

Name: _____

Is That Mammal a Carnivore, Herbivore or Omnivore?

by Guy Belleranti

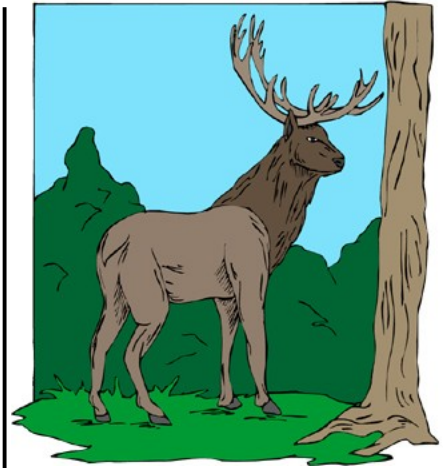
A mammal can be a carnivore (meat eater), herbivore (plant eater) or omnivore (meat and plant eater). By looking at the teeth, eye position and feet you can usually identify which of the three it is.

First let's look at teeth. If the mammal has long, sharp canine teeth next to the front (incisor) teeth and also has sharp cheek teeth (carnassials) it is a carnivore. The canines are for seizing and stabbing prey. The carnassials help cut up meat in the mouth.

If the mammal has either blunt canines or no canines, and has big flat side and back teeth (premolars and molars) it is a herbivore. Herbivores use their molars for crushing and grinding plants.

But what about herbivores that do have large front teeth? Beavers, for example, have huge front incisors. And river hippos have two huge lower canines. Well, beavers use their incisors for chewing through bark, branches and even trees. And hippos use their canine tusks for defense and fighting, not for chewing. But both beavers and hippos have large flat molars that they use for grinding up plant matter.

If the mammal has a variety of all kinds of teeth (canines, incisors, premolars and molars) it is an omnivore. It has a variety of teeth because it eats a variety of foods, both meat and plants.



What kind of teeth do you think this deer has?



How are the fox's teeth different from a deer's?



How are a beaver's teeth similar to a fox's? How are they similar to a deer's?

Now let's talk about eye position. Carnivorous and omnivorous mammals have eyes in front to help them spot and judge the distance of prey. Think of the rhyme "eyes in front, help them hunt".

Herbivores' eyes are located more on the side of their head. This gives them a wider view, helping them to spot predators sooner so they can flee. Think of the rhyme "eyes on side, help them hide".

And, finally, there are the differences in feet. Carnivores almost always have claws to hold prey, climb trees, dig for food and fight. They also have soft pads on their feet so they can sneak up on prey. Omnivorous mammals may have claws (like bears), or hands (like primates) for grabbing food. Herbivores, meanwhile, often have hooves to help them run away. Or, like the beaver and capybara, some or all of their feet may be webbed to help them swim away.



Where are the eyes positioned on this wild boar? How does the location of the boar's eyes help it to survive?



About the Author

Guy Belleranti works as a docent at Reid Park Zoo in Tucson, Arizona. He enjoys spending time with animals, and teaching others about them. Guy also enjoys writing stories and articles for children and adults.

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1. Why do carnivores usually have sharp canines and carnassials?

2. Why do herbivores usually have large, flat teeth?

3. Do omnivores have sharp teeth like carnivores, or flat teeth like herbivores? Explain.

4. Which sentence best describes a carnivore's feet?

- a. Carnivores usually have hooves on their feet.
- b. Carnivores usually have webbed feet.
- c. Carnivores usually have soft pads on their feet and claws.
- d. Carnivores usually have large, flat feet.

5. Tell whether each mammal is a carnivore, omnivore, or herbivore.

lion - _____

bear - _____

wolf - _____

bison - _____

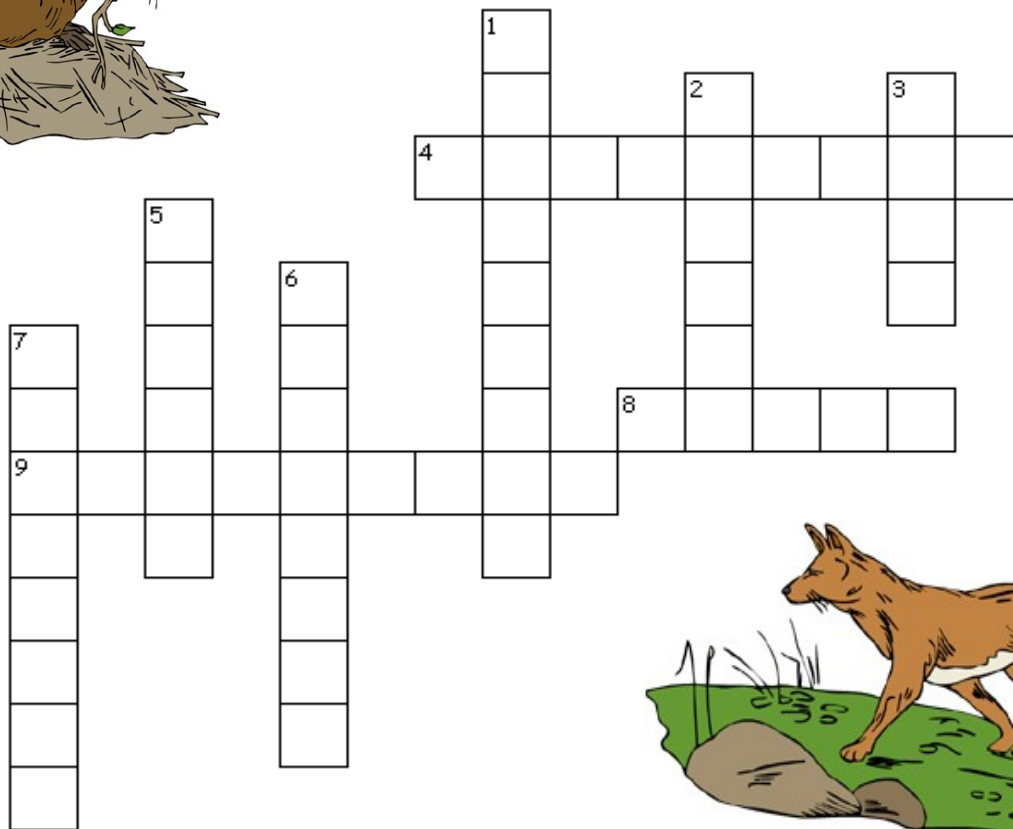
horse - _____

human - _____

Name: _____

Is That Mammal a Carnivore, Herbivore or Omnivore?

Vocabulary Crossword



Use information from the article to help you answer the crossword clues.

Across

- 4. animals who hunts other animals
- 8. sharp, curved nails on an animal's foot
- 9. animal that eats only meat

Down

- 1. animal that eats only plants
- 2. group of warm-blooded animals with hair or fur
- 3. animal that is hunted and eaten
- 5. back teeth
- 6. animal that eats meat and plants
- 7. front teeth

ANSWER KEY

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1. Why do carnivores usually have sharp canines and carnassials?

The sharp canines are for seizing and stabbing prey. The sharp carnassials help cut up meat in the mouth.

2. Why do herbivores usually have large, flat teeth?

The large, flat teeth are for chewing and grinding plants.

3. Do omnivores have sharp teeth like carnivores, or flat teeth like herbivores? Explain.

Omnivores have a variety of sharp and flat teeth because they eat a variety of foods.

4. Which sentence best describes a carnivore's feet? **c**

- a. Carnivores usually have hooves on their feet.
- b. Carnivores usually have webbed feet.
- c. Carnivores usually have soft pads on their feet and claws.
- d. Carnivores usually have large, flat feet.

5. Tell whether each mammal is a carnivore, omnivore, or herbivore.

lion - carnivore

bear - omnivore

wolf - carnivore

bison - herbivore

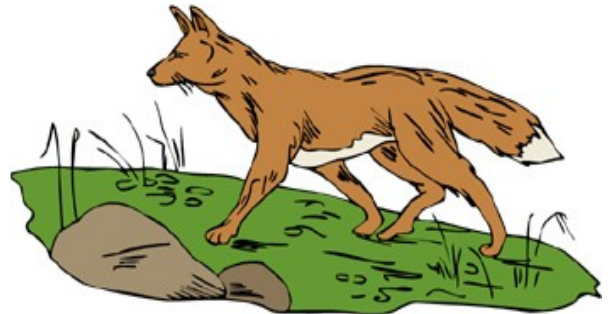
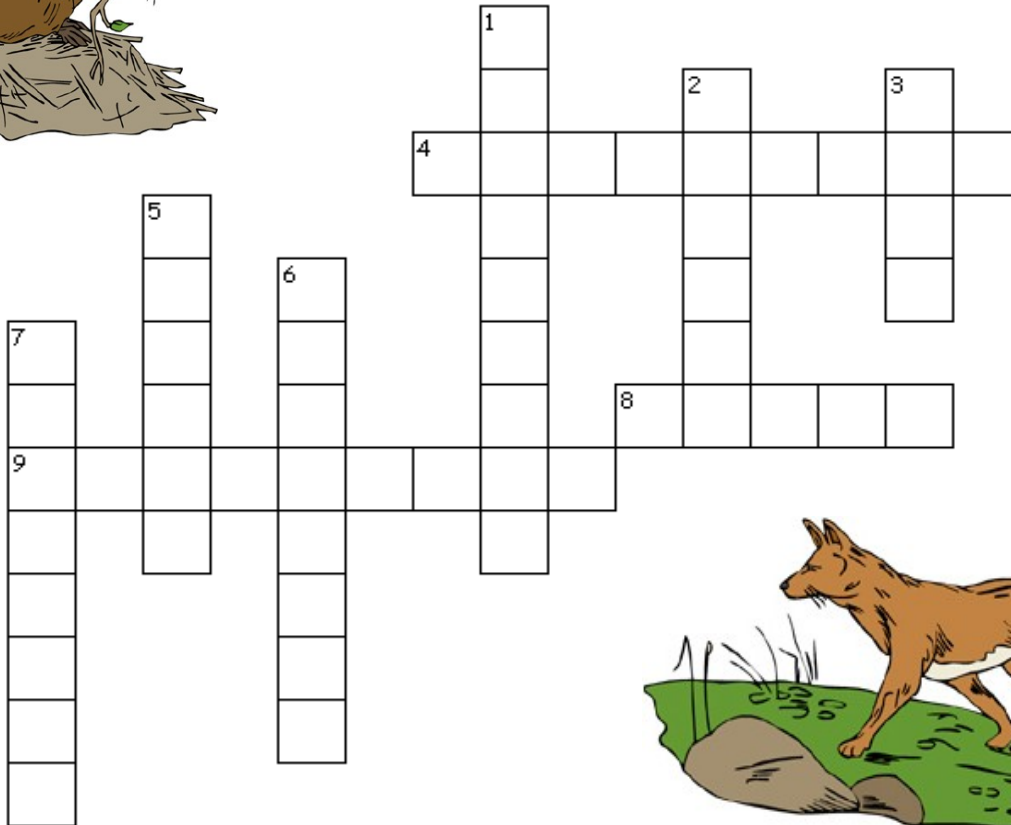
horse - herbivore

human - omnivore

ANSWER KEY

Is That Mammal a Carnivore, Herbivore or Omnivore?

Vocabulary Crossword



Use information from the article to help you answer the crossword clues.

Across

- 4. animals who hunt other animals (**predator**)
- 8. sharp, curved nails on an animal's foot (**claws**)
- 9. animal that eats only meat (**carnivore**)

Down

- 1. animal that eats only plants (**herbivore**)
- 2. group of warm-blooded animals with hair or fur (**mammals**)
- 3. animal that is hunted and eaten (**prey**)
- 5. back teeth (**molars**)
- 6. animal that eats meat and plants (**omnivore**)
- 7. front teeth (**incisors**)