

Meet the Mammals

What's the most familiar mammal? A human, of course. But kangaroos, bats, platypuses, dogs, cats, sheep and cows are all mammals too. Mammals are vertebrates—they have a backbone, and a skull that covers and protects their brain. Unlike snakes and lizards, which have to lie in the sun to get warm, mammals can make their own heat. Mammal babies drink milk from their mother's teats. Most mammals have fur and four limbs. **Marine mammals**, however, such as seals and dolphins, have fins and flippers. In Australia there are three different kinds of mammals: **monotremes**, **placental mammals** and **marsupials**, making up about 380 species.

Placental Mammals

Babies of placental mammals develop inside their mother's womb—just like us. They are fed by an organ called a **placenta** that is attached to the inside of the womb, and are born as fully formed, miniature versions of their parents. Australian native placental mammals include rats, mice, bats, seals, sea lions, dugongs, whales, and dolphins. There are over 200 placental mammals in Australia, including humans, introduced species and **marine mammals**.



Dingos are placental mammals—just like your pet dog. Asian people brought them to Australia on boats around 4000 years ago. Now they live just about everywhere on the mainland.



Monotremes

Monotremes are very strange animals. They lay eggs, like ducks, but suckle their young, like all other mammals. And they have fur, not feathers. There are only three monotremes in the world. Two of them, the Short-beaked Echidna and the Platypus, live only in Australia. The other one, the Long-beaked Echidna, is only found in Papua New Guinea. Monotremes have small, round black eyes. The adults have no teeth and no ears that you can see.

Short-beaked Echidna

Marsupials

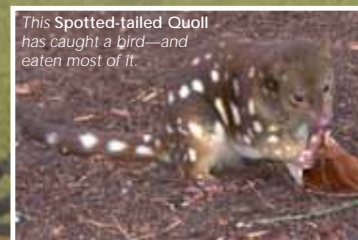
Marsupials are all the mammals that have pouches—kangaroos, wallabies and possums, to name a few. But only the female has a pouch. She gives birth to a tiny, pink, hairless blob of a baby that struggles up through its mother's fur into the pouch. There, it latches onto a teat to drink milk and grow. There are 140 types of marsupials in Australia.



This tiny newborn kangaroo has safely reached its mother's pouch.



There's not much room left in the pouch for this joey!



This Spotted-tailed Quoll has caught a bird—and eaten most of it.

Meat-eating Marsupials

Some marsupials eat insects, birds, reptiles or even other small mammals. These are called **dasyurids**. 'Dasyurid' means 'hairy tail'. Most members of this group have pointy snouts like Tasmanian Devils, dibblers, quolls, dunnarts, antechinuses, planigales and phascogales. Unlike the hopping **macropods**, these animals walk on all fours.



Big-footed Bounders

Kangaroos and wallabies are **macropods**. 'Macropod' means 'big foot' and these animals certainly do have very big back feet—some are longer than your arm. Kangaroos and wallabies are mostly vegetarians, but some will occasionally eat insects or meat.



Mixed Bag

The remaining marsupials include bandicoots, bilbies, wombats, koalas, possums, gliders, bettongs, potoroos and pygmy-possums. Some are herbivorous some are **insectivorous** and some are omnivorous (eat everything). Some hop, some glide, some walk, others climb.

This brush-tail possum is one of 14 different types of possum.



This flying fox is enjoying the pollen of some wattle flowers.

Night Flyers

Spectacled Flying Foxes like to eat fruit, nectar and pollen, but because humans have cut down most of their forests, some now eat orchard fruits to stay alive. Farmers need to cover their fruiting trees with nets to protect them.

What Makes Fur Green?

The **Green Ringtail Possum** lives in the **tropical** rainforests of far northern Queensland. Its fur looks green, but it's not really. It is actually a mixture of grey, yellow, black and white hairs. Unlike other possums the Green Ringtail does not sleep in a hollow. Instead it curls up in a ball and sleeps on a branch out in the open.



Rainforests and Vine Thickets Australia's Jungles

Rainforests are dark, damp, green, mysterious places where it rains a lot. The trees are so tall you can't see their tops. Trees with names like **Bumpy Satinash**, **Quandong**, **Umbrella Tree** and **Sarsaparilla** are food plants for many rainforest mammals. Thick vines hang down from high branches or spiral-wrap themselves tightly around trunks. Moss, ferns and orchids grow both up in the trees and down on the ground. Strong musty smells hang in the air, or sweet perfumes when trees like **Ylang-ylang** or **Beach Calophyllum** are in flower. At night the rainforest comes alive with hopping, climbing, gliding, flying and scurrying **nocturnal** mammals.

Lumholtz's Tree-kangaroos have long thick tails to help them balance as they leap from tree to tree.

A Walking Kangaroo that Lives in Trees

Most kangaroos can only hop with both feet together. But tree-kangaroos can 'walk'—place one leg in front of the other. Lumholtz's and Bennett's tree-kangaroos spend most of their time high up in the rainforest trees and vine thickets of far northern Queensland. They're hard to spot in the **canopy**. Their favourite food is leaves, but sometimes they eat fruits and flowers too. Other tree-climbing kangaroos include the Proserpine, Mareeba and Unadorned rock-wallabies, but none of these can walk.

Tiny Forest Acrobat

The tiny, shy **Long-tailed Pygmy-possum** swings by its tail between branches in the mountainous rainforests of far northern Queensland. It eats insects and nectar and sleeps in tree hollows, nooks and crannies. The Long-tailed Pygmy-possum's tail gets fatter and fatter as it stores fat for the winter.



Chew or Die

The **Giant White-tailed Rat** is as big as a small cat. It's one of Australia's biggest **rodents**. It lives in the rainforests and closed eucalypt forests of northern Queensland. Its teeth are so strong and sharp that it can chew through coconuts, macadamia nuts and hard-shelled rainforest fruits. If the White-tailed rat does not chew enough its teeth grow into its face and can kill it. The Giant White-tailed rat has been known to chew its way through food tins, electrical wiring, plastic jerry cans and canvas tarps.

Red, Red and Red

Pademelons are small wallabies. There are three kinds: Red-legged, Red-necked and Red-bellied. During the day these shy but very fast wallabies rest in rainforests. At night they bound along the runways they have carved through the ground cover to the edge of the forests to nibble on grass.

The adult male Red-necked Pademelon grunts loudly to let others know he is the boss.





Roo Bird Friends

The Bininj Aboriginal people of Northern Territory's western Arnhem Land say that the **Black Wallaroo** has several bird friends. One kind of bird warns it when a hunter is coming to spear it and another bird sings to it and picks the ticks off its fur.

Black Wallaroos are very shy and not often seen in the wild. This young male Black Wallaroo lives in a Northern Territory wildlife park.



Catty Quoll

When explorers first discovered the quoll it reminded them of a cat. The **Northern Quoll** is one of Australia's four 'native cats'. The size of a kitten, this aggressive meat-eater hunts small mammals, reptiles and large insects in the ranges and rocky woodlands of northern Australia. The Northern Quoll is **nocturnal** and spends its day inside hollow logs and trees, rock crevices and caves.

Mammals on the Menu

Some snakes and goannas will eat just about any mammal they can fit into their mouth. Wedge-tailed Eagles won't say no to a tasty mammal either.



Greedy Guzzler

After a big rainstorm, an 11-kilogram **Yellow-footed Rock-wallaby** can drink 1.2 litres of water in seven seconds. By doing this it doesn't have to worry about finding water until the next time it rains. Until then it can get water from its food.

Mountains and Ranges

Australia is the lowest continent in the world, with few mountains. However, mammals live in all of them. The longest mountain range, the **Great Dividing Range**, runs all the way along the east coast from southern Victoria to the top of Queensland. It is home to shaggy thickly furred kangaroos, possums and other smaller native animals. Different species of these mammals live in mountain ranges scattered throughout the rest of the country. More than 40 different kinds of native mammals live in Australia's tallest and coldest mountains—the Victorian Alps and the Snowy Mountains.



Disappearing Mouse

The **Smoky Mouse** is a mysterious little grey rodent that lives in huge burrows in the cool mountains of south-eastern Australia. Small **populations** have been discovered throughout the years only to disappear soon after. The Smoky Mouse that lives in the Grampians (Victoria) feasts on the thousands of bogong moths that **migrate** there in the springtime. Breeding female Smoky Mice nest together in groups.



The Broad-toothed Rat eats lots of grass—more than half as much of its body weight every day. This makes it produce big green poos.

A Mountain Grass-eating Rat

The **Broad-toothed Rat** is big, round, furry and brown. It lives in the Australian Alps and the highlands of Victoria and Tasmania. In summer it scurries around on paths worn through thick ground vegetation; in winter it remains active in the grass-lined tunnels it digs under the snow.