

たぬき ひょうげん
「狸」の表現 'Tanuki' expressions

たぬき ね い
+ 狸寝入りする

Literally 'to fall asleep like a tanuki', this expression comes from the tanuki's habit of fainting when suddenly confronted. Other animals also have this habit, hence the English expression of the same meaning, to 'play possum'.

eg. 「ちょっと、^{たぬき ね い}狸寝入りしないで、^き聞いてよ！」
'Stop pretending to be asleep and listen to me!'



と たぬき かわざんよう
+ 取らぬ狸の皮算用

Literally 'counting the pelts of tanuki not yet caught', this expression is equivalent to 'Don't count your chickens before they are hatched.'

たぬ
+ 他抜き

Little tanuki statues can be found outside shops and restaurants in downtown areas. Their significance comes from the play on words ^{ほか}他を^ぬ抜く to take away others. If you take away others, you are the best!

+ たぬきうどん

In Kanto region, たぬきうどん and たぬきそば are soup noodle dishes which are served with てんかす, bits of fried batter, which is considered to be disguised tempura. These dishes are not to be confused with きつねうどん and きつねそば, which are soup noodles served with thin pieces of fried bean curd!

「狐」の表現 'Kitsune' expressions

An animal that plays a similar role to the tanuki in Japanese folklore is the fox. Both tanuki and fox are considered sly, but the Japanese think of a tanuki as being **まぬけ** (simple-minded), whereas they think of a fox as being more **ずる賢い** (crafty and cunning).



✚ きつねとたぬきの化かし合い

Literally 'fox and tanuki tricking each other', this refers to two people trying to outsmart (outfox!) each other.

✚ 狐の嫁入り

This expression has come from a folktale about a fox's wedding, **狐の嫁入り** and the idea that someone (like a fox) is playing tricks when in the midst of fine weather there is a sudden shower.

eg. 「雨が降ってきた。狐の嫁入りだ！」
'It's started to rain. It's a sunshower!'

✚ きつね色

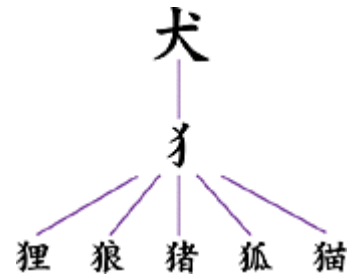
Light, golden brown. Often used to describe bread, eg. パンを狐色に焼く, to toast to a golden brown.

かんじ
漢字 Kanji

You will probably have noticed that the kanji for たぬき and きつね have an element in common. This is the left-hand radical 「犛」 called けものへん animal radical which comes from the kanji for dog, 犬^{いぬ}.

This radical appears in many words for animals, eg. 狸^{たぬき}、狐^{きつね}、

狼^{おおかみ}、猪^{いのしし}、猫^{ねこ}. These words are sometimes written in hiragana when they stand alone and in kanji when part of a compound. They show the role radicals play in the kanji system, giving a generic meaning to a 'family' of related words. What are the meanings of the five animal names left?



Answers: tanuki, wolf, boar, fox, cat