

Name: _____

What is a Wombat?

by Guy Belleranti

Despite its name, the wombat isn't a bat. It's a marsupial from Australia.

Have you ever heard of a marsupial? It's a mammal that stays in its mother's pouch for many months to nurse and develop.

The baby wombat, or joey, is about the size of a jellybean. The joey immediately climbs into its mother's pouch after it is born. Only after six to ten months will the joey begin to leave its mother's pouch for short periods. At around two years, the wombat is ready to live on its own.



The adult wombat has a pudgy, barrel-shaped body that looks like a mixture of a giant gopher and a small bear. It has strong legs and thick paws with claws. It uses these claws to dig complex underground burrows. The wombat hangs out in these burrows to stay warm in the winter and cool in the summer. Inside the burrows, the wombat can hide from predators such as dingoes and Tasmanian devils.

The wombat is an herbivore, or plant-eater. It grazes on grass, roots, moss, and even bark with its rodent-like teeth. It's most active at night. However, occasionally it does come out during the day to sun itself.

There are three species of wombats. The largest is the common wombat, or bare-nosed wombat. This wombat usually lives alone. Some common wombats can be over three feet long and weigh 80 pounds. The two smaller species are both types of hairy-nosed wombats. These wombats live in groups called colonies.

Although a wombat looks pudgy and slow, it can run faster than a track star to get to its burrow. A predator in pursuit of a wombat may be surprised by its defense tactics! First, the wombat's tail is too short to grab. Second, the wombat can fight back with its sharp claws

and teeth. Third, it has a tank-like rump of matted hair, thick skin, cartilage, and bone that makes a great burrow blocker. If an attacker tries to squeeze in, the wombat can crush the attacker against the burrow's walls, which could injure it, or even cause its demise. One thing's for certain: wombats may have an odd name and look a little funny, but these tough marsupials are not going to be messed with!

More fun wombat facts:

- Unlike other marsupials, the mother wombat's pouch opening faces backwards, toward its rear. This keeps dirt from coming into the pouch and injuring the joey when she digs.
- Wombats can go long periods without drinking water. Like its relative, the koala, the wombat gets most of its moisture from the vegetation it eats.
- Wombats don't climb trees like koalas do, but they are very good swimmers.

About the Author



Guy Belleranti is an author of fiction, poetry, articles, puzzles, and humor for children and adults. He also works as a docent at the Reid Park Zoo in Tucson, Arizona. The information in this article comes from his experiences teaching children about the wild animals at the zoo.

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1. In which part of the world would you see a wombat in its natural habitat?

- a. the Northern Hemisphere
- b. the Southern Hemisphere
- c. the Eastern Hemisphere
- d. both b and c

2. At what age can a baby wombat, or joey, live on its own?

- a. as soon as it is born
- b. around one year
- c. six to ten months
- d. around two years

3. According to the information in the article, what are three defenses the wombat uses against predators?

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

4. Which animals are predators of the wombat?

- a. Koalas and Tasmanian devils
- b. Tasmanian devils and dingoes
- c. Kangaroos and dingoes
- d. Koalas and kangaroos

5. Identify the statement about wombats that is false.

- a. The wombat lives in extensive underground burrows.
- b. The wombat is an omnivore; it eats both meat and plants.
- c. The wombat doesn't climb trees, but it is a good swimmer.
- d. The wombat is nocturnal, or active at night.

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What is a Wombat?

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Match each vocabulary word from the article with the correct definition.



_____ 1. pudgy

a. tangled; knotted

_____ 2. vegetation

b. firm, rubber-like tissue found in certain parts of the body

_____ 3. colonies

c. death; downfall

_____ 4. matted

d. right away; without delay

_____ 5. complex

e. the act of following, or pursuing, someone or something

_____ 6. demise

f. plump; chubby

_____ 7. cartilage

g. groups of wombats living together

_____ 8. pursuit

h. grow and mature

_____ 9. develop

i. plant life

_____ 10. immediately

j. intricate; complicated

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In the article, “What is a Wombat?” you learned that a wombat is a type of marsupial, which is a mammal that stays in its mother's pouch for many months to grow and develop.



Choose another marsupial and write about it on the lines below.

Provide **three interesting facts** about your marsupial. Also give **one similarity** between your marsupial and the wombat. If you use the Internet (with your teacher's permission), be sure to give the web address of your Internet source at the bottom of this page.

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

My Internet Source Website Address: _____

ANSWER KEY

What is a Wombat?

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1. In which part of the world would you see a wombat in its natural habitat? **d**
 - a. the Northern Hemisphere
 - b. the Southern Hemisphere
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 - d. both b and c**
2. At what age can a baby wombat, or joey, live on its own? **d**
 - a. as soon as it is born
 - b. around one year
 - c. six to ten months
 - d. around two years**
3. According to the information in the article, what are three defenses the wombat uses against predators?
 1. **The wombat's tail is too short to be grabbed by predators.**
 2. **The wombat can fight with its sharp claws and teeth.**
 3. **The wombat can block the entrance to its burrow with its backside.**
4. Which animals are predators of the wombat? **b**
 - a. Koalas and Tasmanian devils
 - b. Tasmanian devils and dingoes**
 - c. Kangaroos and dingoes
 - d. Koalas and kangaroos
5. Identify the statement about wombats that is false. **b**
 - a. The wombat lives in extensive underground burrows.
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 - c. The wombat doesn't climb trees, but it is a good swimmer.
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