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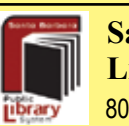
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This Month's Theme: Predator and Prey

There Was An Old Lady...



Have you heard the rhyme about the Old Lady who swallowed a fly? We don't know *why* she swallowed the fly that wiggled and jiggled and tickled inside her, but we know why she swallowed the spider next. She wanted the spider to catch the fly!

A spider is an example of a **predator**. It is an **organism** (living thing) that lives by preying on (or eating) animals. If you have ever looked closely at a spider web, you might have seen that one of a spider's important **prey** (food source) is the fly.

As chanted in the old rhyme about the Old Lady who swallowed the fly, predators can often be dinner for other larger predators. Spiders eat flies, birds eat spiders, and cats eat birds, and so it goes until you reach predators that are at the top of the food pyramid. Animals at the top are **apex** predators, and few organisms prey on them. For example orcas, tigers, bald eagles, and humans are apex predators. They are the ones who go out to hunt but are rarely hunted, except by other apex predators.

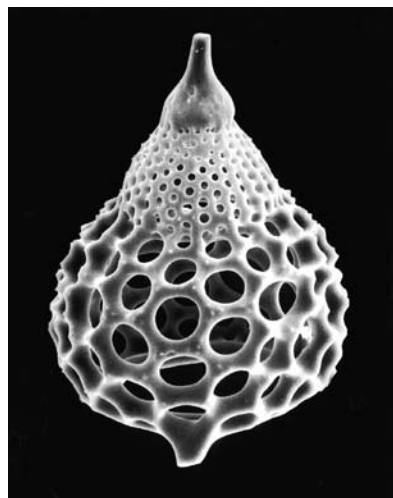
Predators keep their communities diverse by preventing a single species from taking over in a particular area. When one species becomes too **dominant** (most abundant), the ecosystem can become unbalanced. For example, in Yellowstone National Park scientists found that the removal of wolves allowed the **herbivores** (animals that feed on plant matter) to over-graze the area. This affected a lot of other insect and animal food sources, and caused their populations to go down. Scientists found that the creek beds started to change, because the herbivores were eating more of the willows and conifers along the creeks. Those trees helped to slow the water down and hold the soil in place, so when they were gone – the water was free to change its course and carve out new channels.



Draw arrows linking predators to all of their prey.

- | | | | |
|--------|---------------|-------------|----------|
| Deer | Spider | Bird | Fly |
| Cat | Coyote | Man | Wolf |
| Rabbit | Deer | Bear | Mouse |
| Owl | Hawk | Worm | Mosquito |
| Bat | Fish | Grasshopper | |
| | Mountain Lion | | |

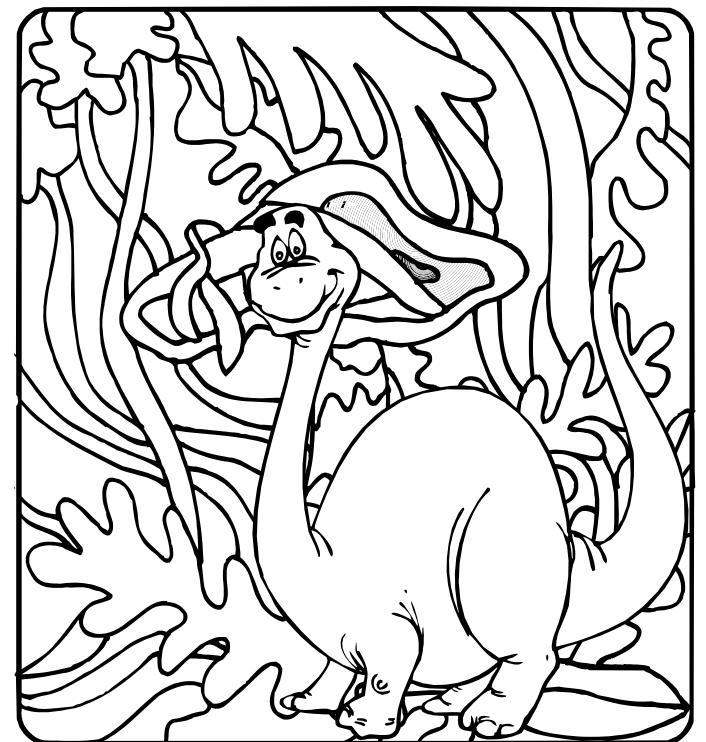
All organisms have adaptations that help them either to hunt or to avoid being hunted. Lions are predators whose tan color blends in with the color of dry grasses and soil. When lions crouch down to sneak up on their prey, they are almost invisible. Zebras, which are important prey of lions, have striped hides. When zebras stand still in the tall grasses they blend in with the stalks and shadows. It doesn't matter that their skin is black and white, because lions are colorblind! Smaller prey animals, like mice and rabbits that are food for many predators, produce large quantities of young at one time. By their sheer numbers, this helps to insure that enough of their species will survive to reproduce and continue to be a part of a balanced ecosystem.



Claudia Fährenkemper, Radiolarian (45-05-06: 400x). Zooplankton found throughout the ocean in the upper layers.

Predator/prey relationships occur both on dry land and in aquatic habitats. In the ocean, the food pyramid starts with single-celled plankton like diatoms that live and reproduce near the top of the ocean where most sunlight is available for photosynthesis. If there was an Old Mermaid, she would have swallowed some plankton, I don't know *why*, but then she'd swallow some **chromis** (tiny fish that eat plankton) to catch the plankton, then swallow some squid to catch the chromis, and then swallow some seals to catch the squid, that *certainly* wiggled and jiggled and tickled inside her! To see some photographs of ocean predators and prey, visit the Wildling Art Museum's exhibition "Wildlings from the Deep" in Los Olivos, opening June 3.


If you were the prey animal below, and didn't want to be hunted, how would you draw the patterns on your skin so you stayed hidden?



Page by Holly Cline, Wildling Art Museum, Los Olivos

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