

The buzzard, the bat, and the bumblebee

Pastor John Hicks

First United Methodist Church

We all have skepticism in us. Think about these phrases: “Open wide now, this isn't going to hurt a bit.” “It is easy to assemble. Just follow the directions.” “Hi. I'm from the IRS and I'm here to help you.” “Please, daddy, I'll walk him. I'll feed him. I'll do everything.”

So, when my niece sent me an article about buzzards, bats, and bumblebees, I liked the analogy, but wondered whether the facts stated were actually true. In true “Mythbuster” fashion, I decided to test them out.

Claim 1: If you put a buzzard in a pen that is 6 feet by 8 feet and is entirely open at the top, the bird, in spite of its ability to fly, will be an absolute prisoner. The reason is that a buzzard always begins a flight from the ground with a run of 10 to 12 feet. Without space to run, as is its habit, it will not even attempt to fly, but will remain a prisoner for life in a small jail with no top.

The conclusion: assumed true. I couldn't find any set facts, but from my experience of buzzard watching, I have noticed that they always seem to hop at least two or three times before flight.

Claim 2: The ordinary bat that flies around at night, a remarkable nimble creature in the air, cannot take off from a level place. If it is placed on the floor or flat ground, all it can do is shuffle about helplessly until it reaches some slight elevation from which it can throw itself into the air. Then, at once, it takes off like a flash.

Conclusion: assumed true. Bats are the only mammals capable of true flight, that is, flight powered by muscular movement as distinct from gliding. The wing is a double membrane of skin stretched between the enormously elongated bones of four fingers and extending along the body from the forelimbs to the hind limbs and from there to the tail. The hind limbs are small and may be rotated in such a way that the knees bend backward rather than forward, as in other mammals;

this is presumably an adaptation for takeoff and flight. Bats at rest hang head down, grasping a twig or crevice with their clawed feet; they take off into flight from this position.

Claim 3: A bumblebee, if dropped into an open tumbler, will be there until it dies, unless it is taken out. It never sees the means of escape at the top, but persists in trying to find some way out through the sides near the bottom. It will seek a way where none exists, until it completely destroys itself.

Conclusion: assumed true. I learned some time ago that bees don't fly at night. They do, however, fly in the daytime - and they sting! I happened to find a bumble bee buzzing around, and trapped it in a gallon jar. With the jar upright, it just buzzed around. I turned the jar on its' side, and the angered bumblebee exited stage right (to my stage left!)

Having settled all of these claims, I have come to a fourth conclusion: In many ways, we are like the buzzard, the bat, and the bumblebee. We struggle about with all our problems and frustrations, never realizing that all we have to do is look up! We find ourselves penned in, shuffling around with no secure footing, or trying unsuccessfully to escape what's restricting us without recognizing that the way up is the way out.

Sorrow looks back, worry looks around, but faith looks up!