

FRIENDS of the KOALA - AMINYA'S STORY

Claire Agnew, Manager, Friends of the Koala

Marley Christian, our Vet Nurse, had just finished her shift on a Friday evening in June when she got a call on the Friends of the Koala rescue hotline. A member of the public had witnessed a koala fall from a tree. Sadly, she was dead on impact, but upon closer inspection, the individual noticed movement in her pouch. Her little joey was still alive!

When Marley arrived, both the mother and the joey were wrapped in a blanket so that the joey could stay safe and warm in her mother's pouch. This is exactly the right thing to do, as whenever a mum and joey are found, they should always be kept together – even if the mother is dead.

While carefully examining the mother koala, Marley found injuries on her back leg that was indicative of a car hit, which could explain her lack of strength and subsequent fall from the tree. The little joey was a female and looked to be about four months old. She was slightly dehydrated but seemed to be otherwise in a relatively good condition. Marley took her home, gave her some subcutaneous fluids and placed her inside a double pouch with a toy teddy bear to cuddle. As the joey was extremely thirsty, Marley slowly fed her glucose mixed with warm water from a 1-millilitre syringe. This can be a very tricky procedure with a young joey as they can inhale the mixture and aspirate if it is fed too fast, but fortunately, the joey was taking it well. The person who found the joey named her "Aminya", after the name of the property where she was rescued. Aminya means "quiet" in the local Aboriginal language, ironic as she heartbreakingly mewled for her mum all night, demanding to be fed every two hours. Marley continued to feed her into the early hours of the morning.

Ordinarily, joeys are with their mothers until they are about 12 months old. As Aminya is now an orphan needing round-the-clock care, she had to be transferred to a volunteer koala carer named Anika. Anika will care for Aminya for about seven to eight months where she will be hand-raised alongside other orphaned joeys. Aminya is doing incredibly well in Anika's expert hands. She still loves to live in her 'pouch' basket with the toy teddy bear but will hopefully become more adventurous soon. She loves her bottle, feeding four times a night and twice during the day – she has even started nibbling on leaves! She is long and skinny but steadily gaining weight. Anika thinks she is destined to be a big, healthy girl like her mum who weighed 8.2 kg, which is above average as female koalas generally weigh 6–7 kg.

Before Aminya is ready for release, we must ensure that she is independent and no longer relies on humans for food and security. This process lasts for a few weeks, during which time there is no physical or verbal interaction with caretakers – only monitoring and observation. Most joeys protest at first, but eventually, they are confident and ready to embark on the next step of their journey.



Aminya in her 'pouch' basket.



Aminya clutching her toy teddy bear for comfort.



Aminya ventures out, testing her climbing skills.

For the final part of her rehabilitation, Aminya will return to Friends of the Koala, where she will stay in the koala kindergarten pre-release area for two to three weeks. At this rate, Aminya will likely be released in February or March of 2020. In the fleeting moments of her return to the wild, all those sleepless nights and arduous days will be worthwhile. Watching these animals take

their first climb, look back at us briefly, and swiftly scale up the tree into the top branches is the most rewarding part of our work!

The generous donation from the Australian Wildlife Society through the Kinder Natoons Project has helped fund the rescue, rehabilitation and release of Aminya.