

## SCIENCE NEWS

# POO MYSTERY SOLVED!

**SCIENTISTS** have finally worked out why wombats have cube-shaped poos.

You do know that wombats have cube-shaped poos, right?! Exactly how the Australian mammal makes its unusual poos has puzzled scientists for years.

Some experts thought the poo became a cube at the moment it was squeezed out. Others suggested it was squashed into shape inside the animal, by nearby bones.

Another slightly bonkers idea was that the wombats moulded their poo into square shapes after passing them! Yes, this really is the sort of thing that scientists spend their time thinking about.

But new research has shown that wombats have two types of muscles in their intestines (guts). One set is stiff and one is more flexible. As the waste passes through the muscles of different thickness, it gets moulded into cubes.

So, now we know how the square shapes are made, but that still leaves the question of 'why'.

Dr Scott Carver, who led the research team, thinks the cube shape might stop the poos from rolling away. As wombats use their dung to communicate with each other through smell, it might be useful to have them hanging around for longer!

The study was published in the science magazine *Soft Matter* (yes, really!).



Wombats are marsupials (the family that includes kangaroos and koalas)

## Questions on: 'Poo mystery solved!'

1) Where do wombats live?

- Australia  Albania  Austria

2) What is unique about their poo?

3) Which sentence is correct?

- Scientists have been studying the poo for a long time.  
 Scientists have been puzzled about the poo for a long time.  
 Scientists have written many reports about the poo.

4) Can you find **three** ideas that experts came up with to explain why the poo is shaped like a cube?

1. ....  
 2. ....  
 3. ....

5) Which idea is described as “slightly bonkers”?

6) How many different words for ‘poo’ can you find in the article?

7) Which part of the news report tells you that wombats are from the marsupial family?

- headline  caption  
 first paragraph  photograph

8) This report is about serious science research, but it’s a funny subject! Find the places where the writer has tried to make you smile.