Bestiaria

Sermons of Fur and Feathers



The bestiary read animals as words in the book of Creation: the question was never what a beast does, but what it means. This sheet collects the Latin from the episode, adds the vocabulary of beasts, birds and marvels, and offers short texts from Isidore of Seville with a handful of exercises. No translations are given for the texts: the notes are there to help you read them yourself. An answer key for the exercises is on the last page.

1 Words from the episode

Latin	Meaning	Note
bestiarium, -ii *n.*	bestiary	medieval; from *bestia*
bestia, -ae *f.*	beast	Isidore derives it from *vis*: *a vi*, 'from force'
fera, -ae *f.*	wild animal	Isidore links it with *ferre* 'to carry': they *feruntur*, 'are carried along'
vis, vis *f.*	force, violence	accusative *vim*, ablative *vi*
natura, -ae *f.*	nature	*de natura animalium* 'on the nature of animals'
nomen, -inis *n.*	name	*nomen* and *natura*: the name discloses the nature
Physiologus, -i *m.*	'the Naturalist'	a Greek title used as a Latin noun
leo, -onis *m.*	lion	afraid of the *gallus albus*, the white rooster
panthera, -ae *f.*	panther	
vulpes, -is *f.*	fox	
castor, -oris *m.*	beaver	Isidore: from *castrare*; the classical word is *fiber*, -bri
elephas, -antis *m.*	elephant	also *elephantus*, -i
caladrius, -ii *m.*	caladrius	the white bird that foretells recovery or death
unicornis, -is *m.*	unicorn	*unus* + *cornu* 'one horn'
aspidochelone, -es *f.*	the island-whale	Greek, 'shield-turtle'; in Latin also *cetus*
monachus marinus	sea-monk	*monachus*, -i *m.*; *marinus, -a, -um* 'of the sea'
nota	note this	imperative of *notare*; a gloss in the margin
moraliter	in the moral sense	adverb; marks the lesson drawn from the animal
adaptatio, -onis *f.*	application	another marginal label
differentia, -ae *f.*	distinction	plural *differentiae*: words that look alike but differ

Say it aloud

The acute accent marks the stressed syllable; it is a reading aid and not part of the spelling.

bestiárium · béstia · féra · natúra · Physiólogus · panthéra · vúlpes · cástor, cástoris · élephas, elephántis · caládrius · unicórnis · aspidochelóne · mónachus marínus · moráliter · adaptátio · differéntia · Etymológiae

2 More bestiary Latin

These words are not all in the episode, but they are the ones you meet most often in bestiaries and in Book XII of Isidore's *Etymologiae*.

Wild beasts

ursus, -i *m.*	bear
lupus, -i *m.*	wolf
tigris, -is *f.*	tiger
cervus, -i *m.*	stag
aper, apri *m.*	wild boar
simia, -ae *f.*	ape
lepus, -oris *m.*	hare
ericius, -ii *m.*	hedgehog
lutra, -ae *f.*	otter
mus, muris *m.*	mouse

Farm and house

equus, -i *m.*	horse
asinus, -i *m.*	donkey
ovis, -is *f.*	sheep
agnus, -i *m.*	lamb
capra, -ae *f.*	goat
canis, -is *m./f.*	dog
catus, -i *m.*	cat (late; classical *feles*)

Creeping things

serpens, -entis *m./f.*	snake
draco, -onis *m.*	dragon, great serpent
vipera, -ae *f.*	viper
rana, -ae *f.*	frog
apis, -is *f.*	bee
formica, -ae *f.*	ant
aranea, -ae *f.*	spider

Birds

avis, -is *f.*	bird
aquila, -ae *f.*	eagle
columba, -ae *f.*	dove
corvus, -i *m.*	raven
pavo, -onis *m.*	peacock
pelicanus, -i *m.*	pelican
cygnus, -i *m.*	swan
ciconia, -ae *f.*	stork
grus, gruis *f.*	crane
noctua, -ae *f.*	owl
ibis, -idis *f.*	ibis
phoenix, -icis *m.*	phoenix

Marvels

basiliscus, -i *m.*	basilisk
gryps, gryphis *m.*	griffin
sirena, -ae *f.*	siren
cetus, -i *m.*	whale, sea monster
belua, -ae *f.*	great beast, monster
monstrum, -i *n.*	portent, monster

The animal's body

cauda, -ae *f.*	tail
cornu, -us *n.*	horn
ala, -ae *f.*	wing
penna, -ae *f.*	feather
rostrum, -i *n.*	beak, snout
unguis, -is *m.*	claw
dens, dentis *m.*	tooth
pellis, -is *f.*	hide, skin

What animals do

rugire to roar · **latrare** to bark · **ululare** to howl · **volare** to fly · **natare** to swim · **serpere** to creep · **mordere** to bite · **rapere** to snatch · **fingere** to feign · **significare** to signify

3 What the texts say

Names and natures

> *Incipit liber Physiologus de natura animalium vel avium seu bestiarum.* — Physiologus, version B
> *Castores a castrando dicti sunt.* — Isidore, Etymologiae XII.2.21
> *Nam fugiens mavult quam totum perdere partem.* — Serlo of Wilton, verse on the beaver
> *Sed rediviva ruit in eas fabricatque rapinam.* — bestiary verse, MS Bodley 533, f. 7v

Notes. *incipit* 'here begins' · *de* + ablative · *vel* ... *seu* 'or ... or' · *a castrando*: *a* + ablative of the gerund, 'from castrating' · *dicti sunt* 'are named' · *nam* 'for' · *fugiens*: present participle of *fugere* · *mavult*: from *malle* 'to prefer'; *mavult partem quam totum perdere* · *redivivus, -a, -um* 'come back to life' · *ruere in* + accusative, 'to pounce on'; *eas*: the birds · *fabricare rapinam* 'to make her catch'.

Question. Why is it *rediviva* and not *redivivus*?

Text 1 · Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* XII.2.2 (c. 630)

Isidore explains two words by their supposed origin.

> *Bestiae dictae a vi, qua saeviunt. Ferae appellatae eo quod naturali utantur libertate et desiderio suo ferantur. Sunt enim liberae eorum voluntates, et huc atque illuc vagantur et quo animus duxerit, eo feruntur.*

Notes. *dictae, appellatae*: supply *sunt* · *a vi, qua saeviunt*: 'from the force with which they rage'; *saevire* 'to rage' · *eo quod* + subjunctive, 'because' · *utantur*: from *uti* + ablative, 'to enjoy, to use' · *desiderio suo ferantur*: 'are carried by their own desire'; passive of *ferre* · *voluntas*, -atis *f.* 'will' · *vagari* 'to wander' · *quo* ... *eo* 'wherever ... there' · *duxerit*: perfect subjunctive of *ducere*.

Questions. (a) Which Latin word does Isidore hear inside *bestia*, and which inside *fera*? (b) Find the two deponent verbs. (c) Which ablative depends on *utantur*? (d) Marcus calls both etymologies wrong. What does Isidore nevertheless tell us about how he thinks language works?

Text 2 · Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* XII.2.29

The fox, as the bestiaries took it over from Isidore.

> *Vulpes dicta, quasi volupes. Est enim volubilis pedibus, et numquam rectis itineribus, sed tortuosis anfractibus currit, fraudulentum animal insidiisque decipiens. Nam dum non habuerit escam, fingit mortem, sicque descendentes quasi ad cadaver aves rapit et devorat.*

Notes. *quasi* 'as if' · *volupes*: an invented form, *volubilis* + *pes* · *volubilis pedibus* 'nimble on its feet' · *rectis itineribus*: ablative, 'by straight paths'; *iter*, itineris *n.* · *tortuosus* 'winding'; *anfractus*, -us *m.* 'twist, bend' · *fraudulentus* 'deceitful' · *insidiae*, -arum *f. pl.* 'ambush, tricks' · *decipere* 'to deceive' · *dum non habuerit* 'whenever it has no' · *esca* 'food' · *fingere* 'to feign' · *sicque* = *et sic* · *descendentes* ... *aves*: object of *rapit* · *cadaver*, -eris *n.* 'carcass'.

Questions. (a) How does the fox run? (b) What does it do when it has no food? (c) Which noun does *descendentes* agree with? (d) Compare the verse on the fox above, *Sed rediviva ruit* ... Which words of Isidore does it retell?

4 Exercises

A · Which beast?

Each sentence describes one animal as the bestiary knows it. Choose from *aquila* · *caladrius* · *cetus* · *elephas* · *leo* · *unicornis* · *vulpes*.

1. *Gallum album timet.*
2. *Mortem fingit et aves rapit.*
3. *Nautae eum insulam esse putant.*
4. *Aegrotum aspicit aut faciem avertit.*
5. *In gremio virginis caput ponit.*
6. *Genua non habet; arbori innixus dormit.*
7. *Iam senex ad solem volat, deinde in fontem descendit.*

Help. *gallus* 'rooster' · *nauta* 'sailor' · *aegrotus* 'sick person' · *avertere* 'to turn away' · *gremium* 'lap' · *genu* 'knee' · *innixus* + dative, 'leaning on'.

B · Differentiae

Serlo of Wilton taught look-alike words in verse. In this line the two *mane* are different words: which is the verb and which the adverb? Then give two meanings for each of *os* · *liber* · *populus* · *latus* · *canis*.

> *«Care», dico, «mane», cum debeo surgere mane.*

C · Read the rubric

Incipit liber Physiologus de natura animalium vel avium seu bestiarum.

1. Find the three genitive plurals and give the nominative singular of each.
2. Which case does *de* take here?
3. Which word of the rubric became the name of a whole genre?

D · Animals in proverbs

Complete the proverbs with *asinum* · *canem* · *lupus* · *lupus* · *muscas*.

1. _____ *in fabula.*
2. *Aquila non capit* _____.
3. *Cave* _____!
4. *Asinus* _____ *fricat.*
5. *Homo homini* _____.

Help. *fabula* ‘story, talk’ · *capere* ‘to catch’ · *musca* ‘fly’ · *cavere* + accusative, ‘to beware of’ · *fricare* ‘to rub’.

E · Your own chapter

The episode ends with a hedgehog. Write its bestiary chapter in three sentences: the name (*Ericius dicitur* …), the nature (*Natura eius est, ut* …) and the meaning (*Moraliter:* … *significat* …).

5 Further reading

Willene B. Clark, *A Medieval Book of Beasts: The Second-Family Bestiary* (2006) · Ilya Dines, “The Bestiary in British Library, Royal MS. 2 C. XII and its Role in Medieval Education,” *Electronic British Library Journal* (2014) · Sophia Hendrikx, *Monsters, Sea-Monks, and Mermaids* · Florence McCulloch, *Mediaeval Latin and French Bestiaries* (1960) · Chet Van Duzer, *Sea Monsters on Medieval and Renaissance Maps* (2013). The full list of sources is in the episode description.

Answer key

A 1 leo · 2 vulpes · 3 cetus · 4 caladrius · 5 unicornis · 6 elephas · 7 aquila.

B the first *mane* is the imperative of *manere*, ‘stay’; the second is the adverb, ‘in the morning’ · *os*, oris ‘mouth’ / *os*, ossis ‘bone’ · *liber*, libri ‘book’ / *liber, -era, -erum* ‘free’ · *populus* (m.) ‘people’ / *populus* (f.) ‘poplar’ · *latus*, lateris ‘side’ / *latus, -a, -um* ‘broad’ · *canis* ‘dog’ / *canis* ‘you sing’, from *canere*.

C 1 *animalium* (*animal*), *avium* (*avis*), *bestiarum* (*bestia*) · 2 the ablative · 3 *bestiarum*.

D 1 lupus · 2 muscas · 3 canem · 4 asinum · 5 lupus.

Names and natures it agrees with *vulpes*, which is feminine.

Text 1 (a) *vis* in *bestia*, *ferre* in *fera* · (b) *utantur*, *vagantur* · (c) *naturali libertate* · (d) that the origin of a name reveals the nature of the thing.

Text 2 (a) never straight, but in winding turns · (b) it feigns death and seizes the birds that come down · (c) *aves* · (d) *fingit mortem* and *aves rapit et devorat*.