

# Central Queensland Koala Volunteers



*Winter Edition 2014*

## Launch of Research Trust Fund



**Shirley Hopkins, Dr Alistair Melzer, Her Excellency Penelope Wensley AC, Mary McCabe, Carmen Drake**

It is several years since CQKV started the process of establishing a Trust Fund in partnership with The Royal Society of Queensland, with the view of maintaining our commitment towards wildlife research, in particular the koala. The day finally came and on June 12th, Alistair, Mary, Shirley and I travelled to Brisbane for the launch of the Research Trust Fund by The Governor of Queensland, Her Excellency Penelope Wensley AC. This ceremony was held at the Queensland Museum on Friday 13th June 2014, followed by a Society of Queensland short seminar titled - Research as Infrastructure.

As the nominated 'founder' of the Research Trust Fund, I was called upon to sign the Trust Fund document along with members of the Royal Society during the launch. Our initiative to establish this research fund was applauded by members of the Society and I would like to make particular note and thanks for the assistance given to us from Cate Melzer. We will now have to make more effort to continue with further funding.

After a morning tea attended by the Governor of Queensland and Society members, we then heard from Chief Scientist of Qld Dr Geoff Garrett, Research Director CSIRO Ms Anna Littleboy and CQKV's own Dr Alistair Melzer. The talks were all very interesting and it was a great opportunity to hear from our leading scientists discussing their work along with the problems dealing with environment and bureaucracy.

We came away feeling in a small way that we were making a positive contribution to the ongoing struggle to finance scientific research in Queensland.

**Carmen**

## Tambo Trip

When we left for Tambo we suspected that the koalas were in trouble due to the ongoing drought. Sadly this was confirmed on our visit to Stirling Downs in late May. Alistair, Marie and I spent 5 days searching along creeklines, reserves, and even the town common ( which was full of possum pellets) for any evidence of koalas. A few scratches were visible but no droppings at any of the sites. The trees were in good condition but ground water, dams etc. were completely dry.



**Marie Natali searching dry creek beds near Tambo for traces of koalas. June 2014**



**Tree death along streams and around dams at Tambo. Previously we located koalas at this spot. June 2014**  
Jim and Jenny have had to sink a bore to obtain water for themselves and their stock. The great mobs of kangaroos we used to see hopping across the downs (a scene we enjoyed, but not shared by Jim and Jenny) have now been reduced to small young animals in minimal numbers.

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We left Tambo with the feeling that it was going to need many years of good weather condition before koalas would return if ever. However we will keep monitoring the area and hope there will be a return of koalas in the Tambo district.

While we were out in Tambo, Flavia and Rolfe attended the Gladstone Ecofest and took a basket of our 'orphan' koalas to sell. They did very well and a large number of 'orphans' found new homes. Well done Flavia and Rolfe.

*Carmen*

## **Drought and heat wave impacts on regional koala populations**

Queensland has slipped back into drought mode and koala populations are suffering – along with property owners, stock and other wildlife. Our study site at Tambo has been severely affected. Jim and Jenny Skelton kindly allowed us to visit their property in June this year. They have been in drought since 2012/13. In spring and summer 2013 the property was afflicted by a heat wave with many consecutive days over 40°C. This was too much for the koalas. Jenny and Jim rescued one female koala from the boggy mud in a largely empty dam. However, despite their care and attention, the animal succumbed to stress and dehydration and died.

We visited the property to confirm what the Skelton's already knew. All the koalas were gone. Carmen Drake and Marie Natali (a French intern) and I systematically searched the stream lines for traces of koalas. We found no recent signs of koalas and only very rare signs of brushtail possum. The creek line vegetation had been severely stressed. In some areas trees had died, mostly, the surviving stream fringing trees showed signs of dieback, and the leaf size was greatly reduced. We went on to search the nearby Ward River. Again, no recent koala signs were found. Here, however, possum signs were more numerous; although there were stretches of river where traces of possum and koala were totally absent. We had to drive north of Tambo to find sparse traces of koalas along stream lines. Jim Skelton recalled that koala numbers were at their greatest in the early 1990's but they have been declining with successive waves of drought since then. It seems that this latest drought has eliminated this population.

In July we visited St Bees Island for the annual koala census. This time I was accompanied by Leith Black (a CQUni research assistant), Galina Kinsella (an intern from USA) and Bethany Walker (Bethany visited us about seven years ago and was keen to return) as well as a small Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service team. Here too last spring and summer's heat wave has had an impact. This was probably exacerbated by two cyclones that crossed over St Bees in the same season. We found koalas and Galina was able complete her research project looking at koala responses to disturbance. The census data, however, revealed a 30% decline in koala numbers. There was no indication of successful rearing of young, and we encountered only one sub-adult animal.



**The only confirmed sign of koalas that we found during the June field trip to Tambo**

However, not all koala populations have been impacted by this drought, so far that is! A property

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inspection near Nebo revealed a widespread, vibrant koala population. All females had advanced backyoung. The vegetation appeared healthy. Further south, near Esk, we visited Dr Bill Ellis's site at Mt Byron. Here again, the koalas were widespread and relatively abundant. There may have been some signs of stress in some eucalypt trees, but this was very limited. We wait and see what the developing *el nino* brings. Our next trip to St Bees Island is in mid 2015. Later that year we'll head to Hughenden to see how the population there is dealing with the drought conditions.  
*Alistair Melzer*

## **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**

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Carmen Drake, signatory, CQKV representative on*

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