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Picture Books

**If My Mom Were a Platypus: Mammal Babies and Their Mothers**
Dia L. Michels
Andrew Barthelmes, illustrator
Platypus Media
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Meet an assortment of fascinating mothers—whose feats include giving birth outdoors, chewing off the umbilical cord with their teeth, and providing their own bodily fluids as sustenance for their young—in this guide to the birth and childhood of fourteen different mammals, including the human. The animals featured range in size from the tiny least shrew to the mammoth Pacific gray whale, and represent geographic regions from the Arctic domain of the hooded seal to the forests of Australia, which the koala calls home. As mammals, they share the experience of live birth and nursing their young, a point noted by the LaLeche League, which features this book on their website.

In fact, the author founded this press in 1995 to promote breastfeeding and attachment parenting. She studied at the University of Edinburgh and the Institut de France, and holds degrees from the Chadwick School and Brandeis University. Her previous books include *Milk, Money, and Madness: The Politics and Culture of Breastfeeding* and a children's series called *Look What I See! Where Can I Be?*, in which children can explore settings like China, a synagogue, and a typical neighborhood.

In a format well suited to the curious browser, the book devotes two full-page spreads to each animal, in which the same four questions are addressed: How Were You Born? How Did You Grow? What Do You Know? And What Do You Eat? The answers are related in the first person from the point of view of the baby animal, a technique that may turn off more scientifically minded readers. The animal facts, however, are completely engrossing. Most readers are sure to be surprised by something they learn about these seemingly familiar animals. For example, the male platypus is poisonous, and when threatened "stabs the offender with a spur on his hind leg." A newborn koala's first food is "a soft, dark greenish substance, called pap" which comes out of the mother's anus!

The illustrations enrich the book's factual information. The pages for each animal feature lavish, colorful artwork depicting an animal mother and baby in their natural environment. The illustrator has designed previous children's books for Random House and Platypus Media, illustrated *Herman the Loudmouth*, and published artwork in *The New Yorker*, *Ladies Home Journal*, and other periodicals. Here, he illustrates each question with small, detailed drawings of the animal baby in action, like a golden lion tamarin monkey playing "catapult" with a tree branch, or a baby elephant nursing.

School-aged animal lovers will enjoy the easily digestible and fun-for-sharing facts, which are sure to spark some lively discussions. The colorful illustrations and catchy title make this a wonderful gift book for expectant parents or families with children.

*Carolyn Bailey*