

Selection Stories

Read the stories and underline the traits. Put a star by the variation that seems to provide a survival advantage for the organism.

Elephants



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Most elephants have tusks, but some are naturally born tuskless. Researchers in some areas are reporting more tuskless females. These elephant populations have experienced heavy poaching where elephants are killed for their ivory tusks. Elephants without tusks are not poached for their ivory.

Hummingbirds



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The sparkling violetear hummingbird lives in South America. A variation in the hemoglobin protein of some birds provides a more efficient transfer of oxygen to rapidly working muscles. This lets them seek nectar from flowers at higher elevations in the Andes Mountains where there is less oxygen available in the thin atmosphere.

Medicinal plant



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Fritillaria delavayi is a small plant that grows on the rocky slopes of the Himalayas. Some of the plants have green leaves with a yellow flower but others are drab, matching the gray rocks around them. This variation is camouflaged and easily overlooked by the people who harvest the plant to make traditional medicines.

Note: Image is a species of Fritillaria, but not F. delavayi.

Salmon



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To reproduce, or spawn, salmon swim from the ocean to return to the river where they were born. Klamath River salmon in California spawn at different times of the year. Spring spawning salmon deposit eggs further upstream in the watershed than the fall-spawning salmon. The early spawning fish also have more fat on their bodies and are more desirable to harvest by fishing communities.