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Edited by Mary Green

Excerpt

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1 Wild things

The texts in this section explore our relationships with wildlife, through fiction, non-fiction, poetry and drama. Some, such as David Attenborough's *Life in Cold Blood*, reveal a lifelong commitment to the study of animals and their capacity for adaptation and survival. Others show humans pitted against creatures or concerned for their welfare. Most texts are celebratory, and all reveal a fascination with the untamed.

As you read these texts, you can consider:

- the diversity of living creatures
- our close connection with wildlife
- our responsibility to the natural world.

Activities

- 1 Wildlife television programmes have remained popular since television was first broadcast. Draw up a list of reasons why you think so many people watch them.
- 2 **a** People say that domestic animals are only partly tamed, that they soon resort to the wild if they need to. What wild features can you recognise in your own pets or your friends' pets?
b The Animal Welfare Act was passed in England in 2006 and emphasises that both domestic and wild animals have needs and entitlements. In what ways do you think animals are entitled to the same treatment as humans?
- 3 We often give animals human traits. For example, we think of pandas as cuddly. Work in a small group and think of four animals to which we give human traits. Now consider why this is unfair to the animal and how it might affect our treatment of them.
- 4 It is often said that humans are the most dangerous of all animals. Conduct a class debate in which you discuss whether this is true, and why.

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2 Wild things

My Life with the Chimpanzees

by Jane Goodall

Jane Goodall has spent most of her life in Gombe National Park, in Africa, studying colonies of chimpanzees. In this extract from her autobiography she recounts how she first made contact with the chimps – or rather, how the chimps made contact with her.

Soon after she'd left, I got back one evening and was greeted by an excited Dominic. He told me that a big male chimp had spent an hour feeding on the fruit of one of the oil-nut palms growing in the camp clearing. Afterward he had climbed down, gone over to my tent, and taken the bananas that had just been put there for my supper.

This was fantastic news. For months the chimps had been running off when they saw me – now one had actually visited my camp! Perhaps he would come again.

The next day I waited, in case he did. What a luxury to lie in until 7:00 A.M. As the hours went by I began to fear that the chimp wouldn't come. But finally, at about four in the afternoon, I heard a rustling in the undergrowth opposite my tent, and a black shape appeared on the other side of the clearing.

I recognized him at once. It was the handsome male with the dense white beard. I had already named him David Greybeard. Quite calmly he climbed into the palm and feasted on its nuts. And then he helped himself to the bananas I had set out for him.

There were ripe palm nuts on that tree for another five days, and David Greybeard visited three more times and got lots of bananas.

A month later, when another palm tree in camp bore ripe fruit, David again visited us. And on one of those occasions he actually took a banana from my hand. I could hardly believe it.

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From that time on things got easier for me. Sometimes when I met David Greybeard out in the forest, he would come up to see if I had a banana hidden in my pocket. The other chimps stared with amazement. Obviously I wasn't as dangerous as they had thought. Gradually they allowed me closer and closer.

It was David Greybeard who provided me with my most exciting observation. One morning, near the Peak, I came upon him squatting on a termite mound. As I watched, he picked a blade of grass, poked it into a tunnel in the mound, and then withdrew it. The grass was covered with termites all clinging on with their jaws. He picked them off with his lips and scrunched them up. Then he fished for more. When his piece of grass got bent, he dropped it, picked up a little twig, stripped the leaves off it, and used that.

I was really thrilled. David had used objects as tools! He had also changed a twig into something more suitable for fishing termites. He had actually *made* a tool. Before this observation, scientists had thought that only humans could make tools. Later I would learn that chimpanzees use more objects as tools



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than any creature except for us. This finding excited Louis Leakey more than any other.

In October the dry season ended and it began to rain. Soon the golden mountain slopes were covered with lush green grass. Flowers appeared, and the air smelled lovely. Most days it rained just a little. Sometimes there was a downpour. I loved being out in the forest in the rain. And I loved the cool evenings when I could lace the tent shut and make it cozy inside with a storm lantern. The only trouble was that everything got damp and grew mold. Scorpions and giant poisonous centipedes sometimes appeared in the tent – even, a few times, a snake. But I was lucky – I never got stung or bitten.

The chimpanzees often seemed miserable in the rain. They looked cold, and they shivered. Since they were clever enough to use tools, I was surprised that they had not learned to make shelters. Many of them got coughs and colds. Often, during heavy rain, they seemed irritable and bad tempered.

Once, as I walked through thick forest in a downpour, I suddenly saw a chimp hunched in front of me. Quickly I stopped. Then I heard a sound from above. I looked up and there was a big chimp there, too. When he saw me he gave a loud, clear wailing *wraaaaah* – a spine-chilling call that is used to threaten a dangerous animal. To my right I saw a large black hand shaking a branch and bright eyes glaring threateningly through the foliage. Then came another savage *wraaaaah* from behind. Up above, the big male began to sway the vegetation. I was surrounded. I crouched down, trying to appear as non-threatening as possible.

Suddenly a chimp charged straight toward me. His hair bristled with rage. At the last minute he swerved and ran off. I stayed still. Two more chimps charged nearby. Then, suddenly, I realized I was alone again. All the chimps had gone.

Only then did I realize how frightened I had been. When I stood up my legs were trembling! Male chimps, although

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they are only four feet tall when upright, are at least three times stronger than a grown man. And I weighed only about ninety pounds. I had become very thin with so much climbing in the mountains and only one meal a day. That incident took place soon after the chimps had lost their initial terror of me but before they had learned to accept me calmly as part of their forest world. If David Greybeard had been among them, they probably would not have behaved like that, I thought.

After my long days in the forests I looked forward to supper. Dominic always had it ready for me when I got back in the evenings. Once a month he went into Kigoma¹ with Hassan. They came back with new supplies, including fresh vegetables and fruit and eggs. And they brought my mail – that was something I really looked forward to.

After supper I would get out the little notebook in which I had scribbled everything I had seen while watching the chimps during the day. I would settle down to write it all legibly into my journal. It was very important to do that every evening, while it was all fresh in my mind. Even on days when I climbed back to sleep near the chimps, I always wrote up my journal first.

Gradually, as the weeks went by, I began to recognize more and more chimpanzees as individuals. Some, like Goliath, William, and old Flo, I got to know well, because David Greybeard sometimes brought them with him when he visited camp. I always had a supply of bananas ready in case the chimps arrived.

Once you have been close to chimps for a while they are as easy to tell apart as your classmates. Their faces look different, and they have different characters. David Greybeard, for example, was a calm chimp who liked to keep out of trouble. But he was also very determined to get his own way. If he arrived in camp and couldn't find any bananas, he would walk into my

¹**Kigoma** a town and port (by a lake) in Western Tanzania

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tent and search. Afterward, all was chaos. It looked as though some burglar had raided the place! Goliath had a much more excitable, impetuous temperament. William, with his long-shaped face, was shy and timid.

Old Flo was easy to identify. She had a bulbous nose and ragged ears. She came to camp with her infant daughter, whom I named Fifi, and her juvenile son, Figan. Sometimes adolescent Faben came, too. It was from Flo that I first learned that in the wild, female chimps have only one baby every five or six years. The older offspring, even after they have become independent, still spend a lot of time with their mothers, and all the different family members help one another.

Further reading

Have you seen the film *Gorillas in the Mist*, in which Sigourney Weaver plays Dian Fossey, a naturalist who worked with mountain gorillas? The film was adapted from the book of the same name written by Dian Fossey (Phoenix, 2001), which you may like to read. Goodall is also the author of *Africa in My Blood: an Autobiography in Letters: The Early Years* (Houghton Mifflin, 2001) about the start of her life in Africa.

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Maninagar Days 7

Maninagar Days

by Sujata Bhatt

Several of Sujata Bhatt's poems bridge the gap between humans and wildlife. The verses below come from the longer poem *Maninagar Days*. In it she depicts the emotional impact that wildlife can have in childhood.

They are always there
just as pigeons or flies
can be *always there*
and the children have to fight them off,
especially during those hot May afternoons
when they dare to jump down from the trees
into the cool shaded spots, the corners between
the canna flower beds
still moist from the mornings watering.

Monkeys in the garden –
I'm talking about rhesus monkeys¹
the colour of dirt roads and khaki
and sometimes even of honey.
Rhesus monkeys that travel in small groups,
extended families; constantly feuding brothers, sisters,
uncles, aunts, cousins screaming through
the trees – while the grandmother sits farther away
sadly, holding on to the sleepy newborn.
Somehow they manage to make peace
Before every meal.

¹**Rhesus monkey** a small brown or grey monkey, with a pink face

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Now and then a solitary langur;
the Hanuman-monkey,² crossing the terrace
with the importance of someone going to the airport.
A lanky dancer's steps
with black hands, black feet
sharp as black leather gloves and black leather shoes
against the soft grey body.
Sharp
and yet delicate
as if they were brushed-stroked in
with a Japanese flourish.
And black-faced too,
with thick tufts of silver grey eyebrows,
a bushy chin. So aloof
he couldn't be bothered
with anyone.

Further reading

Try reading the complete poem *Maninagar Days*, in which the relationship between the monkeys and the children is explored more deeply. You will find it in *Monkey Shadows* (Carcanet Press, 1991).

What other poems do you know about animals? You could read some in the *Faber Book of Beasts*, compiled by Paul Muldoon (Faber and Faber, 1998). There are numerous examples.

²**Hanuman** Hindu monkey god

Kite

by Melvin Burgess

Melvin Burgess has written many novels for young people, including *Junk*, about teenage addiction, which won the Carnegie Medal.

In *Kite*, Taylor Mase's father is a gamekeeper, employed by the domineering and cruel Reg Harris. The Mase family is dependent on Harris not only for their livelihood but also for their home. Teddy Harris, Harris's elderly uncle, values nature and strongly opposes his nephew's attitude to wildlife.

Gordon's Tower was a round stone tower built a hundred and fifty years before. It was a folly; it had no use but to be looked at, and looked from. If you climbed to the battlements on the top you could see for miles. The top of the hill where the tower stood was overgrown with brambles and young trees, but on the lower slopes were full-grown trees. At the bottom of the hill, in a dip in the land, where the crowns of the trees were hidden by the surrounding wood, the kites had built their nest in a slender oak tree. It was the first nest built by kites outside Wales in over thirty years.

Taylor stood at the foot of the slender grey trunk of the oak tree. Even though he was alone he felt a thousand eyes on him: Teddy Harris, Alan, and every bird in the woods. Everything alive seemed to be judging him.

He reached out and touched the rough bark.

He thought: this tree of all trees. This place, these hands, this boy. Above him sat a kite on her eggs. Even in Wales there were only a handful of such nests. The tree was holy.

But Taylor had not come in praise. He felt sick with greed. He stared up into the trembling green canopy. He tried to soak everything in; he wanted to remember this moment forever. But he was too scared to concentrate. The eyes in his imagination disturbed him.

For a happy moment he thought he was going to be too scared to do it, but then he thought: they're going to kill it anyway.

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He was only following orders. He put a foot on a cleft in the trunk and began to climb.

Harris had found Taylor the day before as he walked home from school. He clicked his tongue sympathetically and put an arm on his shoulder as they walked together down the road. 'Pesky relatives!' he said. 'Pesky, pesky relatives! My uncle, your dad. What a pair!' He grinned and chuckled without amusement. 'Tell you what, though . . . ' He bent close to Taylor's ear. 'I'm a little worried about your father,' he said in a little worried voice. 'I'd hate my uncle to catch him at that nest, you see. He'd be out of a job; you'd be out of a house. It is my house you live in, after all.' He smiled and winked. 'It's better for you to do it, you know. Of course your dad just has your best interests at heart. But I'm thinking of him. Here . . . ' He took a ten shilling note out of his pocket and stuffed it into Taylor's pocket. 'Tomorrow afternoon. It's all clear. Uncle's away, your dad'll be busy. I'll see to that.'

Harris stood up, winked, and was gone before Taylor could say a word.

Taylor knew it wasn't right and he hated Harris all the more for going behind his father's back. But he knew at once he was going to do it anyway. And not for Harris, either, although the ten bob¹ would be handy. Taylor was doing it for himself.

He wanted those eggs more than anything else on earth.

As he climbed, Taylor had a picture in his mind of the moment his head would appear over the edge of the nest. It would be a page from a history book. There would be the great bird, caught in her secrecy. He would stare at her and she would start out of her nest like an eagle.

But of course the kite heard him coming. She left the nest almost as soon as he lifted off the ground and all he caught was the briefest of glimpses. A great shape disappeared silently

¹**ten bob** archaic slang meaning ten shillings