



# RED KANGAROO

MARSUPIALIA  
Family: Macropodidae  
Genus: *Macropus*  
Species: *rufus*



**Range:** scattered throughout central region  
**Habitat:** dry grassy plains and stay away from the wetter grasslands  
**Niche:** crepuscular and nocturnal, herbivorous, terrestrial  
**Wild diet:** leaves; wood, bark, or stems  
**Zoo diet:** vegetables, alfalfa, fruits, bread and horse chow, grass available in enclosure  
**Life Span:** (Wild) up to 22 yrs if they survive the first year (Captivity) 16.4 yrs  
**Sexual dimorphism:** M about twice the size of F  
**Location in SF Zoo:** Australian Walkabout

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## APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

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*Macropus rufus* is the largest living marsupial with proportionally the longest hindlegs. Coat color is usually reddish brown in males and bluish gray in females, although these colors may vary in some areas, with females being reddish and males blue-gray. Red kangaroos are robustly built, with large, well-muscled tails and powerful hindquarters. The tail is strong enough to support the kangaroo's body weight, acts as a balance when jumping, and is used, with the two legs, to form a tripod for resting. The second and third toes of red kangaroos are fused and shaped into a grooming claw. Their foreshortened upper limbs terminate in clawed paws used with great dexterity in eating, grooming, and self-defense. They have long, pointed ears, a squared-off muzzle and heavy eyelids. The fur of the red kangaroo has a distinct, wooly texture, unlike other kangaroos. Its coat provides insulation against both hot and cold weather.

Dental formula: I 3/1, C 1/0, PM 2/2, M 4/4 x2 = 32. The kangaroo has large outward projecting front incisor teeth, which it uses to slice through grass and leaves on which it feeds. Large molars at the back of its mouth chop and grind its food. The kangaroo replaces its teeth throughout its life; four sets of replacement teeth are produced. New teeth grow and slowly move forward replacing those in front, which have been worn down or damaged. Kangaroos have aruminant-like stomach and produce carbon dioxide, which is 23 times less harmful to the environment than methane released by cattle and sheep.

<b>Weight:</b>	M 121-198 lb
	F 40-80 lb
<b>HRL:</b>	M 4.3 - 5.2 ft
	F 2.7 - 3.4 ft
<b>SH:</b>	M 5 - 6 ft
<b>TL:</b>	M 3.2 - 3.9 ft
	F 2.1 - 2.8 ft

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## STATUS & CONSERVATION

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*Macropus rufus* is not considered endangered. Nearly three million square miles of Australian territory now lies within the boundaries of excellent national parks. All Australian states regulate the hunting of kangaroos. They are sometimes considered pests by livestock owners because they compete for forage with livestock. In areas where vegetation is limited, kangaroos may cause reduce forage significantly. In there attempt to provide more range for large herds of sheep and cattle, immigrants burned down forest and bush regions, creating habitat suitable for Red kangaroos at the expense of other kangaroo species.

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## COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

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Red kangaroos communicate through a loud defensive cough, an aggressive growl or by courting male and by mother to young a soft cluck. An alarm is communicated by a foot stamp. Red kangaroos occur in groups, 2 - 10, called "mobs." These groups are made up mainly of females and their offspring, with one or several males. Females stay within their natal mob. Occasionally, large numbers of red kangaroos congregate in areas of excellent forage, sometimes numbering as much as 1,500 individuals. Most of their active period is spent in grazing. Most kangaroo species are relatively sedentary, staying within a relatively well-defined home range. This is also often characteristic of *Macropus rufus* populations, but they may travel widely in response to adverse environmental conditions. For short periods they can attain a speed of 35 mph, though they can maintain a speed of 12 mph for hours, with leaps as long as 8 meters and as high as 3 meters, although 1.2 to 1.9 meters is more typical of an average pace.

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## COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

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Male red kangaroos compete for mating opportunities with several females. Males will try to monopolize access to several females and will actively drive away other males, creating a dominance hierarchy. This competition sometimes leads to "boxing" matches, where males hit at each other with their forepaws and kick with their feet. There is no permanent association of males and females. They will breed at any time of the year, but rarely during drought or dry weather. There is a gestation period of 30-42 days, after which the mother will clean her pouch before giving birth. She then will take up the birth position, sitting on her tail base with her legs extended forward and her tail between them. She then licks her birth canal, and the small, lima bean-sized joey emerges, still in its amnion (protective sac). It frees itself of this sac and begins the arduous, 3 minute climb to the mother's pouch, with the umbilical cord still attached. Once it reaches the pouch, it grabs a hold of one of the four teats and begins to nurse. It will leave the pouch after 8 months but will continue to return to nurse for months afterward. Given favorable conditions, a mother red kangaroo produces and raises an average of three young every two years. Reproduction is reduced in times of drought and may cease if drought is prolonged; through embryonic diapause, the female is able to suspend the development of an embryo until better climatic conditions.

Estrous: polyestrous 34.3 d

Gestation: 30 - 42 d / 204 d in pouch

# of Mammae: 2 pr

# of Young: 1

Sexual Maturity: M 20-24 mo / F 15 20 mo

Weaning Age: 12 mo

Weight at birth: 1/35 oz

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## MISCELLANEOUS

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The common wallaroo is stockier, has shaggier fur, lacks black patch on side of muzzle and clear white cheek stripe than the red kangaroo.

### Sources:

updated: 1/17

Walker's Mammals of the World, 6<sup>th</sup> edition Vol II © 1999 Ronald M. Nowak, pgs 118-128

A Field Guide to the Mammals of Australia © 2004 Peter Menkhorst & Frank Knight, Oxford University Press

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