Life is Just a ______

[ Bowl of Cherries ]

Idioms Illustrated and Explained – Part I Animals (24 phrases)
by Tom Fortunato
idiom (n.) - an expression whose meaning can not be derived from its elements

How many times over the course of a day do you hear these? They’re so common in our vernacular that we hardly take the time to recognize them with thousands in the English language alone. A few are presented here using a wide variety of material found mostly in dealer junk boxes. Don’t expect to find philatelic rarities, but you will see some interesting items.

Most important is your participation! This presentation is in “fill in the blank” game format. You’ll see a partial phrase at the top of each page related to the item shown along with a clue to the idiom’s meaning. Just complete the phrase and keep track of your number right and wrong.

PowerPoint users have 5 seconds before a 15 second timeclock counts down then “dings,” by which time an answer must be given. PDF users play on the honor system! Clicking the next page reveals the answer along with details of the origins and meaning of the idiom. Ten references were used researching these. Not all agreed, but the majority plausible response appears here.

This is 1 of 7 thematic related parts (# phrases in each). Enjoy them all!

I – Animals (24)  II – Food (14)  III – Man (18)  IV - Sports & Games (9)
V – Nature (25)  VI – Music (8)  VII - Pot Luck (39)
I- Animals __________ tears

• fake tears, false grief

Click after bell
I- Animals  
crocodile tears

• *fake tears, false grief*

Used first in ancient Rome around 300 AD. Folktales talk of crocks that cried to lure victims.
I - Animals ___ off

• *leave, go away*
I- Animals **bug off**

- *leave, go away*

From Britain in the late 1800’s, “bugger off,” meaning “scram.”
I- Animals ___ race

• stressful run-around of daily life
I- Animals  

rat race

• stressful run-around of daily life

From the French, “ras,” a nautical term meaning tide-race, referring to a strong current.
I- Animals bring home ___

• to earn a living
I- Animals bring home the bacon

• *to earn a living*

Two theories...

American- At county fair competitions, contestants would attempt to get a greased pig. The winner received the pig.

English- In the 1300’s, a baron challenged his constituency that if any married couple could go a year and a day without fighting, they would win the prize, a side of bacon.

(Japanese advertising “Echo” postal card)
I- Animals ___ in your throat

• *left without words, speechless*
I - Animals  frog in your throat

- *left without words, speechless*

In the Middle Ages, frogs were often eaten, and speech is difficult while eating.
I- Animals throw a ______ ______ into the works

• *to interfere with something in progress*

*Swiss military stamp*
I- Animals throw a **monkey wrench** into the works

• *to interfere with something in progress*

An American inventor named Monk created a unique wrench in 1856, the sliding jaw of which reminded people of a monkey.
I- Animals busy ___ ___ _____

• a work-aholic
I- Animals busy as a bee

• a work-aholic

Variant of “busy as a beaver” (17th century) due to their hard working nature.
I- Animals

• *smart, resourceful*

(Second decommissioning for destroyer USS Fox (DD-234), September 16, 1938 at the Philadelphia Navy Yard. Recommissioned in 1939, scrapped in 1946.)
I- Animals   crazy like a fox

• smart, resourceful

(Second decommissioning for destroyer USS Fox (DD-234), September 16, 1938 at the Philadelphia Navy Yard. Recommissioned in 1939, scrapped in 1946.)

First noted in Trinity College Homilies dating to the 13th century.
I- Animals  ________ flock together

• people of common interests unite
I- Animals  

**birds of a feather flock together**

- *people of common interests unite*

Dates back to the Bible, noting species fly amidst their own.
I- Animals go cold _____

• *suddenly go without*
I- Animals go cold turkey

• *suddenly go without*

20th century American expression of unknown origin.
I- Animals get your ____

• *annoy or make angry*
I- Animals   get your **goat**

• *annoy or make angry*

American expression from 1900. Goats were kept with race horses to calm them. If a goat was taken away, it would upset the horse.
I- Animals sitting ____

• defenseless or open to attack
I- Animals sitting duck

• defenseless or open to attack

From a 1944 Reader’s Digest title, *Why Tankers are no Longer Sitting Ducks.*
I- Animals as the ______

• shortest distance between points
I- Animals as the crow flies

- shortest distance between points

Seen first in a letter by Robert Southly from 1800.
I- Animals ___ or cut bait

• *make a decision*
I- Animals fish or cut bait

- make a decision

I- Animals going to the ____

• coming to a bad end
I- Animals going to the dogs

• *coming to a bad end*

Thought to have originated from Thomas Cooper’s Latin work, *Thaesaus*, of 1565, referring to food not worthy of serving to dogs.
I- Animals ___ in the belfry

• crazy, weird, nuts
Bats live in secluded places, including bell towers, typically the highest place in older towns. An American expression used by R. D. Saunders in *Colonel Todhunter*.
I- Animals  ____ ____ ____ is worth 2 in the bush

• a guarantee is more than a promise
I- Animals  

a bird in the hand is worth 2 in the bush

• a guarantee is more than a promise

Ancient Greek proverb, also used in Aesop’s Fables. Hunters probably originated it, referring to the conclusion of a day’s gaming.
I- Animals    get on a ___ _____

• acting in a superior way
I- Animals get on a high horse

• acting in a superior way

Ceremonial parades featured men of higher rank on taller horses. Noted in a Scottish proverb by James Kelly in 1721.
I- Animals taking the ___ ___ ___ _____

• controlling a difficult situation
I- Animals taking the bull by the horns

• controlling a difficult situation

A risky bullfighting tactic is sometimes effective.
I- Animals

- *rich person*
I- Animals fat cat

• rich person

Per H. L. Mencken, an American expression used first in the 1920’s referring to influential political campaign contributors.
I- Animals ______ business

• *mischievous activities*
I- Animals **monkey business**

- *mischievous activities*

Used first by the Brooklyn Standard Union in 1904 on Russian-English foreign relations.
I- Animals sick __ __ __

• miserably ill
I- Animals sick as a dog

• miserably ill

The Bible: Proverbs 26:11, “As a dog returns to his own vomit, a fool returns to his folly.”
I- Animals ___ ___ ___ with honey than vinegar

• use agreeable rather than disagreeable measures
I- Animals  catch more flies with honey than vinegar  

• use agreeable rather than disagreeable measures  

From the 17th century, Thomas Fuller wrote, “More flies are taken by a drop of honey than a ton of vinegar.”
I- Animals ______ of the family

• an outcast from a group
I- Animals

black sheep of the family

• an outcast from a group

To shepherds, wool from black sheep is less desirable than white. In 1816 Sir Walter Scott wrote in Old Mortality, “The curates... know best the black sheep of the flock.”
This is the end of Part I- Animals. If you liked this presentation, try one of the other parts! See them all and the original exhibit online at:

http://www.rpastamps.org/presentations