

Sparrow Tree Square

Night Creatures

Autumn 2011



*“The squalling cat and the squeaking mouse,
The howling dog by the door of the house,
The bat that lies in bed at noon,
All love to be out by the light of the moon.”*

-- from “The Moon,” by Robert Louis Stevenson (page 7)

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Introduction

Dear Readers,

Like many people, I tend to associate certain aspects of nature with different times of the year. The winter is about bare branches, snowy sidewalks, and red-breasted robins. The spring brings daffodils, songbirds, and bright pink flowers on the trees. Summer at the seashore, where I live, is filled with seagulls, ocean waves, and sunsets.

In the autumn, the trees change color and everything in nature seems brighter to match by day. Autumn nights, however, are to me a little spooky and mysterious even when Halloween isn't near. The skies are dark black, and the air is filled with the sounds of night creatures like bats, owls, and crickets. Spider webs spring up overnight in every nook and cranny, and sometimes a black cat will streak past the back door on the way back home after a night roaming outside.

This issue is devoted to these creatures of the night. First off, you'll find two poems by Emily Dickinson, the first about bats and the second about spiders. Next come two selections that pay tribute to moonlight and the creatures who exist by it -- W. B. Yeats' "The Cat and the Moon" and Robert Louis Stevenson's "The Moon", presented here with Jessie Wilcox Smith's black-and-white line drawings. You'll also find a poem about nocturnal creatures by Walter de la Mare, "All But Blind."

The short story for this month features an author new to *Sparrow Tree Square*, Thornton W. Burgess. Burgess is famous for his stories about nature and wildlife, and his story "How the Eyes of Old Mr. Owl Became Fixed" is a great take on explanation myths from the oral tradition.

Our regular features for this month include a word search of nighttime creatures, a Connection article discussing nocturnal animals, and an activity that will help you identify the nighttime creatures that live in your neighborhood. Finally, our book review for this month features a beautiful story by Rumer Godden titled *The Mousewife*.

As always, I hope you enjoy this issue of *Sparrow Tree Square*. If you have any questions or comments, feel free to write to editor@sparrowtreesquare.com. To get updates from Sparrow Tree Square on a regular basis, don't forget to check out my blog (<http://sparrowtreesquare.blogspot.com>), follow Sparrow Tree Square on Twitter, or like Sparrow Tree Square on Facebook.

Happy autumn!

Sincerely,

Megan Friel, editor of *Sparrow Tree Square*

“The bat is dun with wrinkled wings”

Emily Dickinson



The Bat is dun, with wrinkled Wings —
Like fallow Article —
And not a song pervade his Lips —
Or none perceptible.

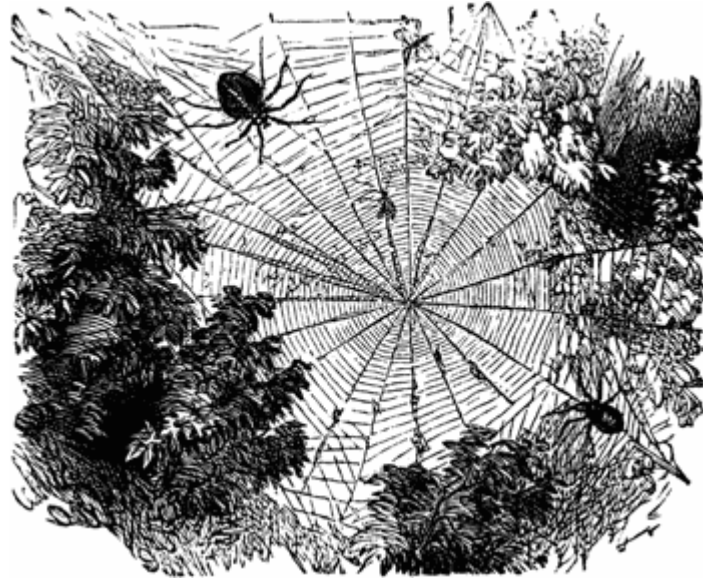
His small Umbrella quaintly halved
Describing in the Air
An Arc alike inscrutable
Elate Philosopher.

Deputed from what Firmament —
Of what Astute Abode —
Empowered with what Malignity
Auspiciously withheld —

To his adroit Creator
Ascribe no less the praise —
Beneficent, believe me,
His Eccentricities —

“A spider sewed at night”

Emily Dickinson



A Spider sewed at Night
Without a Light
Upon an Arc of White.

If Ruff it was of Dame
Or Shroud of Gnome
Himself himself inform.

Of Immortality
His Strategy
Was Physiognomy.

The Cat and the Moon

W. B. Yeats



The cat went here and there
And the moon spun round like a top,
And the nearest kin of the moon
The creeping cat looked up.
Black Minnaloushe stared at the moon,
For wander and wail as he would
The pure cold light in the sky
Troubled his animal blood.
Minnaloushe runs in the grass,
Lifting his delicate feet.
Do you dance, Minnaloushe, do you dance?
When two close kindred meet
What better than call a dance?
Maybe the moon may learn,
Tired of that courtly fashion,
A new dance turn.
Minnaloushe creeps through the grass
From moonlit place to place,
The sacred moon overhead
Has taken a new phase.
Does Minnaloushe know that his pupils
Will pass from change to change,
And that from round to crescent,
From crescent to round they range?
Minnaloushe creeps through the grass
Alone, important and wise,
And lifts to the changing moon
His changing eyes.

The Moon

Robert Louis Stevenson



The moon has a face like the clock in the hall;
She shines on thieves on the garden wall,
On streets and fields and harbour quays,
And birdies asleep in the forks of the trees.

The squalling cat and the squeaking mouse,
The howling dog by the door of the house,
The bat that lies in bed at noon,
All love to be out by the light of the moon.

But all of the things that belong to the day
Cuddle to sleep to be out of her way;
And flowers and children close their eyes
Till up in the morning the sun shall arise.



All But Blind

Walter de la Mare



All but blind
In his chambered hole,
Gropes for worms
The four-clawed mole.

All but blind
In the burning day,
The barn owl
Blunders on her way.

And blind as are
These three to me,
So blind to someone
I must be.

How the Eyes of Old Mr. Owl Became Fixed

Thornton W. Burgess



BLACKY the Crow had discovered Hooty the Owl dozing the bright day away in a thick hemlock-tree. Blacky knew that the bright light hurt Hooty's big eyes and half blinded him. This meant that he could have no end of fun teasing Hooty, and that Hooty would have to sit still and take it all, because he couldn't see well enough to fly away or to try to catch Blacky. Now if the day had been dark, as it sometimes is on cloudy days, or if the dusk of evening had been settling over the Green Meadows and the Green Forest, matters would have been very different. Blacky would have taken care, the very greatest care, not to let Hooty know that he was anywhere around. But as it was, here was a splendid chance to spoil Hooty's sleep and to see him grow very, very angry and do it without running any great risk.

"Caw, caw, caw, caw, caw!" yelled Blacky at the top of his voice, and at once all his relatives came flocking over to join in the fun. Dear me, dear me, such a racket as there was then! They flew over his head, and they settled in the tree all around him, all yelling as hard as ever they could. Everybody within hearing knew what it meant, and everybody who dared to hurried over to watch the fun. Somehow most people seem to take pleasure in seeing some one else made uncomfortable, especially if it is some one of whom they stand in fear and who is for the time being helpless.

Most of the little meadow and forest people are very much afraid of Hooty the Owl as soon as it begins to grow dark, for that is when he can see best and does all his hunting. So, though it wasn't at all nice of them, they enjoyed seeing him tormented by Blacky and his relatives. But all the time they took the greatest care to keep out of sight themselves. Peter Rabbit was there. So was Jumper the Hare and Happy Jack the Gray Squirrel and Chatterer the Red Squirrel and Whitefoot the Wood Mouse and Striped Chipmunk and a lot more. Of course, Sammy Jay was there, but Sammy didn't try to keep out of sight. Oh, my, no! He joined right in with the Crows, calling Hooty all sorts

of bad names and flying about just out of reach in the most impudent way. You see he knew just how helpless Hooty was.

Hooty was very, very angry. He hissed, and he snapped his bill, and he told his tormentors what he would do to them if he caught them after dark. And all the time he kept turning his head with its great, round, glaring, yellow eyes so as not to give his tormentors a chance to pull out any of his feathers, as the boldest of them tried to do. Now Hooty can turn his head as no one else can. He can turn it so that he looks straight back over his tail, so that his head looks as if it were put on the wrong way. Then he can snap it around in the other direction so quickly that you can hardly see him do it, and sometimes it seems as if he turned his head clear around.

That interested Peter Rabbit immensely. He couldn't think of anything else. He kept trying to do the same thing himself, but of course he couldn't. He could turn his head sideways, but that was all. He puzzled over it all the rest of the day, and that night, when his cousin, Jumper the Hare, called at the dear Old Briar-patch, the first thing he did was to ask a question.

"Cousin Jumper, do you know why it is that Hooty the Owl can turn his head way around, and nobody else can?"

"Of course I know," replied Jumper. "I thought everybody knew that. It's because his eyes are fixed in their sockets, and he can't turn them. So he turns his whole head in order to see in all directions. The rest of us can roll our eyes, but Hooty can't."

Peter scratched his long left ear with his long right hindfoot, a way he has when he is thinking or is puzzled. "That's funny," said he. "I wonder why his eyes are fixed."

"Because his great-great-ever-so-great-grandfather rolled his eyes too much," replied Jumper, yawning. "He saw too much. It's a bad thing to see too much."

"Tell me about it. Please do, Cousin Jumper," begged Peter.

Jumper looked up at the moon to see what time of night it was.

"All right," said he, settling himself comfortably. "All the Owl family, way back to the very beginning, have had very big eyes. Old Mr. Owl had them. He could move them just as we can ours. And because they were so big, and because he could roll them, there was very little going on that Mr. Owl didn't see. It happened one day that Old Mother Nature took it into her wise old head to put the little people of the Green Meadows and the Green Forest to a test. She wanted to see just how many of them she could trust to obey her orders. So she lined them all up in a row. Then she made them turn so that their backs were to her.

"'Now,' said she, 'everybody is to keep eyes to the front. I am going to be very busy back here for a few minutes, but not one of you is to peek. I shall know if you do, and I shall see to it that you never forget it as long as you live.'

"That sounded as if something dreadful might happen, so everybody sat perfectly still looking straight before them. Some of them felt as if they would die of curiosity to know what Old Mother Nature was doing, but for a while no one thought

of disobeying. Old Mr. Rabbit just itched all over with curiosity. It seemed to him that he just must turn his head. But for once he managed to get the best of his curiosity and stared straight ahead.

"Now Mr. Owl had tremendous great ears, just as Hooty has to-day. You can't see them because the feathers cover them, but they are there just the same."

Peter nodded. He knew all about those wonderful ears and how they heard the teeniest, weeniest noise when Hooty was flying at night.

"Those, big ears," continued Jumper, "heard every little sound that Old Mother Nature made, and they sounded queer to Mr. Owl. 'If I roll back my eyes without turning my head, I believe I can see what she is doing, and she won't be any the wiser,' thought he. So he rolled his eyes back and then looked straight ahead again. What he had seen made him want to see more. He tried it again. Just imagine how he felt when he found that his eyes wouldn't roll. He couldn't move them a bit. All he could do was to stare straight ahead. It frightened him dreadfully, and he kept trying and trying to roll his eyes, but they were fixed fast. He could see in only one direction, the way his head was turned.

"When at last Old Mother Nature told all the little people that they might look, Mr. Owl didn't want to look. He didn't want to face Old Mother Nature, for he knew perfectly well what had happened to his eyes. He knew that Old Mother Nature had seen him roll them back, and that as a punishment she had fixed them so that he would always stare straight ahead. He didn't say anything. He was too ashamed to. He flew away home the very first chance he got. For a long time after that, Mr. Owl never could see behind him at all. He could only turn his head part way, the same as most folks, and he couldn't roll his eyes to see the rest of the way. It made him dreadfully nervous and unhappy. He felt all the time as if people were doing things behind his back. But he didn't complain. He was ashamed to do that.

"Old Mother Nature was watching him all the time. After a long, long while, she decided that he had been punished enough. But she didn't want him to forget, so she kept his eyes fixed so that they would look straight ahead; but she gave him the power to turn his head farther than any one else, so that he could look straight behind him without turning his body at all. And ever since that time, all Owls have had fixed eyes, but have been able to turn their heads so as to make them look as if they were facing the wrong way."

"Thank you, Cousin Jumper," cried Peter. "But there is one thing you forgot to tell. What was it that Old Mother Nature was doing when Mr. Owl rolled his eyes to look back."

"That," replied Jumper, "Mr. Owl never told, and nobody else knew, so I can't tell you."

Puzzle:
Night Animals Word Search

While we humans are most active during the daytime, some animals are more active after dark or have equal preference for daylight and darkness. See if you can find the names of ten night-loving animals in the puzzle below.

A E V N K G M E T F R J A C B
L G P Y O W V K E J V B H A E
G W H H D O S P I D E R T O H
D S O Z T S C A B T P W T N L
A Q C O M W V C O I S C S I B
J I M I O N Z Y A C E V V T E
Q M X O P P O M S R T R M A P
T A C T U C Q O I R Y E H Z J
J P K A U S Q L P P Q G M M H
D N S R Z H E E X T T D E Y W
B Q L T E K C I R C W A T Q Q
W E F N U D J A M S H B V W K
P X T S E V E U X B V K V I Z
B Q U G P F U G U N L O H X A
D X E X S B O O O J K Y O R L



Badger

Mole

Bat

Mouse

Cat

Owl

Coyote

Raccoon

Cricket

Spider

Connection:

Nocturnal Animals

Have you ever heard strange noises at night, like chirps, squeaks, or scratches outdoors? While it can be easy to imagine that ghosts or monsters are causing these noises when you're alone and scared in the dark, the noises you hear at night are most likely caused by **nocturnal** animals. These animals sleep or rest during the day and are most active after dark, when humans are tucked up in bed!

Humans, along with other creatures such as sparrows and squirrels, are **diurnal** animals. This means that we function best when the sun is up, and get our rest after dark when it's harder for us to see. **Nocturnal** animals, such as bats and owls, follow the opposite schedule: they sleep during the day and hunt and eat during the night. Animals can also be **crepuscular**, which means that they're most active at dawn and dusk, like moths; or **metaturnal**, which means that they function equally well during the night and day, like cats.

Unlike humans, nocturnal animals have adapted to function when there's very little light. They have better senses of hearing and smell, and some creatures such as bats use the technique of **echolocation** to navigate. A creature that uses echolocation makes a high-pitched sound and detects how long it takes for the echo to reach them. In this way, bats and other creatures that echolocate can sense how far their sound travels before it hits an object and bounces back to them.

Now that you know about nocturnal animals, you won't need to be afraid of strange sounds that you hear at night. Just remember that these sounds come from nocturnal, not supernatural, creatures and you'll sleep soundly until the sun is high and bright again!

Activity:

Listening Activity

Even if you can't always see nocturnal animals, you might be able to hear the noises they make in your own neighborhood. Here are some tips for identifying the animal sounds you hear at night, so that next time you're lying in bed and hear an animal's call you might know just what's making the noise!

Supplies

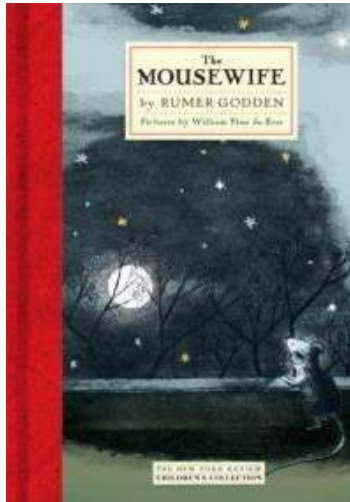
- Pencil
- Paper or notebook
- Timer or clock

Instructions

1. Do some research on what kinds of animals live in your neighborhood. If you live in the United States, your state government most likely has resources for this kind of research on their website. For example, the state of New Jersey's Department of Environmental Protection has online checklists of local wildlife. Search for "wildlife" and the name of your state to find similar sites particular to your state.
2. After you've become familiar with the types of wildlife in your area, get a sense of what your local nocturnal animals sound like by searching for sound clips. YouTube is a good resource for this.
3. Pick a time at night when your home is fairly quiet to sit down and listen to the noises you hear outside. Set your timer for five minutes, or keep an eye on a clock while you listen carefully.
2. As you listen, write down the sounds you hear. Try to write down your best guess for what each noise sounds like, or, if you can't, write down an approximation of the sound.
3. When your time is up and you have your list of sounds, head back to the internet to see if you can match up the sounds with the animals that made them.
4. If you like, you may wish to finish your activity by making a scrapbook, collage, or presentation of the nocturnal animals that live in your neighborhood. You may be surprised to find out how diverse your local wildlife is!

Book Review: *The Mousewife*

Rumer Godden



Have you ever felt different from everyone else? That's how one little mouse feels in *The Mousewife*, as she spends her nights looking after her mousehusband and mousebabies. While the mousewife's husband is content to live indoors and dream about cheese, the mousewife is fascinated by what lies beyond the glass panes of the window that separates her from the world outdoors. But the mousewife doesn't have much time for dreaming, especially after her husband suffers from a bout of indigestion and the task of finding food for the family falls on the mousewife.

One day, a caged dove is brought to the house where the mousewife lives. The mousewife strikes up a friendship with the dove as she talks to him at night when she goes to collect her family's food. The dove, unhappy with being caged, tells the mousewife what it's like to live outdoors. The mousewife listens to the dove's tales night after night, even when her husband becomes angry with her for spending time away from her family. Finally, the mousewife decides to take a great risk to help her friend the dove, even if it means giving up something she loves in the process.

The Mousewife is a beautiful, poignant story based on a tale by poet William Wordsworth's sister Dorothy. *The Mousewife* straddles the gap between picture and chapter book, being longer than most picture books but short enough to be read aloud in one sitting. Rumer Godden's text is accompanied by magical pen-and-ink illustrations by William Pene du Bois, which capture the mystery and beauty of the nighttime world in black and white.