



Owls Aren't Wise & Bats Aren't Blind: A Naturalist Debunks Our Favorite Fallacies About Wildlife

By Warner Shedd

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Have you ever seen a flying squirrel flapping through the air, watched a beaver carrying a load of mud on its tail, or ducked when a porcupine started throwing its quills? Probably not, says Warner Shedd, debunking these and many more popular myths about our animal friends in **Owls Aren't Wise & Bats Aren't Blind**. In this charming and eminently readable biology lesson, Warner Shedd, former regional executive for the National Wildlife Federation, offers scientific evidence that refutes many of the most tenacious and persevering folklore about wild animals. Full of humorous anecdotes and fascinating facts about more than thirty North American species, **Owls Aren't Wise & Bats Aren't Blind** is an entertaining dose of scientific reality for any nature enthusiast or armchair adventurer.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Ever pick up a toad only to have it soak your hand? Don't worry, it was the animal's emergency water storage (not urine!), dumped in a fight-or-flight panic. Think that new beaver clan will dent the trout population in your favorite fishing hole? They don't touch the stuff: beavers are strictly vegan. And go ahead, get close to that porcupine, because they can't fire quills like an AK-47. Want more? Warner Shedd, a native Vermonter, lifelong naturalist, former Forest Service honcho, and a retired executive for the National Wildlife Federation, dispels wildlife fallacies that have passed through generations of well-intended grandfathers and poorly informed folk tales. Shedd covers everything about most backyard critters--from gray squirrels to newts--and expands on some wilder species that we only think we understand.

But Shedd's refreshing anecdotes aren't entirely naysaying. In fact, he confirms many myths with a bit of explanatory elaboration. Take the raven's knack for mimicry, for example; it's entirely capable of uttering "nevermore" if it desires. And while bats aren't entirely blind, Shedd writes, they rely largely on echolocation to navigate, bouncing high-frequency shrieks off nearby objects, sometimes in the range of 115 kilohertz (a human's range goes to a mere 20 kHz).

While these details gives us some solid facts to gnash on, it's Shedd's personal anecdotes (much to the dismay of his resilient Labrador Heidi, who, while accompanying Shedd, has been jumped by muskrats and porcupines, among other things) that elevate his information to entertainment. Retelling stories from his boyhood in Vermont and from his professional work, he takes the reader on a ride through familiar territory: describing roadside carcasses, trash-ravaging raccoons, and clumsy coyotes, among other encounters. To keep us current, however, Shedd updates ongoing conservation efforts and opens an occasional window into his own personal opinions on wildlife management. We're left with a satisfying, inspiring handbook to some of North America's most familiar and erroneously understood creatures. --*Lolly Merrell*

From Publishers Weekly

Owls can't learn beans compared with ravens and jays; they are, however, "superb killing machines," with "virtually silent flight" and wonderful earsA"sightless owls can catch mice by sound alone." Combining reader-friendly wildlife biology and ecology with the folklore of the New England woods, Shedd (who runs the New Hampshire Wildlife Federation) uses common mistakes as springboards for 24 entertaining essays about the real lives, habits and characteristics of various well-known animals. Most concern mammals, from weasels to white-tailed deer, though "The Newt and the Red Eft" get a chapter to themselves, or to itself (the two names describe pond- and land-dwelling stages of the same animal). Moose, it turns out, gained in numbers in northeastern forests after timber companies' clear-cuts created vast "moose pastures" of young trees. Flying squirrels are really gliding squirrels, and during the winter up to eight shack up together. Shedd's helpful chapter on cougars distinguishes the Florida panther (endangered) from its cousins in the Western U.S. (fierce and thriving) and their surviving cousins in the Northeast (mostly mythicalAlthough some poor souls, returning from the mountain states, have brought home cougar kittens as pets). Cougars (like most big cats) don't chase their prey: stalking and pouncing, they rely on surprise instead. Hikers, forest fans, armchair naturalists and others who enjoy these kinds of facts can find plenty more here on bisons, beavers, badgers, bears and other North American creatures (many elegantly depicted in illustrations by Trudy Nicholson). As for those titular bats, "most actually see quite well," though their amazing sonar system, as Shedd describes it, serves most of their in-flight needs. Agent, Linda Roghaar. (June)

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From School Library Journal

YA-Shedd discusses myths about common North American fauna, including squirrels (red, gray, and flying), bears (black, grizzly, and polar), wolves, beavers, badgers, weasels, bats, owls, porcupine, opossum, bison, deer, coyote, and others. The factual text is interspersed with the author's personal experiences with these animals. He provides basic information about each creature before proceeding to expose the truth behind the folk story, such as "beavers pack mud with their tails" or "newborn fawns have no scent." This is a good resource for short reports, to round out longer reports with a different perspective, or simply to browse for pleasure. The author's style is chatty and entertaining without losing clarity or obscuring factual detail. He emphasizes having respect for the wildness of wildlife and repeatedly cautions readers from attempting to interact with wild animals. A great book for nature lovers.

Susan Salpini, Purcellville Library, VA

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