

# Edward The Koala

The only 'pet' koala in Australia



## Three baby koalas brought back to the Island

Koalas are said to have been introduced to Phillip Island in 1880 by four young men ranging in age 18 to mid-twenties- they were brothers Jack and George Smith and brothers Bill and Jack Walton. These lads set out by sail boat to Bass River to hunt wallabies. However, the hunt was apparently not successful, with the only game they 'bagged' being three baby koalas, which they brought back to the Island and released. A year later, one of the young men, Jack Smith, saw two or three fully grown koalas in the area of the cemetery.

The koala was included in the list of protected native game in 1915 and was not permitted to be taken from Phillip Island. For doing so you would face a fine of 'not more than £ 5.'

With the increase of tourism on Phillip Island during the 1920s and the offering of nature-based activities, koalas along with penguins became synonymous with Phillip Island. It took until 1938 for the state government to earmark some 260 acres of land bordering Rhyll dedicated to koala conservation reserve, although the whole of Phillip Island was deemed to be a sanctuary for these cuddly little creatures. The campaign for this fenced conservation reserve was due to the concerted efforts of a number of dedicated individuals including Florence Oswin Roberts, also called Zing.

Florence was the owner of the Broadwater guest house in Cowes. She was highly intelligent with a good business acumen and was a passionate crusader for the protection and conservation of koalas.

Before the days of television and 'Skippy', the koala was probably the best-known and loved of any Australian animal.

In 1937 an orphaned infant koala was found by Florence who named him Edward Lewis Roberts. It was only after being christened Edward, that it was discovered that he was, in fact, a she, and the name 'Edwina' was promptly foisted upon her, but that name never stuck.

The Chief Inspector of Fisheries and Game at that time, Mr Fredrick Lewis, gave his permission for Florence to attempt to rear 'Edwina' provided she always had her liberty – which she did. Florence certainly succeeded in rearing Edward, supplying her with warm, sweetened milk and the koala became so attached to her mistress that she rarely chose to leave the comfort of Broadwater, despite all of Phillip Island available to her for the roaming.

# Florence set up a tiny koala hospital in Broadwater to tend injured koalas.

Edward (sometimes called Teddy) became a celebrity at Broadwater and soon a household name on Phillip Island. She was beyond doubt, the most well-known and loved koala of all. By the 1940s, Edward fame extended beyond the shores of Phillip Island, as she was reputedly the only permitted 'pet' koala in Australia, featuring in numerous articles in Melbourne newspapers.

Florence remained actively involved in the protection of the koalas for the remainder of her life as a member of the committee of management of the koala reserve at Rhyll and a member of the Koala Bear Protection League.

In February 1944 after the koala reserve was ravaged by bushfire, Florence set up a tiny koala hospital at Broadwater, making hessian hammocks in specially built sheds, treating and bandaging the burns and feeding the koalas on milk and gum leaves. Florence went out daily looking for injured koalas.

Edward died in June 1944 aged about 7 years, having reached only about half the full life span of an average koala. Edward was preserved and is part of the collection of the Phillip Island and District Historical Society.

Melbourne Herald - 6 January 1939:

*"Cowes is different, you hear people say. They are right. The whole of Phillip Island is 'different'. It is unique. There is a magic quality about the island, which makes a visit there unforgettable.*

*The most important inhabitants of the island are of course the famous koala bears.*

*As you drive along the straight roads bordered with tall gum trees, you have only to glance upward and in almost every tree you will see a cuddly bundle of fur, curled comfortably in the crook of a branch peacefully sleeping the heat of the day away, or looking down at you with a slightly surprised expression.*

*If you have extra sharp eyes you may be lucky enough to see a baby bear clinging to its mother's back.*

*Where else within fairly easy reach of the city could you see such a sight."*

