



What is My Spirit Animal?

How to Find and Understand Your Animal Guides

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Wild
Gratitude

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Introduction

Wild animals are reaching out to connect with us all of the time. First and foremost, I want to extend my heartfelt gratitude to you for noticing their invitation and for putting in the additional effort in to learn more about the spiritual meaning of animals in your life.

You can benefit personally from exploring a relationship with spirit animals in a multitude of ways. Learning your spirit animal can change the way you look at yourself by bringing you a great sense of confidence and empowerment. Spirit animals also help answer important questions and prayers you are asking. They can point the way to new ways of being in the world as well as open your eyes to the invisible support of the spirits that are all around. You may have already started to notice that certain animals keep reappearing in your life. This is called synchronicity and this means that the spirits are talking to you. Congratulations! Now let's learn what's next!





What is a Spirit Animal?

Simply put, a Spirit Animal, is a guardian angel that watches over you, protects you and acts as your guide.

They are considered a tutelary guide. “Tutelary” means to “*serve as a protector, guardian, or patron.*” Spirit Animals are saints in animal form. They also go by the names of power animal and totem animal.

Spirit Animals lend their power to us in the form of their innate gifts and talents. For example, a hawk lends us the power of being able to see far ahead as well as the ability to soar over our lives and get a big picture view.

Any living creature can be a spirit animal, but it is generally understood that most spirit animals are wild animals as our living domesticated pets are already in the service as our familiars. Pets that pass away can come back in spirit form to help, which would make them a spirit animal.



Animal Messengers vs. Spirit Animals

When we have a chance encounter with a living example of our spirit animal, it is believed that the living animal was either sent by our Spirit Animal or that the meeting was choreographed by our spirit animal. Living animals that visit us are considered “animal messengers” that are bringing specific guidance. When we build a relationship with a living being that is the same species as our spirit animal, we have the chance to learn more about the power our spirit animal carries.





You likely already have an idea about which spirit animal is yours, but are there some you are ruling out unnecessarily?

We believe that we are separate from our animal guides. Our perceived separation from spirit animals is a reflection of the way we think we've taken ourselves out of nature. We can't be apart from nature any more than we can live without air or water. Spirit animals are an expression of who we are. Our spirit animals are already with us guiding our way on a moment-to-moment basis in the same way that our soul is always there talking to us. To hear the guidance we must we must first debunk some key myths and dispel a few dangerous fears.



Debunking the Myths

MYTH #1

My spirit animal has to come in a special ceremony

I've seen spirit animals connect in the most mundane and the most astounding of circumstances. Just like there is no single path to God, there is no one way to relate with an animal guide. Mouse came to me while live trapping hundreds of mice for a scientific study. It was an inglorious job of repeatedly setting and checking traps, weighing mice, tagging their ears, determining their gender, and setting them free. Deer spirit animal made her presence known to me through a life purpose journey a shamanic practitioner performed on my behalf. A wild mountain lion came to me on a riverbank while I was all alone. We stood eye to eye for many moments before she quietly walked back into the woods. There's no special ceremony needed, just contact that leads to consistent interaction.



Mouse symbolizes a the ability to “see God in the details” of our lives and to quietly go about our lives of service much like a monk would.

[Learn More About Mouse Spirit Animal](#)



MYTH #2

Someone else needs to retrieve my spirit animal for me

Of all the beliefs around spirit animals this is the most limiting. Beware of the expert healer that tells you that the only way you will receive a spirit animal is through their ability. This is an invitation to hand your power over to someone else. Ultimately, we all need to practice discernment and decide for ourselves how we are going to connect with divine guides. I'm an adamant proponent of direct revelation. I believe that we have more abilities than we give ourselves credit for, including the ability to claim our own spirit animals.

MYTH #3

I only get one spirit animal

I'm not sure where this one came from, but I know a lot of people live under this illusion. As the beneficiary of a community of dozens of spirit animals, this is a preposterous idea to me. Over and over in my years worth of work, I've seen a whole host of spirit animals flood in to assist people. They are eager to help, and one never seems to do. This doesn't mean that we don't have stronger bonds with some animals over others; it just means that we don't have to limit ourselves so severely. It would be akin to explaining who we are using just a single word. Once we understand that our entire future, healing, power, or identity doesn't hinge on one animal, we are much less afraid of what it will be.



Dispelling the Fears



A great way to get over **your** judgment or distaste of animal is to learn about the service it offers to nature. Some animals are nature's housekeepers – like beetles and ants that clean up decomposing materials – and other animals such as moles are nature's gardeners. Moles help aerate the soil so plant's roots can get more water and oxygen.

Spider is associated with the creation of the alphabet and also the ability to face our fears courageously.

[Read About Spider](#)

FEAR #1

What if my spirit animal is stupid, silly, or weak?

An essential part of being human is worry about what other people will think of us. If we have what we think is a lame spirit animal we fear it will reflect poorly on us. Spirit animals do mirror either what we have inside or what we need to build inside. The thing is, no spirit animal is stupid, silly, or weak. That is our projection on them. When you take the time to pause and study the creature that's come forward to help you, you have the grand opportunity to see what an amazing creature of God they are. The power in a mouse is their ability to see the details in life and this is a power that mouse calls us to embody. The power in skunk is to have our reputation precede us, in ant is to help us with hard work, and in beetle is to teach us about resurrection.



FEAR #3

I am afraid of snakes. What if that's my spirit animal?

Many of us have animal phobias. Before I could walk, I was absolutely terrified of even the tiniest of spiders. Fear of an animal is common. Shifting that fear into a gift is not. To be able to face our fear and transmute it into a partnership is akin to the power of loving one's enemies. This is one of the most potent of relationships with a spirit animal you can ever hope for. If you don't feel like you are ready for this kind of encounter, don't fret. You can politely invite another animal into your life to help you get started. The animal spirits are often kind enough to oblige our idiosyncrasies. Be gentle with yourself in the process. You'll get there someday.

FEAR #4

What if I can't SEE my spirit animal?

So often people are worried they won't be able to envision their animal and then once they do they are worried they've made it all up. I say don't stress it. Over time the animal will show up enough times in absolutely unrelated ways that you won't be able to dismiss their presence. You'll see them in your dreams, in waking reality, and in photos and videos when you aren't intending to look. People will bring them up in conversation without your prompting. Stay open to the countless ways these guides make their presence spontaneously known.



Ready to Name Your Spirit Animal?

Here are five ways you can do this on your own...

#1 Consider the animals that have drawn your attention since childhood

As children we role-play and play with incarnate counterparts of our spirit animals. Some little girls gallop around and whinny like horses while others catch live snakes out in the fields. Other children pour over books about sea mammals while some have the opportunity to live in the company of deer or elk herds on their property. Your spirit animal



2 Evaluate what characters in stories stand out to you

The animals in mythology, books or movies that come back to mind over and over again are likely spirit animals of yours. Timeless classics like *My Friend Flicka*, *The Velveteen Rabbit*, *Never Cry Wolf* and *My Side of the Mountain* capture the minds and hearts of children who have a deep, soul connection to the animals in these books. Regardless of if your favorite story was a classic or not, pay attention to any animal protagonists that you loved.

3 Look for images of animals in your house

We unconsciously surround ourselves with images of our spirit animals. We are intuitively drawn to them and can't help but purchase the giant wall hanging of an eagle or choose the throw blanket covered in bears. Often people dismiss this way of identifying their spirit animals because it's so obvious. Just because they are right in front of you doesn't make them any less valid. In fact, the presence of their images around you all day every day makes them more real.



The hummingbird symbolizes love and the ability to go to the heart of the matter just like these beautiful birds go to the center of a flower to drink. [Learn More About Hummingbird Spirit Animal](#)



4 Pay attention to your dreams

Recurring dreams with a certain animal are telling you that this is a spirit animal of yours. Even if an animal shows up in a dream once, their presence indicates that this animal has a message for you and incorporating them into your list of animal guides will prove beneficial.

5 Recall the real-life encounters with wild animals

Do those visits baffle you to this day? Visits from incarnate complements of spirit animals can make a big impression on us. People tell me stories all the time about encounters with wildlife that go back 20 or 30 years. We remember these experiences because the interaction with the animal made an imprint on our soul. Journaling a list of these memories stretching back from yesterday to your childhood will open up the process entirely.

Now that you've come up with at least one (but hopefully more!) spirit animal, start watching for their presence in your world and learning about their lives. The more you can acquaint yourself with the animal, the better opportunity you have to embody the gifts they bring you.





Raven Spirit Animal reminds us that the path to enlightenment is the same road into the dark. It is our ability to hold awareness that allows us to heal rather than tumble into suffering. Raven has the skill to navigate these currents, to steer through this whirlpool, and come out more robust than before.

[Read About Raven](#)

Resources about Spirit Animals

When working to unwind the mysteries of the mystical world, we must seek guidance in many places. Reference books are a treasure trove of assistance and I can't express how important they are in spirit animal messages. Websites and mobile apps are quickly racing up to parallel the power in books as far as the depth and breadth of information available. However, the internet makes it possible for anyone to post their rendering of what a symbol might mean, and just because a book is published, doesn't mean it is of the caliber I would recommend for your most precious, inner work.



Just as we wouldn't trust just any psychic, healer, or energy worker with our wounds, we shouldn't trust any writer with the riddles of our soul. I recommend exercising your gift of discernment when reading interpretations of spirit animals. Take a few moments to consider these questions:

- Is the writer stroking your ego and telling you about your “gifts”? Remember that we are all gifted. Looking for a reading on a spirit animal to tell us that we are special is the same as hoping we have a horoscope that will tell us that today's the day we'll win the lottery.
- Is the writer speaking in generalities that could apply to more than one symbol? Specificity is key as it indicates knowledge and experience with the topic.
- Do you have an “aha” moment when reading the entry about the spirit animal? This tells you that you've found the information that's right for you at this time.
- Are you frightened by the reading? Does it give you the heebie-jeebies? Are you being told that something bad is happening or about to happen? Spirit doesn't work in the realm of superstition and forewarnings. By buying into bad omens you are buying into fear. I recommend seeking wisdom, understanding, and revelation, rather than fear.
- Does the writing try to help you predict the future? In trying to read the omens to predict the future, we are being pulled out of the present. You will do your very best work by staying in the now with what is up for you at this time.





This list is a list of my absolute favorites that I go to on a daily basis when working with clients in my shamanic healing practice, some of these resources I've used for well over twenty years and others are new discoveries. Within each of these books are countless jewels and occasionally some less desirable messages. I turn each page with my discernment in place waiting to see what "speaks" to my soul. I trust you will develop a similar practice as there is no greater guru than the one YOU have buried deep within. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise even if they do write with authority.



WEBSITES

[Wild Gratitude Spirit Animal Library](#)

BOOKS

[How to Find Your Spirit Animal](#) by David Carson

[Animal Wisdom](#) by Jessica Dawn Palmer

[Animal Speak](#) by Ted Andrews

MOBILE APP

[Heart of the Ark](#) by True North Productions

CARD DECKS

[Medicine Cards](#) by Jamie Sams & David Carson

[Way of the Horse: Equine Archetypes](#)

for Self Discovery by Linda Kohanov

[Touched by a Horse: Whispers from a Horse's Heart](#)

by Melisa Pearce

Frogs symbolize the cleansing and healing power of emotions. Frog reminds us of how to hold our emotions as both unassuming and royal. We must revere them as a pivotal aspect of our being while not identifying with them.

[Read more about Frog](#)



Building Your Own Interpretations

Venturing into the world of animal symbolism, otherwise known as the study of spirit animals, can be very daunting. There are sometimes wide gaps and obvious contradictions between the various books and websites that tell you what a spirit animal signifies. It is important to fact check any spirit animal reading as well as flesh out these readings with additional information. I can tell from experience, that it would be incredibly easy to write an entire book about the symbolism and power of just a single species of animal. That means that any spirit animal interpretation available (yes, including mine), will not cover the entire scope of the animal's gifts. Most books and websites have a limited number of animals listed, and it can be hard to find a reading on the less common animals. This is when we are forced to create our own interpretations, which is a good thing!

We are drawn to the qualities in our spirit animals that we either identify with or we desire. In pinpointing what we like about our spirit animals we have the opportunity to make these characteristics conscious in ourselves. Identifying with spirit animals is a great way to boost self-esteem and become more empowered in who we are. It can be hard to sit down and write a list of what traits we like about ourselves, and a good place to start is by listing the positive aspects of the spirit animal that match our own great qualities. If the animal has a characteristic we covet, they have come to help us manifest that expression in the world. A elk that proudly bugles his voice into the world can help someone with speaking up and claiming their territory.





Any true inquiry into the nature of a spirit animal should include an absorption of simple scientific facts about the colors, structure, eating habits, mating, survival, and environment of the animal. Understanding how the animal makes a living and what their social lives are like can be incredibly enlightening.

Look for what makes this animal unique in the animal kingdom. Take notes on what fun facts really jump out.

Any animal can easily help us with both our fears and our triumphs. It is up to us to determine what the animal has come to help with.

Once we fill up to the brim with information on our spirit animal, it's time to filter through the information and get clear about what the animal has come to help with. Some facts about the animal might resonate while others don't. Our intuition is a powerful ally for us in this process. Try not to think this through too hard. Our rational minds can help sort the information while our intuitive nature deciphers the meaning.

Creating our own spirit animal interpretations is a practice that takes a lifetime to perfect, and it gets easier with each reading we create. I've put together a list of my favorite online resources for biological information on wildlife.



Magpies remind us of the stories we tell ourselves that cause us to be stuck in life. They help us rewrite these stories to become more of who we truly are.

[Read about Magpie Spirit Animal](#)



GENERAL ANIMAL GUIDES

In addition to these general guides, I also recommend an internet or library search for information on the particular animal. There are many books and websites dedicated to a single animal (such as polar bears or humpback whales) that have much more in depth information.

- **San Diego Zoo Fact Sheets** have extensive information on a wide range of animals. Here you will find details not available anywhere else online and all of it is research based: <http://ielc.libguides.com/sdzg/factsheets/index/home>
- **A to Z Index of Animals** has wildlife and domestic animals: <http://a-z-animals.com/animals/>
- **eNature.com** has a series of guides down to the species level: <http://www.enature.com/fieldguides/>
- **National Geographic** has mammals as well as other groups: <http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/facts/>



Red-tailed hawks relate to our sense of community and where we belong in the tribe.

[All About Red-tailed Hawk Spirit Animal](#)



CONTINENTAL ANIMAL GUIDES

- African Wildlife Foundation : <http://www.awf.org/wildlife-conservation/all>
- Mammals of North America from the Smithsonian Natural History Museum:
http://www.mnh.si.edu/mna/image_menu.cfm

ANIMAL GUIDES BY GROUP

- Bears of the World: <http://www.bearbiology.com/iba/bears-of-the-world.html>
- Canids of the World (wolves, coyotes & foxes) by Region:
<http://www.canids.org/species/region/PREKDL133611>
- Cats of the World: <http://www.catsg.org/index.php?id=4>
- Ungulates (hooved animals) of the World:
<http://www.ultimateungulate.com/ungulates.html>
- Insects, Spiders & Crustaceans Guide: <http://bugguide.net/node/view/3/bgpage>



Alligators are considered the “original mother” due to their ancient origins and their reputation for being the best mothers in the reptile world. [Read about the Meaning of Alligator](#)



BIRDS AT THE SPECIES LEVEL

Consider taking your interpretations of birds to the species level. To simply have an “owl” as a spirit animal will get you some of information about what they offer as guidance, but we are limited on what we can learn given that there are over 100 species of owls around the globe. Going to the species level helps us delve deep and gives us magnitudes more information.

Cornell Lab of Ornithology is the premier source for all things avian. Be sure to listen to calls:
<http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/search>

Seattle Audubon Society has facts about species hard to find elsewhere:
<http://www.birdweb.org/birdweb/>

QUICK FACTS ABOUT ANIMALS

These sites will give you a quick summary so you can get in, get what you need, and get out.

- **One Kind** is an animal protection charity with quick and great unique facts:

http://www.onekind.org/be_inspired/animals_a_z/

- **BBC Wildlife Finder** gives a short summary of the animal of interest:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/wildlife>

ENDANGERED/THREATENED ANIMALS

These sites are dedicated to raising awareness about the animals in danger of extinction.

- **Defenders of Wildlife**

<http://www.defenders.org/animal-factsheets>

- **World Wildlife Fund**

http://wwf.panda.org/about_our_earth/species/

- **ARKive**

<http://www.arkive.org/species/>



*About the author: Stacey L. L. Couch is a Certified Shamanic Practitioner, spirit animal publicist, and author of the book **[Gracious Wild: A Shamanic Journey with Hawks](#)**. She empowers people with the ability to form a real connection with their own souls through the natural world. Stacey's spirit animal interpretations can be found at wildgratitude.com*

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GET THE BOOK

Into the Wild!

Join Stacey Couch on a journey out of the mundane world and into a vast and rich shamanic realm where creativity and inspiration reign. Explore what happens when one woman allows the messengers of nature to guide her and learn how to unlock that freedom in yourself.

Couch

"This exquisitely written book warmly touches hearts and gives flight to the soul while offering opportunities for healing."

—COLLEEN DEATSMAN, author of *The Hollow Bone* and *Seeing in the Dark*

Through her relationship with hawks, Stacey attempts to answer life's biggest questions and find a new way of looking at the world—one which includes appreciating the beauty that exists around her and helps her make sense of her purpose.

"*Gracious Wild* illuminates how our animal allies are ever present and persistent teachers, constantly whispering encouragement for us to unfold into the magnificent beings that we humans have the potential to be."

—*E.P.I.C. magazine*—Empowering People, Inspiring Community

"Stacey's heart-warming, at times heart-wrenching, narrative scintillates with possibilities the modern human mind normally embraces only in dreams."

—LINDA KOHANOV, author of *The Tao of Equus*, *Riding between the Worlds*, *Way of the Horse*, and *Power of the Herd*

"In the madness of this modern world that we live in, I found *Gracious Wild* to be a gentle oasis of joyous and uplifting sanity."

—JON TURK, author of *The Raven's Gift: A Scientist, a Shaman, and Their Remarkable Journey Through the Siberian Wilderness*



GRACIOUS WILD

A Shamanic Journey with Hawks

Stacey L. L. Couch

"A highly recommended, beautifully written story."
—Kay Kamala, *Journal of Contemporary Shamanism*

Gracious Wild

A Shamanic Journey with Hawks

"Gracious Wild is a remarkable and heart opening story. Stacey Couch shows us how our relationship with nature and the wild creates a bridge between the seen and unseen worlds. This is such a beautifully written book that takes us into the deep mysteries inspiring us to create a deeper and more profound connection with the natural world."

—Sandra Ingerman, MA,
author of ***Soul Retrieval*** and ***Medicine for the Earth***

[Click here to order Gracious Wild](#)