Virtual Field Observations with Santa Cruz Predatory Bird Research Group (SCPBRG): Observing Animal Behavior

What is animal behavior?
Animal behavior is the study of everything that animals do and how they respond or react to other organisms and their physical environment (e.g. weather patterns or land formations). Scientists are interested in how animals find food, avoid predators, choose mates and reproduce, and care for their young.

Why do scientists study animal behavior?
Studying animal behavior allows scientists to gather more knowledge and evidence to better understand animals. It also allows scientists to predict how human actions might negatively affect animals. These studies help further conservation efforts.

How do scientists study animal behavior?
Scientists typically keep journals of **ethograms** to record animal behavior. Ethograms are a list of behaviors performed by an animal species along with precise definitions and detailed descriptions of each behavior.

Channel your inner scientist!

Hone your data collection skills and make virtual field observations with the Santa Cruz Predatory Bird Research Group's live webcams.

If you are unable to complete these observations because the webcam is not working or due to other technical difficulties, you can still observe and collect data on wildlife such as birds, lizards, or insects in a backyard, on a neighborhood walk, or looking out a window in your home. You can also observe pets at your home or around your neighborhood. *Stay safe during the virtual field observation activity and always follow the social distancing guidelines and other recommendations set forth by public health officials.*

Items Needed
- Pencil or Pen
- Stopwatch
- Observing Animal Behavior Worksheets (pages 2-4)
- Access to Santa Cruz Predatory Bird Research Group's live webcams.

Choose any SCPBRG live webcam to observe for at least three minutes. Use the worksheets on pages 2-4 to make multiple animal observations.

Virtual Field Investigations
Observing Animal Behavior Worksheet
Method #1: Ad-libitum ("at liberty") Data Sampling

Researcher (Your) Name: _____

Date: _____   Location of Webcam: _____

Weather: _____

Species Name: _____

Time Frame: _____ to _____

Description of Animal: _____
_____

Description of Habitat: _____
_____

Record the behavior of individuals for three minutes in the space below. This is a great method for initial observations to help form questions for later research. However, this method of sampling will not give you quality data about numeric variables (e.g. how much or how often a behavior happened).

Virtual Field Observations
Observing Animal Behavior Worksheet
Method #2: Ethogram Observation (One/Zero Data Sampling)

Researcher (Your) Name: _____

Date: _____   Location of Webcam: _____

Weather: _____

Species Name: _____

Time Frame: _____ to _____

Description of Animal: _____
_____

Description of Habitat: _____
_____

Behavior Codes:
- R - Resting
- E - Eating
- W - Walking
- F- Flying
- V - Vocalizing
- S - Social interaction

Additional Behavior Codes (Use this space to record other behavior codes you will use in your study.)

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Additional Notes (Use this space to note any other behaviors you think are interesting or significant, but not described in your defined behavior codes.)

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Virtual Field Observations
Observing Animal Behavior Worksheet
Method #2: Ethogram Observation (One/Zero Data Sampling)

Score the occurrence (score of 1) or not occurrence (score of 0) of a specific behavior during a 15-second interval for a total of three minutes. Some behaviors might be simultaneous (i.e. vocalizing and flying). Score both behaviors. Space is available if you would like to observe for longer than three minutes.

Time (sec)	Behaviors								
	R	E	W	F	V	S	____	____	____
0-15									
15-30									
30-45									
45-60									
60-75									
75-90									
90-105									
105-120									
120-135									
135-150									
150-165									
165-180									
Total									

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Post-analysis

Use the collected data to ask yourself the following questions about animal behavior.

- What was the most common observed behavior?
- What other factors may have influenced the animal's behavior?
- Are observed behaviors of different individuals of the same species the same and/or different? Explain.
- What insights can you make about some of the observed animal behaviors?