

The Furry Crisis

Let's Think!

1. Do you know what kind of animal a koala is?
2. Do you think it is legal to keep a koala as a pet?

All You Need to Know about These Iconic Furry Pals

Nearly never seen without something to hold onto, koalas are, in the eyes of many, one of the cuddliest animals to ever walk the earth. With their soft fuzzy grey fur, fluffy rounded bodies and bemused expressions, they attract visitors coming over from across the globe just to get a hug from them. However, despite being so lovable and popular, koalas are now in greater danger than ever. How well do you know about them and the predicament they are in?



'If not bears, what are they?'

Koalas, sometimes inaccurately referred to as koala bears, are no bears and no relatives of them. They are in fact marsupials, which are native to Australia. Marsupials are a group of mammals that are not fully developed at birth and have to stay in their mothers' pouches for some time. Measuring roughly 2 cm tall and weighing less than 0.5 g, a newborn koala can grow up to 80 cm and weigh up to 10 kg as it fully matures. ¹Given their unparalleled idleness, they, quite understandably, give the impression that they may live as long as the turtles do, while in reality their average life expectancy is approximately 10 years only.



More to Take Away

Both kangaroos and koalas are marsupials. However, unlike kangaroos, which are social animals, koalas are asocial, meaning that they do not engage much in social interactions. The only kind of intimate relationship that exists between koalas is the maternal bond between mothers and their babies.

'No trees, no home.'

Koalas stay primarily in eucalyptus woodlands, which serve as their habitat and are their main source of food. Wholly dependent on a diet of eucalyptus leaves, which are highly poisonous, they spend most of their time in the trees, feasting on the leaves and sleeping on the branches. Each koala consumes around 200 g to 500 g of leaves every day. As they take in only a minute amount of energy from the leaves yet put in a lot of it into detoxifying and digesting them, ²sleeping up to 22 hours is thus a rational tactic for koalas to conserve energy. Surviving on toxic leaves may sound a bit preposterous. But what may be even more preposterous is that munching on more of these leaves, as opposed to drinking from a river or a pond, is how they quench their thirst. Therefore, to koalas, eucalyptus trees are more than a home.

Do you agree that the writer thinks that koalas are lazy?

¹Yes ²No



30 **‘How troubled are they?’**

As is the case with many wild animal species, koalas in the wild are struggling to survive as certain long-standing problems are left untreated and continue to deteriorate. A case in point is habitat loss, a direct result of urban development and global warming. Now
35 in Australia, surprisingly, over 50 percent of suitable koala habitat has been destroyed thanks to human activities like agriculture and urbanisation. Apart from human-led initiatives, bush fires brought about by long droughts are also responsible for the disappearing of koala habitat. Worse still, when land is cleared and trees are felled, koalas
40 would have no option but to wander around for food and mates, in which case cars and dogs would then become major threats to them. Each year, more than 4000 koalas are killed by vehicles and dogs.

Moral



Hunting as a form of recreation has long been controversial due to ethical considerations. Many condemn the practice as unnecessary and cruel since, in hunting, animals are rarely instantly killed and have to endure extreme pain from injuries. In Queensland’s Open Season in 1927, also known as Black August, nearly 800,000 koalas were killed, a number greater than the total number of live koalas today.

The adverb ³‘solely’ consists of the adjective ‘sole’ and the suffix ‘-ly’, meaning ‘only’.

‘Take a step back from extinction’

The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, also known as Red Data List, is
45 a globally recognised tool for assessing the worldwide conservation status of animal and plant species. Species are evaluated and rated on a scale with seven levels from ‘least concern’ to ‘extinct’. At present, koalas are seen as ‘vulnerable’, meaning that their lives are threatened and they are close to being endangered, and that more work aimed at protecting koalas from external threats and preventing their numbers from further declining needs to be taken. For instance, planting more eucalyptus trees near the existing koala habitat and building more hospitals to tend to unwell and injured koalas are two feasible
50 plans that would serve as short-term measures. After all, bringing the population of a vulnerable species back from the verge is not like treating a cold—a few days of good sleep and, sometimes, a tablet or two. It is not ³solely about rolling out a number of new policies and introducing new legislation. Rather, it is more about educating the communities about the significance of saving koalas, and guiding them
55 towards a consensus that saving koalas, a national treasure of Australia that is unique to the continent, is a now-or-never mission. Only in this way will the public be more aware of the criticality of collective efforts, and therefore more proactive in taking concerted action in the long run.

~730 words



Looking into Grammar



Subject-verb agreement refers to the condition where the grammatical form of a verb is appropriate to that of its subject. In simple terms, a singular subject is followed by a singular verb, while a plural subject is followed by a plural verb. Note that a subject can be complexly structured and fairly long.

✗ The **animals** in Zone B of the zoo is the most popular among visitors.

✓ The **animals** in Zone B of the zoo are the most popular among visitors.

? Underline TWO complexly structured subjects and the verbs that follow in the web page.

Part A Multiple Choice Questions

Answer the following questions based on the information provided in the web page. Choose the best answer by blackening the appropriate circle.

1. Read paragraph 1. Koalas _____.

- A. are amicable creatures as they like to be hugged
- B. are fierce and dangerous
- C. are in jeopardy
- D. prefer tree-clinging to walking

2. In line 11, 'native to' can best be replaced by '_____'.

- A. familiar with
- B. the symbol of
- C. not separable from
- D. living naturally in

2 Check which option fits in best with the passage.

3. Newborn koalas _____.

- A. live in their mothers' pouches as they are physically undeveloped
- B. can gain weight exponentially annually
- C. are similar to turtles and bears in certain aspects
- D. have an equally impressive growth rate as their marsupial counterparts

4. If eucalyptus forests had not been _____, koalas might _____.

- A. exploited for human use...not have been in today's crisis
- B. home exclusively to koalas...have starved or thirsted to death
- C. a source of poisonous food...not have been endangered
- D. found only in Australia...not have become its national symbol



5. Read paragraph 4. The writer sounds _____ in his opinion of the difficulty

which koalas are facing. **Q5: Statistics show how difficult the situation is.**

- A. biased and exaggerative **By giving these factual figures, the writer's opinion sounds objective.**
- B. objective and detached
- C. misleading and emotional
- D. clever and dramatic

6. Which of the following may NOT be the contributing factors to the loss of koalas' habitat?

- A. highways and high-rises
- B. farms and shepherd dogs
- C. deforestation and wildfires
- D. none of the above



7. In line 50, the word 'feasible' means _____.

- A. prompt and effective
- B. likely to yield positive results
- C. likely to work
- D. economical and immediate

8. Which of the following is the best alternative title for the web page?

- A. The Australian Treasure
- B. The Loss of Koala Habitat
- C. Get Your Facts about Koalas
- D. Threats Faced by Marsupials

8 Think about the main idea of each paragraph first.



Self-evaluation Checklist

Please scan the QR code on P.6 to access the checklist for evaluating your own reading progress.

Part B Pre-HKDSE Questions

Answer the following questions based on the information provided in the web page. For questions 1, 2, 4 and 5, answer in complete sentences.

1. In lines 51-53, what literary device is used when the writer compares the measures to save koalas to the treatment for a cold? Why does he say so? (Any reasonable answers)

1 How are the two related?

Simile is used in lines 51-53 as the writer tries to tell readers that the situation which koalas are in cannot be improved within a couple of days but requires both short-term measures and concerted action in the long run.

2. Biologically, what sets marsupials apart from other mammals?

2 What makes marsupials so special?


What sets marsupials apart from other mammals biologically is that marsupials are not fully developed at birth and have to stay in their mothers' pouches for some time.

3. Look for words in the web page to match the definitions below.


(i) unparalleled (para. 2) (adj.) having no equal

(ii) thus (para. 3) (adv.) because of that

(iii) consensus (para. 5) (n.) general agreement among a group of people

-  4. Do you think that urban development is to blame for the loss of koala habitat? Explain your answer based on the passage. (Any reasonable answers)

Yes, I think so because over 50 percent of suitable koala habitat has been destroyed thanks to human activities like agriculture and urbanisation. // No, I do not think so because global warming is also responsible for the loss of koala habitat.

-  5. Do you agree that educating the communities about the significance of saving koalas is of the utmost importance? Why or why not? (Any reasonable answers)

Q5: There is no clear line between only educating the public and only taking remedial or preventive measures. The sentence 'It is not solely...new policies and introducing new legislation' implies that all measures are necessary. Yes, I do because only in this way will the public be more proactive in taking concerted action. //

No, I do not because education takes time and short-term measures are equally important.

DSE Level Up

Q5 To get a clearer idea of the three measures mentioned, complete the summary below.

Compared to raising public awareness, which is supposed to be a (i) long-term ongoing process, new policies and new legislation are (ii) short-term measures that can be adopted to alleviate the problem in a shorter time. While some expect a combined effect of all the measures, others believe that heightening public awareness alone is (iii) effective enough.

Part C Vocabulary Bank

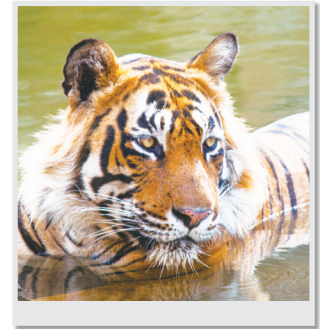
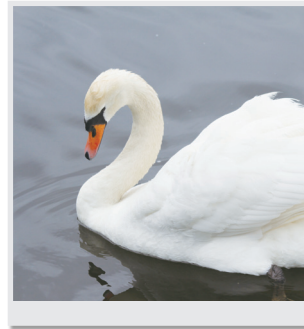
Label the photos below with the names of national animals and those with unofficial status from the word box.

red kangaroo
royal Bengal tiger

beaver
bull

mute swan
bald eagle

kiwi
Gallic rooster

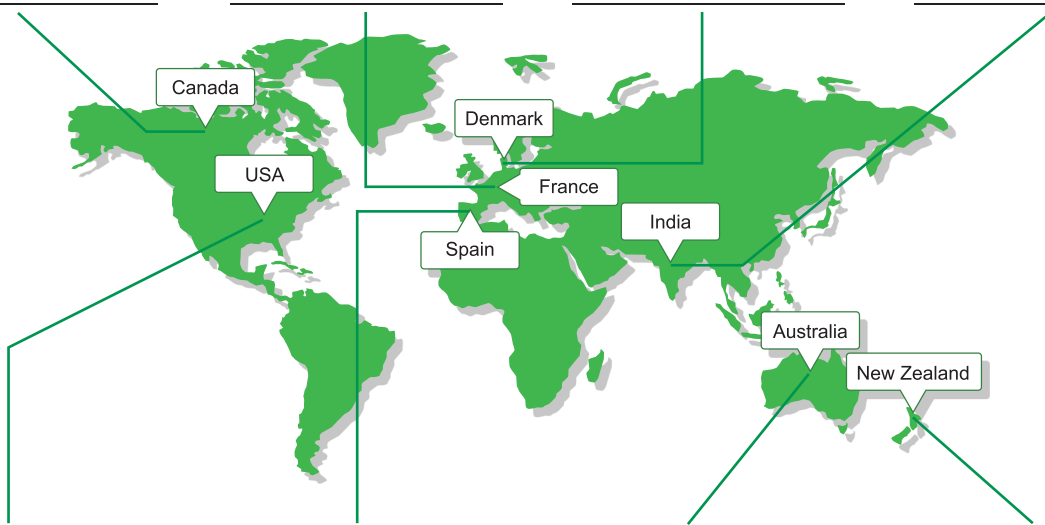


1. beaver

2. Gallic rooster

3. mute swan

4. royal Bengal tiger



5. bald eagle

6. bull

7. red kangaroo

8. kiwi

Reminder

Pluralise the names of the animals for generic reference.

Part D Word Game

Solve the riddles below with the appropriate nouns introduced on the previous page.

Did you just mistake us for those worthless hamsters again? We may look like them, but we are far better swimmers. After all, we live in the water, in lodges we build there as our home. We also create dams to protect ourselves against predators. Do you see the physical prowess we were born with?

What are we? (1) beavers

You may know us by our white bodies, long necks and orange beaks bordered with black. Elegant as we are, we are one of the heaviest flying birds in the world. Feel free to come by the lake and admire us. But don't you dare talk to us. We are busy gliding leisurely on the water surface.

What are we? (2) mute swans

We're born fighters. If you have the misfortune of confronting one of us, our muscular necks and the giant horns on our large heads would make you turn around at once and run away out of fear. You'll pay dearly if you think we are mild creatures like our sisters, the cows.

What are we? (3) bulls

You can't imagine how annoying it is to be birds without wings. The other birds wouldn't stop laughing at us. We are the iconic bird of New Zealand, with cute, grey-brown plumage! Who are they? Gangs of nobirdies!

What are we? (4) kiwis

We are simply the best animals on earth: we have a lion's bravery and appearance, a cat's royal blood (we're in fact wild cats), and skin in a unique pattern better than a zebra's (with an additional orange covering). But how sad! We are a threatened species now. The best always dies young.

What are we? (5) royal Bengal tigers

The pockets on our bellies are not where you put your hands in! They're baby bags. In them, we raise our children, future living symbols of Australia. It's pointless to tell you anyway, since you'll never be able to catch hold of our bags while we're jumping (which is all the time).

What are we? (6) red kangaroos

Every day, we watch our girlfriends (the hens) being taken away and eaten, whereas most of us, the male birds, live on as the unofficial symbol of France. How unlucky to be born female! Can't say we're totally unhappy with this status quo, though. Being good at fighting doesn't mean wanting to die!

What are we? (7) Gallic roosters

We are huge brown birds with smooth white heads and white tails like fans when spread out. Our hooked beaks and claws are in yellow, with which we grasp our prey easily. You think we speak in a cooler tone than the others? Well, that's because we are that cool.

What are we? (8) bald eagles

Let's Discuss!

1. How much do you know about the national animal of China?
2. Would you consider the giant panda or the mythical dragon a better symbol of China?