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Science

Science

Life Science

Animals of the Concrete Jungle

by Gina Felipe

Genre	Comprehension Skills and Strategy	Text Features
Expository nonfiction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Main Idea and Details• Fact and Opinion• Text Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Glossary

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Vocabulary

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raptors

thriving

traipsing

vivid

Animals of the Concrete Jungle



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Word count: 1,810

Note: The total word count includes words in the running text and headings only. Numerals and words in chapter titles, captions, labels, diagrams, charts, graphs, sidebars, and extra features are not included.

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Welcome to the jungle—the concrete jungle, that is. Cities are sometimes called concrete jungles because city people live among dense buildings, streets, and sidewalks in much the same way jungle wildlife lives among dense plants and trees. You wouldn't expect to see parrots and alligators **traipsing** through a concrete jungle, would you? Well, you'd better think again!

It's true that most of the animals you'll find in a city are the ones you'd expect to see. Pigeons, squirrels, and rats have adapted extremely well to city life, which is why you can find an **abundance** of them in most every urban area. But if you take a closer look, you just might see something really wild in the concrete jungle—like hawks, bats, and even mountain lions!

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New York City is full of skyscrapers that **loom** dramatically over the busy streets below. Pigeons have long built their nests on the ledges and balconies of the city's tall buildings. These spots give the birds protection from stormy weather and from predators too. But now the pigeons have company that they might not welcome with open wings—predatory red-tailed hawks, which consider pigeons a tasty meal.

Hawks had often been seen flying over New York City during their migrations, but in 1991 one hawk decided to make the Big Apple his permanent home. Birdwatchers gave him the name “Pale Male” because of his distinctive white coloring.

A female hawk soon joined Pale Male, and when it was time to build a nest, the pair picked the window ledge of a luxury apartment building near Central Park. Four years after moving to Manhattan, the first red-tailed hawk chicks hatched in Pale Male's nest.



One of Pale Male's offspring looks down on Manhattan from its 12th-floor nest.

Red-tailed hawks aren't the only **raptors** that have settled into city life. Peregrine falcons were an endangered species in 1970. Scientists wanted to help rebuild the population, but the falcon eggs and chicks they placed in the wild became fast food for owls and eagles. So scientists turned to cities, where there were few natural predators and a large food supply for the young falcons—and tall buildings that might let the falcons soar and swoop as they do in the wild. Today, peregrines are **thriving** in big cities all over the world, from New York to London to Brisbane, Australia.



A monk parakeet
in Brooklyn

If you want to see monk parakeets, a type of wild parrot, in their natural habitat, you'll have to travel to the South American countries of Bolivia, Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, or Brazil. But you can see them closer to home if you visit places like Brooklyn, New York. There you can find flocks of wild parrots nesting in telephone towers and fire escapes.

No one is quite sure how the parrots got to Brooklyn. Monks are popular pets because of their **vivid** green coloring and their social nature. Some people believe that in the 1960s, monks that were being shipped to local pet stores escaped from a crate that was accidentally opened at a nearby airport.

You might wonder how parrots from South America can survive the cold winter weather of the northeastern United States. In fact, monks are not tropical birds. Their natural habitat is actually snow-covered, mountainous areas of their native countries.

In addition, unlike other parrots, which use their nests only for breeding, monks sleep in their nests all year. This enables them to withstand colder temperatures. In northeastern cities, people often feed the birds during winter months. So what do monk parakeets eat? In the wild, they eat mostly fruits, nuts, and seeds. In Brooklyn, they eat all of those things—and pizza too!

One urban animal is so popular that it gets its own festival every year. Austin, Texas, is home to one of the largest urban bat colonies in the world. Mexican free-tailed bats live right in the middle of downtown Austin, underneath the Congress Avenue Bridge. On hot summer nights, people gather to watch as millions of the flying mammals **emerge** from under the bridge and disappear into the night.

The bats began moving to Austin's bridge shortly after it was built in 1980. Their population grew quickly. At first, some people thought the colony should be destroyed. But environmentalists told them that these gentle bats help more than they could ever harm. How? They eat tons of bugs. The Austin bat colony can eat up to 30,000 pounds of mosquitoes and other pests a night! They also pollinate local fruit trees, and their guano, or dung, makes a great fertilizer for gardeners.



Mexican free-tailed bats in Austin

Each June the bats have babies, and by August the babies are ready to join their parents in flight. The Austin bat population is then at its peak. That is when the city of Austin celebrates these amazing creatures with a festival full of songs, dance, and bat-loving fun.

Of course not all wild animals are as beloved as Austin's bats. Some animals, such as raccoons, are considered pests in urban areas. Others, like bears, can be dangerous as well.

Raccoons are smart, and they can easily adapt to all kinds of environments. If there are no gardens to raid, they'll just take their pick of food from neighborhood garbage cans. If there's trouble above ground, raccoons will travel through underground sewer systems. And if you leave your front door open, you'd better watch out! You might just find a mess waiting in your kitchen when you return.



Raccoons, bears, and deer have all been seen in urban areas.

Mountain lions, or cougars, have been seen far from their natural habitat.



The cougar is known by many names: mountain lion, panther, puma, and catamount are a few. Once, the big cats were **populous**; they were found coast to coast and from Canada all the way to Argentina, at the bottom of South America.

Sadly, that changed because of both hunting and the destruction of the cougar's natural habitat. By the 1960s, cougars had disappeared from the eastern United States, and their numbers were greatly reduced in the West.

Though scientists have been needed to help reintroduce some endangered animals, such as the peregrine falcon, the cougar population has bounced back on its own. Scientists believe that there now are tens of thousands of mountain lions nationwide, including some that have been seen in such urban areas as Los Angeles, California; Portland, Oregon; and Boulder, Colorado.

The coyote could be the model for a wild animal that is perfectly suited to city life. Sometimes called wild dogs, coyotes are scavengers. They're not fussy about their diet—they're content to eat whatever they can find. They can live in almost any environment, from deserts to swamps and mountains to cities. They're also good at finding ways to hide from people. That's an important skill to have if you're a coyote, because people have hunted coyotes for more than 200 years.

City-dwelling coyotes are not as frightened of people as their country relatives. They relate people to food and sometimes will come up to the front door if they know they can get a meal. Though they may seem curious about people and look similar to a pet dog, coyotes are wild animals and should never be fed or approached. Wild animals are naturally frightened by humans, and almost all wild-animal bites happen when people treat the animals as if they were pets.



Urban coyotes may be bolder than their relatives in the wild.



In the mid-1950s, the American alligator was nearly extinct due to hunting. In 1962, Florida passed a law that banned the hunting of American alligators. In 1970, a much stronger federal law made it a federal offense to ship illegally hunted alligators across state lines. As a result, the population of these reptiles has increased over the years. Today, alligators are a common sight throughout Florida. They've even turned up at popular amusement parks!

More than one million alligators now live in Florida, where more than 18 million people live. With those numbers, you might imagine that conflicts between people and alligators occur often. You'd be correct. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission received more than 18,000 alligator complaints

in the year 2005 alone. People complain about alligators in their backyards, on their patios—or even eating their pets.

The state Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission routinely traps and removes these reported alligators from residential areas.

However, alligators are generally shy creatures. People are usually attacked only when they enter an alligator's environment, such as when they swim in lakes where alligators are known to live or when they approach water areas on a golf course. Considering that alligators have lived in Florida waters for millions of years, the reptiles may just be saying, "Keep away from my home!"



This Florida alligator found its way to West Palm Beach.

Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco is a popular tourist site. It's well known for its famous restaurants, its fishing boats, and its crowds—of sea lions! California sea lions used to stop by San Francisco Bay for a visit every so often. Then, in 1989, an earthquake hit the area. Since that time, so many more sea lions have been hanging around the Wharf that they've become one of the city's biggest attractions.

In fact, so many sea lions moved to the K dock at Pier 39 that boats had to be moved to a different section of the pier. The lions come and go throughout the year, but the average population of sea lions at the dock is between 350 and 800. The dock is a safe place for sea lions because the great white sharks and orcas that usually eat them don't enter the protected waters so close to the city.

San Francisco's sea lions sunbathe at Pier 39 while tourists watch.





Whenever people develop a formerly natural area by building homes and businesses, native wildlife is affected. Many times, animals that live in the natural environment lose their homes forever. Some become endangered or even extinct.

But in the best of times, animals and people can learn to live alongside each other in harmony, even in the most crowded urban areas. Falcons, raccoons, and parrots have found it easy to thrive in urban areas, where they don't have to compete with as many natural predators as in their native environments. Of course, they do have to face other dangers, such as power lines and human hostility.



A ranger in the Everglades National Park points out wildlife in its natural habitat.

It's crucial for people to work together to make sure that people and animals can find ways to co-exist in urban areas. It's also important to educate people about the benefits of wildlife in the city. If that happens, "concrete jungle" might be used to describe a great place for people—and unexpected animals—to live!

Now Try This

You have read about how different wild animals have adapted to survive in urban areas. Now it's time for you to be a wildlife observer. It doesn't matter if you live in the city, the country, or the suburbs—you're surrounded by wildlife if you just take the time to look for it.

First, you'll have to go outside or look through a window. Use a notepad and pencil to take notes and draw sketches of what you see. Write and draw details about any wildlife you observe, from the tiniest ant on the sidewalk to a deer grazing in your garden.



Here's How to Do It!

1. If classroom materials are available, work together in small groups to make dioramas that show both the natural environment where you live and the type of animals that you observed.
2. On an index card, write your ideas about why these animals are well-suited to live in your environment. Consider what the animals eat and what food sources are available in your area; what the weather is like and how the animals are protected from it; and so on. Glue your index card to the back of your diorama.
3. When your group is finished, present your diorama to the class. Compare your theories about how animals have adapted to your environment with those of other groups.

Glossary

abundance *n.*
quantity that is much
more than enough

emerge *v.* to come
into view; come out

loom *v.* to appear as
a large, threatening
shape

populous *adj.* full of
people or animals

raptors *n.* birds that
live by hunting, such
as eagles, hawks, or
owls

thriving *adj.*
growing rich or
strong

traipsing *v.* walking
about aimlessly or
carelessly

vivid *adj.* strikingly
bright; brilliant

Reader Response

1. What is the main idea of this book? List three details you learned about animals that live in the concrete jungle.

Detail 1	Detail 2	Detail 3

2. Reread the first sentence on page 14. How did that sentence help you understand what the rest of the paragraph would be about?
3. Choose three words from the glossary and write a sentence for each word.
4. What other wild animals do you think could thrive in urban areas? Why?