

Alaska's Wild Wonders – Predator vs. Prey

Vocabulary List

adaptation – the process by which a species becomes better suited to the environment it lives in over many generations; a feature that helps an organism (animal) survive in a particular environment

behavior – anything an animal does or how an animal acts, like moving, eating, or playing. Most behaviors help an animal or their young survive.

bills – for birds (and other animals like turtles and platypuses), a modified jaw with a hard outside layer made of keratin, also called a beak. Birds use bills for eating, grooming, communication, and nest-building.

bivalves – an aquatic invertebrate (animal with no backbone) with a soft body enclosed in two shells. Examples: clams, oysters, mussels, and scallops.

blubber - the layer of fat under the skin of marine mammals. Blubber helps marine mammals stay warm, float, and store energy from the food they eat.

boreal forest - the forest found in cold and dry northern areas of the world made up of trees like spruce and birch.

breathing holes – in relation to ice on a body of water, where aquatic animals like seals come up for air.

calf – a baby or young ungulate, such as a caribou or moose (under one year old)

calving grounds area where female caribou traditionally come to give birth to their calves in late May and early June (caribou herds are identified by the area where they calve because that is distinctive to each herd)

camouflage – animal coloring or patterning (or, rarely, behavior) that provides a disguise from predators.

carnivore/carnivorous - an animal that mostly eats meat.

depth perception - the ability to see objects in three dimensions, including their size and how far away they are.

diversity - the variety of living things that fill different jobs or niches in an ecosystem.

DNA – DNA stands for deoxy-ribonucleic-acid, which is what carries all the genetic information inside of animal cells that decides how a living thing will look and work, like a recipe or blueprint.

echolocation – a sonar system in which an animal (such as bats or marine mammals) makes specific sounds that bounce off objects and return to them, allowing them to use sound to detect prey animals or obstacles; echolocation is using sound to map what surrounds them.

ecosystems – a community of living things and its nonliving surroundings linked together by the flow of energy and by nutrient exchange

ewes – an adult female (mother) sheep

food webs – many interconnecting food chains; a food chain is the transfer of food energy from living things at one nutritional level to those in another. In a simple food chain, for example, a mammal ate a bird that ate an insect that ate a plant.

herbivore/herbivorous – an animal that mostly eats plants.

interactions – the relationships and connections between different living things

invertebrate – an animal without a spine/backbone (examples include insects, spiders, crabs, jellyfish, clams, among many others)

keystone species – a species (animal, plant, bacteria, fungi) on which other species depend, or that keeps the whole ecosystem healthy by playing a large role in how the ecosystem functions.

lair – a secret hidden home or resting place of an animal

lambs – a baby or young sheep (under one year old)

larvae – the young of some animals (like insects and frogs) that undergo dramatic physical changes before they take their adult form.

marine – found in or made by the ocean (i.e. marine animals live in the ocean)

migration/migratory - a regular, seasonal movement of an animal from one place on earth to another

omnivore/omnivorous - an animal that eats both meat and plants.

physical tools – we are using the word “tools” in this issue to mean body parts that animals use to survive like claws, fins, and wings, among others.

population – a group of the same species of animal that are living in the same area at the same time.

population fluctuations – changes in the number of animals in a population over time due to births, deaths, animals coming from other populations, or animals leaving for another population.

pounce – when a predator suddenly jumps or swoops to catch prey

predator – animals that must eat other animals (prey) to survive and reproduce

prey – animals that are hunted and eaten by other animals (predators)

probe – to physically explore, poke, examine, or search for something with an instrument. A shorebird uses its bill to find food in the sand or soil, for example.

raptors – a carnivorous bird that hunts and kills other animals for food such as eagles, hawks, falcons, and owls.

scavenge – to eat animals that are already dead when found

sea ice – frozen seawater that mostly floats on the surface of the ocean and has a large role in regulating the climate of the earth.

senses – something animals use to learn about the world around them, including sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell.

shorebird – a bird that is often found along shoreline and needs to be near bodies of water to survive.

songbird – a bird that makes musical sounds to communicate and has special body parts to make those sounds.

specialize – to focus on one thing, like a predator that only hunts one or very few species of prey.

stopover sites – a place where animals stop, rest, and eat, especially during long migrations.

subdue – to bring under control, when a predator catches and controls prey.

subnivean zone - a space between the ground and snow cover where small mammals live during winter

subspecies – a specific and separate group of animals within a species that might look different or live in a different place. For example – Alexander Archipelago wolves are a subspecies of gray wolves.

terrain – the natural shape and features of land (flat, hilly, mountainous, steep, gradual, etc.)

ungulates – mammals with hooves, or curved coverings made of horn that protect the toes that are comparable to a nail or claw on other animals. Examples of ungulates include caribou, deer, and moose, among others.