**Play in the Wild**

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half title,

2-3

Full title

**4-5**

Pounce, leap, chase, and slide, young animals like to play.

6-7

Red river hog piglets butt heads in frisky shoving matches, run in circles, and turn found objects into toys by tossing them up in the air.

A pair of red panda cubs bat each other with their paws, jump, tackle, and roll around for some rough and tumble fun.

There is still much we don’t know about the animal world, but through careful observations, scientists are discovering how animals play and why.

8-9

**Many young animals ask first before playing.**

10-11

‘Attack’ games can be mistaken for picking a fight, so before they charge and tackle, some young animals invite a sibling or friend to roughhouse with a special signal.

A young chimpanzee swings his head and shoulders from side to side (called gamboling) while smiling and bouncing. That is his way of asking, “Do you want to play with me?” If his friend looks interested, he might hit her lightly on the shoulder and run away. That means, “The game is on!”

Sea lions can’t change their body posture while swimming to show they want to play. Instead one pup approaches another, holding a piece of kelp that serves as a toy. Then quickly he swims away, as if to announce, “Chase me!”

A yellow mongoose pup whistles to his litter mates to invite them to wrestle. Throughout their pouncing and gentle biting the pups continue to whistle, as opposed to growling which means, “this fight is real,” or screaming, which means, “that hurts!”

12-13

**Play helps young animals learn to find food.**

14-15

Through play, some young animals discover where to forage for food or how to catch it.

Artic fox pups jump, jump, jump, as if their legs are springs, when they hear the faintest sound of a lemming running beneath the snow. Catching prey they can’t see isn’t easy, but someday they will be able to judge where to punch through the crusty ice for a much needed meal.

Young capuchin monkeys are curious about everything. Using objects as toys during creative play helps them develop thinking and problem solving skills. In this way, some capuchins even learn how to use rocks as tools to break open hard nuts.

Cheetah cubs crouch and stalk each other, then pounce, swat and bite. Their games are not only fun, they are also important for mastering hunting skills. Cubs who play more are better at catching live prey.

16-17

**Even during play, young animals follow the rules.**

18-19

No one wants to get hurt while playing, even when roughhousing. So animals have to play fair.

Yellow bellied marmot pups and yearlings stand on their hind legs to play-box, nose-push, and knock each other over. Later matches between males will be real and fierce to determine dominance. But for now, no growling or biting!

While scuffling, young rats make a chirping sound, much like our laughing (though it is too high-pitched for our ears to hear). During playful matches, they tickle each other’s necks with their snouts. They never raise their fur to appear large and aggressive, or bite hard, as they do when they are really fighting.

Even grown-ups like to play. When a male lion tussles with his high spirited cub, he may pin her with his huge mouth in a head lock. But he only pretends to bite. Around him, his litter of cubs pounce and attack! But they swat lightly and keep their claws retracted so they don’t scratch.

20-21

**Play can build communities.**

22-23

Through play, young animals, who live in tight communities, learn how to get along.

Young Rhesus monkeys play a lot of contact sports like slapping and brawling. They also love a round of hide-and-seek. They are not only having fun, they are learning how to read each other’s expressions, an important skill for living within a tight-knit social group.

Baby elephants are too bulky to tussle with their bodies. Instead they grapple with their trunks, entwining them, and touching each other all over. If water is nearby, watch out. A trunk makes a perfect spray hose! Physical contact builds connections that last a lifetime.

Living within a pack, where all the individuals must work together to hunt and raise their young, requires a lot of cooperation. Young grey wolf pups develop social skills through games of pounce, wrestle, and tail-tug-of-war. Unlike many animals, wolves love these games even through adulthood, fostering strong bonds. The pack who plays together, stays together.

24-25

**Play can be practice for finding a mate.**

26-27

Male animals often have to compete with one another to breed. The competition can be fierce so many young animals develop important skills through roughhousing.

Red necked wallaby joeys hop, kick, and push each other with their front paws. If mother joins the fun, she stands flat footed, so her powerful legs won’t harm her small joey. When the males grow to adulthood, their boxing matches will turn serious. Wallabies determine dominance and compete for a mate through forceful kicking and shoving matches.

Polar bear cubs stand on their hind legs and battle in mock fights. But they aren’t trying to hurt each other with their sharp teeth and claws. Someday the males will fight for real, ferociously competing for a mate.

Nubian ibex kids spring vertically in the air, jump on each other, and butt heads. These rounds of “King of the Mountain” may prepare male billies for the challenges they face in adulthood. Adult male ibexes compete for a mate by crashing their long horns into each other like battering-rams.

28-29

**Sometimes when playing, young animals have to say they are sorry.**

30-31

It’s natural for excitement to take over. Young animals may accidently hurt or scare their playmates. Then they must apologize.

While mock sparring, a golden jackal kit gets carried away and aggressively bites her sibling. He stops and moves away. When she approaches again, her friendly tail-wag and playful bow say, “I didn’t mean to be so rough.” Usually her sibling trusts her apology and barks and bows in response. They start playing again.

A colobus monkey initiates a good game of tag by slapping her friend’s leg lightly, or even shaking a stick at him. But if she gets too rough her playmate backs away. After the time out, she tries a friendlier, bouncing walk or a gentler slap to see if her friend has forgiven her. She may even take a turn at letting her partner be the one chasing.

Sometimes in the heat of play battle, a young gorilla bites his playmate too hard. His friend then stops and walks away. She squints her eyes and tilts her head as if to say, “That hurt!” To show he is sorry, he puts a hand on her shoulder. He may even groom her until she feels safe and forgives. Then they can resume their game.

32-33

**Play can mean life and death.**

34-35

For many young animals, an energetic start to life increases their chances of living and growing to adulthood.

Feral horse colts frolic, kick up their heels, and chase one another. Their constant game looks like a lot of fun, but their romping has a serious side. Colts who run and leap a lot grow faster, and are less likely to become a predator’s dinner.

Brown bear cubs are naturally curious and see everything they find as potential for making a game. Whether bouncing at the end of a tree limb, or playing a game of tug-of-war with an old piece of elk hide, their creative play builds coordination and teaches them to understand the world around them. The more cubs play, the more likely they are to survive.

Belding’s ground squirrel pups, cuff each other and tumble in mock fist fights. Scientists have observed that friskier pups grow strong and are more likely to become healthier adults than less playful pups. Spirited female pups have a greater chance later of raising pups to adulthood.

36-37

**Play can be just to have fun.**

38-39

Sometimes play is simply enjoyable!

A bottlenose dolphin creates a toy by blowing bubbles through the blowhole at the top of her head. Then, by tossing her head into the vortices, she turns the bubbles into a silvery ring. She even shares it with a friend and they both chase the ring with their noses.

A raven swoops and circles low over a coyote’s head, teasing him into a game of chase. The coyote runs and jumps after him. Sometimes the raven pauses on the ground, waiting for his friend to catch up. Neither are hunting, only loving a game of “catch-me-if-you-can” on a bright day.

Schweeee! A family of river otters never passes up a chance to slide in fresh fallen snow. They aren’t trying to escape from a predator, or find food. They are simply slipping to the bottom of the hill for the joy of it, then running back up to slide down again!

(Cut) Japanese macaques are creative players. In winter, they find entertainment by making snowballs and rolling them downhill. A baby macaque carries his ball up the hill over and over to launch and watch it roll down again.

40-41

Cubs and kits, joeys, and kittens

Young animals like to play… just like you!

42-48 Backmatter

More About the Animals in this Book

**Red river hogs** inhabit rivers and swamps of central Africa. They live in small groups composed of a single adult male, several adult females, and their young. Mothers give birth to an average of two to six piglets. Both mother and father help care for and protect young. They eat roots, nuts, tubers, fruit, grasses, eggs, insects, lizards, and carrion. Hogs use their large muzzles to snuffle about in the soil in search of food, as well as scraping the ground with their tusks.

**Red pandas** are solitary animals, living in the forested, mountainous regions of eastern Himalayas and southwestern China. They spend most of their time in trees to escape jackals and leopards, and to find food. Bamboo makes up to 95 percent of their diet. Mothers give birth to one to four cubs, raising them alone. The cubs stay with their mother until the next litter is born in the following summer. Adults are roughly the size of a domestic cat, though with longer bodies.

**Common chimpanzees** are social and live in groups known as communities. Females bear only one baby at a time. Newborns are helpless, and cling to the fur of the mother’s belly for the first two months. They are dependent on their mother’s milk for up to six years. Chimps communicate with facial expressions, gestures, and a large array of vocalizations. Their “play panting” and grinning look similar to human laughter and smiling. Chimpanzees live in a variety of habitats, including the dry savanna, rainforests, and woodlands of equatorial Africa. They prefer fruit, but will also eat leaves, seeds, blossoms, and bark, insects, and carrion.

**California sea lions** are native to the western coast of North America. They dive up to twelve hundred feet deep in search of fish, octopus, and squid to eat. They can also swim about eighteen miles per hour for short bursts when escaping killer whales and sharks. The females give birth to a single pup and remain on shore for 10 days to nurse them. After this, mothers leave for up to three days at a time to hunt. Pups left on shore gather in nurseries to socialize and play.

**Yellow mongooses** are very social, living in colonies of up to 20 individuals. They may share their underground burrows with ground squirrels or meerkats. If threatened they growl and screech to warn one another or scare off a predator. They bark when playful. Mothers have litters of two to five pups who play nearly constantly. These mongooses feed mainly on insects and other invertebrates, but also hunt amphibians, rodents, and reptiles. They live in the semi-desert scrubland and grasslands of southern Africa.

The **Arctic fox** lives in some of the most frigid extremes on the planet, ranging throughout the Arctic of the Northern Hemisphere. Incredibly hardy, they can survive temperatures as low as –58°F. The color of their coat changes with the seasons, turning from white when the tundra is snow covered, to dark in summer. Their birth rate is linked closely to the population of their main prey, lemmings. When lemmings are abundant, Artic fox can give birth to up to 18 pups, but they will have no pups when food is scarce. Arctic foxes mate for life, and both mother and father help raise their pups.

The **tufted capuchin** is a primate from South America, living mostly in the Amazon basin. They feed mostly on fruits and invertebrates, but will sometimes feed on small lizards, bird chicks, and plant material. Unlike most animals, they have been observed making tools to forage. They have been known to use containers to hold water, sticks to dig, sponges to absorb juice, and stones as hammer and anvil to crack nuts. They are social, forming groups of 8 to 15 individuals that are led by a dominant male.

**Cheetahs** are the fastest land animal, running up to 58 mph for short bursts while hunting. Adult females are solitary, but males remain together in a groups of two to three called a coalition. A mother raises her litter of three to five cubs on her own. When they are about six months old, she will bring live prey for them to practice hunting. They inhabit the dry forests and savannahs of Southern, North and East Africa, and Iran.

**Yellow-bellied marmots** are native to the mountainous regions of southwestern Canada and western United States. Because of the long winters of their high altitude range, they hibernate about eight months of the year. They live in communal burrows, feeding on plants, insects, and bird eggs. Females within a group have three to eight pups. Members of the same colony play together and groom one another. They communicate through whistles, screams, and tooth chatter, as well as body language.

Alongside humans, the **brown rat** is the most successful mammal on the planet, spreading to all continents except Antarctica. These rodents breed throughout the year and females can have up to five litters a year with six to eleven pups. In the wild, they prefer damp environments, such as river banks and are good swimmers. Here they eat grain, insects, snails, fish and mussels, small birds, mammals and reptiles. But they are also highly adaptable to living within towns and cities, scavenging through trash.

The **lion** is the most social of all wild cat species, living in groups of to 40 individuals, called a “pride”. These groups consist of related females, their cubs, sub-adults, and one or more males. The female lions raise the cubs and are also the primary hunters. Males defend the pride from attacking predators. Each female typically gives birth to a litter of one to four cubs every two years. Lions primarily hunt large animals such as zebra and wildebeest, but will also steal kills from hyenas, leopards and other predators. They inhabit the grasslands and savannas of Africa and India.

Native to South, Central, and Southeast Asia, **rhesus macaques** inhabit a wide range of habitats, from grasslands, woodlands, and mountainous regions, also lively close to human settlements. They climb easily, but spend much of their time on the ground. They are also good swimmers. They live in large groups, consisting of 20–200 males and females, called “troops,” interacting with one another by using facial expressions, vocalizations, and body postures. Females usually have one baby each year. Rhesus macaques feed mainly on fruit, but also eat other plant material.

The **African bush elephant** is the largest land animal, with bull males weighing up to 11.5 tons. Females are much smaller, averaging 3.3 tons. Elephants also have the longest pregnancy of any mammal, carrying their babies in the womb for almost 22 months. Cows give birth to one calf every two to four years. Females and their young live in herds of 6 to 70 members. Several family units may join together to form a “clan” consisting of up to several hundred members led by a female matriarch (the eldest female). Adolescent males leave the herd to form bachelor herds. Elephants eat up to 500 pounds of vegetation a day.

The **gray wolf**, also known as timber wolf, is native to the remote wilderness of Eurasia and North America. They are social animal, living in packs composed of a mated pair, their adult offspring, and an average litter of five to six pups. Mated pairs usually remain together for life. The pack cooperates to hunt large prey such as deer, elk, and moose. Wolves also eat smaller mammals, birds, fish, lizards, snakes, and fruit. Pups begin play fighting at the age of 3 weeks.

**Red-necked wallaby** are common to parts of eastern Australia and Tasmania. They are marsupials, giving birth to a single embryonic joey. Tiny, blind, and hairless, the joey crawls into his mother’s pouch immediately after birth to grow for another 280 days. Unlike many animals, mother wallabies will adopt and care for another motherless joey. Wallabies are usually solitary, but will gather when there is an abundance of food and water. They eat at night, foraging on grasses and leaved plants, and sleep during the day.

**Polar bears** are born in land dens, but they spend most of their time on the sea ice within the Arctic Circle. A thick layer of body fat and an outer layer of hollow fur insulates them from freezing temperatures. Polar bears are strong swimmers and hunt mainly seals. They will live on fat reserves when food is scarce. Mothers give birth to one to four, usually two, cubs at a time. Cubs are born weighing less than two pounds, but grow to become the largest carnivorous land mammals on Earth.

**Nubian ibex** live in the desert mountains of the middle east and Northern Africa. They are incredibly agile, swiftly running up and down steep cliffs where few other animals can live. The females live in herds of up to twenty members and give birth to one kid, occasionally twins. Males live in smaller bands of up to eight members, only joining the females during breeding season. Then they clash with each other by charging and ramming their meter long horns together. Ibex eat mainly grasses and leaves.

**Golden jackals** live in bonded breeding pairs. Mothers give birth to one to nine, usually two to four, pups within a den. During the first few weeks, she never leaves her pups, while her mate and yearlings from the previous year help by bringing food. Jackals are highly verbal, calling to each member of the pack through yelps and howls. They feed on rodents, young gazelle, hares, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, insects, eggs, fruit, and carrion. This canine is native to Norther Africa, Southeast Europe, the Middle East and Southern Asia.

**Zanzibar red colobus monkeys** are mainly arboreal (living in trees) within scattered forests of the Zanzibar archipelago. They live in social groups of 40-50 individuals, with members often playing and grooming each other. Mothers have one or two newborns each year, sharing parental care with multiple females of the group. These monkeys eat leaves, many of which contain toxic compounds. To process these, they have an elongated digestive tract, an adaptation which gives them a pronounced potbelly, and eat charcoal, which helps absorb the toxins.

**Mountain gorilla** live in close-knit family groups, called troops, which are led by a dominant male, called a silverback (for the silvery gray hair on his back). The females have only one baby every four to five years. Newborns are tiny and helpless, clinging to their mothers fur for the first several months. When they are older, much of their day is spent chasing one another, wrestling, and swinging from branches. Mountain gorillas eat mainly leaves. They are critically endangered due to habitat loss and illegal hunting. Only two wild populations remain, in the dense mountain rainforest of central Africa.

**Mustangs**, also called **feral horses**, are free-roaming horses that live in the grasslands of the American west. They descended from horses brought to the Americas by the Spanish and live in herds consisting of one stallion, around eight females and their young. Each herd is led by a dominant mare (female) and a stallion (male). In dangerous situations, the head mare will lead her heard to safety, while the stallion stays and fights. Females give birth to one foal (baby) each year. They mostly eat grass and brush.

**Brown bears,** are threatened, but still found in many different habitats of western United States, Canada, and northern Eurasia. The cubs (usually twins) are born tiny, (less than a pound) within a winter den, but grow up to 200 pounds in their first year. They remain with their mother, called a sow, for the first two to three years, in which time she teachers them how to find food such as roots, grasses, fruit, fish, cashed seeds, and carrion. They occasionally hunt.

**Belding's ground squirrel** is a relatively small species of ground squirrel living in mountain alpine and subalpine meadows of the western United States. They eat mostly seeds, nuts, plant material, and mushrooms, but also insects, and carrion. Females do all the parenting as males disperse directly after mating. Related females may share food and burrows. They give birth to a litter of three to eight pups each year. The pups spend 25-28 days below ground before emerging.

The **common bottlenose dolphin** has a larger brain than humans and are highly intelligent. They live in groups, called pods, and communicate with each other by a complex system of squeaks and whistles. They work as a team to harvest schools of fish, eels, squid, and shrimp. Dolphins search for prey primarily using echolocation, by emitting up to 1,000 clicking sounds per second, then listening for the return echoes to determine the location of prey. They are sleek swimmers reaching speeds of 18 miles an hour. This species is found in the tropical oceans and other warm water worldwide.

**Coyotes** are a canine native to North America. They live in packs, consisting of a family unit or unrelated individuals. Pregnant females line a den with grasses and fur pulled from her belly, then give birth to an average litter of six pups. Her mate, and sometimes adult sisters, will bring food back while she remains with the pups. Unlike wolf pups, coyote pups begin seriously fighting prior to engaging in play behavior. By the age of five weeks, pups have established dominance hierarchies, and are by then more likely to play rather than fight. They eat a varied diet of animal meat, and occasionally fruits and vegetables.

**Common ravens** occur over most of the Northern Hemisphere in nearly any habitat. Part of their success is due to their adaptable diet; they feed on carrion, insects, grains, berries, fruit, and small animals. They build their nests on cliffs, in trees, and on tall man-made structures. Juvenile ravens are among the most playful of bird species. They have been observed to slide down snowbanks, drop sticks midair and dive to catch them, and play catch-me-if-you-can with wolves, otters and dogs.

**North American river otter** are renowned for their sense of play. Even through adulthood they wrestle, slide and chase. In early spring, expectant mothers find an abandoned den, made previously by a beaver or other animal, in which to give birth to her litter of one to six pups. Otters are semiaquatic, living on both land and water. The eat mostly fish, but also consume amphibians, freshwater clams, mussels, snails, small turtles and crayfish. They are widespread along waterways throughout much of North America.

Glossary

aggressive - Behavior intended to increase an animal’s dominance or rank

blowhole - The nostril of a dolphin (or whale) on the top of its head.

breed - The process of selecting a mate.

canine - an animal in the dog family.

carrion - The decaying flesh of dead animals.

coordination - The ability to use different parts of the body together smoothly and efficiently.

dominance - When an animal achieves a higher rank or status in its group

forage - To search for food

gamboling - An animal swinging his head and shoulders from side to side

pack - A group of animals operating together

predator - An animal that kills and eats other animals (the prey)

prey - -An animal that is killed and eaten by another animal (the predator)

retracted - When an animal’s claws are drawn into their paws (so as not to scratch)

siblings - A brother or sister having one or more parents in common.

snout - The projecting nose and mouth of an animal

stalk - To quietly and patiently hunt another animal.

vortices - A mass of whirling fluid and bubbles.

yearlings - An animal one year old, or in its second year.

Sources

Good Websites for More Information