

Classification Key Masters: Nature's Detectives

Learning objective: To identify and classify living things into groups using a branching identification key.

Use these flashcards to test your knowledge of how scientists organize the natural world. Read the question on the front, then flip to check the answer. Once you have mastered these, try the Greater Depth challenges at the bottom of the page.

What is a classification key?

A tool used by scientists to identify living things by answering a series of questions about their characteristics.

What is the difference between a vertebrate and an invertebrate?

A vertebrate has a backbone or spine, whereas an invertebrate does not have a backbone.

Why is the word 'dichotomous' used to describe some keys?

It means 'divided into two parts', as each step in the key offers two choices that help narrow down the identity of an organism.

If a creature has feathers, which group does it belong to?

Birds (Aves).

What is a 'characteristic' in the context of classification?

A distinguishing feature or quality, such as having fur, scales, or six legs, used to identify an organism.

True or False: An insect is a vertebrate.

False. Insects are invertebrates because they have an exoskeleton rather than a backbone.

Bea the honeybee is an invertebrate. Does she have an exoskeleton?

Yes, insects have a hard outer shell called an exoskeleton to protect their bodies.

What is the primary purpose of using a branching key?

To systematically sort organisms into smaller and smaller groups until only one specific type remains.

If you are using a key to identify a creature and you see the question 'Does it live in water?', what is this asking about?

Its habitat.

Why do scientists classify living things?

To make it easier to study, understand, and identify the vast variety of life on Earth.

Nova the owl is a vertebrate. Which group does she belong to?

Birds (Aves).

What might happen if a key only had one choice at each branch instead of two?

It would not be a branching key; it would just be a list, and it would be impossible to filter or sort the items effectively.