Wild neighbours
Koalas and cars

I just saw it come out from behind a parked car and my wheel went right over it. I quickly pulled over and looked back. I thought it must be dead but then I saw it move. I ran back along the road. Another car had stopped. The driver had an old towel and wrapped it up and carried it to the roadside. We could see blood soaking through the towel and the koala just lay there blinking. We didn’t know what to do...

3792 koalas were taken to koala hospitals in south-east Queensland between 1997 and mid-2008 after being hit by cars.

More than 85 percent of koalas hit by a car die.

Too many koalas are dying.

✔ Koalas are hard to see on the road so drive slowly wherever you see a koala crossing sign

✔ Keep the number of a wildlife ambulance or local wildlife rescue group with you in the car in case you find an injured koala or other native animal. Phone the RSPCA on 1300 ANIMAL (1300 264 625) or the EPA hotline for help on 1300 130 372.

Save Our Koalas

This is not a pretty story. Nevertheless, it is only a few months old and perfectly true.

I am writing it mainly for the callous driver who turned the enjoyment of a bunch of happy kids on holidays into a nightmare they’ll never forget.

Returning to the Gold Coast through Burleigh Heads one evening last week, a friend of mine pulled to the side of the road to allow his children to admire a koala ambling along between the reflecting signs which read: “Caution. Koalas Cross Here.”

The animal was changing feeding trees, and in the inmemorial manner of ambling koalas, it saw no reason to hurry.

It was a pretty bear in its prime, with big ear tufts and a lovely silvery brown coat.

Its destination was a bunch of forest red gums on the south side of the highway.

The kids were laughing with delight at the quaint walk of the tawny-nosed character, when a car roared toward the scene from the opposite direction.

In a flash, all with no slackening of pace, the koala was gripped, leaving its mark.

As if they were not enough, the driver failed to stop.

Following this heartache.

From Living with Animals by David Fleay (1960)
A driver’s questions: How can I steer clear of koalas?

When are koalas most likely to be moving across roads?

Even though koalas can sleep for much of the day, they still come to the ground to move between food and roost trees. Where their habitat is fragmented by development they often have to cross roads to reach some of the food trees within their home range.

Their on-ground movements can take place at any time of day but usually occur at night.

Koalas become more active between July and September in the lead up to the breeding season. At this time breeding males are establishing their home ranges and young animals may be moving out into new areas.

If you are driving through koala habitat during ‘koala peak hour’ you should slow down and scan the roadsides for koalas (and other wildlife). Get passengers in the car involved in ‘wildlife watching’ (this can become an activity for children).

You will probably see dead wildlife on the road at times and where it occurs regularly will give you a good indication of any ‘black spots’ where ‘wildlife-friendly driving’ is required. Koala and wildlife crossing signs are also good indicators of where you need to be aware of wildlife on the road.

What do you mean by ‘wildlife friendly driving’?

In many ways wildlife-friendly driving is just like driving through a school zone when school gets out. It involves driving well within the speed limit (but without becoming a traffic hazard yourself), and scanning the roadside for anything that may move onto the road in front of your car.

When driving at night, watch out for the eye shine from animals that are crossing the road. Eye shine is the reflection of your headlights shining in an animal’s eyes. Animals that are active at night have a special mirror-like structure on their retinas at the back of the eyes that allows their eyes to concentrate the available light, helping the animal see in the dark. Animals can act unpredictably when confronted by bright headlights or can be temporarily blinded.
Slowing down will give the animal time to react and get off the road. Once again, if you have a passenger in the car, ask them to look out for wildlife too.

**What do I do if I see a koala on the road?**

Slow down and allow it to move off the road. If you get too close you may ‘spook’ it and it could freeze or run back in front of the car. If it is a young animal, its mother may be nearby and also run out on to the road. Even if you can safely pass a koala that’s beside the road, slow down so that your brake lights catch the attention of drivers in other cars so that they are more likely to notice the koala if it moves on to the road (you can also use your hazard lights).

**What can I do if I accidentally hit a koala or find an injured koala on the road?**

If you drive through an area where koalas (or other wildlife) live, you should be prepared for the possibility of encountering an injured animal. Carry an old towel or blanket in your car that you can use to wrap an animal in if you need to move one off the road and keep it restrained. This will stop the animal from moving and further injuring itself — and from biting or scratching. If the animal is already on the roadside and is safe, avoid moving it and only restrain it to stop it from escaping or injuring itself further.

You should also keep the phone numbers and locations of the local wildlife care group or wildlife ambulance and the local vet surgery in your car.

You always need to consider your personal safety before attempting to move an injured koala. Park your car safely and use the hazard lights to alert the drivers of other cars. Restrain the koala in a towel or blanket, making sure that it can’t bite or scratch. Once it, and you, are safe, contact your local wildlife care or rescue group (numbers can be found in community service directories or by looking under ‘Animal welfare organisations’ in the Yellow Pages). If you can’t contact a wildlife care group, ring the RSPCA on 1300 ANIMAL (1300 264 625) or the EPA hotline (1300 130 372) for advice.

If a semi-dependent joey is seen near the dead koala, a wildlife carer should be contacted. The carer will decide whether the koala is old enough to survive on its own or will be need to be caught. Only trained and authorised wildlife carers or wildlife rescuers should attempt to catch healthy koalas, as it can be a dangerous procedure for both the koala and the person involved.

**How many koalas are killed in Queensland each year?**

The number of koalas killed by vehicles each year in Queensland is not known. We do know that 3792 koalas were taken to the EPA’s Moggill Koala Hospital, the Australian Wildlife Hospital at Beerwah and other veterinary facilities between 1997 and mid-2008. More than 85 percent of these koalas died from their injuries. This makes it the most significant impact on koalas after habitat clearing and disease.

**Do we need to worry about the number of koalas being killed on the roads when habitat clearing is having a greater impact?**

Wildlife conservation issues rarely have single causes or single solutions and it is no different with koalas. Each threat, whether it is habitat clearing, vehicle strike or dog attack, needs to be addressed as part of a combined approach to conserving koalas.

![KOALA ZONE](koala-zone.png)

If a live pouch young is found, it should be kept warm and given to a wildlife carer as quickly as possible.
Maybe koalas are more like our pets than we realised

We need to think about koalas both as members of a species but also as unique individuals—just like we do with our pets. We should also recognise that these animals do belong to someone—in fact they belong to all of us (and our children—and theirs) and we all need to care for them. Thinking about koalas as individuals is particularly important in the case of vehicle strikes because it affects individual koalas—and involves individual drivers.

If a koala ever walks out onto a road in front of your car, the information that you’ve read here may help you to avoid it. If an accident happens, this fact sheet can also help you to deal with its consequences. An injured koala on the road is no longer just another animal, it is an individual requiring special attention.

And by caring for the individual, you will be caring for the species at the same time—and helping to keep koalas for keeps.

For contact details for wildlife care and rescue groups, call the RSPCA on 1300 ANIMAL (1300 264 625) or the EPA hotline on 1300 130 372 or check your local Yellow Pages under ‘Animal welfare organisations’.

For more information about koala conservation, visit the EPA website on www.epa.qld.gov.au/koalaconservation/

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