

Meet the world's most playfully named creatures

By Winnie Lee, Atlas Obscura, adapted by Newsela staff

06/23/2019

Text Level **6**

Word Count **486**



Image 1. Critters with amusing names, both scientific and common, are the subject of a new, fancifully illustrated children's book titled "Encyclopedia of Strangely Named Animals, Volume One." Illustrations by Vlad Stankovic

A species of octopus with reddish skin lives in the shallow tropical waters of Indonesia and the Philippines. They are beautifully marked with brilliant white stripes and spots. Each one has a unique pattern, like a snowflake. This cephalopod with its dramatic looks is a darling of divers and underwater photographers. It also has an equally dramatic scientific name: *Wunderpus photogenicus*.

This and other critters with amusing-sounding nicknames, both scientific and common, are the subject of a new book. The book is called "Encyclopedia of Strangely Named Animals, Volume One." It is a children's book with fanciful illustrations of these animals. Fredrik Colting and Melissa Medina wrote the book. They say they were fascinated by "how each animal has a specialized feature or habit that carries through in their names."

But putting these official labels on the natural world isn't always quite as much fun.

"People give all sorts of whimsical names to animals, but remember that there is the common name — American robin — and the scientific name — *Turdus migratorius*," says Brian Brown. He is a curator of entomology at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County.

All scientific names must be in Latin and follow a general set of rules for a new species. Scientists get to name the species they identify. Still, each name needs to be unique, so sometimes the novelty wears off.

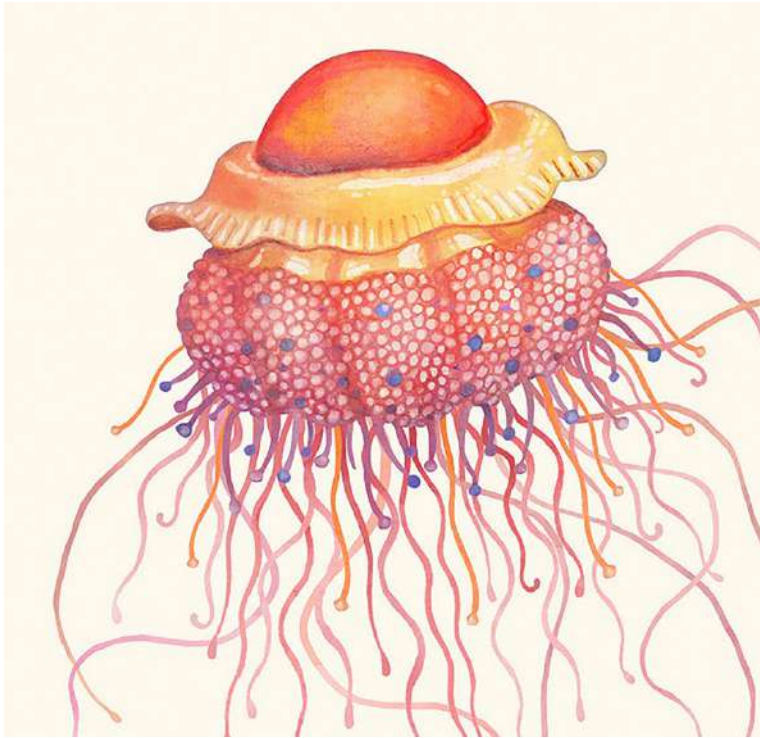


Image 2. This creature is known as the fried-egg jellyfish. That is because it looks a lot like an egg cooked sunny-side up. Illustration by: Vlad Stankovic

"Choosing names is fun in small doses, but when you have 100 new species of *Apocephalus* [a genus of ant-hunting flies] to describe, it starts becoming a chore," Brown says. "Eventually, you just try to think of something to attach to that species concept."

That means, for example, scientists might give a species name that references a defining feature, a place, maybe a person. Sometimes they try to use a pun or something more fanciful.

"Within the taxonomic process, there is some latitude for humor," Brown adds, "like Terry Erwin's beetles of the genus *Agra* ... he called one *Agra vation*, for example." Erwin is also an entomologist. He has an entry in "Strangely Named Animals" as well. He dubbed an elegant canopy beetle *Agra cadabra*.

The book also finds the joy and humor of less official but more widely used common names. The tasselled wobbegong is a near-threatened species of shark in northern Australia with masterful camouflage skills. The pink fairy armadillo is a small, Argentinian species with big claws and a fair complexion. The sparklemuffin is a colorful and hairy spider with a leg-shaking mating dance, also from Australia.

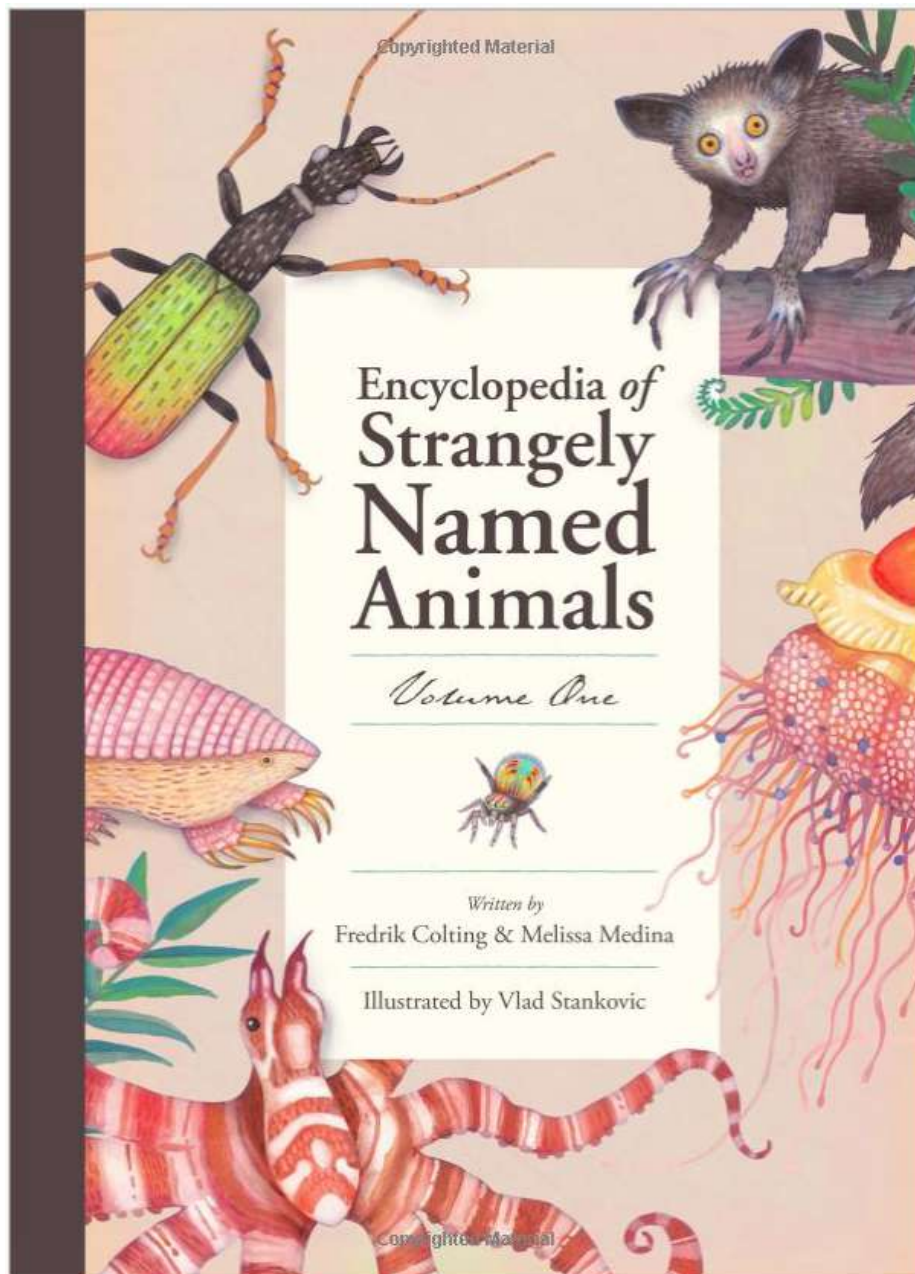
Brown says scientists don't usually bother to propose common names, except for extremely popular animals. "I have never given a fly a common name, for instance," he says, "even though I have described more than 500 of them."

Below are some pages for examples. These are for samples only, please do not violate the copywrite by printing and/or using these.

Encyclopedia of Strangely Named Animals Hardcover – April 1, 2019

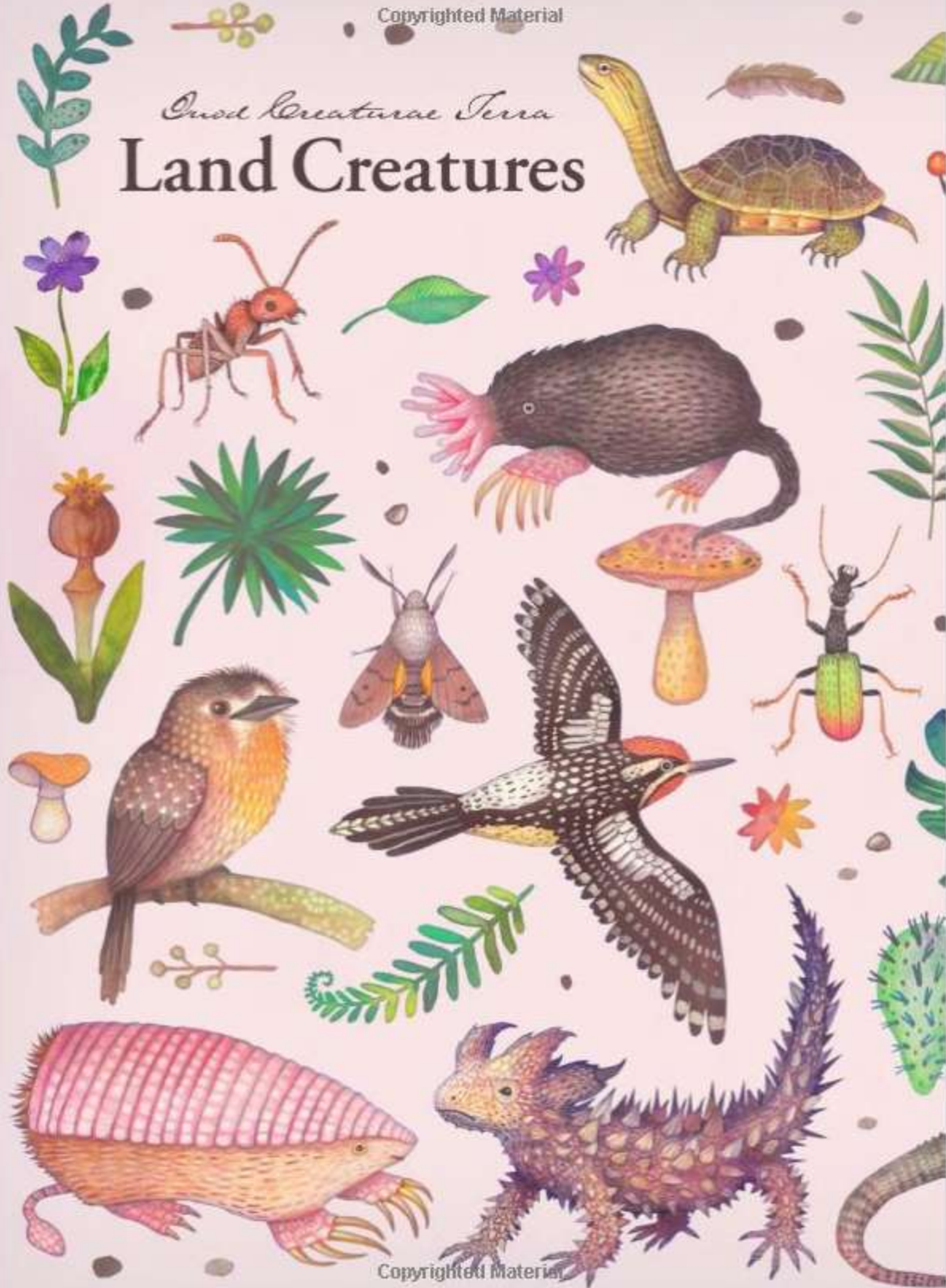
by [Fredrik Colting](#) (Author)

https://smile.amazon.com/Encyclopedia-Strangely-Animals-Fredrik-Colting/dp/0998820571/ref=sr_1_fkmr0_1?keywords=Encyclopedia+of+Strangely+Named+Animals%2C+Volume+One&qid=1561477877&s=books&sr=1-1-fkmr0#customerReviews



Copyrighted Material

Quod Creaturae Terra
Land Creatures



Copyrighted Material

Copyrighted Material



Copyrighted Material

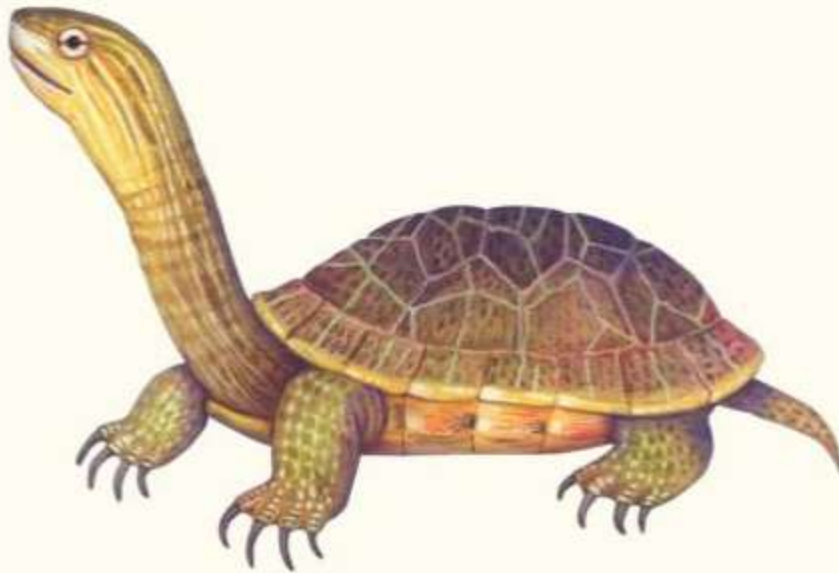
Aye-Aye



The Aye-aye is a lemur native to Madagascar that has teeth that never stop growing, and a special, thin middle finger. To find food it taps on trees and listens for grubs, then gnaws a hole with its teeth and pulls insects out with its long finger. Aye-aye, captain lemur!

Number 1

Chicken Turtle



The chicken turtle is a freshwater turtle in the southeast US. It has webbed feet to help it swim but if you are lucky you can encounter them on land, when they walk between different water habitats. They spend winters hibernating in the mud and can live as long as 20 years. What about the name? Well...it doesn't look like a chicken, and it doesn't sound like a chicken, but apparently it...tastes like a chicken. Yep, Chicken Turtle soup used to be a pretty common meal in the American south.

Number 2

Yellow-bellied Sap Sucker

The yellow-bellied sap sucker is a woodpecker that lives in the northern US and Canada. Its name may sound like an old-timey insult, but it actually gets its name simply because the feathers on its belly are a yellowish color, and its favorite food is tree sap. Just like humans, it collects maple syrup from a hole in a tree, except the yellow-bellied sap sucker uses its bill to make a hole, and not a drill. And it doesn't have pancakes to go with it.



Number 3



Number 3

Agra Cadabra



The Agra Cadabra is one of over 600 types of ground or canopy beetles from the rainforests of South America. They are about the size of a thumbnail and their feet are called tarsomeres, which have pads that allows them to walk upside down, just like superheroes! These magic little beetles are also known to use those sticky feet to... POOF!—disappear.

Number 4

Hummingbird-hawk Moth



The Hummingbird-Hawk Moth looks like a hummingbird, sounds like a hummingbird, and even acts like a hummingbird, but it is really a moth. It feeds on flowers by reaching out what looks like a long tongue, except it's not a tongue but something called a proboscis that is basically a straw. They can be seen from Portugal to Japan, but have also been spotted in the southwest US. Or was that the hummingbird? Hmm...we're confused.

Number 5



How does a tiny flamboyant spider get a name like *Sparklemuffin*? Well one day a handsome sparkle meets a beautiful muffin and...well, maybe not quite like that.

In the wonderful animal kingdom there are certain creatures with names so odd you might think they are strait out of a Dr. Suess story. In this book we visit them in their home environment, and learn not only where they live, what they eat, and what they sound like, but also where they get their strange names from.

Colting and Medina's descriptions are vividly brought to life by Stankovic's stunning watercolor illustrations that harken back to early 20th century biological illustration.



Copyrighted Material

US \$16.95 / CAN \$22.00 / UK £13.95
ISBN: 978-0-998820-53-8

