

KOALAS **SLOW LIFE IN THE FAST LANE**

For one baby koala and his complicated family, Brisbane city living is hectic — and deadly

NARRATED BY SHANE JACOBSON
PRODUCER: BETTINA DALTON
DIRECTOR: PAUL SCOTT



Log Line

For one baby koala and his complicated family, Brisbane city living is hectic—and deadly

One Line Synopsis

Talk about fifty shades of grey: spend seven months with a baby koala, his mum—and all the lustful men in her life—as they brave the dangers of life in the city.

Short Synopsis

Koalas spend a massive 19 hours a day sleeping off a diet of tough and toxic eucalypt leaves. They make up for this indolence by packing the remaining five hours with sex, punch ups and misadventure.

Witness the amazing dynamics within one extended family of koalas, told from the point of view of its youngest member, newborn joey Bruce. We follow Bruce over seven months as he acrobatically braves the world outside the pouch, a world where his mother is harassed by three different suitors and where danger in the forms of cars, dogs and disease is ever present. Cuddly and cute? Not these noisy, aggressive, risk-taking, sex-mad koalas. Narrated by *Kenny's* Shane Jacobson.

Koala Fun

Baby koalas eat their mother's poo. It helps prepare their stomachs for what will soon be a lifetime diet of barely-digestible eucalyptus leaves.

The sexually transmitted disease chlamydia is so rampant in the koala population that members of boy band One Direction feared catching it after being urinated on by a furry Brisbane native earlier this year.

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One Page Synopsis

The common perception is that koalas sit in a tree all day and do very little. New findings from Australian biologists reveal the opposite is true – koalas are highly mobile and aggressively social. Within koala colonies there's a vast array of social behaviour, including males threatening each other, territorial displays, fighting and deception. They even communicate using a unique form of marsupial language..

This in-depth nature documentary joins forces with biologists and an urban koala population to reveal the conflicts and dangers facing a not-so-sleepy koala colony. It also explores how urbanisation is impacting on the intricate workings of the colony and how this iconic Australian animal is struggling to survive.

KOALAS: SLOW LIFE IN THE FAST LANE reveals the inscrutable social and sex lives of koalas and showcases never-before-seen animal behaviour as it follows one extended family of koalas to capture their day-to-day dramas.

Our colony's bush home is being devoured by urbanisation. When not negotiating their own territorial disputes, the koalas are dealing with habitat loss, cars, dogs and disease. Monitoring this hotspot are biologists who track the koalas' movements, tree usage and the impact of human encroachment on the colony.

KOALAS: SLOW LIFE IN THE FAST LANE is told from the point of view of a baby koala in the first seven months of life outside the pouch. Can his mother protect him from the dangers within the colony and the threats from life in a Brisbane suburb? His mother has to contend with three (!) male suitors; a *dominant male* who wants to own her, a *subordinate male* who wants to keep her to himself and a *young rogue male outsider* seeking some furtive copulation! But her biggest threat isn't other koalas: Having to compete with humans for habitat and all the danger that poses, makes life a tough gamble.

KOALAS: SLOW LIFE IN THE FAST LANE is an animal soap opera full of conflict, intrigue, and drama.



Meet the Koalas

Bruce

He's just emerged from the pouch – into suburban Brisbane. It's a race to learn the laws of survival, with and without his mother.



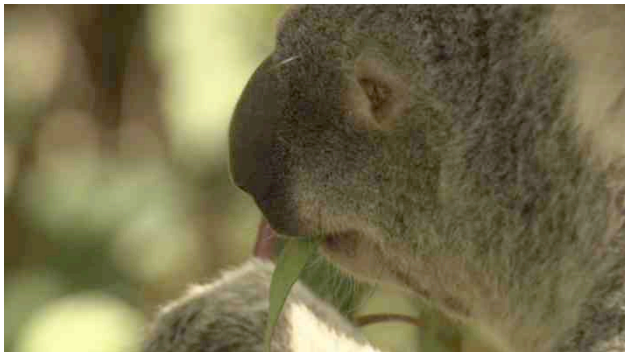
Mary, Bruce's Mum

Not only does Mary have to worry about keeping herself and her toddler fed on one of the most indigestible diets in the animal kingdom, she's also trying to stay alive on the fringe of a big city. Then there are those pesky male koalas desperate to have their way...



Buster, The Dominant Male

Buster is top koala of the colony so by rights Mary should be his. But how long can Buster reign supreme? His territory and his girl are under siege.



Henry, The Subordinate Male

Once a young pup like Bruce, Henry is now oozing testosterone and flexing his claws, determined to get in with the ladies and oust Buster as top dog.

Hendrix, The Travelling Salesman

With no colony of his own, Hendrix does daily battle on the frontline of urbanisation as he searches for food and, erm, tries to satisfy his urges. He's doing ok. New statistics show 50% of koala bubs are sired by sneaky cads like Hendrix!



Meet the Scientists



Dr Bill Ellis is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Queensland and CQ University. His PhD project addressed the physiological responses of koalas to drought and disease. His primary research sites now are the central Queensland islands, where he is investigating communication and spatial and breeding dynamics in koalas. Bill was the Clarke Endowed Conservation Post Doctoral Fellow at the San Diego Zoo, 2006–2011, and has been studying and working with a range of species including koalas for over 20 years.

“I think that what really strikes home for a lot of people is they think, ‘Well surely we can save koalas, surely an animal that we have this much empathy for should be quite easy to save.’”

Dr Sean FitzGibbon is a wildlife researcher at the University of Queensland. He grew up in the city of Brisbane where he developed his fascination and concern for native animals. Sean is passionate about conserving native wildlife in our ever-changing world. For the past seven years Sean’s research has focused on the conservation and management of Australia’s iconic animal—the koala—and its struggle to survive in the heavily fragmented landscapes of Eastern Australia.



“There is that misconception that they’re just this dumb marsupial that sleeps most of the time, eats leaves and that’s it. But actually the more we learn about the koala, the more we realise it is really complex.”



Cathryn Dexter is a member of Griffith University’s Environmental Futures Centre Applied Road Ecology Group. Since 2004 she has been involved in numerous wildlife road mitigation projects. Cathryn has also delivered a number of community talks and workshops on this subject, as well as speaking at conferences.

“When it’s all said and done, I think that the work that we’ve done is going to have some really long term implications for road ecology and for road mitigation for wildlife, and in particular, koalas.”

David Black is a researcher at Griffith University. He works within a team focused on urban wildlife and road ecology. His current project is on koala movement in relation to roads in South East Queensland. He is involved with the capture of the wild koalas, GPS collaring and analysing their movement patterns. He is passionate about ensuring the survival of the species for future generations to experience.



“I’d never like my grandchildren or other people’s grandchildren to miss out on seeing koalas...The way they are affected at the moment with roads, disease, and dogs, and such massive declines, we’re not going to be able to see them in the next twenty years if we don’t do something.”

Statement from Bettina Dalton – Producer

We set ourselves a tough challenge in trying to film the behaviour of a creature with a reputation for being elusive and cryptic. But with the help of new science and a lot of patience, our team was lucky enough to observe a season in the life of this most charismatic treetop marsupial.



Work began at the start of breeding season when our crew began surveillance of colonies throughout greater Brisbane. Unusual seasonal rains meant breeding activity was slow to start. Countless hours were spent tracking animals that would disappear into the night. A deep respect was forged for these 'ghosts of the forest'. But when the poor weather retreated pre-mating bellows filled the spring air. For a few brief and delightful weeks the crew had koalas scurrying around them.

Hot on the trail of the dispersing males were scientists Dr. Bill Ellis and Dr. Sean Fitzgibbon. The steep slopes of the deserted island of St Bees in northern Queensland provided our team with the vital high ground needed to penetrate the treetop world of a colony. Back on the mainland Cathryn Dexter and David Black introduced us to roaming males Captain Bogart and Hendrix. Cranes, climbers and nearby tall buildings were utilised as the crew shadowed the koalas through trees, suburbs and across six-lane freeways.

There is far more to a koala than meets the eye. In our film we wanted to portray not only their plight but also their character. What we found was the koala version of *Desperate Housewives'* Wisteria Lane with all its sleeping around, complicated relationships, male rivalry and punch-ups.

We also explored new science delving into koalas' vocalisations, which I found fascinating. They project this deep guttural call to attract the female and reveal much about themselves in the process. What is also astounding is that koalas exist on an exclusive diet of eucalypt leaves, which are highly toxic. They have a unique digestive system that is able to extract enough nutrients to survive.

Koalas have just been declared a threatened species and rightly so. After seeing the film, I don't think people will ever look at them in the same way again.



Bettina Dalton is a Sydney based producer and company director of Wild Fury who began her career with the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service carrying out research on green turtles and koalas. She produced and hosted the children's wildlife series *Bush Beat*, wrote three wildlife books and for four years was a specialist eco-reporter on Nine's *Getaway*. Bettina has produced and directed more than 70 hours of internationally distributed television. She was co-producer and co-director of award-winning films such as *Flight of the Rhino* and *The Art of Tracking* and was also the director of the Ron and Valerie Taylor biography series *Shadows of the Shark*.

Statement from Paul Scott – Writer/Director

I directed a film on koalas in 1989 and ever since have kept an eye out for any major new scientific breakthroughs to justify another film. A few years ago biologists discovered that there was much more to the koala's world than meets the eye. They uncovered more about how these animals communicate and the fascinating interactions between koalas within a colony.

Most importantly, they discovered that 50% of koalas were sired by roaming males travelling between colonies. This 'travelling male koala' was previously unknown to science and I thought this was a great basis for a poignant contemporary film about koalas.

If koalas need to move between colonies for the species to survive, this changes our whole thinking about how to conserve koalas. Today's travelling koalas have to move on the ground much further than their ancestors because farming and urbanisation have left trees much further apart. Travelling koalas also encounter many more dangers than in the past, such as cars, dogs and disease. This gives the film a dramatic edge and has allowed us to make a contemporary koala film that might help the embattled koala by increasing our understanding of the need for green corridors.

There were two main challenges to directing this documentary. The first was to capture on film all the animal behaviour associated with these new scientific discoveries. We needed to record fights, communication, mating and the male koala wandering into suburbia. Because these kinds of behaviours are clandestine, a special approach and infrastructure needed to be set up to get such behaviours on film. Our goal was to show a side of koala society that people had not seen before, one where koalas reveal their true secret self, a quick-witted animal with a sophisticated social system

The second challenge was to make a film with an entertaining narrative where the viewer could become truly intimate with the koala and understand its plight in modern day Australia. The intent was to make something that went beyond that of the usual blue-chip wildlife film; an emotional rather than an intellectual film. We decided to tell a story akin to a modern day koala soap opera, rather than simply following the academic facts. Although the film is firmly rooted in science, we weren't afraid to anthropomorphise and find the parallels between the social interactions of koalas and their human neighbours. We included the science from two groups of biologists to add weight to the emotional story.

I hope the resulting documentary reveals the true world of koalas and allows Australians to get to know and empathise with this iconic animal. Hopefully it will inspire Australians to help conserve the koala, whether it be at a local or national level.

With 29 years television experience, **Paul Scott** is one of Australia's most renowned science and natural history filmmakers. In 2007 Paul's film *The Secret Lives of Sleepwalkers* won a Silver Dragon at the Beijing Science Film Festival and in 2009 the doco series *Dead Tired* won a Golden Tripod at the Australian Cinematographers Society Awards. His *Outback Fight Club* was nominated Best Documentary Series at the 2011 AACTA Awards and was also nominated for a 2012 Logie in the Most Outstanding factual program category.



SALLY MORAN – EDITOR

Sally Moran trained as an editor at THEpostWORKS on various series featuring the late Steve Irwin, The Crocodile Hunter, and subsequently has accrued 12 years experience working largely on long-form films with life-affirming themes. She recently returned to Australia after ten years in the UK working on a range of genres including arts, science and natural history for independents and the BBC. Projects include *Monty Halls Great Escape*, *Deadly 60 on a Mission* and *Thames Shipwreck*, which was awarded the West of England RTS Award for Best Documentary (Non-Natural History).

“As an editor, it’s a pleasure to work with such a charismatic creature as the koala and become immersed in the latest research about their biology and behaviour. It was a challenge to frame this content in an accessible way and to tell a natural history story as a family drama, whilst interweaving the narratives of the scientists who research and try to protect them.”

RAJAN KAMAHL – COMPOSER

Rajan Kamahl began his musical career as a keyboard player and pianist at age 18, and by 21 had performed with Kylie Minogue, Dragon, Jenny Morris, Kevin Borich and Tommy Emmanuel ... to name a few. He then ventured into the world of music for television and created music for shows such as *Water Rats* and *Channel 10 News* and advertising clients such as Coca-Cola, McDonalds, Sony and Nike. He became the first Australian composer to be selected as one of the winners of BMI's Pete Carpenter Fellowship, studying under legendary composer Mike Post whose credits include some of the best known music written for American television: *Law & Order*, *Hill Street Blues* and *The A-Team*. Since returning to Sydney, Rajan has worked on everything from feature films to video games and more than 100 hours of TV series and documentaries, covering a vast array of musical styles and genres. His most recent work includes *Missing William* starring Brandon Routh. Rajan is deeply passionate about creating music and considers himself ridiculously lucky to have a career doing the thing he loves most for nearly 20 years now.

“Koalas: Slow Life in the Fast Lane was a wonderful musical experience for me. While avoiding the obvious musical clichés, the score had to help tell the story of the plight of these animals, providing emotion without being saccharine or over-sentimentalising the difficult situation these animals now face.”



Facts & Background Information

Threat of Urbanisation:



Queensland is clearing land at near world record rates. Clearing increased by 21% from 1999-2000 and 75% of all clearing was in Queensland. This put the state of Queensland on par with countries with comparable rates of land clearing including Indonesia, Brazil, Congo and Bolivia.

'Queensland trees cleared at one of the fastest rates', Courier Mail, 25/1/03

In 2003, independent research completed by the Queensland Herbarium, the NSW Royal Botanic Gardens and the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service indicated that Australia is clearing 687,800 ha (6,878 square km) of native vegetation every year.

This means that over 50 football fields of Australian native trees, wildflowers and wildlife habitat are destroyed every hour.

Queensland Herbarium, the NSW Royal Botanic Gardens and the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, 2003

In just over two human life times more than 410000 ha of secondary koala habitat (Class 'A') was cleared, representing a loss of almost half of the original area.

South East Queensland Regional Plan

Threats from Cars:

After habitat clearing, the most serious threat to koalas is cars. In South East Queensland, an average of almost 300 koalas are killed each year by motor vehicles, based on wildlife hospital records in the period 1997 to early 2011.

The State of Queensland Department of Environment and Resource Management, 2012.

<http://www.derm.qld.gov.au/wildlife-ecosystems/wildlife/koalas/koala-threats.html>

Vehicle strikes represent 34% of koala mortality on the Koala Coast of Queensland and have been associated with all classes of road vehicles.

Department of Environment and Resource

<http://www.derm.qld.gov.au/wildlife-ecosystems/wildlife/koalas/research/report-koala-coast-surveys-0506.html>



Around 80 per cent of car hits are fatal.

<http://www.ehp.qld.gov.au/wildlife/koalas/koala-threats.html>

Threats from Dogs:

Around 100 koalas are taken to Moggill Koala Hospital, Currumbin Wildlife Hospital and Australian Wildlife Hospital every year because of dog attacks.

Around 75 per cent of dog attacks on koalas are fatal.

<http://www.ehp.qld.gov.au/wildlife/koalas/koala-threats.html>



Threat from Disease:

Recent surveys in Queensland show that chlamydia has caused symptoms in up to 50 per cent of the state's wild koalas.

White and Timms, 1994, Chlamydia-Psittaci in a Koala (Phascolarctos-Cinereus) Population in South-East Queensland, Wildlife Research Vol. 21, Issue 1, Pages 41-47

Infertility from chlamydia is a contributing factor to the current decline in koala numbers.

<http://www.ehp.qld.gov.au/wildlife/koalas/koala-threats.html>

Diet:

Eucalyptus leaves contain 50% water and 5% sugars and starches. This is a low energy diet. Koalas conserve their energy by sleeping about 19 hours a day, which makes them appear intoxicated.

Lone Pines Koala Sanctuary.
<http://www.koala.net/index.php/koala.html>



Complete Credit List

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CATHRYN DEXTER
DR. BILL ELLIS
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Legals	HUGH MARKS
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Completion Bond	FACB
Camera Equipment	LEMAC FILM AND DIGITAL PRO-CAM

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Absolutely Wild Visuals

Additional footage
Koala the Bare Facts
courtesy of National Film & Sound Archive, Australia

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Michael Major, Toby McLeay, Roger & Cozette Weiss, Yahdoh

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Redland City Council: Jenny Davies
Coomera Waters Body Corporate (AUSTCORP),
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KOALAS: SLOW LIFE IN THE FAST LANE: Technical Notes

Production Format:	HD 16:9
Release Formats:	Digital Betacam 16:9 Anamorphic HD Cam 16:9 Anamorphic
Sound Configuration:	Tracks 1 & 2 Stereo Mix
Date of Production:	2011
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