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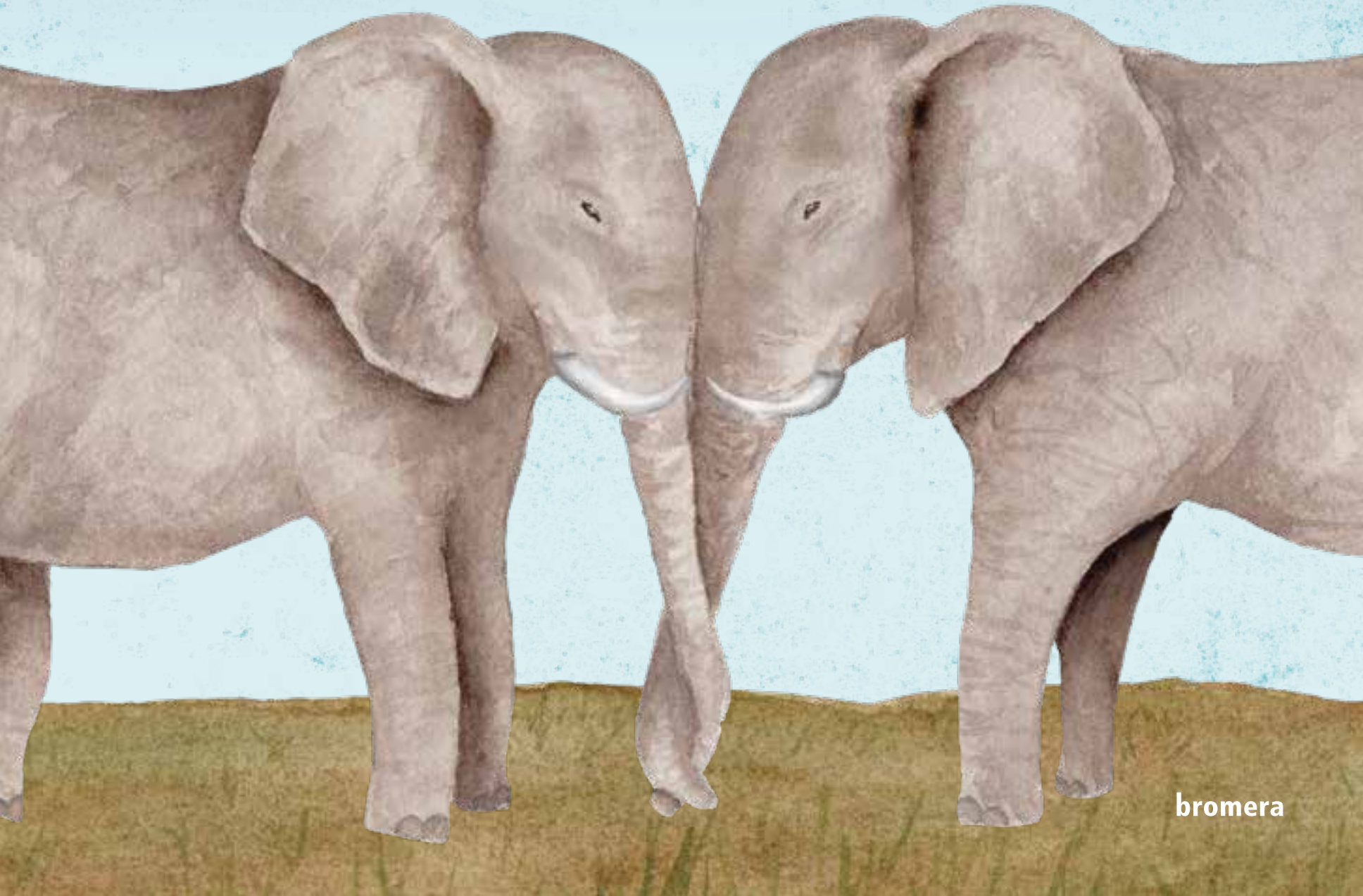
UP CLOSE

30 stories that will change the way you look at animals



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To David Attenborough,
Jane Goodall and Jordi Sabater Pi,
role models.

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UP CLOSE

30 stories that will change the way you look at animals

Translated by
Andrew McDougall

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Getting to know nature up close in order to love and protect it

We live on an amazing planet in a small corner of the Milky Way, a little galaxy in an infinite universe. On our planet there are oceans and mountains, volcanoes and valleys, beaches and blue skies, deep seas and tropical jungles. And all these **ecosystems** are full of living beings: micro-organisms, fungi, vegetation and animals.

Animals are part of nature. Nature is everything that changes and exists without being made by humans, who are slightly different animals because we have complex technologies and can transform the planet.

All living beings, ecosystems and natural phenomena (like rain, earthquakes, snow and volcanic eruptions) are part of nature. Admiring the flight of a bird, listening to the sound of waves, stroking the trunk of a tree, smelling wet earth and watching a line of ants marching to their nest are all ways of remembering that us humans form part of a living whole. So is finding out how animals live. We mustn't forget that nature is fragile and we have to look after it. If we do, it will look after us too.

Within nature, there are things that do not move by themselves, like rocks, and also living beings, like animals. Living beings need to obtain energy and resources from their environment to survive. That's called metabolism. We are born, we grow, we reproduce and we die. We are capable of adapting to changes in the environment and evolving over time. A rock can change, eroded by wind or rain. But it doesn't need to eat, it doesn't grow by itself, it doesn't actively react to external stimuli, nor can it reproduce.

Living beings can be single-cell organisms, plants, fungi or animals. Unlike paramecia, ferns or milk cap mushrooms, however, us animals have a nervous system. Nerves are like a network inside our bodies that allow us to move, feel and think. In many animals, this network is connected to the brain, the organ that coordinates everything.

Thanks to the nervous system we have a variety of behaviours. These are complex and flexible responses to our environment and can vary according to our experience. That's why animals can move voluntarily, are able to learn, have memory, take decisions, feel pain and joy, love and communicate with each other.

Behaviours accompany us for our whole lives, from the moment we're conceived until we die. While we're alive, we cannot avoid having behaviours and reactions. Even if we're not moving or even awake. Because staying still or sleeping are also behaviours.

Graus de perill d'extinció de les espècies

There isn't enough data to know the species' situation.

Little to worry about. Large populations. No immediate risk.

Almost threatened. They could be at risk if their situation worsens.

Vulnerable. There is an high danger of extinction in the medium term.

In danger. Very high risk of extinction.

In critical danger. Extinction is imminent.

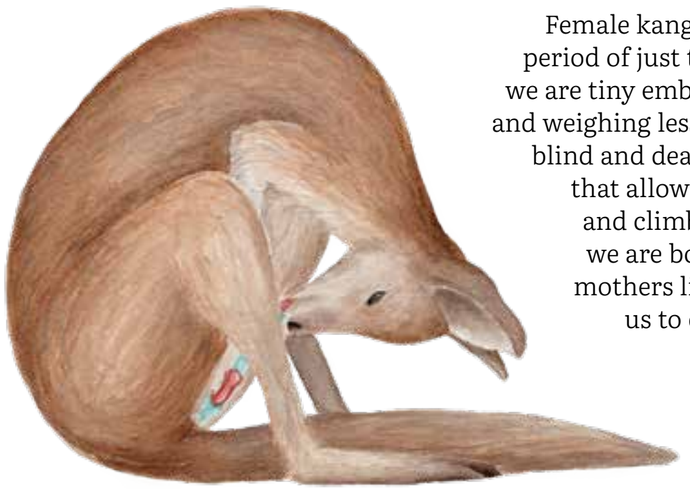
In this book you will find lots of behaviours and many different animals.

Scientists believe that there are between five and ten million species of animals in the world, of which we have only discovered and named one-and-a-half million. And that's just the current species! There are many more that aren't around anymore and we'll never meet, like the tyrannosaurus or the mammoth. These wonderful animals disappeared many years ago, but others became extinct more recently, such as Lonesome George, the last Pinta Island tortoise from the Galápagos islands, who died in 2012.

Some of the animals you'll meet in this book could also disappear soon. If you look at the coloured dot next to their name, you'll see how serious a risk of extinction there is for each species.

HOW ARE KANGAROOS BORN?

Kangaroos live in Australia and we are marsupials. That means that the females have a **pouch**, a kind of bag on their stomach where the young develop until we are big enough.

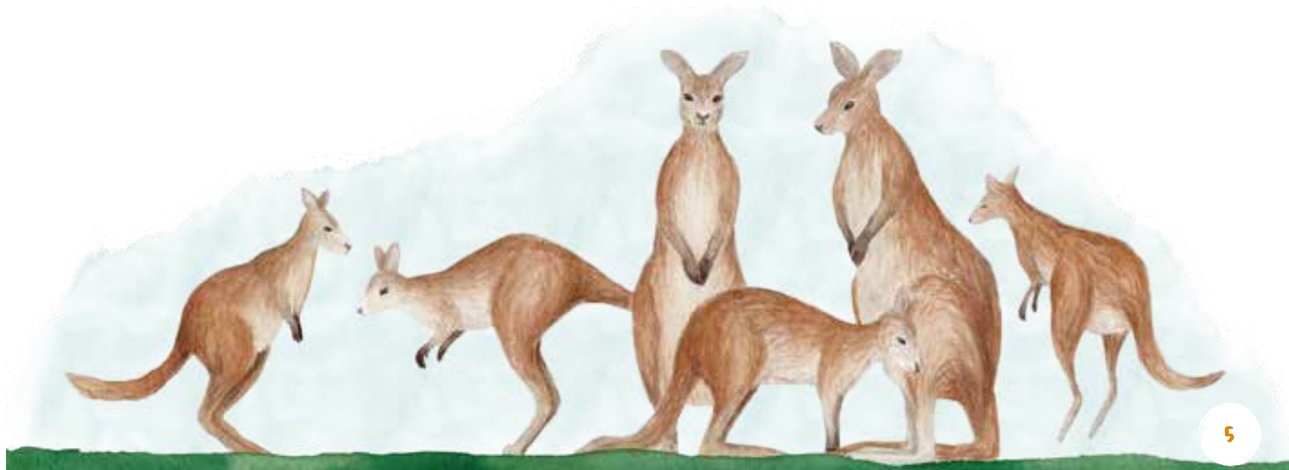


Female kangaroos have a very short gestation period of just thirty days. When joeys are born, we are tiny embryos, measuring two centimetres and weighing less than one gram. We are hairless, blind and deaf. But we have strong little hands that allow us to cling onto our mother's fur and climb through from the cloaca, where we are born, to the pouch. To help us, our mothers lick their fur and create a path for us to climb up, which the embryos can follow, making a big effort.

Once inside the pouch, warm and protected, we latch onto a teat (mothers have four!) and begin to suckle. The pouch is covered by a soft, smooth skin and it's perfect. Furthermore, it can close so we don't follow out when our mothers jump.

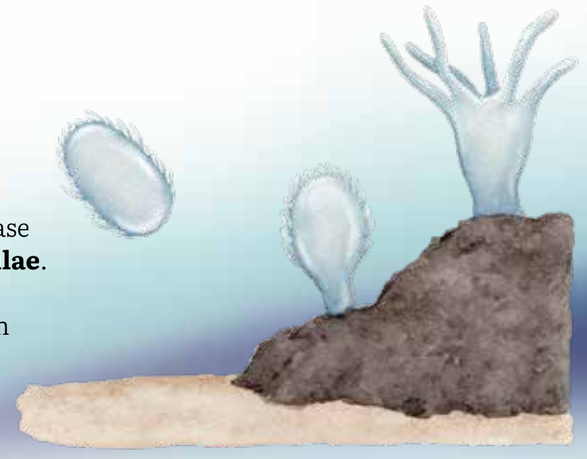
Mothers only have one joey per birth, the one inside the pouch, but meanwhile they can have another embryo in their womb, a hidden embryo, that can develop whenever she wants. She can also have an older joey, who no longer uses the pouch but still needs to suckle. The mother's milk is different according to the age of her joeys. For the youngest, the milk is rich in protein and fats. While for the oldest it is less nutritious. This is called differential lactation and is very rare in the animal world.

When we're a bit bigger, we can poke our heads out of the pouch. And at eight months we can jump around our mothers, although we still run for the pouch if there is any danger!



HOW DO IMMORTAL JELLYFISH GROW OLD?

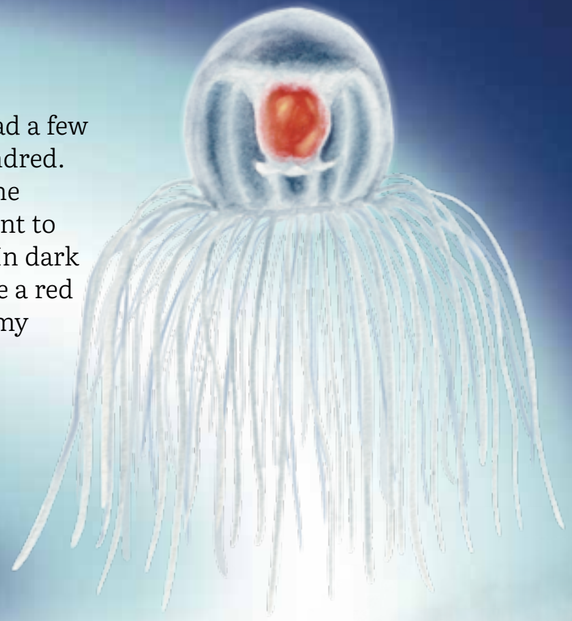
Our species is called *Turritopsis dohrnii*. Despite our striking name, we're tiny, with an umbrella the size of a pea. We live in all mild and tropical seas. In the Mediterranean we are very common. Like all jellyfish, we are born from eggs. In the first phase of our life, we are minuscule larva called **planulae**. We swim to attach ourselves to rocks. Then we become **polyps**. And when we grow up, we turn into jellyfish and swim again, roaming the sea.



My life is very simple and yet I am the most extraordinary animal in the world. Because, instead of dying, I am able to transform myself and repeat my life infinitely. When I grow old, my lovely bell-shaped umbrella is worn, my tentacles are weaker, everything is deteriorated. My body shrinks and I again become the planula I once was.

Everything starts over. The water drags me to a rock I can latch onto and then grow into a polyp again. After a while, I'll become a jellyfish once more, grow older and reproduce myself. And then relive my childhood all over again.

When I began my free jellyfish stage, I only had a few tentacles, whereas I now have almost one hundred. Sometimes I let the current pull me around the water, while at other times I move where I want to go, expanding and contracting my umbrella. In dark waters, I am almost invisible. You can only see a red spot inside of my transparent body, which is my stomach.



When I get hungry, I feed on zooplankton, which are microscopic crustaceans. I expand my umbrella as wide as possible to create a suction current, flex my tentacles and drag them to my mouth. Then, and through the same orifice, I excrete the unwanted waste.

Us *Turritopsis* never die. That's why they call us immortal jellyfishes. If I could remember, I would have memories from all my past lives, going back millions of years, when the world was covered in water and everything had yet to begin.

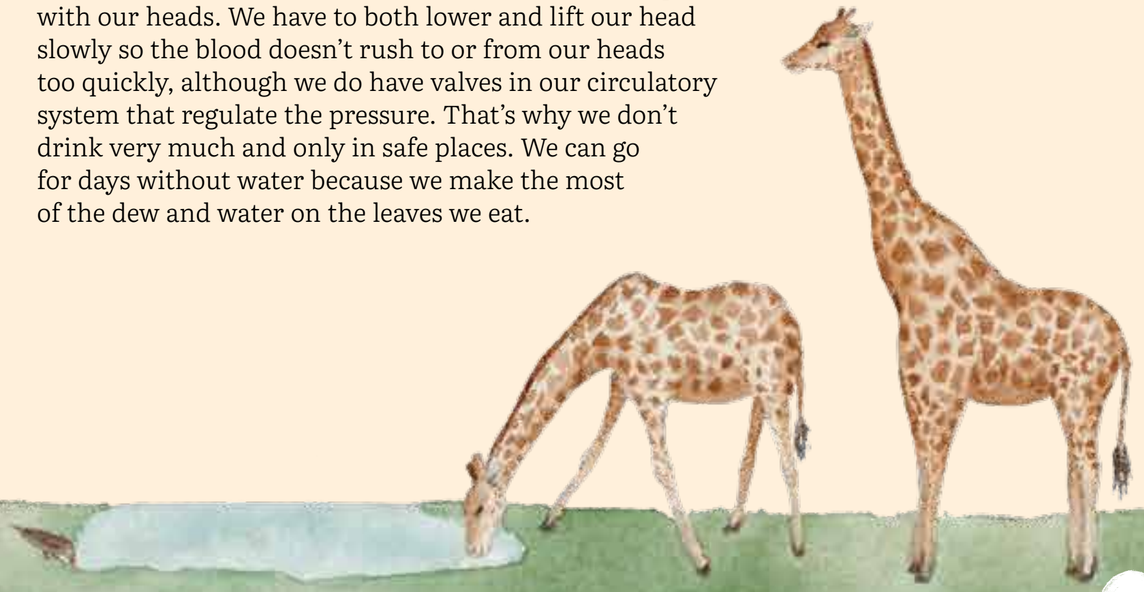
HOW DO GIRAFFES SLEEP?

Giraffes live in the African savannahs. Even though we're not always together, we recognise each other and maintain stable bonds. We love acacia leaves. These trees are very spiky, but we can pull the leaves off without hurting ourselves thanks to our hard tongues. They are also very long, almost fifty centimetres! And they're dark blue so they don't get sunburnt.

We barely have to sleep; two hours a day is enough for us. We also don't sleep in one go, but instead take short rest breaks, of up to ten minutes. As we have lots of predators, we sleep standing up. So, if someone attacks us, we can immediately run away. As we are so tall, if we lie down, it isn't easy to get up again in a hurry.

But if we feel safe, when we have other giraffes around us who can spot danger in time and alert us, or we're in places with few lions or hyenas, we do lie down to sleep. To do this we sit down and put our heads back until they touch the bottom of our back. Then we sleep properly and deeply. It's a funny-looking position but for us it's very comfy, although we don't get to do it very often. It makes us feel very vulnerable.

Like when we drink water. We have to spread our front legs very wide and bend our knees to be able to reach the pool with our heads. We have to both lower and lift our head slowly so the blood doesn't rush to or from our heads too quickly, although we do have valves in our circulatory system that regulate the pressure. That's why we don't drink very much and only in safe places. We can go for days without water because we make the most of the dew and water on the leaves we eat.



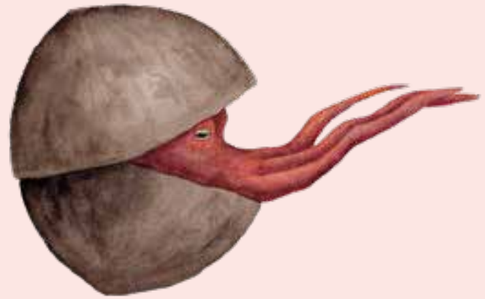
HOW DO OCTOPUSES USE TOOLS?

Octopuses are related to squids and cuttlefish and we live in all the seas in the world. We have eight limbs that we use for exploring our environment, catching prey and performing very precise movements. Every arm can do things on its own and we use them in different ways: the front ones are for discovering and touching things around us, while the back ones are for driving.

Our arms have suckers that we use to feel and taste everything around us. They help us grab and hold our food, and to walk. They are also like an anchor. If I stretch out an arm, I can attach my suckers somewhere and let myself float.

Octupuses are very intelligent. We love oysters and clams and we have various techniques for opening them. We also use rocks and pieces of shell to cover the caves where we hide!

We have also discovered that the coconut shells we find floating the sea are very useful. We pick them up with our front arms and carry them to the depths of the sea to the places we want to use them. They work well has a shelter. If you hide under them, predators don't see you and you can approach your prey without being noticed!



Not all octopuses are equally intelligent, but we're quick learners. We can be curious or timid, impulsive or thoughtful.

We are solitary creatures and don't live very long, with some species living just a year and others reaching five years. We are semelparous, which means we reproduce just once in our lifetime. When I'm older, I'll lay thousands of eggs, I'll guard them as well as I can and, when the little octopuses emerge, I'll have completed my life cycle.

Meanwhile, I like burying myself in the sand and squeezing into the cracks between the rocks. I'm very good at camouflaging myself. I can change colour so I look the same as whatever is around me. And if a predator chases me, I fire off a jet of ink to distract them while swimming very fast, propelling myself with my arms until I find another hiding place.

HOW DO ADÉLIE PENGUINS COURT?

There are eighteen species of penguins in the world. We are the Adélie penguins and, along with the emperor penguins, we are the only ones who live in the Antarctic. We eat fish, squid and **krill**, which are tiny crustaceans. We are fantastic swimmers and we can dive to great depths. Like all penguins, our wings are not for flying but for propelling us underwater.

When males want to reproduce, we need to court the female. To do so, we look for stones to gift to them. According to the number and size of the stones, the female will accept or not. I'm very good at finding stones. And if I don't find any, I steal them from other nests. I'm not the only thief! All penguins do it, because where we live there aren't many stones and they are essential for mating. These robberies are very common, because we form **breeding colonies** and we all have our nests very close to each other. In Antarctica it is very cold and living all crowded together is a way of producing heat. It is also a defence against parasites and southern fulmars, which are birds who prey on our eggs and chicks.

During our courting we make gestures: we bow our heads and move our necks. We also clap our beaks and make special noises. When we have a partner, we then look for more stones, between twenty and forty, and build a small mound with a dip in the middle, a bit like a volcano. That's where the female lays her eggs, usually two of them. Both she and I take turns incubating them. We both have a **brood pouch**, a fold of skin and feathers we use for covering the eggs and keeping them warm. When the chicks are born, we both look after them. We protect them and feed them with fish. Most of the time, only one chick, the larger one, survives.

When the chick is three weeks old, it is big enough to be left alone. However, if it stayed in the nest, it would freeze to death. That's why all the chicks in the colony gather together while they wait for their parents to come back from fishing. We recognise our chicks by their voice. Every penguin has a unique call. When we return from the sea, we make ours and our chick responds.

We can recognise them amongst the hundreds of thousands of individuals in the breeding colony!

Contents

Did you know that chimpanzees also play
with dolls or that clownfish can change sex?
Or that there's a kind of immortal jellyfish?
Or that orcas hunt as a team and use a variety of tactics?

Many animals have surprising behaviours like these,
but often we don't notice them because
we're not looking properly.

In this book you'll find thirty eye-opening stories about animal behaviour that will make you marvel at and adore the world around you because when we respect nature, she will look after us too.

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