During the recent bushfires in Australia, the koala has been one of the reports of animals being stranded among the flames and smoke. Experts believe a few of 1 billion native animals have died in the fires.

One of Australia’s more recognizable animals is the koala. Thousands of cute creatures may have died during the fire crisis, but humans are helping rescue as many as possible.

**Marsupials**

What we sometimes call koalas “bears,” they are not. Koalas are marsupials (mar-SOOP-ee-uls). Marsupial moms raise babies in pouches.

When a koala is born, it is hairless and weighs less than an ounce. It is about the size of a jelly bean. After birth, the baby, called a joey, crawls into its mother’s pouch, where it attaches itself to one of her two nipples and nurses for about six or seven months. When it comes out of the pouch, it is fully developed. Koalas may be awake at dawn and dusk.

**Habitat loss**

from the bushfires that have been destroying forests in Australia, the biggest threat to koalas is their habitat from people clearing the land for buildings, roads and homes. Experts also say “dieback,” when eucalypt forests are damaged and die because of nearby development, destroys the koalas’ homes.

**Picky eaters**

Koalas eat only the tender leaves and bark of certain kinds of eucalyptus (you-kah-LIP-tuss) trees. Many kinds of these trees grow in Australia, but koalas are picky about the ones they eat. Since there is so much moisture in the leaves, koalas drink very little water. They may eat dirt when they come down to the ground to move from tree to tree. The dirt may help their digestion.

Their diet of about a pound of eucalyptus leaves a day does not supply them much energy. They spend 18 to 21 hours a day asleep in their treetop homes. Koalas are most likely to be awake at dawn and dusk.

**Cook’s Corner**

You’ll need:

- 1 cup butter, softened
- 4 tablespoons powdered sugar, plus extra for sprinkling
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract

What to do:

1. Mix butter and powdered sugar in a large bowl until smooth and creamy.
2. Add vanilla extract. Mix well.
3. Add flour and walnuts. Mix well.
4. Roll into small balls and flatten on a greased baking sheet. Bake in a preheated 350-degree oven for 12 to 15 minutes.
5. When cookies are cool, sprinkle powdered sugar on top. Makes about 5 dozen.

**Other marsupials**

• Kangaroos. There are about 60 different types of kangaroos. Some can grow to be 6 feet tall and weigh up to 200 pounds. They are the world’s largest marsupials. Kangaroos usually move about in the late afternoon or at night, eating grasses and other plants. They can easily leap higher than a grown man stands, and can travel almost 50 miles per hour.

• wombats. People don’t get to see wombats very often. They live only in Australia. During the day, wombats stay underground, sleeping. They don’t usually come out of their burrows until night. Wombats dig long underground tunnels for burrows. A group of wombats may share the burrow.

**Eco Note**

Smoke from Australia’s massive fires is being transported into the atmosphere, near to the edge of space, by intense thunderstorms created by the bushfires. Meteorologists call the thunderstorm clouds rising above the fires pyrocumulonimbus (py-roh-koom-you-loh-NIM-bus). Pyrocumulonimbus can have a cooling effect on the planet, they are still learning how the high-altitude smoke affects temperatures.

**For later:**

Look in your newspaper for articles about animal rescues in Australia.

**Mini Jokes**

Catherine: What’s a koala’s favorite drink? Cal: Coca Koala!

**Try ‘n’ Find**

Words that remind us of koalas are hidden in this puzzle. Some words are hidden backward or diagonally, and some letters are used twice. See if you can find:

- I Z H L E U C A L Y P T U S O

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