50 THINGS (YOU THOUGHT YOU KNEW) ABOUT MARSUPIALS & MONOTREMES (Q&A)

Dr. John Freedman

1. Where did marsupials originate?
China, by current fossil evidence.
2. Where did monotremes originate?
Australia, by current fossil evidence
3. What defines a mammal?
Mammary glands, 3 middle ear bones, endothermy, hair or fur (usually)
4. Are monotremes the most primitive mammals?
No, there are no primitive animals! Evolution is non-progressive and not ladder-like. It is like a flat bush, not a tree.
5. Are koalas related to bears?
No, that's a misnomer.
6. Are koalas the only non-primate with opposable thumb?
Yes (possums have an opposable toe, pandas have a 'false thumb' opposable thumb-like wrist bone.)
7. What is remarkable about koala fingerprints?
They are indistinguishable from human fingerprints.
8. Who sleeps more: a koala or a sloth?
Koala is the champ (20-22 hrs/day vs. sloth 18-20 hrs/day)
10. Is the koala the cutest marsupial?
Formerly yes, but In recent years it has lost out to the quokka in polls.
11. What smiley marsupial lives on Rottnest (Rat's Nest) Island? **The quokka.**
12. Is 'the duckbill platypus' truly duck-billed?
No, it's bill is fleshy unlike a duck's keratinous beak. A duck's beak is for grabbing. A platypus beak is a highly specialized electrosensory organ.
13. Is the platypus the only mammal that uses electrolocation?
No, echidnas - and some dolphins - do.
14. What is the plural of platypus? (Hint: It's not platypi).
Platypodes technically since it comes from Greek not latin, platypuses is preferred in English.
15. How are most depictions of echidnas inaccurate?
They show the rear feet facing forward rather than rearward.
16. Does the platypus have webbed feet?
Yes, primarily the front feet; the rear feet have minimal webbing
17. Do all marsupials have pouches? **Yes.**
18. Do any non-marsupials have pouches?
The echidna and the tenrec (a small placental of Madagascar) have makeshift non-permanent pouches in which they nurse their young. The male seahorse has a pouch! (to nourish the young). That's it.
19. Which way does a marsupial pouch face?
Usually forward -sometimes rearward (wombats, Tasmanian devils, numbats)
20. What's another name for a numbat? **Banded anteater**
21. Do egg-laying monotremes nurse their young?
Yes, but they do not have nipples - the young slurp secreted milk.
22. What marsupial uses its butt as a weapon? **The wombat.**
23. What shape is wombat poop? (and why!)
Cubic, so that it can stack it to mark its territory and attract females (!)
24. What mammal has the strongest bite force?
In force per pound of body weight: The Tasmanian devil.
25. When did the marsupial lion go extinct?
46,000 years ago - so it was around when humans arrived ~60,000 yrs ago

(continued)

26. When did the Tasmanian Tiger go extinct? 1936
The last one is stuffed and in the Tasmanian Museum in Hobart.
27. What animals are on the Australian Coat of Arms?
The kangaroo and the emu - both cannot walk backwards so the metaphor is 'always moving forward'.
28. Is there a marsupial equivalent of the Easter Bunny?
Yes, the Easter Bilby.
29. Which marsupial has the largest testicles of any mammal?
Proportionally, the honey possum (5% of body wt)
30. What is the smallest marsupial (full-grown males weigh 1/7 ounce/4 grams) **The planigale.**
31. What is superfetation and which marsupial is known for it?
Multiple concurrent pregnancies, usually heteropaternal (multiple different fathers) - wallabies.
32. How can you tell a kangaroo from a wallaby?
Size (kangs generally bigger, head shape (kangs have a longer horse-like or deer-like face), arm muscularity (kangaroos are jacked, wallabies have thinner wimpy arms)
33. Which marsupial is pentapedal?
The kangaroo - it walks on all 4 legs plus its tail is used as a 5th 'leg'.
34. Can kangaroos swim? **Yes, and frequently do.**
35. Can kangaroos hop backwards? **No.**
35. Who was the first Westerner to describe a marsupial (Hint: Long before Cook in 1770.)
Vicente Yanez de Pinzon on the South American coast in 1499. Numerous Dutch and English accounts in the 1600s
36. Is the tree kangaroo the only arboreal kangaroo**?**
It is mostly arboreal - but it is not a true kangaroo. (A Macropod but not in Genus Macropus)
37. Are there any native placental mammals in Australia?
Yes! - bats crossed over 50 million yrs ago and rodents made it over on their own 5 million yrs ago.
38. Is the dingo indigenous to Australia?
No, it's a feralized descendant of a Southeast Asian domestic dog, brought in by humans about 5000 yrs ago.
39. What is Australia's most numerous mammal?
The hopping mouse, followed by humans (27 million) > bats (25 million) > red kangaroos (10 million+)
40. What is the world's most oversexed animal (which commits suicide by sex)?
Antechinus (aka the marsupial mouse). It copulates frenetically for 2 weeks and then dies of exhaustion, dehydration, malnutrition, and infection due to sky-high cortisol levels which suppress the immune system.
41. Does any mammal breathe through its skin like some amphibians?
Yes, the dunnart during its first 2 week of life. It takes in oxygen and releases carbon dioxide through its skin.
42. What is another name for the numbat? **The banded anteater.**
43. What does the banded anteater eat? (Hint: Trick question.) **Termites.**
44. Do marsupials have a placenta?
Yes, a rudimentary one since they do have a (short) gestational period.
45. Do marsupials have a uterus and vagina?
They have 2 uteruses and 3 vaginas!
46. How many heads does an echidna penis have?
4 (most marsupials have 2)
47. What is a group of kangaroos called? **A mob.**
48. What is a baby kangaroo called?
A joey (the term is used for any young marsupial). Young monotremes (both platypus & echidna are called puggles.
49. What is a male kangaroo called ? A female kangaroo? **Male is a boomer, female is a flyer.**
50. Which are acceptable Scrabble words: bilby, bandicoot, bettong, cuscus, dibbler, dunnart, numbat, planigale, quokka, quoll, yapok**. Answer: All!**