

If you've visited your local public library with children this summer, you may have noticed some talk about "Tails and Tales." This is the summer reading program theme for many libraries, and it means we're celebrating animals! There are so many stories and books about animals, which speaks to our fascination with them. Animal stories can help us all feel more connected to the mammals, fish, bugs, and other critters we share the earth with, and some of those stories are truly amazing. Here are some wonderful books for kids about some of the most fascinating creatures on the planet.

"Animals: Here We Grow," by Shelley Rotner. Full of big, beautiful photographs, this nonfiction book for preschool and early elementary children shows the life cycles of common creatures like butterflies, frogs, and deer. It's fascinating to see how much the animals change throughout their lifetimes, just like humans.

"Inky's Amazing Escape: How a Very Smart Octopus Found His Way Home," by Sy Montgomery. This nonfiction picture book tells the true story of an octopus at a New Zealand aquarium who escaped his tank, crawled across the floor, squeezed into a drainpipe, and found his way back to the sea. Colorful illustrations and easy text teach lots of fascinating octopus facts, too.

"Owen & Mzee : The True Story of a Remarkable Friendship," by Isabella Hatkoff. Humans seem to love stories of unusual animal friendships, and this nonfiction title for younger children does not disappoint. An orphaned baby hippo named Owen finds comfort in the company of a 130-year-old tortoise named Mzee. Real photos of the two adorable animals help to tell their heartwarming story.

"Lovely Beasts: The Surprising Truth," by Kate Gardner. The beautiful illustrations in this nonfiction picture book help to show the deeper truths about villainized animals. A spider is seen as creepy, but really is an amazing crafter. A silverback gorilla is seen as fierce, but is really a fiercely protective papa to his young.

"Hello Hello," by Brendan Wenzel. This picture book for very young readers celebrates the beautiful color and patterns of some very unique animals found around the world. The end of the book has a key to naming all the animals featured in the book. This title is perfect for curious toddlers and preschoolers.

If the kids in your life are older and more independent readers, there are lots of amazing animal stories for them, too! The "Lulu" books by Hilary McKay make up a wonderful series for early elementary students about a girl who has a knack for finding and rescuing animals.

"Flora and Ulysses," by Kate DiCamillo, is a funny, illustrated chapter book for middle grade readers about the friendship between a girl and her superhero pet squirrel. This one was recently made into a movie.

"A Wolf Called Wander," by Rosanne Parry is based on the true story of a wolf separated from his family in the wild and forced to trek a thousand miles to find a home. The story is told from the viewpoint of the wolf, named Swift, and is a fast-moving adventure for all animal lovers.

"The Wild Robot," by Peter Brown. A robot mysteriously lost in the wilderness slowly gains the trust of the animals who live there. They form a unique family and learn how to help

each other when Mother Nature surprises them.

“What Comes Next,” by Rob Buyea. This brand-new novel is about the special place a dog can have in someone’s life, especially when they’ve experienced a tragedy. Twelve-year-old Thea and her family are trying to get a fresh start when they move to a new town after Thea witnesses a horrible accident. They adopt Jack-Jack, a rescue puppy, whose mischief and unconditional love help Thea to process what happened and to move on.

Whether your kids are looking for books about loyal dogs, rodents with superpowers, or curious octopuses, there’s something for them at your local library!