WEEKDAY WONDERS

Content developed by the Tennessee Aquarium Education Department

TENNESSEE AQUARIUM

Weird and Wacky Nature: Day 4

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

What are some of the weird and wacky ways that animals use their sense of taste?

Daily Nature Journal

Bring some of the amazing abilities in nature close to home by asking your young scientists to spend some time outside completing their daily nature journal. Use the Guide to Nature Journaling to support them in nature journaling each day.

Taste the Rainbow!

Tell your young scientist that humans taste with their tongues but not all animals do.

- Catfish have taste buds all over their bodies.
- Jellies have taste buds on each stinging cell that can only tell the difference between that species of jelly and every other animal in the world. The cell will not sting itself or another jelly of that species after "tasting" that it's the same, but it will sting all other animals.
- Female butterflies have taste buds on their feet so that they can find the single kind of plant that their caterpillars can eat and lay their eggs there.

Gather several food items that have the same texture and temperature. For example, you might choose cold liquids, room temperature nut butters, granules such as sugar and salt, or powders. Don't let your young scientist see the selections.

Blindfold your young scientist and feed him or her small amounts of each food. Ask your scientist to try to identify each item.

Try the activity again with your young scientist holding his or her nose. See if your scientist can identify the items this time.

Tell your scientist that in humans, taste and smell are complimentary senses—each works better with the help of the other. Take away the sense of smell and it's hard to taste our food.

Extension

If you have or are willing to buy jellybeans, Skittles, Smarties or another candy with a variety of flavors, test your blindfolded young scientist to learn if he/she can identify the flavors. If you give an initial taste of one of the candies, can the young scientist pick out that one in a blind taste test? Does his/her success improve if allowed to "clear the palette" with a drink of water in between each flavor? Encourage your young scientist to explain why or why not.

Butterfly Taste Race

For this activity, you will need to gather the following household items.

- 6 drinking cups, opaque, not clear
- 6 straws
- Aluminum foil
- At least 2 beverages

Prepare 5 cups with the same beverage in them. Water is an easy choice for these. Cover each with aluminum foil and put a straw in them. For the sixth cup, prepare it the same way but use a different beverage. Place the cups around the house or yard. These will serve as flowers with nectar.

Tell your young scientist that s/he will be a butterfly in this activity. But, instead of tasting with the feet like a real butterfly would, your scientist will taste with his or her tongue. Have your young scientist search for the "flowers" and find the "special beverage" using taste. Encourage your young scientist to flap his or her "wings" while flying from flower to flower. For older scientists hide the cups and challenge them to find the flowers with "nectar."

Extension

If you want make it more challenging to find the "nectar," use up to 6 different beverages in the cups with foil tops. Give your young scientist a taste of one of the beverages and ask him/her to go find the matching beverage.

Imaginary Flavor

Ask your young scientist to look or go outside to observe an animal eating something or to find evidence that an animal has eaten something (for example, seed hulls or holes in leaves). Ask him/her to draw a picture of the animal and its food. Now ask your young scientist to imagine how that food would feel and taste to the animal as it eats. Encourage your young scientist to draw or write what he/she imagines.