

A Sand County Almanac – A Companion Text

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Book Objective:

To compose a companion text to complement Aldo Leopold's A Sand County Almanac. The text will be a compilation of research in order to describe in detail the species mentioned in the monthly almanac section of Leopold's famous work.

Notable Features:

One or two page entries describing each species mentioned in A Sand County Almanac. I intend for the entries to be arranged in mini-chapters that correspond to each month in Leopold's work. Within these chapters, the entries will be arranged in the order in which they appear in Leopold's book. By organizing the entries this way, I hope to achieve a guide to the species that can be read simultaneously with A Sand County Almanac. Furthermore, each entry will be organized in this way:

Scientific name, common name

Picture (one of each sex is dimorphism exists)

General Stats. (food preferences, range, body size, etc.)

Anecdotal Stats. (a short paragraph or two describing breeding habits, migration patterns, voice, and other distinguishing characteristics.

Potential readership:

It is my goal to compose a text that will be equally useful to scientists and laypeople. I intend for the information included in each entry to be both biologically accurate and anecdotal, because I believe that to leave out "quirks" would take the spirit of Leopold out of the companion text. I believe that once completed, college students, professors, and environmentalists alike will find the text very easy to follow and complimentary to Leopold's work.

Sample Table of Contents:

Preface

Introduction

Species Entries: in chapters, January through December, and by order of appearance

Species Index

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* Samples of species' entries from the first part of the January chapter follow below *

Striped Skunk

(*Mephitis mephitis*)

Sand County Almanac, Pg.3



Skunks are members of the weasel family (Mustelidae). Striped skunks measure 20-30 inches long (including the wide, bushy tail) and weigh 6 to 10 pounds (about the size of a house cat). Striped skunks have two wide, white stripes on their backs that meet on the head.

Skunks have small heads and eyes, pointed snouts, and short legs that make them seem to waddle. They are excellent diggers because they have strong forefeet and long nails. They tend to be slow animals, and poor climbers. A litter of one to seven young, averaging five, is born from late April to early June.

In the wild, skunks tend to den in shallow burrows or hollow logs. They prefer individual territories spanning 30 to 40 acres. They hardly ever live further than two miles from a water source. They like warm, dry, dark and defensible areas.

Skunks are nocturnal, and often begin foraging at sunset. They are omnivorous mammals and help to keep the rodent population in check. They also travel five to ten miles within their territory at night looking for field mice and other rodents, as well as lizards, frogs, birds, eggs, garbage and fallen fruit. Skunks also dig for insects, especially beetles, larvae, and earthworms. Being carrion eater, they keep roadways clean. An estimated 70 percent of a skunk's diet consists of insects considered harmful to humans.

The chemical skunks spray at their enemies is a sulfur compound called N-bulymercaptan. It is injected in a fanlike pattern from two small openings near the animal's rectum. The glands that produce the chemical hold enough for five or six full-powered sprays, but skunks seldom spray without warning or cause. Although they have sharp teeth, they rarely use them in defense, because their spray is most accurate and effective at a range up to fifteen feet.

Tracks: The Tracks of a striped skunk will have footprints approximately 2 inches long. When running, the separation between clusters of prints is usually 5 to 6 inches.



Striped Skunk
(*Mephitis mephitis*)

Black Capped Chickadee

(*Parus atricapillus*)

Sand County Almanac pg.4



" We learned to be patient observers like the owl. We learned cleverness from the crow, and courage from the jay, who will attack an owl ten times its size to drive it off its territory. But above all of them ranked the chickadee because of its indomitable spirit."

Tom Brown, Jr. - The Tracker

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Passiformes

Family: Paridae

Geographic Range:

Nearctic: The Black-capped Chickadee is confined to North America, ranging through most of Canada, and the upper two-thirds of the United States.

Physical Characteristics:

The Black-capped Chickadee is easily recognized by its short plump body, solid black cap and bib, and white cheeks. Its back and wings are dark greenish-gray, with some streaks of white and black.

Food Habits:

Parus artcapillus feeds on both animals and plants (the overall consumption has been measured to be about 70% animal and 30% plant). Animal foods are mainly insects and spiders. Caterpillars are preferred in the breeding season. Chickadees have been observed eating shrunk fat and fish. Plant materials eaten by the chickadee include honeysuckle and blackberries, seeds from hemlocks, and wax-covered berries such as those of poison ivy and bayberry.

Reproduction:

Pair formation begins in the fall, with eggs laid sometime between April and early July (depending on the geographic location). The female builds the nest and incubates the eggs alone. The male brings food to the female.

Behavior:

The Black-capped Chickadee hops up and down trees as opposed to walking on them. Pairs have set territories, ranging from 1.5 to 5.3 ha. Most pairs persist together for several years. The chickadee has two extremes in the social system, one shown by territorial pairs during breeding season, and the other by nonbreeding flocks. They are often seen on the edges of wooded areas.