

WEEKDAY WONDERS



Content developed by the
Tennessee Aquarium
Education Department



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Weird and Wacky Nature: Day 2

This week, your young scientist will explore the stranger side of animal behaviors. Your scientist will learn about some of the weird and wacky ways that animals defend themselves, consume their food, and care for their young. They will also explore how animals' senses of taste and sight can be different from humans in their own wonderfully weird way.

These curated activities are listed in a suggested sequence but may be done in the order that works best for you and your young scientists. Learn more about this series in the [Introduction to Weekday Wonders](#).



Question of the Day

How do animals eat their food?



Daily Nature Journal

Ask your young scientists to spend some time outside completing their daily nature journal. Ask them to notice things that are changing as summer gets close. If you need more information, the [Guide to Nature Journaling](#) includes details about the process.



Where's Your Mouth?

Ask your scientist to draw three different animals that they see outside in their environment. Have your scientist circle the mouth on each animal. Then have your scientist make labels to show the features of the animals' mouths. You might prompt your scientist with questions such as, "What does the mouth look like?" and "Does the animal have teeth?"

For each animal, ask your scientist to list three things that they think that animal might eat. Tell your scientist to consider the shape of the mouth, the location of the mouth, and whether the animal has teeth.

Encourage him or her to make a prediction about the type of food if s/he does not know. Older scientists might do further research to see what each animal eats during the different seasons.



Spider Lasso

Ask your scientist how s/he thinks most spiders catch insects to eat. Your scientist will probably say that the spider builds a web and waits for insects to get caught in it. While this is true for many species of spiders, some spiders actually go hunting for their prey.

Share the following information with your scientist.

The Bolas Spider uses one of the weirdest techniques. The Bolas Spider attaches a secretion that acts like glue to a piece of web silk. When a prey insect comes close enough, the bolas spider throws the silk and catches the prey! The spider then pulls the captured prey in and delivers a venomous bite.

Attach a piece of tape to the end of a piece of string or yarn that is 2 to 3 feet in length. Ask your scientist to draw insects on small pieces of paper (about 1 inch square), or print and cut out the insects on page 4.

Tell your scientist that today, he or she will be the Bolas Spider and needs to catch insects to eat. With your scientist standing in one spot, scatter the prey insects around, keeping them within range of the web throwing string. Ask your scientist to hold one end of the string while throwing the sticky end toward one of the prey insects. If the prey sticks to the tape, tell your Bolas Spider to pull it in for a meal!

Offer your scientist different challenges, such as

- catch all of the prey insects,
- catch as many as they can during a specified time limit, or
- improve his or her throwing accuracy.

If you have more than one scientist, they can either compete to gather the most insects or work together to catch them all in the shortest amount of time.



Baby Bird Food

In this activity, your young scientist will have an opportunity to “feed” a young bird. Gather a container with a narrow neck, such as an empty water or soda bottle, and several foods that are easily mashed, such as bananas or strawberries. For younger scientists, also gather a wooden spoon, a bowl, and a funnel shaped object.

Tell your young scientist that the bottle is a baby robin or bluebird. You may wish to have him or her decorate the bottle to look like a baby bird. Your scientist will be responsible for caring for the baby bird.

Share with your scientist that bluebirds and robins can eat fruits, seeds, nuts, and insects. Have your scientist try to feed the whole fruits that you gathered to the “baby bird.” He or she will likely not be able to get the fruit through the narrow opening.

Have your scientist work to figure out a way to feed the baby bird. If you have an older scientist, allow him or her to gather materials from the house and try some different ways to get the baby bird some food. For younger scientists, give them a bowl and wooden spoon to mash the fruits. Have them mash the fruits and then try to fit them through the opening. The funnel may help. If your older scientist has trouble figuring out how to feed the baby bird, give him or her a hint based on these directions.

Once your scientist has fed the “baby bird,” share the following information with him or her.

Many young animals cannot eat their adult food until they have grown up a bit. For example, baby alligators may eat crickets or small frogs until they grow big enough to eat larger prey animals. Some bird parents get even more creative in the food they bring to their young. To help their babies, many bird parents pre-digest their babies’ food in their own stomachs. When the parent returns to the nest, it regurgitates the partially digested food directly into its baby’s mouth! This lets the baby bird easily swallow and digest its food.

With that information, ask your young scientist which parts of their model represented the baby bird (the bottle), the baby’s food (the mashed fruit), the adult bird’s stomach (the bowl, for younger scientists), and eating/digesting (the spoon mashing the fruit, for younger scientists). This step not only helps your young scientist understand what is happening, but also helps him or her learn about scientific models, an important skill in doing science.

Spider Lasso Insects

