

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## The Koala Search

By Chris Jozefowicz



Photo by Chris Jozefowicz

**WR News** headed down under to find out what scientists had been doing to save Australia's koalas.

Koalas are pictured everywhere in Australia—on cleaning products, on boxes of chocolate, on sports team jerseys. Yet the animals live only in pockets along the east coast.

The **marsupials** once inhabited the entire coastline. (A marsupial is a mammal that typically carries its young in a pouch.)

- \_\_\_ 1. Why do you think the koalas no longer inhabit the entire coastline?
- The koalas have moved to a drier environment.
  - Koalas have been killed by hunters.
  - Koalas have been moved to zoos for protection.
  - Disease has caused the koalas to decrease in population.

Read on to see if you were right.

The koala population dropped after farmers cut down many of the forests where koalas lived and hunters killed the animals for their fur.

By the early 1900s, "koalas were basically shot out of south Australia," says **ecologist** Bill Ellis. An ecologist is a scientist who studies the relationships among living things and their environments.

I joined Ellis and his team in a forest on St. Bees Island, 19 miles off the northeastern coast of Australia, with eight other volunteers. The island is a natural laboratory, yielding findings that may help protect koalas elsewhere on the continent.

### Blue Gum Trees



Photo by Chris Jozefowicz

The volunteers combed the island for koalas in the blue gum trees. When we found a koala, we gathered information about the trees in the area.

Blue gum is a species of eucalyptus tree in which the furry leaf eaters spend most of their time. Eucalyptus trees are native to Australia, and their leaves are the main food source for koalas. Although koalas can walk on the ground, they are better suited for life in the **canopy**, the high cover of branches and leaves in a forest.

**Goat Trouble?**

- \_\_\_ 2. How do you think goats caused trouble for the koalas?
- Goats and koalas fight over living space.
  - Goats are meat eaters and koalas are food for goats.
  - Goats eat the small trees that the koalas depend on for food.
  - Koalas catch diseases from the goats.

Read on to find out if your prediction was correct.

The St. Bees Island's koala population seemed to be healthy. Yet Ellis wondered whether the koalas might be heading for hard times. The island was overrun with wild goats, and Ellis thought the goats were eating the small blue gum trees.

Without those trees, the koalas would run out of food in the future. Ellis hoped more research would help him understand how to protect the blue gums—and the koalas that depend on them. "I think that's what everyone is trying to do—to make a difference," Ellis said.

- \_\_\_ 3. Since koalas are better suited to life in the canopy than to walking on the ground, we may assume they have
- extra big feet.
  - floppy pouches.
  - strong arms.
  - beautiful fur.
- \_\_\_ 4. The "*pockets* along the coast" where koalas live are
- pouches in which they carry their young.
  - small, separate areas.
  - islands shaped like pants' pockets.
  - none of the above.
- \_\_\_ 5. What do you suppose would happen to the koala pictures on Australian products if the koala were to become extinct?

---

---

---