

What's for Breakfast?

Overview

Horned lizards are, in general, ant specialists, although each horned lizard species requires a different percentage of ants in their diet. That doesn't mean that horned lizards exclusively eat ants, though! What else might researchers find in a horned lizard's stomach?



Materials

This activity can be customized for the particular horned lizard species in your area by altering the ratio of ants to other insects.

- Pack of plastic ants
- Pack of assorted insects (pick out and use only the insects that might be consumed by a horned lizard)
- Large horned lizard statue or figurine
- Shoe box, painted black, with hole cut out of side big enough for an adult hand
- Velcro to attach the horned lizard statue to the shoe box
- Piece of black felt (for draping over the hole in the shoebox to hide the horned lizards' stomach contents)
- Whiteboard for graphing results, if desired

Directions

1. To prepare, cut a hole in the side of the shoebox. This is where students will put their hand into the horned lizards' "stomach" to pull out some of the stomach contents for analysis. Cover the hole with a piece of black felt to act as a curtain.
2. Preface the activity with a short talk about horned lizard life history.
3. Ask students to reach into the horned lizards' stomach and pull out some of its contents. Place the items they pull out on the table, and ask them to sort into piles of "ants" or "other."
4. Have students count the number in each pile to determine what the horned lizard eats more of. Students can create a graph of their findings.
5. Discuss some of the insects found in the "other" pile, and that horned lizards might eat different species of insects and ants as babies.
6. Discuss the connection between the horned lizard body shape and their diet, and talk about how researchers dissect horned lizard scat to determine what they eat.
7. Remind students that horned lizards, like all wildlife, should be respected by observing them from a distance to reduce their stress.