

👤 Who Was Charley Harper?



Charley Harper was an American artist who became famous for his **wildlife art**. He loved birds, animals, and insects and used **simple shapes, clean lines, and bright colours** to show their beauty in a fun and unique way. He called his style “**minimal realism**” – it means showing the most important parts of a subject without adding too much detail.

🐞 What Did He Love to Draw?

Charley loved animals most of all! His favourites were:

- 🐦 Birds
- 🐟 Fish
- 🐸 Frogs
- 🐞 Insects
- 🌸 Flowers
- 🌲 Trees and forests

He said nature was **funny, cute, and interesting** — and he wanted to show that in his art.

👤 Childhood

- Born on a **rural farm in Frenchtown, West Virginia**, where his family grew crops and raised animals.
- As a boy, he helped with farm chores but always made time for drawing and observing nature.
- He developed a **deep appreciation for wildlife** by watching animals like deer, birds, and insects in their natural surroundings.
- Loved reading **nature books and adventure stories**, which inspired his early sketches.
- Enjoyed walking in the woods alone, listening to birdsong and watching the patterns in leaves and water.
- Was often found doodling animals in the margins of his school notebooks.

- His parents encouraged his creativity by giving him pencils and paper, even though they couldn't afford much.
- Grew up without television, so he spent most of his free time outside or making art.




His Education

- After high school, he briefly studied at **West Virginia Wesleyan College**, before transferring to focus on art.
- Attended the **Art Students League of New York** for a summer, where he explored different artistic techniques.
- Served in the **Army during World War II**, and later used his G.I. Bill to attend the Art Academy of Cincinnati full time.
- At art school, he trained in **classical figure drawing** before moving toward modern, simplified design.
- Studied **graphic design, printmaking, and painting**, which influenced his flat, bold style.
- Became interested in combining art and science after taking a biology course alongside his art training.
- Won a **travel scholarship** that allowed him to visit national parks and sketch wildlife from life.
- Worked as an **assistant teacher** at the Art Academy while still a student, sharing his ideas with others.

His Art Career

Charley Harper worked as a **professional artist** for many years!

 He made posters, magazine covers, book illustrations, and even art for nature parks.

- He illustrated **The Golden Book of Biology**, a famous children's science book 
- He made posters for the **U.S. National Parks** 
- His art was used in nature centres and zoos all over the country
- He taught art at the **Art Academy of Cincinnati** (where he once studied!) 
- He worked from home with his wife **Edie Harper** who was also an artist

- He created Harper Studios with Edie and son **Brett**, Charley's artwork became very popular because it was:
 - ✓ Bright
 - ✓ Simple
 - ✓ Full of animals and nature!

🎨 What Was His Style Called?

Charley called his art style “**minimal realism.**”

That means:

- He drew real things like animals...
- But he used **only basic shapes** to show them
- No tiny details — just the **most important parts**

He said:

“I don't count feathers. I just count the wings. I see exciting shapes, colour combinations, patterns, textures, fascinating behaviour and endless possibilities for making interesting pictures.”

☀️ Art

Red and Fed



Once There Was a Field

Charley Harper

Birducopia



He created many illustrations, such as these for the Giant Golden Book of Biology:



Ecosystems: Woodland forest



Prairie soil



The desert at night

Famous people and their work, such as Gregor Mendel



& Scientific theories and facts, such as Oxygen requirements v weight



Charley Harper

He is best known for his illustrations of birds

