

LEVELED BOOK • 0

Where's Your Hair?



Written by Charles C. Hofer

www.readinga-z.com

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What Makes a Mammal?

All **mammals** have certain things in common. They are warm-blooded, they nurse their young, and most—not all—have hair. Some mammals have lots of hair, while others have almost none at all.

Some mammals—normally hairy—have been **bred** to be hairless. Many common pets include hairless **breeds**. There are hairless dogs, hairless cats, and even hairless guinea pigs. Hairless mammals can be found in the wild, too. Look around you. Hairless animals are everywhere!

Hairless Dogs

Hairless dogs have a long history. The xolo (SHOW-low) is a hairless dog breed that has been around for more than three thousand years. Some believe xolos followed early humans when they first moved to Central America. Today, the xolo is the national dog of Mexico.



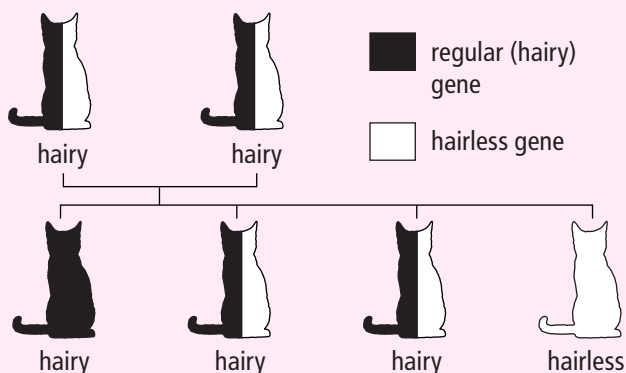
Mexican xolo



Peru is home to hairless Inca orchids, one of the rarest dog breeds in the world. Most hairless Inca orchids have a little tuft of hair on their head. It almost looks like a furry wig! Not all Inca orchids are hairless, though. Both hairy and hairless Inca orchids can be found in the same litter.

How can that be? The answer is **genes**. Genes are instructions for your cells. They help make you who you are, from the color of your hair to how tall you will grow.

Genes Behind the Scenes



If a kitten gets a hairless gene from one parent, it can pass that gene along to its kittens someday. If a kitten gets a hairless gene from both parents, it will be hairless.

Genes are passed down from parents to children, but not every child gets the same genes. That's why siblings often look like their mother and father, but in different ways.

In the animal world, a hairless dog or cat is also the result of genes. If the same hairless gene is passed down over several generations, it can lead to a new hairless breed.

Hairless breeds sometimes need help to survive. Since hair helps keep a mammal warm, many pet owners use sweaters to warm their hairless pets. They also take care to protect their pets from sunburn.

Cool Cats

Unlike hairless dogs, hairless cat breeds have only been around for a few decades.

The beautiful sphynx cat is a result of a gene's natural **mutation**. That mutation led to a new breed of cat. Today, the sphynx is the most popular of all hairless cats.



sphynx cat

Mutant Magic

Sometimes a gene can change unexpectedly. That change is called a *mutation*. Most hairless animal breeds are caused by such a mutation. The gene that was supposed to instruct the body to grow hair changed. That gene was then passed down to the children . . . and a hairless breed was born!

Russia is home to the peterbald. Though it may look like a grouchy space alien, it's a friendly and very playful breed of hairless cat. Because it's so active, the peterbald has a high body temperature. This makes the peterbald a warm and cuddly pet year round!



Hairless cats are happy to seek out a warm lap to sit on. Although they lack a thick coat of fur, most actually have a very fine coat. When petted, a hairless cat feels like a fuzzy peach.

Skinny Pigs and Fancy Rats

Guinea pigs are a popular hairless rodent. One hairless breed of guinea pig is called the “skinny pig.” This guinea pig looks skinny because it doesn’t have a thick coat of fuzzy fur like regular guinea pigs.

Unlike their furry cousins, skinny pigs need special care. Without a coat of fur to protect them, skinny pigs can easily injure their skin or get sick. They need to stay indoors where it’s safe.





furry and hairless rat

Another hairless rodent is a rat known as the “fancy rat.” Rats are mostly social animals—they like to be around other rats. Putting hairless fancy rats together with furry rats (fancy or not so fancy) helps keep them happy and in good health.

A Hairless Solution?

An allergy is your body’s reaction to something it doesn’t like. Sneezing, itchy eyes, sore throat—these can all be caused by allergies.

Some people are allergic to hairy pets. An allergic reaction to a pet is usually caused by the animal’s dander, or small flakes of skin. All pets have dander, but hairless pets don’t have a thick coat of fur to trap the dander. Regular cleaning of a hairless pet—and your home—may reduce the sniffing and sneezing caused by pet allergies.



Hairless in the Wild

Hairless animals are found in the wild, too. These animals have **adapted** to live without a lot of hair. The naked mole rat is a funny-looking rodent that doesn't have thick fur like most rats. Instead it is covered in wrinkly pink skin.



Neither rat nor mole, it turns out naked mole rats aren't entirely naked, either. Hairs between their toes help them sweep away dirt while they are digging tunnels.



When two naked mole rats want to pass each other in a tunnel, the smaller one usually crouches down so the larger one can crawl over.

Naked mole rats spend their entire life below the ground in tunnels. To control their body temperature, they move around. When it's warm out, naked mole rats move to deeper tunnels where it's cooler. When it's cold, the mole rats group together to keep each other warm.



Asian elephant

Hairless Adaptations

Some mammals have adapted to live in places where they don't need a lot of hair. Elephants and rhinoceroses have thick skin to help protect them from the sun and heat where they live. Whales and dolphins live in the ocean. Instead of hair, a thick layer of blubber, or fat, helps these mammals stay warm in the chilly water.



beluga whale

Humans are nearly hairless, too. Instead of fur, we wear coats when we're cold and shorts when we're hot. We heat our homes during winter and cool them during summer. Like these other mammals, we've adapted to live without (much) hair.

Hairless All Around Us

Hairless animals are everywhere. They can be wild animals or cuddly pets. Some hairless animal breeds are thousands of years old, while others are brand new. Who knows what kind of hairless animal will pop up next?



Who you calling hairless? Three hairless breeds—Peruvian Inca orchid, Mexican xolo, and Chinese crested—are ready to stand up for hairless pets everywhere.

Glossary

adapted (<i>v.</i>)	changed to fit a new or specific situation or environment (p. 12)
breeds (<i>n.</i>)	groups of animals or plants that are alike as a result of controlled reproduction (p. 4)
bred (<i>v.</i>)	cared for an animal or plant in order to produce a certain kind of offspring (p. 4)
genes (<i>n.</i>)	tiny carriers of information by which living things transfer traits from one generation to the next (p. 6)
mammals (<i>n.</i>)	warm-blooded animals with a backbone and hair or fur that nurse their young and have babies that are born live (p. 4)
mutation (<i>n.</i>)	a change in the genes from one generation to the next that may change how an offspring grows and what it can do (p. 8)

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Back Cover: A Chinese crested dog enjoys (?) a bath.

Front Cover: The fantastic (and hairless) four: a Mexican xolo dog, sphynx cat, guinea pig, and rat

Title Page: A Chinese crested puppy shows us its good side.

Page 3: A sphynx cat nuzzles her kitten.

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