

October Myths

The month of October brings with it cooler temperatures, warm soups, and superstitions we may not think much about at other times of the year. Halloween, of course, is the impetus of this change in thought, with ghosts, ghouls and goblins on our minds. Let's look at a few of some of the more nature-related myths in this spooky season.

Spiders – all spiders are venomous, as they all must kill their prey in order to eat them. However, Daddy-long-legs, which some people say “are the most venomous spiders in the world, but their fangs are too small to bite us”, aren't spiders at all! Daddy-long-legs are actually a group of arachnids called Harvestmen. They have one body segment (not two), have only two eyes, and don't produce silk. They also do not kill prey in order to eat – harvestmen eat decomposing plant and animal material, and therefore don't even have fangs or venom. There are some actual spiders called daddy-long-legs spiders, sometimes also known as cellar spiders. These spiders do have venom, but it doesn't have much of an effect on insects, let alone humans.

Bats – Some people are afraid that bats will fly and get caught in their hair. Even if one had a coil as large as Marge Simpson, this would not happen. Some bats, especially those who eat things other than insects (such as fruit, fish and flowers) often have good vision and use it to find their meals. Bats that are insectivores cannot see as well, and use echolocation to find their prey, and many bats in general use echolocation in order to navigate. When using echolocation, bats send out high pitched sounds (that humans can't hear) that ‘bounce’ off things in their environment, such as trees, houses, Marge Simpson's hair, and insects. They then know where to go, and where not to go, to navigate and find food in their environment.

Owls – Many people incorrectly believe that owls have the uncanny ability to turn their heads around 360 degrees. What they can do is turn their head 135 degrees one way, then starting from the front again, turn it 135 degrees the other way, thereby making it look like they can turn it almost 360 degrees at once. They can do this because they have 14 vertebrae in their neck, versus only 7 in ours.

Full moon – The moon is thought to have an amazingly powerful force on the Earth. It affects the tides most obviously. However, the actual amount of force exerted on the Earth by the moon is technically very small. There are a myriad of things that are commonly thought to happen with a full moon that don't actually happen, such as a rise in: homicides, births, traffic accidents, and major disasters, not to mention things like werewolves appearing and the dead rising. However, the full moon does seem to have an effect on some happenings in nature. Prey species such as mice, voles, and hares reduce their activity during a full moon because they are more easily seen by predators during this time. Full moons may even reduce the activity of migrating birds, as the moon makes it harder to see the stars the birds use to help navigate.

This month, enjoy the outdoors and our public lands and share some nature factoids with your friends. But do keep your eyes out for Bigfoot. Not all myths can be 100% disproven.