



Classifying Animals into Groups

Week 30 — Monday | Five Major Animal Groups



Reading Time

Scientists organize animals into groups called **classes** based on shared characteristics. Just like you might sort your toys by type — cars, dolls, blocks — scientists sort animals by their body features, how they reproduce, and how they live. There are five major groups of vertebrates (animals with backbones): **mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and fish.**

Mammals are warm-blooded animals that have hair or fur, breathe with lungs, and give birth to live babies (with two exceptions — platypus and echidna lay eggs). Mother mammals produce milk to feed their young. Mammals include dogs, cats, whales, dolphins, elephants, humans, and even bats — the only flying mammals. Some mammals live in water (whales, seals), some fly (bats), and most walk or run on land.

Birds are warm-blooded animals covered in feathers. They have beaks, wings, and lay hard-shelled eggs. Most birds can fly, but some — like penguins, ostriches, and emus — cannot. Birds have hollow bones that make them lightweight for flying. They breathe with lungs and have a very fast heartbeat. Birds are found on every continent, including Antarctica. Some birds eat seeds, some eat insects, and some are carnivores that eat fish or small animals.

Reptiles are cold-blooded animals with dry, scaly skin. They breathe with lungs and most lay leathery eggs on land. Reptiles include snakes, lizards, turtles, tortoises, and crocodiles. Because they are cold-blooded (ectothermic), reptiles depend on the sun to warm their bodies — that's why you often see them basking in the sun. Some reptiles live in water but must come to land to lay eggs. Reptiles have been on Earth for over 200 million years — long before dinosaurs went extinct!

Amphibians are cold-blooded animals with smooth, moist skin. They begin life in water breathing with gills, then develop lungs as adults and can live on land. Amphibians include frogs, toads, newts, and salamanders. They lay jelly-like eggs in water. Amphibians can absorb water and even breathe through their skin, so they need to stay moist. Scientists study amphibians as **indicators of environmental health** — when amphibian populations decline, it often means the environment is polluted.

Fish are cold-blooded animals that live entirely in water. They have scales, fins, and breathe with gills. Fish lay eggs in water. There are over 34,000 known species of fish! Fish range from tiny pygmy goby (less than an inch long) to the massive whale shark (over 40 feet long). Some fish, like sharks and rays, have skeletons made of cartilage (soft tissue) instead of bone. Fish use their lateral line — a sensory organ along their sides — to detect movement and vibrations in the water.



Reading Questions

1. Why do scientists classify animals into groups?

2. List three characteristics that all mammals share.

3. What makes amphibians different from reptiles?

4. Compare warm-blooded and cold-blooded animals. Which animal groups are warm-blooded and which are cold-blooded?

Five Animal Groups Comparison Chart

Fill in the chart using what you read.

Group	Body Covering	Warm or Cold-Blooded?	How They Reproduce	How They Breathe
Mammals				
Birds				
Reptiles				
Amphibians				
Fish				

Vocabulary Grid

Write a definition or draw a picture for each word.

 Vertebrate _____	 Warm-blooded _____
 Cold-blooded _____	 Amphibian _____
 Cartilage _____	 Indicator Species _____

Sort These Animals

Write each animal under the correct group. Some animals might surprise you!

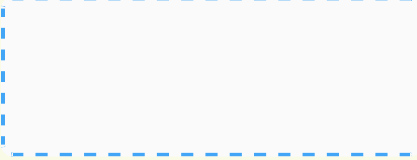
Animal List: Whale, Snake, Frog, Eagle, Goldfish, Bat, Turtle, Toad, Penguin, Shark, Dolphin, Salamander, Cobra, Ostrich, Lobster, Platypus, Crocodile, Newt, Seahorse, Hummingbird

 Mammals _____ _____ _____	 Birds _____ _____ _____	 Reptiles _____ _____ _____	 Amphibians _____ _____ _____	 Fish _____ _____ _____
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Doesn't fit any group? Why?

Draw One Animal from Each Group

Draw and label one characteristic for each group.

 Mammal 	 Bird 	 Reptile 
 Amphibian 	 Fish 	

Think About It

A platypus has fur, produces milk, but also lays eggs. Which group does it belong to? How do you know?

Is a whale a fish or a mammal? Give at least 3 reasons for your answer.
