

## Let Us Read a Wonderful Story...\*

*Sujata Deshpande*



*Every Creature Has a Story: What Science Reveals About Animal Behaviour*  
**Janaki Lenin**  
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 Pages: 296 (Hardbound)  
 ₹599/-

The book *Every Creature Has a Story* by Janaki Lenin is a delight to those who like animals—you could be a pet parent, a student of animal behaviour, a researcher trying to decipher how animals do what they do and why, or anyone who loves to know more about the creatures with whom we share this planet. Those who do not like animals should also read this book because it will tell you how the process of evolution has made the world of animals including ourselves so bizarre and amazing, and how scientists discover it. You will see the animal world like never before, and there is the danger that you will start liking it!

The book is a collection of 50 short, independent essays, each one talking about the science behind animal behaviour in about three to five pages. Written in a simple, elegant, and witty style, these essays will make you chuckle, smile, wonder, and think. Although

free from technical jargon, they are not oversimplified. The author explains the logic behind the science that has revealed many intriguing aspects of animal behaviour and describes how scientists have uncovered these aspects. She also provides references to the original work for the interested reader.

It is said not to judge a book by its cover. But I am tempted to judge this one by its cover! This hardbound edition has a pleasing dark blue cover with beautiful coloured drawings of animals and plants, and inscriptions in silver and white. It makes you hold the book, admire the drawings and of course, flip the pages. Open the contents' page and the titles of the essays will arouse your curiosity. It will lead you into the fascinating world of animal behaviour. Just to give you a few examples—the very first essay 'Good Singers Make the Best Dads' talks about bird songs, sexual selection and Darwinian fitness. The essay on 'The Giraffe's Neck Solution' talks about the problems of having an excessively long neck and how evolution has shaped the Giraffe's physiology to overcome the problem. The essay on 'Sticklebacks Hold Their Waters' describes how male stickleback fish hold their urine for the entire length of their breeding season! The book narrates stories of a wide variety of animals, from snails, octopuses, spiders and insects, to fish, frogs, reptiles, birds and mammals. Each essay starts with a puzzle—something about the animal

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## BOOK REVIEW

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that we find bizarre, curious, surprising or perplexing. Then the author explains how scientists have solved the puzzle and found the answer. Often, answering one question leads to many other questions, or the answer is not complete. Janaki Lenin points that out too, communicating the basic investigative nature of a scientific endeavour.

In recent years, there is an increasing trend of books written, for the layperson, by scientists on their research topics or by science communicators explaining scientific research. I find such books very useful in teaching undergraduate students. These books explain complex scientific topics in an easy to comprehend manner to undergraduate students who are not yet used to or are just getting acquainted with reading research papers. At the same time, these books provide a list of research papers and highly technical books on related topics.

If the students, and their teachers as well, read such books, they will get the basic idea of the topic in a palatable manner. They are then likely to find it easier to understand detailed research papers and technical books. These books and especially the book reviewed here also set excellent standards for aspiring science communicators on how to get on with the business. I teach animal behaviour to undergraduate science students and students of humanities. I am going to recommend this book to my students. I hope they, and the readers of this article, will find the book interesting!

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