

The lost giants of Australian fauna

(A) Australia's wildlife is unique. The vast majority of the animals that live there are not found anywhere else – and things were no different 1 million years ago during the Pleistocene: the age of the super-sized mammal. Before humanity became Earth's undisputed superpower, giant beasts of all shapes and sizes dominated every continent, but the Pleistocene mammals of Australia were different. Some of them could grow to the size of small cars, or possessed teeth longer than knife blades.

(B) None of these animals survive today – although exactly why that's the case is a mystery. Humans, with their advanced hunting techniques and use of fire to modify the landscape, may have played a central role in the megafauna's disappearance, but this idea is still a matter of heated debate.

(C) Even if we cannot be sure that the arrival of Australian Aboriginals on the continent had catastrophic effects on its native animals, it seems that the animals had a rather spiritual effect on the humans. The Aboriginal mythological "Dreamtime" includes a cast of monstrous creatures, many of which bear a close resemblance to some of the real-life monsters that once stalked Australia's plains. Are the myths based in fact? Perhaps: after all, these creatures are far stranger than anything dreamed up by humans.

(D) For instance, the two-tonnes weighting Diprotodon comfortably holds the title of largest marsupial ever. In size and appearance it looked superficially like a modern rhinoceros, but the Diprotodon seems to have had a social lifestyle more like that of an elephant, another mammal with which it shares anatomical similarities. What the Diprotodon most resembles, however, is exactly what it is: an enormous wombat.

(E) Another record breaker, this time a world champion; *Varanus priscus*, commonly known by its antiquated genus name *Megalania* – was the largest terrestrial lizard the world has ever known. *Megalania* was a goanna lizard, a relative of today's infamous Komodo dragon, and conservative estimates have predicted that it was at least 5.5m long.

(F) These monster marsupials were not the only giants. Their numbers were swelled by half-tonne birds and dinosaur-like tortoises. Although this biological assemblage was truly nightmarish for humans, it greatly enriched the Australia's fauna and contributed to the world's biological diversity. Unfortunately, all of these species are extinct nowadays. This fact shows us that even strong, monstrous creatures can easily die out. So we need to care about animals that surround us today and don't let them disappear as it happened to their distant ancestors.

Matching paragraphs questions:

Which paragraph contains the following information? Write the correct letter, A-F, in boxes 1-8 on your answer sheet

1. Extinction of monstrous creatures
2. The largest mammal
3. Myths and reality
4. Incredible creatures of Pleistocene Australia
5. Importance of animal protection
6. Giant lizards
7. Arrival of Australian Aboriginals
8. Mystery the giants' disappearance