



The Yiddish Zoo

Illustration by Joanna Yardley

"And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto the man to see what he would call them; and whatsoever the man would call every living creature, that was to be the name thereof."

— Genesis, 2:19

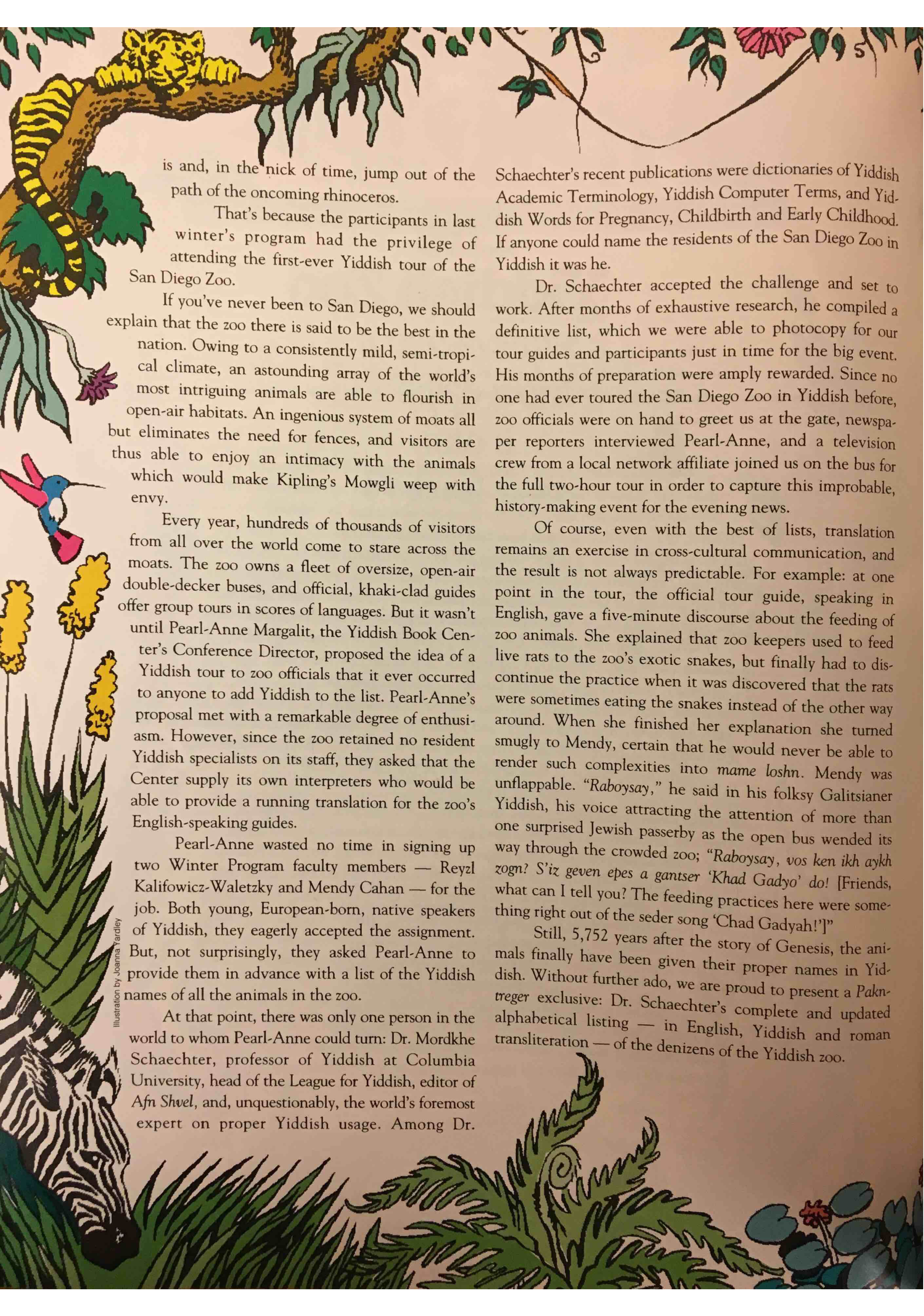
According to the Torah, after God created all the animals it was up to man to name them. Who knew that it would take humans until 1991 of the Common Era before they completed the task in Yiddish?

It's not, of course that animals have had no place in Yiddish. It's just that Yiddish-speaking Jews, living in the villages and cities of Eastern Europe, tended to limit their taxonomy to the animals they knew: *vilde khayes*, wild beasts, such as the *volf* and *ber* (or *velvele* and *berele*, depending on your point of view); domestic animals such as the horse (*ferd* or *ferdele*), dog (*hunt* or *hintele*), and cat (*kats* or *ketsele*); uninvited guests such as the mouse (*moyz* or *mayzl*) and bedbug (*vants*); and edible or milk-giving animals such as the cow (*beheyme*), goat (*tsigele*), sheep (*shepsl*), and pig (*khazer* — *zolst undz moykhl zayn!*). Also included in the Yiddish zoological universe were certain non-indigenous animals such as the lion (*leyb* or *leybl*) and whale (*levyosn*): though few East European Jews had ever actually seen such beasts, they were nonetheless on a first-name basis with them because of their appearance in the Bible or other traditional Jewish texts.

But what of the hundreds of exotic animals from Africa, Asia, Australia and the Americas, unknown to Europeans until the advent of colonialism, which had never so much as stepped foot in the pages of the Tanakh or the woods of Poland? For the most part, alligators and antelopes, chimpanzees and cobras, pandas and rattlesnakes, wallabies and zebras and a whole menagerie of similarly exotic beasts have remained nameless to all but the most scholarly native speakers of Yiddish.

It was the rare Yiddish speaker who, upon being informed, for example, that a raging *nozhorn* was heading his way, would have known enough to step aside.

But not so the 120 participants in "Yiddish By the Sea," the National Yiddish Book Center's annual Winter Program in Yiddish Culture held last December in San Diego. Call out to *them* that a renegade *nozhorn* is on its way, and they will instantly recognize the word for what it



is and, in the nick of time, jump out of the path of the oncoming rhinoceros.

That's because the participants in last winter's program had the privilege of attending the first-ever Yiddish tour of the San Diego Zoo.

If you've never been to San Diego, we should explain that the zoo there is said to be the best in the nation. Owing to a consistently mild, semi-tropical climate, an astounding array of the world's most intriguing animals are able to flourish in open-air habitats. An ingenious system of moats all but eliminates the need for fences, and visitors are thus able to enjoy an intimacy with the animals which would make Kipling's Mowgli weep with envy.

Every year, hundreds of thousands of visitors from all over the world come to stare across the moats. The zoo owns a fleet of oversize, open-air double-decker buses, and official, khaki-clad guides offer group tours in scores of languages. But it wasn't until Pearl-Anne Margalit, the Yiddish Book Center's Conference Director, proposed the idea of a Yiddish tour to zoo officials that it ever occurred to anyone to add Yiddish to the list. Pearl-Anne's proposal met with a remarkable degree of enthusiasm. However, since the zoo retained no resident Yiddish specialists on its staff, they asked that the Center supply its own interpreters who would be able to provide a running translation for the zoo's English-speaking guides.

Pearl-Anne wasted no time in signing up two Winter Program faculty members — Reyzl Kalifowicz-Waletzky and Mendy Cahan — for the job. Both young, European-born, native speakers of Yiddish, they eagerly accepted the assignment. But, not surprisingly, they asked Pearl-Anne to provide them in advance with a list of the Yiddish names of all the animals in the zoo.

At that point, there was only one person in the world to whom Pearl-Anne could turn: Dr. Mordkhe Schaechter, professor of Yiddish at Columbia University, head of the League for Yiddish, editor of *Afn Shvel*, and, unquestionably, the world's foremost expert on proper Yiddish usage. Among Dr.

Schaechter's recent publications were dictionaries of Yiddish Academic Terminology, Yiddish Computer Terms, and Yiddish Words for Pregnancy, Childbirth and Early Childhood. If anyone could name the residents of the San Diego Zoo in Yiddish it was he.

Dr. Schaechter accepted the challenge and set to work. After months of exhaustive research, he compiled a definitive list, which we were able to photocopy for our tour guides and participants just in time for the big event. His months of preparation were amply rewarded. Since no one had ever toured the San Diego Zoo in Yiddish before, zoo officials were on hand to greet us at the gate, newspaper reporters interviewed Pearl-Anne, and a television crew from a local network affiliate joined us on the bus for the full two-hour tour in order to capture this improbable, history-making event for the evening news.

Of course, even with the best of lists, translation remains an exercise in cross-cultural communication, and the result is not always predictable. For example: at one point in the tour, the official tour guide, speaking in English, gave a five-minute discourse about the feeding of zoo animals. She explained that zoo keepers used to feed live rats to the zoo's exotic snakes, but finally had to discontinue the practice when it was discovered that the rats were sometimes eating the snakes instead of the other way around. When she finished her explanation she turned smugly to Mendy, certain that he would never be able to render such complexities into *mame loshn*. Mendy was unflappable. "*Raboysay*," he said in his folksy Galitsianer Yiddish, his voice attracting the attention of more than one surprised Jewish passerby as the open bus wended its way through the crowded zoo; "*Raboysay, vos ken ikh aykh zogn? S'iz geven epes a gantser 'Khad Gadyo' do!* [Friends, what can I tell you? The feeding practices here were something right out of the seder song 'Chad Gadyah!']"

Still, 5,752 years after the story of Genesis, the animals finally have been given their proper names in Yiddish. Without further ado, we are proud to present a *Pakn-treger* exclusive: Dr. Schaechter's complete and updated alphabetical listing — in English, Yiddish and roman transliteration — of the denizens of the Yiddish zoo.

ווילדע חיות

An Alphabetical Tour through the San Diego Zoo

Aardvark
Adder
Alligator
Anaconda
Antelope

dos érd-khazerl
der víper
der aligátor
der anakónd
der antelóp

דאָס ערד-חזירל
דער וויפער
דער אַליגאַטאָר
דער אַנאַקאָנד
דער אַנטעלאָפּ

Bear
Bear, grizzly
Bear, polar
Bear, sloth
Bison, American
Bison, European
Boa constrictor
Bongo
Buffalo, Cape

der ber
der gróer ber
der váyser ber
der pamélekher ber
dos amerikáner vízltir
dos eyropéische vízltir
der bóa; di bóashlang
der bóngo
der káplendisher búfloks

דער בער
דער גראַעַר בער
דער ווייסער בער
דער פאַמעלעכער בער
דאָס אַמעריקאַנער וויזלטיר
דאָס אַיראָפּעיִשע וויזלטיר
דער באָאָ; די באָאַשלאַנג
דער באָנגאָ
דער קאַפּלענדישער בופּלאַקס

Camel, Bactrian
Camel, dromedary
Caribou
Cheetah
Chimpanzee, common
Cobra, king
Cockatoo
Condor
Coyote
Crane
Crocodile

der tsvéy-hóykerdiker keml
der éyn-hóykerdiker keml
der karibú
der geyég-lempert
di shimpánze
di málkhes-kóbre
der kakadú
der kóndor
der préyivolf
der zhuráv
der krokodíl

דער צוויי-הויקערדיקער קעמל
דער איין-הויקערדיקער קעמל
דער קאַריבו
דער געיעג-לעמפערט
די שימפאַנזע
די מלכות-קאַברע
דער קאַקאַדו
דער קאָנדאָר
דער פּרייַריוואָלף
דער זשוראַוו
דער קראָקאָדיל

Deer
Dove
Duck

der hirsh
di toyb
di kátshke

דער הירש
די טויב
די קאַטשקע

Eagle
Elephant, African
Elephant, Asian
Elk
Emu

der ódler
der afrikáner hélfand
der azyátisher hélfand
der los
der emú

דער אָדלער
דער אַפּריקאַנער העלפּאַנד
דער אַזיאַטישער העלפּאַנד
דער לאָס
דער עמו

Finch
Flamingo
Fox
Frog

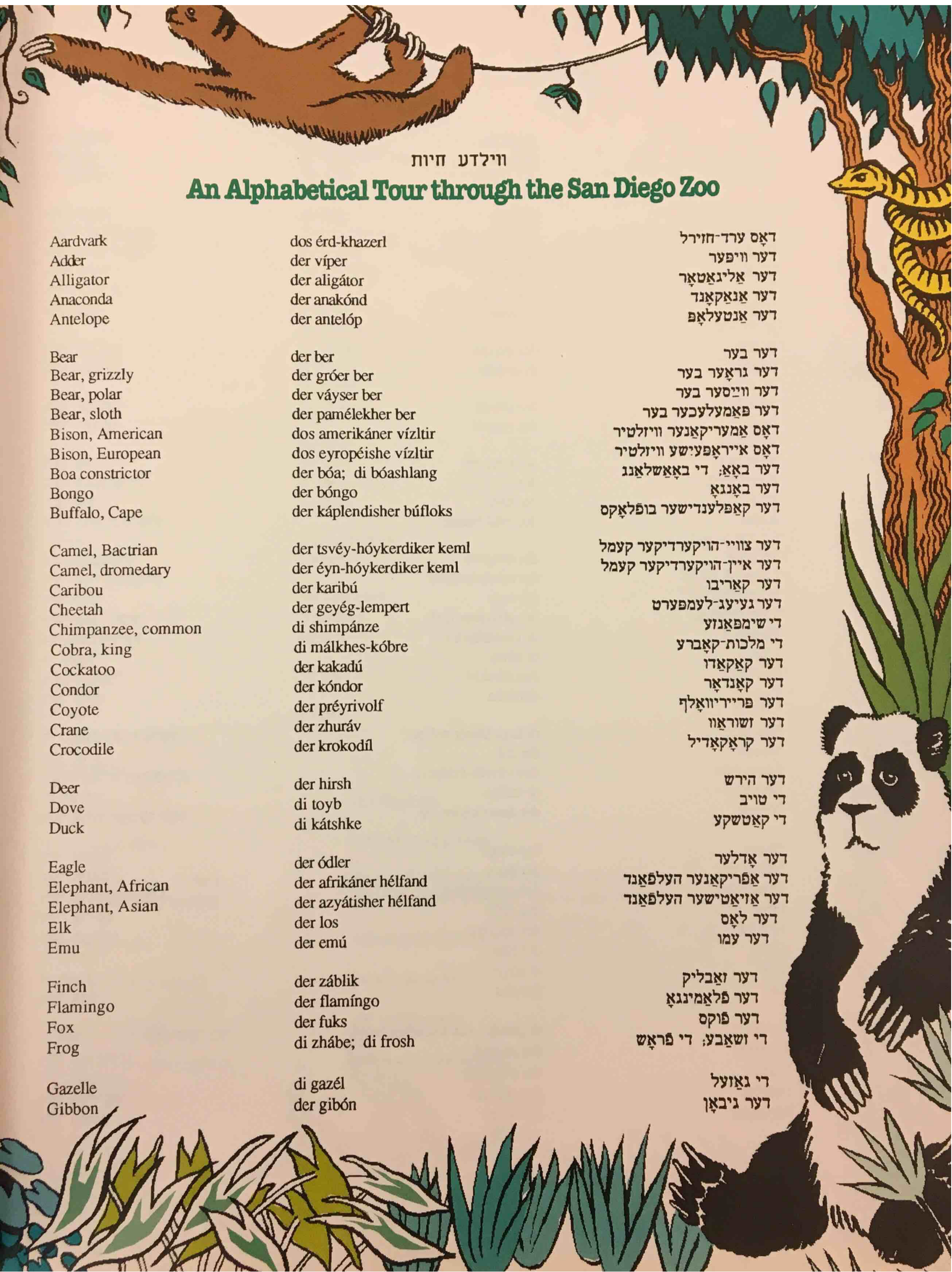
der záblik
der flamíngo
der fuks
di zhábe; di frosh

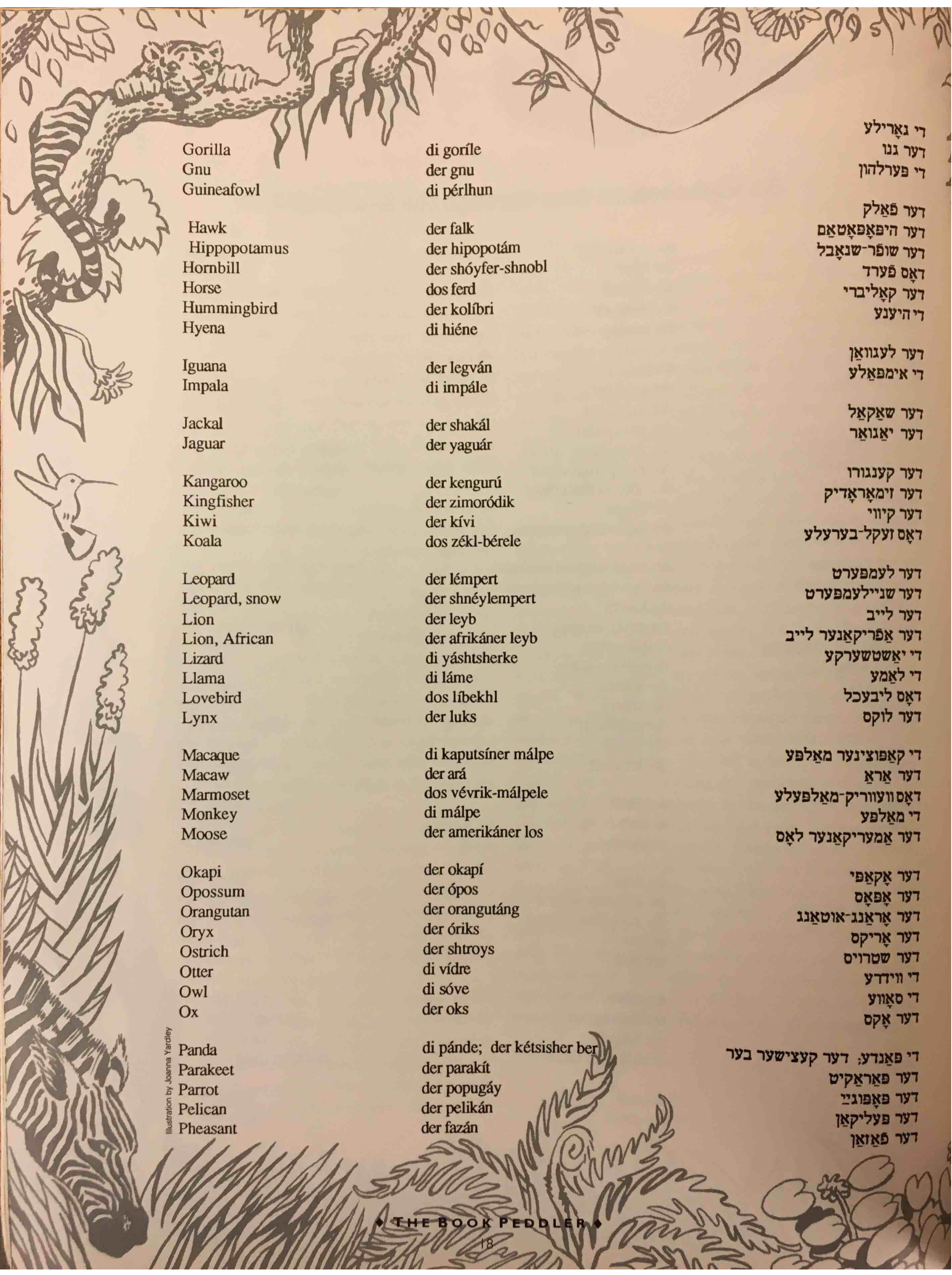
דער זאַבליק
דער פּלאַמינגאָ
דער פּוקס
די זשאַבע; די פּראָש

Gazelle
Gibbon

di gazél
der gibón

די גאַזעל
דער גיבאָן





Gorilla
Gnu
Guineafowl

di goríle
der gnu
di pérlhun

Hawk
Hippopotamus
Hornbill
Horse
Hummingbird
Hyena

der falk
der hipopotám
der shóyfer-shnobl
dos ferd
der kolíbri
di hiéne

Iguana
Impala

der legván
di impále

Jackal
Jaguar

der shakál
der yaguár

Kangaroo
Kingfisher
Kiwi
Koala

der kengurú
der zimoródik
der kívi
dos zékl-bérele

Leopard
Leopard, snow
Lion
Lion, African
Lizard
Llama
Lovebird
Lynx

der lémpert
der shnéylempert
der leyb
der afrikáner leyb
di yáshtsherke
di láme
dos líbekhl
der luks

Macaque
Macaw
Marmoset
Monkey
Moose

di kaputsíner málpe
der ará
dos vévrik-málpele
di málpe
der amerikáner los

Okapi
Opossum
Orangutan
Oryx
Ostrich
Otter
Owl
Ox

der okapí
der ópos
der orangutáng
der óriks
der shtroys
di vídre
di sóve
der oks

Panda
Parakeet
Parrot
Pelican
Pheasant

di pánde; der kétsisher ber
der parakít
der popugáy
der pelikán
der fazán

די גארילע
דער גנו
די פערלהון

דער פֿאַלק
דער היפּאָפּאָטאַם
דער שופּר-שנאַבל
דאָס פֿערד
דער קאָליברי
די היענע

דער לעגוואַן
די אימפּאַלע

דער שאַקאַל
דער יאַגואַר

דער קענגורו
דער זימאָראָדיק
דער קיווי
דאָס זעקל-בערעלע

דער לעמפּערט
דער שניילעמפּערט
דער לייב
דער אַפּריקאַנער לייב
די יאַשטשערקע
די לאַמע
דאָס ליבעכל
דער לוקס

די קאַפּוצינער מאַלפע
דער אַראַ
דאָס וועוּריק-מאַלפעלע
די מאַלפע
דער אַמעריקאַנער לאָס

דער אַקאַפּי
דער אָפּאָס
דער אַראַנג-אוּטאַנג
דער אַריקס
דער שטרויס
די ווידדע
די סאַווע
דער אָקס

די פּאַנדע; דער קעצישער בער
דער פּאַראַקייט
דער פּאַפּוגיי
דער פעליקאַן
דער פּאַזאַן

Illustration by Joanna Yardley

Pigeon
Porcupine
Python

di toyb
der shiékhí-kházer
der pitón

Raccoon
Rattlesnake
Reindeer
Rhinoceros

der shop
di klápershlang
der renifér
der nóz-horn

Sea gull
Seal
Sheep
Snake
Stork
Swan

di méve
der yám-hunt
der sheps
di shlang
der bushl
der shvan

Tapir
Tiger
Tortoise
Turkey

der tapír
der tíger
di tsherepákhe
der índik

Viper
Vulture

di pípershlang
der grif

Wallaby
Wildcat
Wolf

dos valábekhl
di váldkats
der volf

Yak

der yak

Zebra

di zébre

Expressions:

Bird's-eye view

der féyglblik

Birds of a feather

fun eyn teyg geknótn

Don't count your chickens
before they are hatched

leyg zikh nisht keyn féygelekh in búzem
(literally, 'don't put little birds in your bosom')

Crocodile tears

tsíbele-trem ('onion tears')

Make a monkey out of

makhn tsum nar

Monkey business

der kunkl-munkl

Laugh on the wrong side of
the mouth

lakhn mit yáshtsherkes

די טויב
דער שטעכל-חזיר
דער פיטאן

דער שאַפ
די קלאַפערשלאַנג
דער רעניפער
דער נאַזהאַרן

די מעווע
דער ים-הונט
דער שעפס
די שלאַנג
דער בושל
דער שוואַן

דער טאַפיר
דער טיגער
די טשערעפאַכע
דער אינדיק

די פיפערשלאַנג
דער גריף

דאָס וואַלאַבעכל
די וואַלדקאַץ
דער וואַלף

דער יאַק

די זעברע