

Animal Poetry

Unstooping

By Walter de la Mare

Low on his fours the Lion
Treads with the surly Bear',
But Men straight upward from the dust
Walk with their heads in air;
The free sweet winds of heaven,
The sunlight from on high
Beat on their clear bright cheeks and brows
As they go striding by;
The doors of all their houses
They arch so they may go,
Uplifted o'er the four-foot beasts,
Unstooping, to and fro.

What in the World?

By Eve Merriam

What in the world
Goes whiskery friskery
Meowing and prowling
Napping and lapping
At silky milk?

What in the world
Goes leaping and creeping
Onto a lily pad onto a log
Onto a tree stump or down to the bog?
Splash, Kerplop, Ribbit?

What in the world
Jumps with a hop and a bump
And a tail that can thump
Has pink pointy ears and a twitchy nose
Looking for anything crunchy that grows?

Perhaps A carroty cabbagey luncheon
To munch on?

What in the world
Goes Running and sunning
Shrugging and Hugging
Swinging and singing
Wriggling and giggling
Sliding and hiding
winking and thinking
Throwing and knowing and
Growing and growing
Much too big for
Last year's clothes?

Who knows?



THE OCTOPUS

by Ogden Nash

Tell me, O Octopus, I begs
Is those things arms, or is they legs?
I marvel at thee, Octopus;
If I were thou, I'd call me Us.

THE EEL

by Ogden Nash

I don't mind eels
Except as meals.
And the way they feels.

The Hippopotamus Song

by Flanders and Swan

A bold hippopotamus was standing one day
On the banks of the cool Shalimar.
He gazed at the bottom as he peacefully lay
By the light of the evening star.
Away on the hilltop sat combing her hair,
His fair hippopotamus maid.
The hippopotamus was no ignoramus
And sang her this sweet serenade.

Chorus:

Mud, mud, glorious mud
Nothing quite like it for cooling the blood.
So follow me follow, down to the hollow
And there let me wallow in glorious mud.

The fair hippopotamus he aimed to entice
From her seat on that hilltop above,
As she hadn't got a ma to give her advice,
Came tiptoeing down to her love.
Like thunder the forest re-echoed the sound
Of the song that they sang when they met;
His inamorata adjusted her garter
And lifted her voice in duet. ***Chorus:***

Now more hippopotami began to convene
On the banks of that river so wide.
I wonder now what am I to say of the scene
That ensued by the Shalimar side?
They dived all at once with an ear-splitting splash
Then rose to the surface again-
A regular army of hippopotami
All singing this haunting refrain: ***Chorus:***



THE HIPPOPOTAMUS

by Ogden Nash

Behold the hippopotamus!
We laugh at how he looks to us,
And yet in moments dank and grim,
I wonder how we look to him.
Peace, peace, thou hippopotamus!
We really look all right to us,
As you no doubt delight the eye
Of other hippopotami.

THE GERM

by Ogden Nash

A mighty creature is the germ,
Though smaller than the pachyderm.
His customary dwelling place
Is deep within the human race.
His childish pride he often pleases
By giving people strange diseases.
Do you, my poppet, feel infirm?
You probably contain a germ.

The Lion

by Jack Prelutsky

The lion has a golden mane
And under it a clever brain.
He lies around and idly roars
And lets the lioness do the chores.

ELETELEPHONY

By Laura E. Richards

Once there was an elephant,
Who tried to use the telephant -
No! No! I mean an elephone
Who tried to use the telephone -
(Dear me! I am not certain quite
That even now I've got it right.)
Howe'er it was, he got his trunk
Entangled in the telephunk;
The more he tried to get it free,
The louder buzzed the telephee -
(I fear I'd better drop the song
Of elephop and telephong!)

THE PLOVER AND THE CLOVER

by Robert Williams Wood

The Plover and the Clover can be
told apart with ease,
By paying close attention to the
habits of the Bees,
For En-to-molo-gists aver, the Bee
can be in Clover,
While Ety-molo-gists concur,
there is no B in Plover.

Cat Began

By Andrew Matthews

Cat began.

She took the howling of the wind,
She took the screeching owl
And made it her voice.

For her coat

She took the softness of snow,
She took the yellow of the sand,
She took the shadows of the branches of the trees.

From deep wells

She took the silences of stones,
She took the moving of the water
For her walk.

Then at night

Cat took the glittering of the stars,
She took the blackness of the sky
To make her eyes.

Fire and ice

Went in the sharpness of her claws
And for their shape
She took the new moon's slender curve-

And Cat was made.

Cats

By Eleanor Farjeon

Cats sleep anywhere,
Any table, any chair.
Top of piano, window-ledge,
In the middle, on the edge.
Open drawer,
Empty shoe,
Anybody's lap will do.
Fitted in a cardboard box,
In the cupboard with your frocks.
Anywhere!
They don't care!
Cats sleep anywhere.

Rooster

(Fyodor Belkin)

His feathers are burnished gold;
On tiptoes he crows debonair;
He claws up roots in the garden
And sorts his booty with care.

A worthy paterfamilias,
He surveys his chicks with a tingle
Of pride; struts the bird like a warrior-
A pity his spurs never jingle!

THE GUINEA-PIG

by Laura E. Richards (1850-1943)

There was a little guinea-pig,
Who, being little, was not big;
He always walked upon his feet,
And never fasted when he eat.

When from a place he ran away,
He never at that place did stay;
When he ran, as I am told,
He ne'er stood still for young or old.

He often squeaked and sometimes vi'lent,
And when he squeaked he ne'er was silent;
Though ne'er instructed by a cat,
He knew a mouse was not a rat.

One day, as I am certified,
He took a whim and fairly died;
And, as I'm told by men of sense,
He never has been living since.

The Horses of the Sea

By Christina Rossetti

The horses of the sea
Rear a foaming crest,
But the horses of the land
Serve us best.

The horses of the land
Munch corn and clover,
While the foaming sea-horses
Toss and turn over.

JABBERWOCKY

By Lewis Carroll

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

'Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
The frumious Bandersnatch!'

He took his vorpal sword in hand:
long time the manzome foe he sought -
so rested he by the Tumtum tree,
And stood awhile in thought.

And as in uffish thought he stood,
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,
Came whiffling throught the tulgey wood,
And burbled as it came!

One, two! One, two! And through and through
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!
He left it dead, and with its head
he went galumphing back.

'And hast thou slain the Jabberwock?
Come to my arms, my beamish boy!
O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!'
He chortled in his joy.

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

-- *Lewis Carroll (1832-1898)*

Swift Things Are Beautiful

By Elizabeth Coatsworth

Swift things are beautiful:
Swallows and deer,
And lightning that falls
Bright-veined and clear,
Rivers and meteors,
Wind in the wheat,
The strong-withered horse,
The runners' sure feet.

And slow things are beautiful:
The closing of day,
The pause of the wave
That curves downward to spray
The ember that crumbles,
The opening flower,
And the ox that moves on
In the quiet of power.

Three Things to Remember

By William Blake

A Robin Redbreast in a cage,
Puts all Heaven in a rage.

A skylark wounded on the wing
Doth make a cherub cease to sing.

He who shall hurt the little wren
Shall never be beloved by men.

Lion

By William Jay Smith

The lion, ruler over all the beasts,
Triumphant moves upon the grassy plain
With sun like gold upon his tawny brow
And dew like silver on his shaggy mane.

Into himself he draws the rolling thunder,
Beneath his flinty paw great boulders quake;
He will dispatch the mouse to burrow under,
The little deer to shiver in the brake.

He sets the fierce whip of each serpent lashing,
The tall giraffe brings humbly to his knees,
Awakes the sloth, and sends the wild boar crashing,
Wide-eyed monkeys chattering, through the trees.

He gazes down into the quiet river,
Parting the green bulrushes to behold
A sunflower-crown of amethyst and silver
A royal coat of brushed and beaten gold.

The Sea Otter

Alison Jezard

The sea otter lives where the icebergs swarm,
But his thick fur keeps him beautifully warm.
He dives in the water for crabs and fish,
For the otter thinks crabs are an excellent dish;
And it's terribly useful when you are able
To use your fur tummy instead of a table.

Lone Dog

by Irene Rutherford Mcleod.

I'M a lean dog, a keen dog, a wild dog, and lone;
I'm a rough dog, a tough dog, hunting on my own;
I'm a bad dog, a mad dog, teasing silly sheep;
I love to sit and bay the moon, to keep fat souls from sleep.

I'll never be a lap dog, licking dirty feet,
A sleek dog, a meek dog, cringing for my meat,
Not for me the fireside, the well-filled plate,
But shut door, and sharp stone, and cuff and kick, and hate.

Not for me the other dogs, running by my side,
Some have run a short while, but none of them would bide.
O mine is still the lone trail, the hard trail, the best,
Wide wind, and wild stars, and hunger of the quest!

The Sloth

by Theodore Roethke

In moving-slow he has no Peer.
You ask him something in his Ear,
He thinks about it for a Year;

And, then, before he says a Word
There, upside down (unlike a Bird),
He will assume that you have Heard--

A most Ex-as-per-at-ing Lug.
But should you call his manner Smug,
He'll sigh and give his Branch a Hug;

Then off again to Sleep he Goes,
Still swaying gently by his Toes,

The Ways of Living Things

By Jack Prelutsky

There is wonder past all wonder
In the ways of living things,
In a worm's intrepid wriggling,
In the song a blackbird sings,

In the grandeur of an eagle
And the fury of a shark,
In the calmness of a tortoise
On a meadow in the dark,

In the splendor of a sea gull
As it plummets from the sky,
In the incandescent shimmer
Of a noisy dragonfly,

In a heron, still and silent
Underneath a crescent moon,
In a butterfly emerging
From its silver-spun cocoon.

In a fish's joyful splashing,
In a snake that makes no sound,
In the smallest salamander
There is wonder to be found.

Fishes' Evening Song

By Dahlov Ipcar

Flip flop,
Flip flap,
Slip slap,
Lip lap;
Water sounds,
Soothing sounds.
We fan our fins
As we lie
Resting here
Eye to eye.
Water falls
Drop by drop,
Plip plop,
Drip drop.

Plink plunk,
Slash splish;
Fish fins fan,
Fish tails swish,
Swush, swash, swish.
This we wish ...
Water cold,
Water clear,
Water smooth,
Just to soothe
Sleepy fish.

Something Told the Wild Geese

By Rachel Field

Something told the wild geese
It was time to go;
Though the fields lay golden
Something whispered, . . . "Snow".

Leaves were green and stirring,
Berries luster-glossed,
But beneath warm feathers
Something cautioned . . . "frost"

All the sagging orchard steamed with amber spice
But each wild breast stiffened as it remembered "ice".

Something told the wild geese it was time to fly.
Summer sun was on their wings
Winter in their cry!

Seal

by Lyn Melandri

Swiftly and quickly
He dives from the ice,
Down under the water
In a trice,
In and out of his watery room
He zips past the fish
with a playful zoom.
With a mouthful of fish
he swims to the top,
And lands on the ice
With a delicate plop.

Macavity, the Mystery Cat

By T.S. Eliot

Macavity's a Mystery Cat: he's called the Hidden Paw--
For he's the master criminal who can defy the Law.
He's the bafflement of Scotland Yard, the Flying Squad's despair:
For when they reach the scene of crime--Macavity's not there!

Macavity, Macavity, there's no one like Macavity,
He's broken every human law, he breaks the law of gravity.
His powers of levitation would make a fakir stare,
And when you reach the scene of crime--Macavity's not there!
You may seek him in the basement, you may look up in the air--
But I tell you once and once again, Macavity's not there!

Macavity's a ginger cat, he's very tall and thin;
You would know him if you saw him, for his eyes are sunken in.
His brow is deeply lined with thought, his head is highly doomed;
His coat is dusty from neglect, his whiskers are uncombed.
He sways his head from side to side, with movements like a snake;
And when you think he's half asleep, he's always wide awake.

Macavity, Macavity, there's no one like Macavity,
For he's a fiend in feline shape, a monster of depravity.
You may meet him in a by-street, you may see him in the square--
But when a crime's discovered, then Macavity's not there!

He's outwardly respectable. (They say he cheats at cards.)
And his footprints are not found in any file of Scotland Yard's.
And when the larder's looted, or the jewel-case is rifled,
Or when the milk is missing, or another Peke's been stifled,
Or the greenhouse glass is broken, and the trellis past repair--
Ay, there's the wonder of the thing! Macavity's not there!

And when the Foreign Office finds a Treaty's gone astray,
Or the Admiralty lose some plans and drawings by the way,
There may be a scap of paper in the hall or on the stair--

But it's useless of investigate--Macavity's not there!
And when the loss has been disclosed, the Secret Service say:
"It must have been Macavity!"--but he's a mile away.
You'll be sure to find him resting, or a-licking of his thumbs,
Or engaged in doing complicated long division sums.

Macavity, Macavity, there's no one like Macavity,
There never was a Cat of such deceitfulness and suavity.
He always has an alibi, or one or two to spare:
And whatever time the deed took place--MACAVITY WASN'T THERE!
And they say that all the Cats whose wicked deeds are widely known
(I might mention Mungojerrie, I might mention Griddlebone)
Are nothing more than agents for the Cat who all the time
Just controls their operations: the Napoleon of Crime!

Have You Ever Seen?

K. Lampard

Have you ever seen A BAT?
Flitting-flying, sky-diving, brown-skinned,
Ears-listening.
Have you ever seen A CAT?
Slowly-stalking, prey-hunting, eyes-flashing,
Tail-swishing.
Have you ever seen A FOX?
Bushy-tailed, sly-thinking, rusty-color,
Ever-hungry.
Have you ever seen A SPIDER?
Creeping-crawling, deep-black, legs-sprawling,
Shudder-shivering.
Have you ever seen A PHEASANT?
Long-tailed, brightly-colored, proud-looking,
Stepping-neat.
Have you ever seen A DEER?
Spotted-black, lightly-walking, swiftly-shy,
Gentle-eyed.

Have you ever? Have you ever?

What in the World?

By Eve Merriam

What in the world
Goes whiskery friskery
Meowling and prowling
Napping and lapping
At silky milk?

Psst,
What is it?

What in the world
Goes leaping and beeping
Onto a lily pad onto a log
Onto a tree stump or down to the bog?
Splash, blurp,
Kerchrup!

What in the World
Goes gnawing and pawing
Scratching and latching
Sniffing and squiffing
Nibbling for tidbits of leftover cheese?
Please?

What in the world
Jumps with a hop and a bump
And a tail that can thump
Has pink pointy ears and a twitchy nose
Looking for anything crunchy that grows?
A carrotty lettucey cabbagey luncheon
To munch on?

What in the world
Climbs chattering pattering swinging from trees
Like a flying trapeze
With a tail that can curl

Like the rope cowboys twirl?
Wahoo!
Here's a banana for you!

What in the world
Goes stalking and balking
Running and sunning
Thumping and dumping
Lugging and hugging
Swinging and singing
Wriggling and giggling
Sliding and hiding
Throwing and knowing and
Growing and growing
Much too big for
Last year's clothes?

Who knows?

Our New Arrivals

Oliver Hilton-Johnson

Snoozing, snuffling, twitching, dreaming,
Our five black puppies
Sleep.
Yawning, stretching, grunting, rolling,
Our five black puppies
Wake.
Jumping, squealing running, gumming,
Our five black puppies
Play.
Sniffing, sucking, lapping, spilling
Our five black puppies
Eat.
Snoozing, snuffling, twitching, dreaming,
Our five black puppies
Sleep.

The Donkey

Anon

I saw a donkey
One day old,
His head was too big
For his neck to hold;
His legs were shaky
And long and loose,
They rocked and staggered
And weren't much use.

He tried to gambol
And frisk a bit,
But he wasn't quite sure
Of the trick of it.
His queer little coat
Was soft and grey,
And he curled at his neck
In a lovely way.

He looked so little,
And weak and slim,
I prayed the world
Might be good to him.

The Ptarmigan

By Anon

The ptarmigan is strange,
As strange as he can be;
Never sits on ptelephone poles
Or roosts upon a ptree.
And the way he ptakes pto spelling
Is the strangest thing pto me.

Horses

Paddy Kinsale

Horses stand up still on the skyline,
Waiting for something to happen;
Strangely thoughtful with big sad eyes,
Watching the rain fall mistily,
The clouds move, or just the distance
Escaping from them.

Horses gallop sometimes - up hills,
Across fields, thundering wild,
In a mad explosion of power;
Hot, steaming, violently animal,
But specially, individually horse.
They flair the air and the ground,
Hard-stiff on legs bone right
And solid-hooved off nail and iron.
They fetlock thrash the turfs of grass and hair,
Rioting down bone and sinew,
Hurrying to be there.

Gigantically gentle with children,
They feel friendly to the touch,
And take sugar quietly.
Stallion-proud and still they look back
To their primeval youth,
They have learned to be patient.

Albatross

Eleanor Farjeon

Hush ... hush ... hush...
The grey wind comes with a rush,
The cold wind comes with a wail,
The gliding across
The gale full sail
Lo! The Albatross.
The wind is her father,
The sea her mother,
She was born in a lather
Of foam and a smother
Of snow, long ago,
Before the ice was old.
She is careless and calm, and as cold
As a fleece of snow,
She is lovely and large, as a lone
As the Arctic Zone.
The wind
And the sea
Between them toss
Their daughter, the Albatross.

Buffalo Dusk

by Carl Sandburg

THE BUFFALOES are gone.
And those who saw the buffaloes are gone.
Those who saw the buffaloes by thousands and how they pawed the prairie
sod into dust with their hoofs, their great heads down pawing on in a great
pageant of dusk,
Those who saw the buffaloes are gone.
And the buffaloes are gone.

Desert Tortoise

By Byrd Baylor

I am the *old* one here.

Mice
And snakes
And deer
And butterflies
And badgers
Come and go.
Centipedes
And eagles
Come and go.

But tortoises
Grow old
and *stay*.

Our lives stretch out.

I cross the same arroyo
That I crossed
When I was young,
Returning to
The same safe den
To sleep through
Winter's cold.
Each spring,
I warm myself
In the same sun,
Search for the same
Long tender blades
Of green,
And taste the same
Ripe juicy cactus fruit.

I know
the slow
sure way
my world
Repeats itself.
I know
how I fit in.

My shell still shows
The toothmarks
Where a wildcat
Thought he had me
Long ago.
He didn't know
That I was safe
Beneath
The hard brown rock
He tried to bite.

I trust that shell.
I move
At my own speed.

This
Is a good place
For an old tortoise
To walk.

THE TYGER *(from Songs Of Experience)*

By William Blake (1794)

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain?
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

When the stars threw down their spears,
And watered heaven with their tears,
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

The Maldive Shark

By Herman Melville

About the Shark, phlegmatical one,
Pale sot of the Maldive sea,
The sleek little pilot-fish, azure and slim,
How alert in attendance be.
From his saw-pit of mouth, from his charnel of maw,
They have nothing of harm to dread,
But liquidly glide on his ghastly flank
Or before his Gorgonian head;
Or lurk in the port of serrated teeth
In white triple tiers of glittering gates,
And there find a haven when peril's abroad,
And asylum in jaws of the Fates!
They are friends; and friendly they guide him to prey,
Yet never partake of the treat -
Eyes and brains to the dotard lethargic and dull,
Pale ravener of horrible meat

The Platypus

Oliver Herford

MY child, the Duck-billed Platypus
A sad example sets for us:
From him we learn how Indecision
Of character provokes Derision.
This vacillating Thing, you see,
Could not decide which he would be,
Fish, Flesh, or Fowl, and chose all three.
The scientists were sorely vexed
To classify him; so perplexed
Their brains, that they, with Rage at bay,
Called him a horrid name one day,--
A name that baffles, frights and shocks us,
Ornithorhynchus Paradoxus.

Mole

By Wyatt Prunty

For weeks he's tunneled his intricate need
Through the root-rich, fibrous, humoral dark,
Buckling up in zagged illegibles
The cuneiforms and cursives of a blind scribe.

Sleeved by soft earth, a slow reach knuckling,
Small tributaries open from his nudge—
Mild immigrant, bland isolationist,
Berm builder edging the runneling world.

But now the snow, and he's gone quietly deep,
Nuzzling through a muzzy neighborhood
Of dead-end-street, abandoned cul-de-sac,
And boltrun from a dead-leaf, roundhouse burrow.

May he emerge four months from this as before,
Myopic master of the possible,
Wise one who understands prudential ground,
Revisionist of all things green;

So when he surfaces, lumplike, bashful,
Quizzical as the flashbulb blind who wait
For color to return, he'll nose our green-
rich air with the imperative poise of now.

The Snail

by William Cowper

To grass, or leaf, or fruit, or wall,
The snail sticks close, nor fears to fall,
As if he grew there, house and all
Together.

Within that house secure he hides,
When danger imminent betides
Of storm, or other harm besides
Of weather.

Give but his horns the slightest touch,
His self-collecting power is such,
He shrinks into his house, with much
Displeasure.

Where'er he dwells, he dwells alone,
Except himself has chattels none,
Well satisfied to be his own
Whole treasure.

Thus, hermit-like, his life he leads,
Nor partner of his banquet needs,
And if he meets one, only feeds
The faster.

Who seeks him must be worse than blind,
(He and his house are so combin'd)
If, finding it, he fails to find
Its master.

Holding Hands

Lenore M. Link

Elephants walking
Along the trails

Are holding hands
By holding tails

Trunks and tails
Are handy things

When elephants walk
In circus rings.

Elephants work
And elephants play

And elephants walk
And feel so gay

And when they walk-
It never fails

They're holding hands
By holding tails

The Woodpecker.

Elizabeth Maddox Roberts

The woodpecker pecked out a little round hole
And made him a house in the telephone pole.
One day when I watched he poked out his head,
And he had on a hood and a collar of red.
When the streams of rain pour out of the sky,
And the sparkles of lightning go flashing by.
And the big, big wheels of thunder roll,
He can snuggle back in the telephone pole.

The Flower-fed Buffalo

By Vachel Lindsay

THE flower-fed buffaloes of the spring
In the days of long ago,
Ranged where the locomotives sing
And the prairie flowers lie low:
The tossing, blooming, perfumed grass
Is swept away by wheat,
Wheels and wheels and wheels spin by
In the spring that still is sweet.
But the flower-fed buffaloes of the spring
Left us long ago,
They gore no more, they bellow no more
They trundle around the hills no more: --
With the Blackfeet lying low,
With the Pawnee lying low,
Lying low.

Frogs (adapted)

Norman MacCaig

Frogs sit more solid
Than anything sits. In mid-leap they are
Parachutists falling
In a free fall.
I love frogs that sit like Buddha.

Above all, I love them because,
Pursued in water, they never
Panic so much that they fail
To make stylish triangles
With their ballet dancer's Legs.

Frog

By Mary Ann Hoberman

Polywiggle
Pollywog
Tadpole
Bullfrog
Leaps on
Long legs
Jug-o-rum
Jelly eggs
Sticky tongue
Tricks flies
Spied by
Flicker eyes
Wet skin
Cold Blood
Squats in
Mucky mud
Leaps on
Long legs
Jug-o-rum
Jelly eggs
Laid in
Wet bog...
Pollywiggle
Pollywog.

In the Summer When I go to Bed

After Thomas Hood

In the summer when I go to bed
The sun still streaming overhead
My bed becomes so small and hot
With sheets and pillows in a knot,
And then I lie and try to see
The things I'd really like to be.

I think I'd be a glossy cat
A little plump, but not too fat.
I'd never touch a bird or mouse
I'm much too busy round the house.

Then a fierce and hungry hound
The king of dogs for miles around;
I'd chase the postman just for fun
To see how quickly he could run.

Perhaps I'd be a crocodile
With the marshes of the Nile
And paddle in the river-bed
With dripping mud-caps on my head

Or maybe a mountain goat
With shaggy whiskers at my throat,
Leaping streams and jumping rocks
In stripy pink and purple socks.

Or else I'd be a polar bear
And on an iceberg make my lair;
I'd keep a shop on Baffin Sound
To sell icebergs by the pound.

I think I'd be a chimpanzee
With musical ability,
I'd play a silver clarinet

Or form a Monkey String Quartet.

And then a snake with scales of gold
Guarding hordes of wealth untold,
No thief would dare steal a pin-
But friends of mine I would let in.

Now then before I really know
Just what I'd be or where I'd go
My bed becomes so wide and deep
And all my thoughts are fast asleep.

THE YAK

By Hilaire Belloc (1870-1953)

As a friend to the children commend me the Yak.
You will find it exactly the thing:
It will carry and fetch, you can ride on its back,
Or lead it about with a string.
The tartar who dwells on the plains of Tibet
(A desolate region of snow)
Has for centuries made it a nursery pet,
And surely the Tartar should know!
Then tell your papa where the yak can be got,
And if he is awfully rich
He will buy you the creature - or else he will *not*,
(I can not be positive which.)

The Blindmen and the Elephants

John Godfrey Saxe's (1816-1887) version of the famous Indian legend,

It was six men of Indostan
To learning much inclined,
Who went to see the Elephant
(Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind.

The *First* approach'd the Elephant,
And happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side,
At once began to bawl:
"God bless me! but the Elephant
Is very like a wall!"

The *Second*, feeling of the tusk,
Cried, -"Ho! what have we here
So very round and smooth and sharp?
To me 'tis mighty clear
This wonder of an Elephant
Is very like a spear!"

The *Third* approached the animal,
And happening to take
The squirming trunk within his hands,
Thus boldly up and spake:
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a snake!"

The *Fourth* reached out his eager hand,
And felt about the knee.
"What most this wondrous beast is like
Is mighty plain," quoth he,
"'Tis clear enough the Elephant
Is very like a tree!"

The *Fifth*, who chanced to touch the ear,
Said: "E'en the blindest man
Can tell what this resembles most;
Deny the fact who can,
This marvel of an Elephant
Is very like a fan!"

The *Sixth* no sooner had begun
About the beast to grope,
Then, seizing on the swinging tail
That fell within his scope,
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a rope!"

And so these men of Indostan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right,
And all were in the wrong!

May

The little birds have burst their shells,
With hungry beaks they cry;
Their busy parents bring them food
And teach them how to fly.

Small twittering finches fill the hedge,
And rooks the elm trees tall,
The wagtails run about the lawn,
And whistling blackbirds call.

Fat pigeons coo in warm content,
Slim swallows dart and play,
The thrushes sweetly sing at dusk,
And cuckoos shout all day.

Animal Limericks

There was a young lady of Niger
Who smiled as she rode on a TIGER.
They returned from the ride,
With the lady inside,
And the smile on the face of the TIGER!

A RHINOCEROS has one horn that grows
Right out on the top of his nose,
A cold brings him woes,
For he never quite knows
If it's his horn or his nose that he blows!

The old CARIBOU at the Zoo
Can always find something to do.
When it bores him to go
On a walk to and fro,
He reverses, and walks fro and to!

The OTTER is certainly rapacious;
And by nature, is greatly gregarious.
His food is aquatic;
His games acrobatic,
In the show he is downright hilarious!

There once was a corpulent CARP
Who wanted to play on the harp;
But to his chagrin
So short was his fin,
He couldn't reach up to C sharp!

A crusty CRUSTACEAN creature
Was known for his ill-tempered nature.
"Of all of the shellfish
I'm the most selfish;
I'm crabby by nomenclature!"

A SNAIL once said to a MOUSE,
"You're lucky to live with your spouse,
I'm afraid I'm fated
To remain unmated;
There is simply no room in my house!"

Dogs and Cats and Bears and Bats

by Jack Prelutsky

Mammals are a varied lot;
Some are furry, some are not;
Many come equipped with tails;
Some have quills, a few have scales.
Some are large, and others small;
Some are quick, while others crawl;
They prance on land, they swing from
trees;
They're underground and in the seas.
Some have hooves, and some have
paws;
Some have fangs in snapping jaws;
Some will snarl if you come near;
Others quickly disappear.
Dogs and cats and bears and bats;
All are mammals, so are rats;
Whales are mammals, camels too;
I'm a mammal...so are YOU!

The Shark

by Lord Alfred Douglas

A treacherous monster is the Shark
He never makes the least remark.
And when he sees you on the sand,
He doesn't seem to want to land.
He watches you take off your clothes,
And not the least excitement shows.
His eyes do not grow bright or roll,
He has astonishing self-control.
He waits till you are quite undressed,
And seems to take no interest.
And when towards the sea you leap,
He looks as if he were asleep.
But when you once get in his range,
His whole demeanor seems to change.
He throws his body right about,
And his true character comes out.
It's no use crying or appealing,
He seems to lose all decent feeling.
After this warning you will wish
To keep clear of this treacherous fish.
His back is black, his stomach white,
He has a very dangerous bite.

How I Want to Be

Anon

Stars form animals in the sky,
And on the earth before my eye
Form beasts of every shape and size,
Where some of me goes walking by.
Have I been clumsy as an ox?
Or sometimes cunning as a fox?
Can I be catty or a bully?
Or gentle as a lamb so wooly?
Proud as a peacock, busy as a bee
What lives in animals also lives in me.
But, each creature great or small,
Really has no choice at all.
While, I can be kind, brave or true,
Sly or shy but always free
To choose just how I want to be.

Turtle

by May Sarton

Just gently touch him,
And the turtle must
Shrink back into his chased armour,
Until whatever came
That he could not trust
Has gone—
He emerges then,
Not warmer, and not fussed,
But exactly as he was
Before the assault;
A piece of animated jade,
With paws engined and fluted to a fault,
He weaves his patterns undismayed,
His own Gestalt.

He floats a while, and then lies very still,
Closes his eyes, looks wizened,
Stretches his back claws,
slowly unfurls his tail,
Dreaming that he is not imprisoned
In that chaste shell.

Ululation

by Eve Merriam

With a bray, with a yap,
with a grunt, snort, neigh,
with a growl, bark, yelp,
with a buzz, hiss, howl,
with a chirrup, mew, moo,
with a snarl, bah, wail,
with a blatter, hoot, bay,
with a screech, drone, yowl,
with a cackle, gaggle, guggle,
with a chuck, cluck, clack,
with a hum, gobble, quack,
with a roar, blare, bellow,
with a yip, croak, crow,
with a whinny, caw, low,
with a bleat, with a cheep,
with a squawk, with a squeak:
animals—and sometimes humans—speak!

Seagulls

by Robert Francis

Between the under and the upper blue
All day the seagulls climb and swerve and soar,
Are intersecting arc, curve over curve.
And you may watch them weaving a long time
And never see their pattern twice the same
And never see their pattern once imperfect.
Take any moment they are in the air—
If you could change them, if you had the power—
How would you place them other than they are?
What we have labored all our lives to have
And failed, these birds effortlessly achieve:
Freedom that flows in form and still is free.

Goldfish

by Kaye Starbird

I wonder about the thoughts and goals
Of goldfish living in goldfish bowls.
A goldfish drifts through his fishbowl greenery
And never mentions the lovely scenery
Or says he's really enthusiastic
About his pebbles of gay green plastic.
He never raves, with his fish-eyes glowing,
About the places he plans on going.
Of course, he probably finds it hard
(Forever circling his liquid yard)
To know the spot where his trips begin
And whether he's going or he's been.
But even when told Which Way Is West,
A goldfish still doesn't seem impressed.
You tell a goldfish the time of day
Or what he's having for dinner, say,
Or what the weather prediction is
And see if you get a glad "Gee whiz!"
You're lucky to get, for all your trouble,
A passing comment of one small bubble.

Hawk's Beauty

By Robert Tristram Coffin

I have seen beauty in a hawk
Run forth like flame across the land,
His eyes like amber bought with blood
In splendid Samarkand.
Terrible grace and beauty sheer
As curved, cold scimitars of kings,
The cruel beauty of whet steel
In his upcurling wings.
He hung against the wind and moved
Not the least feather as he rode,
Flexing disdainful wings to gales
That bore him as they flowed.
Upon the wind the hedge he coned,
His shadow standing deathly still.
I saw him drop like a plummet line;
My spine twanged with his kill.
Beautiful pain that cuts across
The tangled meshes of rank weal,
Swords and bullets, lovely hawk,
Swift to strike and heal!

Chipmunk

by Marie de L. Welch

When he runs hunting,
the chipmunk stretches
To a stripe over the wood's ground;
He has the sun's style of flickering;
He matches the half-shadowy places
where nuts are found.
The chipmunk is compressed
while the grim wing-beat of a hawk passes;
He is a chunk of turf,
and his whiskers tremble on him
In the manner of grasses.

Eagle, Lion and Bull

The far-sighted eagle glides high in the air;
The roar of the lion tells all to beware;
The might of the oxen, patient and strong,
Pulls for the farmer the bright plough along.

With the wings of the eagle my clear thoughts can fly,
With the heart of a lion my fears I'll defy;
With the strength of the plough-ox my deeds I'll fulfill -
And love, too, I'll bring to thought, heart, and will.

Paul King

Weaverbird

In and out the weaverbird
Weaves his wisps of grass,
Busy and bustling, bent on the task
As the hours quickly pass.

Weaving, winding, twining the strands,
Tirelessly working with care,
Till fine and formed, neat and new
Is a nest beyond compare.

Paul King

Bird

With a glint and glitter of colour
The sunbird quivers bright,
Then darts away to another bloom
Like a flickering arrow of light.

With a delicate sipping of nectar
And a tumbling shower of song
He'll hover a moment haloed in dreams,
Then - suddenly - he's gone.

Paul King

Seals

By Brien Masters

Basking in the Arctic sunshine
Fields of snow and ice their homeland
Dozing on their rocky ledges
Bloated floaters' flap-flopped flippers
Schools of seals together huddled
Till their hunger calls them seaward
Stirring the slumber-blubbered creatures;
Slithering down to waters welcoming
Diving in glee midst the fish-silvered oceans
Shoals inter-darting neath teeth-crunching ice floes.

Salmon

By Brien Masters

In the silvery waters
The silver salmon leap
As the dart on their silvery way
With their glittering scales
They leap over falls
In pure mountain streams at play;
But when the sun
In heaven high
Calls them back to the ocean blue
They return with joyt
Through shady pools
To start their life anew.