

First Impressions

Study Units

[Iowa's Wildlife Resource Base: People and Wildlife](#)

Supplemental Information

Our first impression of an animal may involve observing the reactions of others, hearing a story, or having a direct experience. If an animal surprises or startles us, we might fear future contacts with that kind of animal.

Fear is a normal, healthy human response that functions as a protective mechanism for survival. Fears are learned and can be overcome. If we fear wildlife because of misinformation or ignorance, our fear may be irrational. Irrational fears can lead to negative feelings and perhaps destructive actions toward the source of fear. The intent of this activity is to encourage students to replace irrational fears and misunderstandings about animals with more accurate information.

Perceptions about wildlife are influenced by a variety of factors. These include societal and cultural stereotypes and others' reactions to wildlife. Fairy tales, nursery rhymes, films, television programs, books, and / or legends can influence a person's feelings. When feelings or perceptions about wildlife are inaccurate (due to misinformation), students need accurate information to help them form their own impressions.

Activities that work well with **First Impressions** include the *Project WILD's* 'And the Wolf Wore Shoes' (examines how media representations of animals affect our impressions of them), 'Spider Web Geometry' (students research spiders and reconstruct their webs), and [Animal Poetry](#) (students could write poems using their **Find the Facts** information to evaluate their efforts).

Teaching Suggestions

Show students pictures or slides of once native Iowa wildlife. Let them respond with their first impressions of these animals. The following animals often are misunderstood and feared.

- | | | |
|------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| tick | bull snake | little brown bat |
| wasp | deer mouse | wolf |
| skunk | bumble bee | cougar |
| dragonfly | garden spider | black bear |
| great horned owl | timber rattlesnake | |

After addressing first impressions and general attitudes, have students research native Iowa species using the [Find the Facts Worksheet](#). Check the **Additional Materials** section for possible references. You may give them the [Fact Sheet](#) and have them compare their beliefs with the facts.



Different cultures have interesting views of wildlife. Examine historical impressions of animals from different cultures. The Chinese consider crickets and bats symbols of good luck. Native Americans believe wild animals have special powers and used them as part of many of their ceremonies. Look in the [Additional Materials](#) section for possible references.

Invite a guest speaker with live animals. Many nature centers and [county conservation board \(CCB\) naturalists](#) have live animals. Sometimes seeing someone handle a snake without fear is all students need to replace fear with respect.

Download a copy of the Iowa Association of Naturalists' booklet, [Misconceptions about Iowa Wildlife](#).

Evaluation

Compare attitudes and beliefs of students at the start of the exercises to those held at the completion. Make sure students understand the facts about animals listed on the [Fact Sheet](#).

Student Materials

- Fact Sheet
- Find the Facts Worksheet

Teacher Aids

None

Additional Materials

- [A Complete Field Guide of Iowa Herpetology](#) – information about salamanders, frogs and toads, turtles, lizards, and snakes.
- [Reptiles and Amphibians of Iowa](#) – includes diversity map
- [eBird](#) - A real-time, online checklist program, eBird has revolutionized the way that the birding community reports and accesses information about birds. Launched in 2002 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, eBird provides rich data sources for basic information on bird abundance and distribution at a variety of spatial and temporal scales.
- [Animal Diversity Web](#) - is an online database of animal natural history, distribution, classification, and conservation biology at the [University of Michigan](#).
- [Bat Conservation International](#) – bat facts / trivia, educator activity book, and more
- [eNature](#) – online field guide including range maps, natural history information, photos, and more on species of mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles, insects, spiders, bees, wasps, etc.
- [International Wolf Center](#) – Information on North American wolf species and their conservation efforts
- Caduto, M.J. and J. Bruchac. 1997. *Keepers of the Earth, Native American Stories and Environmental Activities for Children*. Fulcrum, Inc. Golden.
- Goble, P. 2005. *All Our Relatives: Traditional Native American Thoughts about Nature*. World Wisdom Books.
- Scieszka, J. 1999. *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs!* Putnam Penquin Books for Young Readers. Check out this [Teaching Children Philosophy](#) for parents and educators.



Fact Sheet

Bat Facts



- Nocturnal
- Iowa bats eat insects (including mosquitoes and corn borer moths); can consume up to 600 insects per night; important controls for insect populations
- Iowa bats do NOT suck blood; vampire bats live only in South America (they do not suck blood, but rather lap or sip blood from a cut they make, usually at the ankle of a sleeping cow)
- Will not get in your hair; use sensitive echolocation to sense where your head is; swoop so close to people because they eat the insects attracted by body heat and exhaled carbon dioxide
- Iowa is home to the federally endangered Indiana bat
- All bats are protected by state law

Bee and Wasp Facts



- Most sting only when provoked—feel in danger
- Most encounters with people occur when searching for flower nectar (food)
- Bumble bees live underground; people may step on their home while out walking—may provoke them to sting
- Important plant pollinators; pollen must be moved from one flower to another for plants to make seeds and fruits; without bees there would be no apples, plums, cherries, etc.
- Honeybees have been domesticated; live in hives provided by beekeepers; beekeepers harvest honey made from flower nectar and stored for the winter

Skunk Facts



- Spray awful smelling oil from a gland under their tail in self-defense
- Aim with this spray is accurate up to twelve feet
- Most other animals do not bother
- Always give a warning before spraying—shake head side to side, arch back, paw the ground, and stamp front feet
- The state endangered spotted skunk needs prairie habitat; rarely seen in Iowa

Spider Facts



- Symbols of patience and good luck in some countries
- Only two Iowa species are poisonous to humans—brown recluse and black widow; both very uncommon; hide in out-of-the-way places (e.g., storage sheds, outhouses, trash cans)
- Predators, kill or paralyze prey (mostly insects) with toxins injected through bites
- Most catch prey in complicated web-traps



Snake Facts



- Do not chase people; most avoid people and hide before you see them
- Smell with their tongues; smell helps locate prey and avoid predators
- Four species of poisonous snakes live in Iowa (they have fangs and slit-shaped pupils): the timber rattlesnake, Massasauga, prairie rattlesnake, and copperhead; none are very common; the Massasauga, copperhead, and prairie rattlesnake are state endangered species
- Nonvenomous snakes (no fangs and round pupils) are more common; do not harm people; avoid people, but if cornered or handled by people, may strike out in defense; may bite, and even leave “fang” marks, but do not inject poison
- The diamondback water snake, speckled kingsnake, and western worm snake are threatened in Iowa; the western hognose snake and copperbelly water snake are endangered
- Most snakes are protected by state law

Tick Facts



- Bite and suck blood from mammals to reproduce
- Can hang on vegetation for up to two years waiting for a mammal to pass by
- Bacteria/viruses in tick saliva may spread diseases such as Rocky Mountain spotted fever and Lyme disease to their mammal hosts
- Inject anticoagulants (prevent blood from clotting) before sucking blood

Wolf Facts



- All breeds of domestic dogs likely are related to wolves tamed and domesticated thousands of years ago
- Do not eat people; a healthy wild wolf has never attacked a human
- Communicate with other wolves and wolf packs through howling
- Eat large herbivores (e.g., elk, deer, moose); will eat smaller mammals (e.g., mice, rabbits); opportunistic—eat what is most available and easiest to catch; prey mainly on old, young, sick, and weak members of animal groups they hunt; may prey on livestock when other animals are unavailable, but losses have not been known to be extensive (usually happens on large ranches where cows and sheep roam far from human activity); many livestock losses blamed on wolves may be carcasses of animals that died from something else or kills by feral dogs



Find the Facts Worksheet

1. Name of the animal you want to know more about _____

Does it have any nicknames? _____

2. How do you feel about this animal? _____

Have you ever seen this animal? _____

Where? _____

3. In what habitat does this animal live? _____

4. What does this animal sound like? _____

5. Is it rare or common? _____

Is it an endangered or threatened species? _____

6. What does this animal eat? _____

How often does it eat and how much? _____

7. Is this animal afraid of humans? _____

8. How many young does it usually have? _____

Where are its young born or hatched? _____

What do the young look like? _____



Does this animal need to spend a lot of time caring for its young? _____

9. List three things that make this animal important to you.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

10. Does this animal have any special status with or meaning for people from other countries or cultures? _____

_____ [BDG1]

11. Draw a picture of your animal (use the back of this sheet)

