

Koalas moved from KI to South East are fine

Each year since 1997, the Department for Environment and Heritage (DEH) has moved sterilised koalas from Kangaroo Island to their historic range in the South East.

Relocating sterilised koalas from KI to the South East is a critical part of the KI Koala Management Program, and nearly 3500 have been moved since the program began in 1997.

This year, 162 sterilised koalas have been moved from KI to the South East.

Before the koala relocation program began in earnest, DEH began monitoring the survival of koalas released in the South East region.

Using radio-collars, 26 koalas released in a SA Forestry Reserve about 30km north of Mt Gambier were regularly monitored from December 2004 until April 2005, when the radio-collars were removed.

This monitoring regime was based on the premise that if the sterilisation and relocation procedure had negatively affected the koalas' health, mortality would most likely occur within the first four weeks of release.

During this critical four-week period none of the 26 koalas being monitored died.

Moreover, during the entire five-month monitoring exercise just three koalas were found to have died. The fate of the remaining koalas in the group after their radio-collars were removed is unknown.

In June 2007, DEH began monitoring another group of 24 Koalas that had been moved to the South East from KI, to assess their survival, ranging behaviour and habitat use. Of this group, most have survived but two died within the first 4 weeks of release.

DEH staff from KI are in the South East this week to remove radio-collars from the koalas, completing the year-long study.

Final results from the study are expected by December 2008, but preliminary results show the relocated koalas are relatively sedentary in winter and begin moving in spring, ranging around 15km from their release sites.

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