



Bangalow Koalas Planting Trees for Hope

Karen Fittall

In 2022, koalas (*Phascolarctos cinereus*) were listed as an endangered species on Australia's east coast, recognising that one of the country's most beloved animals is one step further along the pathway to extinction. The reality is, without action, koalas on the east coast are at risk of disappearing – but it is not too late.

Habitat saves koalas, and planting trees creates habitat. Consequently, a New South Wales-based community group called Bangalow Koalas strives to plant hundreds of thousands of trees. Founded in 2016, the group started as a handful of concerned neighbours determined to save a 400-metre stretch of thirty-year-old koala food trees in Bangalow, Northern New South Wales, just up the road from Byron Bay. Eight years on, Bangalow Koalas has grown into an active, change-creating group led by inspirational Bangalow local and Bangalow Koalas President, Linda Sparrow.

Bangalow Koalas connects vital koala habitat by creating a wildlife corridor across the Northern Rivers region.

Consequently, this connection and growth will allow koalas to move freely and safely across the landscape as they source food, reducing the main threats of disease, dog attack and vehicle strikes resulting from habitat loss.

The Story So Far

Bangalow Koalas has planted more than 335,000 trees, getting more than 95,000 in the ground in 2023 alone. It has been achieved thanks to support from the Australian Wildlife Society, a collection of empathetic landholders who desire to become part of the corridor, and vital support from local councils.

A dedicated group of passionate members and volunteers, many of whom bring their 'day job' expertise to the table and many more who are willing to get their hands dirty on planting days, is also vital and has been integral in helping Bangalow Koalas work towards its goal.

“With the biggest threat to koalas being habitat loss, Bangalow Koalas is on a mission to plant 500,000 trees by



the end of 2025,” says Linda, who was named Australian Geographic Society's Conservationist of the Year in 2022.

“Having planted 335,941 trees so far, we are more than halfway there, which is truly incredible.”

Planting Habitat and Hope

As well as planting habitat, Bangalow Koalas is also planting hope for koalas, hope for the planet and, in the face of climate change, hope for the mental health and wellbeing of Australia's younger generations.

“Given the state of the world and the incredibly devastating impact we have already seen climate change have here

Top: The ground and soil are prepared and ready to welcome the eucalyptus seedlings. Image: Linda Sparrow.

Bottom: Linda Sparrow and Pat Rafter are ready to plant some eucalyptus trees on Pat's property. Image: Saul Goodwin.



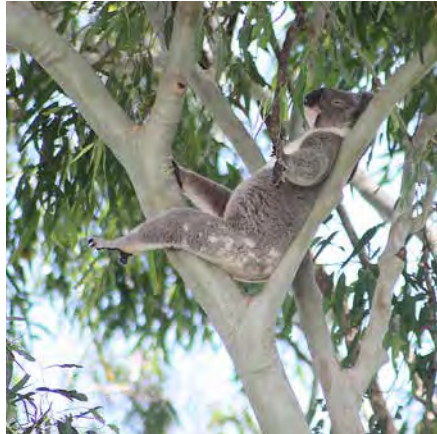
Pat Rafter welcomed guests to the Bangalow Koalas tree planting event. Image: Linda Sparrow.



Eucalyptus seedlings ready for planting on Pat Rafter's property in 2023. Image: Linda Sparrow.



Bush Regenerator, Seamus Faithfull, is geared up with a variety of eucalyptus trees ready to be planted. Image: Linda Sparrow.



A koala (*Phascolarctos cinereus*) relaxing in a tree. Image: Linda Sparrow.

in Australia, as well as in so many other countries recently, I think everyone would agree that now more than ever, we need hope," says Linda.

"But in order to achieve our goal, there are still 164,000 hope trees to get in the ground, and that means we need funding to plant and maintain more than 80,000 trees a year for the next two years."

All funds raised will be used to prepare, plant, and maintain trees over the next three years in strategic locations as part of Bangalow Koalas' essential wildlife corridor.

"So," says Linda, "If you are a government agency, a non-governmental organisation, a corporation, business, foundation, community group or simply an individual who wants to save koalas, we need your help."

To learn more about Bangalow Koalas, including how to donate or get involved, please visit: bangalowkoalas.com.au



A eucalyptus tree. Image: Linda Sparrow.



A group of volunteers, in action, planting the eucalyptus seedlings in the soil. Image: Saul Goodwin.