

I recently saw a video of fainting goats and wondered why they freeze in place? Do other animals have reflexes like this?

Some animals, like the fainting goat, demonstrate behaviors that are often subject of funny videos and entertainment but there's always a reason for their actions. First, we should define the term reflex. The basic definition of a reflex is an involuntary response to a stimulus. This means that the animal does not have to think about its reaction, it happens automatically when triggered by a stimulus. In the case of the fainting goats, the stimulus can be loud noises, sudden movements, or anything that startles the goat. The instant stiffness of limbs followed by them falling over is due to a hereditary genetic disorder called myotonia congenita. Instead of the typical fight or flight response when muscles tense and then quickly relax after the danger leaves, these goat's muscles remain tense and relax very slowly, causing them to lie on the ground "frozen" for up to 20 seconds before standing up and walking away.

Here are a few other animal reflexes:

You have probably heard the phrase "cat-like reflexes", which usually refers to someone who has a fast reaction time. Cats are known for reacting extremely fast to stimuli, especially for their ability to almost always land on their feet after falling. This is called the righting reflex and is possible due to their flexible backbone that allows them to rotate their body quickly once they visually orient themselves to the ground.

Another entertaining animal behavior is the flehmen response. If you've ever seen Mister Ed, you know that the horse curls up his upper lip, exposing his front teeth and a voice talks for him the background. The signature lip curl that makes Ed appear to be talking is the flehmen response. This reaction is typically caused by discovering a new taste or smell. Other animals you may see doing this include cows, goats, deer, etc. Coincidentally, these are all ungulates, or hooved animals.

The dog scratching reflex is another common example. If you've ever hit the sweet spot on a dog's belly, you know what happens next! Their back leg starts moving rapidly in a scratching motion towards your hand. This reaction's purpose originates from the body trying to prevent parasites from latching on. Whether the itch comes from your hand or a flea, the response is the same.

While these animal behaviors are cute and comical, there is a real, physiological reason behind them all!

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