

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, including mammals, insects, reptiles and birds.

Cottontail Rabbit / Desert Cottontail (*Sylvilagus audubonii*)



- Life Span: about 2 years (5 years in captivity)
- Mating season: year-round (promiscuous)
- Gestation Period: 30 days
- Litter Size: 2-6 kits
- 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. Against smaller predators, slapping with front paws 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

Cooper's Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*)



- Distinguished by long rounded tail (white band at tip of tail) and reddish barring on chest
- Ambushes birds (often seen at bird feeders)
- Fairly common year-round resident
- Flies with quick wing-beats
- About size of a crow. Nests in large trees

- 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 pups
- 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 consists 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. A male bird is seen in the Interpretive Center)



- Male is distinguished by curved black throat and face outlined boldly in white; short tail and teardrop-shaped crest
- Female topknot is smaller; body is a drab brown with white scaling on belly

- Its call is *waaw waaw* and *chi-ca-go*. Coveys 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 year-round resident in chaparral. In fall, quail form large coveys of 30-40 birds (in spring, covey disperses)

California Newt (*Taricha torosa*)



- A gray/orange 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*)



- Common lizard that is mottled brown to black with black stripes on back and bright blue bellies (absent in females); change of color during thermoregulation
 - Diurnal and commonly seen sunning themselves on rocks, etc.
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- Eats spiders and insects such as beetles, mosquitoes, grasshoppers
 - Hibernates during winter; emergence depends on climate; lifespan under optimal conditions is 5 years
 - Females lay 1-3 clutches of 3-17 eggs (usually 8) between April and July; the eggs hatch in August

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: usually 3 kittens
- 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: up to 20 joeys, but average 8-9 (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 especially adapted eyesight. Such traits can help avoid predators and 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
- 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; does not hoot
- Most widely distributed species of owl

Gray Fox (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*)



- Life Span: 6-10 years
- Mating season: Feb - Mar
- Gestation Period: about 53 days
- Litter Size: 1-7 kits
- 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*)



- Life Span: 10-15 years (20 years in captivity)
- Red, white and black cross-bands with the red band surrounded by the black bands
- Average length: 2-2.5’
- Found in diverse habitats – moist woods, chaparral
- 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
- Harmless (not venomous), a constrictor
- Clutch of 3-9 eggs, laid June-July and hatch in 50-65 days
- In state of torpor during cold weather

Hoary Bat (*Lasiurus cinereus*)



- Life Span: 6-7 years (projected)
- Mating season: Autumn (delayed fertilization)
- Gestation Period: 40 days (altricial)
- Litter Size: 1-4 (usually 2) pups
- Litters per year: 1

- Named for its frosty appearance, due to white fur tips (excellent camouflage)
- Migratory with a huge range, from Northern Canada's tree line to Central America
- High wind turbine mortality
- Exceptional flight mobility; able to bite insect prey from behind, taking the thorax and abdomen while leaving behind the less-appealing wings and head
- Usually solitary, roosting in tree foliage by day
- Eats up to 40% its weight in a single feeding period (prefers moths)

Mountain Lion (*Felis concolor*)



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

- Preys mainly on large mammals, especially deer, but supplements its diet with insects and other small animals (ambush predator, solitary hunter)
- Both nocturnal and crepuscular (most active around dawn and dusk)
- Territorial; stealthy animal with minimal communication
- Size: 6.5-8' total length
- Habitat: mountain forests, desert hills, and swamps
- Biggest cat in North America. Also known as Cougar, Catamount, Panther, Puma

Striped Skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*)



- Life Span: about 7 years (8-10 years in captivity)
- Mating season: Feb - Mar
- Gestation Period: 59-77 days
- Litter Size: 2-10 kits
- 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, acts out a series of warnings before spraying: 2 scent glands (each containing 15ml of musk) can be accurately 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

Raccoon (*Procyon lotor*)



- Life Span: 2-3 years (14-20 in captivity)
- Mating season: Feb – Mar
- Gestation Period: 63 days
- Litter Size: 2-7 kits
- Litters per year: one

- One of North America's most versatile and adaptable animals
- A mammal that lives throughout much of the world
- Expert climber and skilled swimmer; stands easily on hind legs
- Primarily nocturnal; quite intelligent
- An omnivore – eats acorns, walnuts, fruit, fish, crayfish, aquatic foods, amphibians
- Often dens in hollow oak trees and rock crevices
- Size: body length 26-40 inches, weight 11-57 lbs
- Recognized by its "bandit's mask"
- Habitat: forests, woodlands, residential areas, especially near water