An ALPHABESTIARY

Here's the blurb on Amazon: "*An Alphabestiary* is a book of light verse quatrains, and of lightly lyrical verse quatrains. Each A to Z section (there are four) is devoted to a distinct group of animals, beginning with the mammals and ending with creatures fabulous and imaginary. Each quatrain is preceded by a brief prose commentary on its subject (mostly zoological and factual; occasionally personal or fanciful) and each one is rounded off with its own small illustration. The result is a merry brew of wit and animal trivia and whimsical invention. *An Alphabestiary* is the ideal light browsing book."

The alphabet x 4 should = 104 four line poems, right? But I snuck in ten to a dozen extras.

I re-used, in variant form, four of the original "Alphabestiary" quatrains in the trade book "The Flap Over Tree Debris Island" (see PIC LIT) where I illustrated them with good photographs rather than clumsy drawings.

Three of those quatrains (about Fireflies, Dragonflies, and Mosquitos) are on this site, in the folder for "The Flap."

The fourth one (for the Kingfisher) is right here, without its bad drawing or its lovely photograph.

Here are just nine more of them, without the illustrations.

So nine + four makes thirteen of them somewhere on this site: half an alphabet!

(Oh. 14. "Millipede: features one of the extras.)

B IS FOR BOA

Boas, or *boa constrictors* to distinguish them from the feathery scarf, are big snakes­—ten, twelve feet long or more. Their bite isn't poisonous, but can be very painful; their embrace, on the other hand, is lethal. Yet people do keep them as pets: I taught a girl, in fact, who sometimes brought her big snake (boa? python?) to class, and let it snuggle and slither all about her. Well, we're not their natural prey, and boas, the word is, can grow quite tame in captivity. Until they're just cute, feathery scarves.

Dangerous Liaisons

The Boa waits, with, fierce, coiled grace,

To take our breath: oh wild embrace…

With hunger barely bated slower,

We reach to feed and goad the Boa.

Derek Kannemeyer,

from *"An Alphabestiary,"* available on Amazon

C IS FOR CENTAUR

The centaur had two torsos, one human, one equine: so then, two sets of internal organs, with a digestive system for each? Tricky! (The horse, a non-ruminant herbivore, has a complex, delicate gut.) The centaur legend may derive from tribes of horsemen so expert man and mount seemed like one being; or else the breed was once real, but has since expired of chronic impracticality.

Centaur Anatomy

The Centaur was three-quarters Equus,

Two-thirds Human (where its neck was).

That's quite the brawny bod you fed,

You two-paunched, six-limbed quadruped!

Derek Kannemeyer,

a variant form of a quatrain that first appeared in

*"An Alphabestiary,"* available on Amazon

F IS FOR FINCH

On a visit to China, I saw finches carried in bamboo cages the way we might walk our dog; they were the favorite local pet. So charming. Some people apply the name *finch* broadly, to all kinds of small songbirds, but true finches are varied and pervasive enough—they're globally distributed. Our current cat (we've had no others as lethal) is a merciless hunter and tenderer of trophies; we scold her uselessly, and then we coddle her*.*

Finch Elegy

So guilelessly my cat kills Finches.

They're toys to her. They die by inches.

Conscience is mine: a ragged thing.

How guilelessly the Finches sing.

Derek Kannemeyer,

from *"An Alphabestiary,"* available on Amazon

I IS FOR IBEX

*Not all ibexes are Alpine, like mine in this quatrain, nor are they the only animals who herd in unisex groups, avoiding each other except to mate (a six weeks season). Nor are they the sole species whose horny males brawl to determine who gets which female. Acrobatic climbers, they prefer to live above the tree line, in the rough of the rocks and the snow. The does seek higher ground than the bucks, and quickly kick the young ibexes out of their herd, to go grow up elsewhere, in mixed kiddie klatches.*

Alp Mates

Male Ibex mill about the Alps

Flaunting and butting their horny scalps.

Except to make baby Ibexes,

The females segregate the sexes.

Derek Kannemeyer,

from *"An Alphabestiary,"* available on Amazon

K IS FOR KINGFISHER

*There are well over a hundred species of kingfisher, all brightly colored, albeit in a widely varied palette. They seek out rivers, lakes, and forests, yet are found almost everywhere but at the poles and in the driest deserts. But only one kingfisher species is common to the northern U.S.: the belted kingfisher; the subject of this quatrain.*

A Belted Kingfisher

We'll see her, sometimes, strafe the lake,

Trawling a mirror her as wake;

Or hear, somewhere, from trees and sky,

A rattled clack: her belted cry.

Derek Kannemeyer,

from *"An Alphabestiary,"* available on Amazon

M IS FOR MILLIPEDE

*No millipede has a thousand feet; there is a species that tops 700, but the rest have to grow very old to manage half that (as millipedes age and add segments, they acquire more legs). Fortunately, all one thousand species (milligenera?) go barefoot. In honor of their extra gams, here are sixteen bonus feet of tetrameter:* That long, bald worm on fur-trussed feet— The Millipede—has surplus feet. My aunt told Uncle Phillip he'd The left feet of a Millipede.

Breakfast Ballet

What chorus-line of hairy legs

Has crawled up from my coffee dregs?

I never saw (until he peed)

A more unpleasant Millipede!

Derek Kannemeyer,

from *"An Alphabestiary,"* available on Amazon

N IS FOR NEWT

Newts—brightly hued small salamanders—are soft-skinned, lizard-like amphibians. Newts who develop legs and hang out on land are known as *efts*. At one time, just as *an orange* was once *a* *norange* or *a* *naranj*, *an eft* and *a* *newt* were variants of the same word. *Eft* is the older term, but the juvenile animal—a middle stage after the aquatic larvae, and before the adult amphibian newt.

Newt Science

A Newt's a small, bright salamander:

It learns. It crawls. It gains in grandeur.

An apple once struck Isaac Newt.

He *ate* it—he discovered fruit!

Derek Kannemeyer,

a variant form of a quatrain that first appeared in

*"An Alphabestiary,"* available on Amazon

T IS FOR TURTLE

The turtle has a soft body encased in two hard shells: one, the carapace, incorporates the backbone; the other, the plastron, guards the belly. It can tuck its whole fleshy self inside them: head, tail, and all four legs. *Terrapin* may be used to designate a smaller breed, *tortoise* a land-based one, but for different speakers any of the three terms might be primary. Turtles can live to be twelve feet long and 150 years old, and they were around before the first pterodactyl. They have no teeth, but they bite just fine, clamping their hard, sharp-edged jaws.

Turtle Counterpoint

The Turtle by the jogging track

Has scarcely moved when I huff back.

Around her, fit, fleet humans hurtle.

At our still center sits this Turtle.

Derek Kannemeyer,

from *"An Alphabestiary,"* available on Amazon

U IS FOR UNICORN

*The unicorn's a creature of mystical purity and holy grail glamor—it's that elusive, that ineffably beautiful. No one can trap it, but it may display itself, unpredictably, to the pure of heart. To a young virgin woman, at least. For her, it lies down awhile; but then is gone, too wild to be tied down. To declare their own resistance to capture and co-optation (by the English), the Scots made the unicorn their emblem. For centuries, it was sought out as a being both real and magical; narwhal horn was sold as unicorn horn, or "alicorn," for its allegedly miraculous properties.*

The Unicorn Way

The Unicorn evades all traps,

All lures, except for virgins' laps.

He'll lay his horn there to be petted.

Great, glorious work, if you can get it.

Derek Kannemeyer,

from *"An Alphabestiary,"* available on Amazon

V IS FOR VAMPIRE

*The folklore vampire has been around for millennia, under many names, in many cultures. Its multitude of precursors began to conjoin and take a more coherent shape in the 18th century, even before the birth of the literary vampire. It was novelists such as John Polidori (1819) and Bram Stoker (1897) who introduced the idea of vampire charisma and hypnotic power. Contemporary storytellers continue to mine this same shivery lode.*

The Vampire Vavavoom

Vampires seem to believe that sex

Is mostly soul gazing, and necks.

But crypt breath; bat skin; fangs? Count Dracula,

Your Vampire charms ain't that spectacular.

Derek Kannemeyer,

from *"An Alphabestiary,"* available on Amazon