Guidelines: koala spotting

10 tips to run a community koala spotting day

1.   Plan ahead

Being realistic about your event and having a clear idea of how it should run can make the whole process easier. Ensure that you have a clear timeline to help you remain on track, and document all planning so that you can re-use lessons and ideas.

2.   Pick your timing

By looking at the breeding lifecycle of koalas, we decided to move the 2019 Narrandera Koala Spotting Day to September to try our luck at spotting back-young. This was extremely successful, with multiple back-young koalas spotted throughout the day. Counting back-young helps to identify breeding success, trends over time and the general health of the local koala population.

3.   Spread the word

Running a koala spotting event means getting as many volunteers as possible. Make posters and flyers to spread around your town. Promote the event on social media and tell local schools.

Contact local papers, radio stations and tourist information centres so that people from out of town also know that your event is happening. The more volunteers, the better!

4.   Work with multiple stakeholders

Engaging with different community groups will allow you to share the load during the planning process and provide the opportunity for many people to come together.

Volunteers are also an extremely valuable resource when it comes to running an event. The recent koala spotting day in Narrandera organised by the Narrandera Koala Regeneration Committee and the National Parks and Wildlife Service would not have been possible without the help of multiple volunteers.

5.   Focus on safety

As the event is run in the bush, the safety of volunteers should be top priority. Ensuring adequate risk management and duty of care (e.g. first aid) is critical. Sunburn, dehydration, insects and snakes…make sure all volunteers are briefed on risks and what they can do to mitigate them.

6. Communicate with volunteers

Providing volunteers with the right resources will make it easier for them to understand their role on the day. Explaining the importance of the event and the positive impact it has on the local koala population will help them to understand that they are making a difference.

Distributing regular event updates, encouraging contributions from volunteers and a two-way communication flow will help to get more volunteers involved in the day.

7. Keep people engaged and enthusiastic

Looking up in the trees to spot koalas can get tiring if you aren't spotting many. Engaging with different aspects of the landscape, counting birds and looking for traces of koalas (e.g. scats) are all fun ways to keep volunteers, particularly kids, focused.

Hiring a guest speaker or practitioner (e.g. koala biologist) to talk to your volunteers in the field can also help them develop new skills and add value to the event.

8. Record your findings

Using a simple and repeatable methodology will help the event run successfully over many years. It will allow the scientists to interpret the data collected to understand trends and provide timely warning of koala populations in need of help.

It's also important to make the data accessible to the community by recording it on the I Spy Koala app, so that it can be made available through BioNet, the repository for biodiversity data products managed by the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment.

9. Ask for feedback

Volunteer feedback is essential for the success of future events. It will allow the event to be improved for years to come. After the event, take some time to come together with all organisers to review the event and come up with ways to improve.

10. Have fun

Running an event that engages the community is an essential educational tool in protecting the local koala population, so enjoy the process and have fun with it!