



## AUTUMN EDITION 2016

### Dear Koala Volunteers

Welcome to the first newsletter for 2016. The latter months of 2015, and the first month of 2016, were unrelentingly hot and dry. There has been a belated, but weak wet season in late summer and early autumn. Consequently we have not undertaken any field work since October 2015, and hence, this newsletter is a short edition.



### **Taking a breather! Counting koalas on St Bees Island**

An active field year is about to commence, however. I am running St Bees Island field trips in May, July and October, and a Cape Byron trip (Victoria) in September – all in conjunction with Earthwatch Australia. Flavia Santamaria is running a field program near Monto starting in the mid-year. There are opportunities for your participation in some of these trips. See details in this newsletter.

The hot, dry weather we have recently experienced has yet again placed CQ koalas under stress and has also stressed their habitat. On St Bees Island, for example, koala populations have been declining slowly, and eucalypts have been dying. Unfortunately, it seems likely that this is a reflection of animal and plant populations adjusting to the new normal characterised by increasingly dry dry-seasons, in conjunction with shorter but more intense wet seasons.

We need to be prepared for more of the same as the predicted climate changes arrive and intensify. This places increased importance on koala habitat structural features that allow koalas to escape the heat (see this newsletter for a great example). It is critical that we know how koalas use complex habitat structures, and that we protect existing koala populations and their habitats – not just the food trees.

Looking forward to a busy year and hopefully having you join us in some way or another.

**Alistair Melzer**

## Upcoming field trips for 2016

There are opportunities for The CQKV team to join the research team throughout 2016. If you want to join the team let us know.

### St Bees Island

**2<sup>nd</sup> - 9<sup>th</sup> May** - There is space for up to five adult volunteers. Will involve travel by dingy, bush walking over uneven terrain, hot showers and comfy beds. Travel and accommodation costs will apply. Let Alistair Melzer [a.melzer@cqu.edu.au](mailto:a.melzer@cqu.edu.au) know if you are interested.

**11<sup>th</sup> - 23<sup>rd</sup> July and 20<sup>th</sup> - 31<sup>st</sup> October** - The number of available spaces on these two trips will be known closer to the date. Contact Alistair Melzer [a.melzer@cqu.edu.au](mailto:a.melzer@cqu.edu.au) to be placed on the waiting list. Will involve travel by dingy, bush walking over uneven terrain, hot showers and comfy beds. Travel and accommodation costs will apply.

### Monto

A range of field trips starting in mid-year. This project is in the early design phase. Contact Flavia Santamaria [f.santamaria@cqu.edu.au](mailto:f.santamaria@cqu.edu.au) for more information and to be placed on the waiting list.



### Nairana NP koala uses tree hollow to escape summer heat

During a recent field trip to Nairana National Park, near Belyando Crossing on the Gregory Development Road we found a young female koala sheltering in a hollow in a river red gum on a minor drainage line near the Belyando River. Below are photos of the ephemeral stream, and of the koala partially emerged from the hollow.





This is only the second record of a koala on this park. Also, it is the second record of a koala using a tree hollow by us. The first was of a large male koala using a tree hollow at the base of a river red gum on the Ward River near Hughenden. In these central western habitats koalas rely on habitat structure to find shelter from radiant heat by day. Without this shelter it is unlikely that these sparse populations would persist.

**Alistair Melzer**



### **Fossil evidence for the existence of drop bears!**

The Queensland Museum has produced a wonderful little book *In Search of Ancient Queensland*; A Queensland Museum Discovery Guide (Authors Dr Alex Cook and Dr Andrew Rozefelds, Queensland Museum 2015). This is a great introductory book to Queensland's fossil record. If you read it carefully you will recognise the fossils from our sites near Tambo and near Hughenden. The work provides an excellent account of the geological history of these landscapes, and helps us to understand the local soils and geology and the array of fossils we find during the koala pellet hunt.

“What has this to do with drop bears!” you may ask. Well, buried within the book is an account of a relative of the koala – and it has all the characteristics of the Australian mythical drop bear.

On page 248 is an account of the marsupial lion (*Thylacoleo* spp.). So far two species have been identified, the 140kg *Thylacoleo carnifex* and the smaller *Thylacoleo hilli* (found at Mt Etna near Rockhampton). The nearest relatives to these carnivores are the koala and the wombat.

These animals had semi-opposable thumb and claws, and may have climbed trees. This would also have allowed the marsupial lion to have a

very strong grasp on its prey; presumably it then chewed the prey to death. (Remember that koala chewing off Mary's finger! A.M.)

Don't be misguided by the term "lion". This is not a cat. The teeth are superficially similar to those of koalas and wombats, although modified to facilitate a meat eating diet.

Now, the big question...Are these predators truly extinct? We all know the persistent stories of drop bears! These campfire stories are as common as accounts of sightings of Tasmanian tiger in Victoria and Tasmania.

There are precedents. The Wollemi Pine (*Wollemia nobilis*) was well known in the fossil record before the living population was discovered. Similarly the mountain pygmy-possum (*Burrhamys parvus*) was first described in the fossil record before its discovery in the wild some 70 years later.

So, be aware and send us any sightings, or tracks and traces.

Apart from all that, this is both an informative, and very enjoyable book, and I encourage everyone to buy a copy for themselves or that special 10 or 12 year old with an interest in Queensland's fossil records.

Oh, and if you're going for a quiet nocturnal bush walk, take a torch and look up!

**Alistair Melzer**

## **French university students travel to Australia for the Koala - Flavia Santamaria**

Koalas are like magnets, they, however, do not attract metal; they attract people from all over the world. In this case, two university students from France will join the CQ Koala Volunteers to carry out a research project.

The owners of a beautiful, large property in Monto, south-west of Rockhampton, are happy to host researchers, students and volunteers for a survey which will establish the extent of koala habitat and the number of koalas in their property.

The two students, Julia and Jennifer, will spend 4 months at Central Queensland University to work on the project. They will employ various survey techniques to gather data that will help determine the status of this population of koalas.

It will be a mix of fun and hard work; but, what an experience it will be to work in Australia great environment with the largest arboreal marsupial in

the world, the Koala!

We welcome volunteers interested in being involved with the project.



Contact Flavia at [f.santamaria@cqu.edu.au](mailto:f.santamaria@cqu.edu.au)

## **Mission**

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

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

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

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

## **Office Bearers**

*Alistair Melzer, signatory, Chairperson*

*Carmen Drake, signatory, CQKV representative on Koala Research Centre Board*

*Shirley Hopkins, signatory, Treasurer*

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