

# A Letter to Nature-Lovers

K/P 8

in Connection with a Proposed Re-establishment Sanctuary for the Native Bear at West Pennant Hills (Sydney)—A Practical Effort to Save the Koala for Posterity.



The Koala and her precious "Gum-Baby," that once adorned the bushland of Eastern Australia. Famous throughout the world as a rare specimen of archaic fauna—now almost extinct and needing your help.

**H**UNTED for its fur; its land taken away, and food trees cut down—driven away by our thoughtlessness. One of nature's best gifts to humanity; ours to enjoy, not destroy. No Zoo in the world able to keep a specimen. Will you please help to establish a natural bush reserve for its future preservation?

The Koala is particularly interesting to Science, Forestry, Entomology, Medical, and Agricultural Science—a joy to tourists, the national bush pet and glory of the children. Surprisingly few Australians have seen a live Native Bear, and how can they be expected to love what they have never seen?

Please devote a few moments consideration to this urgent case.

NL 727 Series XI Folder 13 Item 8

## One Reason why it is now Necessary to Undertake the Difficult Task of Breeding the Koala.



### CONSIDERED A GOOD MONTH'S WORK.

A load of 3,600 Koala skins obtained by a party of six men in the Clermont district (Queensland), during the great slaughter of 1927, when the Native Bear was handed over to the tender mercies of the "knights of the gun and poison bait" for a month.

—Photo. by C. Pullar.

## Will You Help to Save the Koala?

**O**F all the animals in the world, the Australian Native Bear is perhaps the most unique, and the most lovable—typically Australian, and yet this quaint little denizen of our bush has unfortunately become almost extinct—particularly in N.S.W. We took this country from its original inhabitants teeming with a wonderful variety of remarkable native fauna which nature took millions of years to evolve: Native Bears were plentiful for little short of starvation would induce the Aborigines to kill one, but to-day, alas, the weird call of this innocent creature is almost silenced for ever; man has done his best to destroy nature's handiwork in less than two centuries.

Australia's fauna comes of ancient lineage; the Koala is one of the most interesting species; the one single representative of its genus. This trusting little fellow is bound up with the spirit of the Australian bush; it is a symbol of innocence, and a source of imagination and delight to the writers, artists, and tourists the world over. A more child-like creature could not be imagined: it possesses a look as if in a state of continual surprise—a strange wondering look expressing the characteristic awe so peculiar to the vast bush of Australia.

As the result of 3 years of careful research, I have very definite evidence that the Koala is rapidly dying out in the three Eastern States of Australia (to which it is indigenous), and the only locality where it is holding its own is on two islands in Westernport Bay, Victoria; elsewhere it is doomed. Many causes can be attributed to the unfortunate fate of the Bears. Continual persecution by irresponsible shooters and vandals, and even licensed wholesale slaughter in Queensland, periodically, has taken an appalling toll of their numbers, and, further, the destruction of forests to make way for agriculture and for timber has robbed them of a great portion of their food supply. Until recently, knowledge of the actual diet of the Koala has been most elementary—even erroneous, but my investigations have proved, so far, that of some 366 species of *Eucalypts* not more than a dozen provide food for the Bear, which is a connoisseur in every sense of the term. Food is an acute problem to the Koala itself; a feed of the wrong kind of "gum" leaves may upset it—hence it will be readily appreciated that the destruction of forests, the limited choice of food, combined with the shutting in of the Bear to confined areas by settlement—and aided by droughts and bush fires—all have prevented it from multiplying. Under most favorable conditions breeding is naturally slow. Dingoes, domestic dogs, and birds of prey, have likewise inflicted severe damage to the straggling remnant.

It is very doubtful whether the Native Bear will again grace the bush of Eastern Australia, nor is any attempt to restore it to the bush likely to serve definite rehabilitation. In the National Park and Kuring-gai Chase (sanctuaries totalling nearly 72,000 acres) it is almost blotted out of existence, whilst over 20 years of protection in N.S.W. has failed to arrest its decline. However, one definite hope to arrest its pending extermination remains—the provision of an ideal natural sanctuary for re-establishment—under careful supervision, full protection, and provided with a super-abundance of staple food trees.

## Queensland Sells the Children's Pets to Pay Her Debts.

**T**HE Koala does no harm to persons or damage to farmers' crops. Up in the "gum" trees it worries no one—being very timid, indeed, I would be pleased to explain personally to those who would know, of the valuable service it performs in the forest. His only crime is that his fur is valuable. In July, 1927, the community was shocked to learn that a callous Queensland Government had declared an "open season" for the trapping and shooting of the Native Bear. Such an edict shattered all hopes of saving the Koala, for naturalists throughout Australia were looking to Queensland for the total protection of the remainder of the species. A mob of 9,500 ferocious licensed trappers were thus released, and the record of one month's slaughter was set down officially at the appalling number of 584,738 inoffensive Koalas—to which must be added at least 200,000 baby cubs which perished with their mothers. The inevitable extinction of the Bear was thus hastened at least a century.

Since the Northern State has failed—deliberately—in her trust to preserve for posterity the remnant of these dainty marsupials it has become urgent for steps to be taken to do something PRACTICAL to save "Billy-Blue-Gum." Its retention is now far beyond the power of publicity or education.

### What Can Be Done?

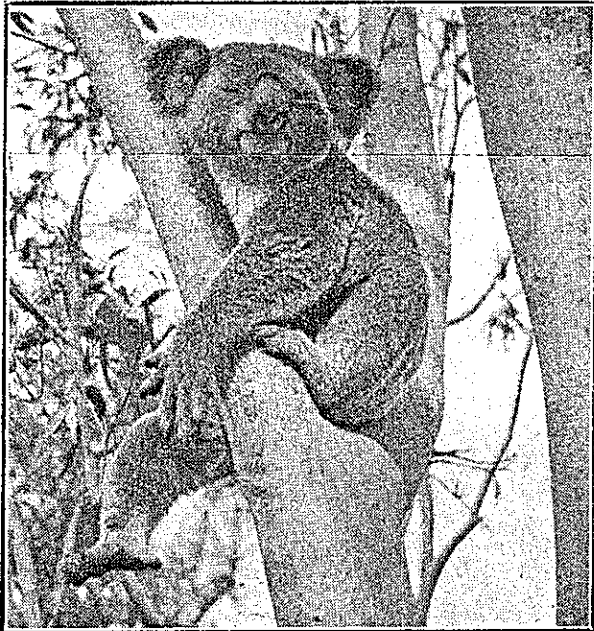
**F**OR some years I have devoted my time almost exclusively to the study of its diet to ascertain what might be done to save our Bear. Every previous attempt to breed the Koala in captivity, even when granted freedom of perhaps hundreds of acres, has ended in failure. My appeal to my friends, and the public-spirited citizens of Sydney for assistance, however, is based on the outcome of careful experiments and the successful breeding of Bears in captivity. The cost of research, and the loss of salary, has been a heavy burden for at least £670 has been the cost of this work.

The re-establishment of the Native Bear resolves into a more serious matter than merely selecting land and putting a fence round some "gum trees," or collecting a few Bears and liberating them in likely areas; both are impractical, but the former offers an alternate suggestion worthy of attention.

As a humble effort on a private basis to restore this little fellow, I have endeavoured for some while to secure suitable land to establish a natural bush breeding reserve for the purpose, hoping to accomplish such plans at an expenditure of approximately £2,000. The sanction of the Government has been obtained, also the approval of a Shire Council, but I wish to assure all that nothing in the nature of a money-making concern is intended, nor anything that would savour of a zoo—just a natural bush park where Australians—and especially the children—might enjoy the pretty sight of the Koala ensconced in the tall "gums" with her baby on her back once again enjoying freedom, peace, and safety—their right of times immemorial. Visitors would be expected to make a small donation for entrance, the proceeds being used entirely for maintenance and beautification.

Principally it is intended to breed the Koala and to conduct further research in regard to its habit and food, but it is also desired to establish an arboretum for Australian trees, shrubs, and wild flowers, to enable the reserve to appeal in many ways to the populace and to provide something unique for tourist traffic.

To this end the County of Cumberland has been searched in quest of likely land. Many difficulties have obstructed the undertaking. Let me explain. If land was required for growing, say, vegetables, the choicest of the whole State would be available, similarly, were it possible to secure 10,000 acres for breeding Bears, we could rely upon sufficient food being found thereon to support a small colony, but, when it becomes 15 acres or so, a small purse, and many Bears to feed on a few remaining trees, the problem is acute.



"Our Jackie"—the hard case of the family.

Two of the favourite food trees growing on the coastal areas of N.S.W. are *Eucalyptus Tereticornis* known as "Blue-Gum," and *Eucalyptus Punctata* or "Grey-Gum." The former, "Blue-Gum," is usually only found growing in good soil in isolated patches on the main ridges; now since all arterial roads follow the ridges the bulk of this food has been destroyed, leaving here and there a few remnants on the footpath, and occasionally a few trees within the fence of the adjacent land. The latter, "Grey-Gum," which grows mostly on the slopes is recognised as one of our best hardwood timbers, consequently, whenever trees are to be felled for farm improvements or the mill, the useful *Punctata*, falls before the axe as first preference. Practically all other local *Eucalypts* are useless as fodder.

Resultantly, great difficulty has been experienced in securing land possessing at least a few of the required trees. In addition other disappointments have awaited. Of all the necessary fodder trees (with one exception) not a seed nor a seedling can be obtained on spot in Australia at this moment, consequently I have been obliged to burn trees in the bush thus actually forcing them to flower and seed before they die—after which a wait of 10 years has to be faced during the growing stage.

In the choice of land, such factors have been presented, as:—

- Growth of required food trees.
- Rich soil to encourage rapid growth.
- Land situated on a main road, on a ridge, and preferably virgin.
- Good natural drainage to prevent foliage from turning rank; such leaves being unpalatable and harmful to the Koala.
- Land of a fair altitude enabling Bears to benefit by every breeze, as their thick fur is a severe burden during the hot Summer.
- Land possessing natural beauties, and of scenic attraction.
- At a reasonable distance from the city to facilitate visitation.
- In a locality where extension could be made in the future.
- Land likely to be saleable again without loss.
- And, at a price within the limit of my purse.

Considering these factors the selection of land was limited—only 3 blocks in the County answering the purpose—two of which have since been lost. It will also be apparent that nothing of a temporary nature could be entertained. As for the third useful area, efforts to secure a portion amounting to 15 acres have proved fruitless, the trustees of the estate declining to subdivide or accept terms on the whole; shortly the entire 38 acres goes under the hammer and may pass out of reach at about £2,500. The land is cheap at the figure; it is the most attractive spot I know of, being in itself quite a natural park. It now appears, however, to represent a minimum expenditure of £3,000, which would include cost of land, dwelling, fencing, and improvements—after which the effort would become self-supporting. Only a further £1,000 is needed to fully finance the object.

An undertaking of this nature should appeal to every section of a nature-loving community—to those who are anxious to save our disappearing native fauna; those who love the tall trees of the forest and the dainty bush flowers; all who are anxious to preserve the beauty of their city and district, and to those who would see a sanctuary where our glorious native birds will be fed and encouraged to take shelter—something more than a park—a unique collection of all things truly Australian right at the door of the city to enable the public, particularly the children, to spend an afternoon of education and recreation. Would this not accomplish far more than school object-lessons and text-book nature study?

Nearly all to whom this letter is addressed know me personally, or have a knowledge of my work, or have seen the little colony of Native Bears temporarily housed at West Ryde, whilst many, no doubt, have seen the delightful pictures of the Koalas which recently appeared in the "Sunday Sun"—but to those with whom I am not acquainted I would be glad to have the opportunity to explain personally at their desire.

Thus, I am obliged to appeal to my friends and other nature-lovers to assist in this worthy cause, as it is impossible for one alone to shoulder unaided the financial burden. Will anyone please help? Shall we save the Koala for future generations—or is the effort to cease and the Bear probably lost forever? This matter is of national import. I have resigned from a commercial executive office to enable research, whilst in my own home, necessities have been denied so that the money might be devoted towards this effort to save the Koala. The preservation of the Native Bear is your interest as well as mine, and I feel sure the public will not leave me to face a situation perplexed with so many difficulties.

From the aesthetic viewpoint alone, what more interesting and attractive creature could afford so much pleasure to nature-lovers? The diminutive Bear puts its arms round your neck, and loves you like a child. I do not know of any other animal possessing such an admirable maternal instinct. Judging by the number, and delight expressed by visitors from overseas, the Koala will cause much attention when it may be observed more readily. Visiting scientists who have come to see our "Teddy-Bears," some of whom have studied the fauna of other continents, are emphatic that the Koala is the quaintest and most beautiful of all the animals of the world. Did any of us realise this before?

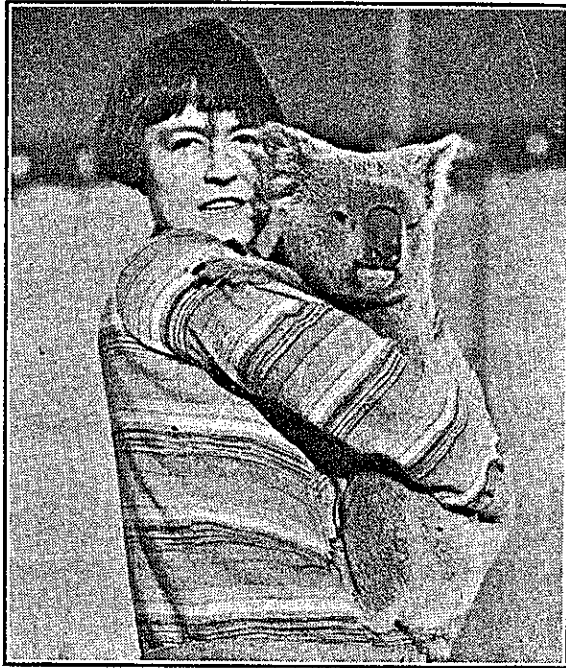
I thank those who have already helped me in various ways. I regret to make this appeal, but the cause is urgent, whilst an early decision in regard to the purchase of land is essential. I will be pleased to reply personally—and promptly, to all communications, and call on anyone who would like to assist.

Yours truly,

*Noel Burnet*

NOEL BURNET,  
"Koala," Moira Avenue,  
West Ryde.  
11/11/29.

P.S.—A generous lady has kindly promised £300 on loan, interest free. The balance, £700 would enable immediate commencement of actual restoration work to be made.



This beautiful Bear is "Billy-Blue-Gum"—who has been reared in captivity since a wee babe, and who has assisted with food research. He considers he should now be given his liberty, and if all his many friends and admirers would help to provide a new home, he would be able to eat his Christmas dinner up in the tall "gums" at West Pennant Hills.

—Photo by courtesy, N. A. Squire, Box 4, Coogee.