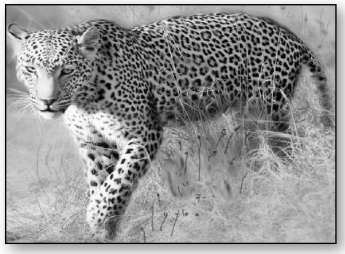
Camouflage

What Is Camouflage?

Animals have many different ways of surviving: amazing eyesight, hearing, sense of smell, speed, strength, tusks, claws, sharp teeth and more. Many also merge with their surroundings and become almost invisible.



Whether it is a creature hunting other animals or one that is potential food for larger animals, camouflage is useful. Here are some of their methods.

Blending In

A common method found in nature is **background matching**, where, for example, the Arctic fox's white fur matches the colour of the snowy wasteland of its hunting territory. Various brown, speckled moths are able to rest on tree bark without being seen. The mountain hare, a grey-brown colour in summer, blending in with the heather-covered moors of Scotland, changes to white to merge with the snow in winter. So, in some cases, the appearance of animals is fixed; in others, it will vary with the changing seasons.

Some animals have **confusing colour patterns**. The effect is to make their outline difficult to detect. These could be stripes, spots or blotches. Good examples are the zebra's stripes, the leopard's spots and the splashes of colour you often find among fish.

Mimicry

This method belongs to the animal impersonators, such as hoverflies whose stripes make them look like wasps. Wasps have a sting for use against attackers; hoverflies pretend they have. Being striped like a wasp is a kind of disguise. To be able to mimic a more dangerous or poisonous creature will put off predators. For example, the non-poisonous scarlet king snake looks like the poisonous coral snake. A number of other creatures don't just blend in with their surroundings; they look exactly like them. Examples are leaf-shaped insects, stick insects that look like twigs, and some seahorses that look like coral.

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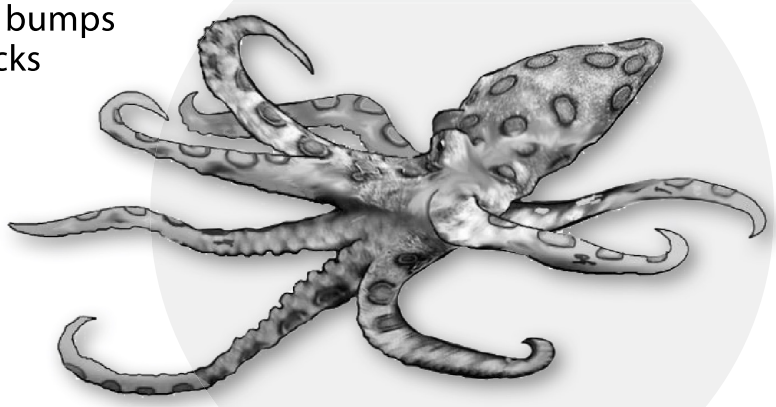
The Experts

Chameleons of the Sea

Some amazing creatures, like the chameleon, are able to match the changing colours of their background. The experts in nature are to be found among octopuses, squid and cuttlefish. Special colour-changing cells close to the surface of their skin enable octopuses, for example, to alter their colour to match their surroundings. Remarkably, they can also change the texture of their skin into bumps and ridges that resemble rocks and coral. In addition, the tiny but deadly blue-ringed octopus of the Pacific and Indian Oceans produces shimmering blue rings all over its body to warn nearby predators that it might be small, but is not to be tangled with!



No wonder these marine animals have been called 'the chameleons of the sea.'