

Wild Relatives: Amazing Animals in Your Family Crest

Have you ever looked closely at your family crest or coat of arms? These symbols represent your family history. And they often have wild animals hidden in them!

Long ago in medieval Europe, only royal families had last names. Regular people were just known by their first names. But when towns grew bigger, people needed unique names to tell each other apart.

That's when last names began, often based on jobs or traits. The Johnsons were the sons of John. The Millers worked at the grain mills. Names like Armstrong described physical attributes. Some surnames came from the farms where families lived.

Last names helped identify families. But wealthy nobles wanted fancier symbols. So they designed elaborate coats of arms featuring creatures that symbolized their families. These coats of arms were like an early logo or mascot.

The animals represented the family's virtues, values and reputation. Lions stood for courage, leadership and royalty. Bears meant strength and power. Foxes symbolized wit and cunning. Falcons represented nobility and grace, while eagles signified honor and authority.

Warriors painted these family crests on shields to identify allies in battle. Displaying your coat of arms showed you were friend, not foe. Families also used crests on seals, flags, tapestries and banners. Soon having a noble family crest became a status symbol and a matter of pride.

Over time, more people adopted family crests, even farmers and tradespeople. Although crests began with European nobility, today people worldwide use them to celebrate their roots.

So how can you research the wild beasts in your family crest and what they might represent? First, look closely at any creatures it shows. Dig into their historical meanings to find clues about the virtues and attributes your ancestors wanted to convey. A crest with a fox means cleverness and wit were prized. One with a lion represents leadership, courage and usually some royal connection.

Digging deeper into your family history might uncover more details about your crest. Say your last name is Carter and your crest has oxen on it. That animal likely ties back to the occupation of cart-driving. Your ancestors may have trained oxen to pull carts and haul heavy loads. The name Carter and oxen crest keep that legacy alive.

You can also look up your specific last name online to explore common family crests associated with it. Many websites explain historical coat of arms designs and their meanings. Search for descriptions that fit your family's story, values and facts you know. This helps determine the right version of a surname's crest if variations exist.

Finally, get creative making your own family crest if you want! Use animals that represent qualities you admire in your relatives. Or include beasts tied to ancestral homes, notable stories, accomplishments or origins. Make the crest meaningful and special to you.

So next time you see a family coat of arms, appreciate its hidden power. The wild creatures link you to the past and tell a story. With each new generation, the legacy lives on. Let the symbol guide you as you write your own chapter in history!

Glossary

- crest - a symbol or design representing a family, like a coat of arms
- medieval - relating to the middle ages, from around 500 to 1500 ad
- virtues - good moral qualities and values
- clan - a large family group that shares a common ancestor

Questions

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What did family crests allow warriors to do in battle?
 - a) Avoid enemies b) Impress their leader c) Identify allies
 - d) Scare opponents
2. Based on the article, what does a fox in a family crest represent?
 - a) Strength b) Cunning c) Leadership d) Honor
3. How does the passage show that coats of arms were special long ago?
 - a) Only farmers had them. b) They represented family virtues.
 - c) Crests were painted on houses. d) They were symbols of status.
4. According to the article, how can you connect a crest to your family history?
 - a) Guess based on your location b) Research the name meaning
 - c) Copy a common design d) Choose your favorite creature
5. The article states that over time, family crests _____.
 - a) Lost all their original meaning b) Became popular worldwide
 - c) Were only for royal families d) Disappeared completely
6. What is the main idea of the article?
 - a) Lions and eagles represent nobility.
 - b) Family crests identify relatives in battle.
 - c) Coats of arms link to family histories and values.
 - d) Crest designs should be very creative.

Answer Key

1. c
2. b
3. d
4. b
5. b
6. c