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Keep Texas Wild

BIRD LIPS!?

Animals use claws and beaks and teeth and tongues to eat their favorite foods.

Barn owl

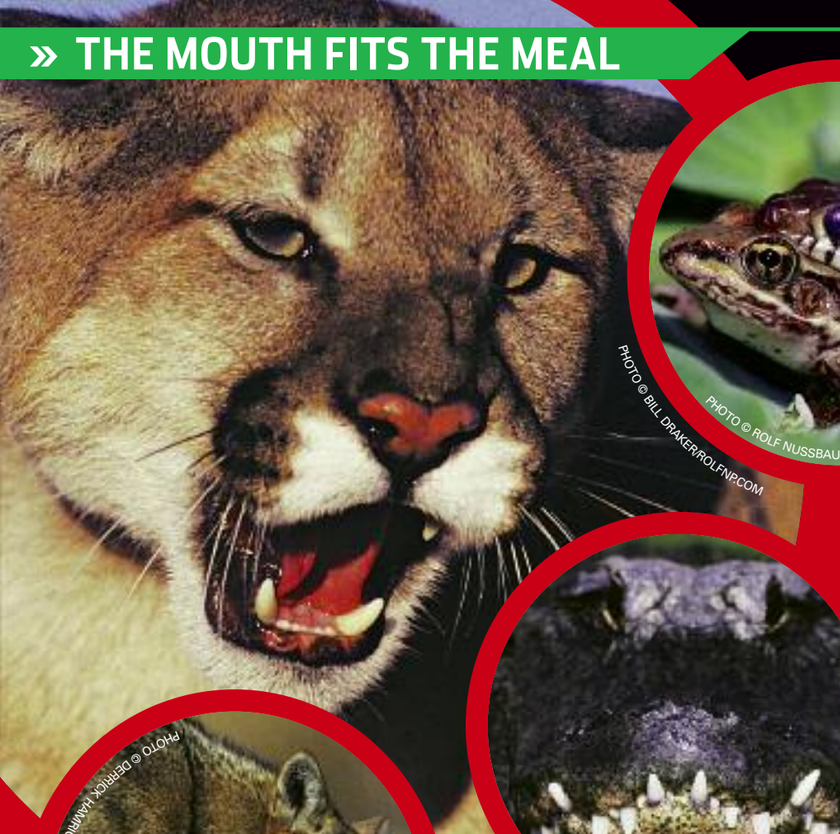
»HAPPY MEAL

IF ANIMALS ALL ATE THE SAME THINGS, there wouldn't be enough food to go around. Animals dine in different ways because they have adaptations. Some eat only other animals, some eat only plants, and others eat both. This way, animals all have a part to play in nature. The barn owl uses a sharp beak to eat a mouse. The sea star eats other animals, like clams, in a special way — by pushing its stomach out through its mouth. Grass-eating animals need large, flat teeth to chew.

PHOTO © ROLF NUSSBAUMER

» THE MOUTH FITS THE MEAL

Carnivores
eat meat



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WHAT BIG TEETH YOU HAVE!

CARNIVORES, like mountain lions and coyotes, eat meat. They have sharp teeth at the front of their mouths to help them catch and eat their prey. These teeth look like fangs and are called canines. Snakes, like the garter snake (above), swallow their food whole. Gulp! Alligators like to give their food a big crunch or two with powerful jaws before they swallow.

Beaks & Bills
help birds eat

PHOTO © LARRY DITTO

SWEET NUTCRACKER

YOU CAN TELL by looking at the bill of a male cardinal that he munches on seeds. He uses his bill (the proper name for a beak) like a nutcracker to break seeds open and eat what's inside.

YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT

ROSEATE SPOONBILLS use their odd bills to strain small food items out of shallow water. Their pink color actually comes from some of the foods they eat.

PHOTO © ROLF NUSSBAUMER

WHOOOO'S HUNGRY?

Look at the great horned owl's bill. It has a special hook at the end. That's because owls are meat-eaters and use their sharp, hooked bills to tear open their prey and pull off bite-sized pieces.

PHOTO © KATHY ADAMS CLARK/KAC PRODUCTIONS

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BUILT-IN STRAW

RUBY-THROATED hummingbirds can reach deep into a flower and sip out the tasty nectar, just like drinking soda from a straw. They sometimes also dine on insects, but the shape of their bills tells us that nectar is their number-one meal.

Omnivores
eat everything

PHOTO @ ROLF NUSSBAUMER

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IT ALL LOOKS GOOD!

OMNIVORES HAVE ALL three types of teeth: canines, incisors and molars. Omnivores, like raccoons and blue jays and even you, eat just about anything. (The prefix "omni" means "all.") Raccoons also have special front paws with five fingers, just like your hands. Many omnivores use hands and paws to help them eat.

Herbivores
eat plants

PHOTO © ROLF NUSSBAUMER

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NO MEAT FOR ME!

ANIMALS THAT EAT ONLY plants, like squirrels and rabbits, need their teeth for cutting and grinding. Herbivores have sharp incisors up front, and molars for chewing their food. Besides grass, they eat fruits, bark, roots and leaves. Some herbivores, like the white-tailed deer, also have a second stomach to help them digest plants.

Spike's Activity Page

WILD SCIENCE

Read the clues and decide if the animal is a carnivore, herbivore or omnivore.

Beaver

A BEAVER uses its two flat front teeth to eat the bark off of trees and branches.

American kestrel

THIS BIRD is a good hunter with a hooked bill.

American alligator

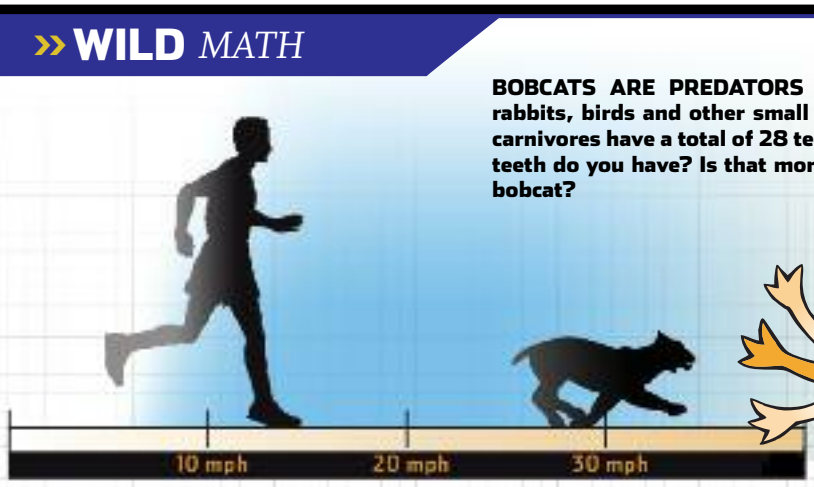
ALL 80 of the alligator's teeth look like fangs.

Striped skunk

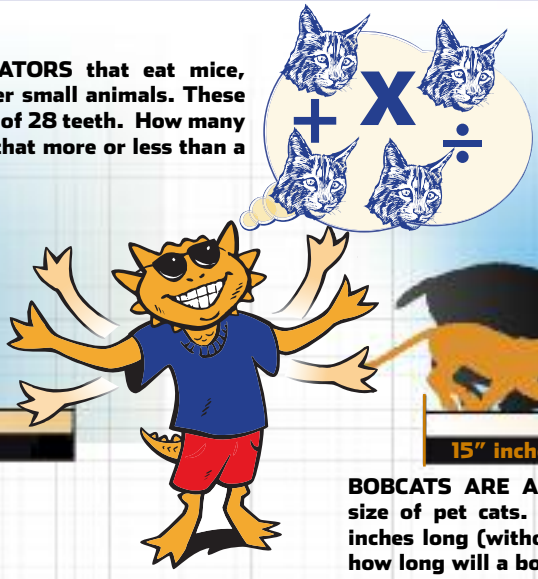
A SKUNK is not a picky eater and will eat insects, animals, berries and fruit.

WILD MATH

BOBCATS ARE PREDATORS that eat mice, rabbits, birds and other small animals. These carnivores have a total of 28 teeth. How many teeth do you have? Is that more or less than a bobcat?



BOBCATS HAVE POWERFUL BACK LEGS to help them chase their prey. They can run up to 30 miles per hour (mph). Most humans can run about 10 mph. How many times faster can a bobcat run than a human?

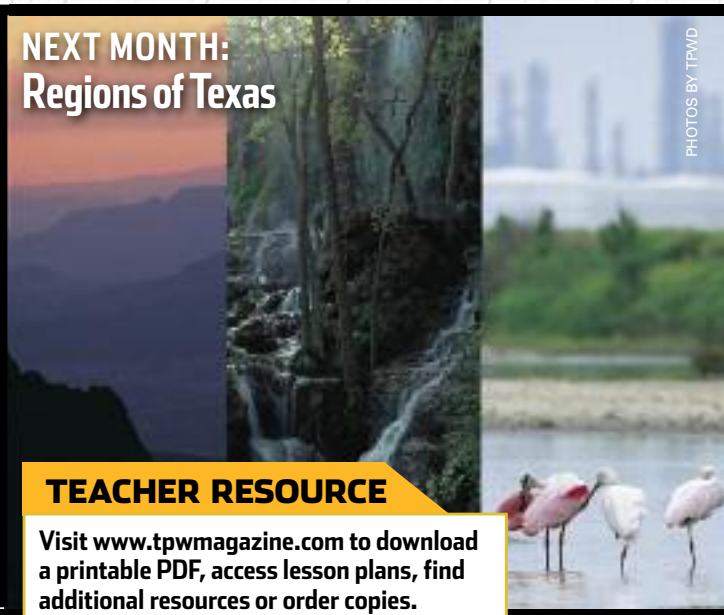


BOBCATS ARE ABOUT TWICE the size of pet cats. If your cat is 15 inches long (without its tail), about how long will a bobcat be?

KEEPING IT WILD

WHAT DO THE BIRDS in your neighborhood eat? Take a closer look at their bills (you might call them beaks) and draw what you see. Try to guess what they eat and how their bills help them.

NEXT MONTH:
Regions of Texas



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