

WHEN ARE YOU AWAKE?

Definitions

Nocturnal: Active at night

Diurnal: Active during the day

Crepuscular: Active at dawn and/or dusk

Cathemeral: Not following any activity pattern

Some animals we see during the day. Some are only awake at night. Some don't seem to fit into either category.

Let's take a look at activity periods and what animals fit into which category.

Nocturnal

Animals that are active at night are considered nocturnal.

Most people think of nocturnal animals and think of raccoons, because they are common in many places in the world. They are awake at night looking for food such as fruit, seeds, nuts, birds' eggs and plants.

The nine species of bats that are native to Iowa are nocturnal. They love to eat mosquitoes after the sun goes down, and they find their food not with their eyes but with echolocation. Bats listen to an echo of a call to build a map of their surroundings. The animals can tell how far away something is by how long it takes the echo to return.

Owls also love to hunt at night because they can sneak up on the prey. They have big eyes and wide pupils that help them see their prey, and they also have good hearing that helps them find prey in the dark. Plus, because they hunt night after night in the same location, they know where branches, trees and other things that they might hit are located so they can avoid them.

You might hear a coyote howling in a prairie or forest area in Iowa when the sun is setting, because they are communicating where they are to other coyotes in the area. Most coyotes hunt at night by themselves, but sometimes in the winter they will gather together and hunt as a team.

Other nocturnal animals that live in Iowa include opossums, skunks, foxes, bobcats, mice, rats and badgers. However, because people have moved into their native habitats, sometimes that can change these animals' eating patterns and you might see some of these animals out during the daytime.

Diurnal

Diurnal creatures wake and sleep with the rising and the setting of the sun. In Iowa, those animals include squirrels, chipmunks and ground squirrels, raptors such as bald eagles, hawks and osprey, turtles and most species of songbirds and waterfowl.

When an animal is awake has to do with a lot of factors: Temperature, humidity, levels of light, prey and predators, and more.

For instance, a turtle may be diurnal because it is cold-blooded. It acclimates to the temperature around it, but to warm itself, it needs to bask in the sun. That means that it has to be awake and active during the day.

Bald eagles and hawks are awake during the day, because that is when their prey is active. Squirrels, chipmunks, ground squirrels are active, so their predators are active.

Animals without night vision must be awake during the day so they can see to eat and find a home.

When an animal is awake and active is innate, but it is also incredibly important for how it lives and functions.



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Crepuscular

When an animal is not nocturnal or diurnal, it may mean it's crepuscular. It simply means that an animal is active at dawn and dusk.

These animals come out the most as the sun starts to set or rise.

Scientists think that crepuscular animals are this way because they are avoiding predators. A lot of animals that are looking to prey on other animals are active during peak daylight or evening hours.

For instance, the rabbit is a crepuscular animal because it has predators such as great-horned owls and coyotes that are nocturnal and also hawks and falcons that are diurnal.

Other animals choose to be active during the dawn and dusk hours to avoid competing with other similar species. This may be the reason that the barn owl is crepuscular instead of hunting against so many other owl species that are nocturnal.

Although many people haven't heard the word crepuscular before, many animals we are familiar with are in fact crepuscular: Deer, skunks, opossums, American woodcocks, rabbits, barn owls and even domesticated dogs and cats.

Plus, crepuscular animals can be broken down even further. Those who are most active in the morning are called matutinal, and those most active at dusk are verpertine.

Cathemeral

Animals that don't have any real pattern of waking and sleeping are called cathemeral.

These animals could be awake at night or awake during the day, and they don't have any adjustment needed between these times. Their pattern is not a pattern at all, it is completely irregular.

There doesn't seem to be a hard-and-fast reason as to why animals are cathemeral either. It may be that at different times of the year, access to food is easier either in daylight or at night, so they switch up their hours to make it easiest to find food. It may be because of temperature changes that being awake at a certain time of day is most efficient. It could also be that an animal's schedule changes to avoid predators in different seasons.

Lions are considered cathemeral, because they can sleep during day or night and are active when they need to find food or water, whenever that may be.

Other animals considered cathemeral could be bobcats, mountain lions, frogs and even coyotes can fit into this category.

