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Nature's Wonders

From the snow-capped, dry deserts of the high Himalayas, to the lush, dense jungles of the Western Ghats, India has it all. It's no surprise that each ecosystem is home to some of the most visually stunning creatures on Earth. The glint of a beetle's shell. The soft fluff of a monkey's fur. The iridescence of bird and butterfly wings. India truly has some of the world's most beautiful animals. But beauty in the wild isn't just for show – it's a matter of survival.

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Orange oakleaf butterflies are found in the Himalayas





Why Do Some Animals Blend In?

Hiding, or camouflage, is a simple survival strategy. For animals that are hunted, not being found is key. Take the oakleaf butterfly, whose wings help it blend seamlessly into the forest floor. By evading predators, they live to see another day. Hiding can be just as important for predators, too. Tigers mostly hunt in grasslands, scrub or dry forests. While moving, they seem to dissolve into the grass. Camouflage could mean the difference between finding a meal and going hungry.





Then Why Do Some Animals Stand Out?

Sometimes, beauty can be an important warning. Snakes, frogs or insects that have bright colours signal danger to potential predators. They're saying, "I could be poisonous, or venomous! Wouldn't you rather eat something else?" Other animals occasionally make bold bluffs, being colourful but not venomous. They might closely mimic another species that is dangerous. Since the wrong choice can be deadly, predators often avoid making the choice at all.





Can Beauty Attract a Mate?

Looking good takes time and effort. The same is true for animals. Colourful feathers, long tails and bright fur are hard to grow. It's a sign that these animals are so healthy that they not only survive, but also thrive. It shows potential partners that they'd be a good choice and the offspring are likely to be healthy, too. Birds are famous for their showy displays and colours. Most often, the males are beautiful, while the less colourful females sit back and choose.

A stunning Himalayan monal in flight

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Why Do Some Animals Shimmer Like Rainbows?

Our hair, skin and eyes are coloured by pigments. These are chemicals inside our cells that give us colour by absorbing some lights and reflecting others. Some animals don't have pigments, but rely entirely on structure. Microscopic structures bend and scatter light, producing shifting hues that dazzle or confuse predators and impress mates.



A photograph of an ornate flying snake (Chrysopelea ornata) with a black body, yellow bands, and orange spots, perched on a green leaf. The snake is the central focus of the page.

Ornate Flying Snake

Find Me Here!

This snake is most common in the Western Ghats, Eastern Ghats and the eastern Himalayan states.

CRITTER STATS

Scientific name: *Chrysopelea ornata*

Size: 1–1.3 m – about the length of a guitar

Weight: unknown

Lifespan: 10 years

Habitat: dense tree canopies of wet forests

Conservation status: least concern



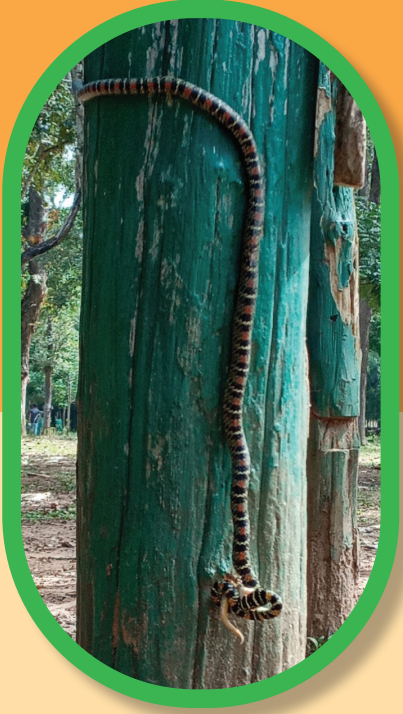
This elusive and beautiful snake hangs out in the canopies of massive trees in rainforests. Good climbers, ornate flying snakes live most of their lives in treetops, ambushing frogs, geckoes and, occasionally, small birds.



The ornate flying snake is a living optical illusion. Is it black on green or green on black? Every so often, there's a flash of red.

Its intricate design makes the snake almost impossible to pick out on the rough tree bark. Combine this with the green and black on the snake's back, and it becomes a master of camouflage.

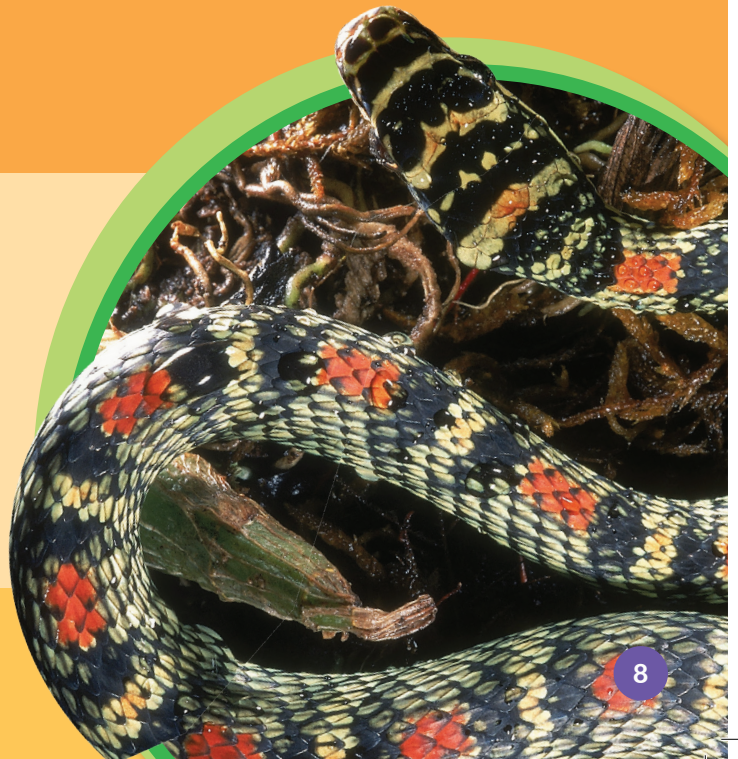




When an unsuspecting small animal passes by, it lunges from its hiding spot to snap it up. They have fangs at the back of their mouths. The mild venom helps them hunt prey, but is not fatal to humans.

Although they're called flying snakes, they're more like really excellent gliders. They flatten their bodies into a ribbon shape and swing from side to side.

The movement allows controlled glides between trees. These snakes can even change direction mid-glide.





DID YOU KNOW?

During the monsoon, multiple snakes entwine together to form a “mating ball”. These balls can have as many as six snakes, fighting it out.



Unfortunately, these elegant snakes are threatened by the pet trade. Exotic pet traders capture and sell them, even though this is illegal.

These snakes can glide forward by as much as 100 m. That’s a hundred times their body length. True long jump champs!

