

7 Animal Mother-Child Bonds That Take Protectiveness to the Next Level

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From abnormally long gestation periods to assigning babysitters to remaining together for life, these bonds are some of the strongest.

Videos available at [SentientMedia](#).



The animal kingdom has evolved some truly incredible maternal relationships, many of which rival the closest of bonds between human mothers and their children. From the multi-generational matriarchies of elephants to the two-part pregnancies of kangaroos, the [bonds between animals and their mothers](#) are touching, impressive and sometimes downright odd. Here are just a few of some of the [most incredible mother-child bonds in the animal kingdom](#).

Elephants

At nearly two years, [elephants have the longest gestation period](#) of any animal — and that’s just the start of the family’s journey. After suckling her young for two years, a mother elephant remains with her children for the rest of her life.

[Elephants are matriarchal](#). It’s common to see [multiple generations of female elephants](#) living and traveling together, with the eldest matriarch setting the pace so the young ones can keep up. If a child is orphaned, they’ll be adopted and cared for by the rest of the herd. [Mother elephants even designate “babysitter”](#) relatives to watch their young while they eat, or to care for their child if a mother dies.

Orcas

Much like elephants, [orcas are a matriarchal species](#) that stick together for multiple generations. A pod of orcas typically consists of a grandmother, her offspring and her daughter’s offspring, and while both sons

and daughters temporarily leave the pod — sons to mate, daughters to hunt — they always return to their families at the end of the day.

While female orcas eventually learn to hunt and survive on their own, a recent study found that [male orcas rely on their mothers for food](#) and protection for the rest of their lives. While the reasoning behind this is still unclear, it's been theorized that this “mama's boy” tendency has to do with [the matriarchal nature of orca pods](#). While an orca's daughter's offspring is raised collectively by her pod, her son's offspring is not; this gives [mother orcas more time to dote on their sons](#). By ensuring that their sons are healthy and virile, they increase their chances of passing on the family genes.

Pigs

Mother pigs are called sows, and they're very affectionate and loving with their piglets. Shortly after birthing a litter, sows build a nest for their young, and will cover them with her body when it gets cold. [Pigs have over a dozen distinct grunts](#), and sows will quickly develop names for each of their piglets, who learn to [identify their mother's voice](#) after around two weeks.

Sows have been known to “sing” to their piglets to signal that it's feeding time, and both [piglets and their mothers become distressed](#) when separated from each other, which is standard practice [on factory farms](#).

Orangutans

Although many mothers care for their young throughout the animal kingdom, orangutans deserve special credit for their level of commitment. As male orangutans play no role in raising their children, that responsibility falls on their mothers — and it's quite the responsibility.

For the first several years of an orangutan's life, they are completely dependent on their mothers for food and transportation, and spend most of this time physically clinging to them for survival. They continue living and traveling with their mothers for several years after this, during which time the [mother teaches their child how to forage](#). Orangutans eat over 200 different kinds of foods, and their [mothers spend years teaching them](#) how to find, extract and prepare each one of them.

In total, orangutans don't leave their mothers until they're around eight years old — and even after that, they'll often continue visiting their moms until well into their adulthood, unlike many human children.

Alligators

Despite their fearsome reputation, [alligators are meticulous, caring and attentive mothers](#). After laying eggs, they bury them in the ground, which serves the dual purpose of keeping them warm and hiding them from predators.

An alligator's sex is determined by the temperature of their egg before hatching. If a clutch is too hot, all of the babies will be male; too cold, and they'll all be female. In order to ensure that she gives birth to a healthy mix of males and females, alligator moms will regularly adjust the amount of covering on top of the eggs, maintaining a constant, moderate temperature.

When an alligator's eggs start squeaking, they're ready to hatch. At this point, the mother carefully breaks open each egg with her mighty jaws, loads her newborn babies into her mouth, and gently carries them into the water. She'll continue protecting them for up to two years.

Cheetahs

Cheetahs are extremely vulnerable in their first few months of life. They're born blind, their fathers play no role in raising them, and they're surrounded by predators. For these reasons and others, [most newborns don't make it to adulthood](#) — but the ones who do have their moms to thank.

Cheetah mothers go to great lengths to keep their cubs safe. They move their litter to a different den every couple of days, so that the cubs' scent doesn't become too attractive to predators, and hide them in tall grass to make them less visible. They keep a constant watchful eye, both for predators who might harm their cubs and, just as importantly, for the prey animals they need to catch to feed themselves. When not hunting, they [cuddle with their cubs and purr](#) to comfort them.

After a few months, cheetah moms start teaching their cubs the ins-and-outs of hunting. They'll start by bringing captured prey back to the den, so that their cubs can practice re-catching it; later, the mother leads her cubs out of the den and teaches them how to hunt for themselves. The maternal instinct of female cheetahs is so strong that they're even known to [adopt orphaned cubs from other families](#).

Kangaroos

Everyone knows that kangaroos have pouches, but that one fact doesn't capture the [extraordinary nature of kangaroo motherhood](#).

A kangaroo first enters the outside world after gestating in their mother's womb for 28-33 weeks, but to call this a "birth" would be misleading. While the tiny kangaroo does indeed leave the mother's body through her vagina, they then immediately re-enter her body by crawling into her pouch. The "joey," as they're called at this point in their lives, continues to develop in the mother's pouch for another eight months before finally crawling out, this time for good.

But oddly enough, the mother still retains the ability to get pregnant during this eight-month period, and when this happens, it initiates a process called embryonic diapause. An embryo forms in her womb, but its development is immediately "paused" for as long as it takes the original joey to finish development. Once that joey is out of the way, the embryo's development continues, until it too grows into a joey, and the process repeats itself.

Finally, mother kangaroos continue to care for their newborns for at least three months after they leave the pouch. This means that, at any given point, a mother kangaroo might be caring for three different offspring at three different points in their development: an embryo in the womb, a joey in the pouch and a newborn by her side. Talk about multi-tasking!