



Tails - Why do animals have tails?

Fact

- Animals have tails for lots of different reasons – for balance, warmth or shade, as a fly swat, as a rudder for direction, a form of protection and even for talking.
- Some monkeys use their tail as a fifth limb for holding on to branches while they use their hands for getting food.
- Cats and dogs use their tails for ‘talking’. The way they hold their tail can tell you how they’re feeling.
- Animals like cows and horses use their tails as fly swats.
- Crocodiles use their powerful tails to protect themselves by thrashing it around like a big club.

Do you know

- A hippopotamus uses its tail in a very interesting way. It uses it to spread its poo around. This is a way of showing other hippos that ‘this is my area!’
- Birds like peacocks use their tails to show off and say “hey, aren’t I gorgeous!”
- Animals that live in cold places often have a fat bushy tail that they can use like blankets to help keep them warm.
- Animals like kangaroos use their strong tails for balance and protection.
- Fish use their tails to push them through the water and animals like the muskrat and otter use their tails like rudders to steer through the water.

Experiments you can do

Watch the tail of your pet dog, or cat. What are they telling you with their tail? What does it mean if a dog’s tail is wagging? How about if it’s curled down between its legs? Is the dog happy then?

What about your cat – watch it when it’s about to pounce on something like a toy or a piece of string. What does its tail do?

Other Investigations

What animal has a tail that can drop off when it’s being attacked? You might have one in your garden. Why would it want a tail that could do that do you think? Think about the kinds of animals that would want to eat this animal.

Jokes

Tell me the story about the giant giraffe with the tail as long as a bus. Nah that’s just a tall tail (tale).