



And You Think You Deserve A Labor Day Holiday? *Try dodging hungry bears, lifting loads 50 times your own weight, laying 1,500 eggs a day, or migrating 22,000 miles.*

Reston, Va. (September 2)—Humans aren't the only ones that have been working hard throughout the year. Wild animals need to work hard to survive too, but some species work harder than others. National Wildlife Federation offers this list of the hardest working members of the animal kingdom.

Salmon

Salmon live in the salty oceans as adults, but they hatch in fresh water streams and rivers. Each fall, adult salmon migrate back to the river where they themselves hatched, swimming against strong currents, dodging hungry bears and even leaping *up* waterfalls! For Pacific salmon, it's a one-way trip. They exert so much energy fighting the to get upstream that after spawning, they are completely spent and die.

Ants

There are thousands of ant species in the world and they eat a lot of different things. Some are carnivores, eating any insect or animal they can subdue. Others gather millions of plant seeds and store them in underground granaries, and some are even farmers, using gathered leaves to grow fungus to feed upon. Regardless of the species, all ants are incredibly strong, able to lift loads that weigh 10 to 50 times their own weight. They put that strength to good work hauling food and defending their colonies against enemies.

Honeybees

Anyone who's watched a honeybee frenetically flying from flower to flower-gathering nectar knows that these insects are hard workers. They have to work so hard because flower nectar is mostly water. An individual bee has to work 10 hours a day for six days to gather enough nectar to create just a thimbleful of honey! It's not just the workers that are busy either. A queen bee can lay as many as 1,500 eggs in just one day. Only the males, called drones, don't do much work at all. They just wait around being taken care of by the female workers bees, waiting for their chance to mate with a queen.

Lions

As with bee society, in the world of the lion it's the females that work the hardest. Lionesses do most of the hunting to feed the pride, and do all of the work to raise the young. Working together they can tackle animals many times their own size, including water buffalos, giant eland and sometimes even elephants and giraffes. Male lions spend most of their time napping and eating, but in their defense, they do protect the pride from hyenas and other male lions that would kill their cubs.

Beavers

What list of hardworking wildlife is complete without the beaver? Pound for pound, beavers are probably more capable of altering their environment through hard work than any other animal. Only humans change the landscape more. An average 40-pound beaver can fell trees several stories tall and use them to build lodges and large dams that stop swift-flowing streams. Imagine a similarly sized

mammal, say your pet dog, accomplishing such a feat and it's obvious why these large rodents earned the title "busy."

Hummingbirds

Like other birds, hummingbirds need to flap their wings in order to fly, but these tiny birds work a lot harder than most other species. The ruby-throated and rufous hummingbirds that visit your feeder flap their wings an amazing 40-50 times per *second*. Some species flap even harder. The amethyst woodstar hummingbird can flap as many as 80 times per second! Even hummingbird hearts work hard. The heart rate of a blue-throated hummingbird was recorded at 1,260 beats per minute.

Arctic Terns

Migration is hard work, and the Arctic tern has the longest migration of any bird. The 22,000-mile journey to and from Antarctica takes the bird 90 days each way. The birds migrate over sea and are rarely seen on land except during breeding season. Considering an Arctic tern might live up to 30 years, a single bird may travel more than 650,000 miles in its lifetime!

Shrews

Shrews are tiny mouse-like mammals that feed on insects, worms, snails and other small animals. They have an incredibly fast metabolism and are constantly on the move searching for food—think of a mouse on speed. In order to fuel that metabolism, a shrew pretty much never stops working. It needs to consume two to three times its body weight in food each day just to survive. If you could starve to death in just a few hours, you'd work hard looking for food too!

Earthworms

Earthworms might seem lowly and insignificant, but they literally move the earth. These legless invertebrates tunnel in the ground, ingesting minerals and pulling decaying plant and animal material below the surface to eat. The end product is a nutrient-laden "casting" which they deposit on the surface, creating rich topsoil. In doing so, a healthy earthworm population can rotate 20 to 40 tons of earth per acre in a year. Knowing that, earthworms don't seem so lowly anymore.

Rabbits

When you're at the bottom of the food chain, having the ability to reproduce at a rapid rate is literally a matter of survival for your species. When it comes to producing babies, rabbits are no slackers. One rabbit female can produce as many as seven litters of four to six babies per year. If you do the math, that adds up to a lot of rabbits. Rabbits work so hard at making more rabbits they've actually become a pest in some places. When a hunter released rabbits in Australia where they are not a native species, they quickly went to work breeding and in less than 100 years there were over 600 million of them. But I guess that's the kind of work that most people wouldn't mind doing.

Check out the hard working critters in your neighborhood at www.nwf.org/wildlifewatch.

National Wildlife Federation is America's largest conservation organization inspiring Americans to protect wildlife for our children's future. Visit www.nwf.org.

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