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Chilling toll for koalas

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US correspondent

THIS sad and brutal image is not how Australia would like the world to see its wildlife, especially when it comes to the iconic and beloved koala.

But *National Geographic* has not attempted to suppress reality in its May edition, which focuses on the plight of the koala.

The photo shows one unnamed Queensland clinic's weekly death toll of koalas — 13 of them, mostly killed by dogs or hit by cars.

National Geographic photographer Joel Sartore, who is back in the US after spending time with koala rescuers north of Brisbane, said anonymous clinic workers had asked him to

get the image of dead koalas out to the world.

"The little baby in its mother's arms was really depressing," Sartore said. "And I saw that many times. I watched them die on the operating table, or after they'd been treated for weeks. It's very sad."

An identifying wristband on one of the koalas was blurred in the photo to protect clinic staff who feared repercussions from the publicity.

"They had all these dead koalas laying around everywhere I went. I thought it would be an appropriate picture," Sartore said from Nebraska on Friday.

"I wanted to actually put a face, to show an image of this constant loss.

"The koalas you see there rep-



resent one clinic's weekly take of dead koalas. And so a lot of these places don't want to look bad to the public because people will think they're failing, even though it's not their fault. It's all our fault.

"I don't want the people who helped me get the picture to get in trouble. But they wanted that picture taken because they want to show the world how bad it is."

Sartore acknowledged that the Federal Government late last month had declared the koala a threatened species in Queensland, NSW and the ACT.

"Which is nice," he said. "It's about time. But wherever I went — and I worked with clinics and state officials, people who day to day work with koalas and see the tremendous loss due to traffic and dog attacks and

disease — they all said the same thing. "They said: 'We're going to lose the koala in northern Australia.'"

Sartore said he believed the picture was important. "This is why I really continue to do my job. Because it's effective, sometimes. This is what happens with roads, dogs and habitat loss — you lose the koala. There's got to be some brakes put on otherwise you will lose all of them."