



Letters to Nature Kids

October, 2023 ∞ Number 14
Halloween



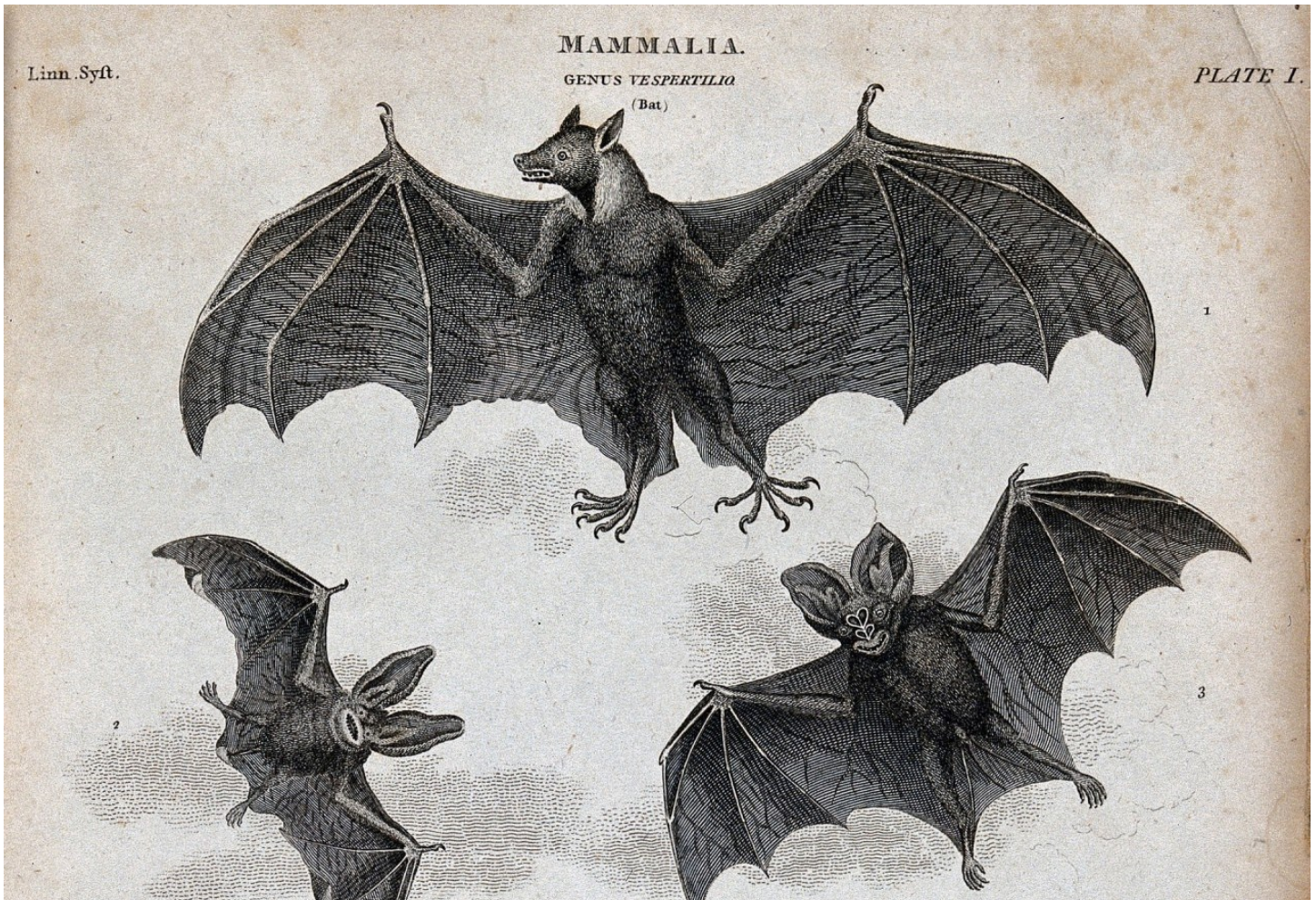
Halloween is short for "All Hallows Eve" - the evening before All Saints Day on November 1

Dear Nature Kids,

Halloween might be the holiday that is most fun, right? With costumes and trick or treat, people look forward to it with smiles on their faces. Along with the parties and candy, Halloween is about being scared, isn't it? There are ghosts and scary music or movies, and some people try to get the most frightening costume they can find. We like being scared – a little – on Halloween.

We even bring the natural world into our Halloween stories and decorations. Last year I wrote about bats at Halloween. With their bare wings, skin stretched over finger bones, I said that we sometimes see them as a weird version of the feathered wings of birds. Bats live in the opposite of the bright daytime world in which we see and hear birds. When people think of angels, they give them feathered wings, but images of demons often have bat wings.

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(Above:) an old illustration of bats (Below:) a real bat



But that's our story, it is not the bats' story. We don't see bats up close very often, so they look strange to many people. Instead of thinking they're weird or frightening, we could think of them as animals who are amazingly well adapted to flying the night skies. They use echoes from their high-pitched vocalizations like sonar, to avoid flying into things and to find flying insects.



We treat spiders the same way, making them part of our Halloween stories. We string fake spider web from the trees and hang fake spiders where people might walk into them. Real spiders don't have to be scary any more than a grasshopper. Most spiders cannot really hurt us and none of them want to.

Sometimes owls are part of the Halloween stories. Why would owls be scary? If we walked through the woods on a dark night, an owl's sudden call - "whoohoo..."

whoohoo!" - might startle us. Their feathers are designed so that they can fly silently. On that walk, a sudden glimpse of an owl flying by and making no sound might seem ghostly. We didn't see it coming, so it scares us.

People make up stories, either for fun or as a way to try to explain what they don't really understand. We think black cats are scary on Halloween, and maybe that's because long ago people thought that witches would turn themselves into black cats so we would not notice them.

I hope you have a good time on Halloween. It can be fun to be scared just a little, when we're with friends and we know the scary thing isn't real. For some people it's a little bit like practicing facing your fears, and once the jolt of fear passes, the relief feels pretty good.



Sadly, some people enjoy scaring others because it makes them feel more powerful or stronger than the person that they scared. I'm not talking about kids having fun with each other, I'm talking about a person who enjoys seeing someone *really* afraid in a way that's not fun. That's bullying and it is not OK. Stay away from someone like that.

So stay safe and don't let anyone scare you unless you're both having fun with it. And remember that those things in nature that we make into scary Halloween stories are really just wildlife. Just because they are strange or unfamiliar doesn't mean that they have to scare us during all the rest of the year.

✍ Michael



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