

The Junior Ranger Way

Know before you go, respect parks and wildlife and leave no trace along your way, that's the Junior Ranger Way!

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wet weather they may retreat to the thick foliage of low trees for protection.

What Does a Koala Eat?

Koalas are often called fussy eaters as they feed almost entirely on only fifty of the 500+ species of eucalypt leaves. An adult Koala will eat up to one kilogram of leaves each night. At certain times of the year some eucalyptus leaves can be poisonous and it is thought Koalas select suitable leaves by sniffing them first.

Different species of eucalypts grow in different parts of Australia, so a koala in Victoria would have a very different diet from one in Queensland. In Victoria, koalas feed primarily on species such as; Manna Gum (*Eucalyptus viminalis*), Messmate (*Eucalyptus obliqua*), Brown Stringybark (*Eucalyptus baxteri*) and Swamp Gum (*Eucalyptus ovata*).

A Koala's Family Life

Female koalas reach maturity and can breed at two years of age, males mature at three to four years. Spring is the peak breeding season. During this time young from the previous year are weaned by their mothers and male koalas bellow loudly to attract a mate.

Thirty six days after mating the female gives birth to a joey. The joey looks much like a pink jellybean as it is only 2cm long, is totally hairless and blind. It makes its way from the birth canal to the pouch on its own, relying on its well developed senses of smell and touch.

The joey has strong forelimbs and paws to help it through its mother's furred pouch. Once inside the pouch it attaches itself to one of the two teats which swells to fill its mouth, preventing the joey from being dislodged. Female koalas have a backwards facing pouch which contracts strong muscles at the pouch opening to prevent the joey from falling out.

The joey stays in the pouch for seven months, drinking only its mother's milk. It then graduates to riding on its mother's back and feeding on 'pap', which the mother produces in addition to milk, and eventually adds eucalyptus leaves to its diet. Pap is a soft form of faeces which is fed to the joey to provide it with the micro-organisms it needs to breakdown eucalypt leaves once it leaves the pouch. The joey is weaned at twelve months and the mother is able to mate again.

Fascinating Fact

Koalas spend 20+ hours each day sleeping and resting due to the low amount of energy they obtain from their leafy diet – it's not just laziness!

Young female Koalas usually stay in the vicinity of their mothers for a second year and some may establish a home range nearby. Males disperse from their mothers' range when they are two years old and may roam for two to three years before establishing a territory. Koalas are generally solitary animals, although they live in wider communities.

Threats

Whilst dogs and dingoes are threats to adult Koalas, joeys are more likely to fall prey to owls or eagles. Overall, the major threat to our Koala populations is land clearing and fatalities that occur from Koalas crossing roads to reach food trees.

Want to Know More?

www.dse.vic.gov.au