

# Top 10 animal friendship stories

## 1. [The One and Only Ivan](#) by Katherine Applegate

Based on the true story of a gorilla, the magnificent caged Ivan tells his own story, musing on art and the humans who stare at him. Although there are several close bonds in this, including a girl and the saddest stray dog imaginable, it is the deep bond with an orphaned baby elephant named Ruby that raises this story to a great height. Their friendship allows Ivan to explore his true nature and express his unfulfilled role as a male silver-back gorilla. Philosophical, funny, deeply moving, and written with lyrical precision, Ivan's voice will stay with you for a long time.

## 2. [One Dollar Horse](#) by Lauren St John

The rescue and subsequent bond that forms between a horse about to be slaughtered and a girl called Casey, is every horse-lover's childhood dream. Casey's father is a convicted thief and her ambitions for herself and her horse are challenged by snobbery, a lack of funds, and dilemmas not necessarily of their own making. The triumphant ending is worth every hardship.

## 3. [Secret Heart](#) by David Almond

Shy Joe's imagination fills his world with strange creatures, including a tiger that connects the boy's imaginary world with the real. In the blue tent, standing high over the rooftops of Helmouth, Joe is introduced to the dying world of the circus. Joe cannot fulfil what his mother and school and friend want him to be, but with the tiger at the periphery of his vision, Joe's stutter abates and his confidence grows. When he finds a place where he feels he can belong, the tiger is revealed to be more than he had imagined. Strange and marvellous, the relationship between Joe and the tiger is extraordinary and unique.

## 4. [The Last Wild](#) series by Piers Torday

Twelve-year-old mute Kester is the hero of this dystopian cli-fi adventure, where the world has been threatened by the apparent extinction of all the animals. Finding himself able to communicate telepathically with a few surviving creatures, Kester is recruited by a coackroach to lead them all to

safety. Set in a future where people have been blinded by misinformation, it is Kester's bond with the fatherly stag (which reminded me a little of Aslan) and the General, a military-mouthed cockroach, that consistently leads the story through humour, peril, and some moving scenes to find Kester's father and a remedy to red-eye.

#### **5. The River Singers by Tom Moorhouse**

A microcosm of the world below our ankles is viewed large through the eyes of a family of young water-voles. The simple life that the water-vole babies have so far experienced in their burrow is soon altered for good as the siblings emerge into the world, and experience danger hovering and waiting for them at every corner. There is a lovely relationship drawn in this between the babies and Fodur, the rat. On a mission to find a new home, the small, defenceless creatures need the assistance of lonely Fodur.

#### **6. Northern Lights by Phillip Pullman**

Apart from the significant relationship with the polar bears in this story, Lyra and her daemon, Pantalaimon, are central to this story. Bringing together the domestic, close relationship of a child and her pet, with their intimate level of knowledge of each other, alongside the fantasy elements, raises the acts of learning, growing, and transformation to a high level.

#### **7. The Butterfly Lion by Michael Morpurgo**

If anyone was ever brought up on Elsa, of Born Free fame, and Christian the lion (whose owners bought him from Harrods and raised him in the basement of an antique shop) this is the children's book that comes closest to those true stories. As a child, I dreamed of this closeness with a wild and dangerous animal. Bertie's relationship with the butterfly cub, their separation over the years and the difficulties they both face in between, is, for me, a wish fulfilment story.

#### **8. Love That Dog by Sharon Creech**

This sparse little book is beautifully difficult to define. It's a kind of diary, a series of responses to a teacher, a selection of poems, written entirely in verse by Jake. The seeming difficulty that Jake has in writing poetry – what it is, how to write it, what to write about - appears to be the basis of the

story at first. But as it progresses, it's the yellow dog that becomes the focus, and what the reader wants to know about. Inspired by a famous poet's work that Jake is loathe to copy, he writes a poem about the yellow dog, revealing the difficulties inherent in writing about love and loss.

### **9. A Kestrel for a Knave by Barry Hines**

More usually known by the film name, Kes, this is an intense story of poverty and a dysfunctional family, and how both these things have an impact on Billy's life. His only saving grace is the bond he forms with a kestrel taken from a nest. Billy is transformed by his relationship with the bird of prey, standing in for the freedom he has from his abusive domestic life. He becomes nurturer and carer, roles that are mostly missing from his own life. But the powerlessness of Kes and his bird forms the stunning and terrible conclusion of this story. The tragedy and injustice in this story remains ever powerful.

### **10. Scarlet Ibis by Gill Lewis**

The birds in this story have strong migratory instincts, finding their way back home across thousands of miles. Although Scarlet and her little brother Red have never seen the Scarlet Ibis, the birds stand in for their future, their hope, and a strong sense of home and belonging. Scarlet is the main carer but the children are separated and taken into care after their mother's mental health deteriorates. Without her brother, Scarlet focuses some of her attention rescuing a baby pigeon, but the story of the Ibis remains her dream of the home where she and her brother will always be together.