

Strange Predators

Predators eat other animals to get energy. Some species have developed some very strange ways of capturing other animals for their lunch. Let's have a look at some of the most bizarre.

The lure of the frogfish

Fishermen use lures to trick fish into thinking there is food. These lures are designed to look like things the fish might eat. They normally look like flies or worms. The frogfish has done something very similar. The frogfish has evolved a special spike that sticks out from its head. The end looks like a group of wriggling worms. The frogfish opens its mouth and sucks small fish in when they swim over to see what the food tastes like. What's even better is that the frogfish can regrow its lure if a fish gets too close and eats it!



The shrimp's knockout punch

Pistol shrimp are not to be messed with. One of their claws grows significantly larger than the other. They snap their enlarged claw shut whenever prey comes close. This shoots out a supersonic stream of bubbles. It only lasts less than 1 millisecond, but the water around the bubbles can reach temperatures of 4,700°C. That's roughly the same as the surface of the sun! These bubbles are so powerful that they stun or kill the prey.



The spider's lasso

Spiders have developed many intriguing ways of capturing prey. Even a basic web is incredibly complex. But the bolas spider has taken it one step further. It releases a silken thread when it is ready to hunt. It attaches a glob of sticky silk at the end and holds it with one of its legs. The spider throws its "lasso" with lightning speed as soon as it sees prey. The sticky glob attaches to the victim, and the spider hauls it in. Yeehaw!



The cunning cat's call

The margay is a stunning spotted cat from the rainforests of South America. It has developed a taste for eating small monkeys and has a devious way of attracting them. The cat hides out of sight of a group of tamarin monkeys and mimics the cry of a baby monkey. The cat attacks when the adults race over to see what is happening.

The predatory plants

Most people have heard of the Venus flytrap. Its kidney bean-shaped leaves are instantly recognisable. However, there are lots of species of plants that seem to prefer being a consumer than a producer. Some species of sundews have long, thin tendrils covered with sticky spikes. Pitcher plants have developed tall, curved leaves that look like trumpets. A pool of water and digestive juices fills the bottom. Anything that falls in is digested slowly. Some even grow big enough to trap mice. One species has also evolved to act as a toilet for tree shrews. They don't catch any food, they simply wait for the shrew to "drop it off". Even tomato plants in your garden trap insects in their hairy stems. The plant absorbs the nutrients from the soil when they fall to the floor.



VOCABULARY FOCUS

1. Write a definition for lure.
2. What does the phrase "significantly larger" tell you about one of the pistol shrimp's claws?
3. Find a word that tells you how the author feels about the ways spiders catch prey.
4. Why is the word "lasso" in quotation marks?
5. Using the description in the text, draw a picture of a sundew or a pitcher plant.

VIPERS QUESTIONS

S

How is a frogfish like a fisherman?

R

How has a frogfish's lure evolved to protect it in case it gets eaten?

R

What is the same temperature as the sun?

I

Why do you think some plants have evolved to allow animals to use them as a toilet rather than catch their own food?

P

Which of these animals and plants do you think has the best method? Explain why you think this.

Answers:

1. To entice or attract something towards you
2. It is a lot bigger/much larger
3. Intriguing
4. Because it isn't exactly like a lasso, but it is used like one
5. Look for use of the description of long, thin tendrils covered in sticky spikes or tall, curved leaves that look like trumpets

S: They both use lures to attract fish towards them

R: It can regrow

R: The stream of bubbles the pistol shrimp uses to stun or kill its prey

I: Look for an understanding that it is less effort for an animal to find the plant than to have to try to attract it