



Zombie Tits, Astronaut Fish and Other Weir Animals

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Did you know that the peacock mantis shrimp has the most powerful punch on Earth? That vampire spiders are attracted to your smelly socks? That the lesser water boatman is the loudest animal in the world and its instrument is its own penis? Or that concave-eared frogs have a secret language that only males can hear? From the mother-eating black-lace weaver spiders to Texas horned lizards that can shoot jets of poisonous blood from their eyes, this book from fearless science blogger Becky Crew will introduce you to a menagerie of the world's weirdest animals.

Zombie Tits, Astronaut Fish and Other Weirdest Animals Details

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Author : Becky Crew

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Kam says

So I completely forgot I had this in my TBR, but it surfaced to the top of the list recently when I did TBR roulette, so I figured I'd give it a shot. And well... It's not quite as fun as I thought it would be. Don't get me wrong: the science is clearly solid and the animals featured are indeed worthy of being labeled "weird", but I'm just not fond of the framing device used in this book, which I think was supposed to make everything even more interesting and funny and put it all in context for people who aren't very much into science, but I personally think it falls flat. Of course that could just be my sense of humour not really jibing with the author's, so YMMV for sure, but I still didn't think it was very funny. I also think that this was a compilation of online articles written by the author, so maybe that framing narrative may actually work in the context of a blog but they don't really work in the context of a book with a sustained narrative.

J.M. says

Very interesting. I loved reading about all the weird animals, birds, and insects I didn't even know existed! My only complaint was that each section was prefaced or followed by a stupid little fictionalized skit that I'm sure the author thought was funny but I just found annoying. I would have rather the publisher deleted these silly little things and added images of the creatures talked about instead.

A says

Zombie Birds?

Astronaut Fish?

Becky Crew writes about a wide menagerie of creatures, furred or scaled, living or dead. Each chapter is written in a quirky, humorous style, and is highlighted by stories. These stories place the creatures in a kind of modern world, where fish answer telephones and shrimp go to court and newts go on dates. Each story highlights the creature's unusual mechanisms, either to help or ruin the situation.

Bo Noir says

I'm so thankful I found Becky crew's Book. It is a staple on my home's table. My friends love to look through and it's so much fun to talk about the animals.

Lili says

This book was so much fun, it was one that I digested over months rather than binging on in one sitting like I

usually do with books. I read it on multiple road trips and on many sleepless nights, though that was hard if I was lying in bed because my giggling tended to wake my boyfriend up. It was set up where you could read about an animal, set the book aside, and come back later and read about another animal, I like having at least one book like that in my arsenal.

So, the book itself was hilarious, there are some weird animals in the world, each animal is prefaced with a very witty and at times a bit vulgar introduction either in character as the animal or a short story treating the animal like they are people with a very weird quirk trying to function in society. I still feel rather bad for the Ribbed Newt. The information about the animals themselves is straight-up science, not dry boring science, but well written facts about these odd little creatures.

If you want a little armchair biology and interesting things to talk about with your friends then this is the book for you. If you are a giant nerd who cracks up laughing at how awesomely weird the world is then I also recommend this book.

Julia says

The title was interesting and was the part that actually caught my eye more so than anything. And then when I found out it was actually about really animals I was excited while I couldn't wait to get my hands on it since I like animal trivia the most.

The second thing that caught my eye about the book was seeing there was some humor going to be involved. I was probably more optimistic that it would help the book but sadly after one or two more horrible attempts at comedy that wasn't comedy it was just some blandly boring imagined scenario that didn't really do anything to help the book at all.

The next thing that caught my attention the more I read into it was that the author seems fixated on sex, which I don't know if that should be a good or bad thing. Definitely not something to truly read to younger kids, especially when she is talking about the Eurasian Roller.

And finally my last complaint to the book is there was too much science offered in the book. Even though it is nice to understand the reasoning behind a research case when you are trying to reach a general population with animal there is absolutely no need to make it sound completely non-fiction with lengthy (and in some cases unpronounceable) names and heavy field research. Instead slim it down then add some more species.

Otherwise I do have to say the concept was interesting in its presentation. It does plead to be a good read in most other senses while doing a wonderful job in educating you about mostly species that one hasn't heard about unlike most others that expound on the same type of animals over and over. For those that are interested give it a chance....

~A Book By A Female Author~

Nate C. says

Fascinating book about interesting animals. Each chapter has an unbelievably strange scenario anthropomorphizing the animal. They're amusing in a slightly cringy way, so maybe it detracted from the scientific aspects of the book. But she's a great writer and I'm looking forward to reading some of her other

material.

Bec says

I had read this book before but didn't realise til I got to the angler fish entry. I remembered that as that was the first I'd read of their weird life cycle, the rest was pretty unforgettable. I do really like weird animal books but read the QI one instead. This author writes cutesy little stories about the animals & they don't always work & they detract from the real weird infor she is imparting. But I don't think it's aimed at my age group. It would have been better if she had concentrated on re-writing the science into understandable English. A lot of the science passages read as if she just lifted it verbatim with no attempt to parse it down which is the purpose of these types of books I would have thought.

Jeannie says

A wonderful exploration of unique animals, but with far too much attempted humor as filler. I would have much rather read about more animals than to have 50% of the book be pointless fluff, and for that I gave it three stars instead of four.

Susan says

Great idea, but an epic fail.

Becky Crew is not a science writer. She is a blogger and nothing more. The writing is poor - lackluster and childish. The humor is dull ... and its best, it is juvenile/dimwitted. The author spent too much time trying to be quirky and not enough time on the animals (many write-ups are only a page and a half).

I have no idea why Becky Crew gets the acclaim that she does. What a letdown.

Darlene says

A neat book of articles on the wild and wacky creatures that inhabit this planet. If you are a fan of Youtube shows like SciShow, you'll get a kick out of it. Where this book really stands out is in the witty prologues or epilogues that accompany most of the articles, wherein the author posits how life for the creature would go if they were anthropomorphized as humans. For instance, the lovelorn Spanish Ribbed Newt, who can't attend dinner parties because his ribs explode through his chest when startled, thereby stabbing his seatmates. (He's using online dating, but with limited success.)

Megan says

Fun little book with lots of very short bits about crazy animals. Most are no more than a page and a half. That part of the book gets 3 stars. I had to deduct 1 star for the filler material. In an attempt to be humorous

the author has added little bits before or after the actual content on the animal. These parts only remotely relate to the animal and are usually humorous only if you like high school grade humor. I skipped most of them and would have much rather had all the pages they took up dedicated to the actual content of the book.

Caitlin says

This is a strange and wonderful journey through some of the most bizarre and strange elements of natural history - reminding us that we're by no means the weirdest and complex species on earth.

This is a very funny, accessible book - I haven't studied much in the way of biology, and yet I found the register well placed - so it really is for those who, like me, might read the odd copy of 'New Scientist' or go to Wikipedia after hearing something interesting on an episode of "QI" but might not have the scientific literacy needed to find this information out on their own.

And although the book doesn't push a conservationist or climate change agenda, you are left with the understanding of just how precious and fragile the eco system can be.

I heard Crew on radio accompanying Dr Karl - and I thought she was very interesting and obviously has a deep curiosity about an area that few get to venture to.

Blogs-to-books can be a tricky business - I can see how this concept works as a blog, but as a book it was very episodic (so I did read this in stages, not in one go.)

The style involved presenting the information about the animal, but bookended by jokes about how the animal might go picking up a mate in a bar, or get away with a crime, or other fun human behaviour. This could have worked better - or been completely removed - because it's the kind of humour that either works incredibly well, or not at all - and might not work so well with international audiences.

At times it was a little difficult to see who the target audience was - it's very funny, and obviously written by a young Australian woman, however I probably wouldn't give it to a precocious 11 year old to get them interested in science and biology because some of the jokes are not age-appropriate. But then "adults" (ie people unlike me who are over the age of 26 and still giggle at the "tits" in the title) might skip the "silly" parts.

So my star rating is somewhere between - I find the project interesting but the delivery not quite hitting the mark.

Tippy Jackson says

I enjoyed this book. I guess some folks didn't like the little stories in it, but I found them refreshingly different. A couple of them weren't great, but most were fine and a couple of them actually made me laugh out loud. It was nice to have a little imagination mixed in with the info.

I also thought there was a nice broad range of animal info. It's tough to find new material sometimes, as after a while, a lot of books in this field start to sound the same. She did a good job of seeking out weird research and she even included a prehistoric animal section. Overall, I enjoyed it and I'm glad I picked it up, despite the mediocre ratings.

Here were a couple of cool facts/things I learned:

Cathemeral- the word for animals active both at night and during the day. I love having this word! I'll often be asked if an animal is nocturnal or sometimes the fancier diurnal or crepuscular. But many animals do not fall in any of these categories! They're just awake when they're awake!

There were horses the size of house cats.

"In late 2008, researchers from Stony Brook University in New York investigated the underarm secretions of twenty novice skydivers before they did their first tandem jump to see if their sweat held any clues about the human fear response. Volunteers were asked to sniff the sweat that was collected in the skydivers' clothing during the jump, plus the sweat collected while the skydivers ran on a treadmill for a similar length of time on the same day. In order to eliminate bias, the volunteers were not told what the study was about. An analysis of the volunteers' brain activity while sniffing the two types of sweat revealed that their amygdala, the brain region associated with fear memory and response, was more active when they sniffed the skydiving sweat. Publishing their findings in PLoS One the following year, the team suggested that humans have some kind of signaling system whereby emotional stress can be sensed via the chemicals that are emitted during a frightening situation."

Autohemorrhaging- the word for when an animal shoots blood on purpose, as in Texas horned lizards, which shoot blood from their eyes, a dwarf boa that squirts blood from its mouth nose and eyes, or the grass snake that secretes blood from its mouth and nose to help it play dead.

So... I knew that Spanish ribbed newts rotate their ribs and puncture their skin to create poisonous barbs for protection. I knew that it had to heal itself afterwards, as there were no permanent pores. I didn't know how they did it though... "A powerful immune system seems to protect the newt's wounds from becoming infected while its skin works at regenerating itself through a process called cell dedifferentiation. Cell differentiation sees a stem cell develop into a more specialized type of cell, such as a bone or blood cell, whereas dedifferentiation means a specialized cell will revert to its primitive form, often for the purpose of regeneration. In the newt's case, the cells around the puncture wounds dedifferentiate, multiplying rapidly and differentiating again to create new skin cells. This process also applies to limbs and other organs, which newts are known to be able to regenerate multiple times over."

There's an extremely poisonous animal called the African Crested Rat or maned rat. It looks a little like a zorilla (type of polecat), which oozes out foul smelling secretions. But mimicry is not its only defense. It can actually chew roots and bark from a poison arrow tree and smear the toxins all through its mane. The hairs on the rat's mane are covered in tiny holes, soaking up the poison and storing it within the shaft of the hair. We don't know how the rat can chew this poisonous bark, when a tiny amount of this toxin can kill an elephant or a hippo. Another animal known to steal poisons in this way, by the way, is the hedgehog, which will chew the poison glands from toads and slather the venom on its spines. This isn't deadly though.

"Unusual lesions and puncture marks found on the skulls of Tyrannosaurus rex and other tyrannosaurus species have revealed that a common avian infection might have plagued these ancient predators... Wolff also discovered that the lesions caused by infection were remarkably similar to those found in the beaks of modern birds such as turkeys, chickens, and pigeons that have been infected by a parasite called *Trichomonas gallinae*... This suggests that there could have been a shared affliction between modern birds and extinct tyrannosaurus species, which is yet further evidence of how closely the two groups are related."

Killfish!! These guys can survive "in any muddy pool, creek or ditch, any salty marsh, polluted harbor or brackish estuary you throw at them; they are unfazed by a severe lack of oxygen, high levels of carbon dioxide, or foul substances in their water and even if their habitat dries up completely, they can survive in the surrounding mud, flopping overland until they reach the nearest body of water." High salinity? No problem.

But there's more! Fish were taken from 3 different environments to compare their genetic make up. "All three environments contain different levels of highly toxic, manmade carcinogenic chemicals, heavy metals and pesticides, which make the water extremely difficult to live in. The researchers compared the genetic make-up of these three populations of billfish to populations from clean estuaries. The New Bedford Harbor comparison found 16 percent of the genes were significantly different from the clean reference sites, the Newark Bay comparison found 32 percent of genes were different and the Elizabeth River comparison found 8 percent of total genes were different. Further, they found very little overlap in the gene sets of the three populations, suggesting that the different chemical pollutants they grow up around brought about different evolutionary solutions." Daaaaamn. Genetically, we're only 2-4% different from chimps, depending on who you ask. Wow. Oh, and they apparently can adjust to zero-gravity pretty well too, although it takes them a few days to learn to only use light cues to know which way is down.

Kaleb Fischer says

Crew implemented an exemplary variety in sources and animals. Overall, the science explanations were concise and general enough for armchair scientists while retaining accuracy.

At times, the anthropomorphic narratives/humor were difficult to follow. Regardless, this book is pretty damn funny and entertaining. This is a great read for anyone casually interested in zoology or comparative studies.
