

# Stereotypes and Animals

Presented by VOICE



What is a  
stereotype?

click the bubble or  
right arrow to proceed

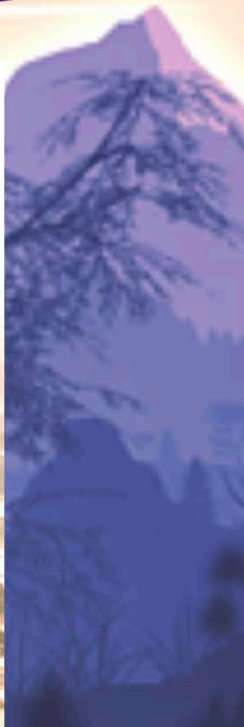
A **stereotype** is an oversimplified or over-generalized belief about a particular group of people. Stereotypes form expectations or assumptions about a person or group of people's personality, preferences, or abilities.



**Dangers of  
Stereotypes**

However, stereotypes cause us to ignore differences between individuals, making us more likely to make assumptions or believe things about people that aren't true. By categorizing people by stereotypes we are belittling one another with hurtful assumptions. No one person can be simplified to a single statement.

## Animal Stereotypes



**Click on an animal or  
tap right arrow to  
view their stereotype  
vs their truth.**

sharks

opossums

rats

spiders

bats

black cats

dogs

# Sharks

**Stereotype:** "Sharks are scary man-eating monsters of the sea."



**Truth**

# Sharks

**Truth:** Shark attacks are rare, with sharks only killing 4-6 people/year. Most shark attacks are just a case of mistaken identity; sharks mistake the silhouette of a surfer on a surfboard as a sea lion, a common prey animal. Sharks actually hold an important role in maintaining coral reef health.



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# More Shark Facts

Sharks only kill 4-6 people/year, while humans kill over 100 million sharks each year. Other cases of shark bites are primarily due to humans messing with or provoking sharks. Sharks are actually a keystone species, meaning without them, the ecosystem would become unbalanced and wouldn't be sustainable. They contribute to maintaining healthy coral reefs by keeping medium-sized predatory species populations in check. Sharks are not a species to be feared. Sharks also consume sick fish so they don't enter into our fishing industry. Some sharks have even been very social with divers they're familiar with by coming up to them asking for scratches/pets and to remove their parasites.



# Opossums

Stereotype: "Opossums are disease-ridden pests"



Truth



# Opossums

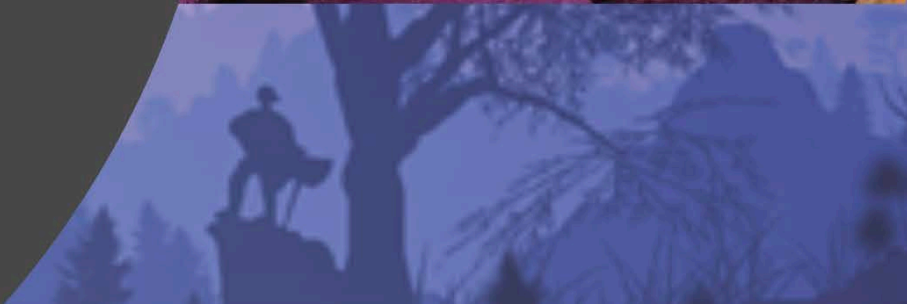
**Truth:** Out of all of the wildlife mammals in your backyard, the opossum has one of the lowest risks for developing and spreading rabies. This is due to their naturally low body temperature (94° to 97°F) that make it difficult for the rabies virus to replicate. They also help prevent tick-borne disease from spreading in their environment.



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# More Opossum Facts

They actually help prevent the spread of tick-borne diseases in their ecosystems by eating 5,000 ticks each season! Opossums also act as the garbage person and pest control for their ecosystems by cleaning up any dead remains and by hunting mice and rats. "Playing-possum" is a true defense tactic used by this species. When threatened, they will flop onto their side, extend their tongues, and play dead. This is a ploy to trick the predator to give them a moment of escape.



# Rats

**Stereotype:** "Rats are filthy disease-carrying pests."



Truth

# Rats

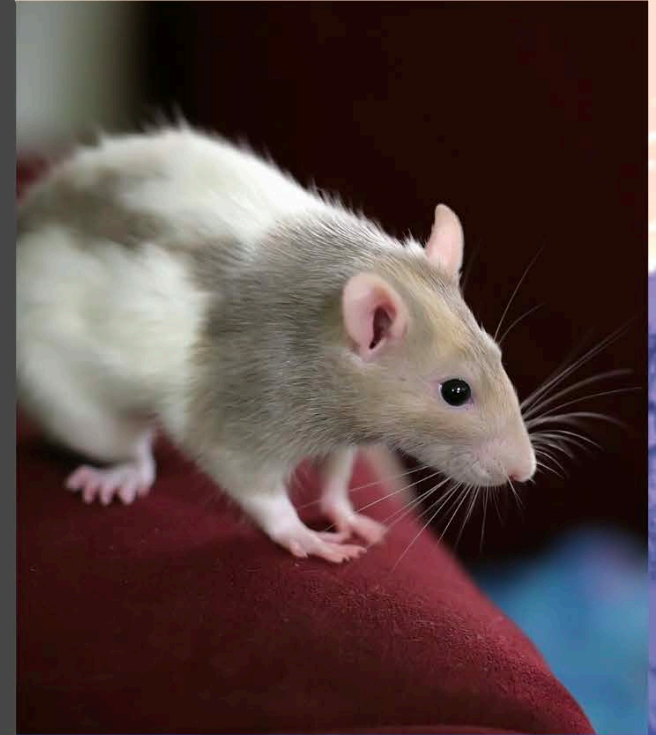
**Truth:** The stereotype of being filthy or disease-carrying originates from the involvement of the wild rat species in the disease spread of the Bubonic Plague during the late Middle Ages. Domestic rats are actually very clean and groom themselves just like cats. They can even be trained to use litter boxes. Domestic rats are one of the only rodents that actively seek out affection.



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# More Rat Facts

During the Middle Ages, rats were not the true cause for spread of the Bubonic Plague. The pathogen was carried within the fleas that infected the rats. Poor hygiene practices and flea bites were to blame for the disease spread. Domestic rats are very social creatures with the ability to form deep relationships with each other and their owners. Rats are very intelligent and with proper socialization, they can make great trainable companion animals.



# Spiders

Stereotype: "Spiders are dangerous and aggressive!"



Truth

# Spiders

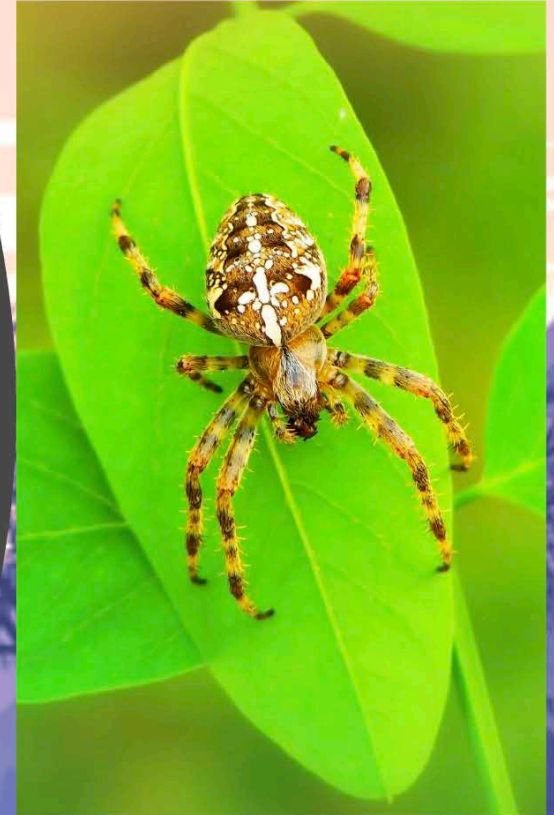
**Truth:** While it's true that almost all spiders produce venom, only a few species are medically dangerous. In the US, the widow spiders and the recluse spiders are the only groups that pose a severe medical threat to humans. Spiders are not naturally aggressive. Like most creatures, a spider's first instinct is to run and hide.



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# More Spider Facts

Even the most venomous spiders are unlikely to bite unless provoked. Spiders are actually very helpful and eat an estimated 400-800 million metric tons of insects every year. Spiders have been proven to be more effective at killing insects than pesticides. With their contributions towards the control of pests both in agriculture and our households, we are able to use less pesticides which is great for the environment.





# Bats

**Stereotype:** "Bats are disease carrying creatures that fly at your head and attack humans."



Truth

# Bats

**Truth:** Bats are one of the few nocturnal pollinators and one of the only animals that pollinate agave plants, an important agricultural plant used as a natural sweetener. In the UK, some bats are actually considered an "indicator species," meaning that they are the first species examined by ecologists to determine the health of the overall ecosystem due to their sensitivity to habitat disruption and insect biodiversity.



[read more](#)

# More Bat Facts

Bats serve as natural pest controllers, eating thousands of insects each night. Many fruit bats even act as seed dispersers as well as reforesters. As they digest the fruit, bats deposit the seeds with their own natural fertilizer, leading to farther seed dispersal and reforestation. Some cases of bats species in tropical forests have been able to help contribute to reforestation of their threatened habitat.



# Black Cats

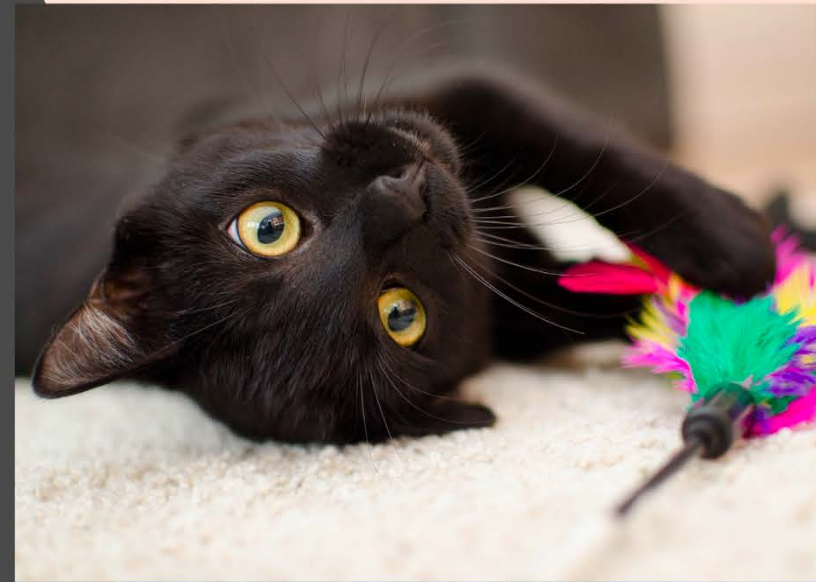
Stereotype: "Black cats are bad luck, evildoers, and are involved in witchcraft."



Truth

# Black Cats

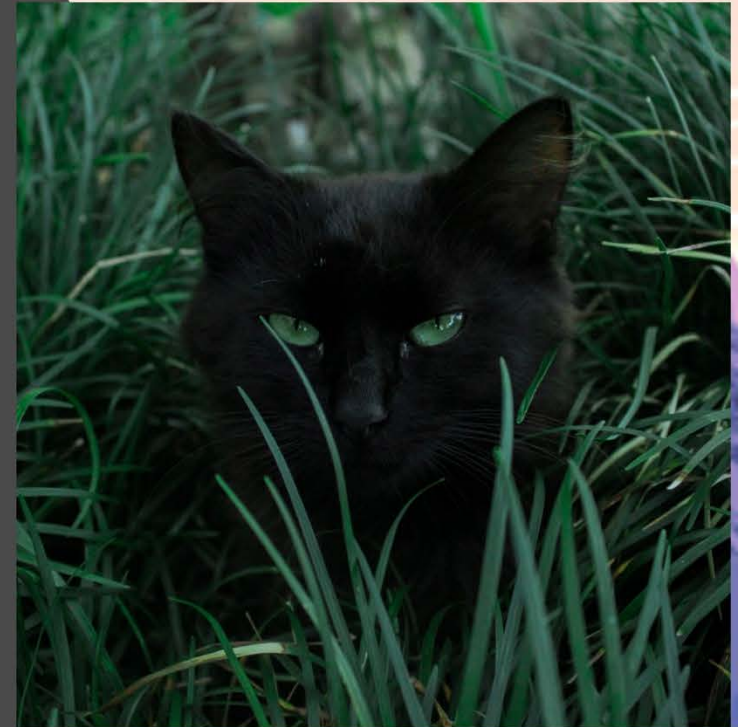
**Truth:** Unfortunately, the black cat superstition still exists today in some western cultures and Halloween festivities. Due to this harmful superstition, black cats (and some black dogs) have the lowest adoption rates across the US. However, if you ask anyone who has ever encountered black cats, they will say they are very sweet and just as deserving of our love, affection, and a home. In fact, in many cultures, black cats are actually good luck!



[read more](#)

# More Black Cat Facts

Black cats have been wrongfully associated with evil since the Middle Ages when they were condemned and depicted alongside witches in religious artwork as well as the Salem Witch Trials in early colonial days. However, many cultures consider black cats good luck. In some areas of the UK, black cats are given as wedding gifts to bring good luck and happiness to brides. British sailors used to take black cats for good luck on voyages as well as to hunt mice.



# Dogs

**Stereotype:** "Dogs are mean and scary." Or  
"Every dog wants to be pet and played with."



**Truth**

# Dogs

Just like you, each dog has their own personality. Every dog is unique and has their own level of comfort that should be respected. Some may want to be pet, while others may not. Always ask the owner before petting their dog.



Receptive\*

\*Receptive = "Yes please pet me"  
\*\*Not receptive = "Please, leave me alone!"

Not  
receptive\*\*

Click on the following bubbles to see what body language a dog may display if they are receptive or not receptive to your attention.



# Receptive behaviors

- Wagging or relaxed tail
- Loose or relaxed stance
- Mouth open with tongue exposed or relaxed mouth
- Head and ears up
- Demonstrating a play bow
- Relaxed body posture

\*Always check with the owner if it is okay to engage with their dog! Remember, there may be reasons other than aggression why they may not want you to interact with their dog including training, service, medical, or personal reasons.

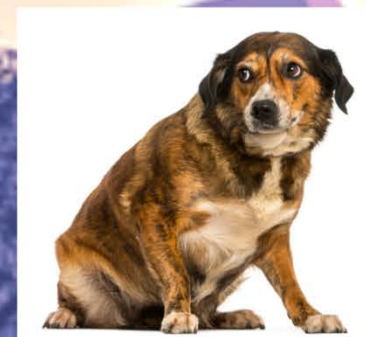
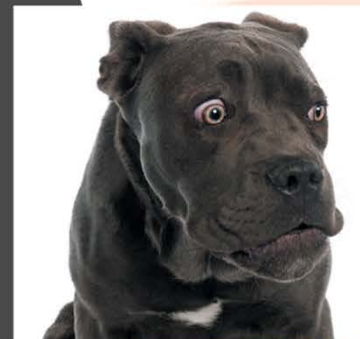


click on a picture  
for a closer view

# Non-receptive behaviors

- Tail is straight and stiff, down, or tucked under
- Tense, frozen posture, or leaning away
- Eyes are wide open or giving the "side eye" where the white part is visible
- Ears are postured back or tight against head
- Barking and/or growling
- Showing teeth
- Raised hackles or hair along back

\*Keep in mind the owner's actions/comfort. Be respectful and give the dog space if asked to. You may also see the owner attempting to pull their dog away, distract them, or cross the street.



click on a picture  
for a closer view