

# THE KANGAROO

Members of the superfamily Macropodoidea are often referred to as macropods. 'Macro' meaning large and 'pod' meaning foot. They range in size from the musky rat-kangaroo weighing about 500g, to more than 90 kg for the red kangaroo.

Macropods are such a diverse group that they have been divided into two families, the Potoroidae and the Macropodidae.

## POTOROIDAE

The Potoroidae family includes the rat kangaroo, potoroos and bettongs.

The diet varies between each species. Underground roots, tubers, seeds and invertebrates are the major components. Food is obtained by foraging and digging with their powerful limbs, which are armed with strong claws.

Members of this family make nests and one species even digs a short burrow.



Red kangaroo

Rufous bettong



## MACROPODIDAE

The Macropodidae family includes kangaroos, wallabies, hare wallabies, nail-tail wallabies, rock wallabies, quokkas, pademelons, swamp wallabies, quokkas and tree kangaroos.

The hare wallaby, pademelon, swamp wallaby and the quokka are predominantly browsing animals (eating tender shoots or twigs of shrubs and trees). Generally their feet are shorter than typical wallabies and kangaroos. Kangaroos, typical wallabies, rock wallabies and nail-tail wallabies are grazers (feeding on herbs and grasses).

## REPRODUCTION

Kangaroos are marsupials, meaning that females give birth to extremely underdeveloped young, which must complete their development in a

pouch. With the exception of the musky rat-kangaroo, who has twins, all macropods give birth to a single young.

At birth, the joey must crawl from its mother's cloaca to her pouch. Once inside, it attaches itself to one of 4 teats. The time spent in the pouch varies depending on the species eg. the eastern grey kangaroo has a pouch life of 11 months and the brush-tailed bettong has a pouch life of 90 days. Once it has left the pouch, the joey (called a foot young) does not stop suckling straight away. Weaning usually takes a few weeks.

A unique process called embryonic diapause involves an embryo's development being paused and re-initiated at a later stage. The signal for re-initiation seems to be when there is less frequent suckling by the foot young as it is weaned. The embryo then undergoes rapid growth and is born soon afterwards. The gestation period is species dependent. This means that after this second joey is born there may be two joeys suckling on differently composed milk.



Young eastern grey kangaroo

## THREATS

Habitat loss, competition by introduced herbivores and direct predation by introduced carnivores are the biggest threats facing macropods today. As they are quite numerous in some grazing areas and are still commercially hunted for their meat and skin, there is considerable controversy about their conservation status. There are more than fifty distinct species of macropods with at least twenty of these being threatened, rare or extinct.



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