

Name: _____

Camouflaged Creatures

by Guy Belleranti

In nature, predators and prey seem to play a game of hide-and-seek. Prey need to hide, so predators do not find them and eat them. Predators need to hide too, so smaller prey cannot see them approaching. Some animals have special colors or marks on their bodies that help them hide among trees, rocks, and grass. This blending is called camouflage.



Can you see the green snake in this picture? The snake's shape and color help it hide among the green forest leaves.

The earth tone colors of deer and squirrels help them hide from predators among the browns of trees, bushes and soil. A brown squirrel can be difficult to see when it is scampering among brown autumn leaves. A brown deer can be overlooked when it is hiding between tree trunks. The deer and squirrel's special coloring help them hide from predators.



This owl sleeps during the day, so it does not want to be seen by other animals. Notice how its feather pattern and coloring match the tree trunk.

African lions have a tan body coloring. However, lions use it not to hide from predators, but to hide in savanna grasses while watching for prey. A lion can sneak up on prey without being seen more easily by blending into the grassy environment.

Another popular animal camouflage color is green. The green tree frogs of Australia blend in and hide from predators better because of their color. Green tree pythons and emerald boas, meanwhile, are more like lions, using their green color to blend in. When a likely meal (a rodent, bird or lizard) comes along these snakes strike quickly, catching the prey.



Is this polar bear camouflaged to protect itself from predators or to hunt prey?

The praying mantis takes things a step further. While its green to brown color helps it blend in with vegetation, the mantis also mimics the shape of a stem or leaf. The mantis uses these camouflage methods both to hide from predators like birds, frogs, snakes, spiders and bats, and to await prey such as insects (including other mantises!), spiders, hummingbirds, and small frogs and mice.



This praying mantis' body mimics its environment. It looks much like a leaf or twig. This type of blending is called mimicry.

Just as important as color camouflage and mimicry is pattern camouflage. Tiger stripes and leopard and jaguar spots are all patterns which help these cats hide among the plants and shadows when they search for prey.

In nature, hide-and-seek is a game of life and death. Pattern and color camouflage, and mimicry, can give predators and prey a survival advantage. Can you think of any other animals that have camouflage?



A tiger has vertical stripes that help to hide it among tall grass. This is pattern camouflage.

About the Author

Guy Belleranti works as a docent at Reid Park Zoo in Tucson, Arizona.

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1. How does a lion's special coloring help it survive?
 - a. It helps protect the lion from predators.
 - b. It helps the lion sneak up on predators without being heard.
 - c. It helps the lion hunt prey without being seen.
 - d. It makes the lion completely invisible.

2. Explain how a praying mantis uses more than just color to blend into its surroundings.

3. How does camouflage help a polar bear become a better predator?
 - a. It makes the polar bear more difficult to see in the woods.
 - b. It makes the polar bear more difficult to see on rocky ledges.
 - c. It makes the polar bear more difficult to see in a snowy environment.
 - d. It makes the polar bear more difficult to see underwater.

4. Read the following sentence from the article and choose the best definition for the underlined words.

The earth tone colors of deer and squirrels help them hide from predators.

- a. color of summer leaves
- b. color of the morning sky
- c. color of soil and ground
- d. color of the planet Earth

Challenge: Draw a picture of a scene in nature. Include several camouflaged animals in your picture.

ANSWER KEY

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1. How does a lion's special coloring help it survive? **c**
- a. It helps protect the lion from predators.
 - b. It helps the lion sneak up on predators without being herd.
 - c. **It helps the lion hunt prey without being seen.**
 - d. It makes the lion completely invisible.

2. Explain how a praying mantis uses more than just color to blend into its surroundings.

A praying mantis is shaped like a leaf or twig. This is called mimicry.

3. How does camouflage help a polar bear become a better predator? **c**
- a. It makes the polar bear more difficult to see in the woods.
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