



Lab 2 Handout – The Making of the Fittest: Natural Selection and Adaptation

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Adapted from: HHMI BioInteractive: *The Making of the Fittest: Natural Selection and Adaptation*

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ALLELE, GENOTYPE, AND PHENOTYPE FREQUENCIES IN ROCK POCKET MOUSE POPULATIONS

INTRODUCTION: The tiny rock pocket mouse weighs just 15 grams, about as much as a handful of paper clips. A typical rock pocket mouse is 172 millimeters long from its nose to the end of its tail, which is shorter than an average pencil. Its impact on science, however, has been enormous. What's so special about this little mouse?

Populations of rock pocket mice are found all over the Sonoran Desert in the southwestern United States. Two varieties occur widely in the area—a light-colored variety and a dark-colored variety. Similarly, there are two major colors of substrate, or surface material, that make up the rocky desert floor. Most of the desert landscape consists of light-colored sand and granite. Here and there, however, separated by several kilometers of light-colored substrate, are patches of dark volcanic rocks that formed from cooling lava. These areas of dark volcanic rock range in age from 1,000 to more than 1 million years old.

Dr. Michael Nachman of the University of Arizona and his colleagues have spent many years researching the genetics of fur color in rock pocket mice. In particular, they were interested in understanding the forces that shape genetic variation in natural populations.

Investigating the adaptive value of different coat colors in rock pocket mice is an example of how scientists are attempting to connect genotype with phenotype for fitness-related traits. In this type of research, investigators try to find the underlying gene or genes for a given adaptation. Examples of other fitness-related traits that researchers are currently investigating are resistance to the pesticide warfarin in rats, tolerance to heavy metals in plants, and antibiotic resistance in bacteria.

PROCEDURE

1. Watch the short film *The Making of the Fittest: Natural Selection and Adaptation*. (10:25 min)

<https://www.biointeractive.org/classroom-resources/making-the-fittest-natural-selection-and-adaptation>

As you watch, record the following information:

- a. What specific trait did researchers' study in this investigation?
- b. How does this trait affect the survival of the mice in different environments?

Black fur in mice

Black fur allowed the pocket mice to adapt better in their environment, where there was a dark lava flow. It allowed them to camouflage better onto the dark rock to avoid predators.

- c. What is the genetic basis of the trait?

There was a mutation in the gene *mc1r*.

2. After watching the film, complete Parts 1–3 that follow.

Making Of The Fittest Natural Selection Answers

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