



Koalas

Koalas (they aren't actually bears) are one of the most iconic Australian animals. They are restricted to the eucalyptus forest in the east of the country, and their numbers are declining rapidly. They have been classified as endangered in most eastern regions. Like many animals, koalas are being impacted by human activity in their area. Deforestation and growing towns mean that there is less food and shelter for them, and they are forced to cross busy roads to find more.

IT'S IN THE NAME

Koalas get their name from a First Nations word that means "no drink". Koalas rarely drink water; instead, they get all the moisture they need from the leaves that they eat. This makes it especially important that they have enough food; otherwise, they are likely to dehydrate quickly.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Even though they can eat other leaves, most of a koala's diet is made up of eucalyptus leaves. Strangely, these leaves are incredibly toxic to almost all other animals on the planet. Koalas have evolved with a special extra part in their intestine called a caecum (it's pronounced see-kum). This contains millions of bacteria that are able to break down the eucalyptus leaves safely. Unfortunately, the leaves are still incredibly tough and take a long time to break down. To help their intestines process their food, koalas rest for nearly 22 hours a day! Their food is also not very nutritious, so they have to eat a lot of it. Each koala can eat up to one kilogram of eucalyptus leaves each day. They are also very fussy and only select the freshest and most nutritious leaves, which makes it even harder to survive when there aren't as many trees left.

Koalas are a bit like humans from different areas. Koalas that live in Victoria will only eat the type of eucalyptus that grows in Victoria, and the same for those from Queensland. This can make them difficult to feed in captivity.

BUSHFIRE

Every year, bushfires rage across parts of Australia. Most of them are controlled and essential for the land - they put a lot of goodness back into the soil and can help remove pests and allow other plants to grow. However, the bushfire season of 2019 to 2020 was bigger than any in history. Hot temperatures and strong winds meant that the fires burned across the east of the country for nearly nine months. This disaster had a huge impact on the wild koala population. The devastation caused to the eucalyptus forests means that those koalas that survived the fires now have much smaller areas to live in, and many of the trees are weak and unhealthy.

It has been estimated that without urgent action, koalas could be extinct in the wild by 2050.

1

Every year, bushfires rage across parts of Australia.

What impression do you get of how bushfires move from the word **rage** in this sentence?

1 mark

2

Look at the section headed: **Food for thought.**

Which of the following **two** statements are **true**?

Tick **two**.

All koalas eat the same type of eucalyptus..

☐

All koalas eat eucalyptus leaves.

☐

Koalas don't eat a lot of food.

☐

Koalas rarely drink water.

☐

2 marks

3

Why are koalas struggling to survive in the wild?

Give **two** answers, using evidence from the text to support your answer.

1. _____

2. _____

3 marks

4

What does the word "koala" mean in the First Nations language?

1 mark

5

a) When were the worst bushfires in recent memory?

1 mark

b) How can bushfires help the land? **Give two reasons.**

2 marks