Koala rests in a mulberry tree, southern Eyre Peninsula. Photo Goin' Off Safaris donated to epkoalas.com.au citizen science project.

Koalas on Eyre Peninsula

History of koalas on Eyre Peninsula

Six koalas were introduced from Kangaroo Island to Mikkira Station, south west of Port Lincoln, Eyre Peninsula (EP) in 1969. Since introduction the koala population has expanded dramatically, both in numbers of individuals and distribution across the southern EP region. Whilst the exact number of koalas is currently unknown, their distribution has been recorded across an area of approximately 1500 km^2 on southern EP, in habitats that include manna gum, river red gum and the nationally endangered Eyre Peninsula blue gum woodland communities.

Why is it important to monitor koala numbers on EP?

Koalas provide a range of opportunities for people, such as a local tourism attraction which directly benefits the tourism industry and community. There are also benefits from increased community environmental awareness through the charismatic appeal of koalas, as many people reconnect with nature.

To maintain these benefits and many others into the future it is important to monitor how well the koala's habitat, the

Koala facts

Scientific name:	*Phascolarctos cinereus*
Breeding season:	October to May (mainly November to March)
Length of pregnancy:	35 days
Litter size:	1 (twins rare)
Pouch life:	6 to 8 months, permanently out of pouch by 9 months
Independence:	at 12 months old
Sexual maturity:	at 2+ years
Longevity:	average 15+ years (females) and 12+ years (males)
Weight:	average 8.5 kg (females) and 12 kg (males)
Period of activity:	mostly at night
Leaf consumption:	up to 1 kg of leaves per 24hrs

woodland communities, are going and prevent overbrowsing from overabundant koala populations.

Rapid population growth has been seen in other koala populations in southern Australia, including Cape Otway (Victoria), Kangaroo Island and the Adelaide Hills. In these areas this rapid growth has resulted in koalas significantly impacting the woodland trees on which they browse. Potential ongoing impacts on woodland communities on the Eyre Peninsula needs to be considered. At most risk are the highly fragmented manna gum (E. viminalis ssp cygnetensis) woodland community and the nationally threatened EP blue gum (Eucalyptus petiolaris) woodland community". If there is a rapid growth in the koala population on EP this may result in large areas of eucalyptus trees dying as a result of over-browsing.

Over browsing is the consumption of leaves to such an extent that all foliage is removed from the tree canopy and the tree eventually dies.

Koala over-browsing also threatens the survival of the koalas themselves. To date, there is no evidence to suggest that koalas can self-regulate their numbers, as kangaroos do. Without effective management, EP's koalas may eventually consume all the available food within an area, resulting in their own starvation. This is particularly pertinent when koala populations are capable of doubling in size every three years. For these reasons Natural Resources Eyre Peninsula (NREP) has now started koala abundance and tree health monitoring at five sites across southern EP to better gauge koala population and tree health changes.

Ways to assist

There are many ways to have a greater involvement in local koala management.

- Observations of breeding koalas and koalas with young are particularly valuable and will assist NREP in estimating population size and distribution. Report all local koala sightings to **www.ep.koalas.com.au**
- Assist in monitoring tree condition and koala abundance monitoring at pre identified sites.
- Implement landcare actions on your property such as revegetation, pest and weed control, excluding over abundant herbivores and/or stock with fencing, to bolster the health of woodland habitats where koalas live. This will enhance the long term survival of eucalypt trees.
- Learn all you can about koala management, both locally and around Australia. Learn about and observe local ecological interactions between species and their environment and take the time to make some notes or take photos.

Photo by S. Sykes, donated to epkoalas.com.au citizen science.

Additional information

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Frequently asked questions

If koala populations become too large on EP why not move koalas to other regions in Australia?

NREP would only relocate koalas to where they once occurred as a natural part of the local ecosystem. However, releasing EP's koalas into the wild in other areas of Australia is not appropriate for a number of reasons, including:

»» Koalas in different parts of Australia prefer different types of eucalypts and many habitat areas are therefore unsuitable.

»» Koala numbers in many areas where there is suitable habitat are already high. In fact other regions of southern Australia, such as Gippsland and Mt Eccles in Victoria, are already facing over-browsing by koalas.

»» Koalas cannot be relocated to New South Wales (NSW) or Queensland (Qld) where koala numbers are declining. The decline in those states is mainly due to habitat loss and disease, so placing more koalas there would just add to the pressure on food resources and available habitat.

»» Koalas in SA are also physically distinct from those in NSW or Qld, being larger with longer hair and better suited to the colder climates than koalas in northern Australia. Thus relocating a larger animal unsuited to the warmer temperatures has animal welfare issues, as well as putting their smaller counterparts at a competitive disadvantage.

If required wouldn't it be easier to cull koalas to get their numbers down?

Culling is not supported by any state in Australia and is not permitted under the terms of the National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy 2016.

Can more trees be planted?

Tree planting to restore formerly cleared habitat is an ongoing and valuable activity but only solves part of the problem. Many of the trees that may be under threat because of koalas are more than 100 years old so it would take at least another century to replace them. If revegetating with manna gums (one of the koala's favoured food trees) efforts should be made to keep new planting very close to the current manna gum stand on Mikkira Station as small plantings in other areas may cause future animal health issues. To discuss further please contact your local Natural Resources Officer for more information.

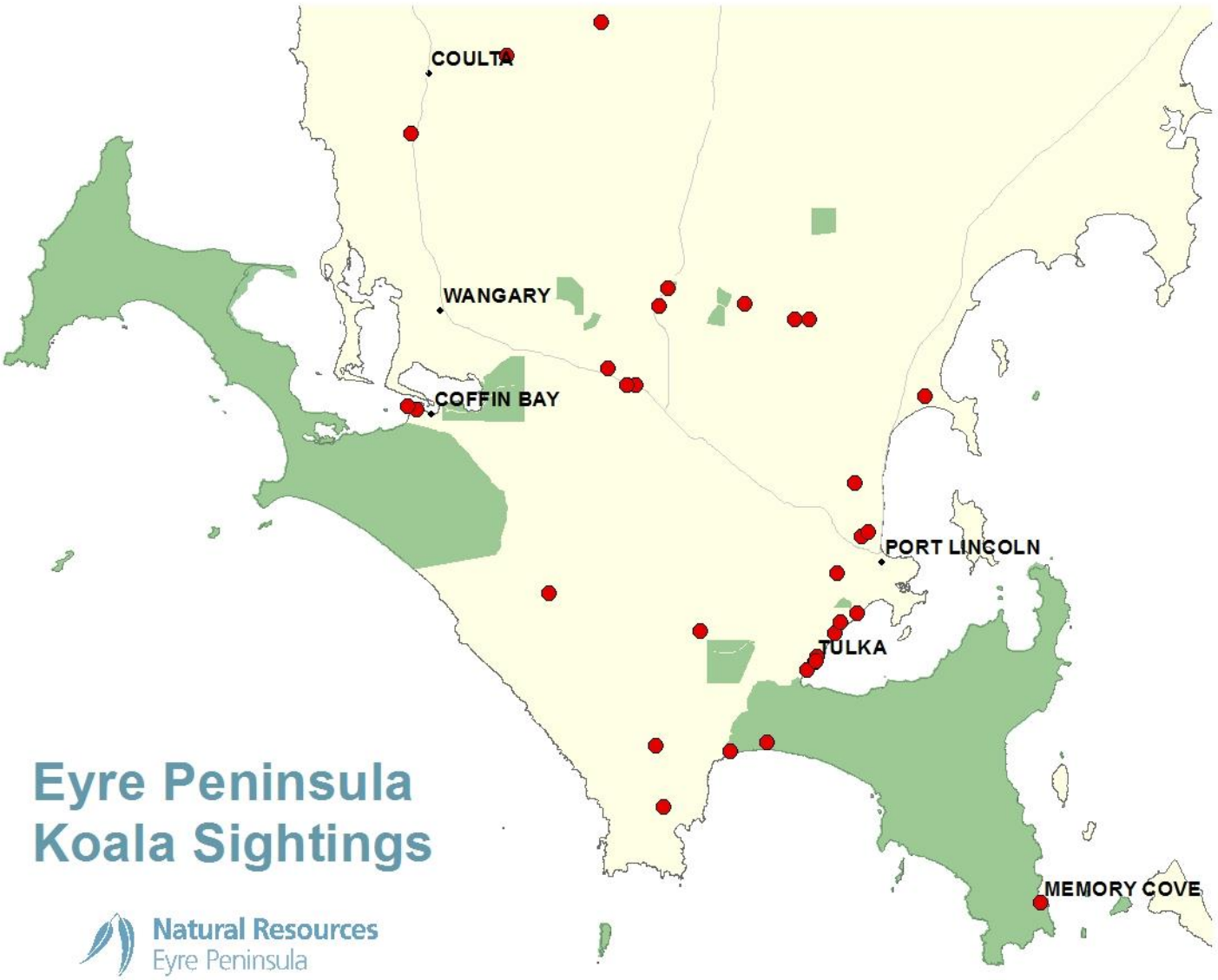
Koala climbs roadside tree within the township of Coffin Bay Photo by B. Stanley, donated to epkoalas.com citizen science

For more information

Please see the Natural Resources Eyre Peninsula website

www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/eyrepeninsula

P (08) 8688 3111
E DEWNR.NREPAdmin@sa.gov.au



Map of recent koala sightings reported via www.epkoala.com.au