close

MAC KOALA

WHEN asked my opinion recently of Campbelltown councillor Sue Dobson's suggestion that Campbelltown should build a stylish "Big Koala" to foster tourism and koala research, I gave an initial negative response largely based on the fact that most "Big Things" are cringeworthy.

Certainly the two existing Big Koalas in Victoria appear tacky and anatomically incorrect.

However, the idea of a stylish Big Koala at Campbelltown needs a considered response because such a construction would certainly have both pros and cons.

Firstly, our koala population is relatively small and of low density. This means that tourists attracted by the statue would be disappointed to find there was little chance of them actually seeing a live koala in the bush. A small zoo would have to accompany the Visitor Centre and this would be very expensive and fraught with difficulties.

There are many towns on the main highway north of Sydney that have larger koala populations. Campbelltown's is not particularly special.

Bargo, in contrast, may have a stronger claim to fame because that was where the first koala was seen by white explorers in 1798, 10 years after white settlement.

Then Murrumbidgee and the Illawarra vie with each other for being the sites of the first koala captures in 1802-03. Campbelltown cannot even claim to have the only koala colony on or within the Sydney rim. We share that honour with Bargo and Wilton, and with Kurrajong, Colo Heights and Kuring-gai Chase.

The statue would probably draw attention away from Campbelltown's other major tourist attractions, such as the Australian Botanic Garden at Mount Annan, the Campbelltown Art Centre, historic buildings, and

the Georges and Nepean rivers. We already have a Visitor Centre - Quandong - that deals with these places and others of interest. A separate centre for koalas would be wasteful.

Building a properly designed statue would be very expensive, as would its long-term maintenance and management, with or without an accompanying zoo. This money would be better spent on more koala crossing signs on roads that are koala hotspots, and on funding to the Wildlife Health and Conservation Centre at Cobbitty where costs of treating injured Campbelltown koalas (and other native species) and research need special funding.

It's important to realise that Campbelltown's bushland is rich in species that don't receive the attention that koalas enjoy.

Report this sighting on the OHS page 0442 0000.

Courtney's death explained

20/06/12

By Robert Close

MAC KOALA

WORKING with the Spring Creek Streamcare group on Sunday morning at St Helens Park, I scanned the trees to see if a new female had moved into the bushland that for the past 10 years has been Courtney's home until she died in April.

Since then I have prepared her skull to add to the collection of more than 150 that will eventually be sent to the Australian Museum in Sydney.

I took the skull to vet David Phalen, of the Wildlife Health and Conservation Centre at Cobbitty, for inspection because I wanted confirmation that the wound in Courtney's chin and the corresponding hole in the lower jaw were not the result of an airgun slug.

Unfortunately, some years ago one of our tagged koalas was shot. On that occasion the slug didn't kill him but the wound

would have been painful. David confirmed that Courtney had had a badly infected lower jaw with the infection having penetrated deep into the bone.

The wound on the chin was from where the associated pus would have drained. Chewing tough eucalyptus leaves would have been terribly painful so Courtney's last weeks must have been hideous. It was no wonder that her stomach was empty when she died.

The original wound may have resulted from a fall or from a sharp twig driving into the gum.

■ Elsewhere, koalas have been quiet. The only call we got was from Willmot, which joins the eastern side of the ADI site at Penrith. This site has been controversial over the past few years because a large area of the

Cumberland Plain Woodland was threatened by housing development and koalas were rumoured to live there.

In fact, I was sent some faecal pellets for identification that had been collected illegally from the site by conservationists. The pellets were definitely from a koala so I have been expecting to hear reports of the actual animals as clearing continues.

The nearest recent verified sightings have been at Cranebrook, on the western side.

Back at Willmot the fire brigade was called to rescue the animal which turned out to be a large grey cat sitting on its tail.

It's amazing how many false alarms we've had over the years that have been grey cats.

Report koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Focus on at-risk species

27/6/12 see also p 4

By Robert Close

MAC KOALA

KENTLYN Public School has long been a favourite place for koalas – and I expect that a second generation of students has now learnt about koalas from those in the playground trees and by checking for pellets on the ground.

Current students learnt about another "vulnerable" species in similar fashion this week.

The second species was the gang-gang cockatoo and the students were treated to the antics of a family of four.

Gang-gangs are very accepting of humans when they are feeding and quiet observers may approach to within metres.

Mature males have a striking red head and wispy crest.

Juvenile males, like the one that visited the school (see photo on page 4) slowly develop the full red plumage.

Their distinctive calls sound like a rusty gate.

They spend summers in forests at higher altitudes but venture to

lower altitudes in winter. They nest in tree hollows that they have excavated themselves, and breeding season lasts from October to January.

The youngsters that visited the school appear to have been born out of season.

Such sightings should be reported to "Birds in Backyards" (www.birdsinbackyards.net/forum/Surveys-and-interesting-sightings) or to the NPWS Atlas of NSW Wildlife (www.environment.nsw.gov.au/wildlifeatlas/about.htm#contribute).

Both of those sites provide much information about wildlife. Another "vulnerable" parrot that appears in Campbelltown bushland is the glossy black cockatoo.

It looks like a red-tailed black cockatoo, but it's "critically endangered" and has declined in its southern distribution in NSW from near Sydney to rare sightings on the far north coast.

Any sighting near Campbelltown of a black cockatoo with a red tail is certain to be of a glossy black.

The Glossy Black Conservancy, a body dedicated to protecting the species, wants observers to record sightings at www.glossyblack.org.au/Submit_sightings.html.

Glossies feed almost entirely on the seeds of a few species of she-oaks. Around Campbelltown they appear to rely on forest she-oaks and black she-oaks.

Only certain individual trees are eaten so it's important to identify those trees so that they can be protected.

If the food species were planted widely across Campbelltown's gardens, the glossies would benefit.

She-oaks are also enjoyed by several other bird species.

Moreover, she-oaks fix nitrogen from the atmosphere so soils would become more fertile.

Report koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

We lose two at the weekend

By Robert Close

4/7/12
ITS 7am on Monday as I write this column to allow maximum time for the community to report weekend wildlife happenings but still give me time to meet the deadline for Wednesday's edition of the *Advertiser*.

My phone rings with a message from a WIRES member Cate Ryan, who has local responsibility for koalas, to say the male koala she had taken into care on the previous evening died at 3am.

The koala had first been reported on Saturday to be at the corner of Hansens and Moreton roads at Minto Heights.

It was a mature male and was allowing passers-by to touch it.

Such behaviour is unusual but the koala eventually climbed a tree and started eating the foliage so we decided to leave him where he was.

On Sunday afternoon callers reported the koala was on the

MAC KOALA

ground and approaching people who had stopped to investigate.

One of the callers kindly took the koala to Cate's house where she has an excellent holding facility. Cate found him dehydrated and administered fluids but to no avail.

She also saw his eyes were closed over, one hand was damaged and he had a curious white, crusty material on his forearms.

Our great fear is that he had chlamydia which affects the eyes and uro-genital system.

However, his bottom was dry so it appears he didn't have the most common and serious form of the disease.

A post-mortem examination will be required so I will take the body across to the Wildlife Conservation and Health Centre at Cobbitty.

This centre featured in last

week's *Advertiser* and I can't emphasise enough how important it is for us to have access to its facilities and first-rate staff to resolve problems such as this.

People wishing to help in the survival of Campbelltown's koalas could do no better than financially support the centre.

Another koala death was reported at the weekend, this time at Katanna Road at Wedderburn.

This koala was only the size of a fist and should still have been in its mother's pouch. It had no obvious wounds.

Sometimes a mother will discard her joey if it is not thriving. Perhaps the mother was young and had been unable to find an unoccupied home range with sufficient nutrients to support herself and the rapidly growing joey.

Report koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Skin disease can devastate

11/7/12

By Robert Close

LAST week a sick koala (pictured) from Minto Heights died overnight and we took the body to the Wildlife Health and Conservation Centre at Cobbitty for a post-mortem examination.

The koala had some kind of skin condition that affected its eyes and caused lesions on its face and arms.

The centre determined the condition was mange, a skin disease caused by a tiny mite that burrows into the skin to lay its eggs.

This causes a strong immune response which is intensely itchy.

Layers of dandruff build up and the skin thickens and cracks.

Our koala had reached that stage with lesions on the face and hands. His eyes were particularly affected.

Mange is occasionally seen in wild koalas but is more common in wildlife parks where it's transmitted from wombats.

MAC KOALA



Picture: Bob Etchells

The disease is seriously affecting wild wombats because the mite can survive for some weeks in their burrows.

How our koala became infected is a mystery because we have not seen infected koalas at Campbelltown before.

However, we have seen a healthy wombat in Ruse and one with mange at Wedderburn, so our koala may have entered a

burrow or cave where a wombat had left some mites.

Previously we had found one of our radio-collared koalas in a small cave on a hot day so we know that method is possible.

As the koala population increases, the incidence of mange is also likely to increase.

This expansion is evident from the following spread of reports received by the pager this week.

There was a koala beside the community hall at Sandy Point, and a roadkill on the Princes Highway at Heathcote.

Then a policeman nudged a koala on Picton Road at Wilton and returned during daylight to ensure it had survived.

Closer to home at Wedderburn there were two sightings at the Gorge, and another at the corner of Kenwood and Minerva roads while at Ruse a koala was seen beside Old Kerit Road.

Please report koala sightings on the UWS pager 9962 9996.

Columns

Advertiser

Will airport threaten wildlife?

18/7/12

By Robert Close

MAC KOALA

THERE have been two reported sightings of koalas in the Wilton area this last month.

This raises several questions about the size and health of the local koala population, whether the construction of Sydney's second airport would have a major effect on that and what are the responsibilities of the federal government given the recent classification of the koala in Queensland and NSW as vulnerable.

The likely location of the Wilton airport, were it to go ahead, is provided in the report of the *Joint Study on Aviation Capacity for the Sydney Region* presented to the federal and state governments in March.

This map can be seen on page 397 of volume five of the technical papers, at infrastructure.gov.au/aviation/sydney_av_cap/index.aspx.

It shows the airport would lie

immediately south of Wilton between the Cordeaux and Cataract-Wallandoola rivers. The site also provides information on other airport options.

One of our recent sightings, on the Picton Road, was in the middle of the proposed airport site and the other was also on Picton Road, beside Allens Creek, about three kilometres north of the site.

Allens Creek rises in the proposed site and flows through Wilton on its way to Cataract River.

This creek is likely to be a pathway for young koalas moving between the Cordeaux and Cataract River catchments.

The Australian Koala Foundation, which provides maps of koala sightings to the public, has several records of koala sightings near Wilton.

Five are on the proposed site

and a further six are within two kilometres.

Our own database includes several older sightings near Wilton. Four of these were on or near the site, while seven were three kilometres north-east, next to Broughton Pass on the Wilton Road and indicating the animals are following the Cataract River.

Moreover, the road is very hazardous and drivers must slow down considerably so they have time to identify the animals.

The same phenomenon occurs in Campbelltown at the Wedderburn Gorge where the number of sightings is now very large.

We need more koala sightings to determine the extent of the Wilton breeding area.

This year's joeys should be appearing out of the pouch soon, so people in the Wilton area should look out for them and if possible take a photo.

Please report any sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Sad end for a joey's mum

25/7/12

By Robert Close

MAC KOALA

THE first of the last season's koala joeys are now appearing on their mother's backs after six to seven months in the pouch.

For most of the joeys it's a magic time as they learn to recognise the tastes and smells of different tree species and begin to explore their surroundings.

They also learn to climb and jump with their mothers close by to supervise.

For one joey at St Helens Park, however, life has been a battle.

He was seen on his mother's back, walking beside a road in the bush and the observer, Margaret, felt that something was not right with them.

By the time I arrived, mother and joey were high in a grey gum and I could see no signs of injury so we resolved to leave them despite the distant call of a potential predator, the powerful owl.

Next morning Margaret rang to

say that the joey was still in the grey gum but the mother was gone.

When I and WIRES member Cate Ryan arrived, however, Margaret had found the mother dead on the ground and was nursing the joey which had climbed down the tree seeking comfort.

We were able to express a drop or two from the dead mother's teat but the milk gland was small and the joey was unlikely to have had a good feed for some time.

The mother's fur was knotted and unkempt and she had a huge swelling under her neck.

When we took the body to the Wildlife Health and Conservation Centre at Cobbitty, the post-mortem examination showed that the swelling was a huge tumour (lymphosarcoma) that was not only on the neck but

also in the body cavity. The poor animal would have been suffering severely but still managed to climb a tree with her joey on her back.

The joey is now in care but will be very weak and vulnerable.

Caring for it will not be easy.

■ Elsewhere koala sightings have been many and widespread.

Two calls, in fact, have come in while I've been writing this column, one from Menai and the other, a roadkill report, from Picton Road near Wilton.

In previous days there have been sightings from St Helens Park Drive; Wedderburn Gorge; O'Hares Road, Wedderburn; Cook Reserve, Ruse; Riverview Road, Kentlyn; Minto Heights and a mother and joey from Old Kent Road, Ruse.

Motorists all around Campbelltown should be on the lookout.

Report koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

1/8/12 1/8/12
Koalas can't eat all gumleaves

By Robert Glaze

CARL Ryan, of WRES, is hand-rearing the joey whose mother died last week of cancer (see story on page 6).

The joey is sucking but is also starting to nibble on leaves.

Care worker Ben Moran, a new recruit at WRES and an expert on koala diet, explains whether she should feed the joey on red-tipped eucalypt leaves. He said: "It's been suggested young red tips are toxic for possums but I'm not aware of any scientific evidence that animals have actually been injured."

Young leaves are softer and often more nutritious but also do contain more toxins than older leaves. However, there's probably nothing in them that doesn't occur in the older leaves, too, albeit in smaller quantities.

"At any rate, it's not these chemicals that cause the tips to

MAC KOALA

be red. Koalas usually learn for themselves what's toxic - nothing in the leaves is going to harm them permanently. They learn by sampling. If there are good nutrients and no toxins in a leaf, then they'll know that when they next encounter one with the same smell and taste it's OK.

"If the leaves contain toxins, the animals will feel nauseous after eating and will thereafter avoid leaves with the same smell and flavour. It's the same with us - if we get food poisoning, we'll go off the flavour of the offending food for a period. Baby koalas also learn what to eat by watching and tasting what their mothers are eating."

"In the case of this particular joey it's probably best to play it safe. This joey can't learn from his mother and is not eating

enough leaves to sustain him so it's best to avoid exposing him to unpleasant dietary experiences.

"When I've had fuzzy eaters I've offered them as much variety as possible. Not only several species but also several individual trees of those species as well. Often one grey gum can be very appealing to a koala, while another growing beside it contains toxins the koala won't enjoy."

"The koalas can tell the difference but we can't - without chemical analysis."

"Make a note of which trees you take leaves from to learn which are reliable trees for feeding to koalas and which aren't. If you're worried about the young tips offer him only small amounts along with older leaves from the same tree."

Report koala sightings on the QWS page, 9982 9986.

Meet Bangor, our new find

By Robert Close

8/8/12

MAC KOALA

WE WERE quite surprised when the call came in that there was a koala at Chester Hill.

However, when Kieran from our capture team investigated, he learned that a motorist near the Bangor Bypass and the New Illawarra Road had rescued a koala from the traffic by wrapping it in a coat and taking it to his home at Chester Hill.

It was quite a brave act because had the koala escaped from the coat during transit there could have been severe problems.

Such a difficulty arose some years ago at Pheasants Nest when a police car stopped to rescue an unconscious koala.

Unfortunately for the police the koala came to in the back of the car and proceeded to wreak havoc.

Back at Chester Hill, however, Kieran discovered a healthy

young male koala, probably the same one that had been reported from Hill Road, Menai, five days earlier.

This animal weighed 8kg and would have been in the exploratory phase of his life. The problem was to find a suitable place to release him.

Returning him to Menai would have been dangerous because of the traffic and the limitations to his movement. Our research findings have shown young male koalas are capable of rapid journeys of many kilometres in unfamiliar territory. So we could release him anywhere within 20 kilometres or so of his capture site and there would be no ill effects on the general koala population.

So knowing also that the Georges River is a transit route for young male koalas we

released him, freshly named "Bangor" and ear-tagged with his unique colour system by the river at Kentlyn. It will be interesting to discover where he turns up next.

Our bet is that Bangor will be seen next at Wedderburn Gorge from where there have been several sightings of koalas over the last two weeks on both sides of the causeway.

This site has its resident females but most sightings are of young animals dispersing.

Koalas moving south along the river from Kentlyn have to cross Wedderburn Road at some point.

There have also been several sightings from O'Hares Road. In this case we expect the animals are residents.

If so, there should be some spirited bellowing there in the next few weeks as mating season begins.

Report koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Many sightings reported

15/8/12

Aug.

By Robert Close

MAC KOALA

OVER the past two weeks we have had several koala sightings.

They were at Wedderburn Gorge, again, high up on the Campbelltown side; O'Hares Road, Wedderburn, again; Appin Road, Appin, again; Georges River Road, Kentlyn (sitting in the middle of the road); and in Smiths Creek Reserve near Leichhardt Street, Ruse, opposite the recycling depot on Junction Road.

The last caller, on August 8, reported that this was the first koala she had seen despite having walked regularly in Smiths Creek for the past 32 years.

It was a similar story for most of the callers reporting their recent sightings and is an indication of the increasing numbers of local koalas.

When another caller reported a koala in Kembala Crescent, Ruse,

just across busy Junction Road from the previous sighting, we expected it to be the same animal.

However, the Kembala koala had eartags that identified her as Liz, a long-time resident of suburban Ruse.

Our database shows she was first captured on December 8, 2008, along with her joey, Greg, beside Darling Avenue, Ruse.

Since then, she and her subsequent joey Jimmy have been regular visitors to gardens in Ruse but lately she seems to have taken up more permanent residence in Cook Reserve.

This reserve is important for suburban koalas because it links with James Ruse Park and Smiths Creek Reserve and allows movement of koalas across Ruse from Kentlyn to Leumeah.

I suspect it was not Liz that

was seen on August 8 in Leichhardt Street. If it was a male, one of the two is likely to try to cross Junction Road shortly.

The breeding season is now under way and female koalas will be responding to the calls of male koalas and assessing their worthiness by the strength and volume of their bellows.

People who live close to Smiths Creek or any Campbelltown reserves that follow creek-lines may hear these distinctive bellows.

The best times to listen are at about 10pm on still, clear nights when there is a temperature inversion.

Under those conditions the sound can travel 500 metres or more.

Report koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Cramar's a tough fellow

22/8/12

By Robert Close

MAC KOALA

A YOUNG male koala was killed last week on the Picton Road, east of Wilton, in the same place where another koala was killed last month.

The road at this site has a concrete mid-line barrier which is a death trap for all animals trying to cross.

That two koalas were killed so close together in time and place is further evidence of a breeding area near the proposed site of the airport at Wilton.

Another sighting was reported from Fullerton Crescent, St Helens Park where council workers spotted a tagged koala close to the road.

The ear tags identified the koala as Cramar, a mature male that we captured in January 2007 as a three-year-old near the bus stop at the corner of Woodland Road and St Helens Park Drive.

So Cramar is now eight years old and should be in his prime.

Since his first capture he has been reported four times in 2007, six times in 2008, four times in 2009, once in 2011 after he'd been hit by a car and escaped with bruising, and twice in 2012.

All but the last two were beside Ironside Avenue which overlooks Spring Creek.

The reporters were residents of the avenue, Robert Zollia and Jeff Hunter, who know the trees that Cramar prefers to browse and drowse in.

The final two sightings were in Fullerton Crescent which is adjacent to Ironside Avenue and also overlooks Spring Creek.

In the first of these sightings, in early May, Cramar was low in the tree and did not look robust.

We were fearful that he was not

well and had been pushed out of his favourite haunts beside Ironside Avenue by younger, fitter males.

However, Cramar is now looking fit and has an excellent coat (sick koalas tend to look brown whereas healthy ones are ash-grey).

Our records show that when the Wildlife Health and Conservation Centre at Cobbitty X-rayed Cramar after his injury in 2011, the vets discovered he had survived a previous injury that had broken a hip. So life for a male koala can be hazardous.

Residents of Ironside Avenue and Fullerton Crescent should be able to hear Cramar and his challengers bellowing across Spring Creek.

Report koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

It's a weird, weird world

29/8/12

By Robert Close

OVER the years we've received a fascinating collection of calls about wildlife – most useful, some funny and some sad.

Coral Avenue, which runs off Georges River Road at Kentlyn, has had more than its share of unusual stories. Among them: 1) a man shooting cockatoos; 2) a greater glider (a rare sighting near Campbelltown) entangled in barbed wire; and 3) a long-term radio-collared female koala, Lyn, found dead in a shed owned by the cockatoo man, side by side with a dead fox.

We doubt there was anything sinister about Lyn's death. She was old.

Nevertheless, Coral Avenue maintained its reputation when we were notified recently that a fully antlered red deer stag was trotting along Georges River Road towards it.

Another puzzling report came

MAC KOALA

recently from bushwalkers at Freres Crossing, Kentlyn. They had found the body of a female koala from which the head had been sheared off and was missing. There were no other clues about this bizarre incident.

The bushwalkers knew that I prepare for the Australian Museum the skulls of most of the koalas that die and wondered whether I had discarded the bodies in the bush.

We were able to reassure them that all bodies are buried in a safe place.

Eventually the skeletons are examined to see how many of the koalas had suffered and survived broken limbs.

A third recent unusual report was from a truckie on the Newell Highway near Moree. He was stopped beside a koala in a landscape almost devoid of

trees. He wanted to know what he should do for the koala. I advised him to leave it. Koalas are capable of considerable journeys even in places where trees are scarce. This ability allows koalas to recolonise areas after events such as fire and drought.

Two other reports this week were less dramatic. One was a young koala crossing Georges River Road and the other was from Long Point where a female koala appeared with a joey on its back. This is the first report of a breeding female on Long Point and is the most northerly sighting of a mother and joey.

This is further evidence that the Campbelltown koala population is expanding.

Simmos Beach is the next site where we predict breeding koalas will be sighted.

Report koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Columns

Advertiser

5/9/12

Cramar may be on patrol

By Robert Close

CRAMAR'S adventures continued last week as he moved from Fullerton Crescent to the drive of St Helens Park House.

Photographs taken of him there (at right) clearly show the colour of his ear-tags.

Even the number on each tag is visible. Also clearly visible is the pattern of pink skin on Cramar's otherwise black nose-pad.

These patterns differ from animal to animal and can be used to help identify koalas if they don't have tags.

Hopefully, he is just patrolling his home range.

If so, he'll probably return to the bushland of Spring Creek.

If not, he's probably been pushed out of Spring Creek by a younger, fitter male.

If that's the case we hope he'll settle down to retirement in the garden of St Helen's Park House.

■ Meanwhile in Leumeah, the mature male, Price, visited home

MAC KOALA



gardens near Leumeah High School, while in the grounds of the high school itself an untagged koala was being

attacked by ravens. Yet two weeks ago in this column we reported that Price appeared to be courting our tagged female, Liz, near Cook Reserve one kilometre south of the high school.

Drivers on Junction Road should therefore keep a watch out for love-struck koalas whose minds may not be on avoiding traffic.

■ Last week we discussed the discovery of the northern-most breeding female beside the Georges River at Long Point.

This week one of our regular callers to the pager photographed a female koala with a joey on its back beside the archery range on Lysaght Road, Wedderburn.

This is our southern-most

breeding female in the Campbelltown koala population.

These sightings are consistent with our hypothesis that the koala population is expanding.

We predict that eventually we will have breeding females in continuous home ranges from Liverpool to Appin.

■ Other koala sightings were reported from Minto Heights (two independent sightings) and Wedderburn Gorge, but the most exciting call was to report a live platypus in the Georges River about midway between the sites where two dead, male platypuses were discovered recently.

How fantastic it would be if these marvellous mammals could be reliably observed in the same areas where the koalas are found.

For a video of a swimming koala see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ofYGIAbAHRE&sns=em>.

Report koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Columns

Advertiser

Platypus has moved in

By Robert Close

IT'S been a busy week for wildlife around Campbelltown.

First the good news: another sighting of a five platypus was reported in the same part of the Georges River where one was observed the previous week.

The site was a large pool with banks suitable for tunnels and with fringing vegetation to conceal the tunnel's entrance.

These observations suggest that the platypus is a resident and not just a youngster passing through.

Anyone walking beside the river should keep an eye out for these fantastic animals and, if successful, notify us by pager immediately.

More good news came from Minto Heights where the caller reported a koala sighting.

She mentioned, in passing, that she had seen an ear-tagged koala in the same area six months earlier and asked if I

MAC KOALA

would like to see a photograph of it. You bet I would!

The photo clearly showed the colour of both ear tags while the oily stain in its otherwise snow-white chest proved it was a male.

The koala was Lance who was captured as a juvenile in suburban Ingleburn in August 2009 and released beside the adjacent section of the Georges River.

In the intervening 2½ years he has moved only 1.5 kilometres upstream where we assume he has established a home range.

Such sightings of tagged animals are valuable for what they tell us about dispersal of young males, movement corridors and how koalas choose their home ranges.

Other sightings were in the grounds of Kentlyn Primary School (mother and joey), at the Georges River Road and Darling

Avenue corner, Hodgson Place, Wedderburn, and on Appin Road near the Rosemeadow roundabout.

Bad news, however, came from further along Appin Road where a motorist hit a koala.

The animal managed to move off the road but we don't know any more.

Two other road collisions were reported, one from near the Bargo exit on the Hume Highway, and the other from Picton Road, near Wilton.

Several kills have been reported from the former site over the years while the latter has had three kills in the past two months.

The third piece of bad news came from Boronia Road, Kentlyn where dogs killed a female koala.

Such deaths are tragedies because they are preventable.

Report koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

12/9/12

Columns

Advertiser

Breeding group at Wilton?

19/9/12
By Robert Close

LAST week I mentioned that a third koala, a female, had been killed near Wilton.

I have since learnt that a dead joey was found near the female.

It therefore appears likely that a breeding group of koalas lives in the Wilton area.

This conclusion will be important for any environmental reports required if planning for Sydney's second airport continues near Wilton.

■ Meanwhile, closer to home at O'Hares Road, Wedderburn, Ted Lalor, who has been reporting koalas over many years, noticed a young male koala that had spent the last few days with its mother overlooking his property.

Last Friday he noticed that the mother had disappeared but the younger animal was on the ground and not fully mobile.

Ted was able to manoeuvre the koala into a small cage then

MAC KOALA

called me. I took the koala to the Wildlife Centre at Cobbitty where the vet, Jane, inspected it.

The koala weighed 5.5kg, indicating that he was two years old.

Puncture and saliva marks on his backside, and another small wound on his flank, indicated he had been attacked by a dog.

There was some bruising but fortunately the wounds were not deep.

Jane administered some long-lasting antibiotics and considered the koala should survive.

We held him overnight and checked that he could climb and eat well before release.

Accompanying me on the release was New Zealand artist, Michel Tuffery and his family.

Michel is working on a project in Airds and was delighted to assist in attaching the koala's ear-tags and to see the koala,

now named Ted, close-up.

Most koalas leave their mothers when they are only one year old but Queensland researchers have shown that koalas that stay with their mothers for a second year have a higher survival rate.

Young koalas presumably learn more survival tricks the longer they stay with their mothers.

So choosing a suitable release site was difficult.

If we released him back near his mother we risked another dog attack, but if we moved him from his familiar surroundings and his mother, we might disorientate him.

Moreover, it is very difficult to find a place where cars or dogs are not a danger.

We decided on the former option and Ted is free once more.

We hope people will see him and report his movements.

Report koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Columns

Advertiser

Just leave them alone

29/9/12

By Robert Close

ON Wednesday there were two untagged koalas on the bush-land edge of Airds, an old male in Woolwash Road, and a younger animal about 750 metres south in Dalkeith Place.

Their arrival was apparently due to fires near the Georges River. I checked both koalas and decided to leave them where they were.

Next morning at 7am I received a report that a small koala had been in a tree in the car park between the Airds pub and shopping centre since midnight.

If it was the Dalkeith koala it must have moved 1.2 kilometres through Airds in just a few hours.

Alternatively it was a third koala that had moved 150m from Smiths Creek, or 500m from the Georges River.

On assessing the situation I decided to leave the koala where it was.

MAC KOALA

Catching a koala can be stressful and they sometimes jump during capture attempts.

A fall on to the bitumen car park could have been serious.

Moreover, placing it in unfamiliar surroundings following capture may have been detrimental.

The caller, however, feared that students arriving for school would torment the koala.

Unfortunately, he was correct.

The koala climbed down to a point where it was visible and some students, oblivious to the potential penalties and to the enormity of their actions, threw stones at it.

The police were called and also the new mayor, Sue Dobson, two council officers and the local press.

I joined the throng and found the koala had climbed high in the tree and out of range.

My advice was the same as before, however, in the afternoon a new group of students arrived and the RSPCA and the fire brigade were called.

I returned to find a cherry picker ready to go and a crowd of spectators waiting.

We soon had the koala captured, weighed, measured and released by the Georges River.

So an apparently successful outcome was achieved.

However, some weeks we receive 10 or more koala sightings and we cannot call the cherry picker, RSPCA, council, police and WIRES every time to save a koala from attack.

We have to live with the koalas and, as a community, respond to people who abuse them. The koalas are part of Campbelltown and can survive remarkably well in suburbia when left alone.

Report koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Columns

Advertiser

Bangor travelled long way

By Robert Close

On July 28, a young male koala was collected by a moboys from a power pole beside the Bangor bypass near the Old Jaffara Road, Merri and taken home to Warragrove.

We were notified and Gordon from our koala team retrieved it. The koala, now named Bangor, appeared to be unscathed and ready for freedom but we were unsure where to release it.

The Bangor bypass was too dangerous, so we carried Bangor and released him at Heathcote where we knew at least the habitat was suitable.

Sadly, Bangor was killed by a car on September 20 on Garvan Avenue, Heathcote.

In a mere 64 days, Bangor had travelled 16 kilometres, as the drive takes, and crossed Georges and Worong rivers on the way. That's 250 metres each night, a mighty feat considering that he still had to eat enough each day to power his travelling.

MACARTHUR

It's tempting to think that he was familiar with the country and could somehow remember usual routes to go to.

Bangor was a rakemon Garvan Avenue when he died. A local resident photographed another live koala there at the same time.

We received a report this week of a koala on the other side of the Princes Highway in East Heathcote.

National Parks and Wildlife Service officers have also reported other sightings from around the Royal National Park. All these sightings indicate either a coastal population is building up or that Bangor is not the only Campbelltown animal to cross the Hoksborough Range.

The Princes Highway takes a high route to the toll.

So do the G6 and Heathcote, and Alpin roads, all of which

claim to be the only male koalas this year.

Like koalas, we need this week of Georges River, Merri, Oldm and Peter Macarthur roads.

Despite the relatively high densities of koala found beside these roads, there are few reported road kills.

We consider the lower speed limits on these latter three roads than on the former three allow motorists to avoid collisions.

Two other koala sightings were seen near or in Smiths Creek Reserve and one dead, untagged, male koala was found in bushland on Katalla Place, Airds.

The body was too decomposed to determine the cause of death.

Fortunately, Dobson (or "Dobbo" for short) the koala rescued from the Airds car park last week, and named in honour of our new mayor's first mayoral duty, has stayed out of trouble.

Report koala sightings on the UWS page 9962 9996.

Note:

No column published on this date

Campbelltown Macarthur Advertiser, Wednesday, October 10, 2012

Columns

Advertiser

McAd. 17/10/12

Hard to catch mum, joey

By Robert Close

FOLLOWING the dramatic capture of the female koala "Dobbo" last month, which involved police, council, fire brigade, RSPCA and UWS, another female koala, with a joey, turned up in Airds.

Again, there were reports of stone throwing and, again, the fire brigade was called.

Stone-throwing, of course, is a police matter and carries heavy penalties.

We advised, however, that the pair appeared to be safe in a tree and should be left alone.

Catching koalas, particularly those with large joeys, is hazardous because the inexperienced joeys tend to panic and attempt dangerous leaps.

This is dangerous enough in the bush but in built-up areas a fall onto concrete could be fatal.

Moreover, the catchers would have to be sure that they could

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catch both mother and cub if they were hoping to translocate them to a safer spot.

However, the joey might climb up to the upper foliage where capture would be both difficult and hazardous.

Alternatively they might capture the joey but the mother might refuse to descend.

The catchers would then have to release the joey and hope that the pair would reunite.

More than likely these activities would be watched by a large, excited group of onlookers which would tend to distract the koalas from responding to the flag.

A crowd also makes conditions tense for the catching team. Imagine the reaction from the crowd if the joey should jump and injure itself!

We have been advising for some time that there are now too

many koalas for us to move all that enter suburbia.

For example, this was the fifth koala reported in suburban Airds in the past month.

Also in the past two weeks, we have had six sightings from Wedderburn. Sadly, one was of a young male killed by a car on the Wedderburn causeway.

Two koalas were also reported from Appin Road one of which was killed in the spotted gum forest along Appin Road.

On a brighter note an ear-tagged mother with its joey were reported from Kembla Reserve in Ruse.

We think that the mother was "Liz" who has been living in suburban Ruse for four years.

A bit further afield, a report came in from WIRES of a koala sighting from Bullaburra near Katoomba in the Blue Mountains, the first from this area.

Report koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Columns

Advertiser

GPS shows their journey

24/10/12

By Robert Close

MAC KOALA

MOST of our radio-tracking of koalas around Campbelltown has relied on radio transmitters attached to collars worn by the animal.

The transmitters emit signals that we detect every week or two by walking around the bush with a small receiver.

Problems arise, however, if the koala moves beyond the range of the transmitter.

With a fresh battery and optimal conditions, the signal can be detected over a distance of three kilometres.

However, the effective range of the signal can be reduced by factors such as thick, intervening foliage, deep gullies and big trees.

If we lose the signal we then have to search in ever-increasing circles from the most recent sighting to try to re-establish contact.

Male koalas are generally more difficult to track than females because they travel further.

Consequently our radio-collar research has concentrated on females.

For information on males we have relied mostly on ear tag sightings by the community.

This technique has been quite successful and in the past two months I have reported, in this column, sightings of Cramar and Price, long-term male residents of Spring Creek and Smiths Creek, respectively, and Bangor, who made it across Holsworthy firing range only to be hit by a car near the Princes Highway.

Great advances have been made in the past few years in radio-collar technology such that we can now add to the collar a satellite device that beams the koala's position at regular inter-

vals back to our computer so we always know approximately where the animal is.

We then use the conventional transmitter with its three-kilometre range to find the actual animal.

In addition, the collar carries a GPS device which stores in the collar more precise locations at much shorter intervals so that when we eventually recover the collar we can see fine details of the animal's movements.

These collars are much more expensive than the original ones but we have one available and plan to fit it on Price so that we can follow his movements.

Unfortunately, we've not had any reports of him in the last month so I am making a special appeal for people near Smiths Creek and Leumeah High School to watch out for a large, ear-tagged koala.

Report koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Mums on move with joeys

31/10/12

By Robert Close

AS expected for the last two weeks of October, the busiest time in the Campbelltown bushland calendar, there were sightings of koalas, often with large joeys on their backs, across the district.

Georges River Road was popular, with large untagged koalas seen beside it near Freres Crossing and Darling Avenue, respectively, while a mother and joey were seen near the Riverview Road corner.

Four days later a single koala was also seen in Riverview Road.

Not far away in Old Kent Road, another mother and joey were observed on two occasions near Kembla Reserve.

The observers could not see eartags but we suspect that the female is Liz, a koala well-known to Ruse residents.

She was originally tagged in

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Darling Avenue but has been living since in Kembla and Cook reserves.

The joey was beginning to move separately from its mother and may soon be off on its own.

If past movements of young, dispersing koalas indicate the path this joey will take, it will move slowly southwards between the Georges River, Riverside Drive and Greengate Road, with an occasional venture into suburban Airds.

Another mother and joey pair was seen in this area off Dalkeith Place and a lone koala was a little further south near Rangers Road, St Helens Park.

Still further south, an untagged, large koala was seen moving along Minerva Road near the monastery in broad daylight.

We've had several recent

reports of koalas near the monastery so it appears that a permanent home-range has been established.

Drivers should be particularly careful in this area.

As usual at this time of year, when young, inexperienced koalas are moving into unfamiliar territory, we see the highest frequency of koala road deaths.

The Hume Highway is particularly dangerous and this week a young male was killed at Yerrinboot, just north of Mittagong.

It is important that we record and map these hotspots so that steps can be taken, such as the erection of suitable fencing, to direct koalas and other wildlife through culverts and under bridges rather than have them try to cross the highway.

Report koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Columns

Advertiser

Service open all hours

By Robert Close

WHEN friends came for an evening meal last Tuesday, I should have turned off my koala pager.

Any calls would then be dealt with by other members of our koala team, Lynn Bowden and Kieran Griffin, who are also on the pager link.

We had already received three pager calls that day – one about a mother and joey in Denison Street, Ruse, one from Riverside Drive, Airds and one of a koala up a power pole in Darwin Road, near Smiths Creek.

So dinner was slightly disturbed by the pager at 8pm reporting a koala at 273 Junction Road. The caller gave no contact details so we resumed our dinner.

However, the pager rang 30 minutes later to report a koala in danger at the corner of Junction and Georges River roads.

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Simultaneously the phone of one of our guests rang, with the caller wanting to know what to do about a koala on Junction Road.

Our guest was able to reassure the caller that the matter was being monitored.

At that stage I contacted team members Lynn and Kieran to see if they could check the koala and Lynn obliged. Unfortunately she was unable to find the koala or contact the callers.

The story didn't end there.

Two days later, Robin from Capertee Street, Ruse rang to report a koala in her backyard.

This address is close to Junction Road and the koala was probably the same one that had disturbed our dinner.

Robin feared the koala was in grave danger from a dog next door on one side and a swim-

ming pool on the other so Robin and captured the koala who turned out to be extremely docile.

Now named Daphne she seemed in excellent condition, and I released her beside the Georges River adjacent to Botany Place.

A few days later, a single koala was seen in adjacent Acacia Avenue and the following day koalas were seen in Botany Place.

So we hope that Daphne was the smaller and her mother or suitor was the larger.

Another mother/joey duo was reported from Bellbird Lane Wedderburn, and a flurry of calls came from Fiveash Street, the Carandini Street, St Helens Park where a young koala was rescued by residents and released in bushland nearby.

Report koala sightings on UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Sightings on Old Kent Road

14/11/12

By Robert Close

OLD Kent Road is an important path for Campbelltown koalas.

From Kentlyn Primary School and the Russian Retirement Village in the east, the path passes the start of the Peter Meadows Creek and Darling Avenue fire trails, then continues along the tree-planted median strip past James Ruse Park, Stromlo and Cook reserves to meet Junction Road, and Worrell Reserve in the west.

On October 18, a caller reported that a koala accompanied by a large joey, was outside 76 Old Kent Road.

Four days later the same pair was walking down the road outside number 39.

Then on November 7, a caller reported that a koala, in his backyard at number 27, was trapped inside a Colorbond fence and in danger from dogs and swimming pool.

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We were able to catch the koala easily, then fitted it with ear-tags and named her Alexis – after the daughter of the caller.

The koala weighed a healthy six kilograms but had no joey in the pouch.

We assume that she was the large joey seen with its mother on October 18 and 22.

However, it's also possible that on those dates she was in the company of an admiring male.

As mature females weigh 6-8 kilograms, Alexis would have been almost as big as her mother.

So another possibility is that a different mother and cub were seen in Old Kent Road in October.

Most koalas separate from their joeys after a year but some hang around for a second year. I suspect that Alexis is in the latter category, as was the koala (Daphne) that we captured in

nearby Capertee Street and described in last week's column.

Joeys that stay with their mothers for an extra year survive better (according to studies in Queensland) than those that leave earlier.

However, raising a succession of late leavers may reduce the overall number of joeys that a female can raise in her lifetime.

Several deaths were reported during the week: a young koala on the highway near the Picton turn-off; a long dead one on a bush track near the Wedderburn airstrip, and yet another roadkill on the Princes Highway near Heathcote.

On a happier note, mothers with cubs were seen in Bellbird Lane, Wedderburn, and Boonoke Place, Airds, while a single koala was rescued from the play area of the Sutton Forest truck-stop restaurant.

Report koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Good health hopeful sign

21/11/12

By Robert Close

IT IS very confusing for people when they see on TV and in the newspapers that koalas are in danger of extinction; yet at Campbelltown we have a koala population that is expanding.

The clue to this conundrum is that in 20 years of study we have never seen a koala showing the clinical signs of being infected with Chlamydia, a bacterium that affects the eyes, the reproductive organs and the urinary system.

The disease causes intense pain, infertility and death. If it breaks out in Campbelltown our koala population would be at risk.

Once a koala is infected, treatment is feasible only if the disease has not taken too firm a grip.

Even then, the treatment lasts several weeks and the koala must be held in captivity throughout.

The cost of care and treatment is therefore enormous.

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Fortunately the Wildlife Health and Conservation Centre at Cobbitty and its director, David Phalen, are dedicated to caring for and researching our local wildlife.

Professor Phalen will be talking tonight (Wednesday) at 7.30 at the Campbelltown Art Centre about koalas – *What is the fuss. Are they endangered or what?*

■ Elsewhere in Campbelltown, koalas continue to be active.

Two koalas were seen at Kentlyn Primary School and individuals were also seen beside Georges River Road, a kilometre or so to the south and north of the school.

Another was seen at the corner of Moorebank and Cambridge avenues, Moorebank.

We've had several koalas turn up here as they follow the Georges River northwards.

Then we had another sighting in

Wedderburn Gorge, presumably of a young koala following the Georges River southwards.

It's always exciting to find an ear-tagged animal, and we were delighted to hear from a resident of Kembula Crescent, Ruse, (who knows her local koalas better than I do), that Janice was in the adjacent Stromlo Reserve with a large joey.

Janice was tagged in November 2002 and is the daughter of Irene who lived a kilometre to the south, opposite Botany Place beside Georges River Road.

Janice would be 11 years old now and it's great to see that she's still reproducing well.

Stromlo Reserve is just around the corner from where we captured Alexis last week, so the area continues to be effective for koala reproduction despite the dogs and cars.

Report koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Ashton another road victim

28/11/12

By Robert Close

ALTHOUGH our pager system runs 24 hours a day, seven days a week, we don't often receive early morning calls.

One came through this week, however, at 4am when Tim Robinson, from Appin, reported that he'd picked up a koala from the Appin-Campbelltown Road at the southern end of the spotted gum forest.

This was the same place where another koala died last month.

Tim was able to deliver the koala to my home and we gave it a cursory examination.

It was a four-kilogram male, one year old, and would have been just weaned by its mother.

It was very subdued but could move its head and forearms so we hoped for the best.

Tim exercised naming rights and named the koala "Ashton" after his son.

The name is apt because the koala's scientific name is *Phascolarctos cinereus*, which

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means "ashy-coloured pouched bear".

The koala, of course, is not a bear, but early biologists tended to name newly discovered species according to similarities with familiar species.

Hence the thylacine was likened to a wolf or a tiger and the rock wallaby's scientific name, *Petrogale*, means "rock weasel".

I took Ashton to the Wildlife Health and Conservation Centre at Cobbitty, where he was examined more closely.

He was unable to move one hind leg and the vet, Jane, was worried. To check the trouble was not just severe soft tissue damage, Ashton was X-rayed.

Unfortunately, the films showed that he had a fractured vertebra and further treatment was not feasible.

So Ashton was euthanised and joins the ranks of the many koalas, mostly young, that have

failed to cross Appin Road safely.

This road separates the Georges River catchment from the Nepean River catchment and is a hazard for any wildlife following corridors between the two river systems.

Roads can be significant barriers, as David Phalen, director of the Wildlife Health and Conservation Centre said during his talk at the Campbelltown Art Centre last week.

The Appin-Bulli Road marks the boundary between koala populations from Campbelltown and Southern Highlands.

If individuals could cross the road, the contact would be good for maintaining genetic diversity of both populations but may simultaneously transmit chlamydia.

There is an apparent outbreak of the disease at Canyonleigh and it has infected Heather and Jemima at our translocation site at Tarlo National Park.

Report koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Researchers study leaves

5/12/12

By Robert Close

LAST week we played host to two researchers from the Australian National University who are visiting all koala research sites along the east coast and in South Australia.

They are taking samples of leaves from all food trees at each site and will measure several parameters to assess the nutritional quality of the browse.

They will then compare the nutritional values of the different sites to see if they relate to koala densities and distribution.

They were interested in the Campbelltown koala population because it is of low density.

They also sampled leaves from Noorumba Reserve, Rosemeadow.

This reserve has more fertile soils than other sites around Campbelltown but we have never found koalas there.

The trees there are mostly river red gums; these are usually

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considered prime koala food.

So the researchers were keen to discover how food quality of the reserve compared with that of known Campbelltown koala home ranges.

I took them to one such site at Ruse and we parked at the corner of Georges River Road and Darling Avenue.

I explained that because our colony is a low-density one we would be unlikely to see one during their two-day field trip.

Immediately, one of the visitors pointed out a koala in the foliage of the tree beside us.

Oh well, I guess I can cope with yet another case of our koalas having a laugh at my expense!

It was interesting to see how the visitors collected their leaves. They used an enormous sling shot to fire a small weight on a nylon cord over a thin branch, sometimes

more than 20 metres high.

When the weight returned to the ground the researchers would pull on the combined "strands" to break the branch.

They would then pluck off 50 grams of leaf and store the sample on dry ice.

■ Elsewhere around Campbelltown over the last two weeks animals have been seen in Dandenong Crescent, Giles Crescent, Burragarang Road, and Cook Reserve, Ruse, outside 143 Georges River Road, Kentlyn, and a mother and cub at Boonoke Place, Airds.

Further afield, in the Southern Highlands, a koala was seen near Tallong.

During the heat the koalas are difficult to see because they find the thickest foliage and sometimes will leave their trees and find shelter in cool caves.

Report koala sightings on the UWS page, 9962 9996.

Nature sometimes cruel

12/12/12

By Robert Close

DOBSON returned to a tree in suburban Airds this week.

Dobson the koala, that is; not the mayor [Sue Dobson] after whom the young female koala was named back in September.

It was a day of high drama at the time with police, RSPCA, the Fire Brigade with a cherry picker, the council and UWS joining forces to catch the koala.

Dobson, or Dobbo as we call her was released near the Woolwash and we hoped she would find an unoccupied patch of bushland to establish her home range.

However, Dobbo's arrival at the Community Centre on Riverside Drive indicates that she's been unsuccessful.

Kerry Ellis and friends were able to capture Dobbo and they released her again in the bush.

If our idea is correct that the riverside bushland is fully occu-

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piated, then Dobbo is likely to return to the suburban areas.

We think now that she should be allowed to choose her own site.

A tagged koala, probably Liz, has been reported frequently over the last month travelling around suburban Ruse with a cub on her back.

These sightings demonstrate that koalas can survive in the suburbs.

Also in Airds last September we received reports of a large, dead male koala 200 metres from housing.

It had been eviscerated by dogs or foxes so it was difficult to assess the cause of death.

So, I was keen to examine the skull after it had been prepared for study, a process that takes about two months.

I found the koala had a bony tumour in the upper right gum.

The tumour had grown around the rear molar preventing the upper and lower molars on the right side from meeting properly.

This would have reduced the koala's capacity to grind up the leaves that make up its diet.

This means that it would have had to chew twice as long each day to extract the nutrients it needed to survive.

The koala, therefore, probably starved slowly and painfully.

Nature is often not gentle.

However, the koala had been living with the tumour for some time because the whole muzzle had twisted to the right.

This twist arises because bone that's under load grows quicker than bone that's not.

So, because the koala was not using its right-hand molars its muzzle grew faster on the active side causing the distortion.

Report koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Fight to save injured pair

19/12/12

By Robert Close

MAC KOALA

TWO members of the community discovered badly injured koalas on different days last week.

One koala was found beside Aberfoyle Road, Wedderburn, and the other beside Appin Road.

Both had open wounds on their upper bodies and both wounds were badly flyblown.

So the koalas had been injured for some time.

We took both animals to the Wildlife Health and Conservation Centre at Cobbitty where they were examined.

Sadly, the first, a young male in his prime, was too badly injured and had to be euthanised.

The wounds, however, were not typical of roadkills, nor were they typical of dog-attacks. That leaves an attack or a fall caused by another koala, or an accidental fall on something sharp.

Given the koala's age, the injury

was possibly caused by fighting.

Over the years we have found the occasional young male dead beneath a tree, with no obvious cause of death.

Once, one was brought in with a broken, infected upper arm.

Tooth marks in the skin beside the break matched the distinctive incisor pattern of a koala.

So fighting is a definite hazard.

The second koala brought in last week was an old female, probably more than 10 years old, as judged by the wear of her teeth.

David Phalen from The Centre decided to try to save her (named Cyn by the original rescuer, Guy Lachat).

Her deep wound was a four-centimetre long gash in the upper arm that, on cleaning, yielded dozens of maggots, some more than a centimetre long.

We didn't give her much chance of surviving, but she proved to be a tough old girl and took to the milk gruel with which she was hand-fed.

She also nibbled on some gumleaves and despite the discomfort of her wound was able to haul herself into the branches set up in her cage.

For as long as she's in care Cyn will need a supply of fresh leaves.

This is a time-consuming and expensive task.

One of her first visitors was Guy Lachat who, instead of flowers for the patient, brought gumleaves!

Like the wound of the first koala brought in, Cyn's did not have an obvious cause.

However, it was unlikely to be caused by fighting. Perhaps she fell during a mating attempt; love in the trees is no breeze.

Please report all koala sightings on the UWS pager 99629996.

Campbelltown Macarthur Advertiser, Wednesday, December 26, 2012

Note:

No column published on this date

Campbelltown Macarthur Advertiser, Wednesday, January 2, 2013

Campbelltown Macarthur Advertiser, Wednesday, January 9, 2013

Campbelltown Macarthur Advertiser, Wednesday, January 23, 2013

Note:

No column published on this date

Helen was feeling the heat

By Robert Close

16/1/13

SPARE a thought, on these sweltering summer days, for the koalas in their thick coats.

Usually, however, a healthy young koala doesn't suffer too much because it chooses a tree with thick foliage and its coat gives it some insulation.

Then by adopting a position which maximises heat reflection by exposing its reflective white belly and chest fur, while also maximising heat radiation by keeping the dark fur of its back in the shade, it can keep relatively cool.

The system breaks down, however, when the koala grows older. Just like humans the ageing koala may suffer from arthritis, teeth wear and general wear and tear.

The result is that it's harder for the koala to eat enough suitable leaves to supply its food and water requirements.

The koala then neglects to groom itself properly and instead of looking healthy and grey, the upper coat looks brown and unkempt. The koala's coat, therefore, is not as efficient at radiating heat and the koala suffers from the heat.

It then turns to evaporative cooling by panting and consequently dehydrates.

Some koalas then descend from their trees, and seek shelter in rocky caves.

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Perhaps that was what an old female koala was searching for when it entered Julie Wasson's garden at St Helens Park last week.

Julie's garden, in fact, is a popular one for koalas.

The most recent visitor had ear-tags and proved to be "Helen", originally captured less than 500 metres away exactly 11 years ago.

She was carrying a two kilogram joey at the time and we estimated her age as three.

She would now be 14 years old, an age that would correspond to about 80 human years.

Not surprisingly, her coat is brown and her teeth are worn.

When Cate Ryan, from WIRES took her to the Wildlife Health and Conservation Centre at Cobbitty for a check-up, director David Phalen treated Helen for dehydration and recommended two weeks' rest.

Cate, who is also caring for young Pindari, whose mother died last year, undertook the task but is worried about Helen.

If, on release, she runs into more hot weather we'll probably be called on to rescue her again.

■ Please report koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Extreme heat took its toll

30/1/13

MAC KOALA

By Robert Close

OUR last column discussed the plight of an old koala, specifically 14-year-old Helen, in dealing with summer's heat.

The terrible temperatures on "Hot Friday" must have been very difficult for all koalas, particularly the old.

Helen, in WIREs care, survived but eagerly drank water from a bowl to make up for evaporative loss. It's a myth that koalas don't drink water, although usually they can obtain all their water from leaves.

However, record temperatures will have tested the quality of local koala home-ranges in providing all of a koala's needs.

A StreamCare team working in Peter Meadows Creek found a tagged koala shortly before the hot Friday.

We identified it as Leslie, tagged as a one-year old in August 1998. That means she is 15.

Her mother was Shirley, a

koala who featured in many of the Mac Koala columns until her death in 2005 at the age of 14.

Shirley lived near the corner of Georges River Road and Darling Avenue, Kentlyn.

So Leslie moved two kilometres north to establish her own home-range.

Shirley's many other joeys and grand-joeys have spread across the landscape, with one male going as far as Affords Point.

Leslie, unfortunately, was showing signs of distress.

Her coat was brown and bedraggled and we fear that she may not have survived the heat.

We ask that bushwalkers and bike riders keep an eye out for her just south of Peter Meadows Road.

Fortunately, the trees in her home-range will have their roots in the water table so the leaves will be relatively succulent. Leslie would also have access to water

holes in the creek bed. Another female koala was not so lucky and died in Bensley Road, Ingleburn.

A brief inspection revealed terrible dermatitis, particularly around her digits. Worse still, her rump was stained with urine and/or faeces.

"Wet bottom" is one of the symptoms of chlamydia.

If lab testing reveals that the koala had this dreadful disease, then the whole Campbelltown koala colony is at risk. However, the staining may be related to the dermatitis or some other cause.

Accordingly, the koala will undergo a complete examination, organised by the Wildlife Health and Conservation Centre at Cobbitty. We await the results with some trepidation.

Please report all koala sightings on the UWS pager 9962 9996. If you have had koalas in your gardens you could make a bowl of water available on hot days.

Platypus sighted in river

6/2/13

By Robert Cline

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JUST before Christmas, two environmental officers from Campbelltown Council were out on the Georges River downstream of Simmo's Beach, in kayaks, surveying water-weeds, when they were treated to a rare experience.

A platypus surfaced only 10-15 metres from them and stayed for 30 seconds before disappearing.

This sighting is the furthest north on Georges River that we have recorded and gives us more hope that a viable population exists along the river.

However, the platypus may have been a young one dispersing from its parents' home in a protected tributary, such as O'Hares Creek.

An encouraging sign that the platypus might be a resident was that one side of the river had a

two-metre high clay bank that was protected by native vegetation.

This would provide a suitable substrate for digging a burrow while the vegetation would hide the burrow's entrance from potential predators and allow the platypus to come and go unseen.

Another interesting factor is that the platypus was observed at 9.30am, whereas most sightings are at dawn and dusk.

This means people using the river should be on the look-out for platypuses at any time of day.

Hopefully, the latest platypus survived the recent deluge.

■ Some good news is that we think the koala reported last week with a dirty bottom did not have a chlamydia infection, our greatest fear for the health of the Campbelltown population.

However, the bad news is that

it had a severe case of sarcoptic mange, a dermatitis spread by mites. This infection was sufficient to cause the koala's death.

The dirty bottom was probably due to the koala being unable to groom itself or from sitting on the ground in its own faeces.

This is only the second case of mange in a koala we've seen at Campbelltown and both were from Minto Heights.

Sadly, another koala with a dirty bottom was seen over the weekend.

This one was at Waratah Rd, Kentlyn, but only four kilometres from the two koalas with mange. Let's hope we are not seeing the start of an epidemic.

Please report all koala sightings on the UWS pager 9962 9996.

Would it really be a koala?

13/2/13

By Robert Close

RESULTS of our 23-year study of Campbelltown's koalas show that female koalas that establish their 20ha home ranges are living up to 15 years before dying of old-age related causes after producing many offspring.

This means once all the suitable places to establish a home range have been occupied, most of each crop of joeys must move away from their mother's territory to find their own spots.

From Campbelltown the joeys can move north along the Georges River until they hit Liverpool, east to Holsworthy firing range, south beside the river to Appin and then to the catchment of Cataract Dam or west to the Nepean River.

We have found several ear-tagged koalas taking the northern, eastern and southern options but only one that took

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the western route. That route is important, however, because once beside the Nepean River, the koala can move either north or south without crossing a road by moving under any of the bridges.

To test my hypothesis, therefore, I've been expecting to find koalas in unusual places not far from the Nepean.

So when Ewan, of Mount Annan, reported a dead koala in a gross pollutant trap that leads into Lake Annan, I was keen to verify the report.

The lake is only 3km from the Nepean and linked to it by a small creek and vegetation, so it was accessible for a koala.

After Ewan had shown me the dead animal, I agreed with him it could be a koala.

It was floating on its stomach

about 5m from the side of the edge of the trap and was hugely bloated.

The water was so foul we couldn't see if it had a tail and unfortunately it was in about a metre of water which prevented us from wading out to inspect it.

Ewan cunningly built a grappling hook from a wire coat hanger and with a well tossed rope was able to pull the corpse ashore.

Unfortunately, it was a very large, very bloated grey cat the tail of which had been hanging vertically down into the sludge. Dead grey cats, in fact, are the most commonly misidentified animal that people report. Nevertheless, I'd rather attend a false alarm than miss a true record from an unusual location.

Please report all koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

More suburban sightings

20/2/13

By Robert Close

MAC KOALA

A youngish, untagged koala peered down at me from the dense foliage of a coral tree on the edge of the playing fields of East Campbelltown Public School.

It was the same tree in which students had seen a juvenile koala last year, so may be the same animal.

A bulge in the pouch area indicated that she is contributing to the expanding koala population in the Smiths Creek Reserve which adjoins the school.

Several sightings of mothers and joeys have been recorded from nearby Canberra Crescent and Brisbane Road, and koalas are using the entire length of the reserve from Airds to Leumeah.

Another koala stirred up excitement in Winbourne Place, not far from the upper reaches of Smiths Creek in Airds.

When it ran out towards the busy Greengate Road council officers, with the help of residents, were able to wrap the koala in a quilt and take it to the nearby bushland.

I expect that we will see it again shortly.

In fact, we have received several reports over the past few weeks of a mother and large joey in nearby Booroke Place.

As more young joeys are produced in Smiths Creek Reserve and in bushland beside the Georges River, we can expect more and more sightings in suburban Airds.

■ Generally, the mention of chlamydia in this column means bad news but now I have some good news: the chlamydial female koala brought in to the Wildlife Health and Conservation Centre

at Cobbitty from near Mittagong was released on Sunday back to where it was originally found.

The koala, which featured recently in a big spread in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, took off up a tree like a rocket and at one stage made a leap of a metre into a neighbouring tree.

These actions were pleasing to see because they indicated that the koala was fit and strong and that its vision was restored.

They also indicated that the koala was strong enough to carry a radio-collar so that we can follow her progress and check that all the effort made to rehabilitate her was not in vain.

At an estimated cost of her treatment of \$4500, it is important to know if the koala survives.

Please report all koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Keeping track is tricky

By David Case

DIABLO

Several koalas were recorded in the past week, and in March this year. The first koala seen in the area was in the area of the Georges River Road.

Several koalas have been killed recently, mostly near the latter site, raising the question of whether the koalas could possibly be in the area, and if so, how many. It is not clear how many koalas are in the area, and how many are in the area.

All koalas seen in the area have been seen in the area, but they are not in the area.

One koala was seen in the area, but it is not clear how many koalas are in the area. It is not clear how many koalas are in the area.

As an example of the koalas ability to avoid detection, I was recently called by a resident of the Georges River Road for the last 40 years.

The owner blind that there were

several koalas seen in the area, and in March this year. The first koala seen in the area was in the area of the Georges River Road.

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Please report all koala sightings on the UWS page: 9562 9566

Vale to one of our finest

613113

By Robert Close

MAC KOALA

THIS is the time when the first of last year's koala joeys are venturing off their mothers' backs and learning how to climb and jump as they prepare for independence.

Few koalas, however, are moving outside their favourite spots so people aren't noticing them.

It has been a sad week, because Campbelltown lost a dedicated lover of wildlife with the death of Pam Hindes.

She was an animal carer with immense patience and concern for those she looked after.

When I first met her, Pam was tending to a juvenile red flying fox (also called a fruit bat) that had torn its wing on a barbed wire fence.

At that time, little had been published on the development of this species.

However, Pam's diary notes were so complete and her observations so keen that we were able to publish a small scientific paper on the flying fox's rate of growth and behaviour.

Pam is also well-known for the column that she contributed to the newsletter published by the Macarthur branch of the National Parks Association.

This well-researched column entitled *Pam's Backyard* was a whimsical and poetic story of some aspect of behaviour of one or other of the many animals, mainly birds, which would visit her small but busy backyard which connected directly with the bushland of Spring Creek at St Helens Park.

Her concern for wildlife led to her membership for many years

of the Animal Care and Ethics Committee of the University of Western Sydney.

This committee oversees all research on animals (including our koala studies).

Although Pam supported our koala research and donated a radio-collar to the studies, she was thorough with her reading of our research applications and would not hesitate to speak up if she thought the koalas' welfare was compromised.

So Campbelltown has lost a great advocate for its bushland and wildlife. She was a gentle, thoughtful person and will be sorely missed by us all.

Please report all koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Giving Pindari a chance

13/3/13

By Robert Close

MAC KOALA

ONLY one call came in on the pager this week.

It reported a large koala near the junction of Hillcrest Road and Wedderburn Road.

The caller also reported that she had heard koalas bellowing.

Because male koalas bellow to attract females, we assume that their breeding season extends into March in Campbelltown.

■ Meanwhile, Pindari, the young male koala being hand-raised by WIRES member, Cate Ryan, grows bigger and stronger by the day. We've delayed his release until the periods of extreme heat and rain have passed.

There are two schools of thought on the issue of optimal time to release. The first is that the hand-raised koala should be released as early as possible after weaning to mirror what happens in the wild where most

young koalas leave after a year with their mothers. However, at this age they are very vulnerable to dogs and even owls.

The second view is that the koala should be held until it is clear that it wants to leave. This is shown by constant activity in the cage and stropy behaviour when handled by the carer.

Research has shown that young koalas that stay an extra year with their mothers have a better survival rate than those that leave after one year.

Presumably the youngsters will have learned more about survival from their mothers and grown bigger and stronger before having to fend for themselves.

Young males, however, will have to face resident males that are more than twice their weight. These older males will attempt

to drive them away at best, and injure them or force them out onto precarious branches at worst.

Pindari will have had little or no experience with other larger male koalas and may react to them in inappropriate and potentially fatal ways.

So another reason to delay his release is to be sure the breeding season is well and truly over.

He would then have three to four months to adjust to dealing with choosing his own food, reacting to other koalas and all the other aspects of freedom before the males start bellowing in earnest again in July.

Please report all koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Colourful snakes in area

20/3/13

By Robert Close

MAC KOALA

THERE was only one koala sighting reported again last week, this time from Parma Crescent, St Helens Park.

This street backs on to the Georges River Reserve and Spring Creek and what used to be the home range of one of our radio-collared females, Courtney, who died of a jaw disease last year.

Hopefully, this recent sighting is of a new female established in Courtney's vacated site.

■ This quiet time for local koalas allows me to emphasise the fact that there are many other species of wildlife in the Campbelltown bushland besides koalas, all of which deserve our recognition.

For example, not very far from Parma Crescent, in Wedderburn Road, Pat and Barry Durman noticed and photographed a strikingly coloured bandy-bandy snake (pictured) that, sadly, had been hit by a car.

This beautiful snake is sometimes called a hoop snake

because of its habit of raising a section of its body vertically off the ground in a loop.

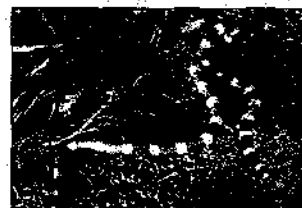
Then, when the snake moves, the result of the loop and the banding is to produce a flicker effect with the looped section appearing to move in the opposite direction to the rest of its body.

This curious behaviour is believed to distract potential predators.

The bandy-bandy grows to less than a metre in length and is found in a variety of habitats across NSW and Queensland, extending into the Northern Territory, northern Victoria, and eastern South Australia, although it is rare in the latter two states.

It is venomous, but the poison glands are small and it is not aggressive.

It is nocturnal and burrows under soil beneath rocks and logs during the day, coming out at night to feed exclusively on blind snakes, which are small snakes



that have only rudimentary eyes.

Besides the bandy-bandy and blind snakes, the Campbelltown bushland supports a number of interesting snakes.

Perhaps the most important is the broad-headed snake, a colourful, venomous snake that is found in the catchments of the Georges and Woronora rivers.

It is classified as endangered and a major problem for it is that some gardeners illegally collect the flat sandstone rocks, under which the snakes shelter and hunt for geckos. Moreover, some unscrupulous reptile collectors take them from the wild.

Please report all koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Pagers report sightings

27/3/13

By Robert Close

TWO calls came in on the pager this week.

The first was from Hodgson Close, Wedderburn, about a koala with a tag in its left ear.

This could be Kade who was tagged in Hodgson Close in 2005.

However, there are other potential candidates, so we need to determine the colour of the tag in the right ear to be sure.

It's an important sighting, if it is Kade, because it indicates that he has been in a stable locality for eight years.

If so, local residents should see him again. We'll find out the right ear tag colour, yet!

The other call was from WIRES; Cate Ryan had picked up from Simmo's beach, Ingleburn, a young four-kilogram male koala that had fractured one of the bones in each lower, rear leg. We don't know how he injured his leg but expect that he had a fall.

His fate will be decided at the

■ Young male found with broken legs

MAC KOALA

Wildlife Health and Conservation Centre at Cobbitty later today.

Koalas are remarkably efficient at surviving in the bush with a broken leg.

Our study of the skeletons of road-kill koalas showed that several had broken bones that had healed before the accident that finally killed them.

■ On a different matter, I was disturbed from my Sunday morning cuppa by the combined shrieking of magpies, currawongs, noisy miners, peewits and butcher birds.

They were taking it in turns to attack something in the upper foliage of a tall tallowwood in our backyard.

With my binoculars I was able to spot the object of such hatred:

a pale owl with large white eye disks.

It was probably a barn owl, the first that I had seen in the area in 20 years.

We've found that birds will also attack koalas in much the same manner.

They must think the koala is a predator. However, the attacks always seem to be in places where we hadn't seen koalas before.

In places where koalas are relatively common the birds have learned koalas are not dangerous and they are ignored, except by black-chinned honey-eaters that pluck fur for their nests.

So if birds are seen mobbing a koala, it's a good indication that koalas are new to the area.

Please report all koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Sightings are increasing

By Robert Close

ONLY one koala sighting was reported on the pager this week.

It had been roaming through a front garden in Guildford Place, Leumeah, and most likely had come out of Abercrombie Reserve which links into Smiths Creek Reserve.

This latter reserve runs from Pembroke Road near the Wests Leagues Club towards Briar Road, near Airs High School.

Sightings of koalas there have been increasing and we have ear-tagged two males and a female in the reserve.

The total bushland area is only about 100 hectares and given that female koalas in Campbelltown need at least 20 hectares for their home-ranges, then we can anticipate that the reserve could support five female koalas.

These five females, however, are capable of producing one young a year — and these youngsters have

MAC KOALA

to leave the reserve eventually.

Unfortunately, their escape routes to open bushland are limited. They must either cross busy Junction Road or follow the reserve south until they come to Airs shops.

From there they have a narrow section of suburban Airs to cross before entering bushland beside the Georges River near the Woolwash.

Koalas also come into Airs from the reverse movement: that is, joeys of mothers established beside the Georges River are moving or being driven into Airs as all suitable sites by the river are being occupied.

We know from the extensive movements of Curls and Jemima, daughters of radio-collared mothers in Kentlyn, that this is the case.

A local resident asked me

whether the Airs Renewal Development would adversely affect koalas, given that perhaps 100,000 square metres of parks will be altered.

My response was that the affected area is not large enough or sufficiently forested to support a female home-range.

The area, as discussed above, however, is an important corridor or resting point for dispersing koalas going into or out of Smiths Creek or continuing their travels beside the Georges River.

As many eucalypts as possible should be planted in and around the development area so that koalas will have to walk as small a distance as possible between trees.

We predict that 2013, from July, will be a big year for the appearance of young koalas in suburban Airs.

Please report all koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Try to note koala tags

By Robert Close

10/4/13

NO COLUMN DW: 7/4/13

MAC KOALA

IT'S always exciting to find, or have reported, a koala with ear-tags. It means we can fill in a little more of that animal's life.

For example, how far has it moved since its last sighting, if at all? Is it breeding? Is it healthy? How old is it?

But because we have tagged so many koalas we have to use two ear-tags to give each animal its own unique colour combination.

Even then we sometimes give a male and female from different areas the same combination when there are no other options.

So we have to be able to see each ear clearly.

This is often difficult depending on the koala's height and position in the tree.

However, each tag is individually numbered and we can sometimes read the number with

the help of binoculars and we have sometimes identified a koala's number from photos.

There are other problems, too, because in some light conditions an orange tag will look red and light blue will look white and so on. And with age the tags fade slightly and on rare occasions a tag is lost. It is very frustrating to know that the animal is tagged but not positively identifiable.

Such an occasion occurred this week when our team spotted a koala beside Peter Meadows Creek. They could see a green tag in its left ear but the right ear was hidden.

They thought, but weren't absolutely sure, it was a male.

The most likely candidate was Maximus, tagged as a juvenile along Darling Avenue at Kentlyn in July 2006.

However, it could also have been Alan, tagged at Minto Heights in 1998. Or one of four local females.

Alan would be a very old koala if he were alive today but this would be a record age for a Campbelltown male so it's important to verify the identity.

Bushwalkers along the creek could help by keeping a look-out along the trail on either side of Peter Meadows Road.

If you see it, check you are recording the animal's left and right ear and look for a dirty stain about the size of a 50-cent piece in the middle of its very white chest.

The stain is produced by a gland which occurs only on males.

Take a photo and notify us via the pager (below).

Report all koala sightings on the UWS pager: 9962 9996.

Campbelltown Macarthur Advertiser, Wednesday, April 17, 2013

Note:

No column published on this date

Vincent seemed fitting name

■ Too many for ear-tag team

By Dr Robert Close

IN THE most recent column, I discussed the ear-tagging system, and how we use it to plot movements of koalas around the district.

As a result of the increased numbers of koalas in the district, the task of tagging every animal that is reported to us via the koala pager has become too large for our catching team.

We are now tagging only those animals that are rescued from dangerous situations.

There are other ways of identifying koalas that don't require ear-tags.

A good example arose recently when a koala appeared (pictured) on Georges River Road with a semi-circular piece, the size of a 10 cent

MAC KOALA



coin, cut neatly out of its left ear.

Assuming that it's a male, we'll obviously have to call him "Vincent", in honour of Van Gogh. The most likely cause of his wound is fighting.

Koalas have very sharp incisors, as I've discovered on many occasions

and I carry scars inflicted through heavy welding gloves.

However, the bite is narrow and unless the ear tore in an unusual manner, I would have expected more of a U-shaped tear.

Vincent also has a distinctive pattern of black and pink skin around the nostrils at the base of his black nose pad.

In other koalas the pattern can range from all black to quite unusual designs in pink.

At one stage we started setting up a register of nasal patterns.

One koala that recently had ear-tags fitted was Pindari, the young koala that has been in WIRES care since his

mother died of cancer in July 2011.

He now weighs more than five grams and is ready for release. I whenever we've set a date weatt conditions have been either too windy or wet.

Because he has spent the last months in a spacious cage he has been spared having to deal with conditions.

Consequently, we want to release him in optimal conditions.

I hope to report his successful release soon.

Pindari shows signs of being a Cate Ryan, his carer, has noticed Pindari takes the branches cut for food and uses them to construct a kind of "nest" on which he then

I've never before heard of such behaviour.

Let's hope he doesn't try to build one in windy conditions on release.

Please report all koala sightings to the UWS pager 996 29996.

Rail line plans a concern

1/5/13

By Dr Robert Cross

It was another quiet week in Campbelltown Koala Country with only one koala sighting reported.

This report came from Endeavour Street, just east of a house with a blue and white night owl. Unfortunately we got the colour of the owl for a positive identification.

The most likely candidate for the first koalas in the area is the Russo, in December 2008.

Since then she has moved between the long Ashurst and the narrow street end that links Cook Reserve to the Ashurst Road, Stroud Reserve at Koorlin Crescent and James Park Park.

She has never worn a radio collar and we have failed on three occasions to spot her. So far we have had 19 reports.

When he was tagged she had a large liver. Guess she would have been at least three years old.

She would now be 7 1/2 years old. She could survive in 2013, but missing the census.

propose a construction time (2013) of the high speed rail plans which were released recently at a federal government event.

The proposed high speed rail line will follow the Ashurst Road corridor and follow the Ashurst Road into the Homebush Farm Range near Stroud's Beach, where both a platypus and a koala were seen recently.

The route then crosses the Ashurst Creek gorge near the Ashurst a popular swimming hole, and then crosses the Ashurst Railway opposite Darwin Avenue before meeting the long gorge of O'Hares Creek near the Woolwash.

It then crosses a loop of the Georges River just downstream of Wedderburn Gorge then goes under Wedderburn Road and over the Georges River again

before going under Ashurst Road and south of St Helens Road.

The track then runs through the Ashurst area and crosses the Ashurst Road on the way.

The traps show there are numerous sites where the track crosses over or under roads and over creeks and rivers.

These crossing points should allow koalas and other animals to cross under the track beneath bridges and over the track at underpasses, thus allowing some of my fears that the track will be a major genetic barrier.

Special fencing would be required to direct the animals towards safe crossing points.

Some of the bridges, underpasses and other crossings will be made during the construction phase and the construction phase will be a major genetic barrier.

Please report all koala sightings on the UWS page 900 255 555.

Pindari branches out

By Dr Robert Close

IT WAS a less than ideal day when I had several people who were watching as Pindari, the young hand-raised koala, was released on the foot of a tall grey gum.

He climbed half a metre, then stopped, clinging to the soft, spongy bark with his sharp claws and looked around as if to say "What next?" Pindari, who was very confident and stumpy in the koala-friendly way that he had spent the last eight months since his mother died of cancer, was clearly overwhelmed by the size of the tree, the bushland and the audience.

Eventually he climbed up a metre and slowly climbed the trunk. He held on breath when he climbed onto a slender, dead branch, briefly received a suitable fork and settled comfortably into it. We had chosen the site because it was in the small valley

BACKGROUND

where his mother was found and we chose the tree because it was a young, growing food tree. Moreover, the mites growing in a creek line at its base should be succulent.

I returned in the evening and found that he was exploring the tree, reaching himself to a substantial height and eating his own food. He successfully made a metre-long leap from one branch, then tried another leap but misjudged the landing, slipped and nearly fell.

Pindari spent a restless night wondering how he would cope in the dark. Fortunately he was still there next morning and the following four mornings.

This sojourn gave him time to develop confidence and gain used to feeding for himself, particularly the dangers of moving on the ground. Unfortu-

nately one of the trees in his range had died in only two days.

The fall of Pindari was signal that it was time to turn with a headwind.

The second line of trees to fall is approximately 200-500 metres from the satellite which we contact our employees. Unfortunately, Koalas are so hard to see in a bush that it will be very difficult to gain a good idea of how many are moving and where.

So we will be able to track the bush ourselves. "Captivity is the best after all, hands-off." It would be however, to replace in the bush people from the Kangaroo Road. So please watch out for the anti-koala signs that can be on the

Please report koala sightings to the DNS page 988248

Pindari has his favourites

15/5/13

By Dr Robert Gray

MAC KOALA

PINDARI, the hand-reared koala released two weeks ago, is doing well. We thought we'd lost him because he moved from his release tree where he had stayed for several days, and his radio-collar had ceased to transmit.

Fortunately however, he had moved to a neighbouring tall grey gum tree. When he was very difficult to spot, this new tree had interlocking branches with a stringy bark eucalypt, which allowed Pindari to browse on two different species. This is important

because some researchers consider that different eucalypts have different toxins in their leaves to deter browsers.

The koala is only able to feed on a given tree until the toxins reach a certain level in its digestive system.

Once that level is reached the koala must feed on a different tree that has different toxins until the koala's very effective liver can

remove the original toxins. So, having spent the first week in his release tree (a grey gum) Pindari would have been delighted to browse on the stringy bark.

Last Saturday he moved again but only 30 metres from his release tree into a tall but slender ironbark. Pindari had shown a liking for this species in captivity although it is not so popular with wild koalas.

The release site is well stocked with different species.

Besides the popular grey gums, stringy barks and ironbarks there are blackbuns, blood woods, and two non-eucalypts, the narrow-leaved apple and casuarinas (she-oaks).

So Pindari has plenty of choice. We hope that he'll stay in his gully until we can re-capture him and give him a functional collar.

So far the trees he has chosen

have been very different to those in other areas. It's a good sign that koalas are becoming more active before the start of the spring mating season.

A koala was seen in Wedderburn about only 500 metres from Pindari's gully in Wilson Park with the help of Senior Constable Jim Hunter, who climbed and tagged a tree where it was trapped in a bushland in Garrison Street.

The householder named the koala 'Ethan' after her son.

Other sightings were from Peppin Crescent, Kings, and of Anzi in Dandenong Crescent, Ruse, and an unnamed koala in Victoria Road, Wedderburn.

Anzi, first captured in 2008, was recognised from a photograph sent to us by Lyn Fildes.

Please report koala sightings on the OWS page: 4562 9936.

Pindari gains confidence

20/5/13

By Dr Robert Close

MAC KOALA

PINDARI, the hand-raised koala that we released back into the wild two weeks ago is doing all the right things.

He was very cautious at first until he became familiar with life outside his former aviary home.

For a while he moved in 10-metre forays to different food trees.

He then felt confident enough to move 150 metres up the valley to the very spot where he had last seen his mother before her death from cancer in July 2012.

Is this a coincidence or could he somehow recognise the site?

One of my colleagues considers that a koala's long-lasting faecal pellets can mark its home-territory for at least six months after the animal's death.

Maybe Pindari is following an old scent path. Whatever the explanation, his chances of survival have increased now that he is comfortable climbing, feeding and

descending from tall trees.

During the ABC TV segment shown after Pindari's release, the interviewer asked me "what chances do you give for Pindari's survival?". I replied "20 per cent", a statement which closed the news item and left viewers with a bleak feeling about the project. However, the justification for my guesstimate is quite complex.

First, I assumed that "survival" would require that Pindari lives to the age of five, by which time he would be big enough to mate successfully.

So Pindari would have to survive another three years.

Given a Campbelltown population of 400 koalas and a breeding life for a female of 10 years, starting at two, then 80 male and 80 female joeys will be born.

It's an interesting calculation to graph out the potential growth of

our Campbelltown animals remembering that in the second year 80 more females enter the breeding group and about 20 die of old age. That year there will be 220 joeys born.

Clearly there must be significant fatalities among the young animals. Otherwise, Campbelltown would be overwhelmed with koalas.

My gut feeling is that 50 per cent of young females probably survive to establish home-ranges, while only 25 per cent of males make it.

Because of Pindari's background I expected that his initial chances were a little less than for normal males.

After his brilliant first three weeks, however, I consider that his chances are now the same as for wild-raised males.

Please report koala sightings on the UWS pager: 9962 9996.

Visitor in the chook yard

29/5/13

By Dr Robert Close

MAC KOALA

BETH and Robert Michie are stalwarts of the Macarthur branch of the National Parks Association who have lived beside Georges River Road for many years.

In all that time, however, they have never seen a koala on their property.

This is surprising because they have koala food trees on the site and we believe that the entire length of the Georges River Road from Junction Road to The Basin – seven kilometres – is flanked by potential koala habitat.

I always reassured them that it was just a matter of time before they were visited by a koala.

So I was not surprised when their neighbour, Adele, rang last week to report that she had a young koala in her chook yard.

Further south along Georges River Road, in Old Kent Road, another caller, Jodie, reported three koalas in her garden: a mother and joey and, presum-

ably, a male. Jodie also mentioned that she had heard squealing during the night.

These sounds are made by the female during the rather vigorous mating procedure.

Jodie also expressed fears that the squealing may have been due to her dog attacking the trio.

Fortunately, there were no signs of damage, although a dog can cause extensive damage without leaving signs of the attack.

This is because the koala's skin is so elastic that the dog's teeth do not actually break the skin but still crush the tissues beneath.

Because all properties along Georges River Road will at some stage be visited by koalas, those with dogs are likely to find themselves in Jodie's situation.

We ask that dog owners be vigilant in investigating any change in their dogs' barking that

may indicate a visit by a koala.

■ I have some fears that Pindari, the recently released, hand-raised, young koala won't know how to react to dogs.

Unfortunately we lost contact with him after his radio-collar failed.

He was last seen heading south and is likely to be crossing Wedderburn Road at any moment.

He can be recognised by his individually coloured ear-tags.

■ On the topic of ear-tags, I must correct my conclusion last week that a tagged koala seen in Ruse was Ariel.

Close inspection of the photograph allowed us to see the number stamped on the tag. In fact, the animal was Bernie, ear-tagged in James Ruse Park in 2008.

Please report koala sightings on the UWS pager: 9962 9996.

Eyes peeled for Pindari

By Dr Robert Close

THERE has been no sign of Pindari, the recently released, hand-raised young koala.

Residents in St Helens Park should watch out for him.

He will have no fear of humans and possibly dogs as well. If anyone sees him please call us via the koala pager and take a photograph, if possible, to show the colour of his ear tags.

Besides his ear tags, he should be wearing a radio collar. However, the collar was designed to fall off after a few months, so he may have already lost it.

We wanted the collar to fall off, just in case the transmitter failed (as in fact happened) and we were unable to find him.

Pindari is only half-grown and he will develop strong neck muscles. So the collar could have eventually strangled him had it been permanently

MAC KOALA

attached. Adjusting the tightness of the radio-collar is always difficult. Too loose and the collar falls off, too tight and the koala could be strangled.

We always attach the collar just loose enough for it to slip over the koala's head, in case a small branch should catch under the collar.

This means that the collar falls off occasionally and we lose contact with a koala, but it's safer for the animal.

We are not the only research group having difficulties. A recently published scientific paper on the problems and successes of radio-tracking wild Australian mammals reported that of 82 radio collars deployed on koalas, six failed, all within one to four months.

■ Koalas continue to appear on

the eastern side of Holsworthy firing range and Heathcote National Park. The most recent sighting, on May 19, was on the corner of Moore Street and East Parade, Sutherland, only 20 metres from the railway line.

If it came out of Royal National Park it would have had to cross both the railway and the Princes Highway.

The chances of it surviving this route would have been small. It would have had an easier path, however, if it came via Woronora cemetery and Loftus or Forbes creeks from the Woronora River.

The koala had vanished by the following day and has not been reported since. It seems unlikely that it could live for long in that busy area without being seen. Perhaps it has found peace and fertility in the cemetery!

Please report koala sightings on the UWS pager: 9962 9996.

Be on the alert, drivers

By Dr Robert Close

12/6/13

MAC KOALA

"ON June 2 [Sunday], a member of the public picked up a male adult koala from the motorway near the Colo Vale exit.

The animal was obviously wanting to cross the road and was very stressed, and the driver "rescued" him. Put him in the tool box of his ute and took it home. Then rang WIRES:

A local vet checked him over and he was a very healthy young male with no visible problems.

He was released in the national park just at the back of Colo Vale and ran up a tree as fast as his legs could carry him."

The quotation above is a WIRES report of a recent incident that occurred on the Hume Highway. The driver was risking injury by collecting the koala and risking an escape at the end of his journey. Had the animal been carrying chlamydia, it could have introduced the disease to a chlamydia-free population.

Movement of koalas by humans outside their normal range is a very real risk of disease transfer.

Long-term readers of this column would remember the story of radio-collared koala Lyn, who was 'rescued' from Peter Meadows Road and taken to a soccer match in the Illawarra region before we were notified.

While on the topic of unusual movements, I was recently sent some maps of sightings collected by the Australian Koala Foundation, which supports research and campaigns against destruction of koala habitat. The foundation has collected details of koala sightings across eastern Australia.

One group of three intriguing sightings was at West Hoxton, just west of Cowpasture Road.

Were these sightings of a single long-distance foot-traveller, or a

driver-assisted mover, or a remnant of a once more widely distributed population?

DNA studies would help solve this problem, so we ask drivers along Cowpasture Road and local residents of West Hoxton to report recent and historical koala sightings from the area.

Our nearest reported sighting was near Glenfield Road and The Crossroads. We have been unable to verify the accuracy of the report, but have long considered that the Leacock Regional Park near the Casula Powerhouse appears to be an excellent koala habitat.

Our nearest verified sighting was at the corner of Cambridge and Moorebank avenues, Moorebank. That's 10km from West Hoxton, well within the potential of a determined young koala.

Nevertheless, we would like to verify the West Hoxton report.

Please report koala sightings on the UWS pager: 9962 9996.

Marsupial in chook yard

By **Dr Robert Close**

LAST week I was at Campbelltown Library attending the meet-the-author talk given by Karen Daley about her new book on the sinking of the Titanic.

In the audience was Karen's husband, Barry, former deputy general manager of Campbelltown Council who told me that some months ago he had spotted a koala.

That's not so unusual these days – except this koala was trapped in a chook yard, as was another reported in this column two weeks ago.

Barry had been attending a meeting at St Thomas More church in Acacia Street, Ruse, but could not remember whether the koala had ear tags. Fortunately he had taken some photographs and subsequently sent them to me.

The photographs clearly show a light blue tag in the left ear and,

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less clearly, a red or orange tag in the right. This pattern is most likely to be that of Alexis, captured in November last year in Old Kent Road not far from Junction Road.

When we magnified the image we thought we could see a tiny, fur-less, clawed paw protruding from Alexis's pouch region.

A female koala has a backwards-facing pouch, with the opening almost between the hind legs, unlike a kangaroo which has the opening about where you'd expect to find its navel, if it had one (which it doesn't).

After we had originally captured and tagged Alexis, we did not want to release her at the point of capture because of its proximity to the dangerous Junction Road. So we released her in bushland near the

Georges River opposite the church in Acacia Avenue.

This area was part of the home ranges of two of our formerly radio-collared females, Shirley and Charlotte, so we knew it was good koala habitat.

Alexis, however, has now crossed back into suburbia but is still in a narrow corridor of trees that runs from the church across James Ruse Park, past Stromlo Reserve into Cook and Bendall reserves, beside Junction Road.

If they can cross the road there they are in the relative safety of Smiths Creek Reserve. We know that koalas regularly use part or all of that corridor.

It will be interesting to discover whether Alexis will also follow the path. As usual we depend on the community to report her movements. So check your chook yards!

Please report koala sightings on the UWS pager: 9962 9996.

Zoo conference on care

26/6/13

By Dr Robert Close

ON Sunday, the conference theatre at Taronga Zoo was packed with WIRES members attending an all-day course on the care of koalas.

Topics included biology and physiology, road-kill, rescue, health and hygiene, stress and pain, enclosures, natural diet, food trees, common diseases, care of sick and injured koalas, and rearing of orphans.

It was impressive to see such enthusiasm among the audience for the care and survival of koalas.

There are a lot of tricky issues for koala carers such as "at what point do you decide that an animal is too badly injured to attempt to save it and rehabilitate?", or "will a koala that has been in care for several weeks be able to settle back into its original home without undue stress to itself or to a new arrival

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that may have settled in to the site during the former's absence."

I was one of the speakers and spoke about the distribution of koala colonies in and around the Sydney basin and the state of chlamydiosis in these colonies.

Briefly, I said that there are three well-known local breeding areas: Campbelltown, Kurrajong area and Wilton/Southern Highlands.

However, there have been many other sightings across the Sydney basin that we know little about.

For instance, a population of perhaps 30 animals was believed to live in an area of Kuring-gai Chase National Park that was not burnt in the 1994 fires.

To the best of my knowledge there have been no methodical searches for this population since that time. I find it amazing that for an animal as famous and

recognisable as a koala we lack basic information such as distribution and abundance.

I also mentioned that koalas in the three breeding areas can be distinguished by their DNA profiles, indicating that they have been isolated from each other for some time and during this period genetic variation has been lost from all three. However, linking the groups by dispersal would restore the levels of genetic variation to a healthier state.

Unfortunately, this leads to a paradox I have mentioned in previous columns. That is, linking the three groups will allow Chlamydia to be spread from the two infected groups to the currently clean Campbelltown group.

Chlamydiosis is an excruciatingly painful disease and our Campbelltown animals are likely to be very vulnerable.

Please report koala sightings on the UWS pager: 9962 9996.

Rain presents problems

3/7/13

By Dr Robert Close

MAC KOALA

SPARE a thought for Pindari, the young hand-raised koala released recently at St Helens Park. His first experience of really heavy continuous rain must have been uncomfortable for him, despite his adaptations for coping with harsh conditions.

His fur is soft, thick and springy and provides better insulation than does the fur of other marsupials. (Antarctic explorer Douglas Mawson was reported to sport a koala-skin hat.)

During heavy rain, Pindari will adopt a ball-like position, with his head tucked in to his chest, so that the rain will run off.

Some mammals have thick layers of fat to provide insulation. Koalas carry little fat, so must rely on its fur.

Maintaining the fur is therefore a priority. Dreadlocks and other tangles must be sorted out, and koalas have a special comb to

achieve this. The second and third toes of their hind feet are fused together except for the actual claws which work together like a small comb. Koalas can reach any part of their bodies with this comb. This means that they can also scratch any human that tries to pick them.

Koalas in the cold and wet can reduce blood flow to their backs to cut heat loss.

But their lack of fat supplies means long rainstorms may be hazardous. Pindari should survive because his coat was in excellent condition. His teeth are sharp and efficient so he will be able to obtain maximum value from his feeding bouts.

Not so capable of surviving heavy rain are older, unhealthier koalas.

Their grooming is not so efficient and their coats are often

brown and matted. The rain is less likely to run off their coats and the insulation would be less efficient.

Although we have not seen Pindari for several weeks, we are not overly worried. Tagged animals often turn up.

In the very early days of our study we released another young koala, a female that we named Elle, that had been in WIRES care. The release site was beside O'Hares Creek at Wedderburn.

We heard nothing more from her for eight years when she was discovered at Wedderburn Gorge, a trip of about six kilometres.

We then fitted her with a radio-collar and followed her life for another four years, when we found her body on the ground following a violent storm.

Please report koala sightings on the UWS pager: 9962 9996.

Campbelltown Macarthur Advertiser, Wednesday, July 10, 2013

Note:

No column published on this date

Watch for koalas crossing

MARK is a truck driver who was travelling along Appin Road at 5.30am last week when he saw a koala dash into the middle of the road, stop, wait for a gap in the traffic, then complete his hazardous crossing.

The koala was apparently moving from the Georges River woodland to the beautiful spotted-gum forest which has a 600 metre frontage with Appin Road.

This forest marks the closest distance of the road to the Georges River (600m) to the east and to the Nepean River (3km) to the west. The forest narrows to 150m along Woodhouse Creek which joins Nepean Creek and finally the Nepean River.

Koalas can cross the watershed between the two rivers without leaving forest cover — apart from Appin Road.

Campbelltown Council has

MAC KOALA

marked this crossing point by placing "koala crossing" signs at both ends of the forest front. We have reports of many koalas trying to cross between the signs.

Curiously, we have never seen a female with an established home-range in the spotted-gum forest. There are possible explanations for this but we suspect the forest is being used as a corridor for dispersing young koalas, not for breeding.

So, how narrow can a functional corridor be? I was asked this in the 1990s by the judge of the Land and Environment Court and recently by Campbelltown mayor Sue Dobson. The judge wanted the information for his decision on whether to allow subdivision of a property near

Wedderburn Gorge and Sue wanted to know what sort of corridor would let koalas move between Smiths Creek behind Airds Community Centre and the Woolwash on the Georges River.

To the judge, I suggested the bigger the better but when pressed I estimated 70m with frequent trees.

We've followed many koalas now and have consequently narrowed our estimate. A corridor should follow creeklines (even perennials), could be as narrow as a single tree line and the trees as close as possible for rapid escape from dogs. Ideally there should be food trees and trees with thick foliage for protection.

Please report all koala sightings on the UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Playtpus sighting is rare

31/7/13

By Dr Robert Close

MAC KOALA

LAST Saturday Professor David Phalen reported he and his niece Carey, who is visiting from the US, had seen a platypus from their kayaks in the Nepean River not far from the Douglas Park bridge.

This sighting was exciting because for several years now platypus expert Dr Tom Grant and I have been interested in the status of this monotreme mammal in the Nepean River. We have been particularly interested in the Camden local government area because Camden Council's logo is a platypus.

When the logo was selected several years ago there was considerable controversy with some residents complaining that the platypus was no longer in the area. With the help of two students and zoologist George Madani we collected details of platypus sightings from local residents and searched the river from Douglas Park to Cobbitty,

classifying each reach according to its potential as a habitat.

Despite the fact we'd collected many reports of sightings from different sites along the river and that our survey had shown that there was much apparently suitable habitat, we'd never been able to find platypuses at these sites.

Given that fleeting glimpses of other residents of the river, such as carp, water rats and turtles can sometimes be interpreted as platypuses, we were unable to state with absolute certainty that platypuses live in the Camden area. Photographic evidence shows platypuses are living in Werriberri Creek at The Oaks and in the Bargo River but these eventual tributaries of the Nepean aren't in the Camden area.

David and Carey, however, saw their platypus dive and surface

several times and are certain of their observations. Downstream of their sighting there are no impediments to platypus movement in the 16km or so of river before it leaves the Wollondilly and Campbelltown areas and enters the Camden area.

So it is fair to infer that dispersing platypuses are likely to visit Camden even if not actually breeding.

We await, therefore, final evidence of recent platypus presence in Camden.

Our feeling is that the many small creeks that run into the Nepean are good candidates for searches. For example, an unverified sighting was recorded relatively recently from Narellan Creek at Kirkham. So always be alert and have your camera ready – the Macarthur area has many wildlife stories yet to uncover.

Please report koala and platypus sightings: UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Sounds of mating season

By Dr Robert Close

MAC KOALA

KOALAS are now entering their breeding season, so males will be heard bellowing.

Females will be listening to distinguish which of the males can demonstrate the greatest breeding potential, by the quality and power of his bellowing.

Once the females have chosen a male they will then move to him, sometimes a kilometre or so from their usual home range, and often with a joey clinging to their backs.

This scenario may have been in process recently when a mother and her cub were seen at Wedderburn, crossing Minerva Road near the corner with Kenwood Road and opposite the Forest Monastery.

We've had other sightings of koalas in this area, so it looks as though a female has established a home range there.

Drivers should be aware that the mother may be crossing the road regularly and that the cub is not

far from becoming independent.

Less happy news, however, came from near Mittagong where a female koala, Kiki, had been brought in to the Wildlife Health and Conservation Centre by WIRES in mid-December last year.

She showed symptoms of chlamydial infection, but vets at the centre considered that it was worth attempting a cure.

So Kiki was given a course of antibiotics and then, after two months in care, was released back where she was originally found.

We fitted her with a radio-transmitter and she was then tracked regularly over the next five months.

Everything looked to be going well.

She showed no signs of having a "wet bottom", a symptom of chlamydia caused by leakage of urine onto her fur, and she was moving around what appeared to be a normal home range.

Unfortunately Kiki's

trackers found her dead. A post-mortem showed external signs of physical trauma, but the chlamydial infection not only returned but also to her reproductive organs.

This sad story puts the light on the whole issue of whether we should be investing time and money on trying to rehabilitate severely ill and diseased wild animals.

Kiki probably would have suffered after the chlamydial infection returned, and may have spread the infection to other koalas.

We already adopt a triage system where animals that have little chance of survival in the wild are euthanased. However, we may now have to reassess our criteria for whether to proceed with care for a koala's chlamydial infection.

Please report koala and platypus sightings: UWS 9962 9996.

Campbelltown Macarthur Advertiser, Wednesday, August 14, 2013

Note:

No column published on this date

Sounds of mating season

21/8/13

By Dr Robert Close

MAC KOALA

A WELCOME call came in last Friday reporting a koala with a joey in the bushland next to the Campbelltown East Primary School in the Smiths Creek Reserve.

The school had reported a young koala in the same patch of bush last year. So with luck it's the same koala that has now established a home-range in the reserve. If all goes well she may survive there for a further 10 years bringing joy to the students and many joeys to the reserve.

The joey was sitting on its mother's front, but as it develops, it will move round to her back before finally learning to move independently.

In previous years we've had reports of koalas with joeys in nearby Canberra Crescent and Brisbane Road, so I expect that the current mother may have been one of those joeys.

Whatever the case, young koalas are going to be moving north and south along Smiths Creek. Those that move north are likely to visit Airds, like one young male that appeared in Boonoke Place last week.

Residents, worried that it was being harassed by dogs, wrapped him up in a blanket and called Lenny from Sydney Wildlife Rescue. Lenny collected the koala from Boonoke Place then rang me. By this time it was 10pm. I found that the young koala weighed 6kg (half his adult weight), was moving well, and had no signs of saliva on its fur which would indicate a dog attack. I then released him near The Woolwash beside the Georges River.

Where will he go from there?

That will depend on the resident male koalas in the area.

There's a good chance that he will be driven back into Airds. He might, in fact, be the same koala that was reported last week in Burrundulla Crescent. Other possibilities are to cross the Georges River and move south up O'Hares Creek or travel into the Holsworthy Firing Range. Despite the unexploded ordnance, the latter alternative would probably be the safest option. Alternatively, he may head south-west and finish up crossing Appin Road near the Spotted Gum forest, as one did two weeks ago at 4am. It was found high in a tree not 2m from the edge of the road on the western side. Hopefully it will continue west and meet the Nepean River.

Please report koala and platypus sightings: UWS pager, 9962 9996.

Koala hit by a motorist

29/8/13

By Dr Robert Close

MAC KOALA

IN LAST week's column I discussed potential routes for dispersing koalas once they're independent of their mothers but did not mention the northerly route into Liverpool.

This would seem dangerous and so it turned out for a young koala last week when it was hit by a car on Moorebank Avenue not far north of the Cambridge Avenue causeway. This was near the spot a few weeks ago where a motorist spotted a koala.

Unfortunately, the koala or koalas weren't tagged so we don't know whether the two sightings were of the same animal.

■ Another sighting of a koala was reported from Kentlyn Primary School near where an animal has been seen regularly for the past four weeks. In the

latest report, the koala was in the school grounds and had a red eartag but appeared to have a damaged leg. Searches failed to find it so we ask people to watch for it and to note the colour of the second eartag.

Unless we know both colours and which was in the left and right ear we can't work out the koala's identity. However, in this case we suspect it's Shy, daughter of June, who lived for many years in the school and adjacent retirement village.

Shy is also the grand-daughter of Shirley who lived for many years near the corner of Georges River Road and Darling Avenue. We'd like to verify that the recent sighting was, in fact, Shy.

Another sighting was recorded near Aberfoyle Road at Wedderburn.

■ Further to the recent platypus stories, an *Advertiser* reader contacted the editor about a sighting of a platypus in Prospect Creek behind the Canley Vale station. Platypus expert Dr Tom Grant said there have been two relatively recent sightings in the creek and a dead one was found in nearby Cabramatta Creek in 1997 but he thinks it most likely the observer saw a carp which looks like a platypus when it rolls at the surface. Always have your camera ready when you walk near water or in the bush — there's a lot happening!

I haven't ended this column with the pager number. I've had to close the account for various reasons. When we work out a replacement system I'll let you know.

Cramar proves a survivor

4/9/13

MAC KOALA

By Dr Robert Close

I thought we'd seen the last of Cramar when he was spotted in the grounds of historic St Helens Park House last year.

First caught in Woodland Road in January 2007, he is now more than 9½ years old.

That is a good age for a male koala and I thought that he must have been driven out of Spring Creek bushland by a younger and less battle-worn male.

However, when Phil Ditchburn photographed a male koala behind his house in Woodland Road, not 150 metres from Cramar's original capture point, the white and yellow eartags clearly identified it as Cramar.

Over the years Cramar has been reported to us on 15 occasions, mostly near Ironside Avenue, where avid koala spotter, Robert Zollia, keeps a lookout for Cramar in his favourite grey gum.

Another fascinating report was of five koalas in one tree at

Hodgson Close, Wedderburn. We've seen such clusters before and they usually comprise a large dominant male and two females and their large cubs from the previous year.

The two females are attracted by the male's splendid bellowing. What particularly caught our attention was that one appeared to have a collar.

We immediately thought of Pindari, the orphaned koala that WIRES carer Cate Ryan had hand-raised.

We released Pindari with a radio-collar which unfortunately failed soon after release.

The only other koala that carries a collar is Sarah, daughter of Fran, whose collar had failed shortly before the big fires of 2001.

Intensive searches failed to find Sarah and we assumed that she was dead.

If she were alive today she

would be 17. Koalas in captivity have lived up to 18 years, but 17 in the bush would be amazing, particularly if she was still chasing the boys with the big bellows.

No matter whether it's Pindari or Sarah, it is an important discovery.

I hope to solve the puzzle before next week's column.

■ That column will be my last in the long-standing and regular Mac Koala series . . . although the editor, Jeff McGill – who has supported our studies for the past 20 years – has welcomed me doing an occasional column if something unusual crops up.

To record koala sightings contact me by email R.Close@uws.edu.au. For occasions where a koala is injured call WIRES (Cate Ryan) on 0415 957 383.

MAC CHAT

4/9/13

Farewell. Sort of.

For the better part of two decades, the Mac Koala column – updating readers on local koala sightings and news – has been a popular part of this newspaper.



Alas, koala expert Dr Robert Close (pictured) has decided to scale back his workload and, as he notes on page 30, next week's

column will be his last *regular* appearance. He is, however, still regarded as an honorary part of the *Advertiser* family and is happy to offer occasional insights "if something unusual crops up".

We'll say a proper "thank you" to

A fond farewell with our last column

By Robert Close

This is the last regular Mac Koala column, although I will still give occasional updates.

I warmly thank the many people who have reported sightings and those who have helped with capture and radio-tracking.

Tim Bowden has played a major role in the research as have Vanda and Mick Pares, Kieran Griffin and Janette Ennals. It's been a great pleasure to have met so many friendly people during the course of the research.

When we started our research in 1990 the only known local koalas were from Wedderburn.

Our first aim was to survey habitat by methodically searching for scratch marks and faecal pellets. Our second aim was to investigate koala health, particularly chlamydia, in collaboration with the Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute.

The clinical signs of the disease have been discovered to this day.

The health aspect of our study is now run by the Centre for Wildlife Health and Conservation at Cobbitty.

When we obtained funding to start a radio-tracking study to investigate

home-range size, diet, longevity, dispersal, causes of mortality and reproductive capacity.

To obtain data, however, we had to find the rare koalas.

So we requested help from the community via the Advertiser in October 1990.

This request was successful three days later with the first sighting in Kentyn. It was also the start of a long and fruitful collaboration between UWS, the Advertiser and the community.

Our continuing liaison became much more efficient with the development of the Mac Koala Club in October 1995 and the arrival of PhD student Steven Ward whose scholarship was half paid by the Advertiser.

This led to a pager system, to the weekly Mac Koala column and to the council-erected koala-crossing signs which also publicised the pager number.

After Steven graduated, Tristan Lee worked on the project, specialising in DNA studies.

He recently was able to submit his thesis.

Here's a summary of our general results.

■ The population is healthy and

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Left: A map by Robert Close shows local koala sightings (yellow dots) over the lifetime of this column.

they can use very narrow corridors, such as the one that links Cook Reserve and James Ruse Reserve.

■ As the koala population increases more and more animals will appear in household gardens and these will usually be more disturbed.

■ Over 3000 community sightings have been recorded. 167 koalas have been ear-tagged and 17 have been radio-tracked. Of that total 57 males and 53 females are less than 15m and may still be alive.

So we will continue to ask the community to report koalas, especially those with ear-tags, by email or directly.

Thank you again for your enthusiastic support.

Report koala sightings to r.close@uws.edu.au. If you see an injured koala, Gate Road, WUBS, 4115 457 383.

extends east across the Holsworthy, lying range and south to Appin but is in danger from the arrival of Chlamydia-carrying southern koalas.

■ Females occupy home ranges of 10 hectares to 20 hectares and once established generally live to an average age of 15.

■ Young animals may travel many kilometres in search of a suitable home range and during dispersal they are vulnerable to dogs and cars.

■ They can live and breed in urban reserves, such as Smiths Green, and

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