PHILIP BUNTING



↑ Dancing for his life!



↑ Can not fly!



↑ Silent but deadly.



↗ Shrimply ridiculous.

The world's most ridiculous* ~~marvellous~~ animals.



↑ One heck of a neck.

*or are they?



↑ Absolutely crabulous.



↑ Shiny showboater.



↑ Can't decide what to wear.

For Rhiannon & Lara. P.B.



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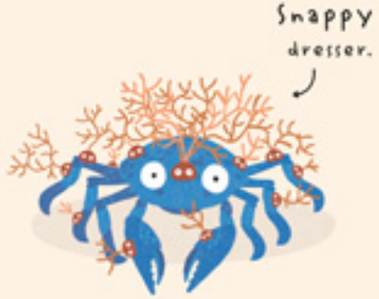
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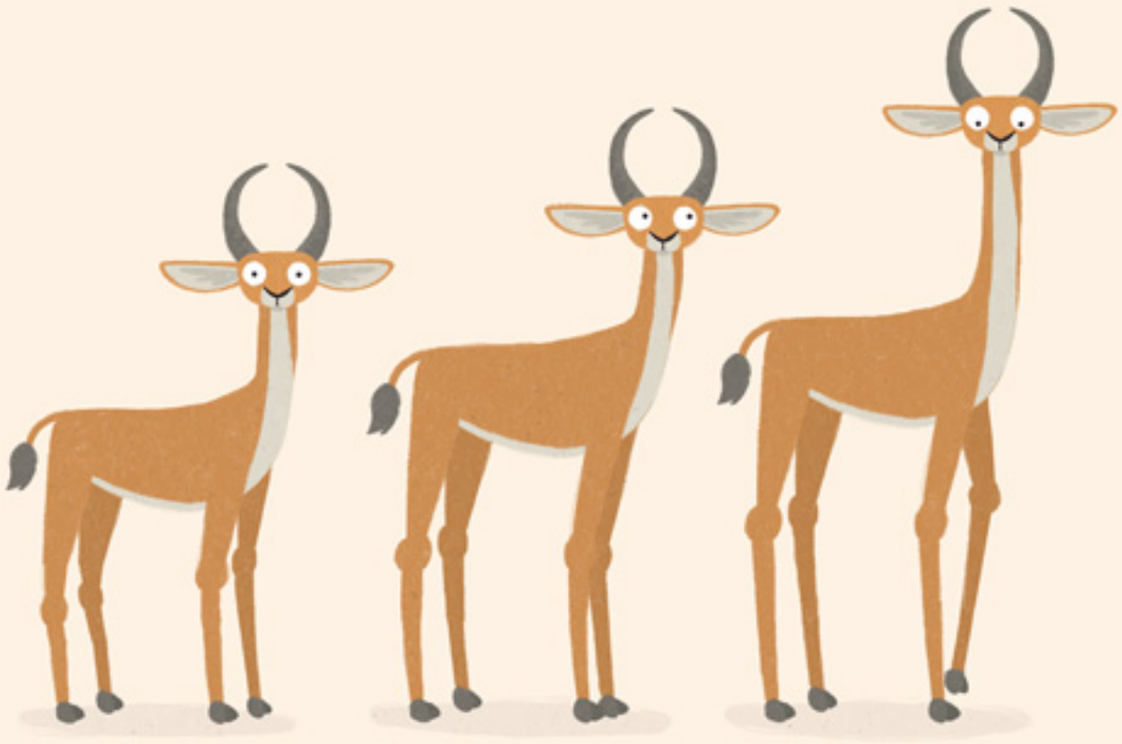
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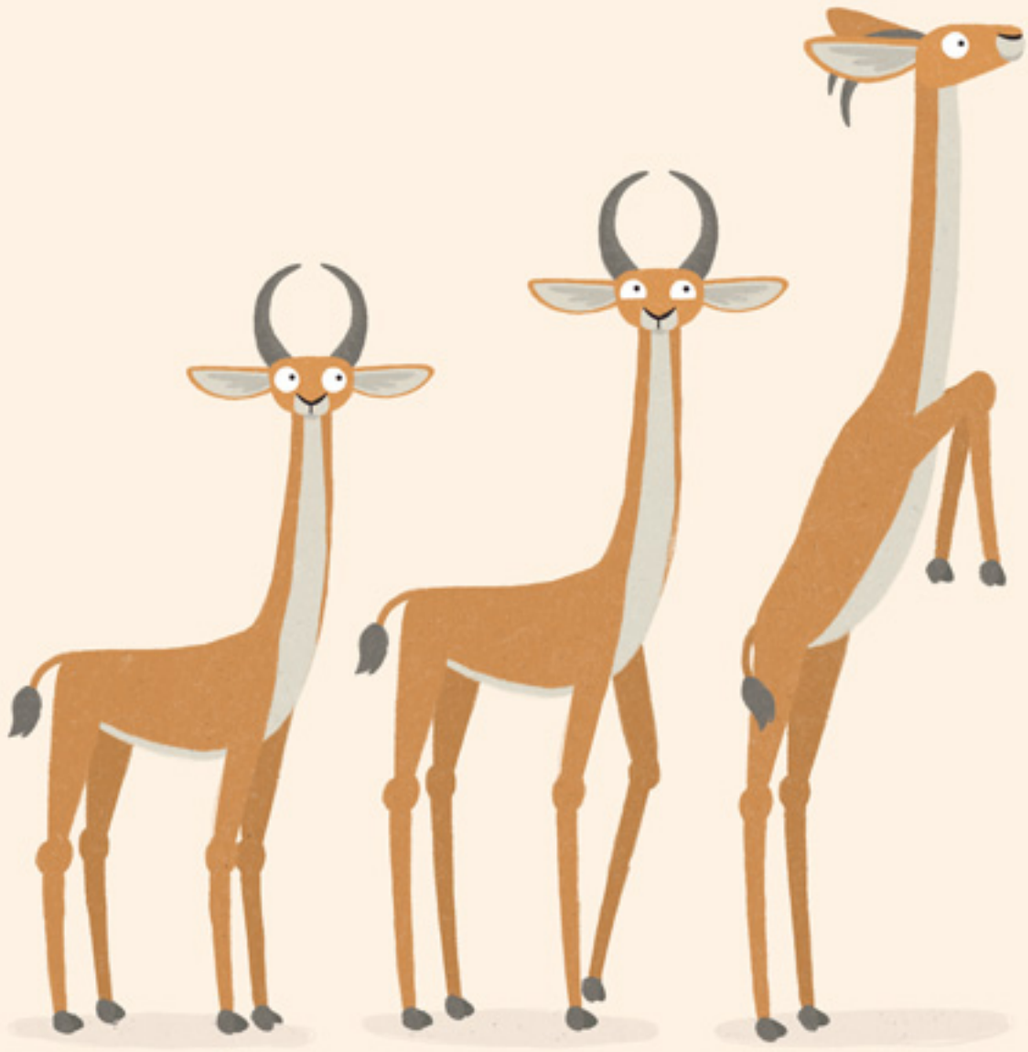


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Introduction.





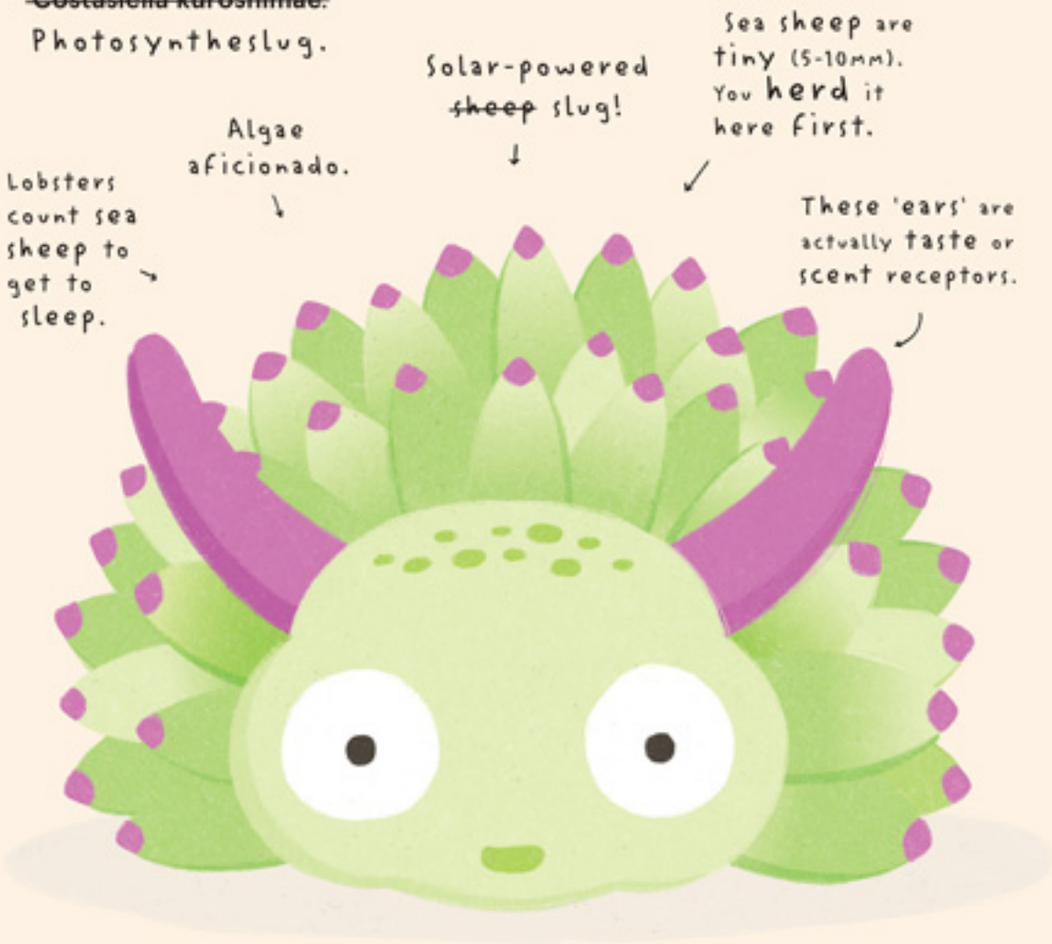
Over multiple generations, all of the animals in our wild and wonderful world have been unknowingly shaped by their environment. Each of their adaptations is a finely honed tool to help them succeed in their particular surroundings. The animals best adapted to their environment have been those most likely to survive, thrive and make babies in their little corner of our home planet.

Adaptations can include physical characteristics like extraordinary feathers (pp68–69) or a ~~really~~ ridiculously long neck (p75). Oi! Who said that? Other adaptations can be based in behaviour, such as the instinct to ~~camouflage~~ cover yourself in seaweed (pp8–9), or mimic the sounds of your surroundings (liarbird!) (p41). Please stop that right now! Let's meet a few of the world's most ~~marvellous~~ ridiculous animals. Hey!

Sea sheep.

~~Costasiella kuroshimae.~~

Photosyntheslug.



Sea sheep are a species of sea slug – they're much more closely related to snails, clams and octopuses than actual sheep! These tiny seaweed superfans spend their days grazing on algae. They eat so much of it that they have adapted to store a special part of the plant (called a chloroplast) in their body. Sea sheep use these chloroplasts in the same way plants do – to turn light energy from the sun into energy their bodies can use!

Maned wolf.

~~Chrysocyon brachyurus.~~

Longus leggus lupus.



The tallest wild members of the canine family (which includes wolves, dogs, foxes and the like) use their long limbs like stilts to walk through the tall grasses of their South American habitats. This lofty adaptation helps the maned wolf to hunt and flush out rabbits, small rodents and other tasty treats from the long grass. They use their elevated position to spot their prey before chasing it down. But surprisingly, maned wolves are not carnivores – they are omnivorous, with plants making up half of their diet.

Decorator crab.

~~Majoidea.~~

Incognito pincheus.

Keep your kelp close and your anemones closer.



As a means of camouflage and self-defence, decorator crabs will attach shells, rocks, coral, sponges, algae and even stinging anemones to their body! There are several species of decorator crab, each with its own style and taste in exterior decoration.

Absolutely crabulous.

Decorator crabs don't like to share their ornaments. They are a little shellfish.



These creative crustaceans come equipped with a velcro-like texture on their shell, which comes in very handy when you have a taste for dressing up.

Snappy dresser.

High fashion in the low seas.



Like many crabs, decorators must shed their shells as they grow. So when they do shed a shell, decorator crabs will commonly take the decorations from the old shell and reattach them to their new one.

Markhor.

~~Capra falconeri.~~

Pongus goatus.



The tallest species of goat is made even more recognisable by their outrageously outsized corkscrew horns. Male markhors use their humongous headgear to battle other males for the attention of a mate, and occasionally to dig for food. Despite their size, markhor are incredibly agile animals and typically live at high altitudes around the Himalayas and central Asia. If you are lucky enough to visit their habitat, the locals say that you can often smell markhors before you can see them. Male markhors are terribly smelly creatures – an adaptation that helps them mark territory.

Bee hummingbird.

~~Mellisuga helenae.~~

Nectar vampirus teenyweenius.



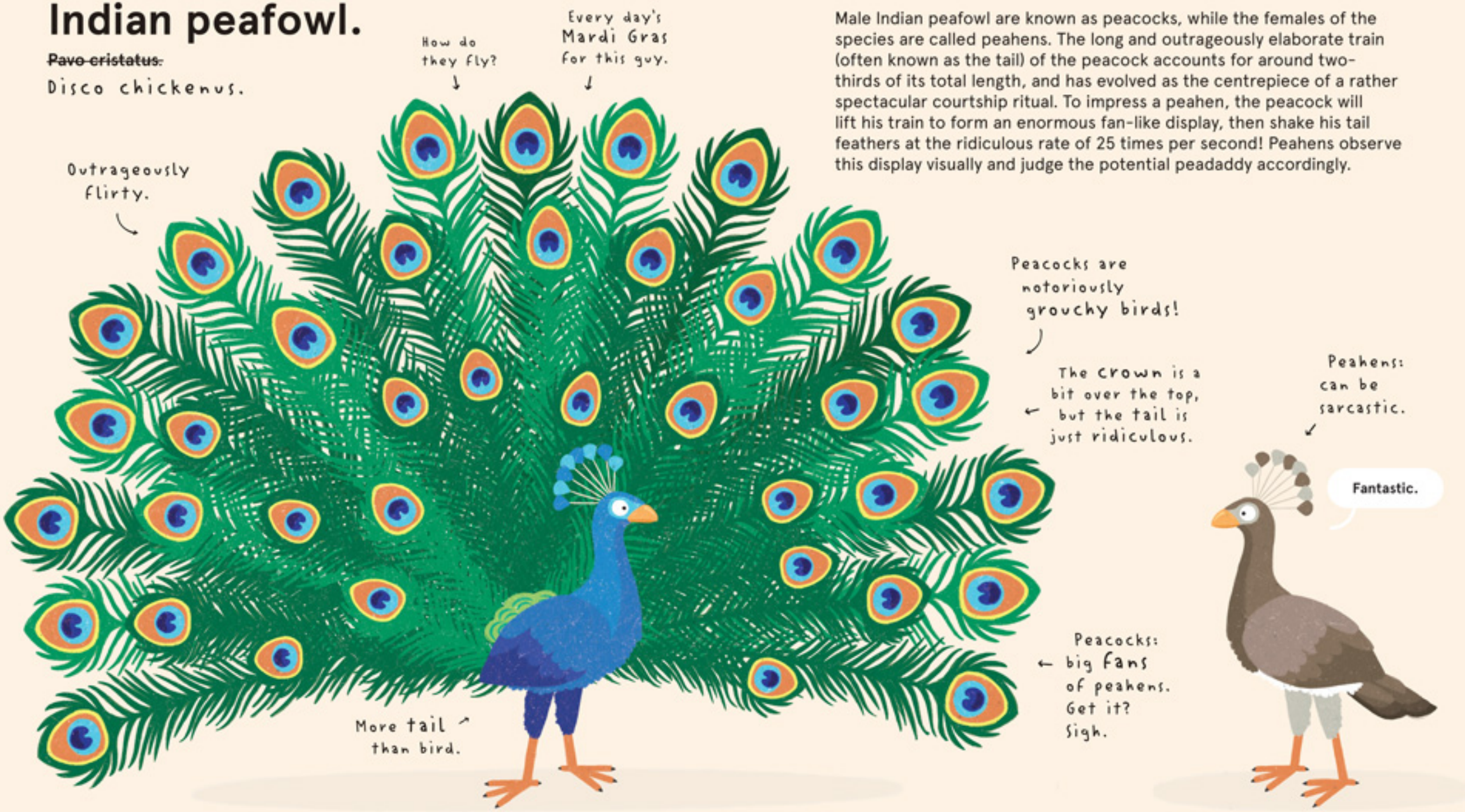
The world's smallest bird is absolutely adorable. At around 5 cm long and weighing about as much as two and a half crisps (2.5 g), the bee hummingbird lives up to its name – resembling a tiny, busy, buzzing insect in flight. With wings that can beat at up to 200 times per second, these mini marvels can fly in any direction – up, down, left, right – even backwards and upside down! Along with their elongated beak, their airborne agility helps the hummingbirds to home in on the sweetest nectar from even the trickiest of flowers. In doing so, bee hummingbirds play a similar role to bees in helping plants to reproduce.

Indian peafowl.

~~Pavo cristatus.~~

Disco chickenus.

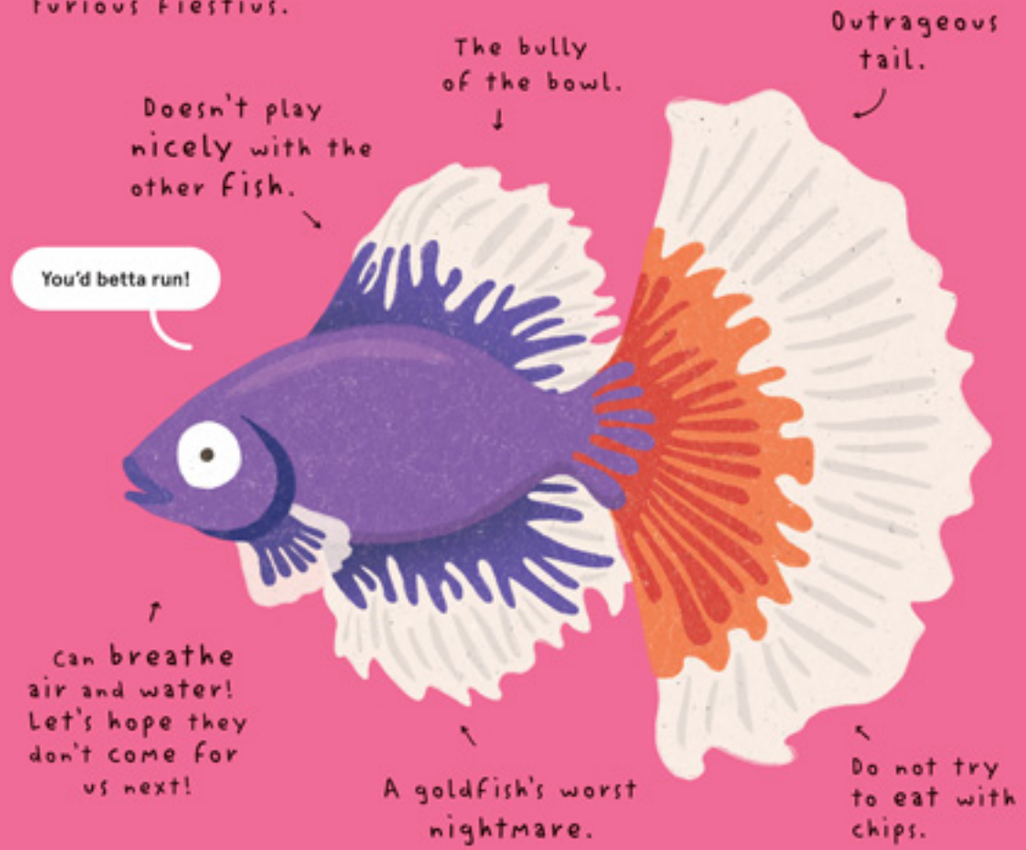
Male Indian peafowl are known as peacocks, while the females of the species are called peahens. The long and outrageously elaborate train (often known as the tail) of the peacock accounts for around two-thirds of its total length, and has evolved as the centrepiece of a rather spectacular courtship ritual. To impress a peahen, the peacock will lift his train to form an enormous fan-like display, then shake his tail feathers at the ridiculous rate of 25 times per second! Peahens observe this display visually and judge the potential peadaddy accordingly.



Siamese fighting fish.

~~Betta splendens.~~

Furious fiestius.



Despite their delicate appearance, these feisty fin-flappers are typically very aggressive – they will attack other fish in their territory through a series of strikes and headbutts! In their natural environment (freshwater creeks around southeast Asia), fighting fish tend to live alone. These creeks are usually relatively still, with low oxygen levels. Over the ages, fighting fish have adapted a very special 'labyrinth organ', which allows them to breathe air from the surface, when oxygen levels are too low in the water.

Okapi.

~~Okapia johnstoni.~~

Fancypantseum stinkyhoof.



While the okapi may look like a cartoon cross between a donkey and a zebra, it is, in fact, the only living relative of the giraffe! Just like their long-necked cousins, male okapis have short, bony knobs called ossicones on their skulls. Known locally as 'forest giraffes', these gentle herbivores are incredibly shy and quiet. So quiet, in fact, that okapi mums can communicate with their calves at a super-low frequency – too low for us hairy humans to hear! This low rumble comes in handy when calling through the dense forests of the Congo.