

How Kangaroo Got His Tail

an Australian Pourquoi Tale

A long time ago, some animals looked different to the way they look now. Kangaroos had no tails and wombats had high, round heads. Mirram the Kangaroo and Warreen the Wombat were good friends. They lived together in a hut that Warreen had built from tree bark.

They liked being with each other, but Mirram liked to sleep outside at night and he made fun of Warreen who always wanted to sleep inside.

"Come, Warreen, sleep outside with me" said Mirram. "It's much better to look up at the stars at night and listen to the fresh wind in the trees."

"It's too cold outside" snuffled Warreen, "and sometimes it rains. I might get wet! I like sleeping in my hut with a nice fire to keep me warm."

Mirram the Kangaroo would not accept this. "Your bark hut is dark and smelly. It is much better to sleep out in the clean air under the bright stars!" "No, thank you" said Warreen. "I will stay in my hut where I am comfortable."

Mirram was impatient. "You are too scared to sleep outside with me. You are frightened to feel a little wind." "I'm not frightened" snuffled Warreen. "I just like sleeping in my bark hut!"

Mirram kept on taunting Warreen, until one night the wombat agreed to sleep outside. During the night he got really cold and waddled back inside the hut. Kangaroo laughed at him.

All summer they played together as friends, but Mirram sometimes still made fun of Warreen's hut.

Things changed when winter came. The wind became colder at night while Mirram slept outside. At first he didn't mind. He snuggled up to a tree to protect himself, and laughed at the thought of Warreen in his smelly hut. "Wombat would not brave the wind like me" he said to himself.

The wind became stronger and colder. Mirram curled himself into a tight ball, hugging his tree.

He told himself that the wind couldn't hurt him - he wasn't afraid. When it began to rain, he muttered "a little wind and rain won't hurt me. I'm not afraid."

One night, blasts of wind lashed the kangaroo with raindrops that felt like icy needles. Mirram was so wet and cold, he couldn't take it any longer. He struggled onto his hind legs and blown by the wind, hopped slowly towards the bark hut.

"It is me!" screamed Mirram, banging on the door. "Now, let me in!" "No!" yelled Wombat. "There isn't enough room."

Mirram's teeth were chattering. He became very angry and pushed hard at the door until it opened. "I'm inside now - and you aren't big enough to throw me out!"

"H'mmph" snorted Warreen. "Well, sleep over there - in the corner. You're all wet and I don't want cold rainwater dripping on me." Wombat stretched out near the fire again and went back to sleep.

Mirram lay down in the corner, but there was a hole in the wall of the hut and the wind and rain came in. He couldn't dry himself or get warm. The fire went out, but Warreen didn't notice. He snored as he slept and laughed every now and again, enjoying a nice dream. This made Mirram more angry.

In the morning his body was stiff and sore. He hobbled outside and picked up a large rock. When he came back, Warreen was stretching and yawning as he woke up. Mirram dropped the rock on Warreen's head, flattening his forehead and making his nose curl around

"This is for not helping me get warm and dry" said Mirram. "And from now on, you will always live in a damp hole. Your flattened forehead and cold home will remind you of last night."

After that, Warreen and Mirram didn't speak to each other or play together and Warreen planned revenge.

He made a big spear and waited until Mirram was busy washing himself.

Then he threw the spear with all his strength and it hit the kangaroo at the base of his spine. Mirram yelled in pain and tried to pull the spear out, but it was stuck.

"From now on, that will be your long tail" yelled Warreen, "and you'll never have a home to live in!"

That is why wombats now have flat foreheads and live in dark, damp burrows underground and why kangaroos have long tails and always sleep outside, under the stars.