

KOALA CARETAKERS

Lexile Level 870; Guided Reading Level S

OBJECTIVE

Learn how and why Australians are trying to save koalas.

SET UP

Use the Internet to obtain and print photos of various traffic signs. Obtain blank paper.

BEFORE READING

1. Hold up one of the traffic signs or display it on a projector. Ask:
 - **What do you observe here?** (*traffic sign*)
 - **What is the purpose of a traffic sign?** (*to warn drivers about conditions specific to their location*)
 - **What does this sign mean?** (*Answers will vary.*)
2. Display the other signs one at a time, and ask students to identify each one's meaning.
3. Ask students to observe the photo of the koala on page 1. Ask: **What is unusual about this koala?** (*Both arms are in casts.*)

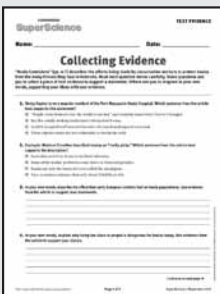
4. Tell students the koala was hit by a car because people are moving into its habitat and building roads. On blank paper, have students design their own traffic signs to warn drivers of koalas. Share the designs.

AFTER READING

- **Name three reasons why the koala population is declining.**
(People are cutting down eucalyptus trees. Disease is preventing some koalas from reproducing. Heat waves are making koalas sick.)
- **How are people in Koala Beach helping koalas?**
(People do not cut down eucalyptus trees to build homes. Residents agree to drive slowly and not keep dogs as pets.)

RESOURCE

Learn about koalas and how you can help them at: **www.savethekoala.com**



READING AND LITERACY CONNECTION

Offer students the skills sheet “Collecting Evidence” below. (*The activity is also available to subscribers at our website.*) Students use text evidence to support statements about the article.

Common Core State Standard
Reading Informational Text: 1



Koala Caretakers

Australians work to save one of their country's cutest animals

With her big, fluffy ears and her winking expression, Oxley Kaylee is one of the most adorable koalas around. She lives at a koala hospital in New South Wales, Australia. "People

come from all over the world to see her," says hospital supervisor Cheyne Flanagan. "They just love her."

But the cuddly-looking koala hasn't always had it

easy. In 2009, hospital staff rescued her after she was found injured on a road. Veterinarians suspected she had been hit by a car.

To save Oxley Kaylee's life, vets



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BONUS
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SHEETS

See attached.

A koala can
eat more than
a pound of
leaves a day!

words to know

habitat—the place in nature where an animal or a plant usually lives

ecologist—a scientist who studies the relationships between animals, plants, and other living things in their environments

population—all the animals or plants of a single type in a particular area or group

climate change—change in Earth's average temperature and weather patterns

Koala hospital supervisor Cheyne Flanagan examines a sick koala.

had to remove her leg. Later, she lost an eye. These injuries make her too vulnerable to live in the wild. Instead, she spends her days napping and entertaining visitors at the koala hospital.

All over Australia, koalas are struggling. People have taken over much of Australia's koala **habitat**. That means there's less food and shelter for the animals. Koalas also

have dangerous run-ins with people. And they're extremely vulnerable to diseases too.

Flanagan and the other workers at the Port Macquarie Koala Hospital are trying

to help. Every year, they rescue more than 250 sick or injured koalas. Most are treated and then released back into the wild. Hospital workers, along with scientists and volunteers, hope they can keep Australia from losing this beloved animal.

Sharing Space

Australia used to be home to millions of koalas. Now, scientists estimate that only about 250,000 are left.

Many of the koalas' problems come down to their eating habits. Koalas eat only the leaves of a tree called the eucalyptus (yoo-cuh-LIP-tiss). "They're really picky!" says Mathew Crowther. He's a wildlife **ecologist** at the University of Sydney in Australia.

About 200 years ago, European settlers moved into Australia. They began cutting down the eucalyptus forests and turning the land into



Rescuers move koalas from populated areas to parks and forests where they'll be safer.

farms. The settlers also hunted koalas for their soft fur. In some areas, the animals almost disappeared.

Today, hunting koalas is illegal. But koalas are still losing their habitat as more and more land is turned into highways, malls, and homes for people.

Living so close to people puts koalas in danger. Many are hit by cars or attacked by pet dogs.

"It's quite tough being a koala," says Crowther.

Uncertain Future

In the 1920s, scientists started trying to help koalas. They moved 18 of the animals to an island near mainland Australia that had a lot of eucalyptus trees. The koala **population** on the island has since grown to tens of thousands.

But on the mainland, koalas are still struggling. In recent years, outbreaks of disease have sickened koalas all over Australia. Some of the diseases can be fatal. Even if sick koalas survive, infections can leave them unable to



A volunteer feeds milk to an orphaned joey, or baby koala.



reproduce. That means that fewer koalas are being born.

Scientists fear that koalas may face even more problems in the future. When the weather gets too hot, koalas can become sick or even die. During an extreme heat wave in 2009, one area lost 25 percent of its koala population in just one week. Scientists think that **climate change** caused by human activity may make heat waves like this more common in Australia.

Saving Koalas

Today, people all over Australia are taking steps to help koalas. Volunteers are planting new eucalyptus trees to expand the koalas' shrunken habitat. Scientists and veterinarians are trying to

develop medicines to protect the animals from disease.

People and koalas are even starting to live side by side in a new neighborhood called Koala Beach. The Australian Koala Foundation, which built the neighborhood, didn't cut down any eucalyptus trees. Instead, it constructed 500 houses around existing trees. To keep the koalas in the area safe, people who live in Koala

Beach agree to drive slowly and not have dogs as pets.

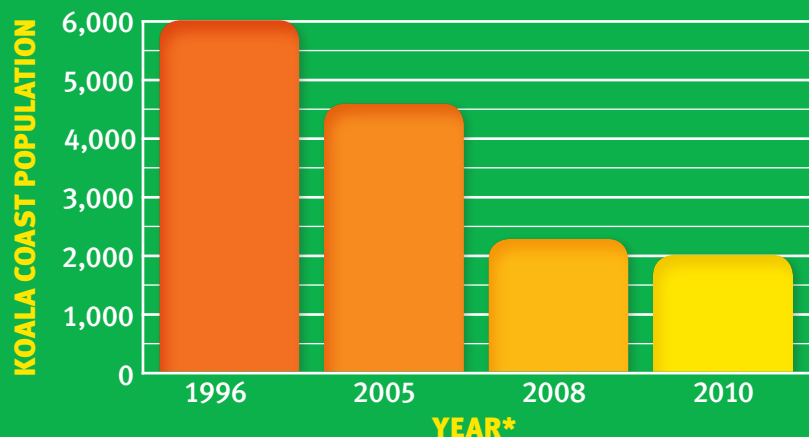
Scientists hope that efforts like these will allow koalas to thrive in Australia again. Until then, workers at the koala hospital will keep helping them, one at a time.

"More than ever," says Flanagan, "it's important that we make sure that every animal is healthy."

—Stephanie Warren

On the Decline

Habitat loss, disease, and injuries threaten koalas in many parts of Australia. In one area, called the Koala Coast, the population of koalas has plummeted in recent years.



*NOTE: DATA COULD NOT BE COLLECTED FOR CERTAIN YEARS. SOURCE: AUSTRALIA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT.

Name: _____

Date: _____

No-Sweat Bubble Test

Directions: Read each question below, then use the article “Koala Caretakers” to determine the best answer. Completely fill in the bubble next to the best answer.

1. In which country is the Port Macquarie Koala Hospital located?

- (A) United States
- (B) Portugal
- (C) South Africa
- (D) Australia

6. What is the purpose of koala traffic signs?

- (A) to designate koala viewing areas along the road
- (B) to point out koala crosswalks
- (C) to warn drivers to slow down for koalas
- (D) to indicate that a koala hospital is ahead

2. What is the primary food that koalas eat?

- (A) spinach
- (B) coconuts
- (C) eucalyptus leaves
- (D) all of the above

7. Which of the following is true about how people are trying to help koalas?

- (A) Volunteers are planting new eucalyptus trees.
- (B) Scientists are developing medicines to protect koalas from disease.
- (C) People near koala habitats are agreeing not to keep dogs as pets.
- (D) all of the above

3. Today, what is the main reason koalas are losing their habitat?

- (A) Land is being used to build businesses and homes.
- (B) People hunt koalas for their soft fur.
- (C) Koalas are starting to eat different types of food.
- (D) Disease has left koalas unable to reproduce.

8. Why is Koala Beach such an unusual place?

- (A) Sand dunes naturally separate people from koalas.
- (B) Koalas and people live side by side.
- (C) The neighborhood contains five koala hospitals.
- (D) The population of koalas there has increased in recent years.

4. Why is it dangerous for koalas to live close to people?

- (A) They can be attacked by pet dogs.
- (B) They can be hit by cars.
- (C) They can get lost in new neighborhoods.
- (D) both A and B

9. What does the term *thrive* mean?

- (A) to grow successfully
- (B) to shrink in size
- (C) to threaten
- (D) to hibernate

5. What is a baby koala called?

- (A) joey
- (B) cub
- (C) kid
- (D) jane

10. Which events do scientists believe are becoming more common in Australia because of climate change?

- (A) high tides
- (B) volcanic eruptions
- (C) heat waves
- (D) solar eclipses

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Collecting Evidence

“Koala Caretakers” describes how conservation workers are trying to protect koalas from the many threats they face in Australia. Read each question below carefully. Some questions ask you to select a piece of text evidence to support a statement. Others ask you to respond in your own words, supporting your ideas with text evidence.

- Oxley Kaylee is a very popular resident of the Port Macquarie Koala Hospital. Which sentence from the article best supports this statement?**
 - “People come from all over the world to see her,” says hospital supervisor Cheyne Flanagan.
 - But the cuddly-looking koala hasn’t always had it easy.
 - In 2009, hospital staff rescued her after she was found injured on a road.
 - These injuries make her too vulnerable to live in the wild.
- Ecologist Mathew Crowther describes koalas as “really picky.” Which sentence from the article best supports his description?**
 - Australia used to be home to millions of koalas.
 - Many of the koalas’ problems come down to their eating habits.
 - Koalas eat only the leaves of a tree called the eucalyptus.
 - Now, scientists estimate that only about 250,000 are left.
- In your own words, describe the effect that early European settlers had on koala populations. Use evidence from the article to support your statements.**

- In your own words, explain why living too close to people can be dangerous for koalas today. Use evidence from the article to support your claims.**

Continued on next page →

Name: _____

Date: _____

Collecting Evidence (continued)

5. One effort to help a population of koalas in the 1920s proved to be successful. Which piece of text evidence best demonstrates this success?

- Ⓐ “It’s quite tough being a koala,” says Crowther.
- Ⓑ They moved 18 of the animals to an island near mainland Australia that had a lot of eucalyptus trees.
- Ⓒ The koala population on the island has since grown to tens of thousands.
- Ⓓ But on the mainland, koalas are still struggling.

6. Scientists think climate change may have a negative effect on the koala population. Which details from the article support this idea?

7. Which piece of text evidence best demonstrates one way that average Australians can help koalas?

- Ⓐ Volunteers are planting new eucalyptus trees to expand the koalas’ shrunken habitat.
- Ⓑ Scientists and veterinarians are trying to develop medicines to protect the animals from disease.
- Ⓒ Until then, workers at the koala hospital will keep helping them, one at a time.
- Ⓓ “It’s important that we make sure that every animal is healthy.”

8. In your own words, write one conclusion you can draw from the article about how to save koalas in Australia. Use evidence from the article to support your conclusion.
