



News

**BUSHFIRE VICTIMS
RELEASED**

Learn more

**ARE THE FORESTS
REGENERATING?**

Thank you

**WORLD SHOWS
KINDNESS AND
INGENUITY**

FORESTS START TO REGENERATE AFTER FIRE AND DROUGHT



Burnt koala habitat in Lake Innes Nature Reserve, November 2019.

Bushfires have been the last straw, annihilating some areas.

The 2019 NSW bushfire season started earlier, and more ferociously than expected. On October 26, a dry electrical storm in Port Macquarie started a fire that very quickly traveled south through Lake Innes Nature Reserve. Concurrently, a fire at Gospers Mountain, further south in Wollemi National Park, also ignited by a lightning strike, started Australia's largest known single ignition point forest fire. This was the beginning of Australia's most devastating bushfire season on record.

2019 was Port Macquarie's driest year in over 150 years of records. This followed ten years of below average rainfall and highest-on-record mean temperatures across Australia. In addition, for New South Wales 2019 was the warmest year on record. We received reports of empty dams for the first time ever and witnessed tree die-back on grand scales; dehydrated koalas were being admitted to the Koala Hospital almost daily.

Some forested areas have been under such pressure over a very long time with drought, that the fires have been the last straw and totally annihilated some sites. Crowdy Bay is a classic example of long-term drought and repeated fire events. Some spots will take

30-50 years to return to glory if ever.

Our search and rescue teams brought animals in from far and wide. While those koalas were in rehabilitation, we awaited the regeneration of the forests from which they had come. Eucalyptus trees have adapted to recover well after fire. Fresh growth stems from lignotubers underground, or from epicormic buds stored deep beneath the thick bark in trunks and branches. Before long, our local koala forests appeared furry with the new shooting branches soon defining the trees' new structure.



New growth sprouts from underground lignotubers following bushfire.

Front cover: A juvenile male koala is released in Lake Innes Nature Reserve. Image courtesy of Port Macquarie Hastings Council.

Some forests are slowly returning to health.

With forests slowly returning to health, we released the koalas back to their recovering habitats. The consequent effect on koala populations, however, has been immense; some populations may never recover. It is estimated that 8,000 koalas have perished and up

to 75% of koala habitat has been lost in New South Wales, due to this single devastating bushfire season.

As a global community, we must address our changing climate as these drought and fire events will occur into the future. Koala Conservation Australia is currently designing the first breeding program and facility to help increase numbers and genetic robustness in wild koala populations in New South Wales.



The resilience of the Australian bush: lush, new growth amongst trees burnt by fire only 6 months earlier. Image courtesy of Port Macquarie Hastings Council.



A newly-released koala in Crowdy Bay National Park. Thankfully plentiful, fresh food leaves surround her in this part of the park. Image courtesy of Port Macquarie Hastings Council.



Fresh leaves grow from epicormic buds deep in the trunks and branches of trees.

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REPORT BY CLINICAL DIRECTOR, CHEYNE FLANAGAN



Goodness hasn't 2020 been a wild ride so far? Drought, bushfires and now COVID-19. We made the decision to close the Koala Hospital to visitors in mid March. It has been eerily quiet in the public areas. Behind the scenes it is still business as usual.

In the early stages of the lockdown, we decided that the majority of the bushfire koalas were ready to be returned as there had been really good rainfall. Three of us spent a day assessing the firegrounds for the expected good flush of new growth. Two of the firegrounds which make up Lake Innes Nature Reserve had excellent regrowth and would definitely sustain the returning koalas. Sadly Crowdy Bay National Park even at the time of writing is still looking like Armageddon so we were reluctant to return them there. However, thankfully on the southern border of the park there is excellent

regrowth of quality vegetation that was not only perfect but there is also a small number of koalas who live there.

It was a major exercise preparing all the koalas – eartagging and microchipping, final weights and health assessments. Some of the koalas were in a big open pre-release enclosure and required tree climbers to catch them. In the end we got them all! We released all of them over a number of days and generated an amazing amount of media interest in the release. We had intended to fit the koalas with radio collars and track them for six months to see how they coped with being returned to their home environment. Due to COVID - 19 we were not comfortable with doing this, in case we were not allowed on site with the lockdown restrictions. Sadly we have lost so much valuable data from not being able to track the koalas. We

can report that all the koalas were successfully released and follow up observations showed they all were high up in the trees, although it was impossible to know who was who. We still currently have five fireground koalas remaining at the hospital.

COVID - 19 lockdown has had a major impact on volunteer numbers, but thankfully the current number of koalas at the hospital is now quite manageable with skeleton staff keeping things ship-shape.

This quiet time has enabled us to get onto the business of working on a number of projects.

In mid-winter breeding season will re-commence and things will certainly start to pick up.

We wish everyone good health in these difficult times and stay safe.

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REPORT BY PRESIDENT, SUE ASHTON

What crazy times we live in - first we had the devastating bush fires that raged in much of Australia wiping out over one billion animals and birds. As we slowly began to pick ourselves up, the coronavirus spread around the world, killing many people and forcing us into self isolation and social distancing.

This month we are starting to relax restrictions and slowly return to life as we knew it.

The Port Macquarie Koala Hospital closed its doors in March and will reopen when the Government advises 100 visitors are allowed to gather in public places, possibly in July. To meet the Safe Work practices we have invested in perspex barriers, signs and will direct visitors through the exhibit koalas. The Koala Museum will remain closed.

Throughout all the sadness and upheaval, the Koala Hospital has continued to care for injured and sick wild koalas.

What has kept our volunteer teams going is the kind way in which the public, nationally and internationally, has supported us.

The staff and volunteers at the Port Macquarie Koala Hospital have been humbled by the kindness of so many. People of all ages from young to old, contacted the hospital and offered their support. Whether by adopting a koala,

sponsoring land at our plantation, or making a donation, people have supported the Koala Hospital and its many volunteers through these tough times.

This issue of Gum Tips recognises just a few of the kind gestures that have helped us over the last six months. There are far too many to acknowledge in the magazine however our thanks go to every single person who has contributed to, and supported, the hospital.

On a personal level, one of the saddest days for me during the bush fires was when the decision was made to euthanase a three year old, female koala I had cared for in home care. Her name was Rue, and sadly her burns were so severe the difficult decision to euthanase her was made.

I was interviewed around this time and asked what made me feel sad during the bush fires and I commented about the loss of Rue. Hanna in Burnsville in the United States saw the interview and was so moved she taught herself to crochet and made the little koala pictured in the photo above with one of our exhibit koalas, Zenani, looking on.

The Port Macquarie Koala Hospital will be forever thankful to people like Hanna. They acknowledged the huge loss of wildlife with love and grace and they also gave us hope when times were tough.

The koalas featured in this issue also continue to give us hope. Despite many having horrendous wounds, and requiring months of treatment, they have healed and been released back to the wild from where they were rescued. They too give us hope; hope and determination to achieve one of our goals - to rebuild the wild koala population.



BUSHFIRE VICTIMS RELEASED

Some good news in these difficult times.

In early April, five months after their bushland homes had been destroyed by bushfires, 26 koalas were released back to the wild by the Koala Hospital! After so much hard work and sadness generated by the catastrophic fire season,



Peter Berecny operates the 'cherry picker' and prepares to first capture a koala from high in the open yards at the Koala Hospital, prior to release back to the wild.

the greatest reward of all came for clinical staff and volunteers as they watched this group of koalas return to life in the wild.

The koalas include males and females, independent juveniles and mature adults. Many had simply been sheltering with us, provided with safe 'bed & board' while the bush regenerated. Some have made remarkable recoveries from the trauma and pain of burns and dehydration.

Given the excellent rainfall along the coast early this year, the Australian bush has proved once more just how resilient it is, with fresh green growth already established in both koala food trees and the species they need for shade and shelter.

These healthy, returning koalas are vital to the continuation of the species on the Mid North Coast of NSW. They were released back to the home ranges from which they were rescued, in Lake Innes Nature Reserve and Crowdy Bay National Park.



Enjoying the sweet taste of freedom once more, high amongst the lush new leaves in Lake Innes Nature Reserve.



**LINR Anwen, early days after being rescued from the firegrounds. Anwen is named after a kind, young girl who was delivering home-made treats for Hospital volunteers in November, when the injured koala was first admitted into care.*



LINR Anwen has made a remarkable recovery. Here she is - bright-eyed, ear-tagged and ready for her release!

All images on pages 6 and 7 courtesy of Port Macquarie Hastings Council, excluding * LINR Anwen.



A newly released koala looks back at Peter as much as to say, 'Thanks, mate!'



A lively koala takes off into the trees, watched by volunteer Jeremy Bear.

These koalas are vital to the continuation of the species on the Mid North Coast of NSW.

The whole process was quite an exercise. During normal times, the Koala Hospital might release one or two koalas in a day. In addition to the sheer number, many had first to be captured from big trees in large open yards, where those that were unharmed by the bushfires were cared for while their homes regrew. Again, we thank Peter Berecny (from Port Tree Fella) for his assistance, including his vital 'cherry picker' and other equipment for working high in the tree canopy.

Peter is a great supporter of the Koala Hospital and we value his time and expertise enormously.

Koalas from bushfire areas inland such as Pappinbarra remain in our care until their homes regenerate enough to sustain them. More rain has now fallen in some of these areas and we are hoping that it won't be long before these koalas can also be released.

Some bushfire victims will remain with us longer, continuing to recuperate. We are pleased to say that LINR Paul and Ruins Way Baz continue to improve, enjoying close care and attention in our Rehabilitation Yard. They are eating well, climbing more. Everyone takes a keen interest and prays for their recovery.



Ruins Way Baz – a quirky, relaxed character, Baz was the only koala whose burns could be treated without anaesthetic! Baz was happy provided his favourite home carer, Barb, was on hand feeding him fresh young leaves! He continues his recovery at the Koala Hospital.



LINR Paul – gentle Paul continues his recovery at the Koala Hospital following extended treatment for burns from radiant heat.

WORLD SHOWS KINDNESS AND INGENUITY

Awesome proactive, creative fundraising

When we truly care, we can achieve great things. This has been illustrated by the variety of fundraising activities across Australia and around the world, as people everywhere have reacted to the worst bushfire season in living memory and the horrific loss of wildlife. We are honoured and humbled to be recipients of some of the money kind and proactive people have raised for Australian wildlife organisations. We wonder at the ingenuity and creativity of adults and children who rallied support and raised money to help all our animals and birds.

Donations have come from individuals and families but also from caring people who are part of so many different groups, facilities and businesses, including:

- Retail shops
- Hotels, motels
- Pubs and clubs
- Financial and legal services
- Dental practices
- Tradesmen and tradeswomen
- Wineries
- Religious groups
- Community and multicultural organisations
- Correctional centres
- Beauticians, tattoo studios
- Recreational and sporting clubs
- Schools, kindergartens, Out Of School Hours Care, childcare facilities
- Medical and diagnostic practices
- Veterinary practices, and veterinary departments at universities
- Seniors' clubs and groups, aged care homes
- Children's sporting and extra-curricular groups
- Business associations
- Gyms

Humbling generosity from young and old all over the world

Considerable time and commitment have gone into the planning and presentation of a myriad of different ingenious fund-raising activities across Australia and around the world. They include concerts, social events and sporting competitions. Baking and craft work has resulted in donations from cookie and cake stalls, handmade jewellery, crafted hearts, greetings cards, koala-themed stationery sales. Talented artists and designers have created their own logos, printed and sold clothing and hats. There have been Mufti Days and Bring Your Own Soft Toy Days, Coins for Koalas, Pizza Fundraisers. Cookery books have been collated and published for sale by groups and organisations. Individuals have spread the word to contacts

and friends via social media, encouraging further giving.

Space here does not enable us to list each and every kindness, but here at Port Macquarie Koala Hospital, we are so grateful to you all; your messages of support, obvious concern and the money you gave and continue to give, makes a huge difference.

When the going has been sad and tough, your action and generosity have helped us to keep going, to keep doing everything we can to rescue and care for koalas, to sometimes make hard decisions, and to move forward now with hope and purpose. Perhaps most importantly, your donations mean we can bring forward our Wild Koala Breeding Program, so urgently needed now following the 2019/2020 fire season.



Our thanks to Cathy at LoveOne Gift Shop in Ipswich, UK – she decided to make a donation for every koala and tree frog soft toy she sold, publicising the fires and their impact on Australian wildlife in her shop. Cathy sold them all!



Students at Central Regional School, Bayville, New Jersey, USA – sold bags of Hershey Kisses chocolates and called their fundraiser 'Kiss a Koala'.



Hats off to the residents of Lord Howe Island off the coast of New South Wales. These lovely people organised and presented a charity concert by local performers, with food stalls and even haircuts to raise money for the Australian Red Cross as well as Port Macquarie Koala Hospital. A local artist designed 'Money for a Mate' t-shirts which sold like hot cakes too! Image courtesy of Port News.



One creative girl called Zeynep in Alabama, USA, made beautiful heart necklaces and sold them after school and at the weekend. Thank you, Zeynep!



Students at the Gymnasium Dreikonigschule in Dresden, Germany – baked cakes and cookies for a fund-raising cake stall, including very popular, yummy koala cakes. Vielen Dank!



Bunnings at Kirrawee, New South Wales, raised funds for us at their weekend barbecue plus an artistic 12 year old girl drew wildlife greetings cards and sold them alongside the stall. Wonderful work!



Students at the United Nations International School in New York City - made and sold koala puppets. They had their work cut out keeping up with demand!



Students at the Cercle des élèves de Polytech in Nancy, France organised sporting and social events and cookie sales. Merci beaucoup! Image courtesy of Port News.

HOSPITAL ACTIVITY

(NOV 2019 - APRIL 2020)

REASON FOR ADMITTANCE TO KOALA HOSPITAL

Chlamydia	19
Motor Vehicle Accident	17
Dog Attack	6
Bushfire Victim	53
Other	49

OUTCOMES

Released following health checks, treatment	92
Dead on arrival, died or euthanased	69

The data indicates increased level of activity over the last six months, heightened by the extreme bushfire season.

During our busiest weeks we were caring for 79 koalas including 53 either suffering burns or lacking food and habitat owing to the bushfires. A couple of offsite 'resorts' were even created at Lake Cathie and Rosewood, to accommodate some of the koalas who simply needed food and shelter until their bushland homes regenerated.



At the 'Lake Cathie resort', tall trees were re-designed to enable koalas to climb and have their own space, but at the same time keeping them contained safely until their release.

AND FROM ONE OF OUR WILDLIFE CAMERAS...

We were delighted to receive this photo recently of two possums at one of our wildlife water stations deployed in northern NSW. We have received images before of koalas at the drinking stations, but it is wonderful to see that other wildlife are also discovering them.



'Geez, how many more times do I have to remind you! 2 metres distance!'

Koala Kids

FACTS ABOUT BUSHFIRES AND KOALAS

1.

In late 2019 terrible bushfires were started by lightning strikes during dry electrical storms. In New South Wales more wildlife habitat was destroyed in this fire season than ever before, including an estimated 75% of koala habitat!

Image courtesy of Australian Maritime Safety Authority and Reuters.



3.

Koalas feel safe in trees, so when they are in danger they climb high into the tree canopy. Smaller bushfires may not reach the canopy but in these very large, hot and fast-moving fires, the fire reached the canopy and many koalas died or were injured. They couldn't escape.



Image courtesy of Port Macquarie Hastings Council.

4.

Koalas have thick fur which can help protect them in bushfires. However radiant heat can burn their skin underneath the fur. LINR Paul was burnt by radiant heat. Paul has been treated at the Koala Hospital for many months, and now he is feeling much better!



6.

Koalas are well-adapted to living in trees but they need long, strong claws to climb and protect themselves. If their claws are too badly damaged by burns in a bushfire, they don't grow back and the koala can't be released back to the wild.



5.

If a koala has burnt hands and feet, we can often treat them successfully at the Koala Hospital, and return them to the wild.



AND WE ARE OFTEN ASKED...

Where do we release our koala patients once they're feeling better?

Answer: We put them back where we found them, in their home range! Adult koalas in particular cannot be released anywhere else, because they will try to return to their home range. They might try to cross busy roads or meet dangerous dogs.



Koala Emergency Rescue Line - Phone (02) 6584 1522

If you sight a koala in distress - call our
Rescue Line 24 hours a day / 7 days a week

E: info@koalahospital.org.au  [koalahospital](https://www.facebook.com/koalahospital)

General Enquiries: 02 6584 1522

www.koalahospital.org.au

LOOKING FORWARD TO SEEING YOU AGAIN SOON!

Once we are open again to the public, please check our website and
Facebook page for information including opening hours and tour times.



*Four of our permanent residents:
Lismore Myrtle, Ocean Summer and
Emerald Downs Mary and NATF Zenani.*

Koala Conservation Australia Inc.

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