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The Relationship Between Predator and Prey

Whether it is a dolphin hunting for shrimp, a group of lions attacking an antelope, or just Tom and Jerry chasing each other through the house, the relationship between **prey**¹ and **predators**² are seen everywhere. Every animal needs food to grow and survive, but many are also on the menu of another animal.

Did You Know?

While we usually think of ticks as parasites, some scientists think of them as predators. This would make your dog (or you) the prey of a tiny tick!

There are many ways that species can interact with other species. **Predation**³ is the relationship in which one species eats another.

Counting sheep – and much more



The relationship between predators and prey is an important aspect of natural communities.

Ecobottle Sample

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population of predators will lower the prey population. Fewer prey will cause the number of predators to then go down. Because there are fewer predators, the prey population will be able to increase, starting a new cycle.

More predators usually don't lead to the **extinction**⁴ (disappearance) of the prey.

Prey can hide and protect themselves, so that enough survive for the population to go up again. Other prey species can also help keep the cycle going, because predators can switch between the different species, giving each of the prey populations a chance to build themselves back up.



Lots of prey allow for lots of predators.

¹ **Prey:** an animal (or plant) that is eaten by another animal (or plant)

² **Predator:** an animal (or plant) that eats another animal (or plant)

³ **Predation:** a relationship between species in which one species eats the other.

⁴ **Extinction:** disappearance of a species

A little out of balance

There are many things that can harm the balance of an ecosystem. Sometimes species end up in an environment where they do not naturally live. These are called **invasive species**⁵. They may get to the environment because they were kept as a pet and have been let go into the wild. They might have hidden on ships, trains, and other cargo vessels and escaped into a new place. The Burmese python, which is native to Asia, now also lives in the Florida everglades. Many snakes that were kept as pets were let go, both accidentally and on purpose. The pythons are a new player in a set, balanced ecosystem. They



The Burmese python is an invasive species in the everglades ecosystem of Florida.

have thrown off the balance. It is hard for other predators to compete with the pythons, and some (including alligators) are even python prey. The prey populations that were already there have a new predator, which means more of them are being eaten.



Ecobottle Sample

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⁵ **Invasive species:** species that are in an environment they are not naturally from

Reading Comprehension Questions

1. What
2. What is predation?
3. How
4. Explain the cycle of populations caused by predation.
5. How
6. What are invasive species?
7. Name
8. How can human influence on populations be good?

Extension Questions

9. Take the case of the pythons in the Florida everglades. The snakes do have some enemies there that do not occur in Asia; for example, the American Crocodile. Use your imagination: what might happen if the American Crocodile suddenly experienced explosive population growth?
10. Create

Ecobottle Sample



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TIME SAVING

References

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