

**"I feel like I'm
nothing without
wildlife. They
are the stars.
I feel awkward
without them."**

—Bindi Irwin,
13-year-old animal
expert and advocate



Animal Habitats

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 will know more about wild animals and how to protect their homes.



Every step has three choices. Do ONE choice to complete each step. Inspired? Do more!

TIP BEFORE TAKEOFF

- ▶ Just as you're careful around pets, be even more careful when you're observing wild animals—and **never** feed or approach them.

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 (like a farm 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?

Wild Pets?

Some people do have wild animals as pets—but it can be dangerous for everyone. Most pets are domesticated, which means they've been taught to be comfortable around humans. For instance, dogs have been best friends to humans for thousands of years. But wolves—close relatives of dogs—are still wild and can do great harm to humans.

Every state has laws about which wild animals, or "exotic pets," people are allowed to keep. You will usually need special permission and special training to know how to keep you and the pet safe.

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

One 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 the habitat.

- What country is the animal naturally found in?
- 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, and coloring; kind 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 animals 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.



More to Explore

Taming wild animals. Taming a wild animal takes a lot of skill and can be dangerous—never try it on your own! If you're interested in the process, find someone who can tell you more. What about a horse trainer at a stable or a staff member at animal control?

(An animal-control officer makes sure people are taking care of animals responsibly. For example, if a dog is left outside without shelter in very cold weather, someone from animal control may come to investigate.)

CLASSIFICATION

Scientists use a system called “biological classification” to put living things into groups. There are seven ranks, or levels, in this system. The levels start with a large number of creatures and then get smaller. The levels are:

Kingdom:

Phylum:

Class:

Order:

Family:

Genus:

Species:



The Animal (or Animalia) Kingdom is divided into two main groups—those with backbones and those without—and the lists narrow down from there.

Here is the biological classification for a common domesticated cat:

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

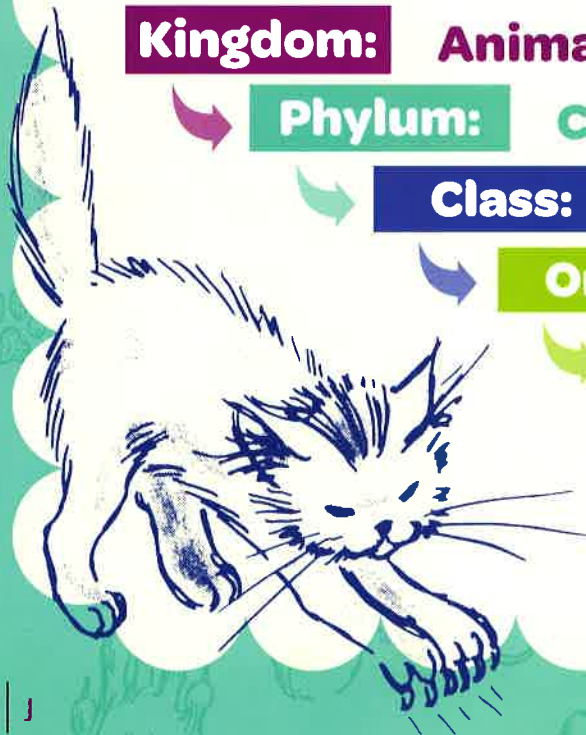
Class: Mammalia

Order: Carnivora

Family: Felidae

Genus: Felis

Species: F. catus



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 Arctic 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 the experiment in the sidebar to see how insulation in a nest works.

Make a Jell-O Nest!

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

Endangered Animals

An endangered animal is at risk of becoming extinct, or dying out, because there are so few left. Sometimes this happens naturally, but most of the time a species is pushed to extinction because of human activities. When the government lists an animal as endangered, it becomes illegal to harm it. In 1967, the bald eagle was an endangered species. People worked hard to protect the birds and their habitats, and it worked. Today the bald eagle's population is stable. It was removed from the list of endangered and threatened wildlife in 1997.

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—maybe one that shares something with you. (Are you a great swimmer like a jaguar? Do you have long arms like a spider monkey?) Then 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 backyard 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 animals. With your Girl Scout sisters, ask an expert to recommend an area that needs cleaning—it could be the woods, a stream, a beach, or a 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?

“People who purchase exotic pets thinking they are going to make a wonderful addition to the household are in for a rude awakening.”

—Scott D. Kubisch,
President, Peaceable
Primate Sanctuary





Add the Badge to Your Journey

As you are earning your 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. Maybe you'll want to think about a role like hers as you earn your Try Out! award.

Now 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: