

NATURE



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***Nature* premieres *Cracking the Koala Code* Wednesday, May 16, 2012 on PBS**

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Loud bellows ring out from a small pocket of forest surrounded by dense suburbs and busy roads in Brisbane, Australia. It's mating season for koalas. Their thunderous roars are difficult to reconcile with the familiar perception of them as cuddly creatures. But it turns out their world is in fact far from cute and cuddly. Rather it is filled with social pressure, conflict, disease, overcrowding and the external stresses of living in the middle of what amounts to an alien world. Predominantly slow-moving, energy-conserving koalas are not exactly well-equipped to handle speeding traffic and packs of dogs, or the consequences of encroaching urbanization. For a real change of pace, ***Nature*** enters the world of urban koalas trying to adapt to life in the fast lane.

Cracking the Koala Code premieres Wednesday, May 16, 2012 at 8 p.m. (ET) on PBS (check local listings). The film explores the day-to-day dramas of a number of urban koalas, seen through the eyes of the scientists studying their every move and vocalization. Fascinating social dynamics include territorial displays, vicious fights, and the surprising mating strategies of traveling male koalas, rogues who truly play the field. New science even "cracks the koala communication code," providing insights into their basic language and social structure. After the broadcast, the episode will stream online at pbs.org/nature.

Celebrating its 30th season, ***Nature*** is a production of THIRTEEN in association with WNET, the parent company of THIRTEEN and WLIW21, New York's public television stations and operator of NJTV. For nearly 50 years, WNET has been producing and broadcasting national and local documentaries and other programs for the New York community.

"People love koalas, yet there is a great deal about them they would find surprising," said Fred Kaufman, series executive producer and recently named recipient of International Wildlife Film Festival's Lifetime Achievement Award. "Koalas may seem docile and sweet, but they are really quite active and can be very aggressive and loud. Viewers will get a whole new perspective after watching this film."

Meet Mary, a typical suburban koala mom. While human life zooms around her, she remains still for hours on end, sleeping or resting 80 percent of each day. Like all koala mothers, her priority is her young joey as he grows and learns the ins and outs of his new world. She will protect her six-month-old, Bruce, until he is weaned. To keep up her strength, she snacks on gum leaves, a toxic diet lethal to most other mammals. But to process the nutrients in the leaves, she must chew the leaves for long periods of time before digesting them for more than 100 hours.

Buster, the alpha male in the territory, claims the exclusive right to mate with Mary and all the other females in his group. He is challenged by Jack, a young traveling male, who comes looking for his chance with Mary. But Buster, bellowing loudly and using his sheer brute force to intimidate Jack, asserts his dominance and sends him on his way.

Biologists Cathryn Dexter and David Black have been studying koalas in the Brisbane suburb of Petrie in an effort to understand the social interactions within an urban koala colony. They have been tracking the movements of more than 70 koalas, monitoring their health, providing medical assistance when necessary, and compiling data they hope will be useful in creating safe passageways through high traffic areas for the animals.

Elsewhere in Queensland, biologists Bill Ellis and Sean Fitzgibbon are engaged in research sponsored by the San Diego Zoo to learn more about the koala social system, mating habits and communication. Using 3G solar-powered mobile phones to record female koala vocalizations, and using those recordings in the field to evoke male koala responses, they have managed to decipher some of the koalas' communications. Their studies suggest that female koalas may be able to tell which males are bigger, and therefore more attractive, by their bellows alone. Through DNA analysis, the team also made a most surprising discovery – that traveling males sire about 40 percent of the offspring in koala groups, despite the best efforts of the group's resident dominant male.

Near the end of the mating season, Jack returns to Buster's territory to try his luck again. He has grown stronger and more confident and this time the fight between Jack and Buster has a different ending. This time it is Buster who is forced out, leaving Jack to take over his territory and his females. Meanwhile, Bruce, now thirteen months old, has reached the first stage of adulthood and will also leave the colony to set out on his own within the patchwork of forest territories in the surrounding suburbs that have become his home.

Nature is a production of THIRTEEN in association with WNET for PBS. Fred Kaufman is executive producer. **Cracking the Koala Code** is a production of Wild Fury Pty. Ltd., Mindful Media Pty. Ltd., and THIRTEEN in association with WNET.

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Nature pioneered a television genre that is now widely emulated in the broadcast industry. Throughout its history, **Nature** has brought the natural world to millions of viewers. The series has been consistently among the most-watched primetime series on public television. **Nature** has won more than 600 honors from the television industry, the international wildlife film communities, and environmental organizations including 10 Emmys, three Peabodys and the first award given to a television program by the Sierra Club. The series received two of wildlife film industry's highest honors: the Christopher Parsons Outstanding Achievement Award given by the Wildscreen Festival and the Grand Teton Award given by the Jackson Hole Wildlife Film Festival. Recently, Fred

Kaufman was named the recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award for Media by the 2012 International Wildlife Film Festival. PBS.org/nature is the award-winning web companion to *Nature* featuring streaming episodes, filmmaker interviews, teacher's guides, and more.

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About WNET

New York's WNET is America's flagship public media outlet, bringing quality arts, education and public affairs programming to over 5 million viewers each week. The parent company of public television stations [THIRTEEN](#) and [WLIW21](#) and operator of [NJTV](#), WNET produces and presents such acclaimed PBS series as [Nature](#), [Great Performances](#), [American Masters](#), [Need to Know](#), [Charlie Rose](#), and a range of documentaries, children's programs, and local news and cultural offerings available on air and online. Pioneers in educational programming, WNET has created such groundbreaking series as [Get the Math](#), [Noah Comprehend](#) and [Cyberchase](#) and provides tools for educators that bring compelling content to life in the classroom and at home. WNET highlights the tri-state's unique culture and diverse communities through [SundayArts](#), [Reel 13](#), [NJ Today](#) and the new online newsmagazine [MetroFocus](#).