

## Uncertain future for east coast koalas

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More forest is not enough (Image: Torsten Blackwood/AFP/Getty)

THE koalas on Australia's eastern coast face a bleak future even if all the deforested land there is replanted to give the tree-dwellers a leg-up.

Faced with the twin threats of disease and urbanisation, [koalas](#) (*Phascolarctos cinereus*) are in rapid decline across most of eastern Australia. In the worst-hit areas more than 60 per cent of the koala population has been lost in the past 10 years.

But for conservationists who think that habitat reconstruction could reverse the decline in the region, [Jonathan Rhodes](#) and colleagues at the University of Queensland in Brisbane have sobering news. Using data obtained by tracking and tracing 220 koalas for four years, their mathematical model predicts that reforestation alone will not be enough to reverse the marsupials' fortunes.

Neither will focusing solely on eliminating road deaths or preventing attacks by dogs. And while preventing 59 per cent of deaths from disease would halt the decline, there is currently no treatment for the Koala retrovirus that is killing the animals.

All is not lost, though. The east coast koalas could bounce back if the threats from disease, dogs and cars are all tackled at the same time. And once the koala population starts to climb, more trees would help maintain it (*Biological Conservation*, DOI: [10.1016/j.biocon.2010.12.027](#)).