

Who Needs Pockets?

Given my fear of frogs, no matter how illogical it is, this video terrified me to the very core. I couldn't even watch the whole thing, and what I did see was watched with my feet picked up off the floor – just too creepy. But I still hope none of the buggers were injured in the filming of this video from youtube called “Who Needs Pockets?”

Francis = MIA

It seems my new pet has gone missing. Thank goodness I didn't end up with something bigger, like a rat or a tortoise or something I wouldn't really want crawling around the house unattended. But I didn't see this coming. If anything, I thought my new ladybug friend would kick the bucket. I wouldn't have guessed that he'd vanish. I don't think the kids got to him; they wouldn't have been able to keep something like that a secret for long. But today when I went to check on Francis the ladybug he wasn't in his cage. And by the way, the name is after the ladybug in *A Bug's Life*, not my late Grandmother – that would be FrancEs and yes, I still want a daughter to have that name.

Yesterday at the thrift store I found a bug catcher for a quarter, so I bought it and put Francis in his new home last night. Today when I went to check on him, he's no where to be found in the bug catcher. My husband and I both examined the lid, and we don't think he escaped, so my guess is that he's hiding in these little pockets in the bug catcher that hold the screws – people can't see in them, but they're ladybug-sized. And I think ladybugs hibernate during the winter, so we might not be hearing from Francis for awhile if he crawled into one of those holes to hibernate... Nuts, he had a bunch of visitors all lined up!

My New Pet

I've wanted a new pet for awhile, mostly since my cat passed away almost a year ago now. What I want most is another cat – I love cats, and it would be the perfect type of pet for our household. But unfortunately, I'm allergic to cats. When I had my cat, it was a constant struggle to decide if I should pet her or not. I always wanted to of course, but then I would itch for hours, my eyes would water, and sometimes I'd get hives. And, my allergy symptoms were worse during my 4 pregnancies. I just don't want to go through that again – so no cat for us. We have a Jack Russell Terrier mix, so any type of animal she'll want to chase and bark at is out also – which means no rats, ferrets, small birds, etc. So that leaves me with reptiles or bugs, I guess. And the only reptile I'm interested in owning is a tortoise. Those can be kind of costly and I'm not entirely sure that my Jerk Russell Terrier mix won't want to hunt it, so I'm going to hold off on the tortoise for a little bit. Also complicating the situation is that I really don't have any extra time to spend with a pet, so that limits my options even further. So lately I've been in limbo, trying to decide what to get. But the other day, a new pet sort of fell into my lap.

It's a ladybug I found in the house – normally I'd let any bugs go outside that I find in the house, but it's way too cold out for a ladybug, and I don't want him to suffer while he froze to death. So I looked up what ladybugs eat, and I found out that their favorite food is aphids, which are an even smaller group of insects. Knowing I couldn't get any of those easily, I put a drop of honey in a little container with the ladybug. He went over to it and started eating it! So I put a little drop of water in there too, and he must have smelled that or something, because he left the honey and went over to the water – it was really interesting to watch. He's survived in captivity about a week now, and I have to say

I'm getting a little attached to him as a pet. It started out as just a fun little project, and I didn't expect it to live more than a few days. But he did, and I've named him Francis (like the ladybug from A Bug's Life), and he is my secret pet – the kids don't know about him. If they did, he'd be dead already because my 4-year-old adores bugs and often smothers them with love – literally. I think today I'll go out and get Francis some grass for his container, because earlier when I fed him, he REFUSED to go back into his container! I'm not kidding; he was sticking to my finger and just doing everything possible to not get locked back in there. Finally, I put him on a Q-tip and cut it to fit in the container and locked him in. I feel a little badly that I've kidnapped this ladybug, but I think I'm his only chance at life. Outside, he'd freeze, and if I let him go into my house, I don't think he'd be able to find food and water and he'd either die or go into hibernation until a kid or a dog got him.

So anyway, I guess I have my new pet. I still don't expect him to last very long, but for now it's fun just taking care of an animal, especially since he's my little secret. If he's still around in another week or so, I'll take his picture and post it. Say hi to Francis!

These Are A Few Of My Favorite Things...

animals. Animals are my favorite things. If I'm bored – yeah, right, with 4 kids, when does that happen? Ok, if I were ever bored, my activity of choice would be to visit a zoo, wildlife park, pet store, or anyplace I could see animals. Without leaving the house, I can also research

animals on the internet. One of my favorite animal sites is the [University of Michigan's Animal Diversity Web](#). It's amazing how much they've changed the taxonomy (classification of animals) from when I first started doing research on the subject not more than 10 years ago, but it's true – this field is one that's ever-changing.

Every now and then, I think I'll choose an animal to share on my blog. Today's animal is the pangolin. What is a pangolin, you ask? Well, it's a mammal, and it's not a marsupial, a group which contains some of the lesser known species. See, in the classification of mammals, you begin by separating them into placental mammals (live birth) and marsupials (young live in the mother's pouch – all but one type live in Australia). Of course, there is also a third category – egg-laying mammals, but we won't go there because I don't want to lose people's interest by getting too complicated.

So anyway, the pangolin is a placental mammal, yet it's scaly. The scales are actually made of a hair-like material, thereby preserving its status as mammal. Check this out – does this thing look prehistoric or what?



But they're not prehistoric; they still exist today – I wonder how come I've never seen one at a zoo? I guess it's because some animals do better in captivity than others, and I applaud the zoo community for recognizing this.

Interesting tidbits about pangolins, as stated on the Animal

Diversity Web:

Pangolins are a small group (seven living species placed in one genus and one family, Manidae) of mammals that feed mostly on ants. They are found in the tropical regions of Africa and Asia. Pangolins are conspicuous and remarkable because their backs are covered with large, overlapping scales made up of agglutinated hairs. But they are strange in other ways as well. Their tongue is extraordinarily long and muscular, arising from the pelvis and the last pair of ribs deep in the animal's chest. As a result, the tongue and associated muscles are longer than the animal's head and body, allowing the tongue to be extruded to an astonishing degree. Pangolins lack teeth. Instead, the the pyloric part of their stomach is thickened and muscular, with odd keratinous spines projecting into its interior. It usually contains pebbles and seems to be used for "chewing" in much the same way as a bird's gizzard. Pangolins have the ability to close their ears and nostrils as well as eyes, presumably to keep ants out.

In short, pangolins are fascinating animals that are closer to you and me on the taxonomy tree than most people would guess – they are mammals, after all. Yet they are a mammal that most people have not heard of, and surprisingly, there are more than a few mammalian species that have this in common – I will try to share little known facts about little known mammals in my blog.

And oh yeah, since there was a complaint in the comments of another tangents.org blog about this – the song I quoted in my title is "My Favorite Things" from The Sound of Music.

I Never Thought About the Crate Being Square and the Turnstile Being Round...

In case you've missed my previous posts about animals and Jack Hanna, let me explain that Jack Hanna is my favorite celebrity and how much I really enjoy following his adventures through zoo life. In case you don't know who Jack is, he is the man who gave Columbus, Ohio a zoo. They did have one before, even though many residents weren't even aware of it, but with Jack's brilliance in zoo management and marketing, the [Columbus Zoo](#) has become one of the most renowned zoos in the world today. These days, Jack spends his time filming tv shows of his own, and also bringing animals around the country for appearances in theaters and on other tv shows, such as David Letterman, Maury Povich, and Good Morning America in order to educate people about respecting animals. Whenever animals are involved, situations can easily become unpredictable. Throw Jack into the mix, and these situations now become hilariously entertaining *and* unpredictable. Things seem to happen to Jack, and if you'd like an example of what I mean, check out the following article detailing an animal mishap Jack encountered at the airport last September:

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) – Animal expert Jack Hanna and an 11-month-old flamingo became trapped while trying to squeeze through an airport security turnstile. It took firefighters to finally get the flamingo out. Animal expert Jack Hanna had a close encounter with a flamingo Sunday. Hanna, the director emeritus of the Columbus Zoo and a frequent guest on nationally televised talk shows, was returning from a zoo fundraiser with a mongoose, a small leopard and the flamingo. Three other people were with them. The entourage arrived at the Ohio State University Airport just after midnight Sunday to find the terminal closed. The only way to leave the tarmac

was through a 10-foot-tall metal turnstile with several horizontal bars – not the easiest exit to squeeze through when you’re traveling with boxed-up animals, Hanna said. **“I never thought about the crate being square and the turnstile being round,”** he said. Hanna, 60, pushed the flamingo’s 2-foot-by-3-foot compartment into the turnstile, then continued pushing while straddling the crate. “I was stuck like a worm. My eyes were as big as grapefruits,” he said. “I can’t describe the feeling in my stomach. I can’t move up or down. The bars are on your face.” Hanna said he eventually squirmed free, leaving the flamingo still wedged inside and everyone else trapped on the tarmac. He then walked to a nearby fire station for help. It took three firefighters to hoist the flamingo’s crate up and out of the turnstile, he said. Columbus fire department logs show the firefighters arrived at the airport at 12:30 a.m. for a “flamingo rescue,” spokeswoman Kelly McGuire said. Hanna joked that the next time he flies through the airport, the biggest animal he’ll bring is a gerbil.

If you were entertained by the preceding article, I highly recommend Jack’s book [Monkeys on the Interstate](#) which details his life before and during his days at the Columbus Zoo – it’s a VERY entertaining and funny read, especially for animal lovers and zoo enthusiasts. I really hope I can schedule some time to catch Jack at one of his appearances soon, but until then, I will keep checking for him on Letterman and will probably check out the book for a fourth time!