# Koala's best friend

## Carolyn is out to save this special species...

By **GAIL FORRER**

THE irony of being born and bred in a state without koalas is not lost on their local saviour.

"I grew up in Tasmanian and you could say I was obsessed with dogs and animals, koala campaigner Carolyn Beatton said.

"Koalas never made it to Tasmania."

Now Carolyn is very worried that koalas may not make it for too long in her hometown of Noosa.

This year her Christmas wish list is all about ensuring a next generation of koalas. Locally, she said the injury rate was up and birth rate was down, so she would like to see funding for a koala conservation, recovery and management plan. Nationally, she wants the federal environment minister to officially acknowledge koalas as a nationally threatened species.

Carolyn's passion for koala conservation started at Australia Zoo where she was employed in 2006 as communications manager for the Wildlife Warriors fund.

"From there I just naturally gravitated to the Wildlife hospital," she said.

"It was my dream job, a combination of PR and my love of animals."

It's a busy position: in 2007 Australia Zoo hospital was treating about 6000 animals annually.

The number has now risen to about 8,000.

In this place of joy and sadness, koalas stole Carolyn's heart.

"When you get up close and personal with them, they are so charismatic," she said.

Unhappily, there was plenty of time to get to know the koalas; many were so badly injured that could spend anything from three months to a year in hospital.

"When they are sick or injured, they are very stoic, she said.

"They don't convey their pain, they seem to internalise their fear and pain."

But Carolyn said when they came to know and trust you; they would display their individual, playful personalities.

As koala hospital numbers increased, she realised there was serious lack of outside koala carers.

"So I decided to take it on," she said.

When Carolyn came home from work, she brought a koala with her.

Some as young as six months old.

"It's much the same as looking after a human baby, when they're very young they need to be bottle fed with formula every couple of hours," she then.

"And then they're introduced to leaves."

Carolyn said it can be challenging to find the leaves that only come from about a half a dozen preferred trees.

Fortunately, her landscaper husband had just the job to track down the food source.

At home, just like in the wild, Carolyn discovered Koalas like to be carried on a back.

"I would have them on my back when I was walking around the house and they would climb on my back even when I watching television."

At times, Carolyn looked after two koalas at the same time.

"They like a buddy, she said.

"They play together – push and jump about with each other and at rest times they cuddle up together."

However, the goal is to get the small furry animal back into its natural habitat.

"They must be de-humanised so they can survive in the wild, she said.

"At the Zoo hospital they have a pre-release enclosure where they are still monitored on a daily basis, but have limited human contact."

Carolyn left her employment to have her own baby son in 2009.

"In fairness to my child, I stopped taking in the koalas, she said.

"That when I created Koala Diaries."

Koala Diaries are an online website which allows people to report koala sightings and track movements.

It's a place where koala lovers can share the latest news and records can be used for their preservation.

Carolyn's koala passions run in tandem with her home duties.

She constantly works on the website and this year gave her input into a senate inquiry into Koalas.

She recalls moving into her Noosa Heads home nine-years-ago and observing koalas in gum trees in her backyard.

"They're not there now, they've all gone."

Undaunted by these grim figures, Carolyn declares the battle to save koalas is far from over.

"I'm still here to fight the good fight," she said.



**SURVIVAL PIGGYBACK:** Carolyn Beaton helps a young koala recover for a wild release.

PHOTO: CONTRIIBUTED.