

- Animal reproduction

# How common are twins in the animal kingdom?

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Twins are fairly common, but with a caveat. In most instances, the offspring will be non-identical twins, triplets, quadruplets and so on. Each individual forms separately, when a sperm fertilises an egg and then goes on to develop. Spotted hyenas, for instance, usually give birth to non-identical twins, as do marmoset and tamarin monkeys. Identical twins, where individuals develop from the same fertilised egg, are much rarer. This makes sense, because identical twins share almost identical DNA, so lack the genetic variability that makes lesser related animals more tolerant of disease and environmental change. The first documented case in birds emerged in 2006, when identical emu twins emerged from the same egg at predicted odds of one in a million or less. Nine-banded armadillos, however, inexplicably give birth to identical quadruplets every time. No-one can really explain why.



**BIOLOGY**

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**Feeling double? Identical twins are rare among birds.**