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Amazing Animals
Fact sheets

Koalas

We often hear these adorable Aussies called â€˜koala bearsâ€™, but they are actually not bears at all. Koalas are marsupials, so they carry their young in a pouch, unlike bears which carry their young in the womb until they are well developed.

The koala lives almost entirely on eucalypt leaves and they have a very low metabolic rate for a mammal, which is why they can sleep for up to 20 hours a day!

Koala

Koalas vary in size and colour depending on where they live in Australia. Koalas found in the southern distributions (Southern NSW and Victoria) tend to be slightly larger and darker than those in the northern areas (Northern NSW and QLD). This is likely to be related to the different temperatures and is a feature exhibited by many species whose distribution encompasses large climatic variations. The most notable physical aspect of the Koala would have to be its big fluffy ears. Koalas have a great sense of hearing and an even better sense of smell. This is how they select which leaves are the best to eat. Their eyesight is not too good, and therefore detection of predators is generally by sound. They possess very strong forearms and extremely long, sharp claws for climbing.

Habitat

Koalas are found in eucalypt forests around the Eastern and South Eastern coast of Australia. The majority of wild Koalas are found on private property thus meaning there is no formal protection of this habitat. It is not known why some areas are absent of Koalas despite the presence of a food source, but it is possible that historically hunting has driven local populations to extinction.

Diet

Koalas eat eucalypt leaves but only from certain species. There are over 700 Eucalyptus species occurring within Australia, however the Koala will eat leaves from less than 50 of these species. Out of the palatable varieties, less than one dozen are staples. They prefer the 'tip' of the leaves, which is the juiciest and softest part of the leaf and eat around 500g of tip per day. Of course wild Koalas have to depend on whatever leaf is available and during the cooler months will often be forced to eat the more mature leaves.

Breeding

When a female Koala is ready to breed she will call out to a male by letting out a loud snorting bellow. The female gives birth 35 days after mating. When born, the baby weighs only half a gram and is the size of a kidney bean at about 2cm long. It stays attached to its mothers teat for 13 weeks, its eyes are open at 22 weeks and it gains teeth at 24 weeks. At around the 7 month age bracket, the baby will start taking short spells climbing on its mother's back and is usually independent at about 12 months old.

Australia Zoo Koala profiles

Coco

Coco is sweetheart through and through. She is quite a big girl - both long and solid, yet she manages to find comfort in the most odd and seemingly inappropriate places. She has a couple of favourite trees to sit in at Koala Walkthrough - one is the flimsy limb of a young silky oat tree, while another is in a small melaleuca shrub where the branches bend under her weight. But rest assured Coco doesn't seem to see any issue with her choices. She happily re-adjusts herself until the branches stop wobbling and settles in for a snooze. Coco has effortlessly won the heart of every keeper. She loves to say hello to her keepers and will often come down from where she is sitting in a tree, offer her paw and then head back up again. Coco is a very special, sweet girl with the most endearing habits - she has even been known to try and sneak a little hand hold from the occasional guest. So Sweet!

Endangered Species!

Very low numbers are left in the wild. Koalas are at risk of extinction within the next ten years. Although still classed as common in most areas, the extensive destruction of habitat has directly resulted in a dramatic drop in koala numbers. Urbanisation has also placed increasing pressure on existing populations through the dangers of roads and domestic dogs.

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