

Classroom Displays

Principal Concept: Animal behaviors

Animals can be active at various times within a twenty-four hour period. The timing of activity by an animal depends on a number of environmental factors such as the risk of predation, the ability to gather food by sight, the temperature, and many others. Some creatures may adjust their activities depending on local competition. Different behaviors may occur at different times of the year when one or more of these factors may change.

Diurnal Display



Diurnal animals are active during the hours of daylight, with a period of sleeping, or other inactivity, at night. Many animal species are diurnal, for example many mammals (including humans), insects, reptiles and birds.

Cottontail Rabbit / Desert Cottontail (*Sylvilagus audubonii*)



- Life Span: about 5 years (in captivity)
- Mating season: year-round (promiscuous)
- Gestation Period: 30 days
- Litter Size: 2-6
- Litters per year: several

- Also known as Audubon's cottontail
- Does not dig its own burrow or den, but uses the burrows made by rodents
- Hides its young (blind at birth, altricial) in a shallow burrow or above ground
- Feeds mainly on grass but also takes many other plants, herbs, vegetables and cacti
- Survival strategies include zigzag running with speed of over 19mph, or against smaller predators slapping with front paw and nudging
- Like all cottontail rabbits, it has a rounded tail with white fur on the underside which is visible as it runs away
- Size: 13-17" (females slightly larger than males)
- Habitat: dry-near desert grasslands, but also less arid habitats

Spotted Towhee (*Pipilo maculatus*)



- Large sparrow with thick pointed bill, short neck and chunky body
- Males have jet black head and neck, black and white spotted wings and rufous sides
- Hops over ground beneath shrubs scratching in leaf litter for insects and fruit

- Prefers shrubby habitat with thick undergrowth
- In spring, the male spends 70-90% of its time singing to attract a mate
- Nests on the ground

Western Scrub-Jay (*Aphelocoma californica*)



- Distinguished by deep-blue above and brown back patch, white throat and long tail (Note: There are no Blue Jays in California)
- Common year-round resident. Important bird for oak woodlands (acorn dispersal)
- Very intelligent

Acorn Woodpecker (*Melanerpes formicivorus*)



- Distinguished by a “clown” face - glossy black above, black-yellow-white face, red crown; large white patches in wings seen in flight
- Very noisy, very social - nests in communal groups
- A community of Acorn Woodpeckers care for the nestlings.
- Year-round resident; this is our “signature” bird

- Stores acorns in conspicuous “granary” trees (or utility poles). Sallies after flying insects and forages for ants on the ground

Cooper’s Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*)



- Distinguished by long rounded tail (white band at tip of tail) and reddish barring on chest (see one in classroom)
- Ambushes birds (often seen at bird feeders)
- Fairly common year-round resident
- Flies with quick wing-beats

- Confused sometimes with Sharp-shinned Hawk (shorter, square tail) – a winter visitor

Botta’s Pocket Gopher (*Thomomys bottae*)



- Life Span: 3 years
- Mating season: any time
- Gestation Period: 18-19 days
- Litter Size: 3-4 average
- Litters per year: 3

- Also known as Valley Pocket Gopher, particularly in California
- Strictly herbivorous, feeding on a variety of plant matter
- Spends 90% of its life in its burrow
- Active for a total of about nine hours each day (most of its time feeding in its burrow)
- Burrows include multiple deep chambers for nesting, food storage, and defecation
- Considered a pest in urban and agricultural areas due to its burrowing habit but also beneficial as its burrows are a key source of aeration for soils
- Size: 7-11” including 2-2.5” tail (male larger)
- Habitat: forests, woodlands

Gopher Snake (*Pituophis catenifer*)



- Most commonly seen snake in California
- Primarily active during the day
- Harmless non-venomous constrictor
- Diet consist of gophers, other small mammals, birds, eggs, lizards and even bats

- May adopt a defensive posture of puffing itself up and assuming a viper like striking pose
- As additional defensive response it may shake its tail rapidly in the dirt resulting in a buzzing noise which mimics a rattlesnake rattle

California Quail (*Callipepla californica*; female. Female's topknot is smaller and straight; a male bird is seen in museum)



- Distinguished by curved black topknot, plump gray ground bird, belly is scaled with white, black throat outlined in white
- Its call is *waaw* and *Chi-ca-go*. Flocks give sharp *pit, pit* calls

- A ground feeder of seeds and insects (scratching with feet). Male watches as "sentry"
- Clutches are large - 12 or more seen in spring
- California's State Bird
- Common resident in chaparral

California Newt (*Taricha torosa*)



- A newt that lives under leaf litter, logs and rock crevasses
- Breeds in ponds or slow moving water
- Exudes a potent neurotoxin on its skin that is hundreds of times more toxic than cyanide
- California newt is dangerous only when eaten

- Very few predators. The most common predator is the Garter snake.
- Eats worms, snails, slugs, mosquito larvae, crickets, and other invertebrates
- Populations have been greatly reduced due to introduced invasive species.

Western Fence Lizard (*Sceloporus occidentalis*)



- Brown to black in color with black stripes on back
- Occupies varied habitats
- Diet include spiders, beetles and grasshoppers
- Has blue belly
- Female may lay one to three clutches of eggs (usually 8) in breeding season
- Goes through a period of hibernation

Crepuscular Display



Crepuscular animals are active primarily during twilight which is the period before dawn and after dusk. However, some crepuscular animals may also be active on a moonlit night or during an overcast day.

Bobcat (*Lynx rufus*)



- Life Span: 7 years average (25 years in captivity)
- Mating season: early spring
- Gestation Period: 60-70 days
- Litter Size: 3 average
- Litters per year: 2-3

- Large-footed cat with short ear tufts and a black-tipped, stubby tail, from which it derives its name
- Territorial and largely solitary (hunts alone and mainly at dusk and dawn by stalking its prey and then ambushing it with a short chase or pounce)
- Sharp hearing and vision, good sense of smell; excellent climber
- Favorite prey is rabbits, but can also take rats, mice, squirrels, other mammals, birds, insects, and even frogs
- Size: 19-49.5" without tail (male larger than female), twice as large as domestic cat
- Habitat: brushy or rocky country, forest, woodlands, swamps, farmlands, and deserts

Virginia Opossum (*Didelphis virginiana*)



- Life Span: 2 years (up to 4 in captivity)
- Mating season: Jan - Oct
- Gestation Period: 13 days
- Litter Size: 20-30 young born, but 7-9 average may survive (female has only 13 teats)
- Litters per year: 1-3

- Clumsy animal with long, naked tail; long pointed snout; large, hairless ears
- Only pouched mammal (marsupial) in North America
- Introduced into the West during the Great Depression (probably as source of food)
- Solitary, omnivorous, mainly nocturnal animal but can also be crepuscular
- Reacts to threats by feigning death ("playing possum"): involuntary reaction to pretend to be dead or injured which is triggered by extreme fear
- Young born very small (size of bumble bee), crawl into mother's pouch and remain there for about 2 months
- 50 teeth (more than any North American mammal)
- Size: 13-33" without tail (tail 8.5-11")
- Habitat: woodlands, thickets, farmlands, and residential areas

Nocturnal Display



Nocturnal animals are active during the night and sleep during the day. These creatures generally have highly developed senses of hearing, smell, and specially adapted eyesight. Such traits can help avoid predators or gather food better.

Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*)



- Distinguished by coloration: pale buffy, gray and white owl with dark eyes and heart-shaped face with no "ear" tufts (think Catori)
- Fairly common (but secretive) year-round resident
- Has exceptionally keen hearing; can locate rodents and other prey in total darkness

- Commonly heard call is a rasping screech, often heard in flight

Gray Fox (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*)



- Life Span: 10 years (in captivity)
- Mating season: Feb - Mar
- Gestation Period: about 53 days
- Litter Size: 1-7
- Litters per year: 1

- Large fox with pointed ears, white on throat, reddish below and on sides of neck (lacks the "black stockings" of the Red Fox)
- Skillful at climbing trees to feed on bird's eggs and to escape predators (no other American canid can do this)
- Monogamous, omnivorous, solitary hunter; primarily eats rodents, rabbits
- Nocturnal or crepuscular
- Size: 31-44" total length (males slightly smaller than females)
- Habitat: forests, woodlands, and thickets

California Mountain Kingsnake (*Lampropeltis zonata*)



- Red, white and black bands with the red band surrounded by the black bands
- Average length: 2-2.5'
- Found in diverse habitats
- Normally active at temperature between 55-85°F

- Secretive, spending most of its time underground or in rock crevices
- Eats lizards, small mammals, nestling birds, bird eggs, amphibians

Mountain Lion (*Felis concolor*)



- Life Span: 8-10 average (20 years in captivity)
- Mating season: any time
- Gestation Period: 88-97 days
- Litter Size: 1-6 (average 2)
- Litters per year: <1 a year

- Prays mainly on large mammals, especially deer, but supplement its diet with insects and other small animals (ambush predator, solitary hunter)
- Both nocturnal and crepuscular (most active around dawn and dusk)
- Territorial; silent animal with minimal communication (cannot roar)
- Size: 6.5-8' total length
- Habitat: mountain forests, desert hills, and swamps

Striped Skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*)



- Life Span: 8-10 years in captivity
- Mating season: Feb - Mar
- Gestation Period: 59-77 days
- Litter Size: 2-10 average
- Litters per year: 1

- Stocky, short-legged mammal with bushy tail; forefeet armed with 5 long, curved claws adapted for digging
- Polygamous omnivore (primarily insectivore) with few natural predators
- Docile animal, acting out a series of warnings before spraying: 2 scent glands with each 15ml of musk (consist of a sulphur-alcohol compound) can be sprayed at a distance of several feet (this can cause intense pain and temporary blindness)
- Size: 22-32" (male larger than female in most areas)
- Habitat: woodlands, plains, deserts, and residential areas