

people | HAVE YOU HEARD

Heard something we haven't? Send your news to editorial@journalweekender.com.au



FUR A GOOD CAUSE

Just three years ago a koala sighting at the Noosa National Park would have been guaranteed, with 30 of the creatures inhabiting the area. But catching a glimpse of a cuddly koala is now a rare occurrence because only three remain.

It's this rapid decline in the koala population – 80 to 95 per cent in the past decade Australia-wide – that has inspired Meghan Halverson (pictured) and the team at Australia Zoo Wildlife Hospital to make it their mission to raise awareness of the animal's plight.

"I've been working with koalas for the last two-and-a-half years as a volunteer at the Australia Zoo Wildlife Hospital," says Meghan, who is a nurse and midwife. "The situation (with koalas) is becoming more dire, so I did my own study and got involved with groups doing rescue and release and it's become a passion of mine – I've fallen in love with the koala."

A fundraising event featuring koala experts and performers, an Evening for Koalas, will be held on July 15 to highlight the need to have koalas listed on the endangered species list.

Research is being carried out to find a cure for the disease, chlamydia, that is killing off these native icons.

"In humans chlamydia is a benign disease but it kills koalas," says Meghan. "There is also an HIV retro-virus known as 'koala AIDS' that makes them susceptible to other diseases."

Growing up in California, Meghan was excited to visit Australia for the first time.

"Everyone wants to see koalas or kangaroos, they're iconic (to Australia). You think of the beach, koalas, the outback, you know – and so many people think of Steve Irwin."

To give fellow visitors the opportunity to see koalas, Meghan's fundraising evening will include a premiere of the documentary *Making Room for Koalas* by Livesmart Videos; a theatre production *The Last Wild Koala* in which Meghan will star; music by Nina Centaine and Josh Halverson (Meghan's son); guest speakers Vanda Grabowski and Caroline Beaton; a question-and-answer session with local koala action groups; and a raffle of locally donated items and services.

Help support the koalas and "save the Earth . . . it's the only planet with chocolate!"

The night will start at 7pm at the Noosa Arts Theatre. Tickets are \$22. Details: Meghan, 0449 255 898; noosaartstheatre.org.au

