

Name: _____

Survivors of the Snow: How Animals Handle Winter

When the air turns chilly and the ground is covered in a blanket of white, humans put on heavy coats and turn up the heat. But for wild animals, winter is a challenge for survival. As the temperature drops, food like green leaves, berries, and insects becomes very scarce. To stay alive, animals have developed three clever strategies: migrating, hibernating, or adapting.

The Great Journey: Migration

Some animals choose to leave the cold behind entirely. This is called migration. Birds like Canada geese and tiny hummingbirds fly thousands of miles to warmer climates where food is still plentiful. Even the delicate Monarch butterfly travels all the way to Mexico! These travelers usually follow the same routes every year, returning only when the ice has melted and the flowers begin to bloom in the spring.

The Deep Sleep: Hibernation

Other animals, like groundhogs, bats, and some bears, stay put but go into a state called hibernation. This is much more than a long nap. When an animal hibernates, its heart rate slows down significantly, and its body temperature drops until it is nearly as cold as the air in the den.

To prepare, these animals eat extra food during the late summer to grow a thick layer of fat. While they sleep, their bodies slowly use that fat for energy. Because they aren't moving, they don't need much "fuel" to keep their hearts beating. If you were to find a hibernating animal, it might look like it isn't breathing at all!

Toughing it Out: Adaptation

Animals that stay active all winter must adapt. This means they change their bodies or their habits to fit the freezing environment. The snowshoe hare is a master of adaptation; its fur changes from brown to white in the winter so it can blend in with the snow and hide from hungry lynxes.

Other animals, like squirrels and beavers, are "planners." Squirrels spend the autumn gathering acorns and burying them in a safe place. When the snow falls, they rely on their excellent sense of smell to find their hidden snacks. These active animals often grow thicker coats of fur or feathers to trap heat against their skin, acting like a built-in winter parka.

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1. Which sentence best describes the main idea of the entire passage?

- A. Many birds fly to Mexico and South America to find insects to eat.
- B. Hibernation is a deep sleep that helps animals save energy.
- C. Animals use different physical and behavioral strategies to survive the winter.
- D. A snowshoe hare's fur turns white to help it hide in the deep snow.

2. How does the author organize the information in the "Staying Active" section?

- A. By comparing how different animals change to handle the cold.
- B. By listing the events of a squirrel's day in chronological order.
- C. By explaining the reasons why the sun stays out less in the winter.
- D. By showing the steps a beaver takes to build a dam.

3. Read this sentence from the passage: "Squirrels spend the autumn gathering acorns and burying them in a safe place." In this sentence, the word "safe" most likely means:

- A. A heavy metal box with a lock.
- B. To be cautious while crossing the street.
- C. A place where something is unlikely to be found or stolen.
- D. Scoring a point in a game of baseball.

4. Based on the text, what can you infer about an animal that is unable to build up enough body fat before winter begins?

- A. It will likely migrate to a different forest nearby.
- B. It may not have enough energy to survive its hibernation period.
- C. It will change its fur color to white to stay warm.
- D. It will start eating insects instead of berries.

5. Look at the description of hibernation. What conclusion can you draw about why an animal's heart rate slows down?

- A. To help the animal wake up faster if a predator comes near.
- B. To allow the animal to breathe underwater in frozen ponds.
- C. To use as little energy as possible so its fat lasts all winter.
- D. To make sure the animal stays cool during the winter months.