

HAIR TODAY, GONE TOMORROW



by Lee Lamb



Ever seen a nude elk strolling through the woods? Elk shed every hair on their bodies twice a year. But they're never caught naked because the new hairs grow in while the old ones are falling out.

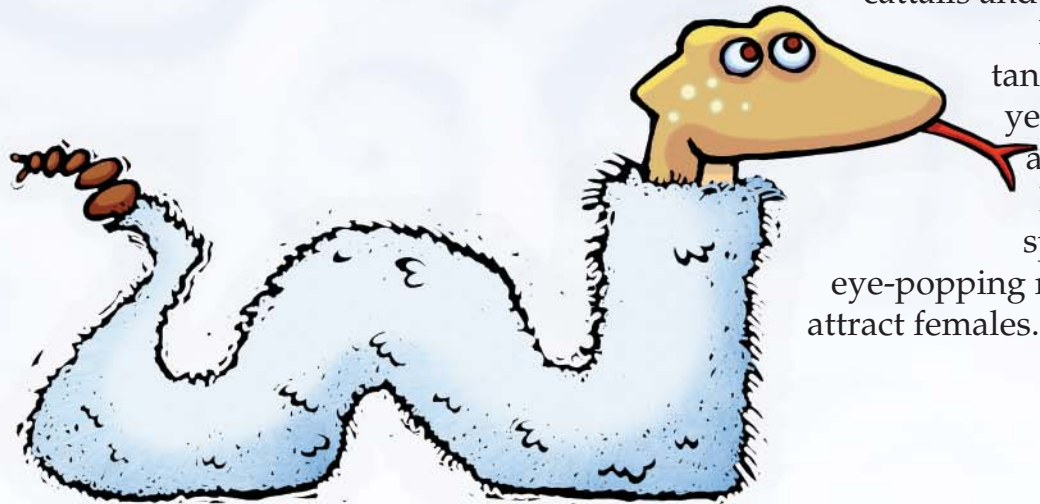
Each fall elk grow thick underfur, like a cozy fleece jacket, and long waterproof guard hairs that work like your raincoat. These layers help keep them warm and dry during winter.

Come spring, elk *molt*, or shed their winter garb for cool summer duds made of thin, short hairs. This is the time of year when elk look a little like Captain Jack Sparrow, their old coats hanging in tattered strips like unruly dreadlocks. Other animals change their wardrobes, too.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Most birds trade in all their worn-out feathers for bright new ones once a year. Marsh wrens molt twice a year because their feathers get extra beat up from flying through the scratchy stalks of cattails and reeds.

Male scarlet tanagers molt twice a year, too. They replace all their feathers in late fall. Then in the spring, they grow eye-popping red feathers to attract females.



GROWING, GROWING, GONE!

Reptiles and insects shed their skins—a process called *ecdysis* (ek duh sis)—to give them room to grow. A prairie rattlesnake leaves its old skin in one piece. When a snake starts feeling too big for its britches, it rubs its nose on the ground to push its skin over its head. Then it slithers on out, revealing a shiny, brand-new skin underneath.



WHERE'D HE GO?

Ever gone hunting dressed in camo with your face painted green and brown so ducks or deer wouldn't see you? Snowshoe hares stay *camouflaged* by swapping coats twice a year. They wear a thin brown coat in spring and summer then grow fluffy white duds for winter. Changing colors helps hares hide from hungry owls and lynx year-round!

THESE CRITTERS GOT THEIR THREADS CROSSED. WHO SHOULD REALLY BE WEARING WHAT?

