

Newspapers In Education in partnership with the Seattle Animal Shelter, Regional Animal Services of King County and Mudbay present

# HOMES ARE HABITATS TOO



## WHAT IS A HABITAT?

A habitat is a place where an animal gets everything that they need to survive. Every animal is different, but despite these differences most animals need some of the same things. Every animal needs food, water, shelter and a safe place. Think about your habitat Where do you get what you need to survive? Your home is your habitat and it might also be the habitat of a family pet or other animal! Can you think of any animals that share your habitat?

Different animals have different needs, which means that they each live and thrive in different kinds of habitats. It is important that if you have a pet, or if you are considering getting a new pet, you do plenty of research so that you know how to set up a comfortable and safe habitat.

## IS YOUR PET LICENSED?

Pets with pet licenses can often skip a trip to the shelter and can be returned immediately by neighbors or officers who find them. Pet licenses also make it easy for anyone who finds your pet to help by simply calling the number on the tag.

- Live in Seattle? License online or call **206.386.7387** or visit **[www.seattleanimalshelter.org](http://www.seattleanimalshelter.org)**
- Live outside Seattle? License online or call **206.296.7387** or visit **[www.kingcounty.gov/pets](http://www.kingcounty.gov/pets)**





# HOMES ARE HABITATS TOO!

## THERE ARE DIFFERENT KINDS OF HABITATS, WHERE ANIMALS AND HUMANS LIVE TOGETHER

### Disappearing habitats

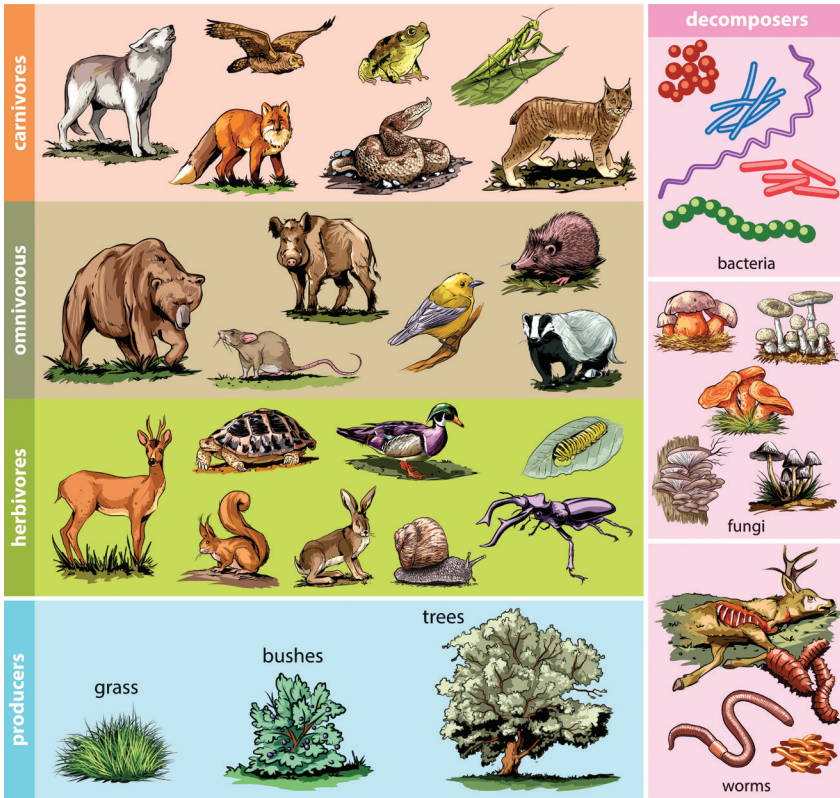
When humans take over or change habitats in order to grow food or to construct houses, many times this can affect the ability of these habitats to support the species of plants and animals that live there. This threatens these animals and plants—leaving them with less and less area where they can live.

By learning more about habitats and participating in programs, humans can also help save these habitats. Some simple things you can do that will help save disappearing habitats:

- Pick up litter and make sure that you dispose of trash in the correct areas
- The three 'R's – reduce, reuse, recycle
- Learn about disappearing habitats and tell others about them

### What is an ecosystem?

Plants and animals rely on each other to survive. Plants and animals that live together in the same area or environment are called an ecosystem. An ecosystem is kind of like a community, where each plant or animal has a specific role that works to keep the ecosystem healthy. Three main parts that work to keep an ecosystem healthy are producers, decomposers, and consumers.



### HAVE YOU CONSIDERED A RABBIT AS A PET?



Rabbits can be wonderful pets, and with attentive care they will live long and happy lives. A healthy bunny should live about 10 years, so choosing a rabbit as a pet is a real commitment! If you are considering a rabbit (or other animal) as a classroom pet, there are some very important things to consider such as: Who will take the rabbit during the summer? On the weekends? It is also important to remember that rabbits are animals and not toys. Rabbits are small and delicate, which means it is easy for them to get hurt if they are dropped or held wrong. Fostering is a great option to look into if you are interested in trying out a bunny as a classroom pet for a shorter time period.

PRODUCER	CONSUMER	DECOMPOSER
Producers make their own food and energy through chemical processes (like photosynthesis). Producers are the building blocks of an ecosystem.	Consumers depend on other animals or plants for food and energy. They include herbivores, carnivores, and omnivores.	Decomposers also feed on other plants on animals for energy, but often they leave behind a lot of nutrients and unused energy in the soil, which is in turn used by producers to restart the whole process of the ecosystem.
Most plants are producers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Herbivores eat only plants</li><li>• Carnivores eat only meat</li><li>• Omnivores eat both meat and plants</li></ul>	Worms, bacteria, and other microorganisms (living things that are so small you cannot see them) work as decomposers by breaking down dead plants and animals so that their nutrients can return to the ecosystem.

Sometimes if a new plant or animal is introduced to an ecosystem when it does not belong, it can create problems for the ecosystem by competing with the other plants or animals for food, water, space or shelter. This is why it is always good to be careful when bringing a plant or animal into a new place.

### Is my house an ecosystem?

Yes, your home is an ecosystem! Particularly if you have a garden where you grow plants for your family to eat! The plants that you grow in your garden are the producers of your ecosystem. Your family and other animals that live around or in your house that eat these plants are the consumers of the ecosystem. You may compost your food waste, which is one way that decomposers such as worms, mushrooms and other bacteria can return the nutrients from food back into the soil. This soil is then used to grow more plants, continuing the cycle!

WILD	DOMESTIC
Wolf	Dog
Lion	Cat
Pheasant	Chicken

is wild? Wild animals, while they may sometimes look like and be related to our pets, have instincts (such as hunting instincts) that help them to survive and take care of themselves.

*Note: While pets are friendly creatures, if you do get bit, make sure to tell an adult. Wash with soap and water and call your doctor. Parents should also call their animal control shelter in order to make sure that the animal is contained and evaluated for health.*

### What is the difference between a wild animal and a pet?

Domestic animals (or pets) have been bred for many, many years to get along with humans. Our pets have been specially bred to have certain traits such as friendliness and trainability. Think about the difference between a lion and a house cat, which one do you think is domestic? Which one do you think



IDENTIFY THE BASIC NEEDS OF FOOD, WATER, AND SHELTER FOR YOUR PET

Sponsored by Mud Bay

How to Choose Healthy Foods for your Pets

For cats

- Look for high-quality proteins. Because cats are obligate carnivores, they need nutrients that are generally only found in meat, like taurine, certain essential fatty acids and fully-formed vitamin A (unlike most mammals, cats can't synthesize vitamin A from beta carotene).
- Choose digestible carbohydrates in proper proportion. While cats don't have a nutritional requirement for carbohydrates, they can use them if they are highly digestible. If a cat food contains a carbohydrate, as all dry foods must, it should be a high quality source. Cooked rice and barley are examples of good sources of carbohydrates for cats.
- Be mindful of moisture. Because cats are desert creatures, they have a tendency to not drink as much water as they should, in favor of getting their requisite moisture from the food they eat. A cat's diet in the wild would be approximately 78% moisture, while dry cat food is only about 10% moisture. If a cat is fed only dry food, he may be chronically dehydrated. Canned and raw foods are about 78% moisture, and may help to reduce the health effects associated with chronic low-level dehydration.

For dogs

- Dogs are omnivorous carnivores. Dogs are members of the order Carnivora, but that doesn't make them strict carnivores, like cats. Current research indicates that dogs can eat a wide variety of foods, both animal and vegetable, and still be healthy. But dogs still have a fairly high need for protein.
- Look for high-quality proteins. Proteins can come from both plant and animal sources. Raw chicken is about 20 percent protein, while a raw grain, like corn, is only 3 percent. making corn a less desirable primary food ingredient for dogs than chicken. Chicken meal, chicken meat with most of the water removed, is about 60 percent protein, and can be a good dietary source of protein in a dry food.
- Choose nutritious carbohydrates from whole grains or vegetables. Most dog foods also contain some carbohydrate source. Carbohydrates are necessary for making dry dog food. Corn, wheat and soy have been identified as ingredients that may provoke allergic reactions in dogs. However, veterinary nutritionists estimate that only about one in twenty itchy dogs is actually allergic to any of the ingredients found in high-quality, natural dog foods. If a dog isn't allergic, then corn, wheat or soy are unlikely to present problems. Barley, rice, oats and potatoes are other excellent carbohydrate sources.

Indoor vs. outdoor pets

Although you may feel guilty about keeping your pet indoors, remember that your pet is a domesticated animal and not a wild animal. By keeping your pet indoors, you are saving them from diseases (such as those that they might contract from other sick animals). Unsupervised cats outdoors may be exposed to viruses (such as feline immunodeficiency virus—FIV or feline leukemia—FeLV), parasites, poisons such as rodenticides and antifreeze, or get into fights with other cats.

If you do let your animal outside, make sure he or she is in a confined space where you can watch over him or her or that he or she has a leash on. In fact, many cities in King Country have leash laws. This means that your pet must be leashed or controlled in some other way by its owner any time that it is outside of a personal apartment or living space.

WHAT'S ON MY MENU?

Can you figure out if I am a carnivore, herbivore, or omnivore?

IF YOU GUESSED HERBIVORE, YOU WERE RIGHT!



Rabbits are an example of one pet that can be kept inside the house but that also has relatives that live in the wild. In the wild, rabbits naturally live underground where temperatures are stable and moderate, so outdoor above-ground living is hard on them. For domestic, or pet rabbits, a small to medium rabbit should have a cage that's at least two feet by four feet. More room is needed for a larger bunny or for two bunnies. Multi-level cages provide additional room and exercise for a bunny in the same amount of floor space. Wire bottom cages are uncomfortable for rabbits and can cause sores. A solid floor cage with a plastic litter box works very well.

Adaptations

**Adaptations** are skills that animals develop in order to be able to survive in their habitat. An adaptation may take the form of a **physical** change to the animal's body—or it may be a **behavioral** change to how an individual animal acts. Adaptations usually occur in response to an animal's specific habitat, meaning that animals will adapt in ways so that they can live with the weather, climate and ecosystem of their habitat.

Physical Adaptation

A physical adaption is the way that an animal's body is built to help that animal survive. For example, some physical adaptations include flight, camouflage, and hair. (That's right—hair is an adaption that helps protect animals from the cold!)

Behavioral Adaptations

A behavioral adaptation is the way that an animal behaves in order to survive. For example, some behavioral adaptations include hibernation, migration and living in groups. As prey animals, rabbits have adapted their behavior to hide symptoms of serious illness. This is why it's important to pay close attention to any signs that might suggest that your pet is sick.

Many pets such as rabbits, mice, snakes and lizards are "crepuscular" which means they are most active at dawn and dusk. They may also be quite active during the night. This is a behavioral adaptation. If you have a pet that is crepuscular, make sure you respect their natural circadian rhythm and spend time with your animal when it's awake and active—during the mornings and evenings.



Peanut with salad greens



# HOMES ARE HABITATS TOO!

## IDENTIFY THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A HEALTHY HABITAT FOR YOUR ANIMALS AND PETS

### Make your home a habitat

Every animal is unique – which means that every animal will need a unique environment in order to call a habitat a home. When we share our homes with pets, it is important that we try to meet their needs. Here are some starting points for making your home a good habitat for rabbits, cats and dogs.

#### Rabbits

- Create a bunny safe room and let rabbits out of their cage for a few hours each day for mental and health stimulation
- A paper towel tube stuffed with grass hay is a fun toy that's easy to make and good for a bunny's teeth

#### Cats

- Cats are hunters and their play behavior is based on the hunting instinct — give them plenty of toys to stalk, chase and pounce on
- Provide a sunny window with a secure screen, or a “catio,” where your cat can watch outdoor activity from inside safely
- Provide an easily accessible litter box and clean it daily to ensure your cats use it
- Consider growing kitty grass indoors so your cat can “graze” safely inside

#### Dogs

- Dogs often bark because they are bored
- Walk your dog safely with a leash on a regular basis
- If you leave, try to leave the radio or TV on so they do not feel alone

#### Key items to remember for pets

- A veterinarian is the best source of information on your pet's health, diet and behavior
- Pets cannot tolerate heat very well, so don't leave them in the car on a warm or sunny day
- Spaying/neutering is one of the best forms of being a responsible pet parent
- Update your microchip contact information
- Tagging your pet is not only the law, but it makes it easier for pets to be returned safely home by friendly neighbors or officers
- Above all, care and play with your pets, cats and dogs are social animals that love and need attention



Dexter in his wooden play box

#### Create an emergency plan for your pet

Know your evacuation plan. Make sure to have an emergency kit for your pet ready that includes food, water and water bowls, pet carrier, first aid, pet medicine, leash, blanket and a toy. In the disaster kit, put a list of places with phone numbers on where your pets could go if you are not available. In case of a disaster, pets will be frightened and confused, so be sure to give them lots of comfort.

## ADOPT, DON'T SHOP!

Find a new friend in our “critter room” this month and receive 50 percent off all fees\* at The Seattle Animal Shelter and Regional Animal Services of King County!

We care for more than just dogs and cats. We have an entire volunteer team and adoption room devoted to the care of lost and abandoned critters — rabbits, guinea pigs, birds, reptiles, and more!

Come on down to visit our critter room and give one of our critters a caring forever-home! Critters make wonderful pets — we'd love to help make a perfect match and find the right critter for you.

\*Receive 50 percent off all fees by mentioning this publication any time through the end of the year (12/31/16) — some exotic animal restrictions may apply.

For more information, call The Seattle Animal Shelter at 206.386.PETS (7387), or view animals available for adoption online at [www.seattleanimalshelter.org](http://www.seattleanimalshelter.org) or contact Regional Animal Services of King County at 206.296.7387 or visit [www.kingcounty.gov/pets](http://www.kingcounty.gov/pets)



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