

TANGAROA

Collect the animals. Protect the animals.

Official Rulebook — Working Draft

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1. Overview

Tangaroa is a two-player animal-themed trading card game. Each player builds a tableau around a Domain Card, places Animal Cards into it, and uses Wildcards to fight for control of the board. A player loses when their Domain Card's HP reaches 0.

Tangaroa is built on five brand pillars that shape both its design and its production: Conservation First, Respect for Indigenous Knowledge, Radical Transparency, Community Stewardship, and Eco-innovation. Every card is sourced from real biological and conservation research.

2. The Tableau

Each player has their own tableau: a 3×3 grid with the Domain Card fixed in the center.

X	X	X
X	D	X
X	X	X

D = Domain Card (center, fixed) • X = Animal Card slot

2.1 Rows

- Front Row — the top three slots
- Middle Row — the two slots directly left and right of the Domain
- Back Row — the bottom three slots

2.2 The Protective Slot

The single slot directly in front of the Domain Card (top-center) is the Protective Slot.

- While the Protective Slot is occupied, the Domain Card cannot be targeted directly by normal attacks.
- If damage dealt to the Protective Slot's animal would take its HP below 0, the excess (“overkill”) damage is dealt directly to the Domain instead.
- Piercing damage ignores the Protective Slot entirely and always hits the Domain directly, regardless of whether the slot is occupied.

2.3 Domain HP = Game HP

The Domain Card's HP total is the player's life total. If it reaches 0, that player loses.

An alternate win condition via “Conservation Projects” (collecting enough icons to complete a project) is still in development.

3. Domain Cards

Most Domain Cards carry two effects:

- A Slot Effect, applied to specific tableau slot(s) shown via arrows on the card (e.g. a buff to both middle-row slots).
- A Biome Buff, which grants a bonus to any animal in the tableau matching the Domain's referenced Biome Tag (e.g. “Animals with the Coral Reef biome tag deal +10 damage”).

Domain HP is intentionally variable: lower-HP Domains grant stronger buffs, and higher-HP Domains grant weaker ones. This creates a risk/reward choice between a tankier, plainer Domain and a fragile, powerful one.

4. Turn Structure

- The starting player takes the first turn of the game with only 1 action.
- After that, turns alternate normally, and each player gets 2 actions per turn.
- A cycle = one turn for each player.

4.1 “Next Turn” Timing

Unless a card says otherwise, a card effect that references “next turn” refers to that card's own controller's next turn (i.e. the next full cycle) — not the opponent's immediately following turn.

4.2 Actions

Each player gets 2 actions per turn (1 on the starting player's very first turn). The following cost 1 action:

- Placing an Animal Card into the tableau
- Using a Move

Wildcards do not cost an action. Instead, they are gated by their own requirements (e.g. needing a specific icon present in a tableau), and can be played at various points in the game, including during an opponent's turn, as specified on the card.

5. Placing Animal Cards

5.1 The Bootstrap Rule

Any one-star animal, of any star color, may be placed for free, regardless of requirements. This is how a tableau gets started from empty.

5.2 Star Bar Requirements

Every animal has a Star Bar showing its placement cost, made up of colored stars:

Color	Meaning
Yellow	Base
Blue	Aquatic
Red	Venomous
White	Apex

To place an animal, the exact color/count combination on its star bar must already be met by star totals from animal(s) already in your tableau. This can be satisfied by a single animal or a combination of several. Star colors must match exactly — a higher-tier star cannot substitute for a lower requirement. A card's own stars do not count toward its own placement requirement.

5.3 Icon Requirements

Some animals also require a specific icon (e.g. Mimic) to already be present in the tableau before they can be placed, in addition to their star bar cost.

5.4 The Icon & Star Pool

Once an animal is placed, its owner permanently gains all of that animal's icons and stars as a shared, persistent resource pool. This pool is not consumed when used to satisfy other cards' requirements or abilities — it remains available indefinitely (until the contributing animal is removed from the tableau, if applicable).

6. Icons

6.1 Regular Icons

Regular icons (type icons, behavioral icons, ecological icons) have no inherent effect on their own. They exist purely to be referenced by other cards' Moves (e.g. “Deal 20 damage for every Reptile icon in your tableau”).

6.2 Behavioral / Special Icons

A shared list of behavioral traits referenceable across cards:

- Mimic, Arboreal, Territorial, Vocal, Countershading, Burrowing, Migratory, Deep Diver, Unique Lineage, Intelligence, Aposematism, Social, Amphibious, Pack Hunter

Vocal is reserved for animals whose vocalization is a defining ecological behavior — territorial/alarm signaling other species key off, or headline-level vocal ability (e.g. mimicry) — not simply “can make sound.”

6.3 Ecological Icons (Revised)

Ecological Icons denote a genuinely notable, specialized ecological role. Predator and Prey have been removed from this system, since nearly every animal is both a predator and prey to something else, making those labels too broad to be meaningful. Most animals will not carry an Ecological Icon at all — this is intentional, mirroring how Abilities work (a rare, special trait, not a default field).

Icon	Color	Definition
Scavenger	Yellow	Feeds primarily on carrion / dead matter
Keystone	Purple	Its presence/absence measurably reshapes the wider ecosystem
Pollinator	Pink	Transfers pollen between plants as part of its feeding behavior
Decomposer	Brown	True detritivore — breaks down dead organic matter (rare among animal cards)
Parasite	Green	Lives on/off another organism at that organism's expense (including kleptoparasites)

Seed Disperser, Filter Feeder, and Ecosystem Engineer are under consideration as further additions once cards exist that would use them.

6.4 Abilities

Abilities are a fixed, shared list of named traits allocated to any animal that genuinely exhibits that real-world trait — used when multiple different animals share a notable common trait that isn't worth writing out as a unique per-card Move. Current Abilities:

Ability	Working Definition	Status
Camouflage	Always takes half damage	Working assumption
Armour	Flat/percentage damage reduction	Working assumption, exact value TBD

Ability	Working Definition	Status
Precision	Ignores evasion/dodge-type effects	Working assumption
Night Vision	May discard a card to gain a bonus action this turn	Confirmed — sourced directly from repeated original card text

The exact mechanical effect of Camouflage, Armour, and Precision is still being finalized. It is also undecided whether Abilities can trigger off an opponent's move targeting the card, or only the card's own move.

6.5 Continent & Type Icons

Continent Icons: Australia, Asia, Africa, Europe, Americas, Antarctica.

The 22 Types: Reptile, Bird, Amphibian, Canine, Feline, Primate, Marsupial, Monotreme, Bat, Fish, Shark, Ray, Pinniped, Cetacean, Arachnid, Insect, Crustacean, Mollusc, Polychaete, Cnidarian, Echinoderm, Microscopic.

7. Moves

Moves cost 1 action to use. The number in brackets before a move's text (e.g. “NEUROTOXIN (100)”) is that move's base damage.

8. Targeting

- Players may freely target any slot in the opponent's tableau by default.
- Some cards restrict this — either by making a specific animal untargetable for a period, or by restricting an attacker to only being able to target the Protective Slot.
- The Staging Slot cannot be targeted by regular attacks or abilities — only cards that specifically reference the Staging Slot may do so.

9. Movement

- No diagonal movement is allowed anywhere in the tableau, under any circumstance, unless a specific card explicitly grants diagonal movement.
- If a card allows movement to “any adjacent slot,” this means one slot away, orthogonally only (up/down/left/right) — never diagonal.
- Cards may also specify moving an animal to the Front Row, Middle Row, or Back Row directly.

10. Staging Slot

- Each player has one Staging Slot by default, located outside the tableau. Certain Animal Cards can grant a player an additional Staging Slot.
- Animals in the Staging Slot have their moves and abilities neutralized, and cannot be targeted by regular attacks or abilities.
- Only cards that specifically reference the Staging Slot (e.g. “Deal 50 damage to all animals in the Staging Slot”) can affect the animals there.

10.1 Out-of-Tableau Zones

Some cards move an animal to a secondary, card-specific zone outside the tableau rather than the Discard Pile or the base Staging Slot. These zones follow whatever rules the triggering card specifies.

11. Discard Pile

- Wildcards go to the Discard Pile once used.
- Animal Cards go to the Discard Pile when knocked out (HP reaches 0; HP cannot go below 0).
- Cards do not leave the Discard Pile unless another card specifically permits it.

12. Damage Types

Type	Effect
Normal	Resolves against the target as normal; subject to the Protective Slot rule if targeting the Domain.
Piercing	Ignores the Protective Slot entirely — always hits the Domain directly.
Spatial	Also deals the same damage to all orthogonally-adjacent animals to the target (excluding the Domain), unless diagonal is specified.

13. Status Effects

13.1 Venom

- “Inflict Venom X for N turns” forces the affected player to discard X cards per turn, for N turns.

Stacking: If a player already has an active Venom effect and is hit again by Venom of the same tier, the effect upgrades to the next tier and its duration resets to the new instance's duration.

- Example: Venom I (1 turn remaining) + new Venom I (2 turns) → becomes Venom II for 2 turns.
- Example: Venom II + new Venom II → becomes Venom III with the new duration.

13.2 Other Damage-Over-Time Effects

Some cards deal flat repeating damage over multiple turns (e.g. “50 damage each turn for 2 turns”). This is distinct from Venom — it is a separate DOT mechanic. Additional status effects (e.g. Blindness, Poison) are planned as further distinct mechanics, not reskins of Venom.

14. Card Anatomy

Every Animal Card includes:

- Common Name & Scientific Name
- Continent Icon(s)
- Type
- Health Points (HP)
- Star Bar
- Icons (behavioral / ecological)
- Ability (if applicable)
- Moves
- Conservation Status (IUCN)
- A short, sourced fun fact

15. Open Design Questions

Not yet finalized — noted here so the rulebook can be updated as these are resolved.

- Starting/maximum hand size, and deck-out rules
- Exact mechanical effect of the Camouflage, Armour, and Precision Abilities
- Whether Abilities can trigger off an opponent's move, or only the card's own move
- Alternate win condition via “Conservation Projects” / icon collection
- Full mechanics for additional planned status effects (Blindness, Poison, etc.)
- Whether Seed Disperser, Filter Feeder, and Ecosystem Engineer should be added to the Ecological Icon list