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FRIENDS OF HODDLES CREEK NEWSLETTER

Our hidden rusty menace

The hazards of barbed wire fencing for wildlife

Stumbling across a rusting barbed wire fence that is hidden amongst the undergrowth is one of the hazards of exploring bushland adjoining private properties. At worst, you might have to take yourself off to the doctor for bandaging and a tetanus shot.

But spare a thought for the wild life who encounter these 'drift net' fences. Consider the wombats and wallabies racing through the bush to escape predators such as dogs – they can easily wound themselves from even the slightest encounter with barbed wire. Gliding marsupials, native bats and many species of birds – especially those that fly about at night, such as owls and frogmouths – are also at great risk from barbed wire fencing.

Tragic encounters

Wildlife carers are frequently called to attend animals and birds caught in barbed wire. One problem is that if the initial impact is not fatal, the animal or bird struggles to free itself, becoming even more entangled and increasing injuries.

A local carer gave an example of a large male kangaroo caught in a barbed wire fence that suffered major cuts and a broken leg in his attempt to free himself and so had to be euthanised. In another case, a wombat suffered horrendous injury high on its back, most likely caused by barbed wire. If this animal had not been reported, it would most likely have died of septicaemia. Luckily, it was able to be treated and survived.

Thousands of victims

It is estimated that many tens of thousands of animals are wounded or killed by barbed wire fencing across Australia every year. Over 62 different species have been recorded to have met their fate with barbed wire fences (Van der Ree, R. 1999 Barbed wire fencing as a hazard for wildlife. Victorian Naturalist 116: 210-217).

Much of our native wildlife is already highly stressed from loss of habitat. Many species need a critical amount of forest to survive and flourish. As their habitat is fragmented into islands many of these areas become too small too to sustain a viable gene-pool across the landscape and they become increasingly at risk of local extinction.

Climate change is also seeing many species having to migrate to areas that are more suitable. Free movement through the landscape is essential. Hidden hazards such as barbed-wire fences greatly increase the stressors on these animals.

What to do?

If you happen to find an animal or bird caught in barbed wire in most cases the first thing to do should be to cut the wire around them and remove them from the fence. However, in many cases, removing the wire is difficult and may need to be done by someone experienced. Once the wire is removed, the extent of injuries needs to be determined. If in doubt, once again it's better to seek experienced advice. In the case of a large animal like a kangaroo or wombat, cover it with a blanket/sheet and call Wildlife Victoria Emergency Response 13 000 94535 or Upper Yarra Wildlife Rescue Network 0427 088 121. For birds, bats or possums, cover them in a towel or blanket and take to your local vet.

Traditionally, barbed wire was used to contain cattle, but these days, electric fencing combined with plain wire, is much more efficient and safe. Have some thought next time you plan to construct a fence, and let's consider our wildlife. And please dispose of any old barbed wire safely.

Thanks to Yarra Ranges Council for their generous printing of the Newsletter.

Has anyone seen our Tuesday koala?

Remember Tuesday the koala? In our summer 2013 newsletter edition we brought you the story of the Tuesday koala. Friends of Hoddles Creek believe that Tuesday has his own friends, maybe Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday, maybe even more!

We've been hearing stories of koalas perched in tree forks (Hansen Creek Road) and sitting on Gembrook Road (asked to move on) and have decided to take some action. Recently, we lodged an enquiry with Vic Roads and this is what we said:

Friends of Hoddles Creek Inc. are a group whose aim is to preserve and improve wildlife habitat and biodiversity in the Hoddles Creek area. We distribute a quarterly newsletter to local residents and in Summer 2013 ran a feature article 'The Tuesday Koala', which declared "Recent sightings of koalas in and around Hoddles Creek have a lot of residents excited, especially the staff and students at Hoddles Creek Primary School. Over the past three months, one koala has been spotted within the school grounds on three separate occasions, each one on a Tuesday." There have been regular and sporadic sightings of koalas in this area ever since. We are concerned about the potential loss of koalas as roadkill on this part of Gembrook Road, as there have been numerous reports of motorists having to slow or stop for a koala crossing the road. While there have been no reports of koala death, we feel it would be irresponsible to wait for this event or an accident to occur before providing appropriate signage. We would like to have this area considered for the potential of installing road signs up and downhill from the school and are happy to assist with this task if required."

The Tuesday koala at Hoddles Creek Primary School in 2013

While waiting for Vic Roads response we conducted some further investigations (with Google) and discovered an amazing website called Koala Tracker that could have answered our question, but didn't, not yet!

You can help with Koala Tracker

Koala Tracker is an extremely worthy citizen science project that allows individuals, community groups, neighbourhoods, councils, companies, states and schools to undertake localised mapping, risk mitigation, conservation and tracking of koalas. The database maps the location of koala populations, points of impact and cause of death and injury of koalas, nationwide.

It empowers localised advocacy, enables more effective risk mitigation, adds to research and engages the community to save the koala. **Anyone can join this project and everyone can become a part of something meaningful and effective.** There are no special skills involved and it's free! You can even save the login screen to your mobile phone to use as an app.

The Koala is not listed as a threatened species. Unfortunately, there is not enough data to know its current status. The Koala Tracker Project will help rectify this situation. Observations collected so far have already proved some state habitat maps incorrect, found koalas where they were believed not to exist and discovered information new to science.

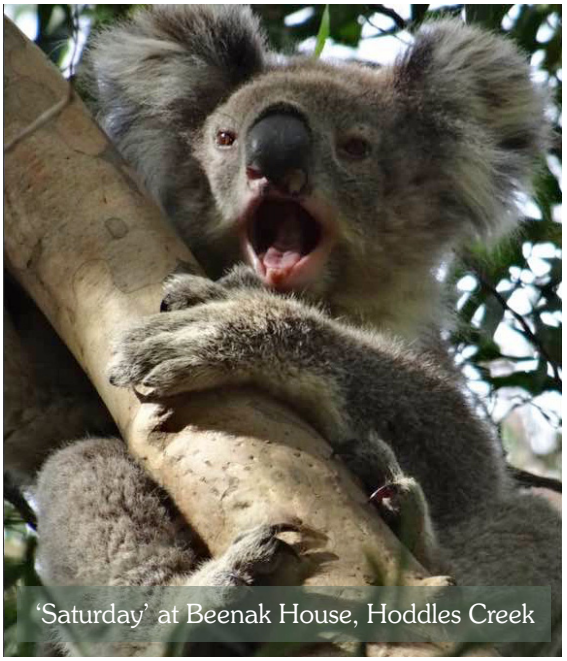
Koala Tracker was created by Noosa real estate agent, Alex Harris. The catalyst was a series of photos taken in 2009 showing koalas seeking water from humans during a heat wave in South Australia. This prompted her to seek answers to three fundamental questions related to koalas: How many are left, where do they live and in what condition? The website seeks to answer these questions and to provide a greater understanding of both quantitative and qualitative data collected by citizen scientists working from home throughout Australia.

Friends of Hoddles Creek encourage you to join Koala Tracker and map your koala sightings. Put Hoddles Creek on the map! Help to save and keep our koalas here in Hoddles Creek for your kids and grandkids. Check out this website and help track our Tuesday Koala.
http://www.koalatracker.com.au/

Where did the koalas come from?

The number of koala sightings in the area has increased in the past 12 months, from Wesburn to Hoddles Creek, including in the Gembrook end of Kurth Kiln Park and it is highly likely there have been sightings in other areas of the Upper Yarra Valley that have not been reported. Based on observations made by residents, most of the recent sightings have been of healthy juveniles (independent, but not quite full

grown), that do not have ear tags. In 2005, approximately 200 koalas were relocated from French Island to the Yarra Ranges, as part of a plan to reduce over grazing pressures on the island. While relocation of native animals generally has a low success rate, the positive news here is that many of the sightings seem to be of healthy individuals bred from the released koalas.


'Saturday' at Beenak House, Hoddles Creek

We can make the following reasonable assumptions about what this means:

1: Enough of the released koalas survived and remained healthy enough to disperse and breed
2: The habitat in the area is suitable for koalas
3: Increased sightings may mean that the koala population has increased
4: Surviving released koalas (they can be identified by ear tags) and their prodigy need to be protected
5: The preferred koala habitat needs to be protected.

What can we do to support koalas in the Upper Yarra Valley?

While the information we have indicates that koalas are very choosey about the trees they feed from, they are often sighted in 'non-feeder' trees. As the population in the area increases, koalas will be seen more often in 'non feeder trees'. If the koala is healthy this is not an issue, however it does mean it will be soon be on the move, usually by climbing down the tree and moving across the ground to another tree.

In areas of major habitat loss, koalas have been found dead at the base of 'feeder trees', because the 'feeder trees' numbers were reduced, those that remained were over grazed by surviving koalas, which meant they had to move around more. The trees were too far apart to move limb to limb, so koalas had to move on the ground. The result of these issues meant that koalas found dead at the base of trees simply did not have enough energy to climb the tree once they got to it. In cases like this there is also a high likelihood of dog attack, as the loss of habitat caused by tree removal is often for house sites or other development.

Because their diet of eucalyptus leaves takes a long time to digest and provides very little energy, koalas spend a lot of time sleeping and, when they do move, it is slowly. They also use up energy reserves very quickly if stressed.

Koala Food Trees suitable for Yarra Ranges

Scientific Name, subspecies	Common Name/s	Preferred soil type and location
E. cyellocarpa	Mountain grey gum, Mountain gum, Monkey gum, Spotted mountain grey gum, Pyrenees gum	Deep fertile soils on slopes in sheltered valleys, tolerates light frost and some shade, rainfall 700-1600 mm.
E. viminalis ssp. viminalis	Manna gum	Lower slopes adjacent to major streamlines, well-drained moist alluvial or sandy loam soils, with clay subsoils, tolerates heavy frosts, slightly salt-tolerant, rainfall 500-1700 mm.
E. globulus spp. bicostata	Southern blue gum, Eurabbie, Blue gum, Victorian blue gum	Medium to heavy, moist soils, especially heavy basaltic loams at higher elevations, frost tolerant, rainfall 600-1200 mm.
E. goniocalyx ssp. goniocalyx	Bundy, Applejack, Long-leaf box, Olive-barked box	Well-drained infertile relict soils with quartz on tablelands, ridges and slopes, preferably clay subsoil, rainfall 500-800 mm.
E. melliodora	Yellow box, Honey box, Yellow ironbox	Gentle slopes and foothills, flats near water-courses, or basalt stony rises. Alluvials, loams and light clays. Frost and drought tolerant, not salt tolerant, rainfall 500-1400 mm.
E. pauciflora ssp. pauciflora	Snow gum	Exposed areas, e.g., basalt stony rises, ridgetops, shallow rock clays to well-drained alluvials, tolerates very cold and windy conditions, rainfall 600-900 mm.
E. Polyanthemos ssp. vestita	Red box	Wide variety of soils, very frost and drought tolerant, rainfall 450-800 mm.

Note: species shown in bold are primary koala food trees. Reference. Australian Koala Foundation National Koala tree planting list.

Hot times for wildlife

Predictions from the Bureau of Meteorology for the next few months are for above average temperatures and below average rainfall. This can mean a stressful time for wildlife. There are simple things we can do to support wildlife friends through this.

Birds in particular will seek out water, so shallow containers of water with something for the small birds to perch on will help them. They will also visit horse and cattle water troughs; however, if the water level is low the birds cannot get out and they may drown. So, a stick or branch weighted down by something like a brick will make it safe for birds of all sizes.

A warm echidna about to enjoy a drink

Water spots can easily be set up for general wildlife. Any container that holds water, but has a 'perch site' will do. It is very easy to provide these water spots, using recycled materials. The last 'hard garbage' collection provided many resources for 'water spots'.

On another note, domestic pets can also be affected by extreme heat and dry conditions. Rabbits, guinea pigs, budgies, cats and dogs (particularly the old and young) will be stressed in such conditions. If you are going to be away from home on an 'extreme' day, plan ahead for your pets.

A young wallaby cools off

On 'extreme' days all pets should be housed in a cool place and out of direct sunlight. Dogs and cats left on their own in these conditions need to be able to access a shaded area. All domestic animals need to have access to fresh clean water. Additionally, an ice pack in the cage or blocks of frozen watermelon or grapes will help keep them hydrated and cool.

Chooks should have access to shade and clean water at all times, but if exhibiting heat stress, a light spray (mist) of water will help them cope with the conditions. Birds cool themselves by lifting the elbow of their wings out a bit, and panting. If a bird is doing this, it is hot and stressed and needs to be moved to a cooler place and sprayed regularly with cool water. Ice blocks in chooks' drinking water can also help to cool their body temperature.

Covert operation

This fearsome creature lurks in our local bush, lying in wait for unwary passers-by. Superbly camouflaged, he (or possibly she - the females are generally bigger) remains still until the unsuspecting prey is within reach, then catches it with powerful front legs, kills it with a poisonous bite, and sucks it dry.

Friends of Hoddles Creek member, Jordan Toman, captured this image when he noticed the small spider, barely visible against a patch of lichen on a dead tree just off the Gembrook-Launching Place Road.

The experts at Museums Victoria Discovery Centre (https://museumvictoria.com.au/discoverycentre) identified it as a species from the genus Stephanopis (family Thomisidae). These are generally known as crab spiders, because they move sideways like a crab if disturbed. They are not active hunters; their colour is adapted to the hunting terrain they use (often bark, in this case lichen) and they may remain unmoving for long periods waiting for prey. They are not dangerous to humans.

Like to join FOHC?

The Friends of Hoddles Creek are always on the lookout for new members. If you'd like to join, simply contact us with your name, address and phone or email details to FOHC, PO Box 298, Yarra Junction, Vic 3797, or email us at friendsofhoddlescreek@gmail.com.

See more at www.friendsofhoddlescreek.com or on Facebook – just search 'Friends of Hoddles Creek' or 'FOHC'.

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