

Animal Atlas: Meet the animals of Australasia and Oceania

By Rachel Williams and Emily Hawkins, "Atlas of Animal Adventures," adapted by Newsela staff on 09.08.17

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A red kangaroo hops across the open land in Australia's Mungo National Park. Photo from: Auscape/UIG via Getty Images. Illustrations: Lucy Letherland, "Atlas of Animal Adventures"/Newsela.

Australia is the world's smallest continent. Among geographers, this land mass is often combined with the islands and waters around it to create a larger region called Australasia. Farther into the Pacific Ocean is the island region of Oceania. The area features tropical oceans, colorful rainforests, great mountains and dry deserts. It also is home to some of the most unusual wildlife on Earth.

Hitting The Dance Floor With The Birds-Of-Paradise In New Guinea

New Guinea is a large island just north of Australia. High in its hilltop rainforests, hikers may find a dance floor devoted to an incredible creature: the bird-of-paradise. The male of this family has feathers that extend from his beak, wings and head. He makes his own stage on a log or patch of ground, showing off his colorful plumage with moves worthy of a professional dancer.

After carefully preparing his dance floor, the male calls out to potential mates in the rainforest. He lets them know the show is about to begin. There are several species of this showy bird. Each one

performs a unique dance. For example, the superb bird-of-paradise hops about in circles. He fans out his plumage and snaps his tail feathers against each other. The western parotia does a ballet-like dance. He shakes his neck to show off his brilliant head feathers. The blue bird-of-paradise hangs upside down. It creates an arch with his long tail feathers. What a show!

Building With The Bowerbirds Of New Guinea And Australia

The forests of New Guinea and Australia are home to a master builder and artist. This creature is known as the bowerbird. The male bowerbird shows off unusual skills to attract a mate. First, he builds a bower out of twigs. This isn't a nest — it is more like a sculpture.

Once the bower is complete, the male decorates it with colorful objects. He spends hours searching the forest for trinkets. These objects are likely to include berries, feathers, stones and flowers. He may even add bottle tops, drinking straws and other plastic knick-knacks. To make their choice of a mate, females tour the bowers. They check to see which effort meets their high standards. Each time a female appears, the male puffs up his feathers. He flicks his wings and makes buzzing noises, all in order to thrill her. The male with the most impressive bower and display is the one that gets the most mates.

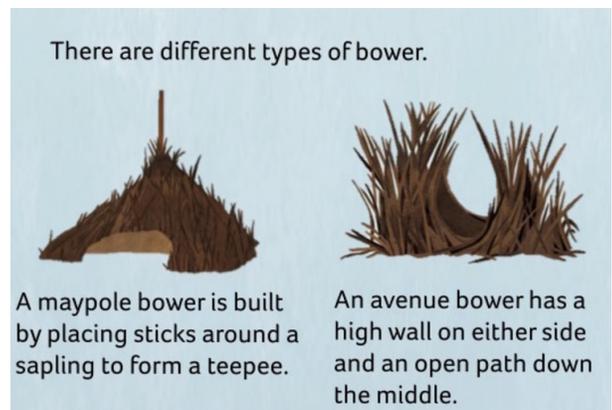
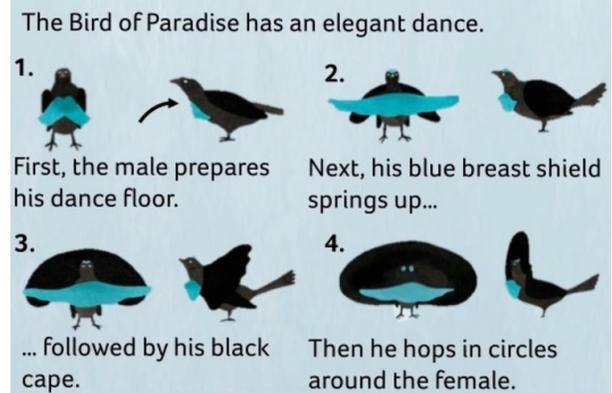
Diving With The Platypus In Australia

What creature has the beak and flippers of a duck, the tail of a beaver and the body of an otter? The platypus! The platypus is a bizarre-looking animal by any measure. When stuffed specimens were first sent to Europe in the late 1800s, scientists thought someone was playing a hoax. They thought a practical joker had sewn together the parts of different animals!

The platypus is well-adapted for its life along Australian riverbanks. To feed, it leaves its burrow and plunges beneath the water. It is a skillful swimmer. Its webbed front feet provide power, while its back feet and tail help steer. As the platypus paddles, it waves its rubbery bill from side to side. This bill is covered in sensors that detect prey. It scoops up mouthfuls of insects, shellfish and worms from the riverbed.

The duck-like beak and flippers aren't the only strange things about the platypus. It also lays eggs! The platypus is one of only two mammals on the planet whose young hatch from eggs. Most mammals give birth to live young.

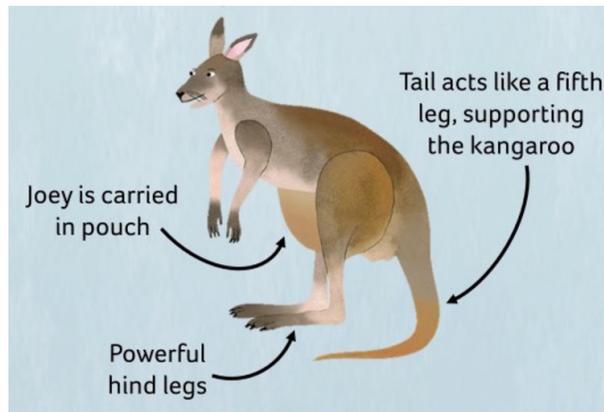
Kick-Boxing With The Red Kangaroos In Australia



The Australian Outback is a very dry part of the continent. It is home to one of the country's most recognizable animals: the red kangaroo.

Temperatures in the Outback's Simpson Desert can reach over 122 degrees Fahrenheit. Water is in short supply. However, the hopping roos here have some cunning ways to beat the heat. In the warmest part of the day, they take cover in the shade. They dig away the topsoil. Then they rest on the cooler dirt beneath. They also lick their wrists to cool their blood vessels.

But things really start heating up when it's time to choose a mate! In a battle for females, rival males often come to blows. A kangaroo's best weapons are its muscular hind legs and enormous feet. When fighting, two males grapple with their forearms. Then they deliver powerful kicks with their hind legs.



Quiz

- 1 Select the detail from the section "Kick-Boxing With The Red Kangaroos In Australia" that explains how kangaroos adapt to hot weather.
- (A) The Australian Outback is a very dry part of the continent.
 - (B) Temperatures in the Outback's Simpson Desert can reach over 122 degrees Fahrenheit.
 - (C) However, the hopping roos here have some cunning ways to beat the heat.
 - (D) They dig away the topsoil. Then they rest on the cooler dirt beneath.

- 2 Read the section titled "Building With The Bowerbirds Of New Guinea And Australia." Which sentence from the section shows how the bowerbird makes his bower unique?
- (A) The forests of New Guinea and Australia are home to a master builder and artist.
 - (B) He may even add bottle tops, drinking straws and other plastic knick-knacks.
 - (C) He flicks his wings and makes buzzing noises, all in order to thrill her.
 - (D) The male with the most impressive bower and display is the one that gets the most mates.

- 3 One MAIN idea of the article is that certain birds will show off dance routines to attract mates. What is another MAIN idea of the article?
- (A) Some animals will fight each other in order to attract mates.
 - (B) The first thing a bowerbird does to attract mates is build a bower.
 - (C) People originally thought the stuffed platypus was a hoax.
 - (D) Australia is the smallest continent on the planet Earth.

- 4 Read the sentences summarizing the MAIN ideas of the article below.

Australia is full of interesting animals. There are birds that dance and others that are expert builders. They also have an interesting creature called a platypus.

Which answer choice would complete the summary?

- (A) These animals are all located on small islands around the continent Australia.
- (B) Originally, scientists did not believe the platypus was a real animal but, rather, a hoax.
- (C) Perhaps, one of the most popular animals is the boxing red kangaroo.
- (D) Some animals live in hot and dry environments, with temperatures reaching 122 degrees.