

LEVELED BOOK • R

Wonders of Nature



MULTI
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J.O.R

Written by Cheryl Ryan

Wonders of Nature



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Introduction

The world is full of strange and interesting animals. Some animals look unusual or have special abilities. Let's look at some of these strange animals and learn what makes them wonders of nature.

Archerfish

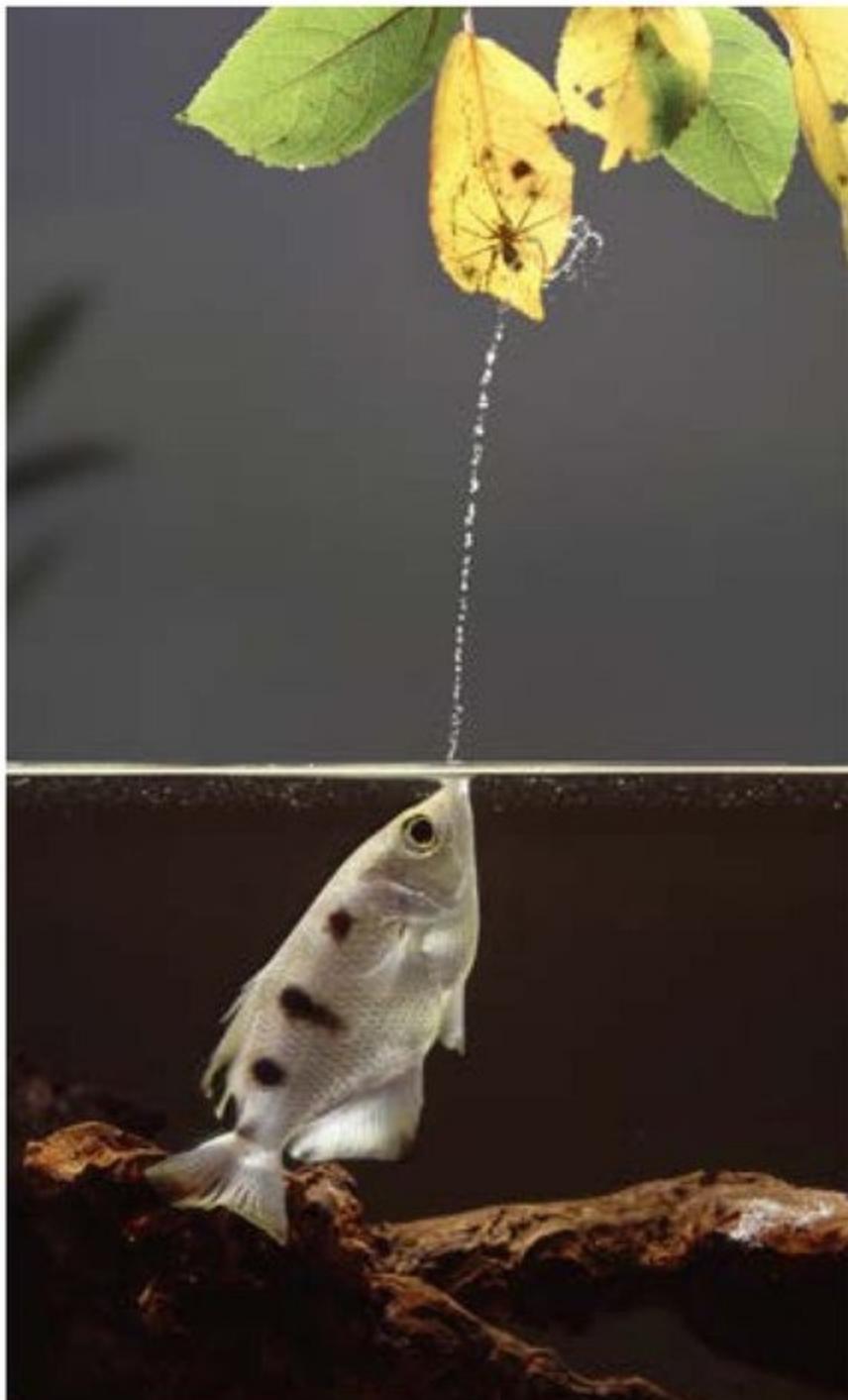
An archerfish squirts drops of water at an insect or spider to knock it off a leaf that hangs over the water. The archerfish forms a

tube with its tongue and the roof of its mouth and then shoots drops of water through the tube.

When a bug falls into the water, the archerfish eats it. Because the archerfish has a flat body, it can swim right under its prey and get into position without being noticed.

Sometimes an archerfish

leaps out of the water to catch a bug instead of squirting water at it.





Trap-Door Spider

A trap-door spider lives in a sticky underground tunnel with a hidden door. The spider's body produces silk, which it mixes with dirt to make the door. The silk in the door helps keep water out of the spider's tunnel when it rains. When an insect passes close to the door, the trap-door spider senses its movements and jumps out to grab it. Female trap-door spiders stay near their tunnels for their entire lives. Their offspring leave to build their own tunnels nearby.

Beaver

Beavers chew through tree trunks with their sharp teeth. Beavers use tree trunks, branches, mud, clay, and stones to build dams in rivers and streams. The dams create ponds where beavers build their homes, which are called lodges. By building dams, beavers create **wetlands**, which are **habitats** for other **mammals** as well as for birds, fish, turtles, and frogs. Wetlands protect the **environment** by preventing **erosion**, soaking up floodwater, and acting as filters to clean water.





Three-Wattled Bell Bird

The three-wattled bell bird lives in Central America. Its call sounds like a large, heavy bell ringing. Female three-wattled bell birds are green, and males are brown with white heads. Three long, pointed flaps of skin called *wattles* grow from the male's beak. The bell bird scares away enemies with its loud call and by shaking its wattles. The bell birds' favorite food is the wild avocado. Bell birds **migrate** to different elevations because avocados ripen at different times of year at different heights in the mountains.



Bower Bird

Bower birds live in Australia and New Guinea. To attract female birds, male bower birds spend up to ten months building tall piles of twigs and branches around the bases of trees. They decorate these piles, called bowers, with shells, feathers, flowers, and fruit. Sometimes they even paint the walls with plant juice. Bower birds have also been known to use film cases, toothbrushes, and other objects made by people as part of their decorations. When the male birds finish decorating, the female birds choose the bowers they like best.

Chameleon

Chameleons are lizards that can change their skin color to blend in with their surroundings. They can even change color to show how they feel. Chameleons catch insects with their long tongues, which can be twice as long as their bodies. Chameleons can point each of their eyes in a different direction at the same time to help them see all around them. When they spot an insect they want to eat, chameleons focus both of their eyes forward to help them aim their tongues.



Flying Dragon

Flying dragons are small lizards that can glide through the air, usually from tree to tree, by opening folds of skin on the sides of their bodies like wings. The wings are brightly colored and have spots and stripes on them. Flying dragons use their sticky tongues to catch and eat insects, mainly ants and termites. They can glide long distances and can even turn around in the air to land on the same tree they took off from.





Leaf Insect

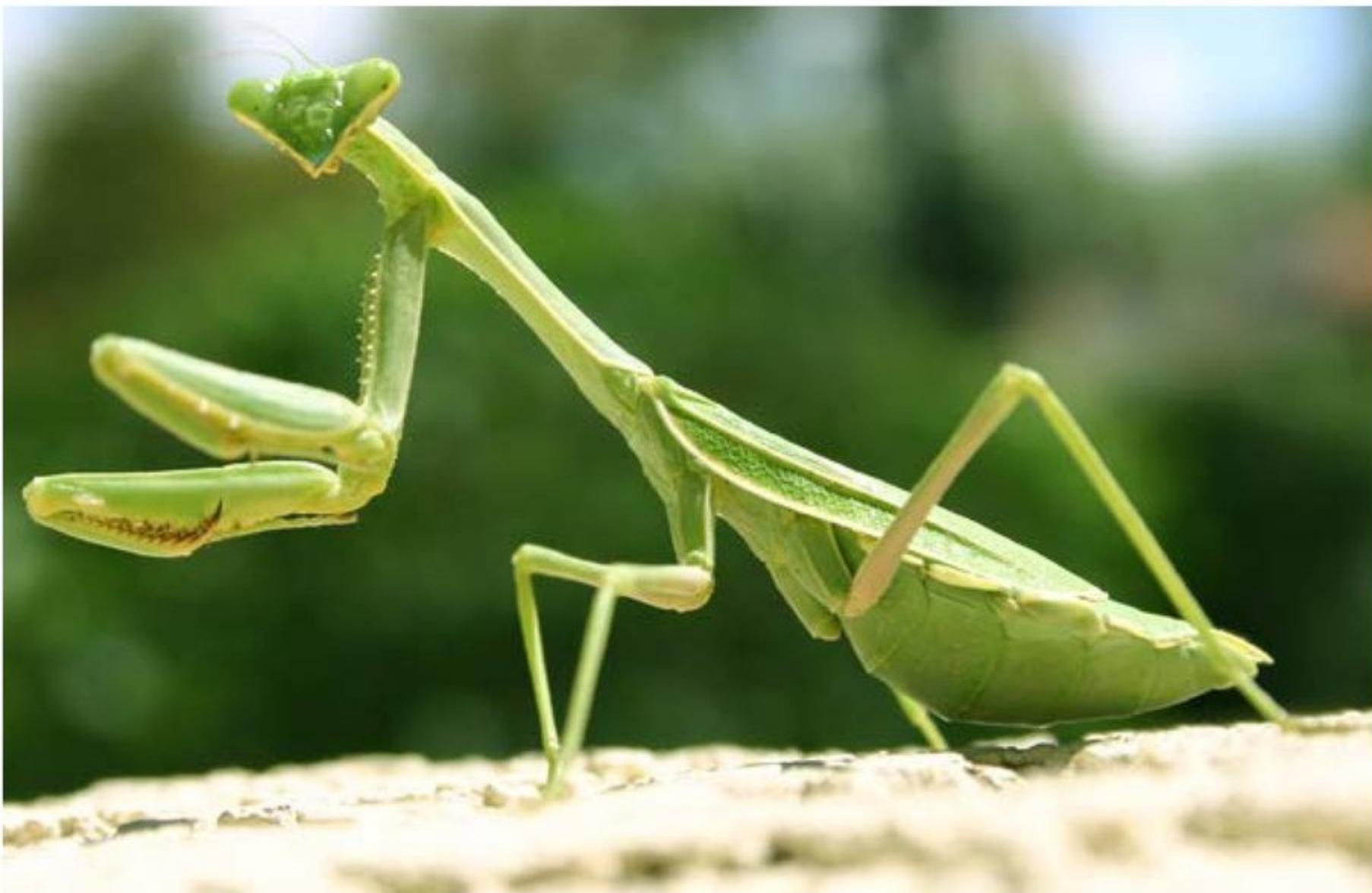
Leaf insects live in hot places. Their bodies, wings, and legs look like leaves, which allows them to blend in with real leaves on trees. Their leaf-shaped bodies sometimes appear to have damage from insects eating them, but the markings are just **camouflage**. Leaf insects will even move back and forth to look like leaves swaying in the breeze. Leaf-insect eggs look like seeds, which helps to fool predators that eat eggs. The eggs can take more than a year to hatch. Baby leaf insects are red, but when they start eating leaves, they turn green.

Leaf-Rolling Weevil

In the summer, the female leaf-rolling weevil rolls a leaf into a cone shape. She takes up to two hours getting the leaf just right. She stops every couple of turns to bite wedges and add folds to help hold the cone together.



When finished, she lays her eggs inside the cone and then closes the open end. When the leaf falls in autumn, it carries the eggs with it. The leaf hides and protects the eggs until they hatch. When the **larvae** hatch, they eat the dead leaf.



Praying Mantis

The praying mantis often holds its front legs in a praying position. Mantises hide on plants to catch their food. Some praying mantises are green to blend in with leaves, while others that live in the desert are the color of sand. The praying mantis is **carnivorous** and eats many types of insects as well as small frogs, lizards, and mice. A praying mantis can even catch and eat small birds such as hummingbirds. A mantis has five eyes and can turn its head to look directly behind its body. Its two large eyes can see shapes and colors, and its three small ones just sense light and dark.

Mole

Moles **burrow** underground to find and eat earthworms. They also eat beetles, slugs, and snails. Moles have big appetites and can eat their own body weight's worth of food in a single day! After digging many interconnecting tunnels that form a maze, a mole builds its nest deep inside. Because its fur points up, a mole can move backward and forward in a tunnel



without getting dirt trapped in its coat. Moles have tiny eyes, but they are not blind.



Side view of a mole's nest and tunnels

Sea Dragon

Sea dragons are small fish that are related to sea horses. Their bodies have many parts that look like the stems and leaves of seaweed. They blend in with ocean plants, which helps them catch food and hide from enemies. The female lays many bright pink eggs on the male sea dragon's tail, and the male carries the eggs until they hatch. Sea dragons don't use their "leaves" to swim. Instead, they use small, clear fins on their necks and backs that are very hard to see.



Conclusion

Interesting animals come in many shapes and sizes. Their special looks and abilities help all these wonders of nature to survive.

Glossary

burrow (<i>v.</i>)	to dig a tunnel (p. 14)
camouflage (<i>n.</i>)	something that helps disguise an animal so it can blend in with its surroundings (p. 11)
carnivorous (<i>adj.</i>)	meat-eating (p. 13)
environment (<i>n.</i>)	the natural world (p. 6)
erosion (<i>n.</i>)	the gradual wearing away of rock or soil by water, wind, or ice (p. 6)
habitats (<i>n.</i>)	the natural environments of plants or animals (p. 6)
larvae (<i>n.</i>)	baby animals that go through major body changes before they look like adult members of their kind (p. 12)
mammals (<i>n.</i>)	warm-blooded animals with backbones and hair or fur that nurse their young and have babies that are born live (p. 6)
migrate (<i>v.</i>)	to move from one habitat or region to another at a certain time each year (p. 7)
wetlands (<i>n.</i>)	areas of land that are marshy or swampy (p. 6)

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