

Orphaned koala becomes first-time mother

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Shirley and her baby Pepper.

(PhysOrg.com) -- An orphaned baby koala that was flown 1200km to be raised in captivity has recently become a first-time mum, following her successful return to the wild.

In August 2005, the tiny five-month old koala named Shirley was found on a property near the Blair Athol Coal Mine in Central Queensland and was rushed to the Moggill Koala Hospital in Brisbane.

A year later Shirley was returned to the wild, but not before Dr Sean FitzGibbon, from UQ's Centre for Mined Land Rehabilitation, fitted her with a radio-transmitting collar so he could monitor the success of her

release.

On a field visit earlier this year, Dr FitzGibbon spotted Shirley curled up in a gum tree, and found an extra surprise.

“There was another pair of eyes looking down on me. Shirley has had a baby,” he said.

“The fact that Shirley has come full circle and now has a young indicates that her rehabilitation to the wild has been extremely successful.

“It is a great outcome. So many people worked as a team to keep Shirley alive and help her to return to the wild, and now that she is a first-time mother we know it has all been worthwhile.”

Fortunately for Shirley, her rescuer, an employee at the Blair Athol Coal Mine, had spent years working alongside scientists from Koala Venture, a collaboration between UQ and Rio Tinto that examines the ecology of koalas and the restoration of their habitat after mining.

Established in the early 1990s, Koala Venture is the longest running koala monitoring program in Australia and has uncovered information about the life cycle of koalas, their dietary preferences and breeding behaviours.

Researchers work with Rio Tinto to ensure mining activities are performed in a way which reduces negative impacts upon koalas and facilitates the restoration of suitable koala habitat.

Shirley, who is now living happily in Central Queensland with her joey, Pepper, is just one Koala Venture success story.

Provided by University of Queensland

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