

Critter Camouflage

Overview:

Animals have evolved many clever defenses from the predators that might want to turn them into a snack—or to hide from the prey they hope to turn into a snack! In this activity, you can check out some of the ways different creatures have developed to hide themselves. How quickly can you spot each one?

Learning Objectives:

- Practice using observations skills to pick out animals from their surrounding environments
- Notice some of the different adaptations of structure and coloration that animals have evolved to help them hide

Background:

Birds, butterflies, fish, big cats, snakes, and countless other animals use camouflage to help them hide as they hunt for food, avoid predators, or even navigate aggressive interactions with members of their own species. Animals may have evolved coloration that helps them blend into their most likely backgrounds, or to resemble a particular object (a plant, a rock, etc.) that is commonly found in their habitat. Many animals reinforce their disguise through their behavior: by staying still, by moving slowly or with back and forth motions that mimic the movement of a leaf in the wind or a ripple in water. Some animals can even change their color or the shape their body makes as needed, in order to hide more effectively. An animal may also use physical objects from its environment to hide, holding them over its body or even attaching them to its body in order to obscure its own form.

Procedure:

Look closely at each image. Can you spot the animal hiding somewhere within it?

Let's start with a relatively easy one! This photo was taken in Cavernas de Camuy, in Puerto Rico. Can you spot the whip scorpion hiding among the rocks?



This image was taken in the Kruger National Park in Transvaal, South Africa. Can you spot the camouflaged animal?



Hint: this animal is quick on their feet, has spots, and is hiding in the brush!

This picture was taken on the shore of Lake Michigan near Green Bay, Wisconsin. Can you spot one sneaky creature?



Hint: Look for eight sand-colored legs! (Beach wolf spider)

This photo was taken at a cave entrance, south of Arecibo, Puerto Rico. There are three different species of bats flying out of the cave (*Monophyllus redmani*, *Erophylla sezekorni*, and *Mormoops blainvillei*). Can you find the three different species? There are also three sneaky Puerto Rican boa constrictors trying to hunt the bats. Can you spot the three snakes?



This photo was taken at the Burgess Shale fossil site in the Canadian Rockies, west of Calgary. How many trilobites can you spot? Can you find an anomalocaris?



These photos were taken at the Lamanai Archaeological Reserve in Belize. Can you spot the howler monkey in each photo?

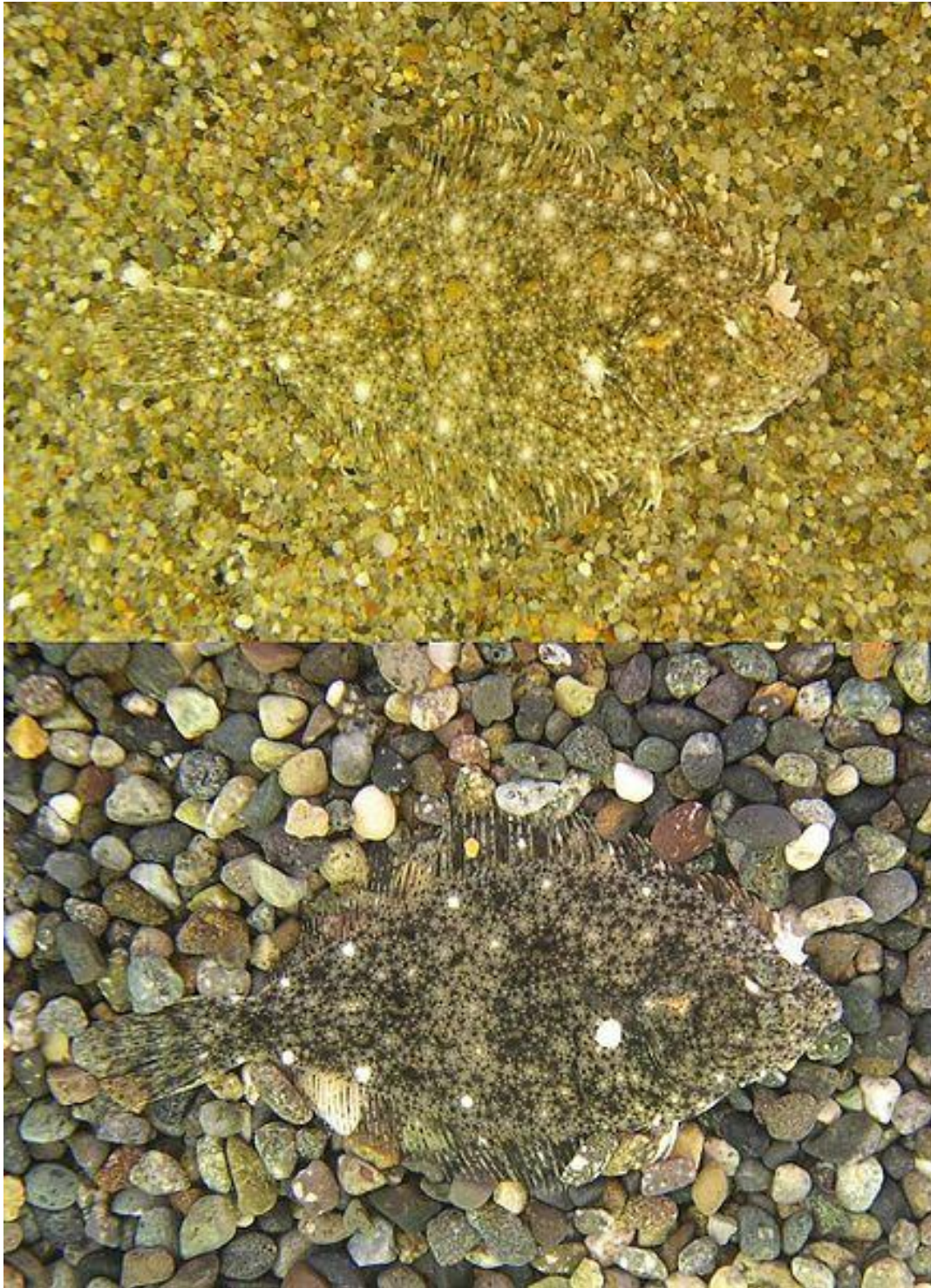




This photo was taken at the Lamanai Archaeological Reserve in Belize. Can you spot the group of vultures?



This finny friend can hide even against different types of backgrounds. Can you spot both stone flounders?



This dancing frog, photographed in Kerela, India, is hiding in plain sight by imitating a leaf. Can you see it?



This French grasshopper is imitating both light and shade on the rocks. Can you pick it out?



This aptly named Dead Leaf Mantis, originally from Madagascar, is hoping a delicious fellow insect will wander by.



This photo was taken at the Lamanai Archaeological Reserve in Belize. Can you spot the hidden scorpion?



Keep scrolling if you are stumped!

Surprise! He was under the leaf.



During/Follow-up Questions:

- Which animals were the easiest and the hardest to find? Why do you think that is?
- Why might it be more important for some animals to be able to quickly change their appearance, instead of always relying on a single disguise? How might this relate to using objects from the environment to build camouflage?