Name_____

The Climbing Rodent

At first glance, it's hard to tell if vizcachas are related to rabbits or rodents. The large ears and long hind legs of a vizcacha resemble those of a rabbit. However, it has a bushy tail similar to a chinchilla. Rodents and rabbits have specific physical differences. The vizcacha has two incisors, as do other rodents. Unlike some rodents, however, it is an herbivore, feeding on almost any type of plant.

Vizcachas live in colonies that range from a few members to hundreds. They use many different methods to communicate. The position of their tails indicates anxiety or relaxation. An extended tail shows the animal is anxious, and if the tail is curled, the animal is at ease. The animals chatter to one another within the colony. They give loud warning calls to alert others of danger. One advantage of colony living is protecting the young. A female gives birth to one fully developed baby, which is weaned at two months. But the young is small and vulnerable.

Mountain vizcachas live in rocky mountain areas of South America. Unable to dig well enough to escape predators, the animal has adapted to its habitat by developing superb climbing skills. It uses its powerful hind legs to jump quickly among the rocks. Their speed and harsh living environment keep the vizcacha safe from most predators, such as pumas and foxes. But speed cannot fully protect it from its worst enemy: humans. People hunt vizcachas illegally for their meat and fur. Habitat loss also threatens them.

We group things in our environment to help us understand the world in which we live. Most often, we use visual cues to help us categorize plants and animals. However, sometimes things are not what they seem. Not all furry creatures with large ears, long hind legs, and fluffy tails are rabbits. Not all rodents burrow to escape predators. Each animal adapts to its unique environment.

Text Questions

1. What is the vizcachas' main defense against predators?
   a. digging
   b. climbing
   c. attacking
   d. hiding

2. Which statement does <u>not</u> describe a communication behavior of vizcachas?
   a. They extend their tails to show anxiety.
   b. They chatter within the colony.
   c. They move their ears to communicate food sources.
   d. They give loud warning calls to alert others of danger.

3. What is one purpose of this passage?
   a. to show how one species is different from another
   b. to describe the habitat of a chinchilla
   c. to explain how animals communicate
   d. to describe how animals survive in rocky mountain environments

4. Which is a synonym for the word *categorize* as it is used in the text?
   a. classify
   b. characterize
   c. describe
   d. attribute

5. How can scientists help people understand differences between species?

_____

_____

 ©Teacher Created Resources

LIVEWORKSHEETS