



Drivers urged to look out for koalas this long weekend after iconic animal falls victim to record-high vehicle strikes

Koala conservation organisation, Friends of the Koala, say there's been a 15% increase in koalas being hit by vehicles in the Northern Rivers region this past year, calling for extra vigilance from motorists ahead of the busy upcoming King's Birthday weekend.

3 June 2024

Friends of the Koala, the organisation dedicated to the rescue, veterinary treatment, rehabilitation and release of koalas in the Northern Rivers region of NSW, has made a plea for motorists and holiday-makers to take care of our iconic koalas this coming long weekend.

The call comes after a record number of koalas were killed or severely injured due to vehicle strikes in the region between May 2023 and May 2024. During this time, Friends of the Koala received reports of 71 koalas who were hit by vehicles, of which only 13 were able to be rehabilitated and released back to the wild.

Unfortunately, 80% of koalas hit by vehicles last year did not survive the impact.

Silva Everaers, General Manager at Friends of the Koala, said with the King's Birthday long weekend coinciding with koala breeding season, drivers must be vigilant to ensure these numbers don't continue to rise.

"Koala breeding season is so important to the health and wellbeing of koalas as well as protecting them from becoming further endangered. Unfortunately, it also makes them more active and likely to encounter motorists on roads as they search for their mate," she said.

"We're asking that all residents, motorists, and visitors to the Northern Rivers region this coming long weekend be mindful that koala habitat is all around them. It's important to keep their wellbeing in mind as you travel through the area to minimise the risk of accidents."

If an accident does occur in the Northern Rivers region, or if you see a koala close to or on the road, motorists are urged to stop and call the Friends of the Koala 24/7 rescue team immediately on 02 6622 1233, regardless of the perceived severity of the accident and whether the koala seems healthy, injured or dead.

If possible, the team asks that callers stay with the animal until a qualified and licensed rescuer arrives, or to provide detailed information about the location, such as GPS coordinates or landmarks, if they cannot stay.

Those who see a koala are urged not to touch or try to transport them to safety themselves, as this could pose a significant risk to the health and safety of both animals and humans.

"It's confronting to be in a wildlife accident or to see an injured or potentially dead animal on or near the road, but you should never assume that there is nothing you can do to help," said Ms Everaers.

"We've seen countless cases where koalas who appear to be dead were later rehabilitated, or who had a joey in their pouch that could be saved."

Orion, a young male koala hit by a car in June 2023, is just one example of how immediate care can save the lives of this endangered Australian species.

When he arrived at the Northern Rivers Koala Hospital last year, Orion had multiple rib fractures, a collapsed left lung, a fractured left shoulder, head injuries, difficulty breathing, and bleeding into his lungs. However, with state-of-the-art care from the veterinary and volunteer teams at Friends of the Koala's Northern Rivers Koala Hospital, Orion was able to recover fully and be released back home after four months in care.

Dr Jodie Wakeman, Clinical and Research Director, said their Koala Hospital is purpose-built to save and rehabilitate koalas in such situations.

“Calling for immediate help ensures our 24/7 volunteer hotline and rescue team can get them to our facilities as soon as possible and, in many cases, save their or their joeys’ lives, just like it did with Orion,” she said.

Friends of the Koala’s dedicated Northern Rivers Koala Hospital has rehabilitation facilities on-site and more than 300 volunteers who help rehabilitate koalas until they can be released back to their homes in the wild.

The organisation has been working on a range of habitat protection, restoration and creation initiatives for the past 38 years to ensure koalas have a safe place to call home.

Friends of the Koala offers the following recommendations for motorists:

1. **Reduce speed:** koalas are often difficult to spot from a distance, especially at night, and can cross the road unexpectedly. Lowering your speed will give you more time to react and avoid collisions.
2. **Be cautious:** Pay extra attention when driving through areas identified as wildlife habitats, or where signage indicates recent sightings.
3. **Report every koala** you see close to, or on a road immediately, whether they appear healthy, injured or dead.
4. **If a koala is on** or near the road and may have been hit by a car, stay with the animal until a rescuer attends. If you cannot stay, try to be as exact as possible about the location i.e specific addresses, GPS points or landmarks are incredibly helpful.
5. **Save the phone numbers** of Northern Rivers wildlife rescue organisations in your phone, so you are ready to report any sightings or accidents. For koalas across the Northern Rivers, call Friends of the Koala’s 24/7 koala rescue hotline 02 6622 1233.
6. **Download IFAW’s Wildlife Rescue App** to be connected to the closest licensed wildlife rescue group across Australia at the touch of a button.

- ENDS -

About Friends of the Koala: Friends of the Koala's mission is to make a significant contribution to Australia's biodiversity by ensuring the conservation of the iconic koala and the preservation and enhancement of its habitat, particularly in the Northern Rivers Region of New South Wales. The organisation plays a crucial role in protecting and rehabilitating koala populations through its dedicated efforts, including habitat protection, restoration and creation, rescue and rehabilitation, education and advocacy, and the operation of a specialised koala hospital.

Friends of the Koala was established in 1986 to create habitat for koalas and then increased its focus to rescuing and rehabilitating koalas obtaining its license from NPWS in 1993. The first care centre was opened in 2018 becoming a specialist koala hospital in 2020. The organisation has recently rebranded the hospital to Northern Rivers Koala Hospital.

For more information or to make a donation, please visit www.friendsofthekoala.org or contact manager@friendsofthekoala.org.

Press contacts

Aliison Kelly
President
aliison@friendsofthekoala.org
0428216079

Rhonda James
Vice-President
rhonda@friendsofthekoala.org
0409244294

Silva Everaers
General Manager
silva@friendsofthekoala.org
0437233316