



## Night Walk Activities

(Compiled by Deborah Price, Natural Areas Educator)

The goal for your night walk is to help people enjoy being outdoors after dark, help them feel safe, and share information about nocturnal animals, the senses they use at night, and how we can better develop our own senses and awareness of the dark.

You can use as many of these activities as you like. Use the ones that you feel most comfortable with. This is not an astronomy program. You are welcome to include information about moon phases and constellations if you wish, but it is not the main goal of the program. If visitors ask you astronomy questions, explain to them that this particular program isn't designed to be an astronomy program, but there are a variety of astronomy programs offered through the Natural Areas Program. Give them a Tracks and Trails and invite them to register for one of the astronomy programs.

Safety Message: Before each walk, you should remind visitors:

--stay in a group together. Nocturnal predators are out—if you are in a group, they will stay away.

--watch for snakes. You should be able to see the path in front of you, especially with the moonlight. Back away from a snake and go around it.

--do not remove anything from a Natural Area or leave anything behind.

Remember to share copies of Tracks and Trails with them, and give night evaluation cards to your assistant to pass out to visitors. They can take the evaluations home with them and mail them in (postage is already included on the evaluation card).

### Activities

#### **Bat Baby Search** (adult and family activity)

Materials needed: film canister containers, cotton balls, bottles of different flavorings.

Before your program, assemble your film containers. Notice that each container has a letter printed on the inside of the lid, indicating a certain scent (A = Almond, C = Cinnamon, O = Orange, Ch = Cherry, M = Mint). Put new cotton balls in each container and put a few drops of the related scent on the cotton ball. Be sure to always use the same containers and lids for the same scents each time—otherwise the scents get confused and it's more difficult to tell them apart. Right before your program, put all the containers in a bag and mix them up so you won't know which scent is which.

At your program, tell visitors that each bat has its own smell. This is one way that mother bats can find their babies when there are thousands of them in a cave. Pass out the containers to visitors (if you have more than 10 visitors, have them pair up and work in teams). Tell them to get a good whiff of their scent (through the holes on top of the lid—don't open the container). They need to try to find the other container in the crowd that matches the scent they have. Once they find it, mother and baby are reunited!

Collect the containers at the end of the activity. When you get home, be sure to separate the containers out into their individual scents (and remove the old cotton balls) and put them back in individual bags to keep the scents from mixing with each other.

**Nose Lickers** (adult and family activity)

Materials needed: several plastic containers with holes in lid; different pieces of fruit or food (just bring something from home—orange, lemon, strawberry, onion, spices, mint leaves are some examples)

Smell is important to wildlife. Dogs can pick up scents so much better than humans, but a bear's sense of smell is that much greater than a dog's, than a dog's smell is greater than ours. Bears can smell food (like a few strawberries) over a mile away!

Animals like elk, that are preyed upon, use smell to alert them to the presence of predators. To enhance their sense of smell, they lick their noses. The moisture helps to trap scent molecules.

Have visitors try to reach their tongues out and touch their noses. We aren't as lucky as elk! If you watch elk, they will often lick their noses (so do dogs and other animals).

Before your program, put a piece of fruit or food in each of your plastic containers. Pass them out to visitors. Tell them not to remove the lid, but just to smell the container to see if they can identify what is inside. Have them pass the containers around to the group and let everyone have a turn. Then have them wet their finger with a little saliva and rub it on the tip of their noses, and immediately smell the containers again. See if they can more easily identify what is inside. After everyone has had a turn, remove the lids and reveal the contents.

At the end of your program, please dispose of the food and rinse out the containers.

**Mom's Voice** (family activity)

No materials needed.

We all recognize the voice of our parents. To illustrate this, have kids stand on the other side of the trail from the adults and face away from the adults. Tell them they can't turn around and look at the adults, but if they hear the voice of one of their parents, they should raise their hand. Then point at a parent and have them say something like "bats are cool." The parent's child should raise his/her hand. Do this several times.

Afterwards, explain that this is one of the ways that mother animals find their babies—they know what their baby sounds like and the baby knows the voice of its mother. Even bats know their individual sounds and can find each other, even when there are millions of bats in the same area.

**Fading Colors** (adult and family activity)

Materials needed: container of construction paper squares.

Nocturnal animals' eyes are designed different than animals that are diurnal. Eyes have cells called rods and cones. Cones help us see color (cones and color both begin with "C"), and rods help us see well in the dark. We have lots of cones in our eyes because we are diurnal. Nocturnal animals have mostly rods; therefore they are usually color blind. You actually need light to be able to see colors, so seeing in color is not important when you're a nocturnal animal. To illustrate this, have each person pick out a square of color from the container. Have them

guess what the color is and then put the square into their pocket. Remind them they cannot use flashlights to look at the square!

This activity should be done towards the end of the walk when it is as dark as possible. At the end of the walk when you are back at the parking lot, bring out a flashlight and hold it close to the ground (so that you don't wreck everyone's night vision). Have everyone place their square under the light to see if they guessed their color correctly.

Have them imagine how much better nocturnal animals must see in the dark than us since they have all those extra rods!

### **Raccoon Food** (adult and family activity)

Materials needed: bag of different items to touch

Explain that touch is also important for nocturnal animals. Raccoons use their little paws to feel around in the water for things to eat. They can identify their food by how it feels.

Have visitors line up in two lines or in a circle. Everyone should be facing the same direction with their hands cupped behind their back. Start passing the items out from the bag. Instruct visitors that they should feel the item and try to figure out what it is but they can't look at it. (You will really have to emphasize this to kids!) When they have finished examining it with their hands, they should pass it along to the next person behind their backs. After everyone has had a chance to feel the items, reveal them to the visitors and see if they guessed right.

With kids, you may need to explain ahead of time that all the items are something from nature and that nothing will hurt them. Kids are sometimes afraid to touch something when they can't see it.

### **Silent Owl Wings** (adult and family activity)

Materials needed: smooth rope and frazzled rope

Owl feathers are not smooth-edged like other birds' feathers. Smooth, sharp edges on feathers help birds take off quickly and catch the air well, but they are noisy! Owls want to sneak up on their prey. Their feather edges are very uneven, allowing them to fly silently. For a demo, take the rope with even, smooth edges and whip it around in a circle (be sure you step away from your audience and that no one is close enough to be hit with the rope). The rope will make a whirring sound as it whips through the air. Then take the cotton rope that is more frazzled (there is a weight tied to the end of this rope since it is lighter and harder to whip around). Do the same demo and this time there will hardly be any sound. The soft, unsmooth edges allow for silent flight!

### **Sounds of the Night** (family activity)

Materials needed: CD player (check out from Nix), CD of wildlife sounds, packs of animal photo cards.

Sound is important at night. Wildlife depend heavily on their hearing to find food or to stay away from predators. We can enhance our hearing as well.

Divide group into three or four smaller groups. Give each group a packet of wildlife photo cards. Tell them you will play a series of nocturnal wildlife sounds and they need to match the photos to the sounds, putting them in the correct order that they hear them. Tell them you will not say anything the first time they listen to the CD. They can talk within their group to figure out which animal is which.

Then play the CD a second time. This time ask them at the end of each sound which animal it is to see if they guessed correctly. At the end of the CD, see how the groups did as far as guessing the wildlife sounds. Encourage them to use their ears on the hike to see if they recognize any of these sounds along the way.

**Animal Ears** (family and adult activity)

Materials needed: none

Ask the group to think about the ears of animals like coyotes, bears, mountain lions, etc. What shape are they? Many animals have very large ears that they can position in different directions. These large ears help funnel sound into the inside of their ears so they can hear better. Have visitors cup their hands around the back of their ears, with palms facing forward. Ask them to say something to their neighbor and listen to the response. They should be able to hear louder with their hands cupped behind their ears. Ask them to get completely quiet and rotate in a circle with their hands behind their ears, and listen. They should be able to hear things they didn't notice before!

*If you have questions about any of the activities, please call Deborah Price at 970-217-3075 or email [dprice@fcgov.com](mailto:dprice@fcgov.com).*