



Eucalyptus leaves

### Koalas' Vanishing World

Koalas face the same threat. They're adapted to living in the **eucalyptus** forests of Australia. Eating only eucalyptus was a huge advantage. Eucalyptuses were common, and few other animals ate them.

Eucalyptus leaves, you see, contain a **toxin**, or poison, that harms most animals. The leaves also provide little nutrition. But koalas' digestive systems have adapted to remove the toxin and take every bit of

energy from each meal. These **marsupials** also sleep 20 hours a day to keep their energy needs low.

Today, though, eucalyptus forests are vanishing. That leaves koalas without homes or food. Even in captivity, these gray fur balls eat

nothing but eucalyptus. "If you offered them something else," said an Ohio zookeeper, "they wouldn't know what to do with it. They'd starve before they'd eat a carrot."

### New Neighbors

Things look quite different for another animal—the rabbit. Centuries ago, Old World rabbits lived in Spain and Portugal. But people took them to habitats around the world. Argentina, China, New Zealand, and the United States are just a few of the places where you can find these rabbits today.

In such places, the bunnies are considered an **introduced species**—something that wasn't in a habitat naturally. Rabbits' new habitats often lack bunny-chomping predators. So rabbit populations skyrocket.

That can be bad news for other animals in the same place. On some Pacific islands, for example, rabbits devoured most of the plants where birds used to nest. Australia lost one-of-a-kind marsupials that couldn't compete with the rabbits for food.

### A Continuing Challenge

Today more than 5,000 animal species face the threat of extinction—and the number is rising. Luckily, many people are responding. Individuals and groups all over the world are trying to find ways to protect other species while still meeting human needs. In fact, figuring out how to share the planet will be one of the great challenges of your lifetime.

