

of a fast-moving ship. Like human children, ermine—a type of weasel—have been observed leaping into piles of leaves, then rolling around in them. In winter, river otters climb up the sides of a stream for the sole purpose of sliding down its snowy banks.

There's more: Sea lions often grab long pieces of kelp in their mouths and then chase each other around. Columbian ground squirrels—when they have free time—occasionally play “leap frog,” as do badgers. Badgers also engage in “tug-of-war” games; jackals fancy “blind man’s bluff,” and spotted hyenas use sticks to play “keep-away.” Who taught all these animals the games they play, games enjoyed by our children as well? Jesus did!

I honestly think that most of God’s creatures run and play simply because they’re glad to be alive, enjoying the life

Christ graciously gave them! It’s not uncommon to see animals playing quite intensely after narrowly escaping death. This has come to be known as the ‘play of relief.’

Everything is under Christ’s sovereign control, and the play found throughout creation is an expression of God’s joy as Creator and Savior. Let us all then strive to share in His joy!

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*Shout for joy, O heavens!
And rejoice, O earth!
Break forth into joyful shouting,
O mountains!
ISAIAH 49:13*

HIS *Nature*

*“the joy of the LORD
is your strength
NEHEMIAH 8:10*

THE JOY OF THE LORD

Nothing in creation just happens on its own. The sweetness found on Earth was brought here by Jesus from His Heavenly Father (Matt. 11:27; John 15:11). When ravens play with one another (and yes, ravens do play!) they proclaim God’s joy. Christ’s delight in being Creator echoes through the romping and rolling of all creatures because, as God, He made them and His personality is stamped upon their being (Rom. 1:20).

Do you own a pet dog or cat? Have they never broken into spontaneous and joyful play without any prompting?

And is this not a reflection of the joy of our Lord Jesus, their Creator?!

Most animals frolic from time to time. Despite their notoriously cantankerous character, Tasmanian Devils have been observed using trees or hollow logs in which to play “hide and seek” with their brothers



Pure joy!

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and sisters. The mongoose also enjoys chasing and hiding from others of its kind.

There are monkeys that carry rocks up into trees, only to fling them to the ground again. They then retrieve the stones and take them back up the trees. But what does this accomplish for the monkeys . . . that is, from their point of view? The only "purpose" seems to be that they enjoy dropping rocks from a tree! Gorilla fathers and chimpanzee mothers have been observed tickling their children. What possible survival skills are they teaching here? Surely they're not instructing their young to **BEWARE OF THE TICKLE MONSTER**, are they?!

Marmosets and tamarins are monkeys

Horses playing with a large ball



that also enjoy playing tag. So do the Roe deer of Europe. It's not uncommon for rowdy young deer to run around the woods early in the morning just as the warming sun begins to rise. They then love to chase each other through the trees at break-neck speeds.

But mammals are not the only ones who savor the sweeter side of life. Christ Jesus has given a species of parrot in New Zealand the same desire to play hide-and-seek. And the peacocks of India occasionally engage in games of tag with other peacocks.

All this sport is beautifully orchestrated by our Lord Jesus Christ. Some scientists argue that the reason for these various animal behaviors is that it's a creative way for animals to build and maintain their strength so that they can survive in the wild. This may very well be; and if so, they

are then a living testimony to the truth of Nehemiah 8:10, *the joy of the LORD is your strength*. If there's no work to be done, young beavers can be found splashing in the water, rolling and somersaulting as they go. This probably does help them maintain their swimming skills.

Of all God's creatures, it seems that the wolf holds the world record for play. Young wolves have been observed running after each other and roughhousing for up to five hours nonstop!

Young goats sometimes jump straight up into the air for no apparent reason, as do many animals. Goats have even been observed 'dancing' at the sight of a butterfly. It may be hard to believe, but I think they are dancing for joy at the beauty of their Creator revealed in the delicate things He makes. (How often do we do the same?)



Leaping for joy!

Their Creator is our Lord, and His joy is their joy and ours. It permeates all life. At the heart of sin, is a refusal to share in this joy of our Triune God because the foundation of true delight is humility (see 2 Sam. 6:14; Matt. 18:4). Sadly, proud people often struggle with joy.

It's not just youngsters who have all the fun though. Full-grown tigers enjoy wading in rivers. And many adult animals frequently sprint or gallop at a moment's notice. Captive dolphins seem to enjoy balancing objects on their noses, and wild dolphins frequently ride the waves created by the bow

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