# Who Are You Calling Weird?

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words & pictures

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A big-eyed lemur with magical fingers. A very smelly bird that climbs trees with its claws. A roly-poly, scaly creature that isn't a snake. A duck-billed, egg-laying critter that isn't a bird.

Are these animals in fairy tales? Are they invented by writers or mad scientists? Nope. These bizarre beasts are just as real as you are. Although they may seem strange to you, there's a reason for each one's peculiar features or behavior. So, come along, if you dare, on a trip into the weird and wonderful.

Explore rivers and oceans, grasslands and rainforests, swamps and deserts. Climb up to the tallest treetops and dig down into hidden burrows. Swim in the sparkling sunlight, and dive into the darkest depths of the oceans to meet these marvelous animals. You'll find out who they are and why they look and act the way they do. Get ready to be amazed at just how practical and fantastic the natural world can be!

# Aye-aye

Nighttime. We are deep in a rainforest. Listen. Do you hear that tap-tapping? No, it isn't a woodpecker knocking on a tree with its beak. It's something much stranger. It's an aye-aye, rapping on a branch with its long, skeletal finger.

Because of its floppy, leathery ears and continuously-growing sharp teeth, people once thought the aye-aye was a rodent. But it's actually a lemur, a type of primate found only on Madagascar. Most lemurs are active during the day, but the aye-aye is nocturnal. Its huge eyes can see well even in low light and, unlike all other lemurs, it has that special middle finger which it taps on trees. It is listening for the echo that says there's a hollow tunnel beneath the bark. Inside the tunnel are tasty insect larvae. With sharp nails, the aye-aye tears open the bark and uses its finger to fish out its meal.

Aye-ayes can live in other environments besides forests. They often venture into farms and villages, where they feast on coconuts and other fruits. This makes them unpopular with farmers. Some people don't just dislike aye-ayes; they fear them. They believe that if an aye-aye points its finger at you, then you will die. So they think that aye-ayes should be killed before they can do harm. The truth is that humans are more a threat to aye-ayes than vice versa. The only critters that should fear these gentle lemurs are bugs!

