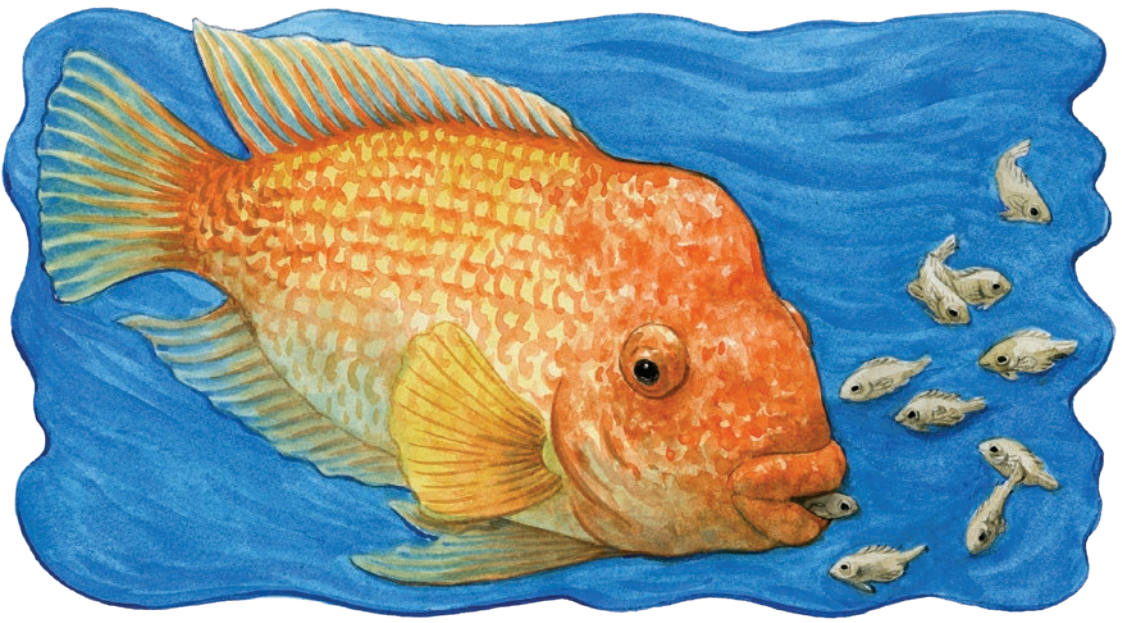


Fabulous Fathers

by Monica A. Harris • Art by Carol Schwartz





FATHERS COME IN all shapes and sizes. In the animal kingdom, fathers have some fascinating (and strange!) ways of helping their young. Some animal dads protect their babies. Some provide food. Some teach survival skills. Whatever their talents, the following fathers are fabulous!

Suck Them Up and Spit Them Out

Most fish do not live in family groups, but in the Red Devil Cichlid families of Central America, fathers help take care of their young. If a little one swims too far away, it's his dad's job to put him back into place. He gently grasps the wandering fish in his mouth and—*aaapooey!* He spits the young wanderer back with his brothers and sisters.



Excuse Me, I've Got a Frog in my Throat

If you were a Darwin's frog father with 20 or 30 babies to protect, where would you keep them? In your throat, of course! This South American dad picks up the young ones with his tongue and slides them through slits in his vocal sacs. As the babies grow, they push on Dad's throat and prevent him from croaking. Finally, when the babies are big enough, they crawl out of Dad's throat and hop away. (In case you were wondering, there are times when Dad accidentally swallows one. Oops!)

Taking Care of Business

Speaking of cool frog dads, the male barking frog is the only frog in North America that helps take care of his young. Once the mother lays the eggs, he guards them until they hatch. He also has the important job of keeping them wet. How? He pees on them! This takes care of the eggs and his bathroom needs at the same time.





Protective Father

The Great Hornbill of South and Southeast Asia is an overprotective dad. The mother hornbill nests in the hollow of a tree where she lays 1 or 2 eggs. To protect his babies, the father gathers soil, chewed wood and bark, and poop and plasters it in the nest opening. All he leaves open is a space big enough for the mother's beak to peek through. The mother and babies stay inside the nest for about 40 days. While they're inside, the father must provide everything for his family—food, water, and bathroom cleanup—to keep them safe.

When seahorses mate, it's the father who gives birth. During mating, the mother puts her eggs in the father's special pouch, called a brood pouch. He settles the eggs in the pouch by knocking his body against a rock or plant. Over 10 to 30 days, the babies grow. Depending on the seahorse, the father can carry 10 to 300 young in his pouch. When it's time to give birth, it takes several hours for the father to push all the babies out. Within 24 hours, he returns to the mother seahorse and accepts more eggs.





Piggyback Nursery

Where does the mother giant water bug lay her eggs? On the father's back! She attaches the eggs with a sticky material called an egg pad. When she's done, the father swims away and does all the caregiving. He visits the water's surface so the eggs can get air and uses his hind feet to clean the eggs. Once the babies are on their own, the father rubs off the sticky egg pad.

Cold Feet, Big Heart

In the chilly Antarctic, a mother Emperor penguin lays an egg. She must find a warm place for it before it freezes. Dad to the rescue! The pair works carefully to roll the egg to the top of his feet. He covers it with a flap of thick belly skin. The mother penguin then leaves for 2 months. She travels to open hunting waters that are over 50 miles away. In the meantime, the father keeps the egg on his feet. He doesn't eat. He doesn't drink. He just huddles together with the other fathers to keep their eggs warm. When the egg hatches, the chick stays cozy in the same place—on Dad's feet, under a layer of skin. Soon after, the mother returns and takes over while Dad goes hunting.



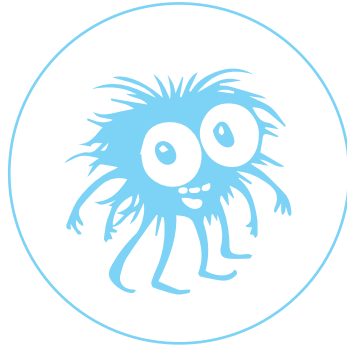


Sly Teacher

For the red fox, raising babies is a team effort. The mother stays in the den to keep the young, called kits, warm. The father brings the mother food every 4 to 6 hours until the kits are old enough to roam outside. To teach them how to find their own food, the father red fox buries extra meat near the den and hides it with twigs. *Sniff, sniff* . . . the kits find the food! Soon they'll be out on their own, thanks to dear old Dad. 🦊



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