

3. Albinism in Animals

It may be hard to believe but this is a skunk. We know that skunks are usually black and white, however this skunk has a condition called *albinism*. Creatures with this condition are sometimes referred to as 'albino's'.

Albinism is an inherited condition. When a creature is born with albinism, they lack the pigment that they would normally have, which gives color to a creature's skin, hair and eyes. The lack of this pigment, called melanin, causes the animal to be white, or mostly white, and they usually have pink eyes, although occasionally they will have blue eyes.

Being white, however, doesn't always mean an animal is an albino. Some animals that appear white, such as this fallow deer, are considered *leucistic*. Some white animals are leucistic year around, while others, such as this jackrabbit, are leucistic only during winter months, which helps them camouflage in the snow. Leucism is often mistaken for albinism.

Wild animals that have albinism may be faced with more challenges and danger than creatures without albinism. To live and flourish in the wild, we know that animals must be able to find food and be able to camouflage so they don't become food themselves. Since their fur is missing camouflage, they would be more easily spotted by predators.

It is thought that albinism occurs in approximately one in 10,000 mammal births. Any mammal can be born with albinism however, it is thought that it occurs most frequently in birds.

If you see a rare albino animal, seize the moment and enjoy the rare opportunity you've been given!