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# THE WORLD

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The mammals



## WHAT'S THE NEWS

Robotic reptiles reveal animals walked tall earlier than we thought.

Wild dolphins learn to 'walk on water', study finds.

Antelope called Taylor Swift escapes from zoo enclosure.

Black leopard spotted in Africa for first time in 100 years

Diet May Be a Key Factor for Influenza A Virus Exposure in Wild African Mammals

## March Gifts

March  
Arrives  
Ready to  
Captivate spring's  
Heart

Gifts  
Include  
Flowering  
Trees and warmer  
Sun

Sandra Haight



every possible form of locomotion. Terrestrial species walk, run, jump, climb, hop, swing, dig, and burrow. Aquatic ones swim, shuffle, and dive. A few even fly.



herbivores, especially hooved animals like deer and zebra. By living in large groups, they gain both protection against becoming another animal's meal and more

Mammals range in size from the vast blue whale to tiny rodents. They live in the sea, in the tropics, in the desert, and even in Antarctica. Different as they are from one another, however, mammals have a number of important physical and behavioral characteristics in common.

## ABOUT MAMMALS

Mammals are among the most adaptable animals on the planet. They are found on every continent and in every ocean, and range in size from tiny bumblebee bats to enormous blue whales. One reason for their success is the way they move. Mammals as a group use

Diet and behavior vary, too. Many carnivores, for example, are top predators that live generally solitary lives. These include jaguars, tigers, and polar bears. By contrast, lions, otters, wolves, and dolphins live in family groups. Even more social are some of the



And there are some facts about mammals:

**#1** Definitive counts are hard to come by—since some mammals are on the verge of extinction, while others remain to be discovered—but there are currently about 5,500 identified mammal species, grouped into approximately 1,200 genera, 200 families and 25 orders. Those numbers may appear large, but they're actually tiny in comparison to the roughly 10,000 species of birds, 30,000 species of fish, and five million species of insects alive today.

**#2** About 230 million years ago, during the late Triassic period, a population of therapsids ("mammal-like reptiles") split off into the first true mammals (a good candidate for this honor is

Megazostrodon). Ironically, the first mammals evolved at almost exactly the same time as the first dinosaurs; for the next 165 million years, mammals were banished to the periphery of evolution, living in trees or burrowing underground, until the extinction of the dinosaurs finally allowed them to take center stage.



**#3** Thanks in part to their bigger brains, mammals tend to be more socially advanced than other types of animals. Examples of social

behavior include the herd behavior of wildebeests, the hunting prowess of wolf packs, and the dominance structure of ape communities. However, you this is a difference of degree, and not of kind: ants and termites also display social behavior (which, however, seems to be completely hard-wired and instinctual), and even some dinosaurs roamed the Mesozoic plains in herds.



# #4

Although the precise classification of mammals is still a subject of dispute, it's obvious that marsupials (mammals that incubate their young in pouches) are different from placentals (mammals that



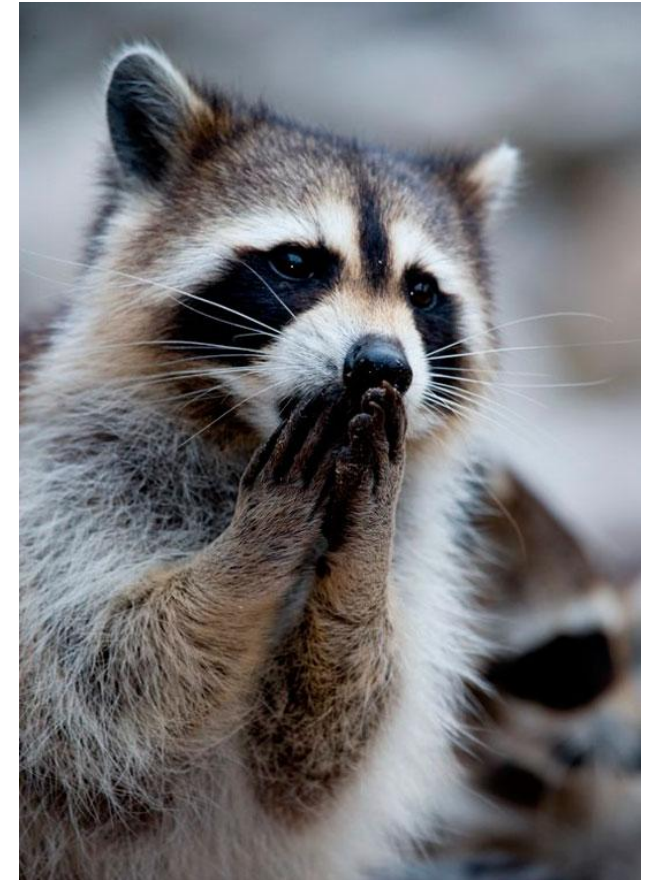
incubate their young entirely in the womb). One way to account for this split is to divide mammals into two evolutionary clades: Eutherians ("true beasts") which include all placental mammals, and Metatherians ("above the beasts") which diverged from Eutherians sometime during the Mesozoic Era and includes all living marsupials.

# #5

One of the most amazing things about mammals is the different evolutionary niches they've managed spread into



over the last 50 million years. There are swimming mammals (whales and dolphins), flying mammals (bats), tree-climbing mammals (monkeys and squirrels), burrowing mammals (gophers and rabbits), and countless other varieties. As a class, in fact, mammals have conquered more habitats than any other family of vertebrates; by contrast, during their 165 million years on earth, Dinosaurs never became fully aquatic or learned how to fly.



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