

AKF Report on NSW Southern Highlands to Busch Gardens

Brief Overview:

Initial field data collection for the Southern Highlands, New South Wales (NSW) was undertaken by the Australian Koala Foundation (AKF) between November 8 and 18, 2001. Participants included AKF staff, a representative of the South East Forests Alliance and volunteers from Dallas, Toledo and Duisburg Zoo.

The field trip was the first data collecting expedition to this region for the AKF. The data collected from this area will contribute to the development of regional models for koala habitat.

Aims of the Project:

- Determine the tree species preferences and the influence of edaphic features from the perspective of koala habitat utilisation within the study area;
- Identify and map the distribution of Primary, Secondary and Marginal Koala Habitat within the study area at a resolution and in a format suitable for land use planning by the local council;
- On the basis of the research findings, provide advice and recommendations for the conservation and management of koalas and koala habitat within the study area; and
- From the data collected develop a regional model of koala habitat.

The Results so far:

Data was collected from sites around Bredbo in the south, Numerella Nature Reserve, Hangman's Creek, Nattia, Canyonleigh and Macquarie Pass. Twenty-four sites were surveyed encompassing a total of 886 trees (including 841 Eucalypts). Of these 24 sites, 23 recorded evidence of koala activity. This activity is derived by the presence/absence of koala faecal pellets. The activity level in the active sites sampled ranged between 31% and 1.6%.

An intriguing phenomenon observed during the data collection process was evidence of the eating/gnawing of Eucalyptus bark by koalas. This activity has not previously been recorded by the AKF and does not appear in any previous publications regarding koala diet or behaviour.

Where to from here:

The AKF is currently drafting an initial paper regarding the bark-eating phenomenon in conjunction with pellet analysis being undertaken by Associate Professor Robert Close of the University of Western Sydney.

The paper in preparation should have the following authors and title:
Allan, C., Callaghan, J., Close, R., Student, ?, & Thompson, J. 2002. "The *****"

The AKF will be revisiting this region again in May, 2002 for a duration of two weeks. This data collection will be undertaken in collaboration with NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) to establish valid data sets. The NPWS are also proposing a fieldtrip in April followed by the May fieldtrip. These field trips will target different areas to build a more complete picture of distribution and status of the koala population in the local area.

Following the next field trip we will be combining current data sets with a view to identifying tree species preferences for the development of a Koala Habitat Model and Map for the region. We hope to complete this work along with implementation by the NSW Koala Recovery team on which we are represented by early 2003.

The work undertaken to date has confirmed the presence of otherwise little known significant koala populations that may be vital for conservation to ensure a future for koalas of south-east New South Wales.