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Sex and reproduction

Broadly speaking, tree-kangaroos reproduction follows much the same pattern as other macropods. Gestation is brief with the new born (known as a neonate) emerging in a nearly embryonic condition. Appearances are deceptive, however, and the respiratory, olfactory, digestive and urinary systems of this queer little creature all appear to be functioning. As well, it is equipped with strongly developed forearms, clawed forepaws and, most important of all, with the inherent will to climb. As soon as it emerges from the cloacal opening, it has to climb – up the mother’s belly fur and into her pouch. And it has to do it quickly or it won’t survive. Once inside the pouch, it has to locate a suitable nipple (probably using its olfactory sense), attach to it and commence suckling. It’s a big journey, particularly when you are only 45 days old.

Preceding this minor miracle of marsupial birth, many other things have to happen. There is a courtship between a male and female tree-kangaroo, a fruitful mating and a period of embryonic development (gestation) within the mother’s uterus. Following birth there is a lengthy period of growth and development within the pouch. At the end of pouch life the young tree-kangaroo has to face what really amounts to a second birth – its exit from the pouch and entry into the dangerous world of the rainforest canopy. This marks the beginning of another lengthy phase of growth and learning that culminates in