

# Yes, some animals can have babies without a mate. Here's how

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Flora the Komodo dragon walks around her enclosure at Chester Zoo in Chester, England, Monday Dec. 18, 2006. Flora's virginal conception, and that of another Komodo dragon earlier in the year at the London Zoo, are the first time it had been documented in Komodo dragons. Credit: AP Photo/Dave Thompson, File

A boa constrictor in the U.K. gave birth to 14 babies—without a mate.

Is it a miracle? The result of a secret rendezvous? Probably not. Females of species have the ability to reproduce asexually, without sperm from a male. The process is called parthenogenesis, from the Greek words for "virgin" and "[birth](#)."

Some plants and insects can do it, as well as some amphibians, reptiles, birds and fish. A [stingray](#) named Charlotte that was thought to have become pregnant by this method [died this week](#) at an aquarium in North Carolina, though she never delivered and it is unclear if she was ever pregnant.

Some wasps, crustaceans and lizards reproduce only through parthenogenesis. But in other species it's rare and usually only observed in captivity. Scientists have a good idea how it happens, though they aren't clear why it happens, according to Kady Lyons, a research scientist at the Georgia Aquarium in Atlanta.



This 2015 photo provided by the Missouri Department of Conservation shows a female yellow-bellied water snake at the Cape Girardeau, Mo., Conservation Nature Center that for the second time in two years has given birth without any help from a male member of the species, conservationists say. Credit: Candice Davis/Missouri Department of Conservation via AP, File

A female's egg fuses with another cell, often a cell leftover from a process that allows the female to create the egg. That cell, known as a polar body, gives the egg the [genetic information](#) it would normally get from sperm. The cell starts dividing and that leads to the creation of an embryo.

The snake, a 6-foot, 13-year-old Brazilian Rainbow Boa named Ronaldo, gave birth last week after having [no contact with any other snakes for at least nine years](#), according to the City of Portsmouth College, which kept the [snake](#).

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