

Mammal Mania



Stoat carry kit to a new den ©Tom Hibbert

What is a mammal?

- Mammals are **vertebrates**, they have an internal skeleton
- Mammals have **hair**, (even wales and dolphins do, but they have less and it's harder to see)
- Mothers feed their young **milk**
- **Most** have **live young**, there are a few unusual exceptions like duckbilled platypus and echidnia
- They are **warm blooded** so can warm themselves without having to bask in the sun like insects and reptiles do

We are mammals, so are dogs, cats, sheep, mice, lemurs hedgehogs, bears, seals, squirrels, the list go on...

There are around **5 500** species of mammal in the **world**. In the UK we have a total of around **90 species of mammal**. This includes 18 bat species and 37 land based mammals and marine mammals including whales, dolphins and seals.

Mammals are divided into 3 main groups



1) Monotremes – the **egg laying mammals**. The duckbilled platypus and 4 species of echidna (see above, how cute are they?!) are the only members of this group. Monotremes means “one-holed” as they lay their eggs and go to the toilet through the same one opening. Their eggs have a leathery covering to protect it just like a reptile egg.



2) Marsupials – these are mammals which **keep their young in a pouch**. This group includes kangaroos, wallabies, koalas, opossums (above), dunnarts, gliders and wombats. Most marsupials are found in Australasia but more than 60 species of opossums are found in America.



Badger ©Bertie Gregory

3) Placental mammals – all remaining mammals are in this group.

The young develop within the womb attached to the mother internally by the placenta. When the midwife cuts ours we end up with a belly button. This group includes carnivores like the big cats (and all cats), wild dogs and wolfs, herbivores like cattle and deer, insectivores like shrews and ant eaters.

Mammals can be found on every continent of the world except Antarctica and have adapted to all environments. Most of our domestic animals are mammals.



There are also some very unusual mammal which you may have never heard of. This is a long eared Jerboa found in southern Mongolia.

Take a look at our unusual mammals sheet and videos to learn more!