

# How to Tell Wild Animals

*This humorous poem suggests some dangerous ways to identify (or 'tell') wild animals! Read it aloud, keeping to a strong and regular rhythm.*

If ever you should go by chance  
To jungles in the east;  
And if there should to you advance  
A large and tawny beast,  
If he roars at you as you're dyin'  
You'll know it is the Asian Lion...



Or if some time when roaming round,  
A noble wild beast greets you,  
With black stripes on a yellow ground,  
Just notice if he eats you.  
This simple rule may help you learn  
The Bengal Tiger to discern.

If strolling forth, a beast you view,  
Whose hide with spots is peppered,  
As soon as he has lept on you,  
You'll know it is the Leopard.  
'Twill do no good to roar with pain,  
He'll only lep and lep again.





If when you're walking round your yard  
 You meet a creature there,  
 Who hugs you very, very hard,  
 Be sure it is a Bear.  
 If you have any doubts, I guess  
 He'll give you just one more caress.



Though to distinguish beasts of prey  
 A novice might nonplus,  
 The Crocodile you always may  
 Tell from the Hyena thus:  
 Hyenas come with merry smiles;  
 But if they weep they're Crocodiles.



First Flight

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The true Chameleon is small,  
 A lizard sort of thing;  
 He hasn't any ears at all,  
 And not a single wing.  
 If there is nothing on the tree,  
 'Tis the chameleon you see.



CAROLYN WELLS

### Glossary

**ground:** background

**discern:** make out; identify

**hide:** animal skin

**peppered:** here, covered with spots

**caress:** a gentle, loving touch

**novice:** someone new to a job

**(be) nonplus (sed)** (usually only in the passive): (be) puzzle(d), confuse(d), surprise(d)





## Thinking about the Poem

1. Does 'dyin' really rhyme with 'lion'? Can you say it in such a way that it does?
2. How does the poet suggest that you identify the lion and the tiger? When can you do so, according to him?
3. Do you think the words 'lept' and 'lep' in the third stanza are spelt correctly? Why does the poet spell them like this?
4. Do you know what a 'bearhug' is? It's a friendly and strong hug — such as bears are thought to give, as they attack you! Again, hyenas are thought to laugh, and crocodiles to weep ('crocodile tears') as they swallow their victims. Are there similar expressions and popular ideas about wild animals in your own language(s)?
5. Look at the line "A novice might nonplus". How would you write this 'correctly'? Why is the poet's 'incorrect' line better in the poem?
6. Can you find other examples of poets taking liberties with language, either in English or in your own language(s)? Can you find examples of humorous poems in your own language(s)?
7. Much of the humour in the poem arises from the way language is used, although the ideas are funny as well. If there are particular lines in the poem that you especially like, share these with the class, speaking briefly about what it is about the ideas or the language that you like or find funny.

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**English is funny, because...**

We have noses that run and feet that smell

