Lesson 5: How do animals adapt?

How Animals Get What They Need

Young animals get traits from their parents. A trait is a physical feature, such as eye color. Animals are also born knowing behaviors that help them survive. They learn other behaviors.

An adaptation is a physical feature or behavior. It helps animals move, get food, protect themselves, or reproduce. Birds and mammals have adaptations. The shape of a bird's beak helps it get food. Polar bears have fur coats that keep them warm in cold weather. Their sharp claws help them catch and eat food.

Every animal needs food, water, oxygen, and shelter. Sometimes there are not enough of these resources for each animal. Animals with better adaptations have a better chance of getting what they need. They have a better chance of survival.

Adaptations That Protect Animals

Some animals have adaptations to keep them from being eaten by predators. The color, shape, or patterns of animals can help them blend into their environment. For example, Mandarin fish live in bright coral reefs. The fish blend into this environment because they are very colorful. This adaptation makes it hard for other animals to see the Mandarin fish. Animals also use stingers, claws, or smells to protect themselves. Some frogs and toads can even squirt poison.

Animal Instincts

Instincts are behaviors that organisms inherit from their parents. Animals have instincts to help them live. For example, ducklings are born with the instinct to follow their mother. This helps them get protection and food.

Migration

In winter, plants stop growing. Insects die or bury themselves. This means that many animals cannot find enough food. Some of these animals migrate. Migration is traveling to find food or a place to reproduce. Canada geese live in Canada and the northern United States during spring and summer. In winter, they migrate south to find a warmer climate and food.

There are many barriers to migration. Some barriers are man-made, like roads or parking lots. Barriers make it hard or impossible for animals to migrate. For example, the red land crab migrates from the rain forest to the ocean. Sometimes, they must travel over busy roads or across parking lots. Cars or trucks hit some of these crabs.

Other barriers are natural. White storks must cross the Mediterranean Sea to get to their winter homes in Africa.

Migration is a natural behavior for organisms. They do not have to learn it.

Hibernation and Inactivity

During hibernation, animals slow down their body functions. Some mammals, reptiles, and amphibians hibernate during the winter. They move only once in a while to warm themselves or to eat. Some organisms stay still. They get their energy from stored body fat. Hibernation helps animals to survive cold weather.

How Animals Learn

Some behaviors are partly instinct and partly learned. Young animals learn by practicing new behaviors. They see which behaviors help them and which do not. For example, a white-crowned sparrow is born knowing what its song sounds like. This is instinct. But it does not know how to sing the song. The sparrow learns how to sing the song from its parents.

Lesson 5 Checkpoint

1. What is an adaptation?

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2. Name some adaptations that animals use to avoid predators.

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3. How do the instincts of migration and hibernation help animals to survive?

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4. Explain the difference between instinct and learned behavior.

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5. How do the adaptation of body color and patterns help the Mandarin fish survive?

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