

Structural features and behaviours of animals

Read through this fact sheet. In the column on the right, record your responses to the following:

- list two things in this factsheet that are new to you
- describe two things from this factsheet that you find interesting or important
- write down two questions you have about the information in this factsheet.

Overview

All animals have special body parts (structural features) or behaviours that help them to live in an environment. Plants and animals have developed structural features or behaviours that allow them to live in strange and difficult environments. These structural features and behaviours have evolved over thousands, sometimes millions, of years and have usually occurred alongside other animals and plants, meaning that relationships have been formed that are critical to their survival.

What is the difference between structural features and behaviours?

- Structural features - Structural features are the body parts or physical features that help animals survive in their environment.
- Behaviours - Behaviours are the ways that animals behave that help them to live in the environment that they live in.

Examples of structural features:

- Lizards have short legs so that their stomachs can rest on the ground, helping them stay warm and get into small holes in the ground. They have scales to help defend against predators.
- Birds have wings to fly - their feathers and hollow bones help with flying.
- Fish have gills so they can breathe underwater. They have scales 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 while bouncing. They use their pouches to carry their young. They have fur to keep them warm in winter and cool in summer.
- Echidnas have backward-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.

Add your thoughts and questions in this column

- Goannas are the only lizards with forked tongues. This adaptation allows them to sense fine odours and track their prey in a similar way to snakes.
- Bees have wings to fly from flower to flower to get their food. They have a strong 'shell' (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.

Examples of behaviours:

- Animal migration - Animal migration is an example of a behavioural adaptation. Grey whales migrate thousands of kilometres yearly, swimming from the cold Arctic Ocean to warmer waters near Mexico. Their calves are born in these warm waters, and they travel together to the nutrient-rich waters of the Arctic.
- Hibernation - Hibernation sees animals hide away in a secluded, sheltered place over the cold months of winter and then emerge when the spring comes to feed and breed.
- Hunting in groups - By hunting as a team, animals like wolves expend less energy when hunting.
- Acting dead - Some animals, like the North American opossum, pretend to be dead so other animals won't chase them.
- Living in groups - Many species of animals live in groups. Living in groups has many benefits, including warmth, sharing resources like shelter and food, sharing roles like rearing young, and company.