

# Color in the Animal World

*Adapted from an article by [www.colorcombos.com](http://www.colorcombos.com)*

Color is an integral part of this world, not just for human beings, but for many creatures in the animal kingdom. Insects, birds, and aquatic animals come in a huge variety of colors.

Animals may use their unique coloring for protection, for aggression, for attracting a mate or for finding a meal. In some cases, extra melanin pigments serve as environmental protection from the harmful rays of the sun (also known as a tan!).

Perhaps the most common use of color is for camouflage, especially among smaller, more defenseless forms of animal life. A sea creature's transparent blue coloring can make it almost invisible in the ocean depths. A sandy-brown snake or crab may disappear against the similarly-toned shore or desert sands. More specific coloring adaptations involve body-coloring that looks like something it is not—such as a twig, stone or bark. Since most predators normally show little interest in consuming these things, a creature that can mimic them and stay very still has a better chance of surviving undetected.



Predators also use camouflage, blending into their environment so that they can more easily surprise their unsuspecting prey. The leopard is difficult to see when it lies quietly among the grasses. An owl perched in a tree can look more like a branch than a hunter getting ready to swoop down on a meal. The flower mantis looks more like a flower than a hungry insect.

In the human world, the colors red, yellow, black and white are often signals of impending danger. The same is true in the animal world. Some creatures actually use their colors to scare potential

predators away, whether or not they can actually defend themselves. These animals are often foul-smelling, poisonous or bad-tasting, and they want everyone to know and leave them alone. The Monarch butterfly is poisonous and advertises the fact with its bright colors. The Viceroy butterfly is not poisonous, but pretends to be by mimicking the Monarch in its coloring.



Animals use colors to attract sexual partners. Many male birds are much more brightly colored than the females. While this fact also makes them more likely targets for predators, it also assists them in attracting

a mate and reproducing. For example, the male peacock uses his bright, beautiful tale to attract a female. On the other hand, the duller colors of the female help protect her when she must sit on her eggs and care for her young.

In the animal world, color is a trade-off. Species in a dangerous environment tend to evolve camouflage, to hide from predators. And animals in safer environments tend to be more brightly colored to attract mates. But you can't be both!