Nature’s Mothers

**A male goat has been adopted by a troop of 40 or 50 baboons in the Loteni area of the Natal Drakensberg, South Africa. According to game guards, the billy goat, who was adopted by the troop when he was still a kid, has often been seen with young baboons riding on his back as he makes his way up the mountain with his primate family. “Baboons have been known to eat kid goats when food is scarce,” says the senior ranger-in-charge at the Loteni Nature Reserve, “but they are also extremely maternal. It is obvious that the goat has come to regard himself as a very good baboon.” *(Natal Parks Board, in Reader’s Digest)***

**After a forest fire in Yellowstone National Park, forest rangers began their trek up a mountain to assess the inferno's damage. One ranger found a bird literally petrified in ashes, perched statuesquely on the ground at the base of a tree. Somewhat sickened by the eerie sight he knocked over the bird with a stick. When he struck it, three tiny chicks scurried from under their dead mother's wings. The loving mother, keenly aware of impending danger, had carried her offspring to the base of the tree and had gathered them under her wings, instinctively knowing that the toxic smoke would rise. She could have flown to safety but had refused to abandon her babies. When the blaze had arrived and the heat had singed her small body, the mother had remained steadfast because she had been willing to die, so those under the cover of her wings would live. *(Christ Unity Oceanside newsletter)***

**A cat in China has adopted two puppies that she’s teaching to catch mice. The puppies’ mother died during the delivery, so the owner of the cat – which had just given birth to kittens – put the puppies next to her basket. “The puppies crawled over to the cat and started to fight for breast milk with the kittens.” said the cat’s owner. Now the cat feeds the puppies first, and has been showing them how to stalk and pounce on mice. *(The Week magazine, April 24, 2009)***

**The mother eagle teaches her little ones to fly by making their nest so uncomfortable that they are forced to leave it and commit themselves to the unknown world of air outside. And just so does our God to us. *(Hannah Whitall Smith)***

**Among elephants, no baby can be abandoned. If a mother dies, a foster mother takes over. *(L. M. Boyd)***

**Mei Xuang, one of two giant pandas in Washington, D.C.’s National Zoo, has given birth to a healthy baby. Several pandas were born in the zoo during the 1980s, but none lived longer than a few days. Mei Xiang’s pride and joy arrived last week – four months after the mother was artificially inseminated – and zoo officials say the signs of long-term survival are promising. “She’s doing a great job at being a mom,” said keeper Brenda Morgan. The tiny cub, Morgan said, is “very vocal and fussy,” like a newborn baby. “That means it’s doing well, too.” *(The Week magazine, July 22, 2005)***

**Not only can a mother penguin identify her chick by its call, but she can recognize the egg it’s in before it’s hatched likewise by its call therein. *(L. M. Boyd)***

**Infant rats showered with maternal affection grow up to be smarter and less timid than those reared by more reserved mothers. And infant rats removed from the litters of reserved mothers and reared by foster mothers who lick and groom them while they nurse also become smarter, less timid adults. The findings may be relevant to understanding early intervention programs for humans, said Canadian researchers who conducted experiments with the rats. While the results seem to indicate that early life experiences are more important than genetic inheritance in guiding the development of personality, Michael J. Meaney, a neuroscientist at McGill University in Montreal and leader of the research team, said the “nurture vs. nature” question is actually blurred by the research. That’s because genes responsible for brain development are directly related to different personalities. Meaney's research, which is being published today in the journal Science, also showed that “reserved” mothers become significantly more affectionate toward their offspring when the infants are regularly petted by human handlers. In such litters, female infants grow up to become affectionate mothers. *(Rocky Mountain News, November 5, 1999)***

**Male mother: A male sea horse has a special pouch on its stomach. The female sea horse lays her eggs in it. The eggs are fertilized and develop in the pouch until they are big enough to be born. Then the male goes into labor and gives birth, pushing the babies out into the sea. *(The Diagram Group, in Funky, Freaky Facts, p. 6)***

**It’s not easy doting on a family of thousands. Just ask Gonatus onyx, a squid species that cares for its eggs throughout their six-to-nine month development rather than dumping them on the seafloor to fend for themselves. Sending a remotely operated vehicle down 8,200 feet off Monterey, California, University of Rhode Island biologist Brad Seibel and colleagues at Monterey Bay Aquarium observed five mother squid cradling masses of up to 3,000 eggs each. Tiny arm hooks hold the membranous sacs in place. And the adults periodically pump the sacs open and closed, drawing in water to aerate the eggs. In time, the strenuous care saps the adult’s strength and limits her movement. But Seibel suspects the behavior is common in deep water, where predation is fairly light. Even if a mother is pursued as prey, Seibel’s team found, her flight can cause the eggs to hatch, allowing at least some young to survive. *(Jennifer S. Holland, in National Geographic magazine)***

# Among wild animals, the longer the infant of a species naturally tends to stay with its mother, the more easily its species can be tamed by people. Generally. So say the zoo experts. *(L. M. Boyd)*

**How long they stay with their moms: Male elephants – 12 years; Zebras – two years; Chimps – three years; Female African wild dogs – three years; Cheetahs – 18 – 20 months; Female lions – their entire lives. *(World Features Syndicate)***

**A baby gray whale can’t swim at birth, so its mother boosts it above the surface for the first few breaths. *(L. M. Boyd)***

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