mystery science

Grades K-5
Mini-Lesson: “Can animals be friends with other kinds of animals?”

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

VIDEO 1

Hi, it's Esther! One night, right as the sun was setting, I went out for a walk. When I looked up at the sky, I saw this. At first, I thought it was a cloud or smoke, but it was actually a gigantic flock of birds called starlings. Wow! Lots of animals spend time in groups like these starlings, living and playing with animals who are the same kind of animal they are. But is this always true? Do animals only spend time with animals who are the same kind? Someone named Charlie has a question about this. Let's give Charlie a call now.

[Video Call]

- Hi, Esther!

- Hi, Charlie!

- I have a question for you. Can animals be friends with other kinds of animals?

- That's a great question.

Maybe you can guess why most animals spend time with animals who are like them. They eat the same things and they live in the same places. Being together in a group can also help keep them safe. But what about animals who aren't the same? Do they ever spend time together? Well, check out these two. In Canada, this is a pretty common thing you'd see. A magpie sitting

on an elk, walking on an elk, or standing on an elk, and the elk doesn't seem to mind at all. They seem so relaxed together, just hanging out. But are they friends? What do you think?

VIDEO 2

Some of you may have answered, "Yes, these two are friends." Maybe you noticed how peaceful the bird and the elk looked together. And some of you may have said, "No, these two are not friends. They're not doing anything together." Maybe you even thought that the elk looked relaxed because it didn't notice the magpie. But guess what? Scientists have observed these elks getting very annoyed when other kinds of birds try to sit on them. But they let the magpie stay. Why? Well, there's a third creature in the video, hidden in the elk's fur. If you've ever taken a hike or gone camping, you might be able to guess what it is. A tick. A tiny blood-sucking bug. Ticks love to attach themselves to elks. Not only is this itchy and annoying but dangerous. Ticks carry diseases that can make elks sick. And guess who loves eating ticks? Magpies. So both animals get something great out of this relationship. The elk gets rid of ticks and the magpie gets lunch. Scientists who study animals call this type of relationship mutualism. Mutualism is when everyone in the relationship gets a benefit. The animals help each other, and helping is a big part of friendship. Think about your friendships for a minute. You help each other out with all kinds of things. But there's more to being a friend besides helping. When you think about your friendships, I'll bet you also think about the fun stuff you do together, like playing, going places, and just being together. When I think about the friends I had at your age, that's what I remember the most too. The fun stuff like sledding, building forts, and making up games. But I don't only have friends who are humans. When I think about my friends, I also think about Olive, my cat. We play, we hang out, and I help her by feeding her and taking her to the vet. Spending time with her makes me feel calm and happy. Olive and I are friends in a lot of the

ways that I'm friends with other humans. But we're not the only ones with this type of friendship. Check this out. This baby elephant was orphaned and brought to a wildlife sanctuary in Africa. The rescuers tried putting him with a group of other elephants to see if they would adopt him but that didn't work. He was rejected. The elephant wouldn't eat, wouldn't play, wouldn't even drink water. The rescuers were very worried about him, so they brought in a sheep from a neighboring farm to be a companion. The rescuers didn't exactly know how this would turn out but they were ready to try anything to help the elephant. At first, things didn't go so well. But in just one day, they started playing and spending time together. After a few days with the sheep, the elephant drank milk for the first time since he was rescued. And after that, the sheep and the elephant continued to spend most of their time together, playing, resting, going on walks—just generally having lots of fun at the wildlife refuge. So in summary, different kinds of animals can be friends. When we observe different animal relationships, like me and Olive or this elephant and sheep, these friendships look very similar to how we are with our human friends, whether it's playing, helping each other, or just having fun spending time together. That's all for this week's question. Thanks, Charlie, for asking it!