



## AT THE LIBRARY

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***“A group of kangaroos together is called a mob. Not all species form mobs. ‘Mob behavior’ is found only in large species such as the red and gray kangaroos.”***

-From Sneed B. Collard, III's *Pocket Babies and Other Amazing Marsupials*

Once a month, I order new children's books from an online list. In addition, a children's collection development librarian purchases materials for the Albany Library. So, every time new books come trickling in, I am curious to see what they look like.

For some reason, this month there were an unusually high percentage of wonderful children's non-fiction books about animals. You would think it would be fairly simple to write a great children's book about animals, especially one with lots of photographs. But like any book, the choice of words, the amount of text on a page, the layout and the tone all matter.

I have picked up books for children that are written as if children were just not very smart adults. The language is heavy and slow and without humor, and even the pictures can't make up for the ponderous and boring text. So when I find one that is well done, I am appreciative of the effort it

takes to be informative and personal at the same time.

*Pocket Babies and Other Amazing Marsupials* is a perfect example of a charming, beautifully done non-fiction book. It isn't simply the photographs, although they are perfect as they show marsupial babies, maps, predators and even wombat poop, next to a section called "Name That Poop!" In case you didn't already know this (and I certainly didn't): "You don't have to be an expert in scatology - the study of excrement - to identify a wombat's poop. Wombats poop out dung that is almost perfectly cube-shaped...The poops also have a special feature. When they harden, they can be used as building blocks!"

It is also the content. I learned so much about marsupials from reading this book that I can't begin to list everything. But I was especially impressed with how fast bandicoot babies are born - twelve days after the female mates, giving them the shortest gestation recorded for

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any mammal.

My other particular favorite this month is Nic Bishop’s *Spiders*. This incredible book starts out with a close-up of the green lynx spider, which looks like a large green jelly-bean with eyes and long, almost transparent black-spotted white and yellow legs. The words next to it say: “Spiders were hunting long before lions and tigers. They were hunting even before Tyrannosaurus rex...”

The photographs in this book are fantastic because they are all close-ups of spiders in action. Included are a jumping spider “dancing on tiptoes,” a young wolf spider clinging to her mother’s back, a rose-hair tarantula eating a cockroach and a cobalt-blue tarantula molting. Did you know that a spider must even shed the skin covering its eyes and the inside of its mouth?

At the end of the book, Bishop gives some background on how he photographed the

spiders. Several of them were raised at home, he tells us, so he could get shots of “rare events like molting, courting, or egg-laying.” In a friendly and easy to understand style, he goes into detail on the equipment he used for some of the action shots, like the jumping spider. As he explains it, the spider had to jump many times but they took a break now and then, so he could give it a drink of water and a fly for a snack.

These are only two of the many lovely new non-fiction books on our children’s shelves. If you have a chance, come take a look.