

Jess Lloyd-Mostyn

Part of the magic of long term blue water cruising is that it affords sailors the privilege of seeing all sorts of exotic birds and beasts in their natural habitat

The highlights of good day-sailing are all about efficient trim and nifty manoeuvres; passage-making is focussed on covering mileage and reaching a new destination. Sailing long-term and globally has many highpoints but by far the most wonderful for us is the opportunity to come up close with animals that you normally only see on an Attenborough programme on the BBC. From orangutans to whale sharks, lemurs to elephants, birds of paradise and Komodo dragons, there are a lot of us sailors who go out of our way for the chance to catch a glimpse of a creature naturally, in its own habitat, without any fees, fences or formalities involved. As such there are particular places on a circumnavigation route that we're willing to detour from in order to enjoy one of these rare and magical encounters. But of course, the tricky thing with any animal in the wild is that there is never any guarantee that you will see them.

Humpback whale breeding season in the South Pacific happily overlaps with when cruisers are heading westwards across the same ocean so it's understandable that many choose to dawdle in the waters around Tonga in order to dive or snorkel near these gigantic beasts. However, it was our unintentional meeting with a humpback en route to Tahiti that struck me far more as the random surprise of it knocked the breath out of me. A huge dark shape was moving towards our yacht at a pace and, upon realising it was a whale, James and I both had fleeting worries of being rammed. We were under full sail but the winds were light and soon the grey mass slipped alongside us, stretching the full 12 metres of our length. As luck would have it the whale was just as curious about us as we were about it and it kept level for some while, giving us all time to check each other out. At one point it rolled over and showed off its vast white belly before slowly turning back over and blowing us a kiss of briny air from its blowhole in salute.

In Costa Rica we had barely risen for breakfast and were sipping coffee in the cockpit when a large saltwater crocodile started circling the boat. He was so big and



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looked very much like a modern-day dinosaur, all leathery scales and reptilian eyes, ancient, wise and powerful. We decided that was not the place to clean the hull. On a mooring in Singapore our trips ashore were often punctuated by watching the large sea-otters scramble up the beach and take leisurely family sand baths, mere metres away from our feet. They seemed so relaxed and at ease, while still keeping an eye on the nearby human interlopers, and they had pups with them. They'd frolic for five minutes or so and then slowly slip back into the water to fish. In New Zealand a stand-up paddleboard session could quickly turn into getting right next to bottle-nosed dolphins. I remember my husband taking turns with the children, them balancing on the board as he deftly steered it along the shoreline at the anchorage where the dolphins

were obligingly playing. They often accompany our boat underway too, dancing at the bow while we gaze down at them, the little ones giggling with delight. It's amazing how these moments become part of your sailing journey, almost to the point where you forget how bizarre and extraordinary each tale would be when told to your friends back in the UK. The noise of the cockatoos or hornbills flying overhead in the morning; the chirp of the geckos and cicadas; the monkeys climbing the masts in the Malaysian marina again, or the fruit bats stealing your provisions. Our kids' first experiences of snorkelling were with giant manta rays gliding around them and turtles darting about in the water ahead. When they go ashore to a playground it's likely to have the odd visiting yelping peacock or they spot a troop of monkeys running up the slide or trying to snatch their flipflops. And as the boat is our home it makes it even more miraculous. Imagine lifting your living room curtains and glancing out at racoons or orcas, camels or giant monitor lizards, scarlet macaws or wild boar on any given day. Yes, it's incredible and we are aware of the all-too-painful truth that our lives won't always be this way. So it's important to recognise and relish this rare fairy-tale ocean view, and share the story with as many as we can of the wild creatures we meet along the way. ✦



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Jess and James left the UK in 2011 in their Crossbow 42 and have sailed halfway round the world, growing their crew en route. Follow their journey at water-log.com

ILLUSTRATION: MICHAEL PARKIN