

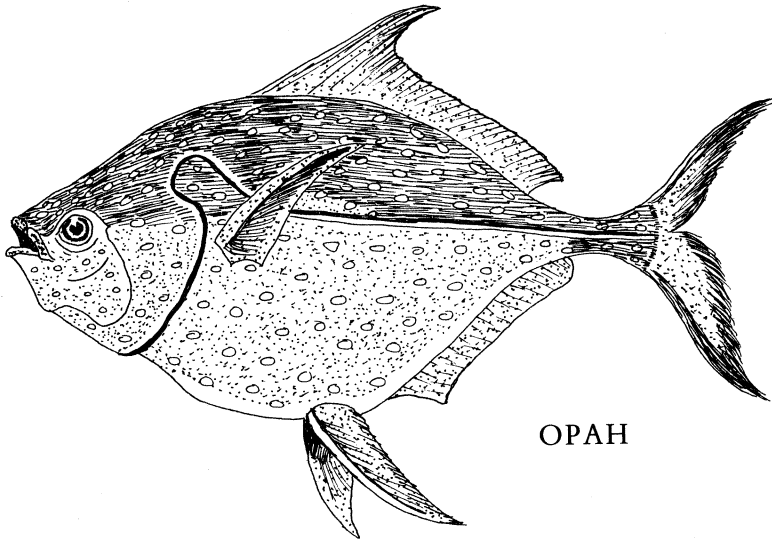


QUETZAL

## The Man Who Measures Animals · *James Solheim*

The aye-aye's tail, for one—  
Feel how soft it is. Though bufflehead  
Is lily-need, cassowary the urge to strut,  
Douroucouli a shriek, each has his thoughts.  
Eland, fulmar, gerenuk: all can love,  
Suzanne, though our love—man's—  
Is higher, knowledged. While the gerenuk's  
Desire is sometimes  
As automatic as an aoudad's irrational ascent,  
You don't choose *your* blood's climb, Suzanne,  
So don't get superior. My parlour's full  
Of hanumans—as spoilt  
And dangerous as royalty—  
So I know they know both love  
And cruel disdain, that they can tease  
An indri into hate or languor.  
(Look. A jacana walking water. (His weight seems  
Almost negative.)) Klipspringer, loris, marabou—  
I map them all, a Noah of their statistics,  
An Adam naming them  
In length and speed and mass. But even should  
The number and precision of my stats  
Reach an infinity  
(There's more than one infinity, of course),  
No nilgai nor opah nor phalarope  
Would burst from my computer. There is a factor  
We can't factor in—  
A soul, I'd call it—in flea, fly, phalarope.  
Clay hears our feet, and the great rat's breast that holds  
The earth (the moon a burning  
Drop of milk) steeps fierce, while gorillas  
Whomp in our chests and yowl.  
How else explain the automatic quetzal  
Accordioning to functional beauty!

We're all deus ex machinaed inside,  
All changed to harts when we watch our own  
Dianas bathe. And yet—when Pax, my cook, rattles  
This pulley with fruit each night  
(I concede we must eat fruit (but never rorquals,  
Saigas, thylacines) )—I sometimes  
Change my mind about what food I'll take  
Simply for the pleasure of knowing I can.  
Oh the good clammy muscle of a mushroom  
Collapsing in my mouth: Pax always knows what I want.  
And what I want is to measure animals—the saiga's  
Homely nose, the urutu's pure muscle.  
I want to know them to each flip and battle,  
Each need as weird as guacamole  
On a rune-stave (I'm Mexican and Swedish both,  
Suzanne, though mostly British.  
I call it hybrid vigour).  
In these voiceprints I have vicuña's spit,  
Whydah's cry, and xurel's waggle,  
Material disturbances caused by their desire  
(Which is what any sound  
Of any animal is).  
Even the yabby, I believe, must feel an odd longing—  
Or even love—hunched in his starless burrow,  
As must this zyzyva (though I wouldn't call  
That thought). A man, however—a man  
Should be responsible in this world,  
No elephant to his desire.  
A man should be no elephant to his desire.  
The lorises spring in the ylang-ylang; muntjacs tromple  
The fly agaric; and yet—my dear, listen:  
Deep in the narcissi, the beefalo  
Begin to stir.



OPAH



AYE-AYE

*drawings by Gloria Jones*