

Colorful Critters

with Snapshot Wisconsin



Welcome to Colorful Critters!

1. View collections of animal photos with something in common about their appearance (their **color** or their **patterns**)
2. As a group, have a discussion as to why the animals may be this color or pattern.
3. View examples of Wisconsin critters. See how many you recognize!
4. As a group, take a fun quiz to test what you have learned.

- What do all of these animals have in common?
- Why do you think these animals look like this?

Hint: how easy is it to see these animals?



Camouflage

What do all of these animals have in common?

Some species use their patterns and colors to blend in with their surroundings! This may last throughout their entire life, only while they are young, or even just for certain seasons of the year.

Why do you think these animals look like this?

When animals are able to blend in with their surroundings, it is less likely that predators may find them and eat them for a snack.

Camouflage Example: Patterns

Young deer (called fawns) are born with white polka dots to help them blend in with the plants and grass when they lay down! As the fawn grows older, these white dots disappear and their coats become darker brown.

Similarly, the feathers on grouse allow them to blend in perfectly on the forest floor!

Can you spot the bird in the lower photo?



Camouflage Example: Colors

Snowshoe hare are a great example of using color for camouflage. When seasons change, so does their color!

In the winter, their coats turn bright **white** to blend in with the snow. When the weather warms up, they go back to their **brown** coats (just like the forest floor!)

Do you think that animals in the southern United States do this?



- What do all of these animals have in common?
- Why do you think these animals look like this?

Hint: do these critters look like you should approach them?



Warning

What do all of these animals have in common?

Animals may use colors or patterns as a warning sign to others.



Why do you think these animals look like this?

They may be warning their predators saying, “don’t mess with me!” or even warning other individuals of the same species that there is danger nearby.

Warning Example: Patterns

“Flagging” refers to when deer lift up their tails and show their white bottom pattern.

There are two reasons that deer flag:

1. Warn other deer that danger is nearby.
2. Tell predators that they know they are near by - and that they will run away if they come too close!



Warning Example: Colors

Bright colors can be used to warn predators, “you’ll regret if you try to eat me!”

Honey bees use their **yellow** and **black** stripes to warn predators that they can sting them. Monarch butterflies use their **orange** coloration to warn predators that they are poisonous to eat!

Can you think of any other brightly colored bugs? Reptiles?



- What do all of these animals have in common?
- Why do you think these animals look like this?

Hint: why would an animal want to be visible?

Source: All About Birds



Source: Kevin T. Karlson



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Attract Mates

What do all of these animals have in common?

For certain species, especially in birds, **bright colors** or **fancy feathers** are attractive to the other gender.

Why do you think these animals look like this?

It depends what gender, male or female, is responsible for attracting their mate. If males are responsible, they may be bright or decorated! If females are responsible, they will be the bright or decorated bird.

Attract Mates Example: Colors

One gender may be more brightly colored than the other, or even a completely different color!

For Northern cardinals, because males attract the females they are bright red. Female Northern cardinals don't need to be brightly colored. They are often a mix of red and brown.

Can you spy the female cardinal?



Attract Mates Example: Patterns

Ruffed grouse are named after the black “ruff” of neck feathers that only males have. Males use these feathers to attract females.

For other birds, both genders may have these decorative feathers! Can you think of a Wisconsin bird like this? **Hint: *gobble gobble!***



Male Ruffed grouse



Female Ruffed grouse

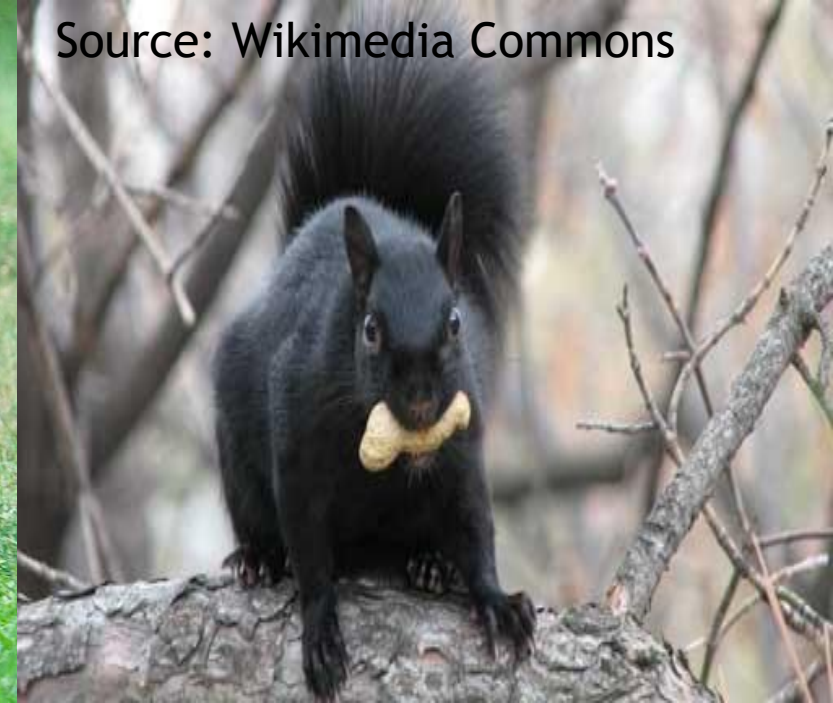
- What do all of these animals have in common?
- Why do you think these animals look like this?

Hint: do they normally look like this?

Source: FeederWatch



Source: Wikimedia Commons



Source: R.M. Buquoi

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→ Oops!

What do all of these animals have in common?

Sometimes animals are not the same color as their conspecifics (individuals of the same species)!

Why do you think these animals look like this?

There are several reasons why animals may be a different color. Maybe it is genetics, or maybe it is what they eat!

Oops Example: Leucism

Pronounced “LOO-SIZ-EM”, leucism is a condition where animals have color that is pale, white, or patchy!

This is because their bodies are not able to produce the certain colors. Leucitic animals stay this color their entire lives.

Melanism causes the opposite effect, where animals are darker than usual!



Oops Example: Diet

Are you what you eat? For some animals - kind of! Northern flickers have **yellow** on their feather in Wisconsin, but these birds have been found with **red** on their feathers elsewhere!

This is because some flickers eat honeysuckle berries that make their feathers **change colors**.

Source: <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2016/10/birds-change-colors-flickers-honeysuckles/>



Quiz Time!

Using what you have learned, work with your classmates to make your best guess for the reasons behind the coloring of these critters!

A quick review:

- Camouflage
- Warning
- Attract Mates
- Oops!

Why is the pigeon this color or pattern?



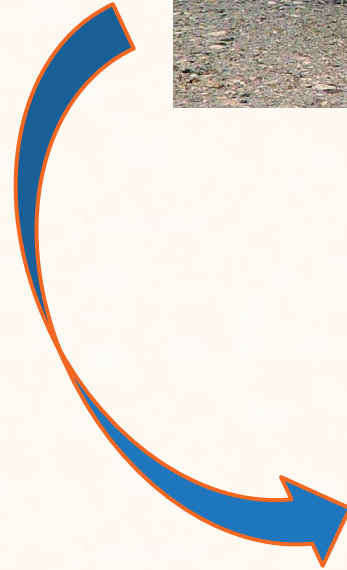
Source: Howcheng, Wikipedia

Hint: think of a pigeon! Is it normally this color?

Oops!

This bird is leucitic, meaning that it cannot produce the colors of most pigeons (like the bottom photo!)

Remember the opossum earlier? This can happen to many species!



Why is the weasel this color or pattern?



Hint: What season does this look like?

Camouflage!

Weasels will happily blend in with the snow in the winter if it means they are less likely to be eaten!



Why is the skunk this color or pattern?



Hint: How nice would you smell after being behind this skunk?

Warning!

These fierce animals use their bold black and white color to warn animals.

The goal is to save the energy from spraying their “weapon” by warning predators to stay away before they come too close!

