


10-1931

Popular Fallacies

Roy L. Abbott
Iowa State Teachers College

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.uni.edu/science_bulletin

 Part of the [Health and Physical Education Commons](#), and the [Science and Mathematics Education Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you

Copyright ©1931 by Iowa State Teachers College

Recommended Citation

Abbott, Roy L. (1931) "Popular Fallacies," *Science Bulletin*: Vol. 4: No. 2, Article 9.
Available at: https://scholarworks.uni.edu/science_bulletin/vol4/iss2/9

This Contents is brought to you for free and open access by UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Science Bulletin by an authorized editor of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uni.edu.

Offensive Materials Statement: Materials located in UNI ScholarWorks come from a broad range of sources and time periods. Some of these materials may contain offensive stereotypes, ideas, visuals, or language.

POPULAR FALLACIES

Slimy as a serpent: It would be difficult to conceive of a more inaccurate expression. Reptiles are practically devoid of glands in the skin, and the body of a snake instead of being slimy is smooth and polished like glass. Slimy as a fish or a frog, if you will, but not "as a serpent."

Wise as an owl: I have observed a great many owls and have never seen anything in their behavior to cause me to believe them wiser than other birds. Their eyes are placed in front of the face, and both focus simultaneously upon the same field of view; that is, owls have binocular vision. This peculiarity gives them something of human aspect. Like most humans, however, they are not wise but merely appear so.

Blind as a bat: This is said of them probably, because we usually see them at their worst; that is, in the daytime. They see amazingly well in dim light, and anyone watching them catch mosquitos at twilight cannot choose but envy.

Crazy as a loon: A terrible slander on an astute feathered citizen. Try to shoot him and watch him dive before the shot can reach him. His wild, laughing call does sound maniacal perhaps to us, but not to other loons. Besides he is not talking to us.

Quick as a cat: This expression over-rates the cat. A graceful, smoothly moving animal it is true, but no quicker than a fox squirrel, and slow as compared to a weasel. Watch a monkey moving through a treetop and draw your own conclusions.

Ferocious as a gorilla: A slur upon the real reputation of man's closest living relative. According to Carl Akely—and he knew gorillas first-hand—they are mild, inoffensive creatures vastly less harmful

and dangerous than the men who hunt them.

Dirty as a pig: Anyone viewing a pig confined in a filthy, narrow pen might well believe the animal to be dirty, but a pig is not dirty in actual fact. Under these conditions, the animal is filthy simply because he cannot help himself. Give him a chance to be clean and he will be as clean as a horse or a cow.

Strong as a lion: A powerful beast, truly, but some recent tests conducted in a "zoo" showed the tiger to be much stronger than the lion when compared pound for pound of body weight. Roosevelt says that a lion can run a hundred yards from a standing start in about four seconds. If this is true, the lion is about the fastest creature for his weight I know of, and the above expression might appropriately be changed to: "Swift as a lion."

Swift as an eagle: David attempted the acme of praise by saying that Saul and Jonathan were "swifter than eagles." He must not have known of the various falcons, or any of our native teal ducks. An eagle following one of the above-named "fliers" would be much like a fast express chasing an aeroplane.

Shine like a cat's eyes in the dark: Pick up your favorite "Tabby," if you will and carry her into some very dark place—say a clothes closet—and then observe whether or not her eyes shine in the dark. The eyes of many mammals (the cat is a common example) possess a peculiar, light-reflecting layer, the tapetum. This reflects so much light as to make their eyes visible in the dark when light is thrown upon them from some outside source—an automobile headlight for example. They shine under these conditions, but not otherwise, many novelists to the contrary notwithstanding.

The above are only a few of the many popular fallacies concerning animals. Not all popular expressions about animals are bad, however. "Sleek as a mole," "sly as a fox," "swift as a falcon," "savage as a weasel," "slimy as an eel,"—these, and many more like them, are all accurate and useful expressions.

Roy L. Abbott