

### The Koala and Bilby – Facts for Students

Australia has a wide variety of fascinating and unique fauna. You may have seen some of it in your local area. Here is some interesting information about two of Australia's cutest and most iconic animals – the koala and bilby.

#### The Koala

The koala is a tree-dwelling marsupial mostly found in eucalypt woodlands and forests between south-eastern South Australia and Queensland. It can be identified by its large furry ears, black nose, and long sharp claws which help it climb trees. They vary in colour from pale grey to a grey-brown. Adult males weigh between 4 and 14 kilograms and adult females between 4 and 10 kilograms.

Female koalas normally produce one young koala each year. Newborn koalas are tiny (similar to the size of a thumbnail), blind and hairless. When born, they find their way into their mother's pouch where they are raised until they are about seven months old.

Koalas eat about half a kilogram of eucalypt leaves each day. They can be quite fussy eaters, choosing most of their food from a few varieties of eucalypt. As their food contains little energy, koalas conserve energy by sleeping most of the day and searching for food in the evening.

Sadly, koala numbers are decreasing, mainly due to loss of habitat, predators and disease. In 2012, the Australian Government classified them as a 'vulnerable' species.



#### The Bilby

The bilby is a shy, nocturnal marsupial found naturally in arid desert regions of Western Australia, Northern Territory and Queensland. There are also populations in sanctuaries in South Australia and New South Wales. Bilbies live in long underground burrows.

The bilby is about the size of a cat and has a grey and white silky coat, a black or dark grey tail with a pure white tip, long sensitive ears, a pink pointed nose and thick claws and forelimbs, which enable them to dig rapidly in the desert soil.

Each year, a female bilby will deliver between one and three tiny babies (about 11 millimetres in size). They stay in their mother's backward-facing pouch for about a week. At about eight days old, their mum will remove them from her pouch and leave them in the burrow while she goes to find food. A few weeks later they will leave the pouch permanently.

The bilby feeds on bulbs, tubers, spiders, termites, witchetty grubs and fungi, and uses its long tongue to lick up grass seeds that have fallen to the ground.

Bilby numbers are decreasing and they are classified as an 'endangered' species.

