

PAGE OF READING FOR THE FAMILY

AUSTRALIA'S



BEAR

Prepared by National Geographic Society, Washington, D. C.—WNU Service.

IF AN imaginative child could be transported from a visit to an American toy shop to the midst of an Australian eucalyptus forest, and there shown for the first time the Australian native bear, or Koala, climbing among the branches and nibbling the leaves, he would be hard to convince that the teddy bears he had been inspecting had not been brought magically to life; for the Koala, with his round roly-poly body, short arms and pointed nose, is the living prototype of the jolly toy bear that helps make Christmas morning merry in many an American nursery.

Koalas are found in eastern and southeastern Australia, but do not occur on any of the neighboring islands or in the western half of the continent. They were probably once the most common animals in the Australian bush, but about 40 years ago a widespread epidemic overtook them and they died by thousands.

They also were hunted extensively for the sake of their warm, thick fur, and as a result are now extinct in New South Wales. A few hundred are still to be found in Victoria, in carefully protected localities, and a fair number remain in Queensland. Little is known of the nature of the disease that so nearly exterminated them, but study is being given the subject, now, with a view to preserving the remains of this formerly numerous species.

The koala is one of the most interesting of Australian animals. He has a thick, grayish-colored fur, a prominent black nose, and stands about two feet high. A good specimen weighs about 20 pounds. He is one of the most inoffensive animals imaginable, doing no harm or damage to anyone or anything.

He Lives in Trees.

Essentially an arboreal and mainly nocturnal animal, he spends his time in the branches of certain species of eucalyptus trees, where he feeds at night upon the tender young leaves. If approached, he will sit and stare at the intruder with a surprised expression, and only if danger threatens he will climb to the topmost branches. He is rather inactive, especially in summer, and often sits in the fork of a tree, sleeping the daylight hours away. The adult males are fond of perching themselves on a dead limb at the top of a tall tree,

from which they appear to enjoy their survey of the surrounding landscape.

They have five toes on each foot, and each toe is armed with a curved, needle-sharp claw. The toes are in groups of twos and threes, the two claws being in the form of a double thumb. They are thus enabled to climb easily and also to grasp the branches of a tree and pull them down for the purpose of feeding on the leaves.

Even an iron telegraph post offers no obstacle to their climbing powers, and they have been seen sitting among the wires on top of one, although it is difficult to say what motive took them into such a position. A tall flagstaff seems to present an irresistible temptation, and even in the windiest of days they climb such posts to perch on the top.

The leaves of certain kinds of the Australian eucalyptus (gum trees) form their staple diet, although occasionally they feed on the barks of certain trees and on sphagnum moss, perhaps as a tonic or medicine. They never drink water in a state of nature, but are apparently able to obtain enough moisture from feeding on the juicy gum shoots from which the commercial eucalyptus oil is extracted.

Make Delightful Pets.

Koalas are such quaint and attractive little creatures that they are much in demand as household pets. They are very easily tamed, but as they grow older they are careless of the fact that their claws have needle-like sharpness, which will easily penetrate the thickest and strongest cloth.

Although when living in the bush they take no liquid, in captivity they quickly acquire a taste for weak sweetened tea and starchy foods. This depravity is the cause of their undoing, for if given such things in mistaken kindness they soon begin to lose condition and in a few months die from indigestion. Even when fed only on eucalyptus leaves, they are difficult to keep alive in captivity.

Because of their unique interest and the difficulty of keeping them alive in confinement, and because of their now decreased numbers, the Victorian government strictly forbids their capture. But, in order that they may be seen under normal conditions, they are gradually being established in suitable places where there is an abundance and variety of their natural foods.

It is now possible, within a two-hour run of Melbourne, with its more than a million inhabitants, to see the Koala in his native gum trees, and it is hoped, through the exercise of strict protective measures, to preserve this interesting little animal for posterity.

"Joey" Reared in Pouch.

The Koala is a marsupial, having a pouch in which the single cub—"Joey," in the language of the bush—after birth in a very immature state, is sheltered and fed for some months. When about six inches in length, it gradually leaves the pouch and spends its time in its mother's arms, not clasped by the mother, because she needs all her toes for hanging onto the trees, but clinging to her thick fur by means of its own sharp little claws. This is the usual position of the young until it is big enough to look after itself; but if danger threatens, necessitating active climbing on the part of the mother, the youngster quickly clambers around upon her back, so as not to hamper her movements. There it hangs on securely while she climbs to safety.

Koalas are, as a rule, silent, but when frightened or annoyed will cry very much like a child. In some of their habits they closely resemble human beings. A mother bear has been seen to cuff her little one, probably for some transgression of bush law, until it cried as if broken-hearted.

Contrary to what one might think, the bears are very unsociable among themselves. It is extremely rare to find more than one in a tree, unless it be a very large tree. Even where they are fairly abundant they seem to prefer a solitary life.

A few years ago a number were placed on an island for their better protection, and when visited later had scattered over the whole extent of the place, none being closer than 200 or 300 yards to another.

Sparrow Hawk's Diet

The sparrow hawk's diet consists of less than one-fifth of 1 per cent of game birds and no poultry. More than 50 per cent of its diet is composed of insects and 25.4 per cent of mice and other small mammals.

Sleuths of Uncle Sam War on Counterfeiters

While the secret service, charged with protection of the currency of the United States, is always alert in the war against counterfeiters, present conditions have necessitated even greater vigilance.

Two factors have led to a substantial increase in counterfeiting. First, there was the repeal of prohibition, with a resultant seeking of other fields by bootleggers. Second, the depression has caused the reduction of the "market" for "suckers" in confidence-game manipulations, and therefore the necessity for the so-called "slickers" to turn to other methods of income. Acting Chief Joseph E. Murphy, of the United States secret service, says that, because of the peculiar economic conditions, counterfeiting is today on the high tide.

Great success, however, has attended the efforts of the secret service against the bogus-money entrepreneurs. The recent arrest in New York of Victor Lustig, alias "the Count," illustrates the thoroughness of the methods used.

Secret service records show that in April, 1927, the Count, who has a long police record in this and European countries, escaped from the Crown Point, Ind., jail. He turned to

Bedtime Story

By Thornton W. Burgess



WHAT DANNY MOUSE WAS DOING

ALL the time Nanny Meadow Mouse at home on the Green Meadows was worrying herself almost sick because Danny Meadow Mouse didn't come home. Danny himself was too busy with his own troubles to even think of Nanny. He had been trapped in a hollow log by Billy Mink and then Billy had been frightened away by Mrs.



Buster Stopped and Raked Over Some Leaves With His Great Paws.

Hooty the Owl, who had then flown away to hunt for a meal in another part of the Green Forest. This had been Danny's chance to get out of that hollow log and he had made the most of it.

He had run his fastest until he just had to stop for breath and to rest a little. You know Danny's legs are short, and though he can run fast for a short distance, he cannot run far without resting. He crept under a pile of leaves to recover his breath and think what to do next. It is hard work to think when you are out of breath. Danny found it so. When at last he had stopped panting he began to consider what to do next. Never

had he been in that part of the Green Forest. He didn't know a single hiding place. This gave Danny a most uncomfortable feeling.

"I will have to trust to luck," thought Danny. "Yes, sir, I will have to trust to luck. There isn't anything else I can do."

Just then he heard heavy, shuffling footsteps. Now, who was coming? Danny's heart began to go pit-a-pat, as he peeped out from under the leaves. What he saw made his bright little eyes almost pop out of his head and his head and his heart almost stopped beating. Shuffling along straight toward him was a huge black form. Never in his life had Danny felt quite so little and helpless. He knew who it was. There was no mistaking that great black fellow. It was Buster Bear.

What to do Danny didn't know, so he did nothing. He simply crouched right where he was under that little pile of leaves and wished that he could shrink into nothing at all. Yes, sir, that is what Danny wished. Buster stopped and raked over some leaves with his great paws, at the same time sniffing among them with his nose. Every snuff sent a shiver over Danny. Buster picked up something and ate it. What it was Danny didn't know, but he did know that if Buster should find a certain little Meadow Mouse under the leaves he would treat it in just the same way.

Danny wanted to run. Never in all his life had Danny wanted to run as he did right that minute. But there was nowhere to run to. He didn't know of a single hiding place. Buster Bear hadn't found him yet and didn't know that he was anywhere about. If he should run, Buster would be likely to see or hear him, while, if he sat still, Buster might not rake over that pile of leaves. So Danny sat still.

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The First Sewing Machine

The first sewing machine was probably made by an Englishman named Thomas Saint, who received a patent on July 17, 1790. Thomas Saint's patent was discovered within recent years by a searcher among the patent archives of the British patent office, where it had lain unnoticed for almost a century. Isaac M. Singer, in 1851, patented a sewing machine having a fixed overhanding arm and a vertical needle, but his most important contribution was the presser foot with a yielding spring.

THAT'S SOMETHING



Frosh—Do you think a classical education helps a man?

Soph—Surely. It helps him to forget his own troubles by thinking about those of the Greeks and Romans.

Highway to the Arctic

There are some very earnest advocates of the proposed highway from the state of Washington to Alaska. It will be 2,225 miles long and will open up 370,000,000 acres of land along its length.