

NATIONAL WILDLIFE WEEK

March 19-25, 2012



LITTLE BROWN BAT

Wildlife with **Super Senses**

Scientific Name: *Myotis lucifugus*

Description: The little brown bat varies in color from brown, reddish, to golden, and has a wingspan of 8 to 11 inches. To locate their prey, most insect-eating bats use a system called “echolocation.” This super sense is similar to sonar used in ships. The bat emits a high frequency sound that bounces off of objects in their environment. They can then determine the location and size of prey by listening to the sound echo that returns to them.

U.S. Habitat and Range: The little brown bat is found in abundance throughout the northern U.S. and in lesser numbers in southern states. They live in colonies in nesting sites called “roosts.”

Fun Fact: Individuals usually live to 6 or 7 years, although a 31 year old little brown bat was found in the wild. Such a long lifespan is highly unusual in small mammals.

Conservation Status: Declining. They are one of many bats suffering from white-nose syndrome, a fungal disease that causes death.

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RATTLESNAKES

Wildlife with **Super Senses**

Scientific Name: *Crotalus* spp. and *Sistrurus* spp.

Description: Rattlesnakes are highly specialized, venomous reptiles. They are one of the most iconic groups of snakes due to the characteristic

“rattle” found at the tip of the tail. The rattle is composed of a series of interlocking scales, which are added to each time the snake molts. Muscle contractions cause the scales to click together, resulting in the rattle sound. Rattlesnakes are pit vipers—they have heat sensing organs located in pits near the eyes. These pits allow them “see” the heat signature of prey.

U.S. Habitat and Range: Rattlesnakes can be found throughout the country. They live in a variety of habitats, from forest to desert.

Fun Fact: Although rattlesnakes may seem scary to people, they play a very important role in their ecosystems by controlling small mammal populations.

Conservation Status: Most species are stable, but one species and one subspecies are Federally listed as Threatened.

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VENUS FLYTRAP

Wildlife with **Super Senses**

Scientific Name: *Dionaea muscipula*

Description: The Venus flytrap is a type of flowering plant that is best known for exhibiting carnivory. The “trap” is made of two hinged lobes at the end of each leaf. On the inner

surface of the lobes are hair-like projections called “trichomes” that cause the trap to close when they are touched multiple times in quick succession. There are other carnivorous plants in the wild, but the Venus flytrap is one of the very few that will exhibit motion to actively trap its prey.

U.S. Habitat and Range: The Venus flytrap is endemic to North and South Carolina, but it has been introduced to a few other states. It grows in moist soil which may be poor in nutrients.

Fun Fact: Like all plants, the Venus flytrap gets its energy from the sun in a process called “photosynthesis.” It digests insects and arachnids to get nutrients that are not available in the surrounding environment.

Conservation Status: Declining. This species is threatened by overcollection, habitat destruction, and fire suppression.

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SUPER SENSES



NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD

Wildlife with **Super Senses**

Scientific Name: *Mimus polyglottos*

Description: Northern mockingbirds are medium-sized songbirds that are gray to brown in color with a lighter underbelly. Their Latin name means

“many-tongued mimic,” because rather than singing their own songs, northern mockingbirds learn and repeat the songs of other species. An individual can learn up to 200 songs during its lifetime. Both males and females sing, but males are louder and active more often throughout the year than females.

U.S. Habitat and Range: Northern mockingbirds are found throughout the continental U.S. They sit atop high structures and forage for insects and berries in open areas, especially in parks and suburbs.

Fun Fact: These birds don’t just repeat other birdsongs randomly. It appears that males may have two separate sets of songs for the spring and fall seasons.

Conservation Status: Their numbers have rebounded significantly since a decline in the 1800s when they were collected as pets.

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MOLES

Wildlife with **Super Senses**

Scientific Name: Family Talpidae

Description: Moles are small, burrowing mammals. Their eyes are poorly developed, but what they lack in sight, they make up for in their sense of touch. All of them have very

sensitive snouts and long, clawed digits which they use to dig for insects. The 22 tentacle-like protrusions on the snout of the star-nosed mole are six times more sensitive to touch than a human hand!

U.S. Habitat and Range: Found in the eastern states and southern Great Plains. The shrew-mole is native to the west coast. Landscapers sometimes consider them pests, since they can damage lawns and gardens. They are very important, however, for aerating the soil and eliminating harmful insects.

Fun Fact: Moles are amazing tunnelers. Eastern moles can hollow out a 160 foot burrow in just one night. The equivalent would be an adult human digging a tunnel reaching a half mile in length in the same amount of time!

Conservation Status: Most species are stable.

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GREAT HORNED OWL

Wildlife with **Super Senses**

Scientific Name: *Bubo virginianus*

Description: Despite its name, the great horned owl doesn’t actually have horns. Instead, it has tufts of feathers on either side of its head that resemble horns or ears. Its feathers

are brown to gray, except for the throat which is white. Owls have many fantastic adaptations that make them great birds of prey. Their sense of hearing is so acute that they can detect a mouse stepping on a twig from a distance of 75 feet. Their eyes are very large, and they can move their heads up to 270 degrees (a three quarter turn) to look in different directions.

U.S. Habitat and Range: The great horned owl is a solitary bird that lives in forests, canyons, and clearings throughout the continental U.S., as well as in Alaska.

Fun Fact: Another unique adaptation of owls is silent flight. Most birds have rigid feathers that make wooshing noises when they fly. Owls, on the other hand, have softer feathers that give them the ability to fly silently and sneak up on prey.

Conservation Status: Stable

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EXTRA-ORDINARY WILDLIFE



SAWFISH

Wildlife with **Super Senses**

Scientific Name: Family Pristidae

Description: Sawfish are highly modified rays, which are closely related to sharks. Unlike the rest of the cartilaginous fishes, sawfish have evolved a long snout called a rostrum

edged with special teeth. The saw-like rostrum can be used in a swiping motion to cut prey in half or to dig through the sediment. What’s more amazing, though, is their ability to detect nearby living things using electro-sensing pores in their rostrums. This super sense is common to sharks and rays alike.

U.S. Habitat and Range: There are two U.S. species of sawfish found near shore in the Gulf of Mexico and along the borders of southern states.

Fun Fact: Like many toothed fish, sawfish can replace their teeth if they are worn down or lost. This phenomenon is called “polyphyodonty.”

Conservation Status: Smalltooth sawfish is Federally listed as Endangered. Sawfish populations are declining due to overharvesting and entanglement in fishing gear.

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CECROPIA MOTH

Wildlife with **Super Senses**

Scientific Name: *Hyalophora cecropia*

Description: With a wingspan of 5 to 7 inches, the cecropia moth is the largest moth found in North America. They are beautiful silk moths with reddish bodies and black to brown

wings surrounded by bands of white, red, and tan. In order to find a mate, male cecropia moths must have extraordinary senses. A female moth will produce chemicals called pheromones, which the male can detect from over a mile away! The sole purpose of the adult stage is to mate and lay eggs. Adult Cecropia moths cannot eat, so if a predator doesn’t scoop them up, they will die after two weeks.

U.S. Habitat and Range: These nocturnal moths are found in hardwood forests east of the Rocky Mountains.

Fun Fact: Bolas spiders are able to mimic the pheromones produced by insects like the cecropia moth. Male moths then follow the scent of the pheromones and end up becoming the spider’s next meal!

Conservation Status: Stable

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ANTS

Wildlife with **Super Senses**

Scientific Name: Family Formicidae

Description: Ants are most closely related to bees and wasps, which all have a narrow waist that segments their body. Ants use their keen senses to communicate with colony

members. They produce chemicals called “pheromones” which are sensed by other ants using their antennae. They can also use their antennae or other body parts to send messages through touch. Sometimes ants communicate by producing “stridulations,” which are sounds and vibrations generated by rubbing parts of their bodies together. These forms of communication can relay different messages, such as where food is located or what dangers are present.

U.S. Habitat and Range: Ants are found throughout the U.S. in soil, leaf litter, or decaying plants.

Fun Fact: Colonies of ants are separated into groups of individuals that have different jobs, such as workers, soldiers, and queens.

Conservation Status: Stable

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