

Animal Myth Busters

By: Stephen Lovgren

Myth

Touching a frog or toad will give you warts.

How It Started

Many frogs and toads have bumps on their skin that look like warts. Some people think the bumps are contagious.

Why It's Not True

"Warts are caused by a human virus, not frogs or toads," says dermatologist Jerry Litt. But the wartlike bumps behind a toad's ears can be dangerous. These parotoid glands contain a nasty poison that irritates the mouths of some predators and often the skin of humans. So toads may not cause warts, but they can cause other nasties. It's best not to handle these critters - warts and all!



Myth

Ostriches bury their heads in the sand when they're scared or threatened.

How It Started

It's an optical illusion! Ostriches are the largest living birds, but their heads are pretty small. "If you see them picking at the ground from a distance, it may look like their heads are buried in the ground," says Glinda Cunningham of the American Ostrich Association.

Why It's Not True

Ostriches don't bury their heads in the sand - they wouldn't be able to breathe! But they do dig holes in the dirt to use as nests for their eggs. Several times a day, a bird puts her head in the hole and turns the eggs. So it really does look like the birds are burying their heads in the sand!

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Read the story. Use the information in the story to answer the questions below.

1. What is a myth?

- A. A true story
- B. A legend or story that people think is true
- C. An animal that is almost extinct
- D. A secret that only a few people know

2. The wartlike bumps behind a toad's ears are parotoid glands that contain _____.

- A. Warts
- B. A bad smell
- C. Poison
- D. Pimples

3. Why is the ostrich such a unique animal?

- A. It is the largest living bird
- B. It flies south for the winter
- C. They taste like chicken
- D. They give live birth

4. How did the ostrich myth start?

- A. They are small birds with large heads
- B. They are large birds with small heads
- C. They are magicians
- D. The ostrich needs to breathe underground

5. Why do ostriches dig holes in the ground?

- A. To find buried treasure
- B. To bury their bone
- C. To find food
- D. To use as nests for their eggs

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ANSWER KEY

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