REPRODUCTION, whether sexual or asexual, is necessary for the propagation and survival of a species. Likewise, in the animal kingdom every day in the life of an animal means competition for access to vitally important but limited resources such as food, territory and most importantly mates.

To draw a female’s attention and to bring her into the mood the animals not only engage in show-offs but ward off competitors for a chance to mate with the female. These endeavours may sometimes take the form of fights, which can sometimes turn bloody and may prove fatal for one of the suitors. Let’s take a look at some of these interesting battles for sex in the animal kingdom.

In the world of giraffes, the strongest male gets a preference to mate with a female but what decides who’s strongest? Male giraffes get into neck wrestling which means that two males stand with their necks entwined and then push each other from side to side. The male who gives up at the end also gives up his chance of mating.

The stag beetles also wrestle to settle this point. These stag beetles have massive jaws and this organ is used for not only drinking sap from trees but also for deciding who will get a chance to mate and occupy a favoured mating site. The stag beetles fight with these huge jaws, the winner lifts the opponent on to his back and the loser accepts his defeat and retreats from the battle field gladly without sustaining an injury.

In the case of Elephant seals the male makes a booming sound to intimidate opponents but if this trick fails then these huge beasts do not hesitate to fight on the beach inflicting injuries on one another. This bloody fight goes on till one of the males accepts defeat and moves on.

Bighorn sheep have a different way to settle this mating issue. In their breeding period in the autumn season two males run at each other and with all their might strike at each other’s head. This head butting may go on for hours till one of the suitor gives up. The winner gets the opportunity to mate with the females.
In many instances in the animal world sex for a male means either his certain doom or ending up at the dining table of the female!

This often happens in the spider world. Here the males usually happen to be smaller in size than the female. Females of the spider species such as the venomous Black widow spider and their related species the Australian Red Back spider are notorious for killing and eating the males during or after mating. Probably to save their skin the male wolf spiders have devised a life saver plan. The male wolf spider catches a prey and then wraps it up in his silk and offers this “present” to the female and then mates with his comparatively massive female partner without paying the price of his life. Unlike the unfortunate males of the Black Widow spiders and the Australian Red Back spiders who become food for their female partners the male Wolf spider turns out to be really smart and fortunate in this regard.

The female praying mantises are also bigger in size than the males. When the male moves onto the female’s back to attempt mating with her she simply grabs him with her front legs and bites his head off. Their mating is really queer since the female praying mantises are known to eat the head of their partners while his headless body continues mating with the female! Even in cases where the male’s head has not been eaten the female will never allow the male to escape from her deadly clutches and will slowly dismember and eat him.

In scorpions too the male scorpions sometimes get eaten up by the female after mating. Scorpions mate at night. The male holds the female’s pincers in his own pincers. They both arch up their abdomens until their stings touch, then they dance. This scorpion dance lasts for a few hours to a few days! The male deposits a spermatophore on the ground and pulls the female over it until the sperm mass is taken up by her. The female scorpions sometimes do not hesitate to grab the golden chance to eat her exhausted partner.

In bee hives, the roles of queen bee (female), male bees (drones) and the worker bees are clearly demarcated. The role of queen bees is to reproduce and though she may lay as many as million fertilised eggs each year, she mates only once in her lifetime! A few days after completing metamorphosis into an adult, the queen bee flies out of the hive and mates with one or more drones while flying in the air. The drones die minutes after mating but deposit millions of sperm in the queen’s seminal receptacle, where they are stored for use for five or more years of her life. Drones develop from unfertilised eggs. When in a hive the honey supply begins to run low the worker bees sting all of them to their painful death. Thus the only function that a drone has in his life is to deliver sperm to the queen bee.
The lifespan of silkworms that provide us with silk is about 70 to 75 days. This period includes egg to emergence stage, mating, followed by death after 2-3 days. But the majority of their lifespan is spent in the cocoon. After emerging from the cocoon, the silk worms seek a partner for mating and they find each other by the pheromones secreted. The mating lasts for 6 to 8 hours. After a day or two of mating, the male silk worms die. The females start laying eggs after 3-5 days of mating and die immediately after laying eggs.

Organisms that mate once and die are common among some plants and some fish but rarer among mammals. A rodent like small marsupial endemic to Australia, the antechinus, is one of a small number of mammals that die after mating. Recent Australian research reveals that sex is such a frenetic and stressful process for them that it literally kills them—and for females, break out. The marathon mating session lasts for twelve hours at a stretch with males and females swapping partners! Since the males in the mating season lose essential body weight by starving themselves, the strenuous mating session kills them. All the males die after mating due to over exhaustion.

In the animal kingdom there are also some rather bizarre mating cases. Deep Sea Angler Fish: The cold and dark ocean depths is the home of a very clumsy and bizarre female fish called the Deep Sea angler fish. It is a grotesque looking fish like some monster straight out of a horror movie. Due to its clumsy looks, it’s also called the “common black devil”. This fish has a torch-like structure on its head which is the elongated dorsal spine. It emits light due to a chemical process called bioluminescence. The angler keeps waving its torch-like structure to and fro. When an unfortunate prey gets attracted by the light source and comes nearer to inspect, it is instantly gobbled up by the angler fish. The angler fish’s mouth is full of sharp fang-like teeth.

The female angler fish is a small fish reaching the maximum size of 5 inches but the fish has the capacity to swallow prey almost double its size. It can do so because it has flexible bones which allow the jaws and stomach to expand.

The male angler fish is way too smaller than the female and reaches the maximum size of only 6 mm! The male has no elongated dorsal spine which it can use to attract prey just as a female does and due to its small size cannot hunt. To prevent death due to starvation the male is on a constant look-out for a female and once it comes across one it will waste no time to attach itself to the body of the female with the help of its small hook-like teeth. Then the male releases an enzyme which dissolves the skin of his mouth and the part of the female body where he is attached. Gradually the tissue of their body will bond together and their blood vessels will join. The male will survive like this the rest of his life. Gradually the eyes and other internal organs of the male will degenerate but only the testes will remain. A female angler fish has been known to carry up to six males on its body.

The males appear as some sort of growth on the female’s body. Carrying the males in this fashion is mutually beneficial for both because the male will survive without having to worry for anything, on the other hand, the female can reproduce at her own sweet will without worrying about finding a mate in the deep darkness of the ocean.

Maroon Clownfish and Flame Angelfish: Some fish species, especially which live on coral reefs, can change their sex as the situation demands! The maroon clownfish lives in a school of one female and several males. If the female dies, one of the males changes to a female and takes over her role in breeding. On the other hand, a Flame angelfish lives in schools of one male and several females. If the male leaves or dies a female becomes a male to replace him!

These examples drawn from the animal kingdom, which are in no way exhaustive, strengthen the fact that reproduction is one of the primary goals of an organism and animals will mate, come what may.

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