

# What Is an Adaptation?

Species change to fit well with their ecosystems. Small changes happen over long periods of time. These changes help species survive and reproduce.

Ecosystems also change. For example, food and predators change or weather changes. To survive, species must continue to change or **adapt** to fit a changing environment.

Why do bats sleep upside down? Bats are safe when they sleep in hard to reach places. Some bats roost on the roofs of caves, in tree hollows, or in empty buildings. The Honduran ghost and other tent bats hide beneath large, floppy leaves. The easiest way for bats to hold on to walls, branches, and leaves is with their feet, so they hang upside down.

Why does the seed of the strangler fig tree sprout on the branch of a host tree? Strangler figs seeds need sun to sprout. The rainforest floor is shady because sunlight is blocked by a dense canopy of leaves and branches. The strangler fig sprouts and grows quickly when it starts life higher up, above the canopy, where it can get plenty of sunlight.

**A good fit.** The bats and strangler fig fit snugly within their ecosystems. This helps them live longer and reproduce. Both are examples of **adaptation**.

Some adaptations are physical. For example, the fig seedling sends long roots to the ground.

Other adaptations are changes in behavior. Bats didn't always roost in buildings and under leaves. Now they seek out these safe, comfortable places to sleep.

**All species adapt.** Every species has unique ways of living in its ecosystem. Many of the strange and beautiful ways that animals look are adaptations. A lot of the amazing things they do are adaptations. Adaptations help living things survive—and they make every species unique.

