



Once through the cervix, you reach the uterus or womb. It is a fleshy, blood-rich hollow organ that periodically has a thick lining. If the female doesn't become pregnant, this lining breaks down and exits via the vagina as the period or menstruation. Many animals such as horses and cows reabsorb the lining so don't experience periods.

The uterus is the area that the foetus develops in. The thick blood-filled lining is where the embryo first implants and receives its nourishment from.

At either side of the top of the uterus are the fallopian tubes or oviducts. These are tubes that join the uterus to the ovaries. Ova (eggs) travel from the ovaries at the end of the fallopian tubes to the uterus and sperm (if present) will fertilise the ovum inside these tubes. Each fallopian tube has a separate ovary at its end. These resemble a pouch of marbles and have the function of making eggs (ova). Within the ovaries are follicles of varying sizes that contain the developing eggs. When an egg matures, the follicle bursts and releases the ovum into the oviduct where it becomes available for fertilisation. Usually, only one egg is released each month and the ovaries take turns at doing this.

The female also has an anus for the expulsion of faeces and a bladder for the storage of urine. The bladder sits in front of the uterus and has a tube called the urethra which takes the urine out to the vulva.



Mating Rituals and Weird Mating Habits



Animals can be truly bizarre! Forget about going to the movies, buying flowers or updating their social media status! They go to extreme lengths and perform a range of weird behaviours to find a mate. I recommend you don't try any of the following methods to try and find a boyfriend or girlfriend.

Example One: Praying Mantis

Most species of praying mantis are predators that feed on flies, beetles, crickets and even small scorpions, lizards, frogs, birds, snakes and fish. They lie in wait until the prey comes close enough then they launch and grab them with their spiked front legs.

Praying mantises will perform mating dances to attract and confirm a mate. Once mating has been agreed upon, the male will climb on the back of the female and begin to mate with her. Sometimes during mating, the female will bite the head off the male which causes him to jerk around wildly and results in the sperm being ejaculated. Other females will wait until the male has finished then as he dismounts she will eat him. This is known as sexual cannibalism, and while it is common in 90% of species, it only occurs in around 20% of matings.

The female then lays her eggs in a special foam produced in her abdomen that hardens like a shell around the eggs protecting them.



Example Two: **Porcupines**

Porcupines are spine-covered rodents that are found in Europe, Asia, Africa and Northern America. The female porcupine is only interested in mating for around 12 hours out of an entire year. She has complete control over mating and the male has to perform some weird rituals in order to woo her. If she doesn't want to mate or finds the male unappealing then she uses her spiky quill covered tail to swipe at his soft unprotected reproductive organs and stomach.

The ritual starts by the male rubbing his nose against the females' nose. If she finds him attractive then she will allow him to continue to try and win her over but if not, she will walk off to find a more attractive mate. The successful male then stands on his hind legs and sprays a massive stream of urine all over the female porcupine's body, covering her from head to toe. It isn't normal urination though – it is a super high powered jet, much like a fire hose. The female will then sniff and taste the urine and if she is impressed by the pheromones that she senses then she will allow him to mate with her. She will show the male her non-quilled belly and allow him to mate with her repeatedly. If he tires too soon, she will leave him and find another male to mate with.

The female porcupine is pregnant for around 210 days, then she gives birth to baby porcupines which luckily for her, have soft spikes.



Example Three: **Banana Slugs**

Banana slugs are often yellow and sometimes have brown spots like an overripe banana. They are the second largest land slug and grow up to 30 cm and weighing in at 115 g. They are found in North American forests and bush land where they feed on decaying material such as leaves, animal poop and mushrooms.

Banana slugs, like many slugs and snails, are hermaphrodites. In fact, they are simultaneous hermaphrodites which means that have both male and female sex organs at the same time. In order to find a mate, they produce a thick mucus that contains pheromones that attract another slug.

Each banana slug has a vagina and a penis that is almost the same length as they are. Their penis comes out of a pore in their head. When they find some slime pheromones that tickle their fancy, they nip and bite their mate, then extend their penis and insert it into their mate's vagina. After a long time, they ejaculate and transfer their sperm. Each slug does this at the same time so both slugs become fertilised.

Where it gets weird is what happens next! More often than not, the slugs then chew off each other's penis so that they become lodged inside their mate. Unfortunately for the slugs, the penis doesn't grow back. It was originally thought that they did this because they had got stuck but new research and theories show that it could be to prevent the mate mating with another slug and having too much competition between the sperm.



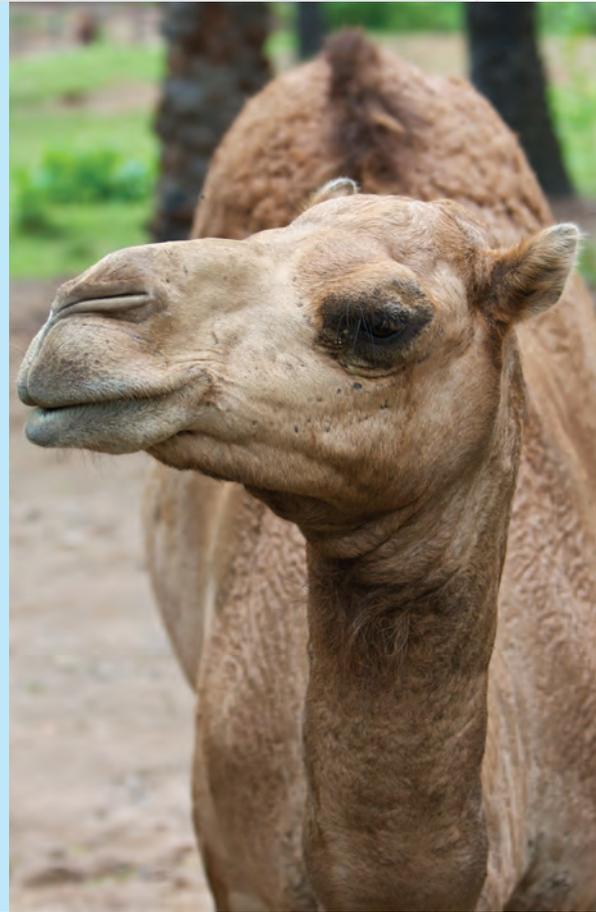
Example Four: Camels

The Arabian camel has only one hump and is found throughout the hot, dry deserts of the world such as Africa, Middle East and Australia. They are large animals and can grow around 2 m tall. The hump on their back is a store of fat that allows them to walk for days on end in the inhospitable desert without stopping to eat.

Male Arabian camels go to quite extreme lengths to find and attract a mate and get her to have sex with him. Firstly, they urinate on their own tails to emit their pheromones and rub their necks on any surrounding objects they can find. They do this because they have glands called 'poll glands' that make a brown, smelly, gooey substance that also contains sex pheromones.

The most disgusting part of their ritual is that they fill part of their mouth with air so it forms a large (30 cm) pink sac that hangs out the side of their mouth. This is called a dulaa. They then drool, producing massive amounts of foamy saliva and make gurgling noises in the saliva pooling in their mouths. This is what female camels find attractive and a male with a large mouth sac can attract large groups of females (up to 20) with whom he mates and produces offspring.

Males will fight each other for the females and become quite aggressive where they bite and pinch their opponent's dulaa. If it becomes damaged, it may become stuck, hanging outside the mouth.



Example Five: Honey Bees

Male honey bees (drones) have one function in life, which is to mate. They don't work, help raise the young or defend the nest. While this might seem like a nice life, they are only needed for mating and really aren't much more than a sperm donor. In fact, if a male bee fails to mate, he will be driven from the nest as the honey is too important to waste on him.

When they mate, honey bees do it in the air while flying. The queen bee flies out of the nest and proceeds to circle around trying to find a mate. The drones will compete with each other and form a swarming mass around the queen, all trying to be the chosen one.

When a drone is successful, he holds onto the queen and extends his penis into her reproductive tract. His ejaculation is immediate and occurs with so much power that his testicles basically explode and the tip of his penis is ripped off and remains inside the queen. The drone then drops to the ground dead. This is referred to as 'sexual suicide'.



These are just a handful of the weird and wonderful ways animals mate. There are many, many, more examples that could have been used such as the bower birds, hippopotamuses, flatworms, frigate birds, male hooded seals and the bedbugs ... and the list could go on. The animal kingdom is full of unique (sometimes terrifying and disgusting) mating rituals.