



What do wild animals eat?

All animals have their own form of balanced diet. Some eat meat, plants or a mixture of the two. Few can eat the same food as we do.

Wild animals are very sensible about what they eat. Just like us, they sense that some foods are good for them. They know that their bodies can only digest certain foods. This is why animals search for the foods that suit them best. If it cannot find suitable food, an animal will starve, even if there are other types of food around.

Plant eaters

Many animals can only get their proper diet by eating plants (Picture 1). Some of the world's largest animals, such as the elephant and the giraffe, are plant eaters.

There are large numbers of plant eaters in every part of the world. These may be insects such as grasshoppers, seed-eating birds such as finches, or small animals such as squirrels and beavers (Picture 2) which eat fruits, nuts and the bark from trees.

Meat eaters

Some animals can only get their proper food by eating other animals (Picture 3).

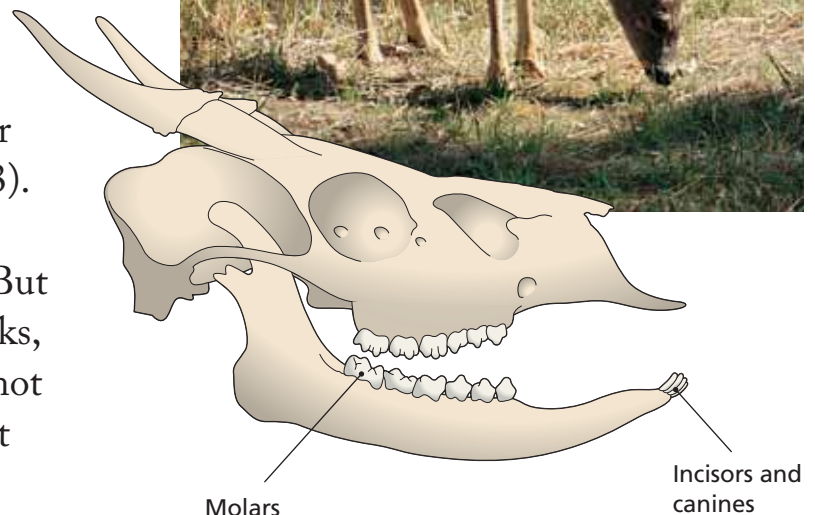
We tend to think of meat eaters as large animals such as lions and tigers. But smaller animals, such as frogs and hawks, are meat eaters, too. Such animals cannot use plants for food because they cannot digest plants.

Meat and plant eaters

Only a few animals can get nourishment from both plants and other animals. The bear and the wild boar are two animals that eat both meat and plants.

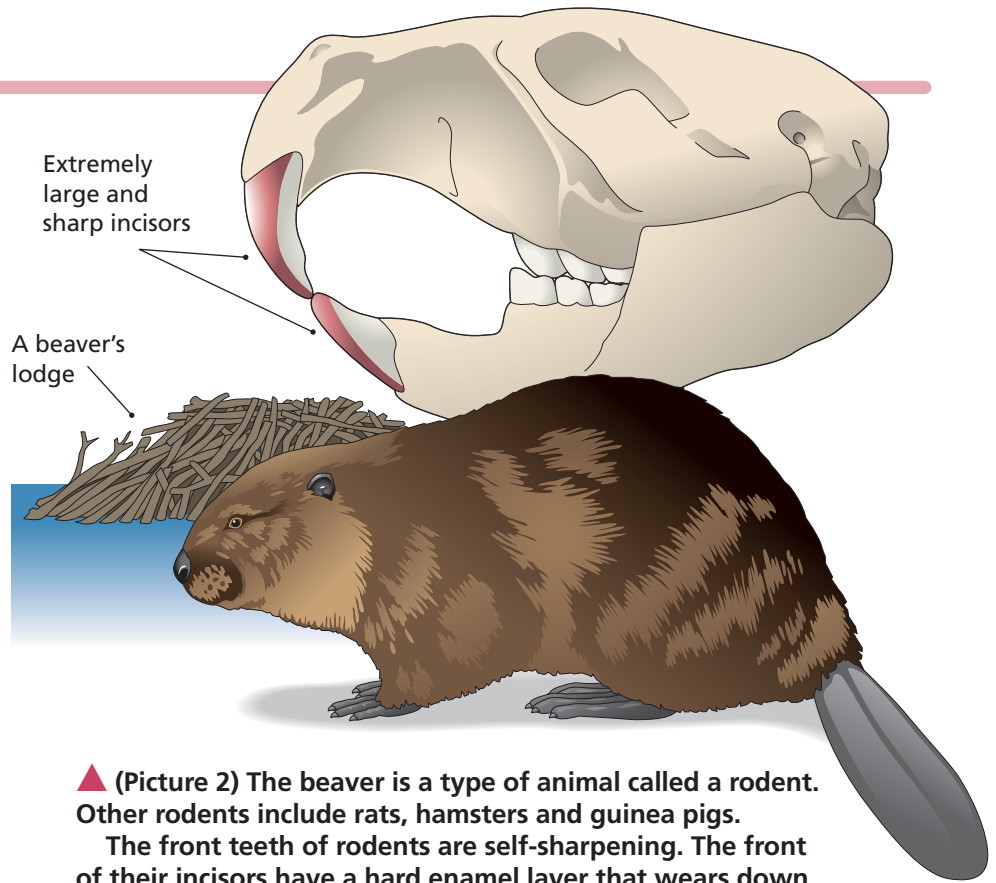
▼ (Picture 1) This is the skull of a deer. Deer feed entirely on plants and need to be able to cut and grind the tough fibres in their food.

The incisors and canines are only present in the lower jaw. The upper jaw has a tough pad. The teeth and the pad act like a knife and chopping board when the animal bites grass. The back teeth have many ridges which grind up the food as the jaw moves from side to side.



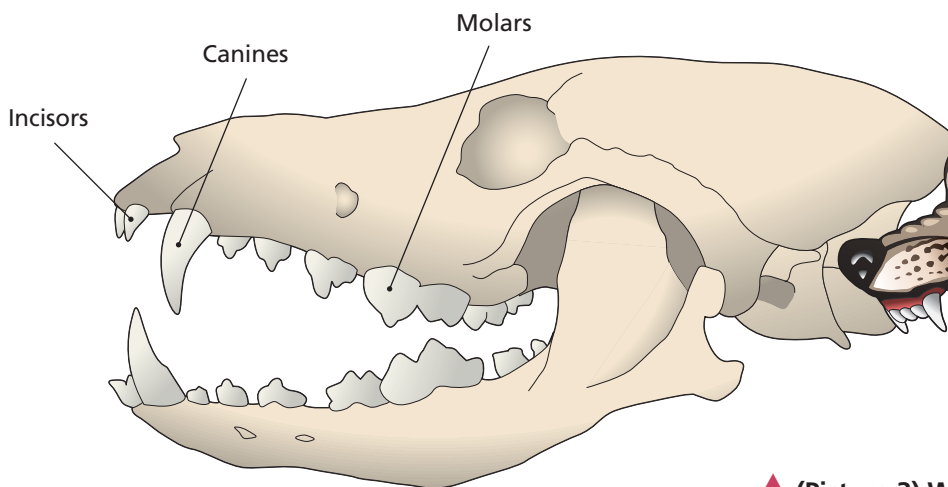


The beaver is capable of cutting down trees just by eating through them, as this picture shows.



▲ (Picture 2) The beaver is a type of animal called a rodent. Other rodents include rats, hamsters and guinea pigs.

The front teeth of rodents are self-sharpening. The front of their incisors have a hard enamel layer that wears down more slowly than the rest of the tooth leaving a sharp, cutting edge. These teeth grow continuously to keep pace with the wear and tear they get from tough food.



▲ (Picture 3) Wolves hunt in packs and eat meat. When they catch their prey they have to tear up the flesh. The wolf's front teeth are large and sharp so that it can hold on to its prey and bring it to the ground. The back teeth are more pointed than human teeth because they are used in tearing. They do not crush their food, but swallow lumps whole.

Summary

- Plant-eating animals have teeth designed for crushing and grinding.
- Meat-eating animals have teeth designed for holding and tearing.
- Some animals can eat both plants and other animals.