👴 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:

- 🛯 🗳 🖌 🖌 💺
- < 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 Frenchton, 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.

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- 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

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• 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."







Once There Was a Field

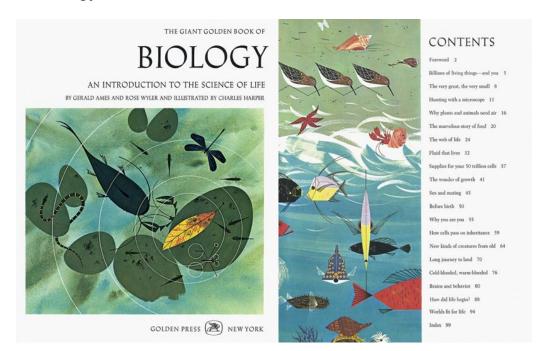
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Charley Harper

Birducopia



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





Ecosystems: Woodland forest



The desert at night

Famous people and their work, such as Gregor Mendel



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



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Charley Harper

He is best known for his illustrations of birds



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