

K.B.'s Favorite WEIRD & WACKY CREATURES



I'm her
favorite!



BY
K.B. CARR

K.B.'S FAVORITE
WEIRD & WACKY
CREATURES



That's Me!

K.B. CARR

The Weird & Wacky Planet Series



DSG  **KIDS**

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(Yes, that Kelsey)

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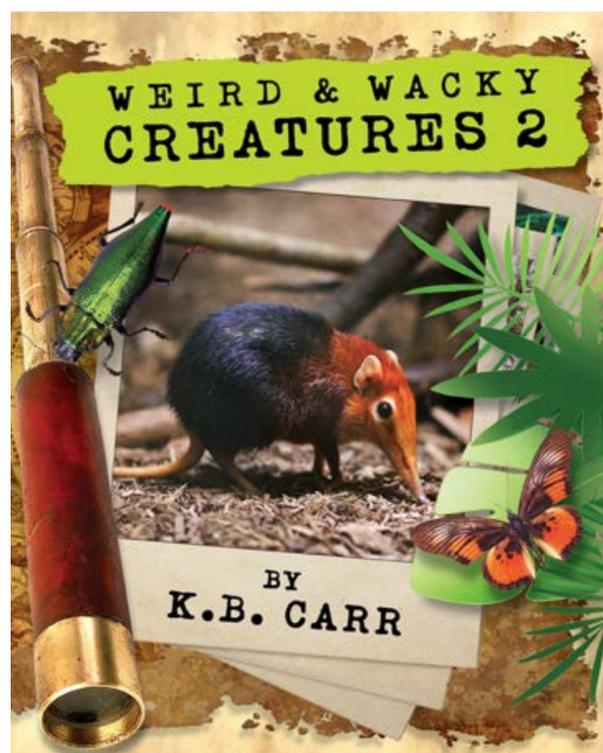
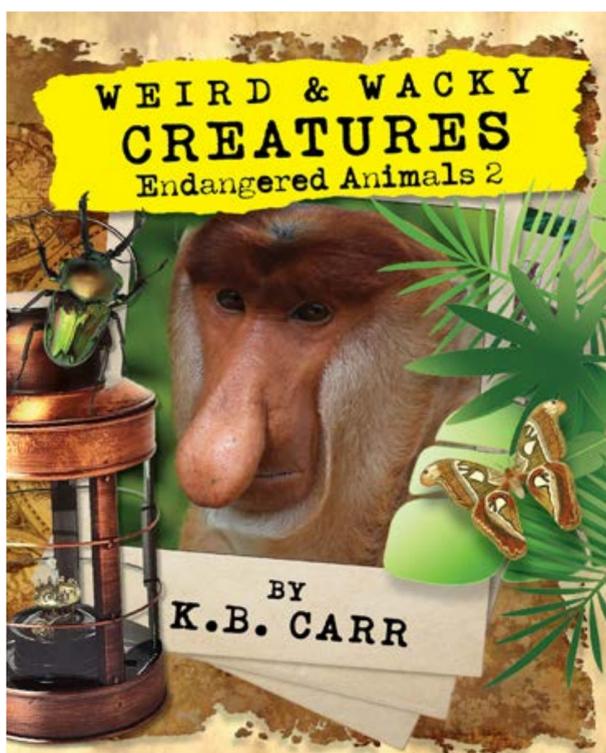
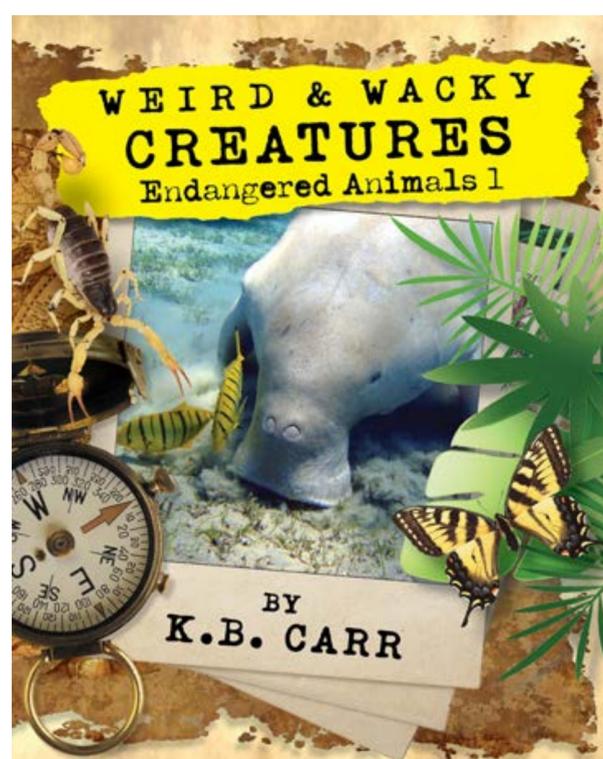
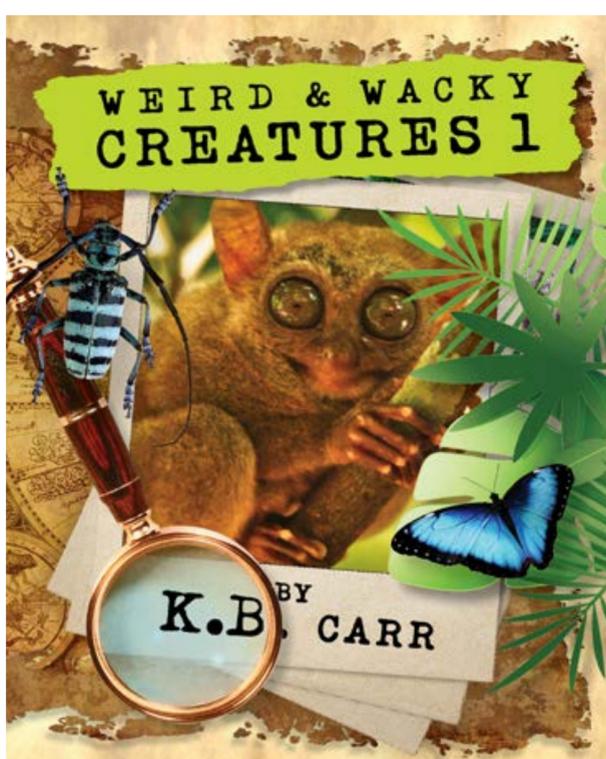
See cute pictures of Captain Jack-

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Learn more about K.B.-

& Contact K.B. and Captain Jack.

OTHER BOOKS BY K.B. CARR



THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO:

All of those who helped, and are still helping, in the aftermath of the Australian fires. We don't yet know the impact these fires will have. Are some species now on the endangered list that weren't there before? Are some species extinct? But, we do know that, if not for the dedication of so many volunteers, both individuals, businesses and conservation organizations, those numbers would be way worse. Thank you so much for all you've done, are doing, and will do. We are grateful.

And, of course, for Ryan and Kelsey.
You are always my favorite weird & wacky creatures.
Nothing will ever change that.
I don't think...





Like the books?
Then, you'll love
the podcast!

Listen to the Nature Just Got Real! podcast for kids wherever you get your podcast episodes.

This podcast is also available as a video podcast on YouTube.

Meet K.B., Captain Jack, Tito the Treefrog, Chuck Darwin the Chimpanzee, and various fascinating guests as we get the REAL skinny on what's REALLY going on in the Natural World!



INTRODUCTION

Yay, welcome to my favorite Weird & Wacky Creatures!

In this book, I list some of my favorite animals in each of the first four Weird & Wacky Planet books. There are two chapters from each book. You can see what book they are from at the top of each chapter, and a little about why they are my favorites!

In each book I've written, you'll find either my cartoon self, or Chuck Darwin the Chimpanzee, or Tito the Treefrog. Look for one of us in each chapter. Can you find us?

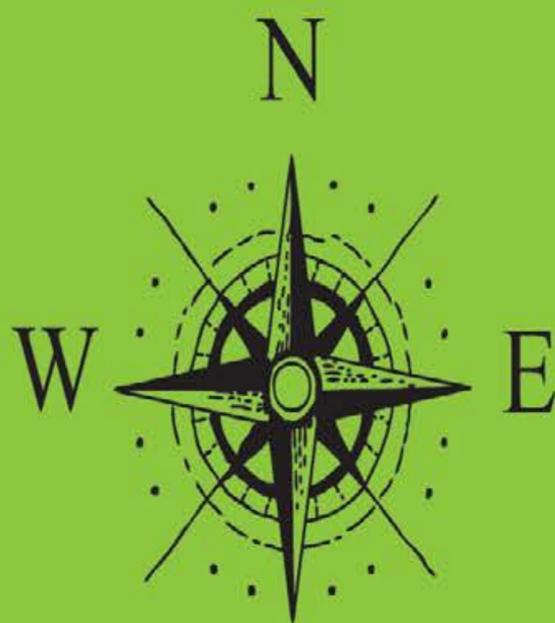
Chuck and Tito are also on the Nature Just Got Real podcast for kids, so check that out wherever you get your podcasts. If you'd rather watch us as a vodcast, you can find us on the Weird & Wackey Planet channel on YouTube. Don't forget to subscribe wherever you watch/listen to us. We have such fun doing the podcast, talking to experts and doing the projects, too!

You are going to find that some of the words in these sample chapters are underlined. In the regular books, the definitions to these words are in the Glossery of Terms in the back of the books, as well as the photo credits and the place where I got all the facts on each animal.

If you want to find even more animals and fun projects, check out each book by itself. Each book will have 6 more animals in it, as well as the ones here for a total of 8 awesome animals in every book. It's a lot of work, I'll tell ya...

And, it was sooo hard to pick my favorites! I hope you enjoy these selected chapters, and you get to read all about the other Weird & Wacky Creatures I couldn't fit into this book.

Truthfully, they are all my favorites. I think they'll be yours, too!



S

Put on your
Adventurer's hat,



get out your
Field Journal,

& get ready to dive into the
world of

Weird & Wacky Creatures

Your **adventure** starts

RIGHT NOW!



Cool.
/ I'm ready.

"I'm sure my dog would loooove to have a Capybara live with us. He's walking ON A LEASH! And, his feet are sooo cute. I would name him Carl."



Capybara

[kap-uh-bahr-uh]

BIGGEST. RAT. EVER.



A Capybara is out for a walk around the block. Nice neckerchief, dude.



Chillaxin' in the sun



SCIENTIFIC NAME:

Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris

OTHER NAMES:

Meaning of name is “one who eats slender leaves” or “Grass Eater”

SPECIES CLASSIFICATION:

Mammal

IUCN STATUS:

LC – Least Concern

BIOME:

Region: Central & Northern South America

Habitat: Densely forested areas near water

Range: About 50 acres for a group

DIET CLASSIFICATION:

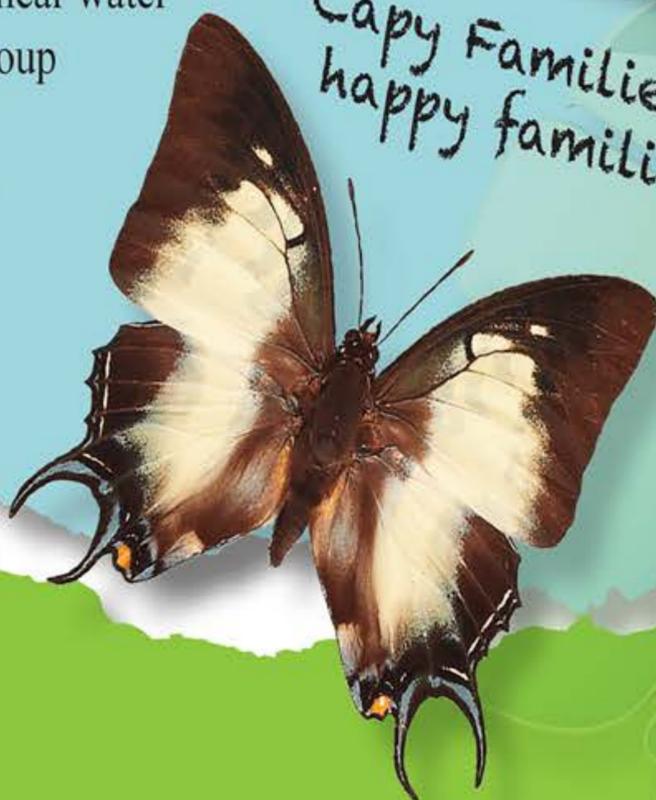
Herbivore

FOOD SOURCE:

Grass and aquatic plants



"Capy Families are happy families!"

**ANIMAL FACTS:**

* The Capybara has a heavy, barrel-shaped body with reddish brown fur. It's about one and a half feet tall and about three to four feet in length.

* It has three large toes on its rear feet and four large toes on its front feet. And, even with those large-toed feet, it can run as fast as a horse!

* Big cats like Jaguars, Pumas, and Ocelots are the main predators of the Capybara, but also Eagles and Anacondas, too.

* No wonder it runs like a horse. So would I, wouldn't you?

* Capybaras live about eight to ten years, and have an average litter size of four babies.



WHAT MAKES THEM WEIRD & WACKY?

The Capybara's claim to fame is that it's the largest rodent in the world. It has been described as being "basically, a huge Guinea Pig." And, well...that's pretty much what it looks like.

BUT...unlike a Guinea Pig, it's also semi-aquatic, which means it's comfortable on land OR in the water.

It has webbed feet, and can keep most of its body submerged, like a Hippopotamus. It can squeeze its ears against its head to keep water out and can completely submerge itself for up to five minutes to hide from predators, which is a pretty cool trick.

But, can you imagine running as fast as a horse on webbed feet? Wow.

The Capybara's front teeth never stop growing. Like, ever. They have to wear them down by chomping on bark and wood, or they would trip over them eventually.

Some people keep them as pets, like the lady in the picture, even though they are wild animals.

And, here's a real Weird & Wacky thing:

MAMMAL OR FISH??

Apparently, people in Venezuela love eating Capybaras! They are considered to be such a delicacy, that they don't want to stop eating them during Lent, a Catholic religious season where you are not supposed to eat meat, unless it's a Fish. (Which is still meat, in my book, and my Goldfish, Einstein, agrees.) So, whoever was the Pope (the leader of the Catholic Religion) sometime in the 1500s, declared that the Capybara is a Fish, instead of a Mammal!

Um...no. If it gives birth to live offspring, is fur-bearing, and feeds its young with its own milk, IT IS A MAMMAL, Sir.

A MAMMAL, as plain as the stylin' hat on your head.



An Open Letter to the Pope:

Dear Pope,
Please don't change a Mammal into a Fish. Science doesn't work like that. Besides, isn't Lent about giving something up?
I respectfully suggest that people give up eating Capybaras.

Sincerely,
Cap Y. Bara

P.S. I really like your hat.
P.S.S. I have a hat, too.



FIELD ACTIVITY

Related to a Hippo Pig who's a Social Butterfly

The super fun thing about Capybaras are that some species like to use them as chairs. Birds, monkeys, rabbits, turtles, even other Capybaras have been photographed lounging on top of them.

There's even a few websites and a Blog devoted to these pictures called, "Animals Sitting on Capybaras."

I'm not kidding. Apparently, Capybaras are so friendly and social, that not only do they get along great with humans, but all kinds of other species as well! We could certainly learn some lessons from the Capybara, couldn't we?

Below are some of the pictures I found. They're hysterical! I also made one of my own with my dog Jack. It's a fake. Jack has never met a Capybara. Can you draw an animal (or your brother, sister, Mom, Dad, teacher) sitting on a Capybara?

Now, go out and have a
Party Animal Adventure in YOUR neighborhood!



This is a fake picture I made of Jack sitting on a Capybara who is wearing a cool hat.

She wishes it was real.



"The first time I saw this Deer,
I thought it was a fake.
Cuz, a Deer with fangs?
That's just crazy, right??"



Water Deer

[WAW-TER DEER]

BAMBI WITH FANGS



What a sweet little deer!
With full-on fangs.



Pretty sure this one
is stuffed :(



SCIENTIFIC NAME:

Hydropotes inermis

OTHER NAMES:

Vampire Deer (cuz, yeah)

SPECIES CLASSIFICATION:

Mammal

IUCN STATUS:

VU – Vulnerable

BIOME:

Region: Korea, China

Habitat: Tall reeds and grass areas

Range: Now also found in Britain, because of escapees and deliberate releases by man.

DIET CLASSIFICATION:

Herbivore

FOOD SOURCE:

Coarse grass



"The female Water Deer has no fangs, but she is still sassy!"



ANIMAL FACTS:

- * Water Deer are small, Asian deer with yellowish-brown coats on their head and torso, and yellowish-white bellies. They have no rump patch or antlers, like most deer.
- * They are about two to three feet long, and weight around twenty to thirty pounds. They look like they are about the size of an older fawn.
- * Their main enemy is Man, through poaching, hunting, and habitat destruction.
- * Water Deer live up to thirteen years and can have up to seven young at a time. They are the most prolific of all deer species, which means that they give birth to more babies at one time. Can you imagine seeing a Mother Deer with seven babies following behind her?!



WHAT MAKES THEM WEIRD & WACKY?

Ummm...they have FANGS!

Which is Weird and Wacky enough, all by itself, right?



But...those aren't actual fangs. They look like fangs, but are actually small tusks. They are the only species of deer where the males have no antlers. Instead, they have those long, curved, sharp tusks, which can exceed three inches in length.

They are also super good swimmers, which is why they're called Water Deer, and their hind legs are longer than their front legs, so they run in rabbit-like jumps.

Ok, back to the fangs.

They (the fangy-tusks) are movable in the sockets, and, by using facial muscles, can be moved out of the way to eat.

They can also be thrust out and prominently displayed for aggressive encounters with other males, and are only used for territorial fights, not for hunting.

Still, they are impressive looking. I wouldn't care to run into one in a dark forest, would you? I mean, whose idea was it to call them Water Deer? Shouldn't they be called Fang Faced Deer?

Are you Team Bambi or Team Deeracula?



HOW DID THEY GET TO GREAT BRITAIN?

The Chinese Water Deer were first brought to the London Zoo in 1873. Then, the Duke of Bedford, who was apparently a collector of deer, (odd hobby, right?) introduced them to his Woburn Estate in Bedfordshire. They first arrived in 1896, and he gave some to the nearby Whipsnade Park in 1929, now Whipsnade Zoo. Some escaped into the wild in 1945. No one is sure if they escaped from his estate or from Whipsnade Park, but, either way, they ran into the surrounding forest and began to have those "up to seven" offspring you read about earlier.

But here's the rub: no one is sure if this is a good thing or a bad thing. Usually, a species that is non-native to an area is considered an invasive species and does harm to the new ecosystem. This hasn't been the case so far. And, there is also this: the Chinese Water Deer are listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN list in their native China. About 10% of the population now resides in Great Britain, where they continue to thrive, while their numbers dwindle in China. So, no matter what, it looks like it was a good move for the Water Deer!



FIELD ACTIVITY

Related to Fang Faced Deer
(I changed their name.)

Even though Water Deer have obvious differences, they have a great deal in common with all species of Deer. Here are a few facts you may not have known :)

DEER FACTS TO STUN & AMAZE YOUR FAMILY & FRIENDS:

1. Most male Deer grow new antlers each year. (Water Deer do not.)
2. Animals such as Antelope resemble Deer in a number of ways, but have horns instead of antlers. The difference between them is that horns are not grown and replaced like antlers are.
3. During the mating season, male Deer will often use their antlers to fight for the attention of female Deer.
4. Most Deer are born with white spots to make them less visible to predators, but lose them within a year.
5. Deer can hear far better than humans. They can hear frequencies that humans can't. They can also turn their ears in any direction without turning their head.
6. Deer are excellent swimmers, even in deep water.
7. Deer also have extraordinary smelling ability. They can smell food from a large distance. They use this to communicate with each other, and also to detect the position of other groups of Deer.
8. Deer are more active in summer, and less active in winter. They also eat only one third of the food they usually eat, and stay in the woods to escape from the cold.



Go have a
Know-it-all Adventure
in YOUR neighborhood!

This is a real
Chinese Water Deer
skeleton from the
Royal Veterinarian
College in London.

And, you totally saw
this part, right?



"It's pretty funny to me that ANYONE could mistake a Dugong for a Mermaid! That is hilarious."



Dugong

[doo-gong]

THE LITTLE MERMAID

This Dugong is vacuuming the ocean floor, cuz, housework doesn't do itself!

SCIENTIFIC NAME:

Dugong dugon

OTHER NAMES:

Sea Pig, Sea Cow, Sea Camel (really?), Queen of the Sea; Dugong means "Lady of the Sea"

SPECIES CLASSIFICATION:

Mammal

IUCN STATUS:

EN – Endangered

BIOME:

Region: Indo-West Pacific

Habitat: Bays, mangrove channels, shallow waters of inshore islands

Range: From east coast of Africa, to the islands of western pacific, and coast of Northern Australia

DIET CLASSIFICATION:

Herbivore

FOOD SOURCE:

Sea grass-the whole plant, even the roots!



"Mom and baby dugongs."

**ANIMAL FACTS:**

* Dugongs look a lot like Manatees, with the same fusiform bodies, with no dorsal fin or hind legs, and the same smooth, thick skin. They differ from Manatees, however, in that they are smaller at 8 to 10 feet long, weighing 300 to 900 pounds, and have a fluked, shark-like tail. They also have unique snout, which is sharply down-turned for feeding on Sea-grass. Their front flippers are paddles, and their teeth are simple pegs, unlike the more elaborate teeth of the Manatee.

* Predators of the Dugong are Sharks, Crocodiles, and Humans.

* Dugongs also only give birth a few times in their lives, and have one calf at a time. Calves don't reach full size until they are around 15 years old and they stay with the mother for the first 2 years. A Dugong can live up to 70 years.



WHAT MAKES THEM WEIRD & WACKY?

The Dugong is the only herbivorous mammal that is strictly a marine animal, meaning it does not use fresh water areas. It needs the salt water of the ocean to survive.

It's not related to other marine mammals at all, but more closely related to Elephants!

The Dugong has long been considered to be the inspiration for the legendary Mermaids of old, with sailors spotting them and mistaking them for women with fish tails. I'm going to assume this was before the time of really efficient eyeglasses. Or, they liked bald girls.

All Dugongs grow tusks, but these only just break through the skin and are barely visible. Too bad the sailors couldn't see those...

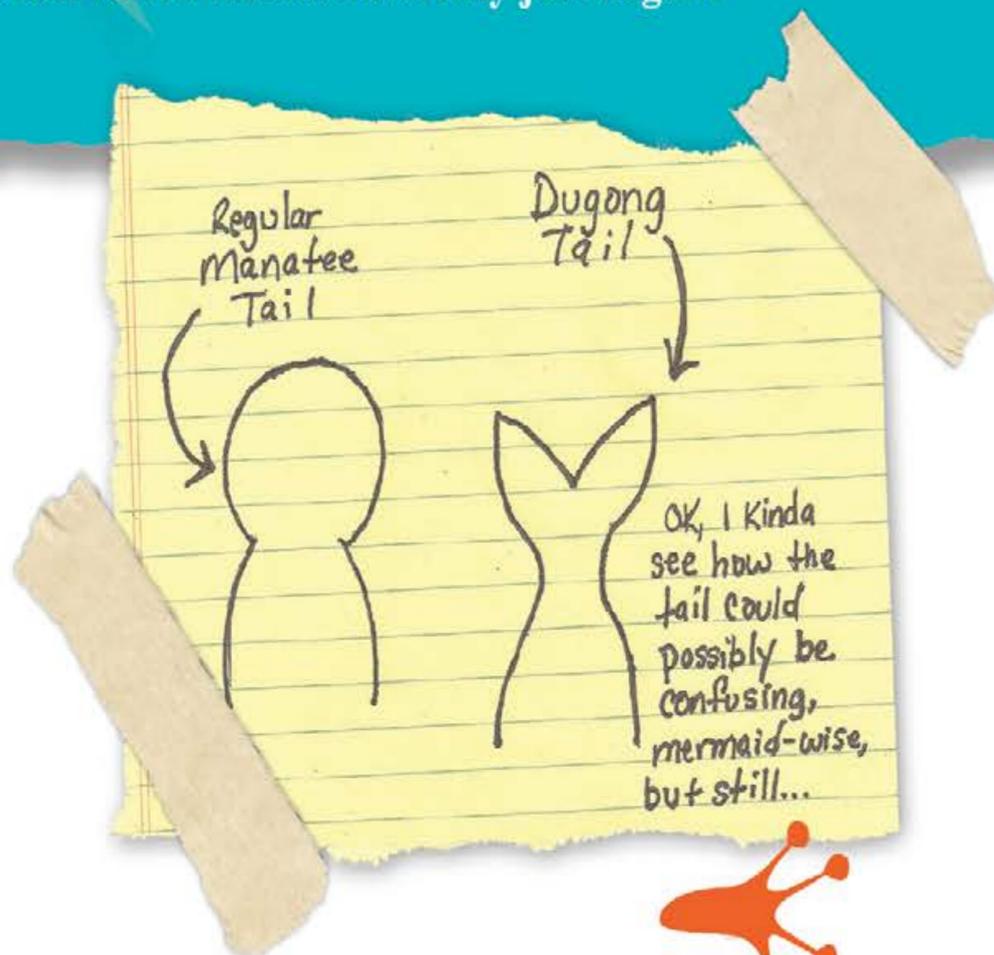
They can also hold their breath underwater for up to six minutes, sweeping their downward snouts over the sand in search of more sea grass. It looks like they are vacuuming the ocean floor with their nose.

I guess we could think of them as being MerMAIDS! Get it?



WHY ARE THEY ENDANGERED?

The Dugong is hunted for its meat and oil. It is still hunted for cultural reasons in Northern Australia and the Pacific Islands. Slow reproduction rates, shrinking habitat, and fishing related fatalities are all contributing to this gentle creature's declining numbers. Conservation efforts have only just begun.



FIELD ACTIVITY

Related to a Housekeeping Hottie

Because the Dugong is a strictly marine animal, I decided to create my own Ocean, and it is beautiful! You can make your own and be as creative as you'd like.

Make your own Ocean in a Jar!

HERE'S WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- Glass or plastic bottle or jar
- Water
- Blue food coloring
- Seashells or other underwater decor
- Hot or Cool temp glue gun
- Sand
- Vegetable, Grape Seed, or Coconut oil



Make sure your jar is washed out and clean. Spoon some sand into the jar.

Add water until 1/2 to 3/4 full. Add 1 drop of blue food coloring or more until you get a color you like. Add a few shells or other items of your choice to your "ocean". Add vegetable oil until almost full. Leave a small space for air at the top. Use the hot or cool temp glue gun and put glue around the lid and then place the lid on the bottle. No leaks!

Turn your ocean on its side and watch the waves go back and forth. Watch the sand gently move as the waves go by. Shake up the bottle. What happens to the sand? What happens to the shells? Does all the sand move as the waves move or just a little at a time? I think I could watch mine for hours...

Go have an
Epic Oceanic Adventure
in YOUR neighborhood!



"Can you imagine what would happen if I had one of these in my pocket and I showed it to people? I bet there would be some loud screams!"



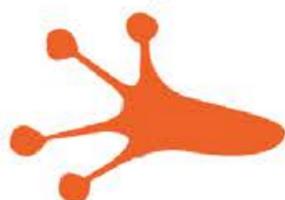
Bumblebee Bat

[buhm-buhl-bee bat]

POCKET DRACULA



Awaw, I want one!
Not really, but, awaw!



SCIENTIFIC NAME:

Craseonycteris thonglongyai

OTHER NAMES:

Kitti's Hog Nosed Bat

SPECIES CLASSIFICATION:

Mammal

IUCN STATUS:

EN – Endangered

BIOME:

Region: Asia

Habitat: Limestone caves along rivers

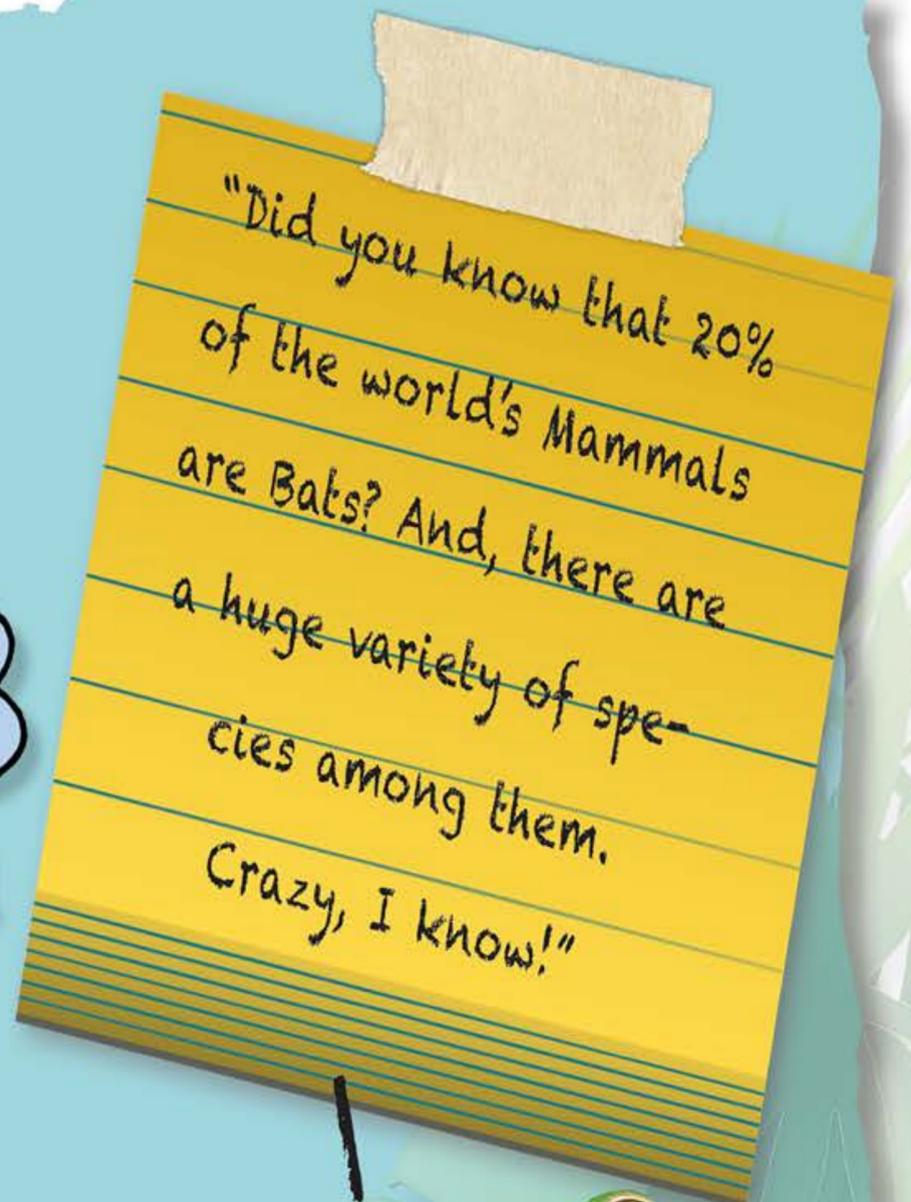
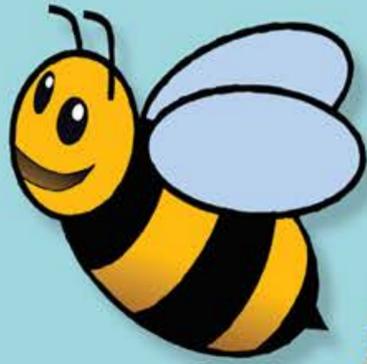
Range: Thailand, Myanmar

DIET CLASSIFICATION:

Insectivore

FOOD SOURCE:

Insects either taken from foliage, or captured in the air.



"Did you know that 20%
of the world's Mammals
are Bats? And, there are
a huge variety of spe-
cies among them.
Crazy, I know!"

**ANIMAL FACTS:**

* Bumblebee Bats are tiny little bats that are only about 1 to 1.5 inches in length. That's about the size of a Bumblebee and it's where they get their name. Their wingspan is about 6.5 inches in length and they weigh around .07 oz. They have reddish brown or grey bodies with paler undersides and dark colored wings with long tips. They have small eyes, large ears, and their nose is turned up like a Pig's, so they are also called Hog Nosed Bats.

* They live in colonies of 10 to 100 and roost on the ceilings of limestone caves. They spread out, so they don't touch each other as they roost. My dog does NOT sleep like this. Ever.

* They are most active at dusk, because that's when they can capture the most insects. The females give birth to only one offspring each year in late April.

* It is not known who their predators are or what their lifespan is.



WHAT MAKES THEM WEIRD & WACKY?

Bumblebee Bats are the world's smallest Bat, but are also, in fact, the world's smallest mammal!

The long tips on the ends of their wings allow them to hover like a Hummingbird. I thought they might be called Hummingbird Bats, but Hummingbirds are actually bigger than they are...

They have a large (well, large, for them) web of skin between their hind legs called a uropatagium, which helps them in flight, and also in catching insects.

They leave their caves at dawn and dusk for twenty to thirty minutes at a time to forage for insects using echolocation, a kind of radar that bats use. We use the same thing underwater, to locate things we can't see with our eyes.

Bumblebee Bats have been known to migrate seasonally between caves. During feeding periods, babies will either stay in the roosting caves, or remain attached to their mothers during flights. Can you imagine how small the babies must be? Super adorable!

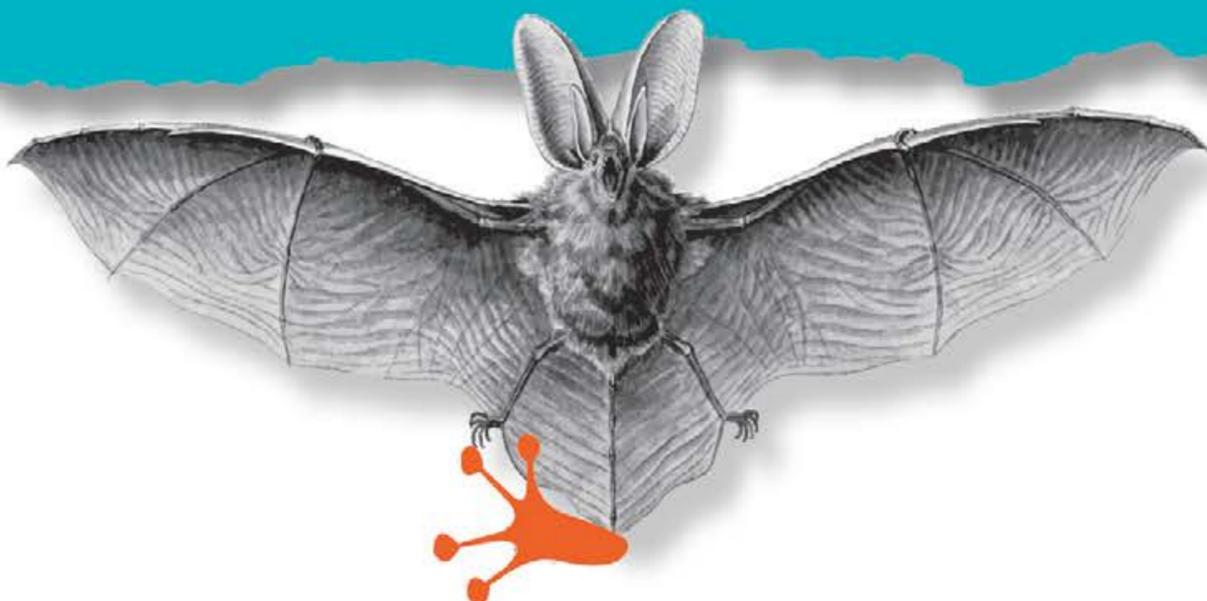
They were discovered by Thai Biologist Kitti Thonglongya, and they have that pig nose thing going, so they are formally named Kitti's Hog Nosed Bats. Bumblebee Bat is just their nickname, but it's so much cuter, don't you think?

I could keep one in my pocket and call him Count Cute-ula. Bwahahahaha!



WHY ARE THEY ENDANGERED?

Not much is known about Bumblebee Bats, but it is known that the main threat to them is the annual burning of forests near their caves. Smoke inhalation and the killing off or driving off of their food source is a popular theory for their declining population. It is thought that there are only about 4000 Bumblebee Bats left in the wild.



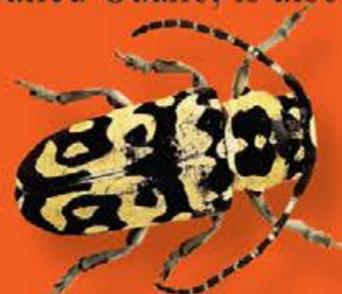
FIELD ACTIVITY

Related to a Bug-Sized, Bug-Eating Bat (yup)

This is what most people think of when someone says the word “Bat”- a creepy face with sharp fangs! But, did you know that, just like bees, bats play a super important role in the pollination process? They help with the pollination of flowers and the distribution of fruit seeds. They are also the only Mammals who can fly.

There are about 1,200 different species of bats in the world. 70% of them consume insects and small bugs. We’d be overrun with bugs if it weren’t for Bats! Bat poop, called Guano, is also used for fertilizer to grow plants and food.

Take a second look at these highly useful animals in your own back yard!



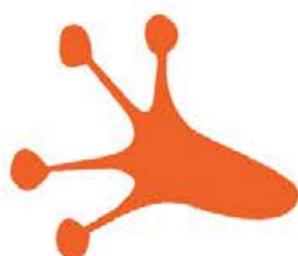
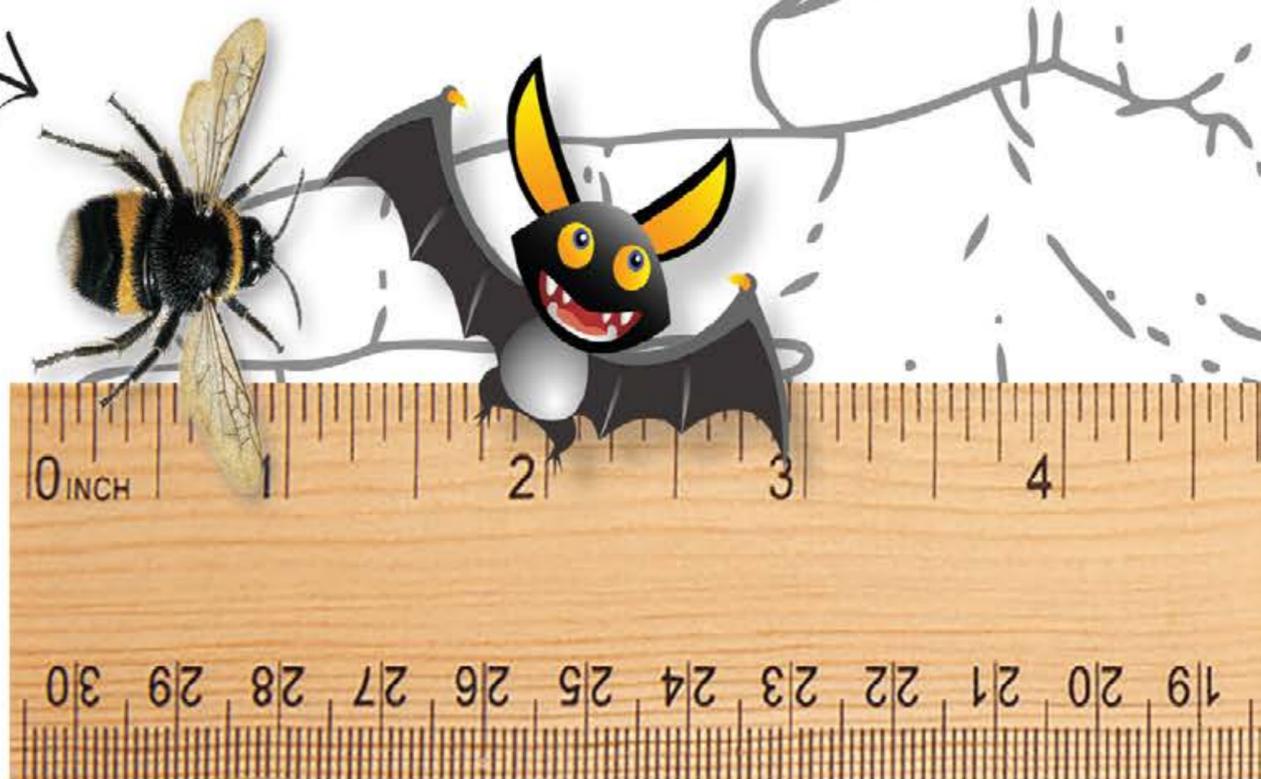
Bats are most active right around dusk, when flying bugs like mosquitoes are also the most active. Makes sense, right? Go out to a park or your yard, if it has a large open area, and see how many bats you can see flying around. They’re pretty quick, aren’t they? How many do you see? How do they keep from running into each other mid-air? The answer to that is echolocation. You can look that word up in the Glossary at the back of this book.

Now, go out and have a
Beautiful Batty Adventure in YOUR neighborhood!

This is a real
Bumblebee.

The Bumblebee Bat is
the same size!

But, with
much longer wings,
obviously...



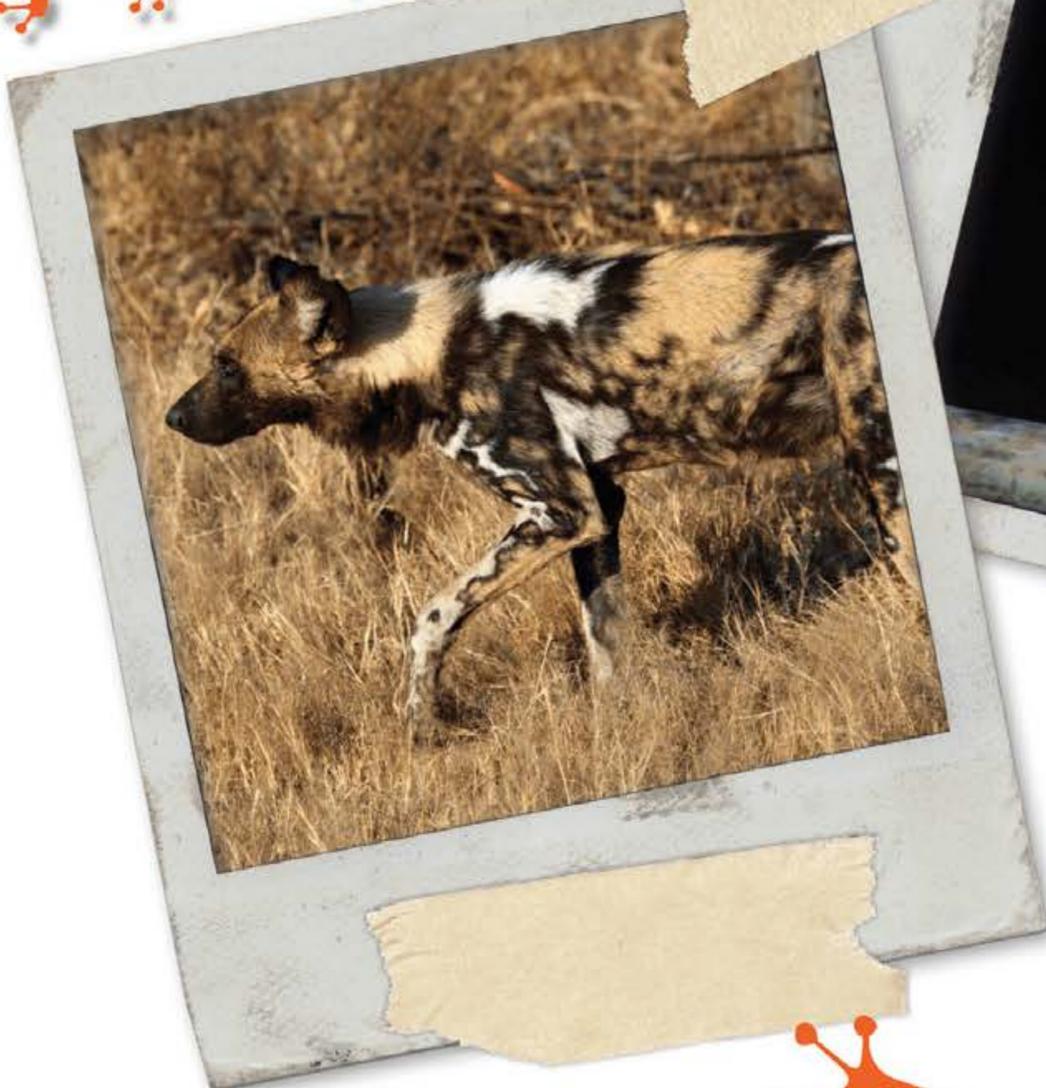
"Aren't these dogs pretty? No two of them are the same! I wonder why they aren't called Calico Dogs like cats who are the same colors. Hmm..."



African Painted Dog

[af-ri-kuhn peyn-tid dawg]

PICASSO'S PUP



Is it just me, or do you think this dog rolled around in a bunch of house paint?



SCIENTIFIC NAME:

Lycaon pictus

OTHER NAMES:

Cape Hunting Dog, African Wild Dog,
Latin name means Painted Wolf

SPECIES CLASSIFICATION:

Mammal

IUCN STATUS:

EN – Endangered

BIOME:

Region: Africa

Habitat: Open plains, sparse woodlands.

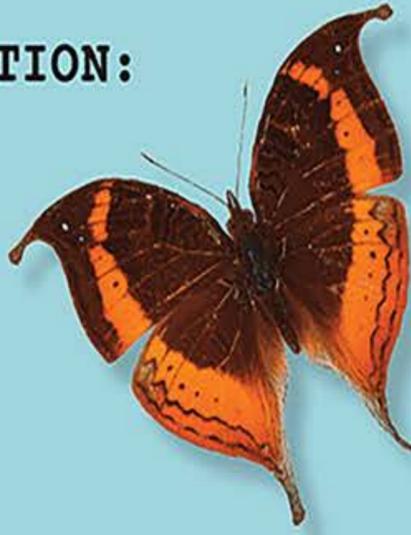
Range: Constantly roaming, rarely staying in one place for long.

DIET CLASSIFICATION:

Carnivore

FOOD SOURCE:

Mostly Antelope, Zebra, Wildebeest, or even
Cattle or Sheep if they wander onto farmland.



"Nice
Choppers!"



ANIMAL FACTS:

* The African Painted Dog is a canine species of wild dog found in Africa. They have irregular mottled-color coats of black, brown, red, yellow, white, and tan fur. It looks like they were spray painted that way! They have huge, rounded ears, weigh from 40 to 80 pounds, and are 30 to 40 inches in height.

* They are the second largest canine in the world. The Northern Grey Wolf is the first largest canine. The Wolf is much heavier, but not necessarily taller than the Painted Dogs, who tend to have longer legs.

* Painted Dogs have a lifespan of around 11 years, which is the same as most domestic dogs their size. A breeding pair may have 2 to 20 puppies at a time. Yes, you read that right-up to twenty puppies!

* Many people think that they are Hyenas, but no, they are actual dogs. The biggest difference from domesticated dogs are their feet, which only have four toes on the front paws, while domesticated dogs have five toes on the front paws. I checked my dog, Jack's toes after I read this, and it's true. They also walk up on their toes. This is called digitigrade. I wonder if missing that fifth toe has something to do with it?



WHAT MAKES THEM WEIRD & WACKY?

Painted Dogs hunt in packs of 6 to 20 and can bring down massive prey like Zebra and Wildebeest that might easily be ten times their size. They are considered to be the most efficient hunters in Africa, and I can see why. That's pretty impressive! Each dog also has its own coat pattern, so no two are alike. That's somewhat like our fingerprints, isn't it?

They have a social life similar to Wolves, because they live in packs and are dominated by a single breeding pair of dogs. These pack leaders are called the Alpha Male and Alpha Female. The Alphas are monogamous, meaning they stay with each other as mates, and they are the only pair who have offspring. Remember the possible 20 puppies? That number is the highest possible offspring in one birth in the entire Canine kingdom! But, luckily for the Alpha Female, the rest of the pack steps up and helps care for the puppies. It would be like having one set of parents and up to eighteen Aunts and Uncles all telling you what to do. The Aunts and Uncles help feed the puppies, too, and will chew, partially digest, and then regurgitate meat for the Alpha pair's puppies. Yeah, that means "throw back up". That's pretty disgusting to us, but if you've ever had a dog, you know they are gross like that sometimes...

Painted Dogs are also highly social. They make a lot of noise by screaming and squabbling amongst themselves, but they are rarely aggressive with each other. They stay with the same pack their whole lives and are extremely close. They will grin and bow to each other in submission and friendship. They will share food and help the sick or weaker members. After a hunt, meat is freely distributed, with the most submissive dogs eating first, then the youngest, with the Alpha Pair sometimes being the last to eat. These artistic-looking Bow-Wows take care of each other like families should!

And, they look like Picasso (who was a famous modern artist) painted every single one of them. You should look him up. He's really famous. I mean, REALLY.



WHY ARE THEY ENDANGERED?

Painted Dogs are faced with an ever shrinking environment. There are no preserves large enough to contain them because of their nomadic lifestyle, meaning they need to roam at will, so they stray on to farmlands and roadways. They are hunted and killed by farmers protecting their livestock, and they are also highly susceptible to diseases spread by domestic animals. It is estimated that there are only about 3000 to 5000 left in the wild.



FIELD ACTIVITY

Related to an Artistic Team Player

Make Your Own Dog Biscuits!

HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED:

- 2 cups of plain or whole wheat flour
- 1 tablespoon of baking powder
- 1 cup of chunky or smooth peanut butter
- 1 cup milk



Mix the dry ingredients together in one bowl and the milk and peanut butter in another. Add the dry ingredients to the milk and peanut butter mixture to make a dough and knead for about five minutes.

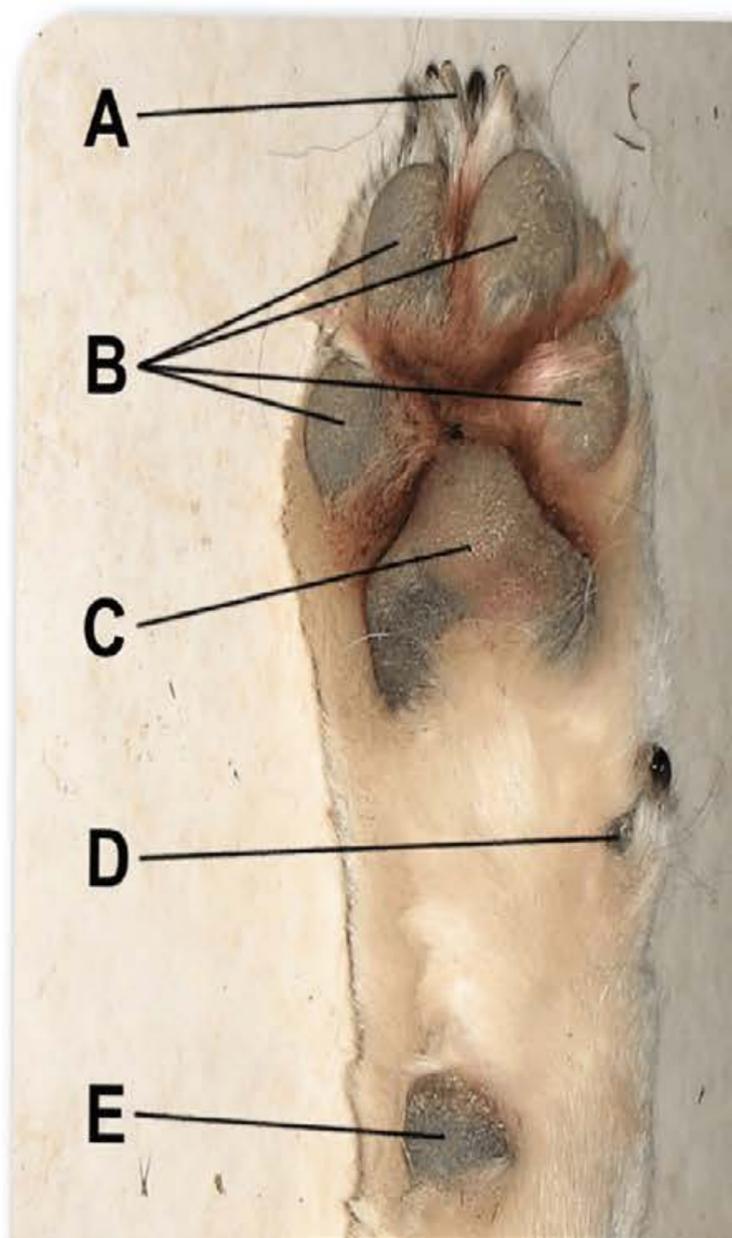
Use a cookie cutter to make shapes and have an adult help you bake in a preheated oven at 350 degrees for about 20 minutes. The biscuits should be hard but not rock solid.

Don't let dogs eat them until after they have cooled. You can give them as gifts to your friends' dogs, too.



Make some awesome dog treats and have a **Barking Good Adventure** in YOUR neighborhood!

This is not Jack's paw, cuz she wouldn't sit still long enough.
A -these are the claws
B -see that there are four toes in front?
C -this is the pad
D -this claw is called the "dew claw"
E -the fifth toe is here.



"Seriously, I don't think it gets much cuter than this! Loooove!!"



Axolotl

[ak-suh-lot-l]

UNDERWATER CUTIE PIE



Awwww! And, is that blue nail polish?



Totes adorbs!

I am definitely getting one of these...



SCIENTIFIC NAME:

Ambystoma mexicanum

OTHER NAMES:

Mexican Salamander, Mexican Walking Fish, Mudkip, Water Monster (yeah, right...)

SPECIES CLASSIFICATION:

Amphibian

IUCN STATUS:

CR – Critically Endangered

BIOME:

Region: Mexico

Habitat: Bodies of fresh water that are very clean

Range: Only found in Lake Xochimilco

DIET CLASSIFICATION:

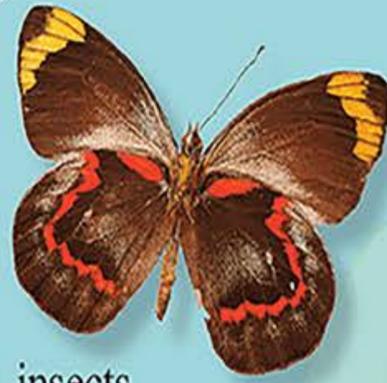
Carnivore

FOOD SOURCE:

Small crustaceans and brine shrimp, worms, insects, small fish. Strips of beef and liver are given to those who are pets.



"Developing baby Ax!"



ANIMAL FACTS:

* Even though the Axolotl is called a Walking Fish, it is NOT a fish. It is an amphibian. Like a fish, it has small gills, but it is a type of Salamander, closely related to the Tiger Salamander. It grows to be between 6 to 18 inches in length, with a weight of 2 to 7 ounces.

* Its colors vary from grey to white, but its eyes are blue with large black pupils. It also has a wide mouth that looks like it is smiling all the time. So sweet!

* Its predators are birds and larger fish. It lives about 6 years in captivity, but has been known to live 10 to 20 years in the wild.

* A single female Axolotl can lay from 100 to 500 eggs per season.



WHAT MAKES THEM WEIRD & WACKY?

The Axolotl is one of the most unusual amphibians on the planet. It is a Neotenic Salamander, meaning that it reaches adulthood before it goes through the metamorphosis necessary to become an actual Salamander. It remains an aquatic animal with gills. In other words, it never grows up! Scientists think this is because it lacks a thyroid hormone necessary to complete the metamorphosis process.

Science is also extremely interested in one of the Axolotl's very special talents. It is used extensively in scientific research, because it has the ability to regenerate limbs!

When attacked by a predator, the Axolotl can release a limb to escape, and before long, that limb will actually grow back. That should definitely qualify as a superpower, right?

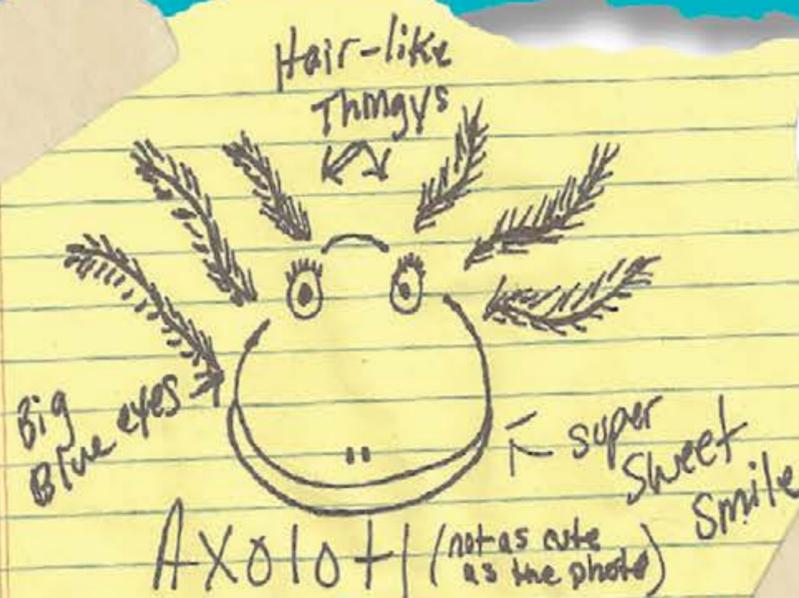
It also, in my opinion, has one of the sweetest faces that you'll ever see underwater. With those big blue eyes and happy smile, you can't help but smile back! Add in the pink hair and blue fingernails, and you have one adorable Peter Pan Super Hero. Many people raise them and keep them as pets. I must admit, I'm seriously thinking about it.

Who wouldn't want to see that sweet face every day?



WHY ARE THEY ENDANGERED?

The Axolotl has only been found in the wild in two places, both of which are in Mexico. The first place, Lake Chalco, no longer exists because it was drained to avoid flooding. The second place, Lake Xochimilco, is much diminished, and is now mostly polluted canals. Non-native fish like Asian Carp have been eating all the Axolotl's food sources, as well as its eggs and offspring. Although possibly completely extinct in the wild, large numbers are being easily bred in captivity for the pet trade.



FIELD ACTIVITY

Related to a Lovable Water Monster

Axolotls are Salamanders who never grow up! Here are some things you can do to help Salamanders in the wild:

Save the Salamanders!

Salamanders are in crisis. Many salamander species are disappearing from the wild. Unfortunately, due to their secretive lifestyles, salamanders are not commonly seen by people. This means the decline in salamanders largely goes unnoticed.

If you encounter a salamander in the wild (whether in land or water) admire it by observation only. Salamanders have very absorbent skin and the oils and salts from human hands can seriously harm them. Chemicals on the hands such as insect repellents, sunblock, and lotions can cause further damage.

Do not use and encourage others not to use rat poisons, chemical pesticides, herbicides, fungicides, and other similar chemicals around your home. These chemicals often wash off into nearby wetlands and forests, where they can be absorbed into the salamander's skin and kill them. Chemicals also cause deformities in salamanders. Use only environmentally friendly, organic products around the home and garden.

Humans share the earth with salamanders (and many other species). We should strive to be better environmental stewards.

To learn more about what you can do for Salamanders, visit www.savethesalamanders.com, and have an **Awesome Amphibian Adventure** in YOUR neighborhood!



"These are REAL Dogs you can have as a pet! They are so fluffy and smart. I just want to hug one!"



Raccoon Dog

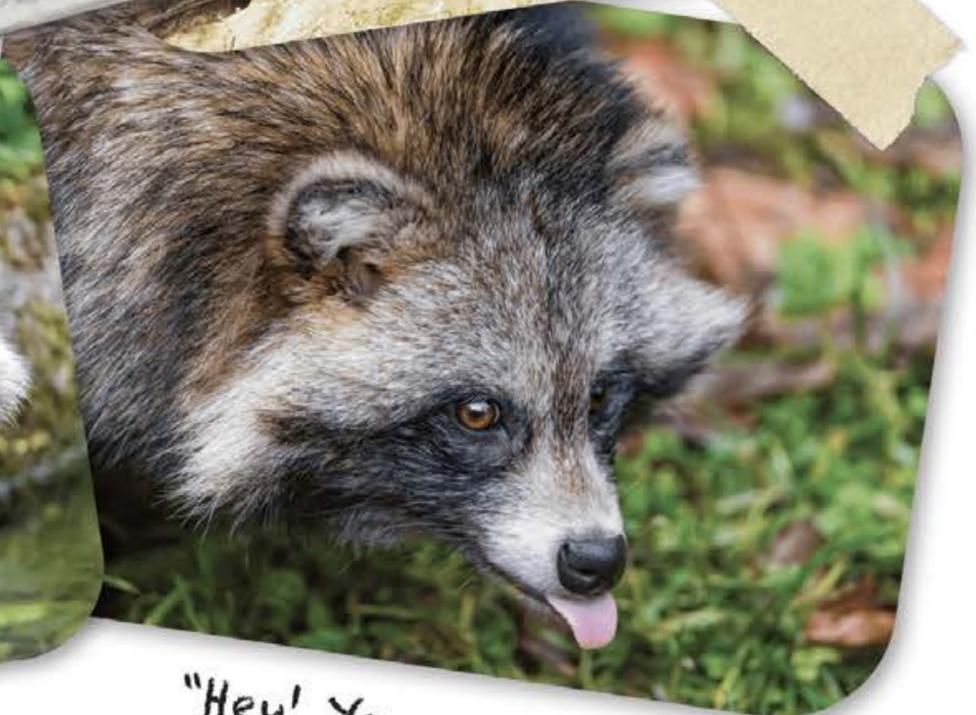
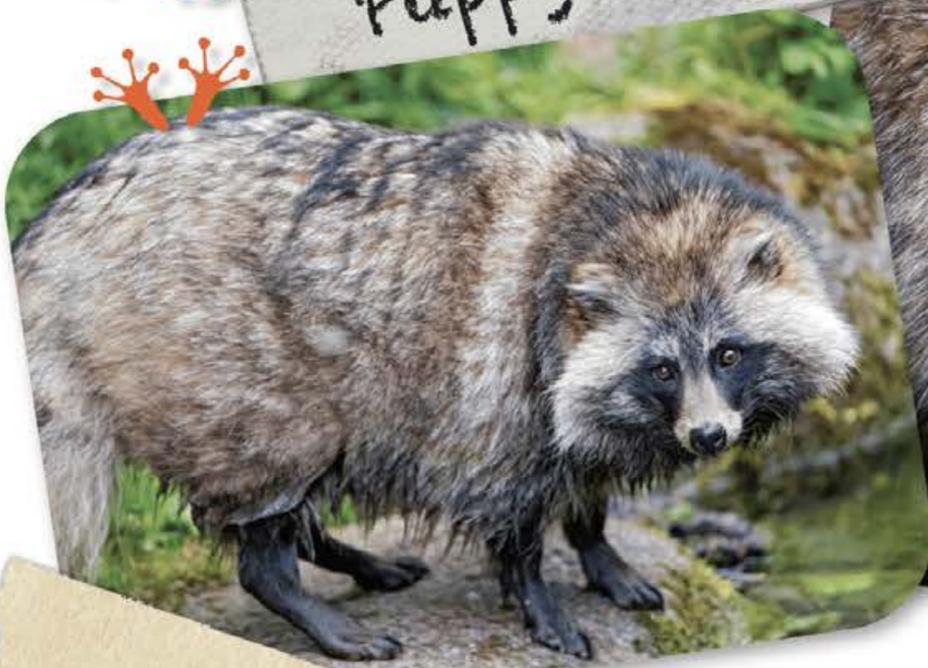
[ra-koon dawg]

SMARTEST DOG IN THE WORLD?

A Raccoon Dog is hangin' with its homie. Or its wife. I can't tell.



Puppy baby face!



"Hey! You wanna piece a' me? Do ya?"



SCIENTIFIC NAME:

Nyctereotes procyonoides

OTHER NAMES:

Scientific name means Night Wanderer
Japanese name is Tanuki

SPECIES CLASSIFICATION:

Mammal

IUCN STATUS:

LC-Least Concern

BIOME:

Region: Eastern Asia

Habitat: Forests and woodlands that are close to water

Range: Japan, China, and has been introduced to Europe

DIET CLASSIFICATION:

Carnivore

FOOD SOURCE:

Fish, rodents, small birds and eggs, but favorite food is frogs

"Raccoon Dogs also come in white with blue eyes, too! If my dog, Jack, was a Raccoon Dog, she'd be a Jackcoon..."



ANIMAL FACTS:

- * The Raccoon Dog or Tanuki, is a species of wild canine, which means dog. They are native to Asia. Their fur is tan, black, brown and creamy white.
- * They range in size from nineteen to twenty-six inches long, and weigh from seven to twenty-two pounds, which is slightly bigger than the average Raccoon.
- * They can run up to twenty-five miles per hour, and their predators are Foxes, Wolves, and Wildcats.
- * The Raccoon Dog lives about three to eight years, which is a shorter lifespan than the average domesticated dog. Its litter size is from five to sixteen pups.



WHAT MAKES THEM WEIRD & WACKY?

The Raccoon Dog is a wild dog, but it looks just like a Raccoon! It's thought to be one of the earliest species that other dogs evolved from.

It's named for the Raccoon because of the uncanny resemblance, but, weirdly, it's not closely related to Raccoons.

However, it does have a few things in common with a Raccoon. For instance, it's one of the only wild dogs that can climb trees.

It has been seen washing its food before it eats. It has incredibly dexterous front paws.

It's nocturnal like a Raccoon, meaning it's much more active at night, and it's the only dog-like mammal that hibernates during the winter.

I don't know about your dog, but my dog can't do any of that! Except hibernate. Or, maybe it just seems like it, because she sleeps a lot.

Raccoon Dogs live in pairs, or very small groups and are monogamous, meaning they have only one mate and they stay with that mate. They're very social animals, and the males are helpful husbands, bringing food to pregnant mates and helping to raise the young pups.

That's pretty adorable. And pretty smart. If my dog could do all this, I'd think she was a genius!



FAKE FUR MAY ACTUALLY BE RACCOON DOG!



"WHAAT?? Say it ain't so..."

I don't knowingly wear fur or leather, because I'm an animal lover, but I recently discovered a shocking fact. You might unknowingly be wearing Raccoon Dog — even if you bought something labeled "faux fur" (faux means fake). Under federal law, it's illegal to sell real animal fur as fake fur, and companies caught doing it can face fines, as well as lawsuits from animal rights groups. But, "mislabeling" means I won't be buying that coat with the faux fur-trimmed hood. Raccoon Dogs are hunted and farmed for their fur in several countries, though China and Finland supply most of the fur found in stores, according to the Humane Society. That's a big "NO WAY, JAY" for me!



FIELD ACTIVITY

Related to Super Smart Dogs Who Can Wash Their Kibble.

Have you ever wondered if your dog is right-pawed or left-pawed?

It turns out that dogs, like humans, do tend to have a preference for using one side more than the other. According to a study, animals are similar to humans. The majority of animals are right handers. A much smaller percentage are left handers. And, quite a few dogs are ambidextrous, meaning they can use both paws equally.

Some researchers have wondered if there is a connection between paw preference and behavior. Findings from at least one study suggest that dogs who are ambidextrous are more likely to be scared of noise from fireworks and thunderstorms. This theory has been suggested as a way to screen dogs before training them for bomb sniffing, guide dog work, and other programs. Obviously, dogs who react to these kinds of things would not be good candidates if the theory is correct. You can test your own pooch and discover his paw preference in several ways.

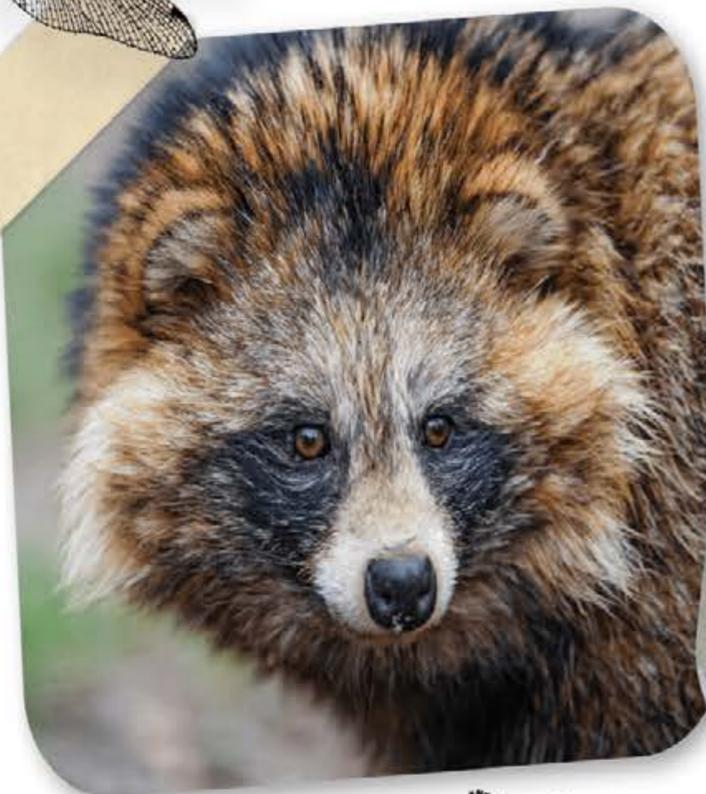
HERE'S WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- * Put a treat under your couch and see which paw he or she uses to try to reach it
- * Give your dog a bone and see which paw he uses to hold it when he chews on it
- * See which paw your pooch normally uses when he steps forward

I'm pretty sure my dog is ambidextrous, which explains storms and the 4th of July...



Go have a **South Paw Adventure**
in YOUR neighborhood!



Raccoon Dog.



Actual Raccoon.



"You won't believe what is on the menu if you are one of these guys. Just NOOO..."



Naked Mole Rat

[ney-kid mohl rat]

OVER-EXPOSED RODENT

A Naked Mole Rat outside of its tunnel systems. And, it does NOT look happy about it.



Nap time in the colony. Get your foot out of my ribs.



SCIENTIFIC NAME:

Heterocephalus glaber

OTHER NAMES:

Sand Puppy, Desert Mole Rat

SPECIES CLASSIFICATION:

Mammal

IUCN STATUS:

LC-Least Concern

BIOME:

Region: Eastern Africa

Habitat: Exclusively underground in tunnels/burrows

Range: Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia

DIET CLASSIFICATION:

Herbivore

FOOD SOURCE:

Mostly tubers and roots



"Baby Naked Mole Ratties. Awww!"

**ANIMAL FACTS:**

* Naked Mole Rats are grayish pink rodents shaped like a tube, with a gnarly set of front choppers. They look like saber-toothed sausages or tiny, wrinkled walrus.

* They are mostly hairless, but have whiskers on their faces, and tails, as well as here and there on their bodies. These whiskers are used to feel around in the totally dark tunnels and burrows they live in. Living underground, their only natural enemies are snakes.

* The average Naked Mole Rat is about three to four inches in length, which is about the size of a mouse. They weigh about one ounce, although the Queen can be longer, and weigh up to three pounds. Their Queen has about ten to twenty-five babies at a time, and the babies are called "pups".

What? Their Queen, you say? Yes, a real Queen. Read on ...



WHAT MAKES THEM WEIRD & WACKY?

Naked Mole Rats are the only mammals who are “eusocial”, which means that they live in colonies like ants or bees. They live in tunnels or burrows underground, which they dig themselves. They are fossorial, meaning they are well suited to underground living. There are rooms connected by the tunnels that serve as nests, toilets, and pantries where food is stored.

They have a “caste” system of order to their colonies. This means they have a leader, which, in this case is a Queen, and the rest of them have specific jobs, like workers or soldiers. The workers dig tunnels, gather food, or tend to the Queen. The soldiers defend the colony.

The Queen is the only female in the colony who gives birth. Colony sizes range from twenty to three hundred individuals, with one Queen per colony.

Naked Mole Rats are neither Moles nor Rats, but are more closely related to Porcupines, Chinchillas, and Guinea Pigs. They are also the longest living rodents, with almost a thirty year life span.

They don't need to drink water, because they get enough from their food, so that's pretty interesting. But, a more interesting and disgusting fact is that they eat their own poop.

Yes, and other Naked Mole Rats' poop, too.

Gross.



WHAT CAN NAKED MOLE RATS TEACH US?



Naked Mole Rats have something in common with Elephants. Both species are surprisingly resistant to Cancer! Scientists study Naked Mole Rats in labs like this one, to see if they can determine what makes them so resistant to cancerous tumors. If they can discover why, it might lead to discovering how to cure it in humans. Maybe it's their diet and in the future, we will all be eating tubers, roots and poop. Wow, I hope that's not it. Seriously. And, I'd really miss chocolate, wouldn't you?



FIELD ACTIVITY

Related to Poop-Eating Subservient Rodents

Naked Mole Rats aren't the only creatures who have eusocial colonies with Queens. Coleoptera Beetles, Snapping Shrimp, and Damaraland Mole Rats all live in eusocial colonies.

Also included are 50 species of Bugs, 400 species of Bees, 900 species of Wasps, 14,000 species of Ants and ALL Termites. Yay for GIRL POWER!!

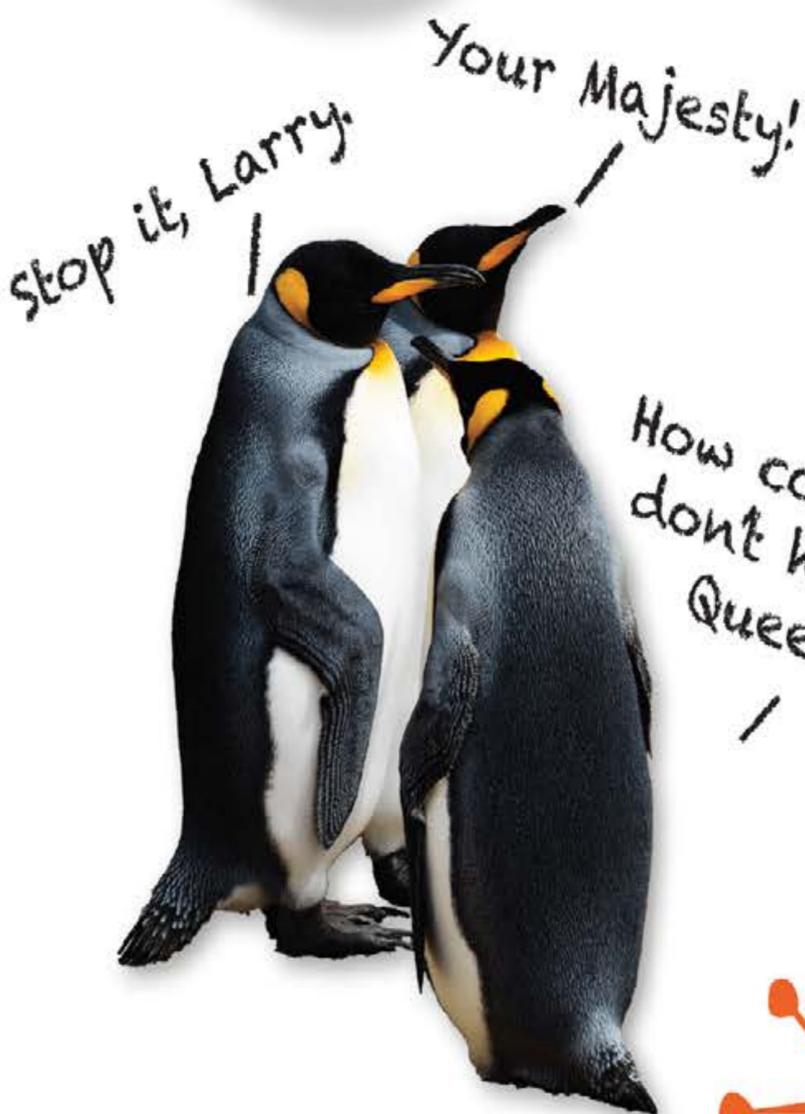
Even Humans have Colonies and Queens. Ok, it's not the same, not even close. But, I just had to throw that in there, hahahaha!

You can observe some Ant colonies in your neighborhood to see if you can spot the queen of the colony. She is much bigger than all the other Ants, and they swarm around her to protect her. You could observe a Bee colony, too, but I can't say I'd recommend it without a Bee expert with you. Unless you'd like a stinging good time!

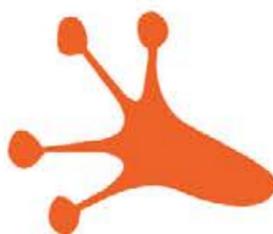


Go have a
Royal Adventure
in YOUR neighborhood!

See the much
bigger Queen
in these pix?



How come we
don't have a
Queen?



IN CONCLUSION

I hope you enjoyed my favorite Weird & Wacky Creatures from books one through four!

I really love animals, and I have since I was a kid. I loved taking pictures of them with my camera and I brought home many abandoned and injured animals from my walks. My mom took them all in and tried her best to rehab them and then let them go. We were successful more times than we weren't, and I'm so grateful that she passed her love of nature down to me. I've tried to do that with my kids. I think I've been pretty successful there, too!

If you enjoyed these sample chapters, check out the books they belong to, and try some of those projects and activities.

If you do, take pictures for me, or email me at naturejustgotreal@gmail.com and tell me how it went. My dog Jack and I love hearing from you:)

Now, go out there and have a **Nature-Loving Adventure** in YOUR neighborhood!

Love,
K.B Carr, Adventuress,
Captain Jack, Sidekick,
Dr. Chuck Darwin, Chimpanzee,
& Tito, the Treefrog



ABOUT SCHOOL AUTHOR VISITS

Jack and I love to visit kids at their schools and talk about things like the animals in our books, how to write a book, or what kids can do to help the animals on our planet, especially the ones who are in trouble.

If you'd like us to visit YOUR school, just email me the name of your school, town and state, and I'll send an author visit packet to the appropriate person. And, who knows? Maybe someday, Jack and I will get to meet you in person or on a virtual visit. We can go anywhere in the world on a virtual visit!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

K.B. is an animal enthusiast, not an animal expert. They both start with the letter "e", but shouldn't be confused. One of them requires much larger student loans.

Her mother wanted to know why she asked so many questions all the time. "Curiosity killed the cat", her mother would say. "But, satisfaction brought her back", K.B. would reply.

She is the mother of two children, Ryan and Kelsey, and she tries really hard to answer all their questions if she can.

K.B. lives in West Michigan with her dog Jack.
Jack is a girl dog with a boy's name.

K.B. says that Ryan, Kelsey, and Jack are -and always will be- her favorite Weird & Wacky Creatures.