

The wallaby

Wallabies are small to medium-sized marsupials that inhabit the Australian continent and its surrounding islands. The word *wallaby* comes from the indigenous Australian language.

A

While the largest wallabies can measure 6 feet from head to tail, as big or bigger than some kangaroos, most species of wallaby are smaller than kangaroos. The smallest are around 12 inches when fully-grown. They have an upright posture supported by two disproportionately large hind legs and feet, small forelimbs and a large thick tail. Wallabies have strong hind legs that enable them to travel at speed; their sizeable Achilles tendons assist them in hopping. Besides hopping, the hind legs can also be used to deliver hard kicks to other wallabies. Their tails are not able to grip but are essential in that they provide balance when a wallaby is stationary or in motion.

Because wallabies are herbivores, they have a large jaw to allow them to chew grass and plants. This accounts for their elongated faces. One distinction between a wallaby and a kangaroo is the teeth: wallabies have flat molars at the back, while kangaroos' back teeth are curved.

B

Wallabies generally prefer bushy or rugged areas in remote locations of Australia, rather than the open arid plains that kangaroos prefer. Some smaller wallabies, such as pademelons, live in the forest. Often wallabies are named for the type of area where they reside, e.g. shrub wallabies, brush wallabies and rock wallabies.

From 1858 until 1870, about 12 species of marsupial were taken from Australia and liberated in New Zealand, but only the brush-tailed opossum and the wallabies adapted successfully to the new land. Inadequate early accounts of which exact species were introduced and where they were initially taken from, mean that there is still confusion with regards to which species of wallaby are actually present in New Zealand today.

In 1896, the acclaimed Australian painter Frederick McCubbin painted *On the wallaby track*, showing a family in the bush without a home, the woman with a child on her lap and the man boiling water for tea. The painting's title derives from the Australian colloquial term 'on the wallaby track' describing the wandering rural workers who moved from place to place for work and alluding to the nomadic tendency of wallabies.

C

In terms of their young, like all marsupials, wallabies are born at an early stage of development. Young wallabies, like young kangaroos, are called a *joey*. As soon as they are born, they crawl into their mothers' pouches and stay there, generally for around two months. At first, the joey spends varying lengths of time out of the pouch, grazing and acquiring vital survival skills. When it needs to sleep or it feels it is in danger; however, the joey will return to the pouch. In some species, joeys stay in the pouch for up to a year or until the next joey is born. However, for most wallabies the young are thought to be independent by 9 months.

There is significant variation when it comes to the daily habits of wallabies. The larger wallaby species tend to be diurnal (mostly active throughout the day) and live in mobs, or groups, whereas smaller species are generally nocturnal (active at night) and solitary.

D

There are animals that are native to Australia that have always hunted the wallaby; these include dingoes, wedge-tailed eagles and

Tasmanian devils. However, it is species that were brought to Australia by settlers that have posed more danger. Foxes, cats and dogs have all taken their toll on wallaby numbers, as have herbivores like rabbits, sheep, goats and cattle that compete with wallabies for food. However, it is human activity that has had the most impact; land clearing and burning of bushlands have left great numbers of wallabies effectively homeless and without a source of food.

E

Four species of wallaby have already gone extinct. There are others that are classified as *vulnerable* or *endangered*, which means that they face a high or very high risk of extinction in the wild. Measures are being taken to help particular species, including conserving their habitats and breeding them in captivity, so they may be reintroduced into the wild at a later point when conditions are favourable.

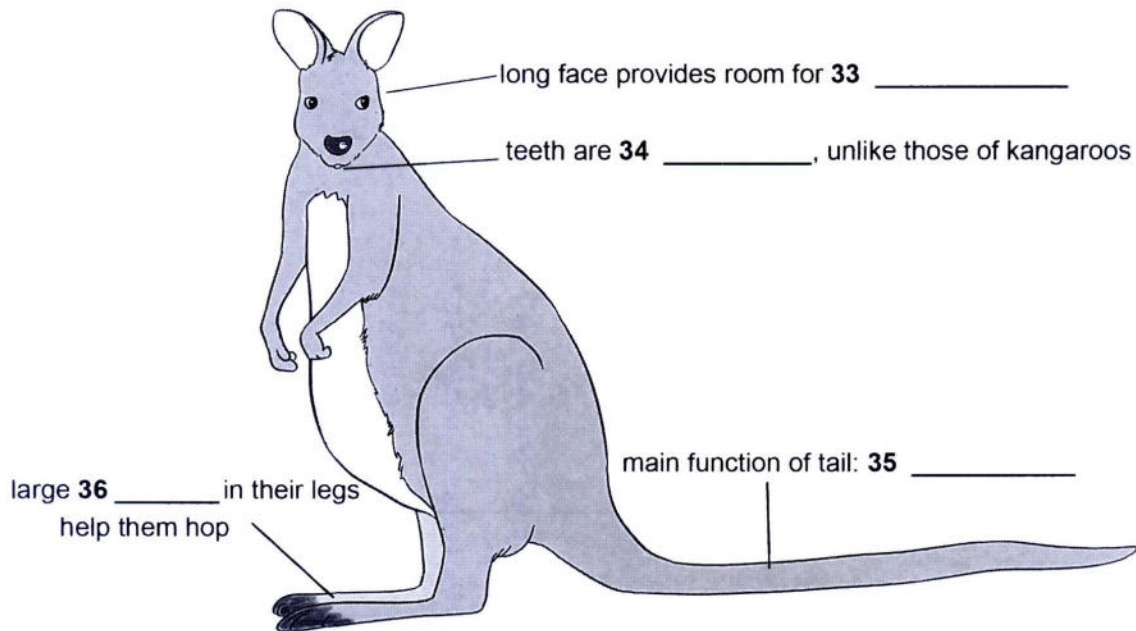
While wallabies are considered by some farmers to be a pest, efforts are being made by the Australian Society for Kangaroos to stop farmers culling kangaroos and wallabies. Instead they advocate that they should be captured and relocated.

Questions 33-36

Label the diagram below.

Choose **ONE WORD ONLY** from the Reading Passage for each answer.

Write your answers in boxes 33-36 on your answer sheet.



Questions 37-40

Write the correct letter, **A, B, C** or **D**, in boxes 37-40 on your answer sheet

- 37** Where do wallabies tend to live?
- A in places inhabited by similar animals, such as kangaroos
 - B in areas where bigger species cannot steal their food
 - C in dry areas with a minimum of vegetation
 - D in wild places that are far away from humans
- 38** There is debate about which species of wallaby are present in New Zealand because
- A some seem to have disappeared since they were introduced.
 - B records from the time they were introduced are incomplete.
 - C they are sometimes mistaken for a type of possum.
 - D they are shy creatures that avoid human contact.
- 39** 'On the wallaby track' refers to people who
- A travel around without a fixed home.
 - B live in areas where wallabies can be found.
 - C follow the trails of wallabies in order to hunt them.
 - D make their home in a remote part of the country.
- 40** The greatest danger to the survival of wallabies is
- A predator species that have been introduced to Australia.
 - B animals that eat vegetation that wallabies need to survive.
 - C native animals that have increased in numbers.
 - D destruction of the places where they live.

