

WHERE **SCIENCE****HISTORY****AND****ART** CONNECT

To: Raven Hill friends
From: Cheri
Date: January 4, 2025
Re: *Hear their voices*

Epiphany falls on January 6 every year. It is an ancient celebration with many traditions, legends, and other strange events. For many, it ends the Christmas season. Epiphany is also known as the Twelfth Day of Christmas or “Three Kings Day.” As legend would have it, on Epiphany the world falls still and the animals speak. The belief that animals can talk on special occasions, particularly during Epiphany or Christmas, originates from folklore and traditions found in various cultures throughout history.

Across cultures and around the world, common themes occur when animals speak. First talking animals often appear during transitional

periods, like Epiphany, emphasizing the mystical nature of these times. Second, animals speaking is usually tied to sacred events, highlighting their role in divine or supernatural contexts. Finally, these beliefs often carry a moral warning that humanity should listen to and respect the natural world. These traditions, whether lingering or reinterpreted, highlight the shared human desire to bridge the gap between the natural and spiritual realms. As dawn breaks on Epiphany morning, the animals fall silent again, leaving us to wonder about the truths they have shared. Have humans really listened to the animals in their infinite wisdom? Have we learned any universal lessons for our own lives?

Here at Raven Hill, a wintery hush of snow blankets the ground and instead of the traditional domesticated animals common to most nativities, the scene at the Center is alive with myriad animals: living,

preserved and artistically interpreted. In this magical moment on the Twelfth Day of Christmas, some inanimate animals find their voices even here. Raku owls and fish whistle. Clay turtles rattle when shaken. Fancy beaded lizards sit soundlessly on their owner’s shoulder, rendered magnificently as porcelain beaded jewelry. Ornate frogs cling quietly to the walls. Glass hedgehogs stand silent & shy.



Goldfish whistle

While fish might seem silent to us, they are indeed part of nature’s symphony! Fish sounds are often low-frequency and travel easily through water. Scientists use underwater microphones (hydrophones) to study these noises, revealing a hidden underwater world of communication.
--artist Sally Brayton



Owl whistle

During the Epiphany, the owl, perched in the rafters, speaks first, its voice wise and ancient, “The star was our guide also, lighting a path not only for kings but for all creatures great and small.” In reality, owls hoot, screech, whistle, bark, chirp, twitter and growl in communication.
--artist Sally Brayton

Raven Hill animals are always a popular and memorable part of the visitor experience. Are we anthropomorphizing (humanizing) those animals when we hear them vocalizing with each other? Or are they actually talking to us, perhaps saying, "Feed me. Feed me." It is fun, maybe even an epiphany of sorts, to imagine that we know what our animal friends at the Center might be saying!

"True epiphanies occur not when we seek answers, but when we open ourselves to the wonder of discovery." – Unknown. The animals at Raven Hill invite you to explore, discover and reflect. Listen closely and encounter your own epiphanies.

See you here soon and often! Cheri

Porcelain lizard pin



Most lizards are quieter than frogs, but certain species can vocalize with each other. They hiss, click, bark, growl and squeak—a fascinating live chorus in their natural habitats.
--artist unknown

Flameworked glass hedgehog



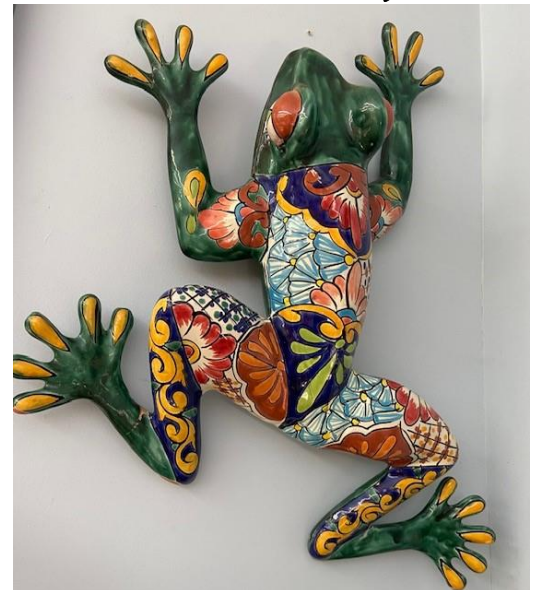
Hedgehogs are quite vocal, at least those not made of glass! They snuffle & snort, puff & hiss, grunt, chirp & squeak, growl, purr & click to communicate, adding a mysterious cacophony of sounds to their charming nature.
--artist unknown

Turtle rattle



While turtles are not as vocal as many other animals, their sounds serve important purposes, such as communication, defense and stress. Turtles will hiss, grunt, chirp, click, squeak and sometimes even roar.
--artist unknown

Earthenware frog



In the wild, frogs can vary their vocalizations from being completely silent to producing low, guttural sounds for territorial or defensive purposes. During mating season, they become very vocal, emitting a variety of calls such as croaks, ribbits, trills, and peeps. The poison dart frogs that lived at the Center in past years would make a barking sound!
--Mexican Talavera pottery