

STUDENT MASTER

What Lives in Mangrove and Salt Marsh Habitats?



Polar bear in native Arctic habitat



Black mangrove



Salt marsh

Are you likely to find a polar bear hunting for seals in the warm coastal waters off of Hawaii? No! What if someone brought a polar bear to Hawaii? Could it survive in the wild? No! Animals are adapted to survive in specific habitats. A polar bear is adapted to survive in the cold Arctic, so it has immensely warm fur. The white fur camouflages the bear, allowing it to blend in with the ice. And the bear's powerful legs are great for running and swimming from ice floe to ice floe. Those adaptations help the polar bear survive in the Arctic. However, all that warm, white fur would probably prevent a polar bear from surviving in Hawaii.

At Harbor Island, Texas, which is part of the Mission-Aransas National Estuarine Research Reserve (MA NERR), there are mangroves and salt marsh habitats. Both of these habitats occur along the Gulf Coast where the salty, tidal waters flood the salt marsh and mangrove habitat each day. Even though these habitats occur in similar locations, different animals live in them. A marsh is a wetland habitat dominated by grasses or grass-like plants. A salt marsh is a marsh that is flooded by salty water, such as water from the ocean. Mangrove habitat consists of saltwater wetlands that are dominated by trees, such as the black mangrove. Some animals are adapted to survive in the salt marsh while others live only in mangrove habitat.

In this exercise, you will choose a specific salt marsh or mangrove animal to study. You need to learn why that animal lives in the salt marsh or the mangrove habitat and how the animal is adapted to survive in that habitat.

Procedure

1. Read the introduction above. Then look closely at the photos of the two habitats: the mangrove and the salt marsh habitats. Imagine what it would be like to be an animal living in each habitat.
2. Choose a salt marsh or mangrove animal to study from the lists on the next page.
3. Use references provided by your teacher to fill out an Animal Flash Card for your animal.

Selected Animals of the Mangrove

Common name	Formal (Latin) name	Common name	Formal (Latin) name
Periwinkle snail	<i>Littoraria angulifer</i>	Mangrove tree crab	<i>Aratus pisonii</i>
Mangrove rivulus fish	<i>Rivulus marmoratu</i>	Roseate spoonbill	<i>Ajaia ajaja</i>
Snowy egret	<i>Egretta thula</i>		

Selected Animals of the Salt Marsh

Common name	Formal (Latin) name	Common name	Formal (Latin) name
Fiddler crab	<i>Uca longisignalis</i>	Gulf killifish	<i>Fundulus grandis</i>
Whooping crane	<i>Grus americana</i>	Snowy egret	<i>Egretta thula</i>
Marsh periwinkle snail	<i>Littorina irrorata</i>	Blue crab	<i>Callinectes sapidus</i>
Marsh wren	<i>Cistothorus palustri</i>		

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Animal Flash Card

Common name of animal: _____

Formal (Latin) name of animal: _____

Lives in which habitat? _____

1. What does the animal eat?
2. Does the animal find its food in the salt marsh or in the mangrove habitat? If neither, where does the animal find its food?
3. List one or more adaptations that help the animal find or eat food.
4. What are the animal's predators?
5. List one or more adaptations that help the animal avoid predators.
6. Does the animal nest or have its young in the salt marsh or in the mangrove habitat? Where does it have its young?
7. List one or more adaptations the animal has that help it find a mate or protect its young.

Draw your animal or print out a photograph and place it here.