

Test Your Knowledge of Rhode Island's Wildlife

1. Since many bats use sophisticated echolocation (high frequency sounds) to navigate, communicate, and detect prey, most species of bats are actually blind [True/False].
2. This RI snake is nicknamed the “puff adder” because it will puff up, flatten its head (like a cobra), hiss, and pretend to strike when threatened. Despite its intimidating display, this snake isn't venomous, poses no threat to humans, and is perhaps the most docile of RI's local snakes. In fact, if this first display does not ward off the threat, this snake will often resort to rolling onto its back, opening its mouth, and “playing dead”! What is the name of this snake?
 - a) Northern Water Snake (*Nerodia sipedon sipedon*)
 - b) Northern Brown Snake (*Storeria dekayi dekayi*)
 - c) Eastern Hognose Snake (*Heterodon platirhinos*)
 - d) Black Rat Snake (*Elaphe obsoleta obsoleta*)

Bonus: How many of the 7 remaining native RI snakes not listed above can you name?

3. Bug zappers are a great way to reduce the number of biting insects in your yard. [True/False]
4. The Rhode Island endangered species regulations have specific provisions to protect habitat within the state, so amphibians that rely on vernal pools and their surrounding uplands are protected. [True/False]
5. This RI critter is one of the world's oldest living mammals. Nicknamed the living fossil, it has existed for about 70 million years and dates back to the days of the dinosaur. Can you name it?
6. Feeding wildlife can increase the incidence of nuisance complaints as well as injuries to both humans and animals, and it is even illegal in most cases. [True/False]
7. RI has a native fish species that is catadromous (lives most of its life in fresh or brackish water, but reproduces in the sea), can survive out of water for *several hours*, and can navigate over exposed rocks, dams, and even some waterfalls. [True/False]
8. In a given year, the RI Department of Health may test between 100 and 200 bats for rabies. Over a ten year period, the average infection rate of tested bats in a given year was determined to be:
 - a) Less than 1%
 - b) About 4%
 - c) About 30%
 - d) Over 50%
9. Hibernation is a survival strategy used by many mammal species to cope with adverse environmental conditions such as cold temperatures or lack of available food resources. Which of these RI species is a true hibernator?
 - a) Black bear
 - b) Raccoon
 - c) Woodchuck
 - d) Skunk
10. If you find a turtle crossing the road, you should bring it to the best habitat in your neighborhood to keep it safe [True/False].

Wildlife Quiz Answer Sheet

1. **False. All bats can see, and most bats have excellent eye sight.**
2. **c) Eastern Hognose Snake**
Bonus: (5) Eastern Milk Snake, (6) Northern Ringneck Snake, (7) Eastern Smooth Green Snake, (8) Eastern Ribbon Snake, (9) Eastern Garter Snake, (10) Eastern Worm Snake, and (11) Northern Black Racer
3. **False.** Mosquitoes, blackflies and other blood-seeking pests are attracted to heat and carbon dioxide rather than to light, so a traditional bug zapper will do nothing to keep you and your family from getting bitten. Some bug zappers now also release carbon dioxide or other “baits,” but they still kill a lot of harmless and beneficial insects and shrink the food supply for birds, bats, and fish by doing so. Bats are primary predators of night-flying insects and are important in controlling many insect pests, so encouraging them to stick around is a good idea for you and them.
4. **False. There are no provisions to protect habitat in the RI endangered species regulations (RIGL Title 20; Ch. 37).** RI DEM has jurisdiction over freshwater wetlands, but their powers aren’t sufficient to safeguard vernal pool species. They can restrict disturbance within 50’ of certain wetlands. Only bogs have this “perimeter wetland” regardless of size, whereas ponds must be at least ¼ acre, marshes at least 1 acre, and swamps at least 3 acres. Freshwater wetlands not meeting these size requirements are still regulated, but they have no protections beyond their immediate boundaries. Even where these 50’ perimeter wetlands are established, they are insufficient to protect vernal pool species. Spotted salamanders, for example, have been found up to ¼ mile from their breeding pools.
5. **The opossum (*Didelphis virginiana*)**
6. **True.** Feeding wildlife causes numerous problems. Animals can become accustomed to taking handouts, which **can lead to aggressive or unwanted behavior in public spaces and around homes.** Examples include turkeys and geese chasing people and pets, defecating on homes, cars or lawns, and becoming a general neighborhood nuisance. **Feeding animals can also make them sick.** Foods outside their natural diet can wreak havoc on their digestive systems and often lack the nutrients they need to be healthy. For example, the natural winter diet of deer includes acorns and woody browse rather than corn or hay, and that of waterfowl includes grasses, insects, and other aquatic life rather than processed grains like bread and crackers. Waterfowl that are fed produce a lot of waste that can raise bacteria levels in our waters. Further, **feeding can concentrate animals tightly and promote the spread of disease.** For example, Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a fatal and contagious brain disease in deer, and feeding them can promote its spread. For all of these reasons, the feeding of wildlife is illegal in RI with very few exceptions (e.g. most bird feeders).
7. **True. The American eel (*Anguilla rostrata*),** also known as the common eel, freshwater eel, or Atlantic eel, can absorb oxygen through its skin to breathe. This allows it to climb out of the water for short periods. Some barriers to stream passage are too great even for this superstar navigator, however, so RI DEM incorporates eel passage into all its fish ladder installations.
8. **b) About 4% of tested bats** were found to have rabies, but the actual incidence in RI is likely far less. Sick bats are more likely to be caught and turned in than healthy bats, and **scientific surveys of wild bats usually report a rate of <0.5% for most North American bats species.** It’s still important not to handle bats and risk exposure.
9. **c) The woodchuck.** This one was tricky! Black bears, raccoons, and skunks all may den up during winter months. Black bears don’t eat, drink, or defecate in their winter den, and their heart beat, body temperature, and breathing decrease substantially, but not quite as much as hibernator bodies do. This very deep sleep is referred to as *torpor*. It is displayed to varying degrees among mammals and is far more common than true hibernation. Bats, jumping mice, and ground squirrels are “true hibernators.”
10. **False.** Many turtles have a very specific home range they occupy their entire lives. Unfortunately, bringing a turtle to a spot that seems perfect to you may actually put them in more danger than their original circumstances. The turtle may not find suitable food and habitat in its new surroundings and is likely to try to return to where it was going. Along the way, it will likely have to cross more roads and may be exposed to additional perils such as exhaustion. If you find a turtle in the road, the best thing to do is to take note of which direction it is headed and help it cross to that side of the street. *Of course you should always be sure conditions are safe for you before you attempt to rescue wildlife.*

Sources: RI DEM staff and website, including the *Wildlife and You* fact sheets available at: <http://www.dem.ri.gov/topics/wltopics.htm> and Bat Conservation International website at: <http://www.batconservation.org/>
For additional information contact the RI Wildlife Action Plan Community Liaison at <mailto:dem.rwap@dem.ri.gov>