Physical adaptations

Animals have developed adaptations that allow them to live in all sorts of strange and difficult environments. These adaptations have evolved over thousands of years and have usually occurred alongside other animals, meaning these animals have formed relationships that are critical to their survival. Furthermore, many animals have evolved alongside plant species and the climate, meaning that their survival is also dependent upon many the factors in their local environment.

lIn order to adapt to their particular environments, both animals and plants have had to evolve different features. Below you will find examples of some of the ways animals have physically adapted to their environments. Not all the behaviours of a species are adaptations. We define an adaptation as something that has a particular advantage for a species, which is then passed down to the next generation.

Physical adaptation definition - Physical adaptations are the physical features of an organism that have evolved to suit particular environmental conditions.

Examples of physical adaptations -

- Lizards have short legs so that their stomachs can rest on the ground, helping them to stay warm and so they can get into small holes in the ground. They have scales to help defend against predators.
- Birds have wings to fly, so they can live in trees. Other animals often eat birds that live on the ground; living in trees makes it harder for them to be caught.
- Fish have gills so they can breathe underwater. They have scales to allow them to move from side to side while protecting their bodies. They have fins to help them swim.
- Kangaroos use their long, strong tails for balance and bouncing. They use their pouches to carry their young. They have fur to keep them warm in winter and cool in summer.
- Echidnas have backwards facing hind legs to push dirt out of the way while burrowing.
- Crabs have big claws to catch their prey. They also have a hard shell to protect them from predators.

- Goannas are the only lizards with forked tongues. This adaptation allows them to sense fine odours and track their prey, similar to how a snake would.
- Bees have wings, so they can fly from flower to flower to get their food. They have a strong ‘shell’ (called an exoskeleton) to protect their bodies.
- A snail lives in its shell. They can hide in their shells when there are predators close by. Snails make a slimy trail to help them slide along the ground and to stick to the surface when they climb up high.