

For Creative Minds

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Special Feet

Most, but not all, animals have feet. Animals that don't have feet, like this milk snake, have strong muscles in their abdomen that grip the earth beneath their belly when they move.



The toe flaps (pectinations) of ruffed grouse that live in northern areas with long winters and deep snow are twice as long as those of grouse living further south.



In just one minute, a mole can dig a tunnel as long as your two hands put together. It uses its front feet to dig with while its hind feet kick the loose dirt above the ground.



A woodpecker spends a lot of time clinging to the bark of trees while it drills holes with its beak to reach insects or make nesting holes. Many birds have three toes pointing forward and one toe pointing backwards. Woodpeckers have two toes in front and two toes in back (zygodactyl feet), which gives them a much better grip on tree trunks and branches.



Some mammals, like the fisher, have scent glands (dark spots on pads) on their feet. They leave a little scent of themselves with every step they take.



What Legs Can Do

Match the descriptions on the right with the animals on the left. Answers are below.



white-tailed deer



honey bee



red squirrel



mallard duckling



spider



dragonfly

1. My legs are a weapon.
I kick predators so
they'll leave me alone.

2. I use my legs to swim.
Webbed toes help me
paddle in the water.

3. My legs can catch
my next meal. I have
three pairs of legs

4. My legs and feet help
me grip the bark and
scurry up a tree.

5. I use all eight legs to
walk along my web.
My feet can taste food.

6. My legs have small
pouches. I carry pollen
from flower to flower.

Answers: 1: white-tailed deer. 2: mallard duckling. 3: dragonfly. 4: red squirrel. 5: spider. 6: honey bee.

Match the Foot to the Animal

Match these feet with the animals they belong to. What can you tell about the animals by their feet? What do you think these animals use their feet for? Answers are below.



Answers: 1-B barred owl, 2-F dogbane beetle, 3-A millipede, 4-E red eft, 5-C red fox, 6-D wood turtle

Fun Facts

Opossums have a special “thumb” on each hind foot that can touch each of the toes on the same foot. This opposable thumb helps an opossum grasp branches and climb.

Humans have opposable thumbs on our hands. Can you touch the your thumb to the tips of your other fingers on the same hand? Imagine how hard it would be to climb a tree, brush your teeth or eat a sandwich if you didn’t have opposable thumbs.



Porcupines eat bark and spend a lot of time in trees. Their feet help them climb up tree trunks and out onto limbs where they eat leaves and buds. The claws on a porcupine’s foot are curved and grip the bark of a tree very well. The pad on the bottom of each foot is bumpy. These bumps help the foot hold onto the bark of a tree.

A beaver’s front feet are small and not webbed. Beavers use them to hold mud, sticks and stones, but they don’t paddle with them. A beaver’s hind feet are very large and have webbing between the toes. When a beaver swims, it paddles through the water with its hind feet and steers with its tail. Each hind foot has two nails, which are split. A beaver uses these nails to comb leaves, sticks, insects, and snarls out of its fur. A beaver uses the nails on all four feet to spread oil on its coat to make it waterproof.



All spiders spin silk, and their legs help guide the silk as they make things with it. Most spider legs end with two claws. With help from their legs some spiders weave silk webs, wrap prey, make egg sacs and create silk nurseries for their young. A spider’s eight legs and feet help it capture food, weave silk, stalk prey, and climb up plant stems.