



Meet KCA's new
General Manager

Koala breeding
facility underway

What's the state of
the environment?

MUDGEE BOWIE - A FAVOURITE AT OUR KOALA HOSPITAL



Mudgee Bowie, who was fondly known as 'Chunk'.

At the time of writing, this precious koala, was living a comfortable life at the Koala Hospital. Sadly, as often happens with koalas, his health suddenly deteriorated, and a decision was made to euthanise him. Here is his story.

Mudgee Bowie was found in a park near Mudgee, where he was observed sitting on the ground and seemingly unable to climb trees.

It was suspected he had been hit by a car and was rescued by a WIRES volunteer and initially

treated at Taronga Western Plains Zoo.

After some triage through WIRES, in December 2020, he was transferred to the Koala Hospital in Port Macquarie for ongoing care and management.

His initial health screen at the Koala Hospital showed he had good body condition with no overt trauma as would be expected from a severe motor vehicle accident and he had no structural evidence of disease seen in an abdominal ultrasound.

He was also negative for chlamydia. However he had some weakness in his legs, which compromised his ability to climb.

Bowie was then housed in one of the hospital's rehabilitation yards where his body condition remained stable although he suffered from intermittent

Every great design
begins with an even better story

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Cover Photo: Koala, Lake Sequoia recovering, in her treatment area, from a motor vehicle accident.

episodes of diarrhoea. After testing for infectious organisms, the hospital's vet suspected these episodes were largely a dietary sensitivity to certain leaf types.

A more recent health screen conducted by Dr. Shali Fischer, one of the resident veterinarians, revealed he had some mild joint changes consistent with osteoarthritis. This did affect his mobility which was catered for in the Koala Hospital by modifying his specialised yard set up.

Due to his ongoing gastrointestinal disease (which required diet modification and monitoring) it was assessed that he was not suitable for release.

Bowie suffered from dietary sensitivity and osteoarthritis so stayed at the Hospital and became part of the study and exhibit program.



Bowie in his treatment gunyah.

Mudgee Bowie was a valuable resident for the vets to study and understand how to manage and treat koalas with disorders to their intestinal biome. He therefore stayed with us and was included in our exhibit facility.

Bowie settled in and his medical conditions were under control. He was recently transferred from his treatment gunyah to a

new one in the exhibition area where he seemed very happy and entertained our many visitors with his beautiful personality. He lived at the Koala Hospital for over two years but, unfortunately, recently, 12 year old Bowie finally succumbed to medical complications and old age and we lost this lovely fellow.

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MEET MARIA DOHERTY KOALA CONSERVATION AUSTRALIA'S NEW GENERAL MANAGER

Koala Conservation Australia has undergone enormous change over the last few years.

It was successful in obtaining a grant to rebuild the aged Koala Hospital in Port Macquarie and an influx of donations during the black summer fires of 2019/2020 has enabled Koala Conservation to build a facility to breed koalas for release to the wild.

These two projects are huge and require extensive management.

In late 2021, Koala Conservation Australia (KCA) joined with the NSW government to purchase 147 The Ruins Way in Port Macquarie ensuring residential development of the land is stopped and it remains a conservation area. The purchase allows KCA to plant koala food trees and regenerate some of this ecologically valuable land.

Koala Conservation Australia now operates at several different sites and continues to grow. As well as continuing to rescue, rehabilitate and release wild koalas, by 2024 it will be breeding up to 35 koalas per year for release to the wild.

Managing all these expanded activities is too much for a volunteer Board to manage on a part-time basis so the decision has been made to recruit a General Manager, Maria Doherty. Read on to meet Maria and learn about some of her plans for Koala Conservation Australia....

The Board decided to recruit a General Manager, Maria Doherty.

Well what a lovely warm welcome I have received at the Koala Hospital since starting here as General

Manager. I feel very lucky indeed to be working with such awesome dedicated people - our koalas are certainly in safe hands. I was very excited when I saw this role advertised – it has been a dream of mine to be a part of something positive for the environment, something that tangibly makes a difference for generations to come.

Growing up in the wilds of Ireland I gained a deep love and respect for nature. I have many brothers and so had a bit of a rough and tumble childhood, and highlights were the hedgehogs, pigmy shrews, foxes, badgers and once a pine martin, which we were allowed to keep for an overnight stay, feed up and release! We lived beside native



Maria meeting Ocean Summer one of our exhibit koalas.



Koala Conservation Australia General Manager, Maria Doherty, with Lahey Construction's KCA Breeding Facility Site Manager Simon Tamblin and Project Manager Neil Ussher, alongside koalas Ocean "Summer" (foreground) and Emerald Downs "Mary" (background).

woodlands, high on a mountain that overlooked an estuary that my father fished – It's only when you look back you realise what a wonderful way to grow up that was! As kids we were in and out of boats, swam a lot, climbed trees, chased birds and picked and planted many flowers and trees.

I studied zoology and maths at university specialising in marine biology and then did some further studies in environmental science, environmental education and marine pollution. I always wanted to dive off the Great Barrier Reef so I finished my year of around the world backpacking here in Australia.

I fell in love with an Aussie, got a job in Sydney as an Environmental Scientist and five children later decided to move as a family to beautiful Port Macquarie.

Sixteen years on and a plethora of various environmental management roles and here I am, learning about koalas!

My initial plans are to listen and learn and absorb how Koala

Conservation Australia does business and operates. I am trying to meet with as many people as possible and get to know what everyone does. Immediately on my plate are a couple of priority projects – our website, transitioning to a shared drive so people can operate from anywhere and other IT systems, and of course managing our new build and the move. There is a lot going on! But working together as a team I am positive we will have a successful transition.

I'm looking forward to meeting lots of people and getting to know a lot more about Koala Conservation Australia's business.

FACILITY TO BREED WILD KOALAS BECOMES A REALITY

Guulabaa, the new facility, will offer a unique experience for visitors to the mid north coast region of New South Wales. The precinct will showcase wild koalas, a café and gallery run by Bunyah Local Aboriginal Land Council, a WildNets canopy adventure experience and a Big Koala.

Dignitaries and invited guests joined Koala Conservation Australia's Board, volunteers and staff at a 'Sod Turning' on National Threatened Species Day 2022. The event marked the start of the build for a facility that will be home to koalas that are part of the world's first wild koala breeding program.



Uncle Bill, Birpai elder in Port Macquarie delivered Acknowledgement of Country and Forestry Corporation's John Shipp and Bunyah Local Aboriginal Land Council's Amos Donovan, helped with a smoking ceremony to cleanse the site of the breeding facility of bad spirits.

Funded through donations made by the public to the Koala Hospital during the 2019/2020 bushfires along the east coast of Australia, the facility will eventually be home to up to 100 breeding koalas. Almost \$8M was donated to the Koala Hospital's Go Fund Me



Koala Hospital rescuers worked tirelessly to save our koalas after the fires.

account during the fires and all of that money is being used to build the facility.

The design of the facility has taken over 18 months and involved a team of volunteers and staff from Koala Conservation Australia who have worked closely with architects, Allen, Jack & Cottier and wildlife breeding experts, and a founding partner in the program, Taronga Conservation Society Australia.

Two buildings will be built to house Koala Conservation Australia's operations. One building will hold the administration, staff and volunteer areas while a second building will showcase care of the koalas, with a clinic and a laboratory.



Architects for the new facility with Sue Ashton, Chairperson KCA Board and Matt Whatman, KCA Project Manager.



Architect impression of Guulabaa 'Hub'.

The facility will be built at the Guulabaa Tourism Precinct which is now taking shape in Cowarra State Forest between Port Macquarie and Wauchope. Guulabaa will offer a unique showcase of wild koalas, a café and gallery run by Bunyah Local Aboriginal Council, a WildNets canopy adventure experience and 'Hello Koala's' Big Koala. The precinct aims to be a nature-based experience for visitors to the mid coast region of NSW and a rest stop for travellers on the east coast.

Koala Conservation Australia's Chairperson, Sue Ashton, says: "Koala Conservation Australia's goal is to breed healthy, genetically diverse koalas for release to the wild in NSW. "

"This facility is purpose built to accommodate up to 100 koalas and will provide ideal conditions for them to breed. Rebuilding koala numbers and reversing local extinctions will be key to giving the species hope of survival in the future."

Building of the breeding facility starts in September 2022 with the goal of opening to the public towards the middle of 2023.



The Sod turning ceremony to mark the start of the build of the breeding facility.



Sue Ashton and Leslie Williams and proud Koala Conservation Australia volunteers cut the cake marking the progress of this important project.



The Lahey team responsible for construction of the new facility.

THE STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT REPORT: FROM A KOALA POINT OF VIEW

Scott Castle

The reviewers of the 2021 state of the Australian environment said “Our biodiversity is declining, and the number of threatened species is increasing.” That’s a problem.

They continued, “...biodiversity overall is monitored very poorly in Australia, and we cannot assess the state and trend of most species with any confidence.” That’s a problem.

They also said, “Our inability to adequately manage pressures will continue to result in species extinctions and deteriorating ecosystem condition.” That’s a big problem!

Although, they also added, “Our understanding of the state and trend of terrestrial and marine threatened species in Australia has increased significantly since 2016, including our understanding of knowledge gaps.”

Is this the beginning of a solution?

Every five years, the [State of the Environment Report](#) is a comprehensive

assessment of the health of every aspect of our environment. These include the current condition, pressures, impacts, management, and outlook for 12 environmental themes: air quality, Antarctica, biodiversity, climate, coasts, extreme events, heritage, Indigenous, inland water, land, marine and urban. Overall, the [2021 State of the Environment Scorecard](#) declared that Australia's environment is deteriorating.

Habitat fragmentation is the opposite of connectivity, on which ecosystems depend for viability.

One symptom of fragmentation is inbreeding, causing loss of genetic diversity and reduced population viability.

Fragmentation can result from habitat alteration, roads and development, and degradation from invasive species, pollution, and changing fire regimes. These habitat fragments might not be large enough or connected enough, for species that require a large territory that can support a healthy selection of mates and food. When many fragments join up, we have total habitat loss.

Habitat loss due to direct destruction, as well as fragmentation, is the primary threat to species persistence worldwide.

It is certainly no different in Australia. Human activities such as urban and commercial development, water diversion, draining wetlands, dredging rivers, lakes and coastlines, agriculture and resource exploration continue to degrade delicate ecosystems. These elements squeeze animals closer together which increases disease occurrence and forces urbanisation, which results in more frequent road strikes and domestic dog attacks. Many urban areas no longer support the native wildlife on which it encroached. Professor Graeme Samuel AC led an independent review of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act), which made 38 recommendations to fix the EPBC Act. Samuel noted that the EPBC Act is generally not good at securing good outcomes for protecting wildlife; that the administration of the Act is ineffective; and noted that there is increasing use of offsets to protect threatened species and ecosystems from the impact of development. It's difficult to demonstrate successful outcomes for biodiversity from offsets, because the oversight and reporting, has been recorded as inadequate.



Familiar image when habitat is cleared for urban development.



Clearing of koala habitat for commercial development.



There is no requirement in the EPBC Act for the Australian Government to implement or fund recovery actions for threatened species or communities, or report on progress or the outcomes achieved, Dr. Helen Murphy reported.

There has been an increase in 'last resort' measures to prevent species extinction or conserve ecosystems. These measures include ex-situ conservation, translocation and feral proof fenced areas, 'safe havens', where a limited number of species and individuals are protected. Without normal and necessary immigration and emigration of

individuals between neighbouring populations, these areas have potential to create 'island populations' without genetic diversity and they don't solve the underlying drivers of extinction of species in their natural habitat.

Looking beyond our beloved koala, removing koala habitat is also destroying the local web of life, millions of years of evolutionary co-adaptation, which provides services to humans such as clean air, water, food and shelter...all of the building blocks for our survival. Nature also supports our health and wellbeing, and our economy.

Wild koalas safe for now, in their natural habitats.



Koala, Lake Cathie Bravo, recently had a sizeable portion of his home habitat cleared

If legislation continues to allow removal of core koala habitat, there is no methodology available to protect koalas. Koalas were listed as 'vulnerable' in 2012 under the EPBC Act. It could be said that this was followed by a decade during which decision makers would militate against the protection of koalas, which has led to koalas being uplisted to 'endangered' in 2022. Now, without legislative action which reduces or halts removal of koala habitat, how long until the next uplisting of the koala? Uplisting the koala to 'endangered' is the first step, which needs to be followed by swift action addressing the fundamental drivers of decline.

Thankfully, there is a positive way forward.

Australian individuals can help out our ecological communities by joining environmental discussions and groups; supporting local businesses and non-government environmental organisations; and organising their own community action to engage with nature and support biodiversity and heritage.

Successful on-ground actions provide opportunities that deliver benefits for individuals, communities and Country.

Many urban planners and governments recognise the need for change and a more collaborative, whole-of-system approach, to build greater resilience and regenerate biodiversity into our urban areas.

With strong legislation; councils that respect the legislation; and the right conservation efforts, along with ingenuity, investment, expertise and commitment, healthy koala numbers can be brought back to the areas in which they currently decline.

The Port Macquarie Koala Hospital and Koala Conservation Australia Wild Koala Breeding Program will continue to work tirelessly to achieve everything possible to aid the repopulation of wild koalas... because their future is in our hands.



Scott Castle
(KCA Conservation Manager)



One solution to losing natural habitat is for plantations of Koala friendly eucalyptus planted on private property such as this.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A CLINIC VET

Dr. Shali Fischer

Vets check new patients daily and Koalas that require a health check are assessed and samples are collected for testing.

8:30am:

Arrive at the Koala Hospital for a day's work. First on the agenda is to check if any new patients have arrived overnight, and triage these koalas as needed. These patients are usually kept in an intensive care unit next-door to the clinic, so we can keep a close eye on them. We then will do our rounds of the koalas on exhibit or in rehabilitation, and give eye medications as needed.

9:30am:

We check in with our volunteers working on koala care, making sure our residents are well fed, comfortable and passing normal sized, coloured and amounts of scats (a very important indicator of their health!). We are very well versed here in what 'normal' koala poo looks like.



A koala having ointment applied to its eye.



A koala having an abdominal ultrasound under general anaesthesia.

10:00am:

Koalas that require a health check are usually done in the morning. This is done under a general anaesthetic and allows us to do a more thorough examination that can be done when they are awake. We assess their body condition, tooth wear, overall health and collect some samples for testing. This often involves bloods tests to check internal body function and swabs for detection of the bacterial infection chlamydia. An abdominal ultrasound is done to look for internal structural changes indicative of previous or current chlamydial infection, as well as any other signs of disease. We then decide what we need to do for the patient, be that a medical treatment plan, plan for release or euthanasia.

12pm:

Lunch! This is religiously held on time at the PMKH and a great time

to catch up with the team and have a yarn. Baked goods are not uncommon at the table- we have some avid bakers at the Koala Hospital!

12:30pm:

Post-mortem examinations are typically done after lunch (you can guess why!). These exams allow us to better understand why a koala has died or how its disease progressed to the point of warranting euthanasia. We collect samples of tissue for more detailed analysis and research purposes.

2:30pm:

We sit down at our desk and check our emails. We collaborate regularly with researchers, academics, media personnel and other people within the wildlife field.

4:30pm:

Home time!

TRUE BLUE DELIGHTS VISITING CHILDREN

Students from The Steiner School, Armidale visited the Koala Hospital and were treated to a wonderful surprise when 'Trueblue' arrived.

Steiner School teacher, Leonie Evans, said the children were extremely excited and wanted to cuddle Trueblue and asked many questions. 34 primary aged students from The Steiner School, Armidale were treated to a school excursion in Port Macquarie and visited many sites including the Koala Hospital. Three staff and four parents accompanied the school students and enabled this wonderful excursion to happen.



Visiting children listening to volunteer Bronwyn Wheeler.



Visiting Steiner School students meet Trueblue at the Koala Hospital. Excited children cuddle Trueblue.

MEET THE BOARD



The Board for 2022-2023 is from left to right: Elizabeth Casey, Lynne Booth, Rita Saunders, Michael Jacobs, Tonia Woodberry and Sue Ashton, front. (Absent, David Baker).

A new Board of directors was elected at Koala Conservation Australia's September 2022 Annual General Meeting. Koala Conservation Australia (KCA) will continue to be led by a volunteer Board which oversees the financial management and strategic direction of the organisation. Reporting to the Board will be Maria Doherty, General Manager, responsible for the day-to-day management and operations of KCA and reporting to the General Manager will be all the department heads – managers and coordinators, a mix of

paid staff and volunteers. This team is responsible for areas such as human resources, retail including the shop, media and public relations, maintenance, rescues, work experience, hospital rosters and lots of other functions essential to keeping the business going.

KCA's business has grown and while it has been through huge changes over the last few years, it is embarking on more change. It's a positive time for koalas and an exciting time to be a part of Koala Conservation Australia.

MOTORISTS – WATCH OUT! KOALAS ABOUT! IT'S BREEDING SEASON!

Motor vehicle danger

Koala breeding season has commenced, which means breeding males and females are on the move to find a mate. They investigate their home ranges and beyond for suitable breeding partners. The breeding season is mainly from mid-winter until late summer.

Koalas can't jump from tree to tree so will climb down and cross on the ground to get to a female in another tree. Unfortunately, because of their grey tones and sometimes close proximity to the road, they may not be seen by motorists so drivers need to reduce their speed.

This increased mobility means they are at particular risk from motor vehicle accidents. The Port Macquarie Koala Hospital admitted eight koalas hit by cars in July-August and the majority were deceased on arrival at the hospital.

It is particularly sad and frustrating that the majority of those injured were young and healthy and these koalas are the future for the urban koala population in Port Macquarie.

Domestic dog attack

In the wild, introduced predators and undesirable males are the main obstacles, however, urban koalas and peri-urban koalas have these and other inherent dangers that impede successful mating opportunities.

As they are moving around in breeding season, more than at other times of year, they're more likely to cross roads and venture into suburban backyards where they often fall victim to domestic dogs.



This koala is named Lake Sequoia. She was rescued after being hit by a car in November 2018. She was later released but she was brought into the hospital again after an accident in August 2022 where she was hit by a car at twilight, 6.30pm, one of the most dangerous times for koalas crossing roads.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Drivers

Drivers can adhere to speed limits and watch carefully for wildlife entering from the sides of the road.

Pet owners

Locking up your dog at night and offering an escape route for koalas can help prevent the great number of wildlife losses experienced by pet attacks.

We encourage more dog owners to:

- train their pets from an early age to leave wildlife alone
- restrict pets' access to wildlife in their yard by confining them in some way when they are unsupervised
- fencing off a vegetated patch of the yard that wildlife use
- offering an escape route for koalas, such as a secure branch or log leading up to the fence top
- keeping dogs on a leash while out and about

What Council has done to help

The Koala Hospital has worked closely with Port Macquarie-Hastings Council for many years, collecting road strike information that governs where koala warning signs are positioned, and where other measures could help reduce the likelihood of koala road strike. Measures such as reducing or removing roadside vegetation, and improving lighting can increase visibility for both motorists and koalas. These measures along with educational and seasonal awareness campaigns are constant items on our agenda as we do all we can to reverse the decline in Port Macquarie's urban and peri-urban koala populations.



Its 'wait and see' for little Lake Sequoia's survival as she is treated in the Intensive Care Unit. She is another victim of a car hitting a koala. Drivers need to be alert and slow down when they see wildlife signs and know they are in koala territory.



Lake Sequoia recovering after treatment.

IF YOU SEE A KOALA...

- Call the Port Macquarie Koala Hospital on 02 6584 1522 if you are on the Mid North Coast of NSW. In other areas contact your local wildlife rescue organisation.
- Follow the instructions of the phone operator.
- Stay at the scene until rescuers arrive. Keep the koala in your line of sight if possible.
- Minimise stress to the koala. Noise and activity, human touch and talking will all frighten the koala.



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    

General Enquiries: 02 6584 1522

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