

PECULIAR PAIR

Liger?

Zorse?

Beefalo?

Who are you calling bizarre, buddy?!



are many barriers that must be overcome to produce a hybrid animal. Such barriers are known as breeding barriers and include factors such as different habitats, mating cues, egg-sperm incompatibility, and so on. Even if the egg and sperm do merge,

the embryo could be malformed and die from its defects. In fact, many hybrid animals are born infertile!

Without this mechanism, we could be seeing bee-flies, hippo-phants and even human-zees! Yikes!

Freaks of Nature?

Animal hybridisation is rare in the wild, but it sometimes does occur. A recent example is the sparrowed owl of North America. The sparrowed owl is a hybrid animal bred from the barred owl and the spotted owl.

Scientists believe that this pairing occurred when the barred owl was forced out of its territory due to deforestation (the clearing of forests by Man). As a result, the barred owl had to move into the spotted owl's territory, and later mated with spotted owls to produce sparrowed owls!

Do you know that different species can mate to create new hybrid animals? That's exactly what happens when a zebra and horse crossbreed – a zorse is born! A zorse looks a bit like a horse with stripes! Bizarre? That's not all! Ligers are born when a lion and tigress mate, and beefalo is what you get when a bison and cow mate!

Bee-fly? Hippo-phanta? Human-zee?

Breeding barriers are natural mechanisms that protect the purity of species and safeguard genetic diversity. Just imagine a world where every animal is a hybrid: there wouldn't be any pure breed bees, elephants or humans!

What makes this particular hybrid animal so unique is its ability to reproduce. This means that the population of sparrowed owls will increase, and the endangered spotted owl may subsequently become extinct altogether!

How does it work?

Animal hybridisation usually takes place in captivity and when there is a lack of mates of the same species. People have bred these exotic hybrids either naturally or via artificial insemination.

Why aren't there more hybrid animals?

Animals from different species don't pair off easily because there

Man-bred Animals?

If you think that breeding hybrid animals is something new, think again! Humans have been breeding mules by crossing male donkeys with female horses since ancient times! Mules are popular animals to breed because they are hardworking, patient and sure-footed animals that help to haul heavy loads and pull carriages.



RINGS

In case you are wondering, a different hybrid is produced when a male horse and female donkey interbreeds – the offspring is known as a hinny. A hinny is said to have a horse's head and a donkey's body, while a mule is said to have more donkey characteristics. Don't be surprised if you can't tell the two apart – most people can't!

Mythical Beasts

Is the mythical Unicorn a hybrid animal? Some people believe that such mythical beasts as the Unicorn, Minotaur, Sphinx and even the Merlion are hybrid animals that were bred in the wild, and caused great alarm when they were first "sighted" by humans. Scientists however, have dismissed this as nonsense - only closely related species are able to produce hybrid offspring. It is virtually impossible to produce creatures like the Minotaur (human-bull hybrid), Sphinx (human-lion hybrid) or Merlion (lion-fish hybrid) because the genetic link between the species is simply too distant!

Lion or Animal Hybrid?

When Prince Sang Nila Utama first came upon the shores of Singapore, he saw a strange beast with a black head, white breast and red fur – a beast that was assumed to be a lion. A lion with a black head, white breast and red fur?! How is that possible? That is why some people believe that the beast Prince Sang Nila

Utama saw was actually a hybrid animal! Possibly a big cat hybrid!

Speaking of big cat hybrids, these happen to be one of the most interesting animal hybrids around because of their almost limitless combinations! There are tigons (male tiger and lioness hybrid), leopons (male leopard and lioness hybrid), jaguleps (male jaguar and leopardess), jaglions (male jaguar and lioness hybrid), as well as other hybrids bred from domestic cats and big cats.

Other Weird Animal Hybrids

There are zeedonks (zebra-donkey hybrid), geeps (goat-sheep hybrid), wolphins (False Killer whale-Bottlenose dolphin hybrid) and dzos (bull-yak hybrid). These are animal hybrids that don't come about naturally but are bred by Man for display in zoos and circuses. These animals may be interesting to look at, but do you think it is morally right to breed these animals purely for novelty?

Blue Tigers, White Lions and Stripe-less Tigers?

Are these animal hybrids too? Actually, these are what scientists



call mutations – random changes in the genetic material of an organism that cause its appearance or behaviour to change.

Very often, these mutated animals don't survive for long in the wild, and it's no wonder. Just imagine life as a white lion in the African grassland: you would be spotted by your enemies from miles away! That is why most mutated animals are kept in zoos as curiosities, or killed by Man and taken home as trophies.

So, next time you come across an animal that looks like a cross between two animals, don't be surprised! It could be a hybrid animal!

