

# JR FACT FILE



BORN TO EXPLORE

## COMMON WOMBAT

*Vombatus ursinus*



### AT A GLANCE

#### Size:

Grows to an average length of one metre and 27 kilograms in weight.

#### What It Eats:

Grasses, tree bark, leaves, roots and fungi.

#### Life Span:

Wombats live to around five years in the wild but can live up to 27 years in captivity.

#### Habitat:

Dry and wet forest, woodland and coastal heathlands.

#### What Is a wombat?

The Common Wombat is the world's largest burrowing herbivorous (which means plant eating) mammal. It is so good at burrowing that early settlers called it a 'badger'. They use their strong front legs with short flattened claws to dig, and their back legs to push the loose earth and rocks away.

Their burrows can extend 20 or 30 metres below the ground. Burrows are usually made by digging into a hillside or creek bank.

The Common Wombat grows to an average of one metre in length and 27 kilograms in weight. Although they can grow slightly longer and weigh up to 36 kilograms. They are solidly built with a squat, round, bear-like body, small ears and eyes, and a large hairless nose.

Their thick, coarse fur varies in colour from sandy brown to grey and black, and is sometimes flecked with lighter brown.

As well as the Common Wombat, there are two other species of Wombat found in Australia. The Southern Hairy-Nosed Wombat and the endangered Northern Hairy-Nosed Wombat. The closest relative of the wombat is the koala.

#### Where Do Wombats Live?

The Common Wombat is found throughout most of Australia. It inhabits coastal scrub and heath, dry or wet forest and woodland.

Wombats are a solitary animal in the wild. They are particular about their feeding grounds which they mark by leaving scent trails and their unique square droppings around the boundaries. They confront intruding wombats with a series of snorts, screeches and even a chase.

Generally only one wombat lives in a burrow; however the overlap of home ranges does occasionally result in joining burrows and a number of Wombats using the same burrow.

Wombats are mainly nocturnal, spending most of the day sleeping in a burrow. However during winter in cooler areas they are sometimes seen out during the day. As the sun goes down wombats come out to graze when temperatures are lower. They graze and forage for three to eight hours, travelling many kilometres and visiting up to four burrows within their home range to rest.

As part of their daily activity, they enjoy rubbing against logs or branches. If used often enough, these rubbing posts can be recognised by their worn or polished appearance.

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*Vombatus ursinus*

## FASCINATING FACTS:

- A WOMBAT'S POUCH FACES BACKWARDS, DESIGNED SO THAT IT DOESN'T FILL UP WITH SOIL WHEN BURROWING.
- THEY HAVE HOLLOW RODENT LIKE TEETH WHICH NEVER STOP GROWING.

## What Does a Wombat Eat?

Being a herbivore, the diet of the wombat is plant material. Its favourite food is native grass, although shrubs, roots, sedges, bark, moss and herbs are also eaten. When there isn't much food, they may dig up clumps of dead grass and eat the roots.

## A Wombat's Family Life:

Wombats reach maturity at two years, which is about the age they begin breeding. Although wombats can breed at any time of the year, mating usually occurs during winter.

Thirty days after mating the newborn wombat arrives weighing only one gram and less than three centimetres in length (the size of a twenty cent coin!). After birth, the newborn crawls into the mother's pouch. The young wombat will stay in the pouch for six months for protection and to feed.

When the young wombat is old enough to leave the pouch, it still remains close to its mother for another twelve months, ready to take refuge if threatened by predators. Due to the long period of time that young wombats are dependent on their mother, wombats only give birth to one young every two years.

## Threats:

Wedge-tailed Eagles are one of the wombats predators, although their major threats are habitat destruction, competition with introduced animals such as cattle, sheep and rabbits as well as road accidents.

The rump of the wombat is covered by a very tough, thick skin. When threatened, a wombat will dive into a nearby burrow or hollow log, using its rump as protection from the teeth and claws of its attacker. If the attacker follows the wombat into the burrow it can use this hard rump to crush the attacker against the ceiling of the burrow.

## Want to Know More?

[www.zoo.org.au](http://www.zoo.org.au)

[www.dpi.vic.gov.au](http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au)