

# Watching Wildlife



Have you ever taken a really close look at some of the animals that live in your neighborhood? If you do, you'll discover many interesting things about them.

## 1. Animal Architects

Many animals make homes or nests from paper, twigs, or wax. Find some animal homes in your neighborhood. Don't disturb these homes by touching them. Try to figure out what each is made of and which animal made it.

To find out what kinds of building materials the animals in your area like, try this:

1. Collect hair from a hairbrush, cotton balls, short pieces of string or yarn, and scraps of paper and cloth.
2. Place these items on a tray. Leave the tray outside on the ground. Or place the items in a mesh bag and hang the bag from a tree branch or other object.
3. Observe which animals collect the different building materials. (Spring is an especially good time to do this—do you know why?)

## 2. Animal Talk

You probably know what a dog means when it wags its tail or growls. A lot of animals use their bodies and their voices to communicate how they feel. Learn what some of the birds and other animals in your neighborhood mean when they chatter, flutter their wings, or shake their tails.

## 3. A New Wardrobe

Many animals change the color of their feathers or fur with the seasons. Pick some animals that you can see year-round in your community.

Birds, for example, are pretty easy to observe almost anywhere. Keep a watch on the animals you have chosen to see if they change color from one season to the next.

## 4. Earthworm Observations

How do earthworms move? How do they feel things? Can they see? Find out the answers to these questions by observing earthworms.

Here's what you'll need:

- Earthworms (from your backyard or a pet supply store).
  - Paper towels.
  - Water.
  - Magnifying glass.
  - Flashlight.
1. Wet the paper towel. Put an earthworm on the paper towel and observe how it moves. Earthworms breathe through their moist skin. If they dry up, they'll die—so keep the worm and paper towel moist!
  2. Can you tell which end has the head?
  3. Lightly touch the earthworm's back and belly. Do you feel a difference? Can you see a difference with the magnifying glass?
  4. Shine the flashlight on the head end and the tail end of the earthworm. What happens? Do you think that earthworms can see light?

After you finish, make sure you put the earthworm where it will have soil to dig in. A park, backyard, or garden is a great place for earthworms.

## 5. Ant Adventure

Ants are very interesting animals. They live together in a group called a *colony*. All of the ants in a colony work to keep their nest healthy and safe. Some ants raise the young, some gather food, some defend the nest. Learn more about this very hard-working little insect by doing this activity.

You will need:

- Cookie, cracker, or bread crumbs.
  - Magnifying glass, if you have one.
1. Look for ants in the cracks of a sidewalk, along the bases of buildings, or in a park.
  2. Place some crumbs near an ant and see what it does.
  3. Try using different kinds of crumbs to see if ants like one kind better than another. Does your ant tell other ants about the food it found? How can you tell?

## 6. Outdoor Shopping

When you need food, you go to a grocery store with a list. Wild animals need food, too, but they find the food they need in nature. Make believe that wild animals make a list of groceries when they search for food. Pick two of the animals in the list below and make a grocery list for each. Make sure to observe these animals for a few days before you make each list.

- Squirrel.
- Bird.
- Caterpillar.
- Deer.
- Raccoon.
- Butterfly.
- Fish.
- Dragonfly.
- Garter snake.
- Turtle.
- Ant.
- Spider.
- Rabbit.
- Earthworm.

# Try It!