

There are many ways to group animals.

There are animals that live on land,
some that live in water and
some that inhabit both.

One of these groups is called mammals.

Mammal. A warm-blooded animal with vertebrae
and the distinguishing characteristics of...

hair or fur,

females that produce milk for their young,
and females generally giving birth

to live young. Fun fact: Only two
species of old-world mammals lay eggs.

The duck-billed platypus and the echidna.

Human beings are also
part of the mammal group.

Within the mammal group there
are predators and prey,
and some may even fall into both groups.

Predator. An animal that
hunts and eats other animals.

Prey. Animals that are hunted
and eaten by other animals.

Animals hunt or forage for their food,
while plants get their food through
the process of photosynthesis.

All the food each creature consumes
becomes the energy that is needed for
that creature to survive in the wild.

In addition to food,

predators and prey need fresh air,
clean water, and plenty of
space to build their shelter.

The main difference between
predators and prey is in what they
eat and how they get their food.

Each predator has hunting behaviors
and physical characteristics that
make them successful hunters.

Hunters find their food either
alone or in groups, for example,
kit foxes will search for their food alone,
while wolves will hunt in packs to
increase their chances of hunting prey
that also hang out in groups such as deer.

Fun fact, deer groups are called herds.

Predators have sharp senses to
help them hunt successfully.

For example, big cats like lynx
and mountain lions use stealth
and speed to catch their prey and
excellent eyesight to spot their
prey even when it's dark out.

Other predators, like coyotes have
amazing ears so they can hear even
the quickest movements of their
rodent prey moving beneath them.

Bears have a very advanced sense of smell,

which helps them hunt animals and even find dead prey or carrion that has been left behind by other predators.

Finally, all mammalian predators have sharp teeth and claws to help them eat and grab onto their prey.

Hunt like a predator.

Imagine that you are a predator.

What hunting behaviors would you apply?

What physical characteristics would you have to help you find prey?

Make a list of all your predator qualities, or draw what you'd look like! Share with your peers.

Each prey species also has a specific set of characteristics and behaviors to avoid being eaten by predators such as sharp eyesight, good hearing, a strong sense of smell, and ways to warn members of their group when danger is present.

For example, prairie dogs adapt to survive by living in groups, hiding in their underground burrows, and using warning calls or barks to alert other members of their group when a predator is nearby.

White-tailed deer have great ears and will warn members of their

group when they sense danger by
flagging or exposing the white
part of their tail and backside.

Some mammals can be difficult
to spot in the wild,
but you can find signs such
as scat (poop) or tracks to show
you where they have been.

Compare the tracks.

Look at your hands.

Look at the tracks of
these predators and prey.

How are they different from each other?

How are they similar?

How do they compare to your hands?

Write down your answers.

Share with your peers.

The next time you visit a National
Wildlife Refuge, keep these tips in mind
for observing mammals and other wildlife.

Start your observation early in the day,
most wildlife is active earlier in the day.

Bring ID guides and a pair of
binoculars to get close up views.

Some visitor centers have binoculars
and guides you can borrow.

Be very still, quiet and
patient when observing wildlife.

It might take some time
before you spot anything,
and when you do keep a safe distance.

Look for animal signs such as
biofacts like scat or tracks
to see where wildlife has been.

Now you're ready to observe wildlife!