

Wild Kids



On the Run for Dinner by Nancy jo Tubbs

A white wolf chases an arctic hare across the summer tundra. At frantic speed, the white rabbit dodges around mounds of tiny pink wild flowers. The wolf zigzags in close pursuit. Down a gully, up the other side, around a rocky mound, the rabbit surges ahead; it might get away. But the wolf anticipates the hare's next turn and is there to meet it. A pounce, a bite, a shake of the wolf's head—the hare is dead. The wolf carries her prize back to a litter of excited pups.

In this scenario, the wolf won the race for life-sustaining food, but sometimes the hare gets away; then the wolf and her pups go hungry. It is the same with wolves and their prey around the world—elk in Yellowstone National Park, gazelle in Israel, beaver in Canada and wild boar in Russia. Not all are as fast as the arctic hare, but each has its own unique defense system.

You may be surprised to learn that in nature, each prey animal's defenses are well matched against the predator's hunting skills. If the wolf could kill all the elk, it would soon go hungry. Likewise, if elk were so well defended that they always got away, their numbers would grow so large that they would eat themselves out of house and home. The predator-prey cycle keeps the two species roughly in balance. ■



L. David Mech

What do you know about these four prey animals—**whitetail deer**, **moose**, **beaver** and **musk ox**?

See if you can match the prey animal to the list of skills and physical advantages below. Answers at bottom of page

A. ANIMAL:

SKILLS:

- Runs 35 miles per hour
- Sharp hooves for striking
- Sharp antlers
- Babies have no scent
- Sensitive ears, nose and eyes
- Coat is the color of the woods

B. ANIMAL:

SKILLS:

- Weighs 600-1,200 pounds
- Stands up to 6 1/2 feet tall
- Runs 35 miles per hour
- Massive antlers
- Thick, heavy hooves

C. ANIMAL:

SKILLS:

- Lives in a herd
- Forms a defensive circle
- Thick skull bone
- Short pointed horns
- Long, thick coat
- Massive body up to one-half ton

D. ANIMAL:

SKILLS:

- Can retreat to water
- Fast swimmer
- Can hide underwater for 15 minutes
- Warns others with tail slap
- Good hearing
- Stick and mud house, difficult to penetrate

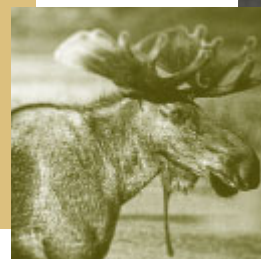
Use the encyclopedia or another reference to describe defenses that other animals use against wolves. Some choices are bison, woodland caribou, elk, wild boar, and Dall sheep.

1. ANIMAL:

DEFENSES:

2. ANIMAL:

DEFENSES:



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Answers: A—Whitetail deer B—Moose C—Musk ox D—Beaver