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Amazing Animals
Fact sheets

Wombats

Wombats are Australian marsupial mammals that have very short muscular legs and are the closest relative to the Koala. They have a backwards facing pouch so that when they are nursing young in their pouch they can still dig burrows and not fill their pouch with soil! Wombats feed on grasses and roots (they are herbivores) and dig long extensive burrow systems with their powerful claws. Although the wombats at Australia Zoo are diurnal, in the wild, wombats are nocturnal and will rarely venture out during the day.

Wombats are generally slow movers however they can run quickly if required. Their best form of defence though is when they are in their burrow. Here if they are cornered they can crush their would be predator/attacker underground using a large solid plate in their backside against the roof of their burrow.

Southern Hairy-nosed Wombat

The Southern Hairy-nosed Wombat is one of three species of wombat, it can grow to a length of 75-100cm with a height of 25-35cm and can weigh as much as 32kg. Don't let appearance fool you, these guys are very alert and when disturbed are capable of reaching speeds of 40km an hour. Southern Hairy-nosed Wombats are generally solitary creatures, however they live in complex tunnel systems which are known to hold between 5 and 10 wombats, generally not all individuals are present at the same time. The extensive burrows have clustered entrances which form a warren with smaller burrows attached. Burrows are connected by a network of trails which often lead to rubbing posts and wallows. Within the burrows the wombats rely on their excellent olfactory sense to communicate and entrances are often marked with urine, faeces and scratch markings. Southern Hairy-nosed Wombats use their burrow systems to beat the harsh heat of the day and can conserve energy while in a burrow by maintaining a low body temperature and slowing its breathing and heart rate. A tunnel system can have a radius of 100-150m and a Southern Hairy-nosed Wombat usually has a home range of 6-10 acres depending on the quality of the pasture.

Habitat

The Southern Hairy-nosed Wombat inhabits arid and semi arid inland regions as well as grassy plains, savannahs and open woodland in the Southern Coastal Region of South Australia and the South Eastern corner of Western Australia. It formerly inhabited the South West portion of Queensland, however it is now extinct there. Today, the Southern Hairy-nosed Wombat is listed as an endangered species and populations are fragmented where it does exist.

Diet

The Southern Hairy-nosed Wombat is a herbivore and a grazer, preferring young tender grasses. In addition to grasses it is also known to eat herbs, roots, shrubs, barks, mosses and underground roots and tubers. Its diet is low in protein and high in fibre and therefore must conserve energy with a low metabolism. The wombat has a more efficient digestive system than other grazing animals such as the kangaroo or cattle.

Breeding

The Southern Hairy-nosed Wombat usually gives birth to a single joey which at birth is hairless and weighs around 2 grams. It crawls into the pouch and attaches itself to one of two teats which swells around the joey's mouth to prevent it falling out of the backward facing pouch. The joey will make its first appearance out of the pouch between 8 and 9 months when it starts eating solid foods, but it will stay with its Mum until the age of 2 and will reach sexual maturity at age 3. The mating season of the wombat is between September and December. In the wild, the Southern Hairy-nosed Wombat is thought to have a short life of between 10 and 12 years, however research shows they are capable of living to 20. The oldest recorded Southern Hairy-nosed Wombat is in captivity and was 30 in 2005.

Australia Zoo Southern Hairy-nosed Wombat profiles

Laura

Laura is an absolute character, and easily one of the funniest animals in the Zoo! Though she is the oldest of our Southern Hairy-nosed wombats, she definitely gets into the most youthful mischief and shows no sign of settling down any time soon. Whether sheís bouncing like some sort of fuzzy round gazelle through sandpits while out on her walks, frolicking through the rain and getting her coat absurdly messy, or digging up a storm (usually in the garden beds, underneath freshly planted foliage), you can bet this girl will always be on the lookout for her next activity! This probably goes a long way to explaining why she loves her bed so much... come the end of the day, when all the wombats are getting ready to settle in, Laura is always the first in her den, just waiting to get comfortably tucked in to rest up in preparation for her next big day.

Endangered Species!

Very low numbers are left in the wild. Wombats are at risk of extinction within the next ten years.

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