



PLATE 140

Types

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THERE ARE THREE TYPES OF KOALAS weighing between nine and thirty-two US pounds (4 to >14kg) as adults, depending on their location and gender and measuring two to three feet (60 to 80cm). While all belong to the same species, they have different combinations of traits—scientifically known as a “kline,” that depend on weather factors along the East Coast. All koalas fall into roughly one of three main categories: Queensland koalas up-north, New South Wales koalas in the center, and Victorian koalas in the southern-most states. The average weight of koalas in Queensland is thirteen pounds (6kg) and twenty-two pounds (10kg) in the south. Male koalas can weigh fifty percent more than females.

As Australia is in the southern hemisphere of the globe, its climate is hottest toward its northern tip, which lies closest toward the equator. This accounts for the Queensland koala variety having the shortest fur of the lightest gray coloration. Light colors reflect more sunlight and help keep the animals cool in the summer. Queensland koalas are the smallest types and often weigh half as much as their Victorian counterparts.

New South Wales koalas of the Sydney area are what people are most often familiar with when they think of a typical koala. They have slightly longer, thicker, and more sheep-like fur than the Queensland variety, bearing different shades of light- to medium-gray and ivory accents. They frequently have fluffier (not shaggier) ears than the other types. Their coat is light enough, both in shade and density, for protection from the heat and thick enough to shield from the cold and rain. Frequently, a circular area around their eyes is marked by off-white fur which adds to their seemingly wide-eyed expression

of surprise. This area is oftentimes less pronounced in Queensland koalas and more often absent in Victorian koalas, whose darker fur usually extends into their eyelid areas, thereby yielding an entirely different first impression. New South Wales koalas are a bit heavier and larger than Queensland koalas, but smaller by far than the Victorian ones.

Victorian koalas can weigh up to thirty-two US pounds, live in the southernmost areas of Australia and have to contend with the coldest of winters. The larger mass of their bodies in relation to the area of the skin covering them helps with conserving heat. Their fur is thick and shaggy with long hairs of varying lengths and shades ranging from medium-gray to cinnamon-brown. Their darker coat helps with absorbing more warmth from the sun.

As with the other two types of koalas, ivory accents in ears, underarms, chests, and bellies are the norm and help to keep them cool in the summer. All koalas will recline on their backs to expose their light undersides with limbs dangling to cool off and will muffle up into a ball to protect themselves from the cold.

TRAITS OFTEN OVERLAP depending on past migration patterns. Brisbane is located in southern Queensland but has many koalas exhibiting traits of the adjoining state's New South Wales variety, as summers in Brisbane are not as hot as those in Far North Queensland areas. Koalas farther south might display Victorian as well as New South Walian attributes by perhaps featuring the shaggy ears of a Victorian koala, yet bearing a relatively shorter coat of a medium-gray color. The combinations of their physical characteristics are many and varied, as are their unique personalities.

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