

Koalas

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In news- Recently, Australia has classified Koalas as **'endangered'** after widespread bushfires, drought and land clearing destroyed much of their eucalyptus-rich habitat.

About Koalas-

- A koala or koala bear **is an arboreal herbivorous marsupial native to Australia.**
- It is the only extant representative of the family Phascolarctidae and its **closest living relatives are the wombats.**
- It is easily recognisable by its **stout, tailless body and large head with round, fluffy ears** and large, spoon-shaped nose.
- It has a body length of 60–85 cm and weighs 4–15 kg.
- Its fur colour ranges from silver grey to chocolate brown.
- According to fossil records, **Koala species have inhabited parts of Australia for at least 25 million years.** But today, only one species remains i.e., the *Phascolarctos cinereus*.
- They were classified as **"vulnerable" only in 2012.**
- They are found in the wild in the southeast and eastern sides of Australia in coastal Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria.
- They **inhabit open Eucalyptus woodland**, the leaves of these trees make up most of their diet.
- The species is **sexually dimorphic, with males 50% larger than females.**
- They are **asocial animals**, and bonding exists only between mothers and dependent offspring.
- Adult males communicate with loud bellows that intimidate rivals and attract mates.
- **Males mark their presence with secretions from scent**

glands, located on their chests.

- **Being marsupials, koalas give birth to underdeveloped young** that crawl into their mothers' pouches, where they stay for the first six to seven months of their lives.
- These **young koalas, known as joes**, are fully weaned around a year old.
- The koala **has one of the smallest brains in proportion to body weight of any mammal**, being 60% smaller than that of a typical diprotodont.
- Because of its small brain, the koala has a **limited ability to perform complex, unfamiliar behaviours**.
- Its **vision is not well developed, and its relatively small eyes** are unusual among marsupials in that the pupils have vertical slits.
- **Another major threat** to Koala population **is the spread of chlamydia**, a sexually transmitted disease known to cause blindness and cysts in the koalas reproductive tract.