

*the*  
**CREATIVE**

**Animals**





## About Us

"The Creative" is the magazine from Centrepieces' Creative Writing group, bringing together a diverse range of contributions and styles. From fictional stories and poems to non-fictional articles and reflective accounts, there's always bound to be something to capture your imagination. Each issue explores a different theme explored from the unique perspective of our writers' wellness and recovery journeys.

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## Feature Article

### *“Animals: Worshipped by Some, Condemned by Others”*

**Michael Armstrong**

Some consider life to have a common origin. Zoological classification includes humans as an animal, with damage to one species in the food chain causing difficulties for others.

From earliest known history, humans have had a somewhat complicated relationship with animals. Some cultures and civilisations, such as the Ancient Egyptians, revered and even worshipped certain animals. Other points in human history – such as the extinction of Dodos, Moa Birds, and the Thylacine due to colonisation, have proved more destructive to our zoological neighbours.

Early human history saw the development of animal husbandry, with species such as wolves and cats becoming domesticated allowing them to co-exist closely with us humans. Though initially rooted in practical purposes such as farming and protection, this practice has led to certain branches of select species families becoming companion animals. These are mainly cats, dogs and rabbits, though it is also known to include more exotic animals such as lizards and reptiles.

Some early civilisations and faiths often engendered certain animals within their culture due to perceived traits to characteristics: the “courage” of the lion, the “strength” of the bear, the “wisdom” of the owl and so on. Over time, this has extended to mythological animals as well. Some national identities have developed an affinity with certain creatures due to believed traits or qualities. In our modern age, an example of this is the dragon – with the cultural identities of countries such as Wales and China having a strong connection to this animal which, to date, has only existed in legend.

But some aspects of human history and culture haven't been as kind to our animal friends. From species endangerment and extinction due to human expansion and climate change, certain species have vanished from our planet for good, and more are facing increasingly challenging circumstances. Thankfully, there is some positive counterbalance: environmental campaigns and active conservation and re-wilding initiatives consistently strive to repair some of the damage our species has caused others. In the UK, the reintroduction of beavers to the River Otter in Devon has proved highly successful, with a government report citing “two family groups

of beavers, now successfully bred and dispersed throughout the catchment [area] with up to 15 territories and 28 dams”, resulting in “a wealth of benefits to the local area and ecology”.

Given care and consideration, animals give pleasure and loyal service. Domestic pets radiate love and affection, providing companionship to those they bond with. Some animals, such as the elephant and the donkey, assist with haulage and transportation in certain regions and cultures around the world, though animal welfare remains an integral part of contemporary animal husbandry. Elsewhere, horses have long been used for active service and transportation in professions like the military and police services. Furthermore, “man’s best friend” the dog, has also found a working niche with uniformed services for its sense of smell – assisting their human companions with tasks ranging from search-and-rescue to detection of illegal substances.

Humans continue to adapt to the changing needs of our animal friends where possible. Gardeners increasingly minimise poisons and encourage natural predators. Farmers have been moving away from using harmful pesticides on crops; and a greater modern emphasis on composting and recycling continues to help restore and preserve the ecological balance. Increasingly we find ponds becoming a haven for frogs, toads and newts. Habitat conservation efforts are helping other species like birds and hedgehogs to regain their natural footing within the ecosystem, while the planting of lavender, honey-suckle and other “bee-friendly” plants helps species involved with pollination.

Overall, the relationship between humans and animals on our beautiful planet has been a complicated one. And while certain chapters of human history haven’t been as-kind to animals, humans continue to overwhelmingly enjoy positive relationships with a lot of the diverse species we share the planet with. Humankind may have caused varying degrees of damage to certain food-chains and ecosystems. Growing efforts to restore the natural balance to allow harmonious co-existence are proving fruitful. The end isn’t nigh just yet though, and humans will continue to live hand-in-hand (or hand-in paw / claw!) with our various animal friends for generations to come. And with the advancements in science and technology, some individuals even believe humans can “bring back” certain species we were responsible for bringing to extinction in the first place. Who knows, one day we may even see a dodo strolling down Sidcup High Street! Watch this space!



ABOVE: "Turtle" – Lesley Cody.

## FEATURE: Curious Collective Nouns

- Given the extensive range of animals humans have discovered and encountered throughout time, language naturally developed collective terms for specific animals rather than simply using more generic like “a group of...”. Collective nouns often reflect a trait or characteristic of the associated animal, with some entries being downright hilarious. Sometimes, an animal can have more than one accepted collective noun, reflecting the sometimes complicated nature of the English language.

Some interesting and humorous collective nouns for animals include:



- ❖ An Embarrassment of Pandas
- ❖ A Prickle of Hedgehogs
- ❖ A Mischief of Mice
- ❖ An Aurora of Polar Bears
- ❖ A Memory of Elephants
- ❖ A Conspiracy of Ravens
- ❖ A Flamboyance of Flamingos

But what about extinct or make-believe animals? Often we find these have been forgotten, probably because they weren't actively around for people to consider when the concept of collective nouns came into being. Curiously though, Reader's Digest quotes the collective noun for Unicorns as “a Blessing”!

How about coming with your own? Which extinct or make-believe animals would you choose to make a collective noun for?

Here are some examples to get you started:

- ❖ An Extinction of Dodos
- ❖ A Flame of Phoenixes
- ❖ A Stomp of Stegosauruses

## “Thumper, Chip and the Great Rabbit Takeover”

**Lesley C.**

When my daughters first asked for pet rabbits, I imagined two soft gentle creatures. We were told by the pet shop owner that both Thumper and Chip were female. Perfect, I thought. No surprises. We set them up with a cosy cage in the shed, with a little tunnel I made at the bottom so they could hop in and out into a secure outdoor run. The girls adored them, feeding them every day with handfuls of dandelion leaves and carrots.

Everything was peaceful—until that morning. We were rushing about, late for school and work, when something caught my eye from the kitchen window. In the outdoor run, there was a sudden blur of movement. Not just Thumper and Chip. Tiny shapes—two or three of them—jumping around like dervishes.

“Girls! Come here!” I called.

My daughters raced to the shed, squealing with excitement. There, in the corner of the indoor cage, was a nest of small, wriggling baby rabbits. It turned out, of course, that one of our “females” was most definitely not a girl. And that morning’s discovery was just the beginning.



Weeks passed. The babies grew. Then there were more babies. And then more babies. I counted them one evening—thirty-five. Something had to be done. I posted an urgent message on Facebook: “Free rabbits. Cages included. Free delivery.” Within hours, I was inundated with replies. I bought five extra cages, split the rabbits into groups and hired a ‘man with a van’ to deliver them to their new homes. When the last cage was loaded, I stood in the now almost-empty shed. The girls were a little sad, but they still had Thumper and Chip (in separate cages). And I had learned a valuable lesson: When someone tells you two rabbits are both females... get a second opinion!

**“Help! There’s a Bear in the Bathroom.”**

**Matthew D.**

Help! There's a bear; a bear's really there.

Help! There's a bear in the bathroom.

His chocolate fur is all a state,

Why are you in my bathroom, mate?!

He growls and grumbles in the shower,

He's been in there for half an hour!

There's shampoo all across the floor,

The bottle's dry, I'll need some more.

Help! There's a bear; a bear's really there.

Help! There's a bear in the bathroom.



Rinsing, scrubbing, towels all wet,

How messy will this bathroom get?

Toothpaste smeared across the sink,

Whatever will the landlord think?

Muddy paw-prints on the tiles,

His hair now gelled in timeless-style

He's fancy and all clean at least,

The room's a state, I stand aghast!

Help! There's a bear; a bear's really there.

Help! There's a bear in the bathroom.



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**ABOVE TOP:** "Bear With Me" – *Mathew Delaney.*

**ABOVE BOTTOM:** "You're Purrfect" – *Matthew Delaney.*

## “Ode to Daisy”

**Lesley E.**

My dog's name is Daisy  
At times she can be very crazy and lazy  
She is a tan and white Bassett Hound  
With a body that is long and low to the ground  
Her eyes are big, brown and shiny  
When she wants some fuss she can be very whiney  
Her zoomies are something to behold  
Ears waving, tongue flapping, tail wagging  
She looks so cute and very bold

Daisy loves to bark especially when it's dark  
She fox-watches at night and won't settle till they are out of sight  
Her long nose, knows no bounds and is always sniffing the ground  
With the help of her long ears, she stirs up the scent  
To find out where all the other dogs went

To own a Bassett Hound can be a challenge that's true  
For they can be stubborn and deaf right on cue  
Daisy loves food, walks and a nice long nap  
Alas I have fallen into the Bassett Hound trap.

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**ABOVE:** "Red Squirrel with Nut" – Nicola Wills.

## “Rabbie Burns Meets Nessie”

**Michael A.**

Is it a bird? Is it a plane? No, it's Nessie, the Loch Ness monster of Scottish ancestry.

Nessie, fable or fact, has long been something of an enigma. A mystery surrounds the creature, dating from before Rabbie Burns put pen to paper. Perhaps Nessie inspired Burns to write on the folklore of the Highlands.

One theory, and it's never been disproved, is that Nessie was trapped in the depths of Loch Ness during prehistoric times. Then the sea linked the Loch's inlet with Scotland. Saltwater allowed the monster within, then the land rose to enclose Nessie and form the Loch. The Caledonian Canal was formed later by picks and shovels.

Since then, it is argued that otters playing “tag” in the murky Ness have formed the so-called humps of Nessie. Surface driftwood, part visible, part-submerged has also given this impression. Sightings are usually hazy and well distanced from the Bonnie banks. Even so, photographs with zoom lenses have captured the animal on newsprint. The daily press is always keen to reveal and sell such stories to an eager readership. Even then, hoaxes have been revealed years later. Underwater cameras still probe and persist, exploring at times.

Tourism here provides much-needed income for shops, hotels and tours of the Loch. Scotland, home of historic troubles with England, may well have inspired Rabbie Burns. The poet and lyricist, thinking about Nessie, wrote the famous lines “will ye nae come back again”. Every January, many people in high spirits eat, play bagpipes, and celebrate Burns Night with haggis, drinks and dancing.

To the tune of “Auld Lang Syne” (itself penned by Rabbie Burns and set to a traditional melody), its just possible to hear some singing:

*“Rabbie Burns drink yer heart out,  
There's whisky in the jar, how 'bout  
One fer' the road,  
Breaking news ta' be told,  
There's another another scoop ta' unfold,  
Another legend very old.”*

## “A Moment Suspended”

**Lesley C.**

Perched on the garden wall, tail flicking,  
He watches a dainty sparrow hopping across the lawn.  
He tenses his muscles, ready to spring.  
Then a sudden jarring sound interrupts the silence –  
A child's shrill laughter.  
Instinctively, with a frantic beat of his tiny wings,  
The sparrow launches itself into the air  
And vanishes over the rooftops.  
The cat remains motionless.  
His tail settles back into its regular gentle swish.  
The moment has passed.



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I love my Freddie,  
He's my dog and best friend,  
But a pickle too.

- Nicola W.



Big and bodacious,  
Empathetic, Beautiful,  
Boo Boo the Black Cat.

Loved everybody,  
Everybody loved him too,  
Stayed in six houses!

Loved the attention,  
Huge huggy ball of black fur,  
Hardly fit my lap.

Owned loads of names,  
Max, Derek, Micio, Boo,  
Loveable sweetheart.

- Nadia H.

There once was a tortoise named Dash,  
Whose behaviour was surprisingly brash,  
She'd zip down the lane,  
Leave the snails in disdain,  
And win every race in a flash!

- Lesley C.



Monty. Golden smile.  
Our mascot and so gentle.  
Kindness on four paws.

- Matthew D.



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Three Siamese cats,  
Sleeping silently with me.  
How lucky I am.

- Sue T.

Bert and Harry are two sharks swimming in the sea,  
They see a bright light ahead and think Oh what can it be,  
Bert said to Harry "*ere its one of them new under water cafes*",  
Harry said to Bert "*ooh I hope its self service*  
*I'm starving and I fancy a latte.*"

- Lesley E.

Bumblebees are cute,  
Without them we fade and die,  
They feed our planet.

- Nicola W.

Ziggy. Paws of fury.  
No lamp or plant-pot is safe.  
Terror comes with white paws.

- Matthew D.

I have a dog called Chase,  
Who loves to chase the ball with a wagging tail and loving kisses,  
Watch out cause he never misses,  
Chase and his sloppy kisses.

- Andrea Montague.

## “Biffer”

**Michael A.**

Once upon a time, a long time ago there was a happening. A young rabbit came to stay in the garden of England – then free of foxes!

No ordinary rabbit this, a pet Angora with magical powers. When owners are only aged in single years, everything is magical, you understand.

For those wiser to the ways of the world, Angoras are farmed commercially, with a view spinning wool from their long natural coats.



As with all rabbits, Biffer consumed enormous quantities of grass and vegetables. Baked bread, good for his teeth, being gnawed too. He, as such animals should be, was only held by arms supporting his rear legs. Biffer was also self-taught to be house-trained.

Unlike wild rabbits, this pet escaped 'mixy' – a fatal cruel killer ravaging the world. The disease, introduced in Australia deliberately by man, slowly made the animals blind with swollen heads. Today, others have developed partial resistance, as is the case with those on Dartford Heath.

Biffer lived to a ripe old age, then slowly lolloped away from us all. With help from the vet, Biffer joined the stars above and entered the great rabbit hutch in the sky.

## “The Goldfinch War”

**Lesley C.**

It all started on a sunny spring morning when my husband spotted a squirrel in the garden. This wasn't an ordinary squirrel. It moved like Speedy Gonzales on a mission. Its target? Our bird feeder – the one filled with special Niger seeds meant for goldfinches.

My husband adored those goldfinches. He liked to watch them from the kitchen window, sipping his tea, as they flew in like tiny bursts of yellow sunlight.

The first attempt to stop him was... potatoes. My husband would lob them from the back door, trying to scare him off. The squirrel would run away for a moment, then come right back, munching seeds as if to mock him. So my husband bought a “squirrel baffler” – a gadget designed to keep squirrels away from bird feeders. It looked like a little metal umbrella. The squirrel took one glance and nonchalantly climbed right over it.



Things were not looking good. Then one day, in the shed, my husband spotted our grandson's bright green water pistol. He came out of the shed with a satisfied smile on his face. When the squirrel appeared, he took aim and squirted. The water hit the squirrel's tail perfectly. The squirrel jumped high into the air, spun around, and retreated over the fence – completely embarrassed.

The war wasn't won completely, but from then on, my husband was in control. The goldfinches returned, happily feeding in peace. The water pistol stayed on the kitchen windowsill, ready for the next raid!



ABOVE: "Dragon" – Karen Larkin.

## “I Wish I Had a Dragon”

**Lesley E.**

I wish I had a dragon all of my own,  
From egg to baby to fully grown.  
He would protect me from all that I fear,  
Chase away my enemies when they get too near.

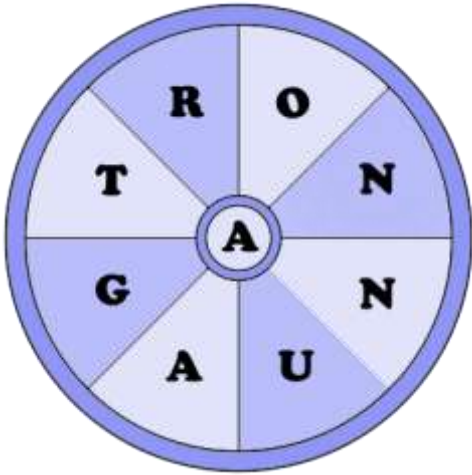
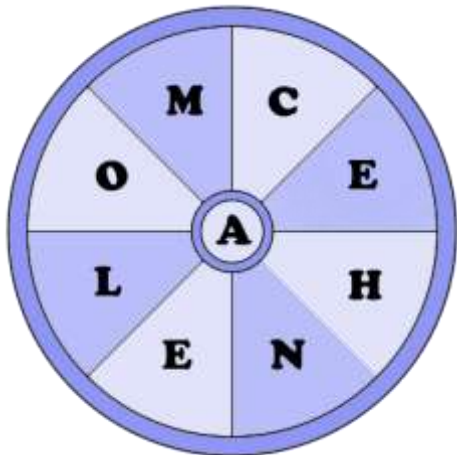
I would sit on his back and we would fly up high,  
To watch to the world as we fly by.  
We could have adventures high and low,  
Go to magical places that people don't know.  
Where dragon owners and their dragons can frolic and play,  
Oh that would be an awesome day.

When it's time to fly back home,  
I would sleep on his back and feel peace that I have never known.  
Oh I wish I had a dragon all of my own.

## Puzzle Corner

Y	P	A	G	D	F	Z	J	P	J	B	R
A	N	T	E	L	O	P	E	O	A	A	A
K	G	I	R	A	F	F	E	N	C	T	T
U	L	G	B	M	C	O	W	Y	K	C	X
M	H	E	I	B	H	I	J	K	A	O	D
O	G	R	L	C	I	V	E	T	L	Y	O
U	W	I	C	A	M	E	L	L	I	O	N
S	O	C	H	T	P	L	D	E	F	T	K
E	L	K	E	R	Z	E	B	R	A	E	E
H	F	S	E	A	E	P	P	A	B	G	Y
O	R	H	T	B	D	H	I	P	P	O	N
R	O	E	A	B	O	A	G	C	W	A	O
S	G	E	H	I	N	N	B	A	F	T	Q
E	X	P	O	T	K	T	A	P	I	R	Y
M	O	N	G	O	O	S	E	E	F	O	X

CAMEL	ANTELOPE	PONY
ELEPHANT	MOUSE	PIG
ZEBRA	LION	TAPIR
APE	HORSE	TIGER
RAT	COW	HIPPO
GIRAFFE	DONKEY	CIVET
CHIMP	COYOTE	WOLF
FOX	JACKAL	GERBIL
LAMB	FROG	BAT
PONY	HOG	CHEETAH
GOAT	ELK	RABBIT
CAT	SHEEP	ZEDONK
YAK	MONGOOSE	



## Word Wheels

How many words can YOU find within the word wheels? Can you discover the special nine-letter word in each one?

### EXTRA CHALLENGE

Try giving yourself a time limit to really test your mind.

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## Quick Quiz

1. Despite being known as the "Tasmanian Tiger", what species was the Thylacine?
2. The Ocelot belongs to which species family?
3. What famously extinct bird was solely found on Mauritius?
4. Which hemisphere of Earth are penguins native to?
5. How can you tell an Indian Elephant apart from an African Elephant?



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### Puzzle Solutions

**Word Wheels:** Chameleon; Orangutan.

**Quiz:** 1. Marsupial; 2. Cat; 3. Dodo; 4. Southern 5. Size of the Ears.