

ANIMAL MYTHS

THE TRUTH BEHIND FIVE SUPERWEIRD TALES...



Is a mouse's number one meal really cheese? Do tomatoes actually knock out skunk stink? Well, no. But many people still believe in these age-old legends. NG KIDS reveals the backstories behind some common myths and explains why they're simply NOT true...



MYTH 1

COCKERELS ONLY CROW AT DAWN.

HOW IT MAY HAVE STARTED

Cockerels (or roosters) usually do begin their day with a cock-a-doodle-do. Because morning is a relatively quiet time of the day when crowing often wakes people, the noise is very noticeable. Over time, people may have assumed that the cockerel only crows at sunrise.

WHY IT'S NOT TRUE

Cockerels, or male chickens, actually crow many times a day for several different reasons. The loud-beaked bird might unleash a hearty cry to communicate with his flock of hens, scare off rival roosters, or warn of predators such as foxes.

MYTH 2

MICE LOVE CHEESE.

HOW IT MAY HAVE STARTED

This myth might stem from the expression "quiet as a mouse in cheese." Coined about 300 years ago, the saying meant that a person was making soft, muffled sounds. Eventually the expression was shortened to the more familiar "quiet as a mouse." But the idea that a mouse craves cheese stunk.

WHY IT'S NOT TRUE

In reality mice will eat almost anything they can get their paws on – chocolate, peanut butter, seeds, fruit and, yes, cheese. But no studies have found that the rodents prefer cheese above all other foods. In fact, many pest control experts will use other grub such as chocolate or even sweets coated in sugar – not cheese – to entice mice into traps.



BUSTED!

MYTH 3

TOMATOES GET RID OF SKUNK SMELL.

HOW IT MAY HAVE STARTED

The origin of this myth is unclear. But it's easy to see why it caught on. Tomatoes do seem to get rid of skunk stink. So for years people have used everything from tomato juice to ketchup to try to eliminate the stench.

WHY IT'S NOT TRUE

When you're faced with smelly skunk spray, the odour receptors in your nose get used to the stink and soon barely detect it. This is called olfactory fatigue. "The nose stops smelling skunk spray," scientist William Wood says. "And if tomatoes are present, you might smell those instead." But if you give your nose a break and then return to the scene of the stink, you'll still be able to smell skunk instead of tomatoes. So what does get rid of skunk smell? A mix of hydrogen peroxide, baking soda and washing up liquid.



MYTH 4

EARWIGS CRAWL INTO EARS.

HOW IT MAY HAVE STARTED

More than a thousand years ago, in parts of Europe, people held the superstition that earwigs – brownish insects less than 2cm long – had a habit of crawling into a person's ear and boring into the brain to lay eggs. The belief endures today.

WHY IT'S NOT TRUE

Earwigs lay their eggs in cold, dark places such as soil, but not in human brains. So they have no reason to burrow into your ear. In fact it's unlikely that any bug will crawl into your ear. Earwigs can give you a sharp pinch, though. Pinchers on their hind end are used to fend off enemies and capture prey. Ouch!



MYTH 5

ZIGZAG TO ESCAPE A CROCODILE.

HOW IT MAY HAVE STARTED

No one really knows where this old wildlife tip came from. But it could have been concocted because crocs have long bodies and short legs that don't seem well suited for making repeated sharp turns while running.

WHY IT'S NOT TRUE

Crocs don't usually chase prey over land. Instead, they prefer to hide in the water and then spring forward, snapping their jaws around their target. If you do somehow find yourself on land with a croc in hot pursuit, experts suggest running in a straight line, which allows you to move faster and cover more ground. We hope this advice won't come back to bite you!

