

Adorable Animal Friends



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From unexpected pairings to amazing animal families, discover some of the coolest—and cutest—animal pals around.



Friendships are important—including the ones we have with animals! Animals are also able to form amazing partnerships and friendships on their own. Read on to find out more about some animals who truly are best buds.

Ancient BFFs

Have you ever heard the term “human’s best friend”? From playing with them to feeding them to even sometimes letting them sleep in our beds, there’s nothing we wouldn’t do for our dogs. But this isn’t anything new; scientists think that humans and dogs have been companions for thousands of years. While experts don’t know exactly when canines and humans first forged a bond, they believe it was at least 16,000 years ago—and maybe even as many as 40,000! Archaeologists have discovered burial sites for beloved canine companions that date back some 30,000 years. This suggests that, even back then, people cared strongly enough for their pets to remember them with special burials.

DID YOU KNOW?

Scientists think that pet dogs’ ancestors, wolves, and humans might have first teamed up around ancient human campfires. The wolves received cooking scraps, and in return their presence scared away other predators.



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Over the centuries, dogs continued to serve as the faithful companions of humans everywhere. In parts of western Asia some 4,000 years ago, they were depicted as the beloved pets of gods and goddesses. In places such as ancient Egypt and some regions in Central America, dogs were mummified after they died. And in ancient China, some members of the royalty even carried small Pekingese dogs around in their long sleeves!

It wasn't just dogs; cats became wonderful feline friends for humans around the world. Historians think that cats were first domesticated about 12,000 years ago. They soon became beloved in many places; in ancient Egypt, they were even revered as magical creatures.

So, is it really any wonder that many people consider cats and dogs members of their family? After all, humans have been buddies with these amazing animals for thousands of years



A family, or pack, of grey wolves stands together in the forest.

Family Friendships

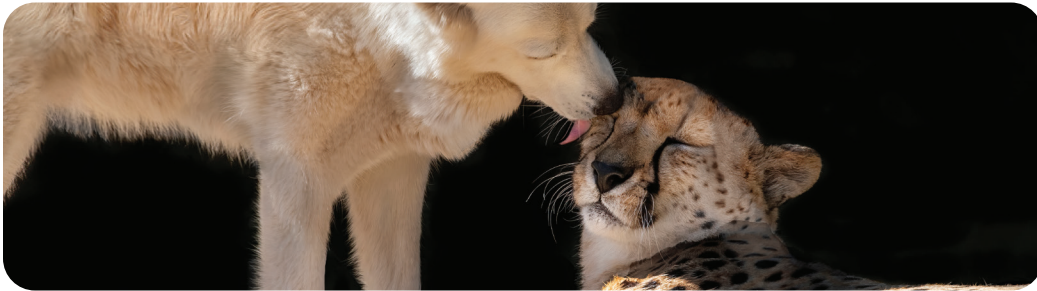
Just like with humans, animals can form strong bonds with one another. And—also like humans—many of these bonds occur right within their own families! Wolves are some of the most social animals, and they build strong group connections to help them survive. These wolf families or groups are known as packs. Packs work together to stay safe and healthy. They also work together to take care of the baby wolves, called cubs.



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Wolf pack members take turns bringing food for cubs and babysitting them. And the cubs themselves grow close, too! They learn to hunt by playing with one another, and often practice pouncing and stalking. Other times, they'll play with their own versions of toys, like bones or feathers. After all, some of the best friendships you have can be right within your own family!



A yellow dog licks the face of its best friend: a cheetah!

An Unexpected Match

While just about all animal friendships are adorable, some are also very unexpected. Take, for example, some of the animal friendships that form at animal sanctuaries and zoos. At one zoo in New Jersey, a cheetah named Nandi made a close friend called Bowie. But Bowie isn't a cheetah—he's a Labrador retriever!

While this may be surprising, it's actually not unheard of. In fact, many zoos and sanctuaries around the United States pair cheetah cubs with puppies. But don't worry, it's not dangerous for the puppy. Because the cheetah and the pup are introduced when they are very young, they grow up seeing each other as siblings. More importantly, the dogs help the cheetahs feel confident and comfortable. Cheetahs are often shy animals, and can feel nervous or upset in captivity.

FUN FACT

Peregrine falcon siblings sometimes practice hunting by chasing one another through the air.



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Cheetahs are endangered animals, which means that their population in the wild is decreasing and could go extinct, or die out. Some organizations raise captive cheetahs to help with awareness and activism, or to grow cheetah populations. They also want the cheetahs to be comfortable and happy, so that's where dogs like Bowie come in! Because of their easygoing natures and happy attitudes, Labrador retrievers make wonderful companions for cheetahs (and for people, of course!). On top of being absolutely adorable, animal pals like Nandi and Bowie prove that wonderful friendships can be found in unexpected places.