

# COMMON HAMSTER

GROUP 1: MAMMALS

ORDER  
Rodentia

FAMILY  
Muridae

GENUS & SPECIES  
*Cricetus cricetus*



The common hamster was once widespread from Belgium across central Europe to the former Soviet Union. Although its numbers have been reduced, it is still found on plains and in pastures.

## KEY FACTS

**SIZES**  
Length: 8-14 in. Tail, 1-2 in.  
Weight: 4-32 oz.

**BREEDING**  
Sexual maturity: Females are receptive at 43 days old.  
Breeding season: Early April-August.  
Gestation: 18-20 days.  
No. of young: 4-12.  
Weaning period: 3 weeks.

**LIFESTYLE**  
Habit: Solitary, lives in complex system of burrows.  
Diet: Grasses, seeds, grains, legumes, crops, and rooted vegetables.  
Lifespan: 2 years.

**RELATED SPECIES**  
There are 24 species of hamster grouped in 5 genera. The common hamster is the only species in its genus.



Range of the common hamster.

**DISTRIBUTION**  
Originally only in eastern Europe and western Asia, but penetrated west to Belgium and east into the former Soviet Union, following the spread of agriculture.

**CONSERVATION**  
Numbers have been reduced through modern farming methods, but as it can live in semi-arid habitats and has a high reproduction rate, the species is not endangered.

## THE COMMON HAMSTER'S BURROWS

**Fur:** Reddish colored with black underbelly and black and white bands on shoulders.

**Pouches:** Filled with food to take to its burrow for storage.



**Paws:** Very coordinated front paws.



*Related to the golden hamster, which is often kept as a pet, the common hamster is a truly wild mammal. Its legs are so short that its furry body almost touches the ground as it scurries around its grassy habitat searching for food.*



### HABITS

The hamster prefers dry, sandy soil where it can dig its underground burrows and runways easily. It inhabits all types of grassy and cultivated land. It can also be found on lowland hills at altitudes of up to 2,000 feet. The hamster lives in its burrow year-round, digging different burrows according to season. Its burrow can be extensive—the size depends on the age of the animal. In some areas where the soil

and vegetation are suitable, many burrows may be crowded into one small area. In the winter, the hamster withdraws to its burrow and closes up the entrances with soil. It hibernates in the burrow in a grass-lined nest. Although its body temperature drops from 90° F to 39° F, it is not a true hibernator because it does not survive off its fat, but wakes every five to seven days to feed from its food store.

### FOOD & FEEDING

The common hamster feeds mainly at night on plant matter, including grass, clover, beans, lentils, grains, flowers, seeds, rooted vegetables, and the green parts of plants. It will also eat insects, lizards, frogs, small birds, field mice, and its favorite—earthworms. If a number of hamsters inhabit the same area, food shortages may force the population to find new feeding

*Left: The common hamster lives near rivers, and in fields, pastures, and scrublands.*

*Below: Largely plant-eating, the hamster will also eat small mammals, insects, and lizards.*



### COMMON HAMSTER AND MAN

Over much of its range, the common hamster is numerous and is considered a pest because it digs up rooted vegetables and eats grass, clover, and bean crops. It destroys wheat plants while trying to get to the grains at the tops of the stalks. Still, modern agricultural

*Right: Usually a placid animal, the hamster has been known to attack humans when threatened.*

grounds. During such a journey, the hamster may swim across large rivers. Toward the end of fall, the hamster collects food to store for the coming winter. It carries rooted vegetables in between its front teeth and fills its cheek pouches full of beans and other seeds with its extremely coordinated front paws. Once in its burrow, it uses its paws to squeeze its cheeks and empty the food into a chamber specially excavated for the purpose.



### BREEDING

Common hamsters breed throughout late spring and summer. During this time, they produce a number of litters. The males move into the females' burrows while breeding but are quickly driven out after mating takes place. After an 18- to 20-day gestation period, four to 12 blind and naked young are born in a nest chamber within the burrow. They weigh only a half-ounce at birth, but within a week, even though their eyes

are still closed, they will begin to nibble at grass. Their eyes open after two weeks, by which time they have grown a thick coat of fur. They are completely weaned at 3 weeks old. The female is extremely protective of her young. If they are threatened, she gathers them into her mouth, either by putting them into her cheek pouches or laying them across a toothless area between the incisors and the molars.

### DID YOU KNOW?

- When packed full of food, the common hamster's cheek pouches can extend back beyond its shoulder blades.
- Common hamsters are good swimmers; it is thought that they become buoyant by inflating their cheeks with air.
- The common hamster belongs to the largest mammalian group, consisting of more than 1,000 species. The group also includes rats, mice, voles, lemmings, and gerbils.
- One hamster's winter burrow was found to contain 200 pounds of seeds, legumes, and rooted vegetables.

# WARTHOG

CARD 42

GROUP 1: MAMMALS



ORDER  
*Artiodactyla*

FAMILY  
*Suidae*

GENUS & SPECIES  
*Phacochoerus aethiopicus*



**The warthog's unsightly appearance makes it one of the most unusual animals roaming the grasslands of Africa. When protecting its family, the warthog will ferociously defend against predators.**

## KEY FACTS



**SIZES**  
Length: Body, 46-60 in. Tail, 18 in.  
Height: 30 in. to shoulder.  
Weight: 130-265 lb.



**BREEDING**  
Sexual maturity: 18 months.  
Gestation: 171-175 days.  
Litter size: 2-4, but up to 7 have been recorded.



**LIFESTYLE**  
Habit: Live in family groups called sounders. Will use abandoned aardvark dens or sometimes hollows under rocks.  
Diet: Mainly grasses and herbs, but also tubers and bulbs.  
Lifespan: 12 years in captivity.



**RELATED SPECIES**  
The warthog is the only species in its genus, but it is related to the giant forest hog and the bush pig.



Range of the warthog.

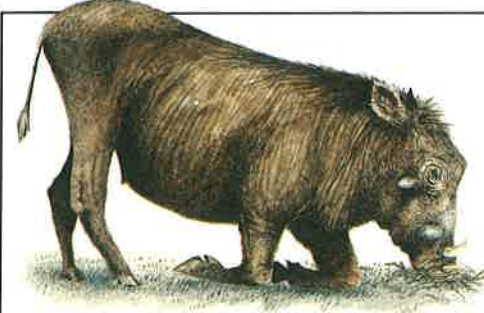
### DISTRIBUTION

The warthog has a wide distribution over the open grasslands of central, eastern, and southern Africa south of the Sahara, and also in the very dry Sahel region.

### CONSERVATION

The warthog is not thought to be in danger of extinction, although many tribes hunt it for sport and meat.

## FEATURES OF THE WARTHOG



**Knee pads:** The warthog is very unusual in that it has to get down on its knees to feed. This is due to its short neck and relatively long legs. Because of this, it has developed special horny skin pads to protect its knees.

**Warts:** The warthog has two warts on each side of its face. They are most prominent on the male and can be a means of distinguishing it from the female.

**Tusks:** The curled upper pair of tusks, 12 in. or more in length, are tipped with enamel, which soon wears away. The much shorter and sharper lower tusks are entirely coated with enamel.



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The warthog gets its name from the four gristly

warts that protrude from the sides of its face.

It is not known for certain what purpose the warts serve.

One explanation is that they are used as a weapon,

or, alternatively, as a defense in fending off blows

from other warthogs.



## HABITS

The warthog lives in a family group called a *souder*, consisting of a male and female and one or more successive litters. Its preferred habitat is the open plains and grasslands of Africa, especially where there is a good water source in which it can wallow and drink. It has also been found in the arid Sahel region, bordering the Sahara desert.

The warthog makes its den either under a rock or in a sheltered burrow, but, more

often, it will sleep and breed in abandoned aardvark dens. When the family enters the underground den, the young climb down head first. An adult is always last to enter, and slides in backwards, facing the entrance with its tusks should any predator try to attack.

The warthog is renowned for its courage and ferocity in defending its family. The combination of speed (it can run at speeds of up to 30 miles per hour) and two sets

of tusks is enough to fend off most predators. Although it has poor eyesight, it has a good sense of smell and acute hearing. The warthog's only real threat comes from lions and leopards.

Adult males, or *boars*, occasionally fight among themselves, putting on a good show of bravado. With manes bristling and heads lowered, the boars will push and shove, trying to unbalance their opponent. Their tusks can inflict severe wounds.

## BREEDING

During breeding season, the male warthog follows the female wherever she goes, often circling her until she is ready to mate. Throughout this courtship ritual,

Below: Wallowing in muddy water holes enables the warthog to stay cool in the heat.

the male makes a noise that sounds like a clattering motor.

When the female becomes pregnant, she leaves the family group and finds an empty den. She gives birth to a litter of two to four young.

The young are grayish-pink in color. They are sensitive to the

cold, so they huddle together in the den for the first few days to keep warm. The mother leaves them for most of the day, returning periodically to feed them. After a week, the young venture out of the den for longer periods, until they eventually return only at night.



Top left: Warthogs mate after a sometimes lengthy period of noisy courtship by the male.



Middle left: The average litter size is usually two to four, although the sow may raise up to seven piglets.



Bottom left: The family unit is important in protecting the young against predators.

## FOOD & HUNTING

The warthog grazes mainly on short grasses and herbs. Because of its short neck, it must get down on its knees to feed (see back page). The warthog's eyes are set very high and far back on its forehead, so that it can watch for predators while feeding. It also feeds on leaves and fruit, and, in some areas, on bulbs and tubers. Although the warthog is usually silent, it grunts when feeding.

Top left: Warthogs mate after a sometimes lengthy period of noisy courtship by the male.

Middle left: The average litter size is usually two to four, although the sow may raise up to seven piglets.

Bottom left: The family unit is important in protecting the young against predators.

## DID YOU KNOW?

- Warthogs wallow in mud to keep cool. They do not have sweat glands.
- The warthog has a long, tasseled tail which it holds erect when it runs.
- Although it is usually active only during the day, it will occasionally feed on moonlit nights.
- The adult warthog is gray or black, but it may appear red or yellow due to a layer of mud clinging to it.
- A warthog will attack humans if threatened. In 1965, a zookeeper at Duisburg Zoo in Germany was killed by a warthog thought to be tame.

# GRAY SQUIRREL

CARD 46

GROUP 1: MAMMALS

ORDER  
Rodentia

FAMILY  
Sciuridae

GENUS & SPECIES  
*Sciurus carolinensis*



**An agile and alert animal, the gray squirrel is active throughout the year. Since it does not hibernate in the winter, it can be seen year-round.**

W Lankinen/Bruce Coleman Ltd

## KEY FACTS



**SIZES**  
Body length: 9-12 in.  
Tail length: 7-10 in.  
Weight: 12-28 oz.



**BREEDING**  
Sexual maturity: 11 months.  
Gestation: About 44 days.  
Litter size: Usually 3, but up to 9.  
Females may have 2 litters a year, 1 in March or April and the other in June or July.



**LIFESTYLE**  
Habit: Tree-dwelling, but spends much time on the ground.  
Diet: Mainly tree seeds.  
Call: Chattering and piercing scream.  
Lifespan: 3-4 years.



**RELATED SPECIES**  
There are 28 species of squirrel, including the European red squirrel, *Sciurus vulgaris*, which is not related to the red squirrel of North America.



Range of the gray squirrel.

### DISTRIBUTION

Native to North America. Introduced to Great Britain, Ireland, and South Africa.

### CONSERVATION

The gray squirrel is in no danger as a species. In North America, its numbers are regulated by shooting it for sport. In England, numbers are controlled by poisoning and trapping in forestry plantations.

## FEATURES OF THE GRAY SQUIRREL

Gray squirrels have long, muscular **hind legs** and short **front legs** for leaping. To help the squirrel scramble head first up and down tree trunks, the **hind feet** are double jointed.

On the **front foot** are four slender toes that each have a sharp claw, used for gripping bark while climbing.



Thick and bushy, the squirrel's **tail** is an important aid to balance in the treetops.

The **back foot** is longer than the front, with five clawed toes.



*Gray squirrels are a common sight in both rural and urban areas. They live mainly east of the Rocky Mountains, but the western gray squirrel is found along the Pacific Coast.*

### HABITAT

Although the gray squirrel is found in parks and yards, woodlands are its preferred habitat. It builds its den in tree branches, inside a hollow trunk, or in an empty bird's nest. It usually lines the nest with moss, thistle-down, dried grass, and feathers and builds a cover.

A gray squirrel will build several nests or dens and use them all. When a female has young, the nest is theirs alone, but winter nests and sleeping dens are often shared to generate warmth.

**Below:** Gray squirrels are commonly found in woodlands.



S.Maslowski/Frank Lane Picture Agency

### BREEDING

Female squirrels can mate only twice a year, but males can mate at any time. Often, several males will attempt to mate with the same female. They try to attract her attention by slapping the bark of trees with their paws and chattering loudly. After mating, the male plays no part in the rearing of the young.

Birth occurs six weeks after mating. The naked, blind young are fed every two to four hours for several weeks.

**Left:** A litter of nearly grown youngsters huddles together for warmth while their mother leaves them to feed.

At seven weeks, they follow their mother out on the tree branches and before long have learned to climb.

The young squirrels gradually begin to eat solid food and are weaned at 10 weeks of age. A month later, they leave the den.

If there are not too many squirrels in the area, the young will build their dens nearby. Otherwise, they will be chased away to less crowded feeding areas.

**Below:** Squirrels prefer to feed on nuts and acorns, which they break open using their sharp teeth.



M.Martin/Planet Earth Pictures



### NATUREWATCH

The gray squirrel is one of the easiest animals to observe. It is found in parks and woods among both *coniferous* and *deciduous* trees, which provide plentiful sources of food.

A squirrel's den can be found in a hollow tree or built between sturdy branches. Winter and breeding nests are usually

larger than the summer nests and they are built of sturdier material.

If you find an abandoned baby squirrel, it is best to leave it alone, since it must be fed every two to four hours for several weeks. Gray squirrels do not make good pets and may carry rabies.

### FOOD & FEEDING

The gray squirrel needs to eat every day, even in the winter. It does not hibernate and is unable to conserve enough energy to survive for long periods without food. It is most active at dawn and dusk, when it searches for whatever fruits, shoots, and seeds are in season. Small thumbs on its front paws allow it to hold the food securely as it feeds.

The squirrel's diet varies according to season. It eats mainly tree bark and fungi in the winter and buds and plant shoots in the spring. In September it eats nuts and acorns. A hungry gray squirrel will also raid birds' nests for eggs, steal food from bird feeders, and dig up plants. The squirrel buries extra food just below the soil's surface, which it later locates by smell.

### COMMUNICATION

In addition to their calls, body language and scent are the most important means of communication between squirrels.

The position of the tail indicates mood, while urine and glandular secretions help them identify one another.

### DID YOU KNOW?

- The squirrel's front teeth continue to grow throughout its life, so they can never be worn away by the animal's continual gnawing.
- A male squirrel can smell a female that is ready to mate up to half a mile away.
- The gray squirrel can leap more than 20 feet.



K.Scholey/Planet Earth Pictures

# HARBOR SEAL

CARD 47



GROUP 1: MAMMALS

ORDER  
*Pinnipedia*

FAMILY  
*Phocidae*

GENUS & SPECIES  
*Phoca vitulina*



**The harbor seal, or common seal, breeds on the sloping beaches at the mouths of rivers. Its streamlined shape allows it to move rapidly through the water.**

## KEY FACTS



### SIZES

**Length:** Male, 5-6 ft. Female, slightly smaller.  
**Weight:** Male, 120-230 lb. Female, 100-190 lb.



### BREEDING

**Sexual maturity:** Female, 3 or 4 years. Male, 5 or 6 years.  
**Mating:** July or early August.  
**Birth:** The following June or July.



### LIFESTYLE

**Habit:** Sociable. *Hauls out* (comes ashore) to rest and breed.  
**Diet:** Wide variety of fish. Also crabs, shrimp, and squid.  
**Lifespan:** 25-32 years. Female lives longer than male.



### RELATED SPECIES

There are 7 seal species in the genus *Phoca*, including the ringed seal (*P. hispida*) and the harp seal (*P. groenlandica*).



Range of the harbor seal.

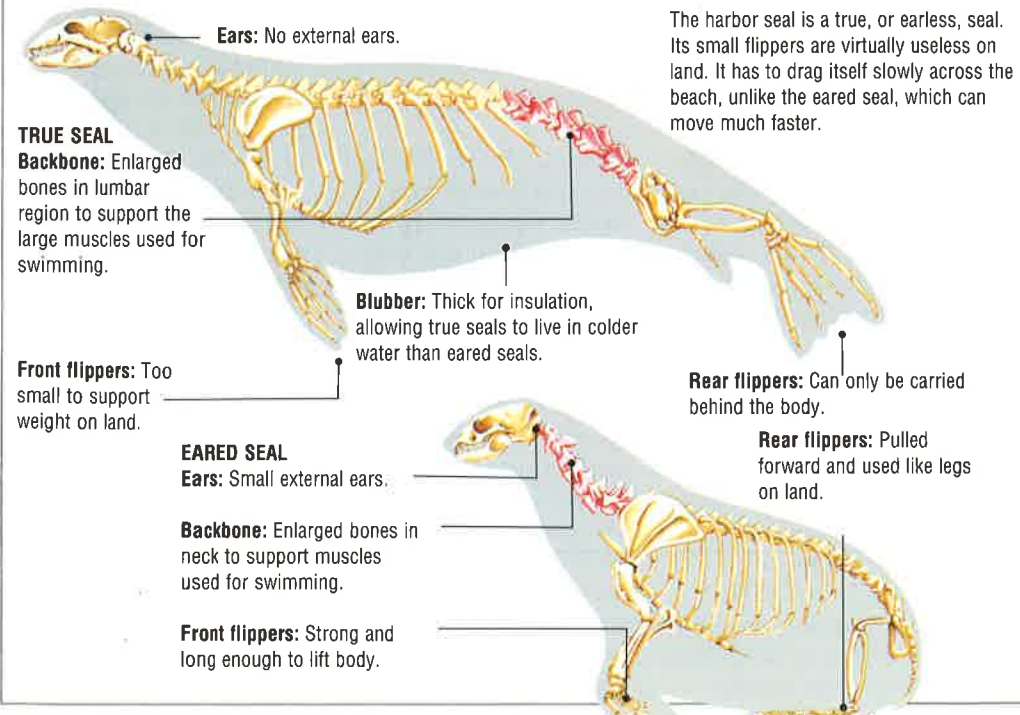
### DISTRIBUTION

Inland waters of the northern oceans.

### CONSERVATION

Because of the harbor seal's apparent liking for commercially hunted fish such as salmon, large numbers were killed in the 1960s. Public outcry brought a halt to the slaughter. The harbor seal is now protected by law, although it may be killed if it is caught raiding fish nets.

## DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TRUE SEALS AND EARED SEALS





*The harbor seal is perfectly adapted to a life in water. Its speckled, grayish black coat of fur gives it surprisingly good camouflage in the coastal waters of the northern seas where it lives, and its thick blubber protects it from the cold.*

### HABITAT

The harbor seal spends most of its life in the sea. It lives in groups on the east and west coasts of the United States and Canada, as well as off the coasts of northern Europe, the Soviet Union, and Japan.

The seal's streamlined body allows it to swim quickly. It propels itself underwater by moving its rear end from side to side like a sea otter, rather than using its neck and chest as a sea lion does.

On land the harbor seal is slow and awkward, spending little time there except during breeding season. Its front

flippers are too small to help maneuver its large body, and the seal must drag itself across sand and rock. If the seal is threatened, it returns to the sea.

At the end of breeding season the harbor seal returns to the water to feed. Groups of seals often travel long distances from their breeding grounds to follow schools of fish. As a new breeding season approaches, the seal eats as much as possible to build up its body fat, called *blubber*, before returning to the breeding grounds.

### FOOD & FEEDING

The harbor seal feeds on a wide variety of fish, such as sole, cod, herring, flatfish, and sand eels. It dives as deep as 100 feet to catch them. It also eats crab, squid, and salmon if other prey is not available.

The seal's mouth and nostrils are specially adapted for diving underwater to catch food. Its nostrils and the back of its throat close to prevent water from entering its lungs and stomach. The seal's teeth and jaws are also adapted for catching and carrying prey. The seal brings its prey to the surface and swallows it whole. Despite the harbor seal's

reputation for raiding salmon fishing nets, recent studies show that salmon is not a main source of its food.



*Far left: The seal prefers water and spends little time on land.*

*Below: The seal's body is streamlined for easy swimming.*

### BREEDING

The harbor seal breeds in June and July. Most breeding sites are located on beaches and rocks that are often visible only at low tide. The female times her arrival at the breeding site to coincide with low tide because the *pup* (new-born seal) must be born before the site is submerged.

Instead of being born with a first coat of white fur, called *lanugo*, as other seals are, the harbor seal pup sheds his coat while still in its mother's uterus. Since the pup will be swimming right after birth, it is already well formed at birth. The pup soon develops a layer of blubber and learns to swim. It goes ashore to rest and feed after staying close to its mother in the ocean for the first few days of its life.

The mother suckles her pup for three to four weeks. During this time she eats very



*Above: The seal pup stays close to its mother until it is able to fend for itself.*

little. She then leaves her pup so she can mate with a *bull* (male seal). Eleven months later the female returns to the same breeding site to bear a new pup.

### DID YOU KNOW?

- Because they live in cold waters, true seals, such as the harbor seal, have a thicker layer of blubber than eared seals (see back cover).
- It is estimated that there are approximately 350,000 harbor seals.
- The crabeater seal is the most abundant seal in the world, with a population of over 14,000,000.
- The harbor seal is the only northern true seal that always breeds on land, rather than on ice.



### NATUREWATCH

The harbor seal mainly inhabits the waters of the northern Pacific and Atlantic oceans. It is the most visible of all the seal species found in North American waters.

The harbor seal often prefers to rest on a sand bar at the mouth of a river or near a harbor entrance. It seems unafraid of humans and often allows people to move close.



# COMMON WOMBAT

CARD 48



GROUP 1: MAMMALS

ORDER  
*Marsupialia*

FAMILY  
*Vombatidae*

GENUS & SPECIES  
*Vombatus ursinus*



The common wombat looks like a cross between a small bear and a badger. It is found only on the Australian continent and the island of Tasmania.

## KEY FACTS



**SIZES**  
Length: 36-45 in.  
Weight: 48-90 lb.



**BREEDING**  
Sexual maturity: 2 years.  
Mating season: Fall.  
Gestation: 20-22 days. Young stays in pouch for 6 months.  
No. of young: 1.



**LIFESTYLE**  
Habit: Solitary, except for breeding season.  
Diet: Grass, roots, bark, and fungi.  
Call: Hoarse growls.  
Lifespan: No more than 5 years.



**RELATED SPECIES**  
The southern hairy-nosed wombat, *Lasiorhinus latifrons*, and the endangered northern hairy-nosed wombat, *L. krefftii*.



Range of the common wombat.

### DISTRIBUTION

Common wombats are found in all five Australian states and in the Northern Territories.

### CONSERVATION

Although not endangered as a species, hunting must be controlled to guarantee a continued stable population.

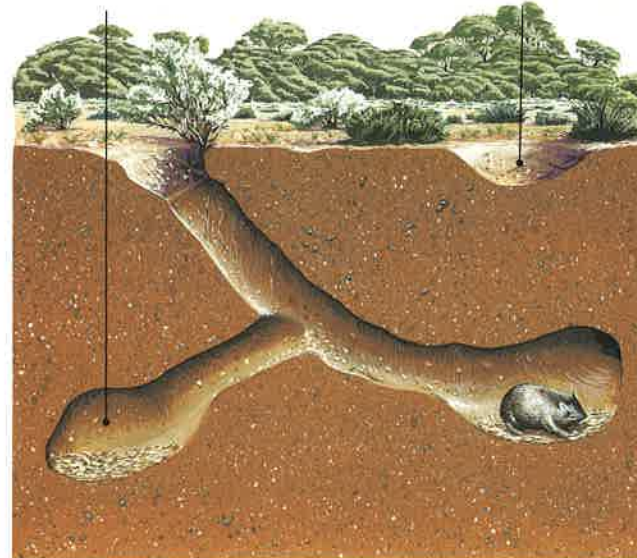
## THE WOMBAT'S BURROW

**Burrow:** May be as long as 100 feet and as deep as six feet. The entrance is arched and just big enough to accommodate the animal's bulk. This way, it can block the burrow with its body to repel intruders.

**Sleeping chamber:** Lined with bark, used for sleeping and rearing young.

**Depression:** Near the entrance of the burrow, the wombat excavates a shallow depression in the ground where it warms itself in the early morning sun.

**Pouch:** The rear opening allows the mother to dig without covering her young with dirt.



*The common wombat, equipped with short powerful legs and strong front claws, is ideally adapted to survive in the harsh Australian environment. But in many areas, it is still considered a pest because of the damage it causes by its extensive burrowing and grazing.*



#### FOOD & FEEDING

Grass is the wombat's principal food. At night it follows regularly used paths to its feeding grounds. It may travel as much as a mile. It uses its forepaws to grasp and tear the vegetation. It also eats roots, shrubs, fungi, and the bark and leaves of trees.

A wombat has its own feeding area, which it defends aggressively. It also marks the territory with its droppings to serve as a visual warning to other wombats.

The wombat is a marsupial and has an external abdominal pouch similar to that of a kangaroo. Still, the wombat is unlike other marsupials in that its teeth are more like those of a rodent. It has sharp-edged incisors but no canine teeth. Furthermore, its teeth have no roots and grow continuously so they do not wear away.

Top left & left: Strong claws are used both for digging burrows, and for tearing at grass and roots.

#### WOMBAT & MAN

The first Europeans to see a wombat were sailors shipwrecked on an island in the Bass Strait between Australia and Tasmania during the late 1700s. They thought it was a type of wild boar. Early settlers called the wombats "badgers."

The wombat was soon considered a pest by the islanders because of the damage it did to cultivated areas. Wombat burrows also harbored rabbits, and efforts to kill the rabbits destroyed the wombat popu-



Above: A road sign alerts drivers to the possible presence of wombats.

lation as well. By the late 1800s, the wombat had been completely exterminated from all the islands in the Bass Strait except Flinders Island.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

- Fishermen on the islands in the Bass Strait used to tame wombats and keep them as pets, like dogs.
- The fur of the common wombat is so bristly that in Tasmania it was often used to make doormats.
- A newborn wombat only measures  $\frac{4}{5}$  of an inch.
- A wombat can dig as quickly as a man with a shovel can.
- The marsupials get their name from the Latin word for pouch, *marsupium*. Some marsupials, however, have no pouch. Their young cling to their mother's nipples and fur.
- The largest and most diverse assortment of marsupials is found in Australia, where there are over 100 different species.

#### HABITS

Among the coastal hills and woodland areas of its habitat, the wombat lives in burrows that it digs itself. It uses the burrow as a resting place and as a retreat in times of danger. A single wombat may have 10 or more burrows, each with several entrances. When digging a burrow, the wombat uses its strong forepaws and sharp claws to loosen the earth. It removes the dirt from the burrow with all four paws.

Since it is mainly nocturnal, the wombat spends most of its

days sleeping in the burrow. Frequently, however, it will dig a shallow depression in the ground nearby and lie in the morning sun.

The wombat is a solitary animal. Although its burrows may be close to those of another wombat's and may even interconnect, they are rarely shared.

If pursued by a predator, the wombat runs to its burrow and turns its hind quarters toward its attacker. The thick skin of its rump protects

it against injury, and the wombat often further deters its attacker by kicking at it.

Below: The many holes leading to a wombat's burrow allow it to escape quickly.



#### BREEDING

One of the few times that normally solitary wombats seek each other out is during mating season, from April to June. Several weeks after

mating the female bears a single young. The newborn's development is incomplete, but its forepaws are strong enough to enable it to crawl into its mother's pouch. It attaches itself to a nipple for six months until it is completely formed.

Unlike most marsupials, the wombat's pouch opens to the rear, rather than to the front. The advantage to this is that the young does not become covered with dirt as the mother burrows. The position

of the pouch also makes it easy for the young to climb into it.

When the young wombat is old enough to leave the pouch, it still remains close to its mother for another year, ready to take refuge in her pouch should danger threaten. It feeds on the tender roots of grasses that its mother tears up and drops on the ground. At 18 months, the young wombat leaves the burrow and becomes completely independent.