

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Koala Reproduction: Caring for the Next Generation



Koalas have a fascinating way of reproducing and caring for their young. Koalas are marsupials, which means they carry and nurse their babies in a pouch, much like kangaroos. Mating season for koalas occurs between September and March. Male koalas use loud bellows to attract females and warn other males to stay away from their territory.

Once a female koala chooses a mate, the pair will breed, and the gestation period begins. A koala's gestation period is very short, lasting only about 35 days. After this time, the mother gives birth to a single baby called a joey. Occasionally, a female may give birth to twins, but this is very rare.

When a joey is born, it is tiny—about the size of a jellybean. It is blind, hairless, and completely dependent on its mother. The newborn joey climbs into its mother's pouch, where it will stay for about six months. During this time, the joey drinks milk from its mother and continues to grow and develop.

At around six months old, the joey starts to peek out of the pouch and explore its surroundings. It begins to eat a special substance called pap, which is partially digested eucalyptus leaves from the mother. Pap helps the joey prepare its stomach for digesting eucalyptus leaves, which will become its main food source as it grows.

By the time the joey is about a year old, it becomes fully independent. The mother teaches the young koala how to find food and climb trees before it ventures out on its own. This gentle care ensures the next generation of koalas is strong and healthy.