Animal Reproduction

Learning aims:

- Understand the process of growth in animals
- Explore different lifecycles and parenting techniques of animals
- Discover different birth processes

Activity 1: Growth

Discuss with your class that all animals have to grow in order to reach their adult (or reproductive) state. You could compare pictures of a new born animal and adult, or ask them to imagine themselves as a baby, and try to identify some of the changes.
Discussion topics might include:

- Why animals are not born at their adult size?
- What enables animals to grow?
- At what point some animals stop growing (if ever)?
- What happens to the body while animals grow (including humans)?

Activity 2: Life Cycles and Parenting

Explain to your class that there are 2 main parenting types in the animal kingdom:

- Animals that produce lots of babies in the hope that at least one will survive. These animals tend not to look after their young, but leave them to fend for themselves.
- Animals that produce just one or two babies and protect them fiercely to ensure that they are more likely to survive.

Explain that for some animals lifecycles are simple like ours, but others undergo "*metamorphosis*" and so experience a lot of change.
Challenge your students to research their favourite animal and answer the following questions:

- How old is the animal when it starts to reproduce?
- Does it lay eggs? If yes - how long do the eggs take to hatch. If no, how long is the animal pregnant for ("gestation period")?
- Does it look after it's young?
- How long does the animal live on average?

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Activity 3: Birth and Egg Laying

Discuss the following terms with your class:

- Live birth (viviparous)- animal gives birth to babies and does not lay eggs.
- Egg (oviparous) - animal lays eggs which later hatch into young.
- Ovoviviparous ("oh-vo-viy-vip-a-rous") - animal lays eggs into their body where they will hatch but then be born as live young!

Challenge your students to guess which birthing technique different animals use. You can start with easier animals such as bear, human, dog, penguin, crocodile, butterfly. Eventually you can introduce "wild cards" such as the duck-billed platypus (an egg-laying mammal, or "monotreme"), and the great white shark (which is ovoviviparous).

Some example you could use are:
Viviparous - monkey, dolphin, elephant, bat, rhino, hedgehog, fox, mouse.
Oviparous - Buzzard, grass snake, lizard, duck, frog, butterfly, ladybird, chicken.
Ovoviviparous - Seahorse, adder, slow worm, great white shark, guppy, anaconda, ray, salamander.

Additional Activities

Learn more about the names we give to different animals' young. Challenge each student to research an animal and find out what its babies are called (i.e. fox = kit).

You can turn this activity into a matching game by creating a card for each adult and baby animal from the whole classes' research. Then challenge students to match each of the pairs correctly. You can also turn them over and create a memory game once the students are familiar with the animal young names.