

Porcupines

Porcupines are large rodents. The largest porcupine can grow to almost one metre long. The smallest is a type of dwarf porcupine which grows up to 38 centimetres. Their relatives include rats, mice, squirrels, beavers and guinea pigs. Unlike the other rodents, porcupines have sharp quills on their backs. The quills on large porcupines can grow to 30 centimetres and on small porcupines grow only to 10 centimetres. The quills are good protection from predators. When frightened, porcupines shake the quills. This makes a rattling sound. If this does not scare away a predator, porcupines may charge backwards into the predator.

Porcupines are nocturnal and forage for food at night. They are mostly vegetarian but occasionally eat bugs and small lizards. Unlike other plant eaters, porcupines like to eat most of the plant. They eat wood, bark, stems, nuts, seeds, grass, leaves and fruit. To keep their teeth sharp porcupines chew on bones, even though they don't usually eat meat.

Porcupines live in many countries but are not found in Australia.

