

# Fact Sheet

# 2

## Animal classification

Scientists classify animals in order to study them and understand how they are related to each other. Some animals are easy to group together because they are very similar. For example, there are some obvious similarities within the six major groups of animals:

1. Mammals,
2. Birds,
3. Fish,
4. Reptiles,
5. Amphibians, and
6. Invertebrates.

### **Mammals**

Mammals are warm-blooded and have specialised glands that produce milk for their young (lactation). Most mammals also have hair. Because there are lots of mammals, scientists have classified them into smaller groups. The three major groups of mammals are:

1. Eutherians - the most common mammals. They give birth to live young and, while babies are developing inside their mother, a placenta is present. Common examples are mice, bats, rabbits, dogs, monkeys, cows, bears and elephants;
2. Monotremes - the egg-laying mammals. The only extant monotremes are the platypus and echidna (extant means still surviving – it is the opposite of extinct); and
3. Marsupials - only found in Australasia and the Americas. Marsupial young are born following a very short gestational period. That means they do not develop for very long inside their mother. For example, Brushtail possums' gestation period is only 17-18 days. Most marsupials have pouches where their young develop after birth. When a Brushtail possum is born, it climbs into its mother's pouch and lives in there for another 4-5 months before leaving the pouch. Other marsupials include kangaroos, koalas, wombats, bandicoots, bilbies, numbats, quolls and the Tasmanian devil.

Koalas, wombats, kangaroos and wallabies are closely related to possums. These marsupials all live in Australasia. They have two large front teeth on their lower jaw that are used for eating the leaves and grasses. This group of animals is called the diprotodontians. Diprotodont means "two first tooth". Other marsupials have different arrangements of teeth.

