

Born to be Wild

Celebrating new life for vulnerable wildlife



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Contents

Introduction

1 Oceans and Seas

2 Woodland and Forests

3 Ice and Snow

4 Rainforest

5 Grasslands and Savannah

6 Rivers, Streams, Swamps and Wetlands

Index

Introduction

While browsing my latest Wrendale Designs catalogue, hot off the press, with an obligatory cup of tea, I noticed how many of my illustrations feature a young animal with a parent. It also struck me how many of these particular paintings I really love – the pure joy and contentment on their faces speaks directly to the part of me that would love to hold one of my babies, touch their soft heads and experience that sweet baby smell again (just for a short while, before the sleepless nights and dirty nappies remind me how hard it actually was!).

The bond between parent and infant unifies us all as humans but extends beyond our own species and offers us a tangible connection to our cousins in the animal world. The innate desire to secure our own immortality by passing on our genes to future generations drives all kinds of interesting behaviours, and it is incredible how diverse parenting strategies have evolved from one creature to the next, depending on the specific niche that species occupies and the pressures that the environment imposes upon it.

It is virtually impossible not to recognise ourselves reflected in the behaviour of our fellow great apes – the devotion and care a mother orangutan gives to her offspring is easy to identify with, but as usual, nature has a trick or two up her sleeve and other species have evolved diverse and complex parenting techniques that often seem

counterintuitive. You might find yourself surprised by the questionable maternal instinct of the beautiful giant panda, who gives birth to twins or triplets but chooses to rear only one cub, abandoning the others to certain death. Delve a little deeper and the reason for this seemingly heartless behaviour becomes clearer: a carnivore's digestive system makes it too difficult for a panda to extract enough energy from a bamboo diet to successfully rear more than one cub – thus it is better to focus her energies on one cub and succeed rather than fail completely trying to raise two or three. Then there is the amazing alligator who confounds her menacing appearance by providing tender and attentive care to her hatchlings. Not to mention the cunning cuckoo catfish who, like her avian namesake, sneaks her eggs into the clutch of an unsuspecting cichlid and lets her do all of the hard work!



This book celebrates the colourful and eccentric variety of parenting strategies that can be found in the animal kingdom, from the heart-

warming and tender, to the bizarre and baffling. Each one is unique and special in its own right, carved out and shaped by Darwin's 'survival of the fittest'. Some of these animals are among the most endangered in the world and as well as celebrating the joy of parenthood, I hope that this book helps to reinforce the desperate need to preserve this fantastic variety of life for future generations.

The image below was painted in early April 2020 when the UK was in full pandemic lockdown – it totally reflects the way I was feeling at the time, home-schooling three children (mostly fruitlessly to be completely honest) at the same time as trying to keep our business afloat. It was inspired by a beautiful thrush who was raising her family in a nest on our driveway at the same time, and without the usual distractions of everyday life, one of our daily pleasures was watching her feed her young through our window.



Oceans and Seas





Humpback Whales

Megaptera novaeangliae

The enormous humpback whale can reach the size of a school bus and is best known for its aquatic acrobatics and haunting song. Contrary to what the name may suggest, this buoyant beauty doesn't actually have a humped back – the name is derived from the way the whale arches its back before embarking on a deep dive. Humpbacks occur worldwide in all major oceans, and migrate further than any other mammal. Females produce a single calf once every two to three years and will nurse it for a year. The males are famous for their complex and melodious whale song, but recent research has identified much quieter conversations between calves and their mothers. This 'whispering' is thought to be quieter than adult vocalisation to avoid detection by predators. Humpbacks form strong bonds with their young, often touching fins as they swim. As well as fiercely protecting their young, the amazing humpback has been observed protecting other animals from attacks by killer whales.