

## Discover Our Neighborhood Night-time Animals

As the Sun begins to set and the daylight fades, day-time animals like songbirds, squirrels, or chipmunks settle in for sleep. But that is when the "night shift" starts in our neighborhoods! A very fun and interesting family activity is to go on evening walks together. Look for night-time animals. Make a game of it - how many can your family find? 😊

**NOTE:** While walking at night, be very safe and avoid cars or difficult-to-see tripping obstacles along the sidewalk or roads. Also be very quiet!

If you make noise, you will not see or hear any animals!

Here are some fascinating animals to find in the Tucker area, as well as in many other parts of Atlanta:

- [Rabbits and possums](#) are frequent visitors to our yards. They are easy to spot both at dusk and at dawn. I recently have seen baby bunnies scampering around in my back yard.
- Many people are surprised to learn we have [deer](#) in our city. Around 8:45 PM last night, I spotted one while I was walking near where Lucky Shoals Creek empties into Lake Ivanhoe. After watching me for a few minutes, it expertly disappeared into the bushes, and made a couple of snorting sounds. (I guess it disapproved of my presence!)
- [Owls](#): You probably won't see them, but you are likely to hear owls. For example, I hear barred owls almost every night near my house or while I go on evening walks. Here are some weblinks for three species of owls I have hear in my own yard. (Also see Backyard Bushcraft issue #4 for learning to identify Atlanta area bird songs):
  - **Barred Owl:** In addition to their normal call provided in this link, these also have a "crazy monkey" call that is super-weird, especially when they get going outside my bedroom window in the middle of the night!  
[http://www.fernbank.edu/Birding/birdID/barred\\_owl.htm](http://www.fernbank.edu/Birding/birdID/barred_owl.htm)
  - **Eastern Screech Owl:** <http://www.fernbank.edu/Birding/birdID/screech.htm>
  - **Great Horned Owl:** Listen for these in January:  
<http://www.fernbank.edu/Birding/birdID/ghowl.htm>

- Starting in early June, you can enjoy [fireflies or lightning bugs](#). We have several species in Georgia. Each has its own blinking pattern. Different species also use slightly different colors of light: some are yellow, while others are amber or greenish color. What patterns can you find in your own yard?
- If you are **very** lucky, **very** quiet, and pay **very careful attention** to your surroundings while walking outside at night, you might have the good fortune to see or hear a **red fox**! Red foxes are native to most countries throughout the Earth's northern hemisphere, and they were introduced by humans to Australia. They have adapted very well to urban areas. Here in Georgia, you can find red foxes throughout the northwestern half of the state on southwards to the Piedmont Fall Line at Macon. Here are some interesting facts about red foxes:
  - They are nature's true masters at catching small rodents like mice and rats. (That's very beneficial for helping to keep these rodents from invading our human houses!).
  - In addition to their superb hearing, there is some scientific evidence that foxes use the Earth's magnetic field to help catch mice!

<https://www.discovermagazine.com/planet-earth/foxes-use-the-earths-magnetic-field-as-a-targeting-system>

- Foxes also eat many other foods they find and are generally omnivorous. When kits are old enough to begin hunting, they start by catching earthworms and insects!
- Here in Tucker, fox parents raise their litters in the spring. You will have the best luck spotting them from mid-March through the end of May. That's when the fox parents are super-busy looking for food to feed their families, and later to teach the little ones how to hunt:
  - One night in early May this year, I saw a vixen (female fox) with her two little ones. After she saw me, mom fox softly barked to tell the little ones to hide. Meanwhile mom walked away to distract my attention --- and then she made a bunch fox "scream calls" at me! (Yes, I got yelled at by an upset mother fox!!!)
- Here are two YouTube links for learning fox sounds and behavior:
  - <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=J6NuhlibHsM>
  - <http://cdn2.discoverwildlife.com/british-wildlife/understand-fox-behaviour>
- Here's a terrific recently published book to learn more about foxes, available from Amazon or other book vendors:

Brand, Adele (2019) The Hidden World of the Fox. New York: William Morrow.

- Here are two stunning photos of a beautiful red fox that Mr. Bill Penkava recently made during a May 26 sunrise hike on top of Stone Mountain:



- Many ponds, marshy areas, and damp backyard areas are located throughout Tucker. These are wonderful places to listen for **frogs**. Right now in early June, you can hear several species. Here is a list that I heard over the last few nights in my neighborhood and in the marshy end of Lake Ivanhoe, along with some sound recording links:

- **Cope's Gray Treefrog:** Often heard in backyard trees. One time after a very rainy Scout camp out at Stone Mountain, one hitched a ride home in my vehicle!  
<http://www.maamp.us/index.php/frogs/frog-calls>
- **Bullfrog:** <http://www.maamp.us/index.php/frogs/frog-calls>
- **Green Frog:** This is one of my personal favorites! They sound like twanging rubber bands): <http://www.maamp.us/index.php/frogs/frog-calls>
- **Green Treefrog:** <http://www.maamp.us/index.php/frogs/frog-calls>
- **Southern Cricket Frog:** <http://srelherp.uga.edu/anurans/acrgry.htm>
- **Spring Peepers:** You won't hear these in June. They typically are active in our area in late winter. Listen for them at the end of next January on through mid-February:  
<http://www.maamp.us/index.php/frogs/frog-calls>

To learn more, search the Internet for Atlanta area frogs, or purchase a CD containing other Georgia frog and toad calls at: <http://georgiawildlife.com/frogCD>

- Finally, as the night-time draws to a close, one or 2 hours before dawn, you will start to hear a few day-time songbirds:
  - Often the species that start singing earliest are the ones that frequent the tops of tall trees. Because of the Earth's curvature, tops of tall trees are the first places to catch the first light of day. That wakes those birds up before other species that prefer sleeping in lower branches near the ground.
  - Eventually, all the birds begin to sing as the sunlight strengthens. This early morning time is called the "dawn chorus." Get up early and enjoy the bird sounds!