23 Unusual Animals - mental_floss on YouTube (Ep. 31)

List Show
https://youtube.com/watch?v=Xz3ApccHwUY
https://nerdfighteria.info/v/Xz3ApccHwUY

=====Introduction=====

Hi everyone and welcome to Mental Floss. I'm Emily, from the Brain Scoop. I'm here at my job at the Chicago Field Museum and over the last few weeks I've found a lot of really interesting and unusual things, like this beef byproduct case commissioned by the beef industry in the 1930s. And that's just the first of many unusual animals, their behaviors, and by-products that we'll be talking about today.

(Intro)

===== 22 Unusual Animals=====

First, let me introduce you to the cloud rat, which is a giant, rare fluffy, rodent that can be found in the highlands of the Philippines. It only has on set of mammae, which is a fancy way of saying it's got two nipples and it only gives birth to one or two young at a time. It's also incredibly delicious which is why it's so incredibly rare.

They look like rabbits, they're arguably cuter than bunnies but viscacha are actually the largest members of the chinchilla family. And if you don't believe me, just look at the photo. They can live in herds of up to fifty individuals and the next time you need a pick-me-up, just imagine being stampeded by a herd of viscacha.

And the pikas look like rodents but they're more closely related to rabbits and hares, although they still fall under the superorder adorable. It's not actually a superorder. Pikas seem to be the victims of constant identity crisis because they act more like birds in that fact that they make nests.

The hyrax is the epitome of the confused mammal because although hyrax is Greek for shrewmouse, they are neither shrews nor mice. Their closest living relatives consist of Sirenia, like dugongs and manatees and elephants.

While we're at it, can we bring up dugongs for a second? Because at some point an elephant thought it was a good idea to retreat back to an aquatic environment and we started calling them the sirens of the sea. Not graceful porpoises or dolphins but dugongs and sea cows.

This is Thor's hero shrew, only one of two known hero shrews ever found in the history of ever, and this one was discovered by the Field Museum's very own Bill Stanley. The hero shrew has a really interesting vertebral column that kind of resembles a Triscuit. It's thought that they have this unique adaptation in order to be able to get between the bark and the trunk of a tree to separate the two and get at grubs underneath. There's only one in the world in a museum, and I am holding it right here in my hand.

If you've ever been curious about where George Lucas got his inspiration for designing the Tauntaun, look no further than the saiga antelope. They look unassuming, other than the giant inflated mobile nose that hangs over their mouths. It's thought that they have this giant proboscis in order to help warm and moisten air during frigid winters. Unfortunately, the beloved saiga is now considered critically endangered after sustaining a population decline from one million to thirty thousand individuals in only ten years. Wah-wah.

While we're on the subject of animals that look unassuming, rather than one exaggerated feature, let's talk about the gerenuk. The gerenuk is what happened when an antelope wanted to be a giraffe. Not only did their long necks help them reach the most delicious parts of the trees but they're also able to swivel their pelvises forward in order to stand on their hind legs for additional height. The gerenuks are often preyed upon because their natural instinct when under the threat of danger is to freeze in place. I do a similar thing when asked out on a date.

On the subject of awkward, babirusas. Babirusas are members of the pig family, but they have tusks that grow directly out of their faces. Let me just iterate that. They have teeth that don't grow into their mouths, they grow out the tops of their snouts. And not only that, if males don't work hard enough at wearing down these tusks naturally, they will continue to grow throughout the animal's life eventually growing into their foreheads and impaling their brains.

Binturongs are the largest member of the Viverrid family, which is a type of carnivore that are similarly related to cats, but binturongs look like a cross between a raccoon and a Dr. Seuss character. Not only that, but their scent glands smell heavily of popcorn.

The winner for the best mammal name ever goes to the aardwolf for the perfect reason that it is the cross between an aardvark and a wolf. Despite how much it looks like a hyena, they live exclusively off a diet of termites, and one individual can consume up to 300,000 termites a day.

You probably heard of the aye-aye which is kinda like the creepy uncle of the lemur family. Although they aren't as painfully adorable as their ring-tailed cousins, they're worth mentioning for their creepy little hands. They'll chew holes in the trunks of trees, and then use their elongated middle finger to fish out grubs. Not only that, but aye-ayes are seemingly fearless. They'll walk right up to researchers and naturalists in the field seemingly uninhibited. Unfortunately this ballsy behavior has got them landed on the endangered species list. The Malagasy people believe that aye-ayes are harbingers of death and will often kill them on sight.

And to wrap up mammals with redundant names we've got the spotted cuscus, which is a marsupial that can be found in New Guinea and parts of northern Australia. The female will give birth after a gestation period of only thirteen days and then the little wormy-worm will live and develop inside of her pouch for up to seven months. Ah, they got the right idea.

Let's move away from mammals and talk about invertebrates for a beat like this plant hopper also known as a peanut-head because its head looks like a peanut. It's not entirely clear what they use this feature for, but there exists a myth that if you are bitten by a peanut hopper, you've gotta have sex within the next twenty-four hours or you'll die. Which is funny, because peanut-heads don't have teeth, so...

The leaf insect is exactly what it sounds like, an insect that so strongly resembles the leaf that it's mimicking that sometimes they even have naturally occurring bite marks that show up along their edges. And when they walk, they rock back and forth like a leaf blowing in the wind. I can't look at them for too long because my brain starts to leak out of my ears.

Here's something you probably would have been fine never knowing about. The whip spiders. Despite their nightmarish appearances, the mother will lay up to sixty eggs at a time which she carries around on her abdomen until they hatch, and then continues to haul around her babies on her back until their first moult. Seriously, so cute.

On the same vein of biological accessories, you can get yourself a mermaid purse. Just kidding, they're not actually purses and they're not actually owned by mermaids. These are skate egg cases and egg cases like these are laid by different species of sharks and

rays. The young develop until they are ready to hatch and then emerge fully formed.

For the record, baby sharks are called pups and a group of these pups is a called a litter. Aw, don't you wanna be smothered by a litter of shark puppies?

Speaking of shark byproducts, there exists an odd family of fishes called the remoras, that have a modified dorsal fin that resembles a sucker-like organ. They use this special feature to attach themselves via their heads onto other larger fish, essentially becoming the hitchhikers of the fish world. This way they don't have to expend any unnecessary energy while they freeload around eating the poop of their hosts. Delicious.

Let's wrap up the list by talking about some of our unusual avian friends like the kiwi. I bring up the kiwi because it has the largest egg relative of its body size to any other bird and can weigh up to 20% of the entire animal's mass. That's like if an average sized human gave birth to a twenty-five pound baby. No, thank you.

Although the bowerbird may not look like anything special, I would be more than happy to hire one as my interior decorator. They make a habit out of creating elaborate nests in order to attract mates, and males will use anything from flowers to fungi to feces in order to do so. A tip for the guys though, maybe don't use feces.

Shrikes are also highly attention-grabbing, perhaps for the opposite reasons. Shrikes are carnivorous birds that lack talents for their appropriate diet, so they nest around thorny trees and bushes and even around barbed wire fences that they use to then impale insects and small vertebrates on in order to tear at the flesh.

The oscillated turkey puts the North American turkey to shame in its loveliness. But mostly I bring it up because those little red bits on its head are called nodules and the dangly bit on its head is called a snood, and both of these things are often referred to as caruncles.

And I'm gonna wrap up this episode by talking about my favorite bird of all time the African whale-headed stork, aka the shoe-bill. They are territorial birds, but rather than attack intruders, they will merely stand their ground and stare you down. When the fable was written about storks delivering babies, I don't think they had shoe-bills in mind, because shoe-bills look way more inclined to sell your baby than deliver it for free.

=====Outro=====

Thanks for watching Mental Floss on YouTube, which is made with the help from all these nice people. A special huge awesome thanks to Bill Stanley, Jim Boone, Alan Resetar, Paul Mayer, and the Harris Learning Collection, and everybody else at the Chicago Field Museum. Every week we endeavor to answer one of your mind-blowing questions and this week's question comes from Superwalkerstalker who asks, "If water has been running through rivers for thousands of years, why does it come with an expiration date in the grocery store?" Well, Superwalkerstalker, this is because of a 1987 New Jersey law that required all food products to come with an expiration date of two years or less from their date of manufacture. This law is no longer in effect, but we kept the practice anyway. If you've got a mind-blowing question, that you would like to see answered, make sure to leave it in the comments below. Thanks for watching, I'm Emily Graslie of the Brain Scoop, and don't forget to be awesome.