

Counting camouflage – guidance card

Were there more green insects than you expected?

Did you count them all?

Were they difficult to find?

The green insects were harder to find because they were hidden against the green background. Some species are coloured to blend in with the habitat they live in. This is called camouflage. It is a defence mechanism, designed to protect the creature from the eyes of predators.

Some insects are brightly coloured and so are easier to spot against the green background. These species use different methods to protect themselves.

What other types of defence against predators are there?

Autotomy

Some creatures such as stick insects and certain types of spiders use a method of detaching parts of their body (for example their legs) to escape the grasp of a predator. In some cases, the creature can regenerate the lost body parts later.

Chemical releases

Some butterflies, when they are attacked, release chemicals which taste horrible to birds and so birds avoid eating them. Butterflies advertise the presence of these chemicals by means of bright colours on their wings. Some butterflies that do not release chemicals mimic these wing patterns to put predators off. Bombardier beetles have developed a mechanism to squirt toxins at predators that come too close.

Masquerade

Some creatures use markings to mimic other creatures that are more frightening to predators. For example, some butterfly larvae look like snakes. The yellow and black bands on bees and wasps warn predators that they have a sting, but some harmless flies mimic these colourings to scare predators off.

Stings

Some insects, such as bees, wasps and hornets have stings that they use to inject toxins, which are painful or sometimes lethal to predators.

Wings

Insects such as bees, flies and butterflies have wings which enable them to make a quick getaway. A butterfly's hind wings are thought to allow the butterfly to take swift, tight turns to evade predators.