

Baby it's tough going for koalas

By PETER GARDINER

TWO – barely enough to board an ark.

Yet according to Carolyn Beaton, co-founder of the Koala Diaries (koaladiaries.com.au), this number is the stark reality of surviving koala joeys reported in Noosa's 150,000ha Biosphere Reserve since September 2010.

And just reaching the “startlingly low” figure of two young survivors was almost a near miss.

Ms Beaton said last Friday evening 10-month-old koala joey christened Geoffrey (both pictured right) was rescued from the middle of McKinnon Dr at Coorobah to claim that second sighting from about 2500 koala sightings that form the basis of the Diaries' project location initiative.

“The only other live joey reported within the wider Noosa area during the same time frame had been observed 19km away at Castaways Beach in August 2011,” Ms Beaton said.

“The alarm bells are ringing very loud and very clear.

Having once been a stronghold for the species – anecdotal evidence suggests koalas numbered in the hundreds in the early 2000s – the low level of koala recruitment/birth of youngsters within the former Noosa Shire is bringing the likelihood of localised extinction into sharp focus for the koala advocate.”

Ms Beaton said she has



become less concerned with the overall numbers and more worried by the clear trends that have been emerging.

“Koala populations on the Sunshine Coast generally are at a flashpoint. Populations that were once firmly entrenched at Nambour and Caloundra – like those at Noosa Heads – are also in single figure territory.”

She said the exodus of the species from the Noosa National Park was another sign post that this koala population is past its tipping point, meaning that localised extinction is now unstoppable without management intervention.

“Yet the Department of Environment and Resource Management (DERM) doesn't have a management plan for the Noosa National Park, nor does the Sunshine Coast Council have a koala

management strategy. DERM's last management plan for the Park was written in 1999 and expired in 2009,” Ms Beaton said.

And since February 2010 Koala Diaries has verified 10 koala deaths within the Noosa National Park – between Noosa Heads and Peregrine Beach – or on its busy perimeter roads.

“Today just three koalas are observed in the headland section of the national park with any regularity.

“One death in a high profile koala population is one too many, but 10 is just tragic. These animals have died within the park, or in their attempt to leave it. Aside from the obvious causes – namely koala disease and motor vehicle strikes – there is a complexity of issues in that location that are not fully understood without scientific assessment.”

Ms Beaton said more koalas have observed of late living along Noosa's Eenie Creek Rd than within the park's headland precinct.

“It is a precarious situation for them to be in, given the busy road's 80kmh speed limit.

“More broadly Australia's first crowd-sourcing koala sighting census (Koala Diaries) has been concerned with investigating how many koalas are left, where they live and in what general condition.”

She said the largest concentration is in south-east Queensland with reporting hotspots North Brisbane, Redlands and Noosa.