

Common Dream Symbols: Animals and Reptiles

This is a four part series that explores the common symbols that appear in dreams, which includes animals, other people, houses and transportation symbols. Animals appear commonly in dreams because we have an animal nature dwelling deep within us. Like the id, which Freud described as the uncivilized self and purveyor of dreams, it is that part of us that remains instinctual and free of society's demand for conformity.

Dreams of animals allow us to explore unprocessed emotion and feelings, teaching us to move beyond habitual behavior. Dreams are like a charade game where we must draw clues from a character's behavior to learn something about ourselves. When the character is an animal or reptile, it is a sign that our more natural self requires expression.

The brain can be observed in 3 layers that evolved as we evolved. The reptilian portion is the oldest and orchestrates sexual impulses, the fight or flight response, and is associated with autonomous functioning like heartbeat and breathing. Dreams of snakes, because of their association with shedding their outer covering each year, can symbolize a need to let go of defense mechanisms. We may dream of snakes as a representation of how our sexual sensations feel beyond our control and can cause us the emotional pain associated with the pursuit of love.

Most dreams of reptiles are portraying how we are unearthing the deeper layers of the psyche in an attempt to achieve a type of metamorphosis. The dragon can embody how the hero must confront one's greatest fear. By challenging the hero to a game of metamorphosis – one must acknowledge and adopt this powerful life that stirs beneath the surface, symbolized by the dragon. Only by doing so, can the hero claim their rightful destiny.

The next area is the mammalian brain. At one time mammals thrived in a nocturnal existence, and smell rather than sight was the dominant sense. These aroma circuits or odor pathways are believed to have become the outline of the limbic system or the emotional area within the mammalian brain. This is the area that generates the parental care of mammals: playfulness, vocal calling and emotion. Emotion and mood originally evolved from neural structures allocated only to the sense of smell. These senses either

attracted or repelled. Over time, these two simple responses have become the complicated emotions we experience today. In this way, animals in dreams have associations with our emotions or attitudes adopted from our parents subliminally.

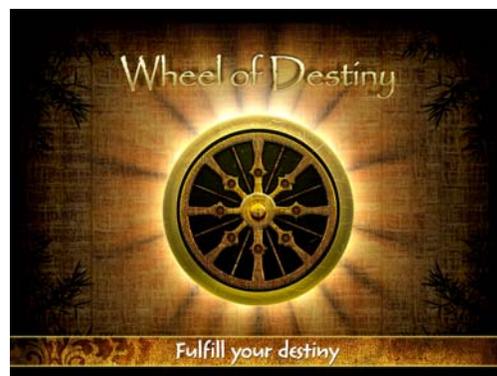
Since we dream of what we are not facing in daily life, an aggressive animal can portray non integrated aggression and how feelings and responses can appear to “come out of the woods.” Our own behavior that day may have surprised us when we don’t own and understand this behavior.

Just as a tiger or lion can sometimes break the skin to draw blood, these animals appear as a way of bringing our natural feelings to skin awareness. They give our emotional life expression and each animal is different. A bear is associated with maternal protectiveness or with a symbol like the teddy bear. Bears can symbolize fear or insecurity associated with behavior that is stunting our ability to know fulfillment by opening to intimacy. We may dream of the bear when we are called to behave emotionally different from what we were taught was acceptable. The enormous size of an elephant can represent the untapped power of our emotional life stirring below the surface. Unexpressed, these feelings can trample over us or remain buried in a way that we find emotional satisfaction through food. It is said that elephants never forget – and dreaming of an elephant is often a sign that past hurts require a healing.

Dogs can signify how we explore unconditional love or our natural feelings of exuberance. We often dream of dogs when we are exploring a commitment. A wild dog can symbolize the idea that love can exist without the need for restrictions. A cat can represent innate qualities considered feminine, like intuition. It can also portray the idea of domestication where we can move toward intimacy without feeling trapped. Animals in dreams are often a representation of our more wild nature. This part of us seeks expression as we are pulled away from authenticity or are cut off from our feelings.



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