

# Wing BEATS

A publication of Liberty Wildlife

F a l l 2 0 0 8

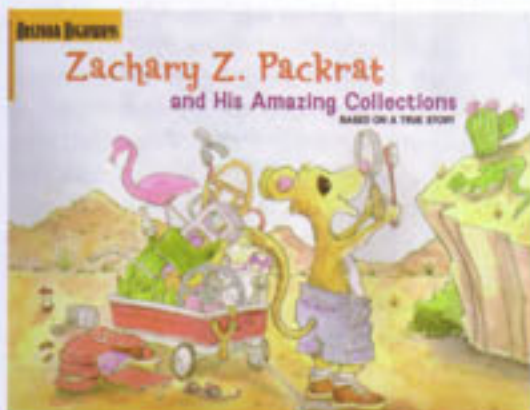
## Extraordinary Authors

by Gail Cochrane

Two very talented writers who have been helping Liberty Wildlife for many years have newly published children's books. Both **Brooke Bessen** and **Robert Mesta** are on the circuit of book store signings and civic events promoting their books. And both of these terrific books are a must have for nature loving children this holiday season.

In the great tradition of 18th century naturalists and adventurers, Brooke Bessen travels the world to study animals. Swimming in the oceans off Costa Rica, the British West Indies, Tahiti and Hawaii with all manner of large marine fauna, and traveling on safari in Africa she strives to satisfy a curiosity about wildlife that has simmered since childhood.

"I have been writing about animals since I was seven years old," Brooke states. "My favorite activity was to get out the encyclopedia or go outside and do gobs of research on an animal. Then I would write up a report." Brooke's first piece of writing was a fifteen page paper about birds she had observed in her back yard. "Back then I wrote 'birds either hop or walk'. Now," she laughs, "I write 'birds hop unless they have rotating hip cuffs, then they may walk'."



Brooke's latest book, *Zachary Z. Packrat and His Amazing Collections* appeared in book stores this fall. *Arizona Highways* published the book, and it is charmingly illustrated by well-known Ohio artist Jenny Campbell, who expertly brings out the fun and movement of Zachary Z. "The book's cover says, 'based on a true story'," explains Brooke, "because it is

the story of my mom and dad, and every other packrat in my life."

Brooke adds that when human packrats collect doodads, knickknacks and family heirlooms they create a history of their lives. On a larger scale humans collect art in museums and books in libraries that preserve a record of our society that teaches about the past.

Brooke is fascinated by the parallel to be found between these human packrats and the mammal packrats that are also obsessed with collecting appealing items from around their homes. Packrats collect irresistible materials like twigs, leaves, bones, human artifacts, shiny objects, insects, and the scat of other animals. They pile these treasures on top of their nests, and urinate on them. Packrat pee is thick and viscous since they drink very little water. The dried urine hardens into a crystallized amber resin called *amberat* that coats and preserves the contents of the heap. In the desert Southwest, there is little rain or snow to break down these packrat middens. Over the generations the packrat collections become enormous. Scientists called paleoecologists, who study the environment, have used radiocarbon dating to discover that some packrat middens are at least 40,000 years old. So, packrats - human and animal - do teach us about and link us to the past.

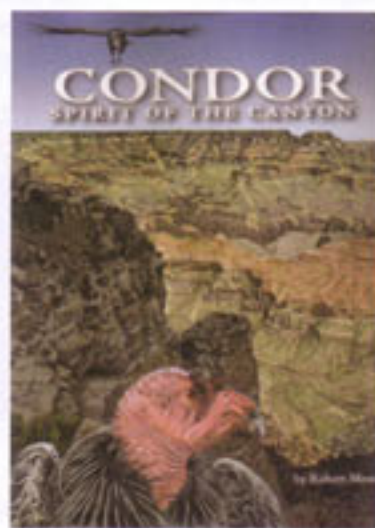
"Packrats are fun and likable," Brooke declares. "And I love to reveal similarities between animals and people."

You will love the story of *Zachary Z. Packrat and his Amazing Collections*. The rhythm, rhyming and humor of the prose are reminiscent of Dr. Seuss and will lighten your heart.

You may decide to buy a copy for that favorite kid in your life and keep another copy on your own bookshelf for daily use.

Brooke Bessen has also written and illustrated, *Look Who Lives in the Desert!* published in 2004 by *Arizona Highways*, and *Look Who Lives in the Ocean!* to be released this March. She has been working in television production for over twenty

years, and is a regular speaker in classrooms around the valley educating children about wildlife, just like she did when she volunteered in the education area of Liberty Wildlife.



Another Liberty Wildlife alum who is fiercely committed to saving and preserving native species is Robert Mesta, biologist and ornithologist.

Robert's first children's book, *Condor: Spirit of the Canyon*, was published by Grand Canyon Association in 2007. This beautifully written, multi-layered story is illustrated by Larry Ormsby. Ormsby's renderings of the Grand Canyon and the Condors that soar there do ample justice to the splendid setting and fascinating animals.

In the story, a young Native American boy named Little Feather sees the giant birds soaring above the Grand Canyon and when he goes back to camp he asks his grandfather about them. Grandfather tells him the story of Condor, a wise bird that soars above all, and about how the Native Americans have revered Condor since the beginning of time. Grandfather pulls a giant Condor feather from his medicine bundle and touches the tip to Little Feather's forehead, and he begins to sing. Thus is born this young boy's destiny. He observes the Condors he saw that first day and brings questions back to Grandfather

Authors - continued next page