



# Adder, Bluebell, Lobster, Wild Poems

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A few years ago, there was a proper fuss when it was discovered that the **Oxford Junior Dictionary** had been removing words that described the natural world, like blackberry and adder, and replacing them with words more 'appropriate' to our digital age, like blog and broadband. All in all, over a hundred words were replaced. Now Chrissie Gittins has chosen forty of the discarded words as the subjects of this poetry collection.

The poems offer a variety of forms and moods. Some are informative in the dictionary sense; some are evocative; and some take off in whatever direction the poet's fancy takes her. Adding an adder to an adder produces a poem about mating snakes. And exploring the rhyming possibilities of a cauliflower ends up with taking the vegetable into a shower. In many poems, animals, plants, fruit and vegetables address the reader directly, offering fascinating switches of perspective and register. The cheetah begins with the wonder of his speed, and ends with his vulnerability: 'I run, I don't fight/I'm made for flight.' The lark may be 'thrilling the heavens' but he's also marking his territory: 'I dare another lark to come near/I'll thrash him out of my patch.' If the metre and rhyme falters in a few places, it's more than made up for by the range of approach, the cleverness of construction, and some telling imagery. I love the jokey poem Mint which moves from one use to another of the herb by a series of cunning contradictions. I won't be able to see a heron eating a fish (should be so lucky) without wondering whether it is really like 'sucking on a saved caramel.' Above all, Gittins has a real sense of her audience. She begins from their experience and gently moves her readers into places of observation, contemplation, imagination and, sometimes, silliness, which are poetic without being portentous or pretentious.

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