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Evolutionary history

At first sight tree-kangaroos really don't bring to mind the large, hopping animals normally associated with the word 'kangaroo'. They are usually sitting in trees and that's not the sort of place you would expect to find a 'real' kangaroo. Their broad face and short, round ears aren't typical of kangaroos either. In fact, their head and face give them more of a bear-like appearance, and it was for this reason the early Dutch zoologists conferred the specific name *ursinus* on the first tree-kangaroos they encountered.

Bears, however, don't have tails and the long tails of tree-kangaroos are one of their most distinctive features. In the canopy, with their tails hanging limply below them, they look more like leaf monkeys than anything else. But they are not monkeys and, on close inspection, you can see that they really do conform to the basic kangaroo body plan and their tails, although not as muscular or as strongly tapered as that of a plains kangaroo, are kangaroo-like (even if they are a little long, rather flaccid and occasionally adorned with a tassel). Their hind limbs, however, are very kangaroo-like and their hind feet, though shorter and broader than most terrestrial kangaroos, are truly 'macro-pods'. In common with the rest of the kangaroo family they lack an opposable first toe and have a greatly enlarged middle (fourth) toe with a long claw attached to it.

These and other anatomical similarities to kangaroos long ago brought zoologists to the conclusion that tree-kangaroos were probably descendent