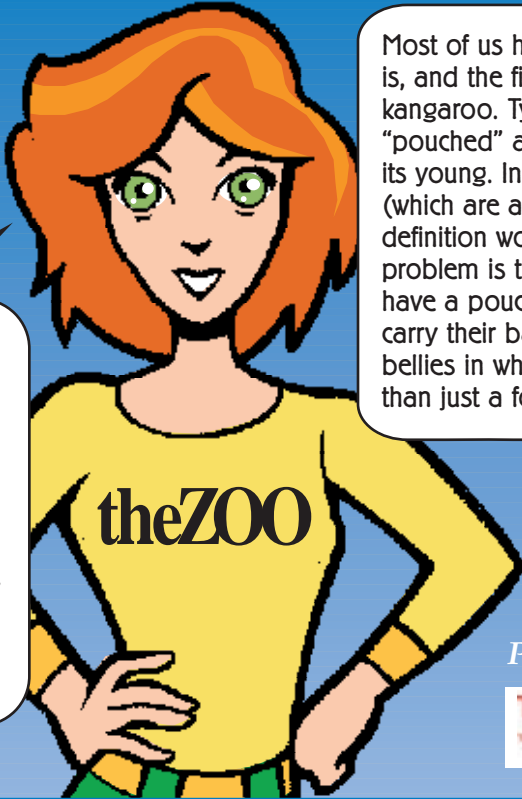


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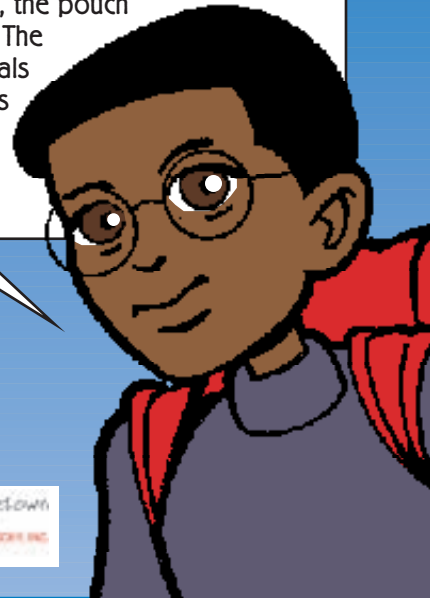
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Marsupial Misconceptions

If you have been out to the Louisville Zoo lately, you might have noticed some changes taking place in the Australian area. Some of the changes will make it easier for you to get up close to a couple of new marsupials: yellow-footed wallabies and red-necked wallabies.



Most of us have a pretty good idea of what a marsupial is, and the first animal that usually comes to mind is the kangaroo. Typically, most people define a marsupial as a "pouched" animal whose pouch is used to carry around its young. In the case of the kangaroo or our wallabies (which are a type of kangaroo), the pouch definition works out to be true. The problem is that not all marsupials have a pouch. Some marsupials carry their babies on their bellies in what is nothing more than just a fold of skin.



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Marsupials Matchup

Can you match these marsupials with their names?

- ___ **KANGAROO** ___ **POTOROO**
- ___ **KOALA** ___ **OPOSSUM**
- ___ **TREE KANGAROO** ___ **WOMBAT**



Marsupials are a special group of mammals. Like all mammals, they feed their babies milk from the mother's body. The thing that separates marsupials from other mammals is the way offspring grow and develop. Marsupials are extremely underdeveloped when they are born. The babies don't look much like full grown adults. These small, generally hairless, and helpless youngsters leave the birth canal and have to crawl up the mother's belly until they find a nipple to attach to. In some marsupials, the nipple is located in a pouch, while in others, it is found in a fold of skin. Once attached, the young do most of their development or "growing" outside the mother's body. In other mammals, known as placental mammals, much of the development takes place within the mother, and the young are born looking like miniature versions of their parents. There are also even species of mammals that lay eggs. These are known as the monotremes, examples of which are the platypus and the spiny echidna.

Another misconception about marsupials is that they are all found in Australia. It is true that the greatest numbers of surviving species of marsupial are found in Australia, but they are actually more widespread than many people believe. There are over 260 kinds of marsupials, living in many different types of environments. They can be found in forests, grasslands, and even deserts. You may have seen the only North American marsupial in your backyard or raiding your garbage can.

Can you name the only North American marsupial? That's right! The Virginia opossum.



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