

Name: _____

Australia's Cutest Animals

by Guy Belleranti

In the trees of Australia's eucalyptus forests lives a cute animal that some people call a bear. However, it isn't related to bears at all. This animal is the koala.

Koalas belong to a group of pouched mammals called marsupials. Other marsupials include the kangaroo, wombat, wallaby and possum.

Koalas in the southern parts of Australia grow north. Full-grown koalas weigh as much as 31 pounds and cover about 10% of the continent.



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At birth, a joey is hairless and blind, but it's still able to get into mom's pouch, where it sleeps, nurses and slowly develops and grows. After six or seven months it outgrows the pouch and rides on mom's back. It also continues to nurse on mom's milk. At the same time the young koala begins eating a substance from mom's intestines called "pap". The "pap" contains bacteria that help the young koala adjust to eating and digesting an adult diet of eucalyptus leaves. By the time it's a year old the young koala stops nursing and is ready to live on its own. However, it also stays in close contact with other koalas in its eucalyptus tree forest home.

Koalas are well adapted to living in trees. While they look soft and cuddly, they have long claws on both their hands and their feet. These claws help them grip branches and climb. And did you know koalas have two thumbs on each hand? This increases their climbing ability. The rough skin on their hands and feet also helps them move in the trees.

Although eucalyptus leaves are the koalas' main food, koalas don't eat the leaves of

all eucalyptus trees. Australia has hundreds of types of eucalyptus trees, but koalas only eat the leaves from a small number of them. The leaves also provide koalas with most of their water. In fact, koalas eat so many eucalyptus leaves that they smell like eucalyptus cough drops!



If you ever have the opportunity to see a real koala, chances are it will be sleeping. Koalas are asleep more often than they're awake. On average, a koala will sleep 16 hours or more every day! They're most active after sunset, going from tree to tree both to eat and to be with other koalas. Sometimes they leap from one tree to another. Other times they'll climb down to the ground to go up another tree

predators like

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Unfor for farming, these animals can always live wild and free.

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About the Author

Guy Belleranti works as a docent at Reid Park Zoo in Tucson, Arizona. The information in this article comes mainly from his experiences working with animals and teaching others.

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1. On which continent do koalas live? _____

2. What is a marsupial?

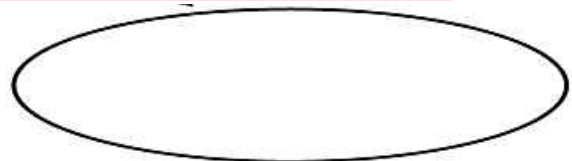
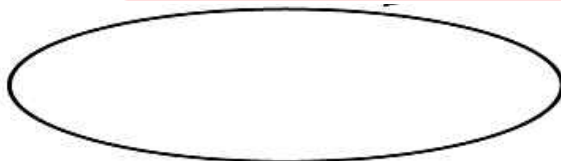
- a. a mammal that lives in trees
- b. a mammal with a pouch to carry its young
- c. an animal that sleeps a lot
- d. an animal that eats eucalyptus leaves

3. Complete the graphic organizer.



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4. What do koalas eat?

- a. leaves from all eucalyptus trees
- b. bark from some types of eucalyptus trees
- c. dingoes, foxes, and owls
- d. leaves from some types of eucalyptus trees

5. If a koala sleeps for 16 hours during the day, how many hours is it awake?
Use your math skills to find the answer. Show your work in the space below.

answer: _____

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

_____ 1. possum

a. harvesting rocks from the earth

_____ 2. jelly bean

b. jump

_____ 3. oi _____ animal

_____ 4. sl

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_____ 5. c

_____ 6. leap

f. tame; bred to live with or help humans

_____ 7. mining

g. becomes too big for something

_____ 8. domestic

h. time when the sun goes down

◆ **Now try this:** On a sheet of lined paper, use each vocabulary word from above in a sentence.

ANSWER KEY

Australia's Cutest Animals

by Guy Belleranti



1. On which continent do koalas live? **Australia**
2. What is a marsupial? **b**
 - a. a mammal that lives in trees
 - a mammal with a pouch to carry its young**
 - c. an animal that sleeps a lot
 - d. an animal that eats eucalyptus leaves
3. Complete the graphic organizer.

long claws



~ PREVIEW ~

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2 thumbs on each hand

rough skin on their hands

Also accept: They eat leaves in eucalyptus trees.

4. What do koalas eat? **d**
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 - leaves from some types of eucalyptus trees**
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Use your math skills to find the answer. Show your work in the space below.

24 hours - 16 hours = 8 hours

answer: **8 hours**

ANSWER KEY

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



c 1. possum

a. harvesting rocks from the earth

e 2. jelly bean

b. jump

g 3. out



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ammal

h 4. sur

d 5. dingoes

e. colorful, sweet, fruity candy

b 6. leap

f. tame; bred to live with or help humans

a 7. mining

g. becomes too big for something

f 8. domestic

h. time when the sun goes down

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