

EVERY TREE COUNTS FOR GOLD COAST KOALAS

David Cuschieri tells *Lyfe – Gold Coast Edition* about what he is doing to ensure that the Gold Coast urban koalas have a future.

I'm a retail designer and together with my wife Heidi, we voluntarily rescue koalas on the Gold Coast. In 2019 we did over 120 call outs.

With the continual diminishment of koala habitat in our Gold Coast suburbs we have started a personal project to change this trend in habitat loss and galvanise local community support to ensure the long term survival of our urban koalas on the Gold Coast.

Koalas On The Green is a partly self-funded program (we have been gifted the trees by a local nursery) to plant koala trees on golf courses. Why golf courses? They are often the largest tracts of private land in our suburbs.

We started the project a month ago and we are halfway through the goal of 200 trees planted on Arundel Hills Country Club. I've personally taken a lot of time out of my business last month to give back and have become a regular fixture in the afternoon at the golf course. We've had positive support from surrounding residents and hope the project creates more awareness of the koalas that live in Arundel and Parkwood.

As koala habitat continues to be cleared in our suburbs, golf courses are increasingly becoming important. They provide habitat, sanctuaries, food sources and safe 'koala super highways' where koalas can travel safely from one end of the suburb to the other. They can avoid dog encounters, car strikes or being trapped in not-so-koala-friendly fenced backyards.

In the past few months we have been out on calls on an almost daily basis. Recently, we extracted a koala from the laundry of the Gold Coast University Hospital. Heidi went out on her own on two separate occasions to rescue two female koalas from an industrial warehouse in Arundel.

Planting koala food trees in an operating golf course has its challenges. It means that we've had to have small group planting days to limit noise and distractions to members playing golf. Other challenges have included kangaroos (which has meant we have had to install tall 'kangaroo proof' tree guards), the

scattered nature of plantings, dry weather and the need to hand-water the trees.

The big goal is to help other golf courses where koalas live to create 'koala friendly' golf courses. With continued urban development, every tree counts. Unless we begin to find creative ways to connect existing habitats and provide greater food sources, then our Gold Coast urban koala populations may become a thing of the past. To me this would really be a great tragedy. We are incredibly lucky – we are the fifth-largest city in Australia and live side-by-side with these beautiful creatures.

A HOME RANGE

We were inspired to start the project after feeling frustrated in our efforts to find suitable habitat to release rehabilitated koalas. Koalas are required by law to be released within 5 kilometres from where they were captured. With the degraded and diminishing habitats in Arundel, Parkwood and Helensvale it has been increasingly difficult to find suitable safe and

LEFT

Kangaroo-proofing the new koala shelter trees





interconnected habitat. It became critical that we start looking at existing habitat and how we can enhance this to create a greater holding capacity in these areas.

Recently, we captured a sick koala from a resident's lawn. They lived a couple of hundred of metres from Arundel Hills Country Club. This male koala (named Charles) couldn't see as he had chlamydial conjunctivitis. If the members of the public hadn't called the Wildcare hotline and we hadn't come out, Charles would have most likely starved to death. Or, he could have been struck by a vehicle or attacked by a dog.

Charles was taken to Currumbin Wildlife Hospital for a full medical work up before being transferred to Australia Zoo where he was kept in care and rehabilitation. We released him into Arundel Hills Country Club two months later to ensure that he had a safe new home close to his original range.

Releasing Charles in the golf course was the inspiration to begin planting koala food trees. We need to ensure that the resident koalas have enough food sources and habitat to prevent them getting into trouble traversing the increasing dangerous and complex urban matrix.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

From our experiences rescuing koalas, we have found that the community wants to help. They want to join local causes that have meaning for them. Is this you? Then, ask your local golf course if they would be interested in making their golf course more koala friendly, and refer them to our Facebook page. We will take care of the rest.

Be sure to follow us to find out when the next koala food tree planting day event is – facebook.com/koalasonthegreen/ You can become part of a 'Koala Crew' for the afternoon and gain a greater awareness of koalas in their area while helping the koalas long term future.



TOP

Charles the koala, well again, looking handsome.

MIDDLE

Koalas On The Green Group Planting trees. David and Heidi are in the centre

BOTTOM

One golf course down, hundreds to go!

HOW GOLF CLUBS CAN HELP

Arundel Hills Country Club has been very supportive of the project. We would like to invite other golf clubs on the Gold Coast, South East Queensland, or Northern New South Wales who have koalas that frequent their golf courses to contact us on 0412 816 855. Or, get in touch via the Facebook page. We can make your golf course more koala friendly. We are happy to visit the golf course, and provide some starter koala food trees. We can also provide advice on how you can activate the golfing community and surrounding residents to be involved in the Koalas On The Green program. ■

RIGHT

The trees are donated by a local nursery.

BELOW

Vehicle of choice for koala habitat rehabilitation

