

WEEKDAY WONDERS



Content developed by the
Tennessee Aquarium
Education Department



TENNESSEE
AQUARIUM



Weird and Wacky Nature: Day 3

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 care for their young?



Daily Nature Journal

Ask your young scientists to spend some time outside completing their daily nature journal. If you need more information, the [Guide to Nature Journaling](#) includes details about the process.



Parent Practice

Have your scientist choose a stuffed animal or a household object (such as a balloon or a ball) to represent a baby animal of their choice. Tell your scientist that he or she will be caring for this baby animal all day. Ask your scientist to identify the things that the baby animal will need. These should include food, water, and shelter. If your scientist needs some help coming up with an animal, the following chart offers a few examples of baby animals and their needs. Throughout the day, remind your scientist that he or she needs to make sure the baby is getting food and water and has the appropriate place to hide, stay warm, or stay cool.

	Emperor Penguin	Fennec Fox	White-Tailed Deer
Lives in...	Antarctica	North African deserts	North American forests
Food	Fish or krill (shrimp), partially digested by the penguin parents	Insects, lizards, bird eggs, small rodents, fruits, leaves and roots (parents bring food back to the cubs until they can hunt)	Milk from mother; begins eating grasses, leaves, and clover
Water	Comes from the food they eat; they don't actually drink water!	Licking dew drops that form on their dens; can go a long time without water	Puddles, streams, lakes, or ponds during spring or summer; may eat snow in winter
Shelter	Stays warm by huddling with penguin parents	Underground burrow to stay out of the hot sun during the day	Tall grass or bushes to hide the baby from predators

After your scientist has spent time caring for the baby animal, ask him or her what might be the same as caring for a human baby and what might be different. You might also compare the process to caring for a pet. Let your scientist know that there are many different ways that animals care for babies—and that some definitely show the weird and wacky side of nature.



What's in Your Nest?

Ask your scientist to look around outside and see if s/he can find evidence of any bird nests.

Ask him or her to draw a picture of a nest—either one s/he found or one s/he imagines—and label the items that the bird used to build it.

Tell your scientist that birds will use many different kinds of items to build their nests, depending on what they have around them in the environment.

- Penguins on rocky islands without plants will build their nests out of rocks and pebbles.
- Hummingbirds use moss and spider silk to make their nests.
- Swiftlets, birds that make their nests on the sides of cliffs, actually make their nests using their own spit!
- Many birds also bring human items to their nests such as brightly colored string or soft scraps of fabric.

Ask your scientist to look around inside and outside to identify items that a bird might use to make a nest. Remind your scientist that a bird will need some items that are sturdy to help the nest keep its shape, and some items that are soft to help cradle the eggs and keep them warm.

To extend this activity, have your scientist actually try to build a nest that will keep its shape and hold small items.



Babies on the Move!

Gather 5 to 10 similar items such as balls, stuffed animals, or pillows. These should be large enough items that your scientist would have trouble carrying them all at once. These items will represent baby animals. Identify 2 to 3 spots in the playing area to be hiding spots (nests or dens) for the baby animals. Consider using hula hoops or tape to show where the hiding spots are.

Tell your scientist the following information. Sometimes, animal parents need to move their babies from one hiding place or nest to another. This might be because they are looking for new food sources, or it might be because their current hiding place is threatened by predators.

Tell your scientist that he or she is going to be the animal parent and needs to move all of the “babies” to a new safe spot as quickly as possible. When you say “GO” your scientist should race to get the babies to a new safety location. After all the babies are safe, ask your scientist how they moved the babies. Your scientist probably used his or her arms and hands.

Ask your scientist what animals might do to move their babies if they don’t have hands to carry them. For the next round, tell your scientist that he or she must move the babies without using their hands! If your scientist needs help coming up with ways to move their babies, you might remind him or her that kangaroos carry their babies in pouches. Your scientist might try using his or her shirt. Some animals, such as foxes, carry babies using their mouths to pick up the baby by the back of its neck. Some animals like alligators and cichlid fish even carry their babies inside their mouths! You might suggest a bag or a sheet to represent your scientist’s mouth if the objects you chose to represent the babies should not be in your scientist’s mouth.