

Keep Texas Wild



WEIRD, WACKY AND WILD

There's no end to the amazing adaptations of Texas animals.



»MINIATURE HELICOPTERS

Whether to find food, survive the cold, protect themselves or migrate, Texas animals have amazing characteristics that help them adapt and survive. Hummingbirds are one example. They are the only birds that can fly like helicopters (backwards, forwards, straight up and down). Hummingbirds can detect how much sugar is in each flower's nectar. They take 500 breaths per minute because they need more oxygen than other animals (you breathe about 15 times per minute).

Ruby-throated hummingbird

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» ASTONISHING ANIMALS



» Look, but don't touch!

WITH prickly spines like a pincushion, the peaceful porcupine can protect itself from any predator. These 30,000 quills cover most of the body. The porcupine cannot "throw" the quills, but rather turns around to defend itself from the rear against enemies.

» Turn up the volume

EVER heard an insect symphony in your yard on a summer evening? The loudest member of the choir is the cicada, who squeezes noisemakers, called tymbals, at the base of its abdomen. Each species plays its own tune!



» Long-distance flyers

THE endangered whooping crane spends winters on the coast of Texas, then migrates all the way to Canada each spring. That's more than 2,400 miles. Luckily this 5-foot bird, the tallest in North America, has enormous wings to help make the flight.



» Ultimate tongue twisters

SPHINX moths have the longest tongues (or proboscis) of any insect in Texas. This amazing hollow device allows them to reach deep into flowers for nectar.



PHOTO © ROLF NUSSBAUMER

» Better than a sting

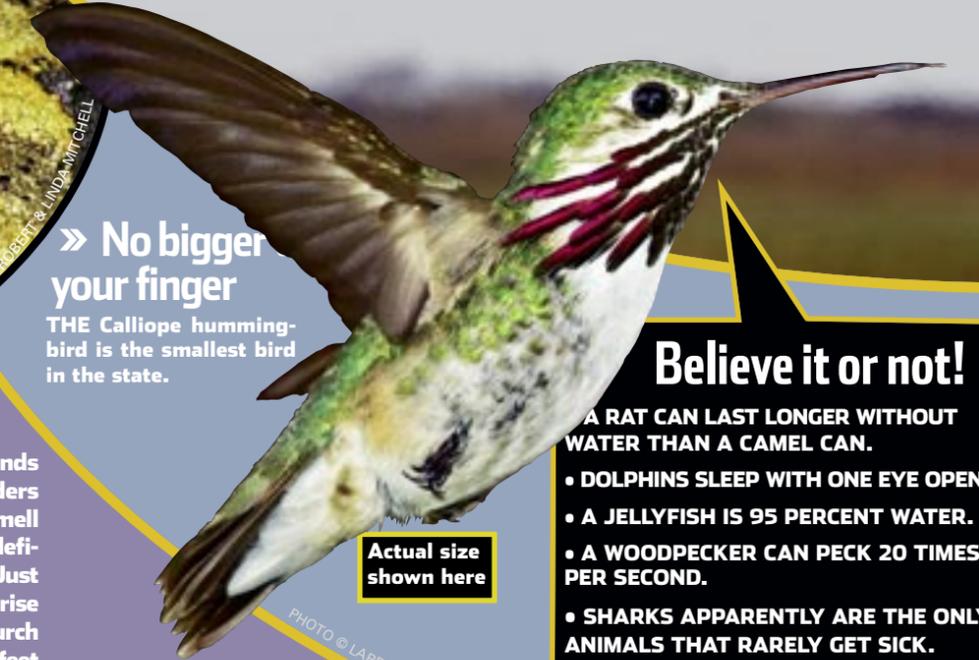
UNLIKE more common scorpions around Texas, the whipscorpion can't sting. Instead, it sprays a mist almost identical to vinegar from the base of its tail. That's why they are also called vinegaroons.



CRANE © LARRY DITTO/KAC PRODUCTIONS
PHOTO © ROBERT & LINDA MITCHELL

» No bigger your finger

THE Calliope hummingbird is the smallest bird in the state.



Actual size shown here

PHOTO © LARRY DITTO

» What's that smell?

THE striped skunk defends itself by spraying intruders with musk, which might smell like perfume to them but definitely smells awful to us. Just before they spray, skunks rise up on their back legs, lurch forward, stamp their front feet and click their teeth. They can also growl and purr.



Believe it or not!

- A RAT CAN LAST LONGER WITHOUT WATER THAN A CAMEL CAN.
- DOLPHINS SLEEP WITH ONE EYE OPEN.
- A JELLYFISH IS 95 PERCENT WATER.
- A WOODPECKER CAN PECK 20 TIMES PER SECOND.
- SHARKS APPARENTLY ARE THE ONLY ANIMALS THAT RARELY GET SICK.
- ARMADILLOS AND OPOSSUMS SPEND ABOUT 80% OF THEIR LIVES SLEEPING.

ILLUSTRATIONS © FIAN ARROYO

» Water babies

Did you know that dragonflies live under water for up to two years as nymphs before climbing out and turning into adults?

These lacy winged beauties only live a few months after that. Watch this nymph transform into a red-tailed pennant dragonfly before your very eyes!



PHOTOS © GREG LASLEY



Spike's Activity Page



>> WILD SCIENCE

The human body might seem limited compared to animals' cool adaptations, but we've invented things to help us survive in extreme conditions. What are some of the inventions that help humans to live in the desert or in very cold conditions? Travel under water? Travel in space? Pick an extreme habitat and design your own invention to help you survive.



>> WILD MATH

Animals adapt to survive in extreme environments. Texas has many different geographic regions with extreme temperatures. The lowest temperature ever recorded in Texas was 23 degrees below zero (Fahrenheit), and the hottest temperature was 120 degrees. What is the difference between those extreme temperatures? What is the temperature at your home or school right now? What is the hottest and coldest it has ever been in your town?



NEXT MONTH: Wildlife Babies



PHOTO BY TIM FITZHARRIS

>> KEEPING IT WILD



Make a list of all the animals in your neighborhood or area. Don't forget birds, insects, fish and reptiles. Now look at your list and figure out which is the largest, smallest, fastest, slowest, furriest or slimiest. You can make up your own categories: best at hiding, biggest eater, friendliest or most funny-looking. Use the encyclopedia or Internet to help you. Share your list with friends and classmates.

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