

# Arkansas Nocturnal Wildlife

The Texas Eagle usually travels through Arkansas at night. As you peer out the window into the darkness between towns, it may look like an empty, lonely landscape. In fact, there is a thriving community of nocturnal animals out there going about their business of finding mates, making nests, getting food and trying to avoid being eaten by their neighbors. An interesting assortment of animals sleep through the day and become active at night, in habitats ranging from forests to modern cities.

The wooded areas of Arkansas shelter red and grey fox, opossums, raccoons, skunks and armadillos, among other mammals. In the evening, these creatures leave their dens and forage or hunt in forested areas or open fields. Some are busy much of the night, while others, like bobcats and deer, are active for 3-4 hours at dusk and again around dawn. Deer will usually bed down in tall grass during the day, and are most easily spotted in the evening, along the edges of agricultural fields.

Farm fields provide homes for many animals as well. Mice and moles live in small burrows or under grassy hillocks close to sources of seeds and grains. While most people aren't terribly fond of rodents, quite a few animals rely on them for food. Mammals like fox and coyotes are joined by owls and snakes as they all hunt for mice and other small animals at night. Small birds like screech owls prey on tiny rodents, snakes, lizards and nocturnal insects such as moths and crickets, while the great-horned owl is powerful enough to kill and carry off a skunk. Unlike humans and many other animals, great-horned owls do not seem to be bothered by a skunk's powerful odor.

The train passes over many river valleys during the night where another community of night animals can be found. Catfish, toads and snapping turtles are most active at night, as are beavers. While most people are sleeping, the beaver is cutting down trees and branches to construct dams and lodges, and also to obtain its sole source of food - a tree's nutritious inner bark. Arkansas is home to sixteen species of bats, including three types which are endangered. Bats can be found in many areas, but often will live near water where insects are plentiful. Each night, bats leave their roosts to consume as many as 1000 mosquitoes and other insects...per hour.

Many nocturnal animals have a special reflective layer in their eyes which enables them see in low light. This makes their eyes appear to glow in the moonlight or the shine of a car's headlights. While humans do not have this reflective layer, we have more precise vision than most night animals, enabling us to read and see shapes clearly in the distance. So use your sharp eyes to watch for eye shine or scan the edges of fields in the evening and early morning, and you might spot one of the nocturnal animals of Arkansas.

## Source(s):

Arkansas Game and Fish Commission. (2011). Retrieved January 24, 2011 from <http://www.agfc.com/species/Pages/SpeciesEndangered.aspx> .

## Author(s):

Written by Susan G. Scott, Lecturer in the Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences at Texas A&M University, as part of a National Park Service Trails and Rails project funded by Amtrak, 2011.