

My Favorite Animal Family

By Dennis Knight

They are an adaptable species, and they populate all continents and climates. They have an incredible range and some individual members have been known to travel back and forth across vast territories, often from continent to continent and even around the earth. It is not unusual to see some scaling the highest peaks and others cavorting in the depths of the ocean.

They are typically carnivorous and employ all manner of ways to vanquish and feast on other animals, yet many shun meat and subsist on fruits and vegetables. Their choices are wide because of their dental structure which features canines for the ripping and tearing of meat and vegetable, incisors for biting, and molars for chewing and grinding. Most partake of a combination of meats and vegetation, and seem to like a variety of each in their diets.

They come in many colors and shades. Their manes may be short or long, and may vary from yellows and whites to reds and blacks and browns. Recently young adult specimens have been spotted in parrot-like purples and greens which appear to be evolutionary mutations because it is rare to find such adaptations in more mature members of the species.

As ubiquitous as the common house fly, they are known to spread disease, pestilence and mayhem. They tend to colonize and often struggle with each other for power, forging powerful alliances and battling to the death for territory and dominion.

It is commonly held that they mate for life, and many pairs do, but they are fickle and often their relationships become confused, entangled or angry and the partnerships terminate. They seem quite jealous and possessive, and even after family units dissolve uneasy relationships seem to linger for years.

And yet, my favorite animals can be curious, charming and attractive. They are quite social and frequently share their habitats with other species, particularly canines and felines.

They arrange their plumages to attract mates. Unlike most other species, members of both genders preen and posture, and often employ melodious vocalizations to promote and advance attachments. Chirping and cooing are an attractive part of their lexicon, but they grunt and growl as well. Flirting couples try combinations of all the above.

Their offspring are reared in a variety of ways. Most of them grow up in a protected and nourishing environment that continues until they reach maturity or even longer. Others seem to suffer from neglect or abandonment from early in life.

The members of my favorite animal family are often discouraging and frustrating, disappointing, irritating, frightening and maddening. Yet they can be joyful, captivating and entertaining. For a real good look at them, I suggest you visit any zoo in the world. In fact, I hope you will join me for a visit this afternoon to the Denver Zoo where I plan to sit on a park bench and just watch them roam and do all the crazy and silly things they do, my favorite animals, the humans.