

Animal Habitats

Junior *aMUSE* badge

Imagine meeting a monkey or kicking up dust with a kangaroo. These animals live in the wild, so we don't get to spend time with them in their natural homes – their habitats. But that doesn't mean we can't find out more about where they live, how they play, and how we can help them!

Steps

1. Find out about wild animals
2. Investigate an animal habitat
3. Create an animal house
4. Explore endangered habitats
5. Help protect animal habitats

Purpose

When I've earned this badge, I'll know more about wild animals and how to protect their homes.

Step 1 Find out about wild animals

Wild animals may seem very different from your pets at home, but at one time, all animals were wild!

CHOICES – DO ONE:

Observe a pet or tame animal for at least 15 minutes. Write at least three things about how it behaves. Then watch a show about an animal related to the one you observed. (If you watched a dog, you might watch a show about wolves.) Which behaviors do the wild and tame animal share? Which are different?

OR

Make a skit or puppet show about the wild animals at a campground or on the trail. Include what to do if you encounter them so that both you and the animals stay safe!

OR

List wild animals near your home meeting place, or school. Survey the area with an adult and your Junior friends. Then pick three animals you saw and learn more about each one. Why do they live here? Do they interact with humans?

More to Explore

Pretend you're a Girl Scout in 1980. As girls did to earn their Hobbies and Pets badge, find out why these six animals would not make good pets: wolf, deer, raccoon, monkey, baby alligator, skunk.

Step 2 Investigate an animal habitat

Once habitat can contain lots of different animals – you might think of it as a city in the wild kingdom. Team up with an adult to visit one.

CHOICES – DO ONE:

Visit a zoo or animal sanctuary. When there, choose a particular habitat, like a beach, jungle, or desert. With help from the staff answer these questions for each of five animals that live in that habitat.

- In what country is the animal naturally found?
- How does its fur or skin help the animal live in this habitat?
- How does it stay clean?
- How does it get around in this habitat?
- What kind of food can it find in this habitat?

OR

Explore an animal habitat near where you live. It could be part of a park, forest, beach, or desert. Figure out what the animals you see have in common. First, make a list of each one's features. Circle the things the animals share, then, trade ideas about why they have each feature with your friends. Some features you might list: type of fur or skin, paw, tail, coloring, kinds of legs, mouth, and ears.

OR

Make a habitat collage. Scientists use habitats to group animals by things they all share. Cut out 15 – 20 pictures of wild animals from old magazines. Group the animal by habitat. Then group them by how they look, how they move, or how they bear their young. Did your groups change? Discuss the groupings with your Junior friends - and make up ways to group animals.

Step 3 Create an animal house

You've watched how animals use their habitats and thought about why they live in that area - now take a look at the houses they build in their habitats. Each habitat has unique challenges for animal builders!

CHOICES - DO ONE:

Check out baby-animal habitats. Find out how different animal parents care for their babies and make "homes" for them. You could read about how Emperor penguins hold a chick under a special flap in chilly Antarctic temperatures or how an orangutan mother builds new nests for her and her baby every day. Draw or paint a picture of your favorite animal pair.

FOR MORE FUN: Use a computer program to turn your picture into a screensaver and add a fun fact about the animals to share with family or friends who use that computer.

OR

Make your own animal house. Meerkats live in large underground burrows with several entrances. Beavers make dome-shaped homes called lodges with branches and mud - and they usually have an underwater entrance. Research these animal homes and try sketching your own meerkat burrow or building your own beaver lodge from sticks and mud. Share your "home" with others and explain how and why it works.

OR

Insulate your own "nest." Many animals use insulation to keep their homes cool in hot temperatures or warm in the cold. They may line a nest with feathers or burrow into snow or mud to hold in body heat. Try this experiment:

1. Mix a package of Jell-O. Before it sets, put part of the liquid into a small container with a lid or sealed top, like a baby food jar or resealable plastic bag. Pour the rest into a mixing bowl.
2. Insulate the small container the way an animal might insulate its nest. You could bury the container in leaves and sticks in the yard or use materials in your house, like socks, to burrow it.
3. Keep the container in its warm, insulated place while the mixing bowl with the rest of the Jell-O stays out in the air - in the same area as your "nest" container.
4. When the bowl of Jell-O has set (gotten firm), uncover and check your "nest." If it's still liquid, you'll know your insulation would have kept the animals inside warm. If it set, try building your animal home again!
5. Share what happened with your Junior friends, and talk about the "warmest" nest designs. What made them work well? What materials didn't work as well?

Step 4 Explore endangered habitats

When the animals no longer have their habitat, they have to adapt to a new place to live. Some animals can't change, and end up becoming endangered. Answer these questions about one of the endangered animal habitats below.

- Why is it in danger?
- What is happening to the animals?
- What are people doing to help the habitat?
- Are the animals able to adapt?

CHOICES - DO ONE:

The Arctic Circle.

OR

The Gulf of Mexico

OR

The Amazon rain forest

More to Explore

Pretend you're a Girl Scout in 1963. As girls did to earn their Conservation badge, list the birds and fur-bearing animals that are protected by laws in your state.

Step 5 Help protect animal habitats

You can take steps to help protect animals' homes and prevent them from becoming endangered.

CHOICES - DO ONE:

Wildlife awareness party. Choose an endangered animal. Dress up like the animal for a party with your Junior friends and tell your story: where you live, why your home is endangered, and how others can help. If there's an organization that protects your habitat, share its name and mission. It's a party because it's positive: The more you know about how to help, the more you can do!

For More Fun: Invite younger Girl Scouts to your party.

OR

Create a background habitat. Get permission from your family to make a habitat in your yard, or ask a school, neighbor or someone who owns land nearby to allow you to create one. Research and then carry out a landscape plan that is best for wildlife in the area. Record the wildlife you attract and their behavior. (The Audubon Society has some good resources to get you started.)

OR

Help clean up an animal habitat. Many times trash and litter destroy animal habitats and harm animal. With your Girl Scout sisters ask an expert to recommend an area that needs cleaning - woods, stream, beach, city park. Get permission to spend a few hours making it nicer for our animal friends.

More to Explore

Re-create an oil spill. Oil spills have affected both the Gulf of Mexico and the Arctic Circle. Find out how hard they can be to clean up by creating your own. Fill a pan or bowl with water and add cooking oil. Try different ways of cleaning up the oil: gathering it into one place using string, skimming it off with a spoon, or soaking it up with paper towels or cotton balls. What else could you use? What works best? How do scientists try to clean up real oil spills?

Add the Badge to Your Journey

As you are earning this badge, talk to a woman who is an animal-habitat expert in your area. Try the zoo, federal or state parks, or an environmental or conservation organization. Ask her what she likes about the role she plays, and add her to your casting call log.

Not that I've earned this badge, I can give service by:

- Educating others about organizations that protect endangered animal habitats
- Making a poster to share at school about how to treat wild animals on the playground
- Organizing a local habitat-cleanup day

I'm inspired to.