Chapter One: Wombats

Arthur Wombat

“This is a quote about the beauty of wombats.”

Wombat Expert

# Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, students will be able to:

1. Objective 1
2. Objective 2
3. Objective 3

# Key Terms

* Term 1
* Term 2
* Term 3

# Introduction to Wombats

Wombatsare short-legged, muscular quadrupedal marsupials that are native to [Australia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australia) and are approximately 1 metre (40 in) in length, with short, stubby tails. All are members of the [family](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Family_%28biology%29) Vombatidae. They are adaptable in habitat tolerance, and are found in forested, mountainous, and [heathland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heath) areas of south-eastern Australia, including Tasmania, as well as an isolated patch of about 300 hectares (740 acres) in [Epping Forest National Park](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epping_Forest_National_Park) in central Queensland.

## Evolution and taxonomy

Though genetic studies of Vombatidae have been undertaken, evolution of the family is not well understood. It is estimated that wombats diverged from other Australian marsupials relatively as early as 40 million years ago, while some estimates place divergence at around 25 million years.

While some theories place wombats as a miniaturized relative of diprotodonts, such as the rhinoceros sized [Diprotodon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diprotodon), more recent studies place vombatiformes as having a distinct parallel evolution, hence their current classification as a separate family.

## Characteristics

Wombats dig extensive burrow systems with their rodent-like front teeth and powerful claws (Figure 1.1). One distinctive adaptation of wombats is their backwards pouch. The advantage of a backwards-facing pouch is that when digging, the wombat does not gather soil in its pouch over its young. Although mainly crepuscular and nocturnal, wombats also venture out to feed on cool or overcast days. They are not commonly seen, but leave ample evidence of their passage, treating fences as minor inconveniences to be gone through or under, and leaving distinctive cubic [feces](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Faeces).

<Insert\_Fig 1.1\_Wombat in Narawntapu>

Fig. 1.1: Wombats enjoying the splendor of Narawntapu.

Wombats are [herbivores](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herbivore); their [diets](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diet_%28nutrition%29) consist mostly of [grasses](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poaceae), [sedges](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyperaceae), [herbs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herb#Botanical_definitions), [bark](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bark), and [roots](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Root). Their [incisor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Incisor) teeth somewhat resemble those of the placental [rodents](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rodent) ([rats](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rat), mice, etc.), being adapted for gnawing tough vegetation. Like many other herbivorous mammals, they have a large [diastema](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diastema_%28dentistry%29) between their [incisors](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Incisor) and the cheek teeth, which are relatively simple.

Wombats' fur can vary from a sandy color to brown, or from grey to black. All three known extant species average around a meter in length and weigh between 20 and 35 kg (44 and 77 lb).

Female wombats give birth to a single young in the spring, after a [gestation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gestation) period, which like all marsupials can vary, in the case of the wombat: 20–21 days. They have well-developed [pouches](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pouch_%28marsupial%29), which the young leave after about six to seven months. Wombats are [weaned](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weaning) after 15 months, and are sexually mature at 18 months.

A group of wombats is known as a ‘wisdom*.*’

## Species

The three living species of wombat all reside only in Australia. They are protected under Australian law.

Common wombat (Vombatus ursinus)

Northern hairy-nosed wombat or yaminon (Lasiorhinus krefftii*)*

Southern hairy-nosed wombat *(*Lasiorhinus latifrons)

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| Table 1.1: Average Weight of Wombats by Species, 1998-2008 |
| Year | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 |
| Vombatus ursinus | 46 | 46 | 46 | 46 | 45 | 44 | 41 | 40 | 41 | 39 | 41 |
| Lasiorhinus krefftii | 33 | 33 | 36 | 36 | 34 | 35 | 34 | 35 | 40 | 36 | 34 |
| Lasiorhinus latifrons | 18 | 18 | 16 | 16 | 18 | 19 | 19 | 20 | 15 | 20 | 20 |

World Wombat Organization, Annual Wombat Report, 2009.

## Human Relations

### History

The name 'wombat' comes from the now nearly extinct [Darug language](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sydney_language) spoken by the Aboriginal [Darug people](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Darug_people) who originally inhabited the Sydney area. It was first recorded in January 1798, when John Price and James Wilson, a white man who had adopted Aboriginal ways, visited the area of what is now [Bargo, New South Wales](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bargo%2C_New_South_Wales). Price wrote:

We saw several sorts of dung of different animals, one of which Wilson called a Whom-batt, which is an animal about 20 inches high, with short legs and a thick body with a large head, round ears, and very small eyes; is very fat, and has much the appearance of a badger.

#### Spelling Variations

Wombats were often called [badgers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Badgers) by early settlers because of their size and habits. Because of this, localities such as [Badger Creek, Victoria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Badger_Creek%2C_Victoria), and Badger Corner, Tasmania, were named after the wombat. The spelling went through many variants over the years, including 'wambat', 'whombat', 'womat', 'wombach', and 'womback', possibly reflecting dialectal differences in the Darug language.

<Begin Text Box 1.1>

Text Box 1.1 – Endangered Species in Australia

There are over forty endangered species of mammal in Australia. Four of those species are critically endangered. The four critically endangered species are listed below:

Gilbert's potoroo, Potorous gilbertii

Christmas Island pipistrelle, Pipistrellus murrayi

Bare-rumped sheathtail bat, Saccolaimus saccolaimus nudicluniatus

Southern bent-wing bat, Miniopterus schreibersii bassanii

<End Text Box 1.1>

# Conclusion

Here is a conclusion about wombats. We love wombats and so should you. We hope that this chapter adequately described wombats, and that you learned something new.

# References

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