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Based on award-winning scientist Marc Bekoff's years studying social communication in a wide range of species, this important book shows that animals have rich emotional lives. Bekoff skillfully blends extraordinary stories of animal joy, empathy, grief, embarrassment, anger, and love with the latest scientific research confirming the existence of emotions that common sense and experience have long implied. Filled with Bekoff's light humor and touching stories, *The Emotional Lives of Animals* is a clarion call for reassessing both how we view animals and how we treat them.

The Emotional Lives of Animals: A Leading Scientist Explores Animal Joy, Sorrow, and Empathy - and Why They Matter Details

Date : Published February 9th 2007 by New World Library

ISBN : 9781577315025

Author : Marc Bekoff , Jane Goodall

Format : Hardcover 256 pages

Genre : Animals, Nonfiction, Science, Environment, Nature, Psychology, Biology

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Parker F says

As a neurobiologist investigating the neural substrates of behavior, I was initially very interested in this book. Despite years of education in neuroscience, I have never satisfactorily been able to discuss animal emotion and have worried that I've approached the issue with an anthropocentric arrogance. This book has unintentionally convinced me that we can never fully understand or value the emotional lives of animals and that the case for human-like (i.e., complex) emotions in animals is extraordinarily weak. While many reviewers have been impressed by Beckoff's academic credentials, his case is similarly structured and no more compelling than that advanced by lolcats.com. This is perhaps the most comically awful book that I have ever read.

Correen says

Bekoff makes his case for the existence of feelings in animals -- I hope scientists soon accept this idea, quit railing about anthropomorphism, and recognize the similarities of our systems. The issue seems so obvious that no book of this sort would be needed but the issue remains.

The author gave interesting examples of animals displaying emotions. Many of these I had read elsewhere but the set of examples enjoyable. There was some cellular explanations to support his thesis -- mirror cells.

In general, I thought it was a good book but I am not his target audience.

Emily says

I love this book! Marc Bekoff is a leading scientist in the area of cognitive ethology (the observation of animals under natural conditions). As an animal lover, I found myself nodding along to all of his statements. Even though Marc Bekoff presents scientific content, his writing style is simple and straight-forward. He thoroughly explains the scientific terms he uses. I walked away from the book having learned several new terms. My favorite is anthropomorphism, which is the attribution of uniquely human characteristics to non-human beings.

I borrowed this book from the library but about half way through reading it I decided to buy it. I know this is the type of book I'll reference again and again. I also bought another book by Marc Bekoff, "Minding Animals: Awareness, Emotions, and Heart". I can't wait to read it!

Amber says

I really like the **idea** of this book, but I feel like it could have been a third as long (or the same length with better/more data). There was ***a lot*** of repetition of "it's obvious that animals have emotions" and "there is scientific data to back it up" but not as many actual impressive anecdotes recounting intelligence/sentience/emotion or hard data from studies of neurotransmitters/lab experiments/etc.

Overall I think he basically made his point that animals are more self aware, socially aware, and emotionally complex than we give them credit for, but he could have given a **lot** more examples in a much lower number of pages.

He also talked a fair amount about how animals care for each other (as friend, mothers, etc.) in a social group or even among different species, but he didn't talk at all about things like infanticide or when baby animals grow up and leave their mothers forever. A more in depth look at instances of what would be seen as "lack of empathy" if it happened in humans would have been appreciated. I feel like it weakened his argument to not address that side of the issue.

After reading this book, the most interesting idea to me is thinking about how some animals get depressed. It seems like most animals will mourn when a friend dies and then move on, but some get stuck and even die from grief. In humans cognitive psychology says that depression (depression is very different from justified sadness) and other pathological emotional states result from errors in **thinking** about a situation. Depression after a loss could result from poor self esteem, for example. If that is the case, and if animals truly can suffer from clinical depression, that has amazing implications about how much animals are able to ***think*** about themselves, the future, etc. (Feeling Good is a good book to read about cognitive therapy for depression, anxiety, etc. in humans).

Not sure if there is a better book on the topic of emotions in animals, but if not this one definitely introduces some interesting ideas.

Doreen says

While I agree with many of the reviewers that this book preaches to the choir and doesn't make arguments that move beyond justifying a humane and ethical approach to animals based on what they can offer and provide us, I think the book is worth reading if only to point out not only that animals have a significant range of emotions that may be equal to or even surpass what humans feel, but that we shouldn't judge animals based on their pet-friendliness or their cutesy qualities. Rather, an important point is that all animals, including fish, rats, and reptiles should be understood as having a vast repertoire of emotions and thus must be respected. Often we are drawn to those animals that do respond to us in ways that are familiar and comforting, what I think the author is trying to make clear is that we must extend our understanding and compassion to embrace all non-human forms of life. While for some readers, this may be obvious, for me, this book became more about examining my own presumption and predilections toward certain kinds of species and non-humans.

This became clear to me as I remembered that this past summer while being exposed to the ongoing oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, I did some volunteer work for The Audubon Society to help 'escort' injured and sometimes dead birds found by those patrolling the waters, I immediately felt a great sense of loss and

tragedy that was particularly focused on the pelicans, gulls, and other kinds of sea birds, many of whom were nesting at the time of the spill, thus exacerbating the level of injury to these avian communities. However, a few months ago I attended a panel on art and disaster in New Orleans put on by the American Anthropology Association and various artists and scientists. Several of the panelists were biologists and artists whose interests were in how minute life forms such as plankton, or certain types of hermit crabs were affected by the spill. One scientist spoke of going to beaches with groups of people to save thousands of hermit crabs who were encased in oil. They were cleaned with soap and water similar to the birds being brought to the bird triage center set up by Audubon. This scientist mentioned the danger of privileging certain kinds of life forms in light of the disaster over others, particularly because each has a role to play in the maintenance of ecosystems and should be protected and defended. Throughout the book Bekoff argues that all non-human forms of life should be respected. Additionally, his arguments at the end of the book suggest a broad range of ways that we can effect change in our relations to animals, particularly within specific institutions. Reading this book as someone affiliated at a research university, I immediately began to wonder how scientists treated animals in the labs on campus and in what ways I could find out this kind of information.

I have a feeling or a hope that some of the arguments he makes against the scientific community have been communicated in professional venues (he mentions a few confrontations in the book) and have been written for more exclusive audiences. My main critique is that he stops short of pursuing a stronger indictment of the use of animals for laboratory experiments. Even though he discusses more humane approaches to treating lab animals, where is the critique of why these experiments are even taking place. In other words, do we really need to know why monkeys get jealous? Or that whales know their left from their right? What is the extent to which we conjure up experiments and research simply for the sake of knowing why. A critique of using animals for experiments should also include a critique of our inability to examine our lust for knowledge and our use of animals, humanely or inhumanely, for this pursuit. In that way, he is ultimately anthropocentric.

The strength of this book is that it can lead readers to examine the places where we work, live, and eat in relation to how animals are treated and perhaps begin to rethink the ways we can lessen our own individual impact on non-human animals and even advocate for change within these micro arenas and perhaps there are other books about animals that can provoke us in the same way.

Christina Booth says

Marc Bekoff takes his scientific research, that he has accumulated for over thirty years, and turns it into a charming book proving that animals do in fact have emotions. It is clear that he is trying to prove to his readers that animals have feelings and these feelings need to be respected. Bekoff proves his findings through several anecdotes and first hand experiences he's had over the years. His lighthearted humor and touching stories is what gave this book life. It wasn't a boring essay filled with experiments and facts. Instead it was a book filled with animals that we fell in love with. Bekoff has taught me just that, a book based on scientific research can be entertaining when paired with the right example. When describing how he came to his conclusion that animals have empathy he shared a story about an elephant named Babyl who was crippled and walked very slow, "We saw that the elephants in Babyl's group didn't leave her behind; they waited for her. They would walk awhile, then stop and look around to see where Babyl was." It's these stories that made me finish reading a book that I typically wouldn't even think about reading.

Asoka Selvarajah says

This was an excellent book that gives many valuable insights.

Don't believe the negative reviews. These are made mostly by non-scientists caught up in the new religion that Science has become. By its very nature, the findings recorded in this book are observational, i.e. of the animals in their normal environment. Hence, you cannot run the same test identically 1000 times as you can do determine the boiling point of water. I am a PhD in Nuclear Physics. I know what Science can and cannot do. In fact, the author addresses these very issues in the book.

This book gives us many wonderful insights and demonstrates beyond question the complex inner lives of animals, and their many similarities to our own. Highly recommended.

Reese says

I started reading Marc Bekoff's THE EMOTIONAL LIVES OF ANIMALS several weeks ago. I was moving through it at my usual snail's pace, reading every word and hoping that my interest in the material would soon equal my interest in the book BEFORE I began reading it. Then I found myself skimming pages, then skipping pages. Still, I resisted conceding the possibility that a book entitled THE EMOTIONAL LIVES OF ANIMALS might be dull. Eventually I got tired of being bored. Not even the joy of discovering that the last 20% of the pages consisted of endnotes and an index could propel me to the finish line. While I read enough of Bekoff's work to know that it fits the GR "definition" of a one-star book (i.e., I "didn't like it"), rating a book that I didn't finish links me to former students who habitually cut class and then submitted evaluations of the course and my teaching. They were entitled to do so since they (or others) had paid their tuition. I bought the book -- and even read parts of it; therefore, I get to rate it? I don't think so.

Brittany says

This was a remarkable and important overview of the emotional lives of animals, what they mean for our worldview and human society. It included some wonderful, touching stories, and some very interesting points.

The book was hampered by the lack of a defined structure, but was readable and enjoyable for all that. The occasional spate of weak writing crept in (and there was some abuse of exclamation points).

The main flaw is that the author seems to suffer from black-and-white vision and an superabundance of naivete. I, too, firmly believe that non-human animals have complex emotional lives and that this is a fact that's of vital importance to all decisions we make about animals and their lives. However, I do not think that the simple recognition that animals are complex emotional beings is going to miraculously stop all research on animals, all poor treatment of animals, and all abuse everywhere. I recognize there are fuzzy areas, and shades of gray, and that there's *not* always a simple answer. If there were, we'd already have chosen it. We humans take the easy paths.

A good example is Bekoff's treatment of the dolphin-safe tuna issue. He describes it very well, but fails to note that some research indicates that "dolphin-safe" tuna is actually worse than the environment. In that case, how do you make decisions? When it comes down to animal testing saving other (animal and human) lives (and sometimes it *does* no matter how creative you get with the solutions), how do you decide then? The simplicity of Bekoff's assumptions made his arguments weaker, and leaves them open to attack by those who have a stake in the belief that animals are automatons. A more nuanced exploration of the issues would have benefited everyone, including the animals.

This is especially true when it comes to his discussion of zoos. I am trying hard (VERY hard) not to take it personally that he chose to cherry-pick facts (some of which were false) from a dark period in my zoo's own history and use them to support his argument that zoos are cruel and ineffective. He condemns all zoos with one brush, without taking into account the (HUGE) recent developments in the past 10-15 years and the amazing affects zoos have on conservation attitudes (well supported by research he chooses to disregard or of which he is unaware.) He fails entirely to even try to take an unbiased look at the subject. This late-in-the-game curveball really soured the book for me. My prior complaints (see above) weren't ruining my enjoyment of the book, and I was looking forward to passing it on to others. Now, his carelessness in this area has highlighted his naivete in others. He appears to think that all animals would be better off in the wild, without even touching upon the issue that there's not enough wild left for them to go back to, or the fact that animals in the wild struggle increasingly with disease, starvation, poaching, and habitat loss from an ever-encroaching human populations.

Obviously, he's touched a nerve. It's a good book, really it is, but I'm disappointed at the shallowness of his arguments and evidence on a topic that's dear to my heart. This book is probably better than no book at all, but I'm left wishing it'd been better.

987643467881 says

I should preface this review with the fact that it's coming from someone who believes that if people have "emotions" then so do other sentient animals, whether or not science could ever prove this - I happen to be a big softy who just doesn't see the point of bending science in order to either validate/justify my emotional responses or to prove them to be superior/more ethical to those of others. Of course depending on what you classify as proof, or even what you define "emotions" as (e.g. behavioural patterns or neurological responses, or even as the author often implies, something more reminiscent of the elusive "soul" rather than physical reactions, etc.), this has either **already** been proven or alternatively could **never** actually be unequivocally proven (for animals and humans alike) – which I feel actually makes the whole argument of this book entirely redundant.

The author's attempts to redefine science made me uncomfortable - playing a game of semantics with the term "science" and trying to save the world with a vegan agenda that aims to appeal to the more irrational side of human nature (as the author did in this book) never results in anything worth while. This isn't actually a book about the science behind animal emotions, but rather an attempt to redefine what counts as scientific research and to vilify people/scientists who do not require animals to have "emotions like us" in order for them to be treated ethically, studied objectively and understood outside the anthropomorphic paradigm that the author is so desperately trying to push.

(The author putting words like *objectively* and *scientific* in quotation marks (while including a section with the title: Dogs are happy, not "happy") and finding "no conflict" in his aim to "contribute to science and develop social relationships [with animals] at the same time" was worrisome, to say the least. If even

concepts like *objectivity* and terms like *science* are up for debate, what's next?)

This was one of the rare cases that I just couldn't bring myself to read the whole book since I just completely disagreed with its whole premise; which was essentially that human behaviour and science can only be ethical if it is informed by “emotions”, those of both the animals being studied and humans/scientists, and therefore quite obviously implying that all behaviour/science that is not, is therefore somehow not only unethical, but also fundamentally wrong, as it doesn't take into account the “whole picture” - this is the mission statement that is repeated over and over again in the parts that I did manage to read through.

I also couldn't bring myself to read a book by a scientist whose stance on anthropomorphism is that it is “nothing to be ashamed of” and is something that “comes naturally” because it is “an evolved perceptual strategy; we've been shaped by natural selection to view animals in this way.” I thought it was obscene to discuss the “benefits” of anthropomorphism without even once mentioning the dangerous trap that it has lead many an animal lover/activist into and the destructive, disruptive and detrimental behaviour that it so often encourages - everything from how animals are treated in captivity right down to the exotic pet trade, etc. Treating animals how we think they want to be treated based on our own emotions and ignoring their actual, (objectively) observable nature in favour of what we believe to be their “emotions” which are deduced through anthropomorphism, whether directly or indirectly appears to be the approach being advocated for by the author.

The arguments in the book are (not so skillfully) blurred in a way that allows the author to make it a book filled with anecdotes that supposedly prove something – he says that it is already widely accepted that animals have emotions, so he doesn't need to prove this, but instead, he will prove why these emotions “matter”, which can basically be summarised in this quote:

“Compassion begets compassion and caring for and loving animals spills over into compassion and caring for humans. The umbrella of compassion is very important to share freely and widely. [...] There's nothing to fear and much to gain by being open to deep and reciprocal interactions with other animals. Animals have in fact taught me a great deal: about responsibility, compassion, caring, forgiveness, and the value of deep friendship and love. Animals generously share their hearts with us, and I want to do the same. Animals respond to us because we are feeling and passionate beings, and we embrace them for the same reason. Emotions are the gifts of our ancestors. We have them and so do other animals. We must never forget this. [...] By making decisions that help animals, we add compassion, not cruelty, to a “wounded world”. This is the conclusion for what is essentially, for the most part, a compilation of anecdotes, new-agey lines about studying the metaphoric “hearts” of animals and encouraging “everyone to go where their hearts take them, with love, not fear” - despite the author claiming: “While stories drive much of my discussion, I bring in scientific studies as necessary for support”.

Finally, the book is essentially preaching to the converted since it makes absolutely no arguments that a person who doesn't believe that animal emotions matter (in the sense that their treatment of animals ignores the animals' emotions, even if the person accepts that animals have them) could possibly take seriously. The author asserts that believing animals have emotions does no harm, but believing that they don't does – that may indeed be so, but in that case, it would have made the book less pointless if the author actually provided some evidence (in the form of peer reviewed research and studies) to show 1) what percentage of people do/don't believe that animal emotions “matter”, 2) whether or not, and to what extent, their belief observably affects their treatment of animals. I would not at all be surprised if the findings of this hypothetical research would show shocking maltreatment of animals by advocates of animal emotions (pet neglect, etc.), and on the other hand a deep empathy for animals from the very people that the author attempts to vilify (scientists against incorporating anthropomorphism into their work, etc.).

Adela (Lita) says

I had high hopes for this book but I've been disappointed by the frame the author chose for the book. Bekoff is trying to teach people who don't necessarily agree that animals have "emotional lives" about the behaviors and signs that speak for animal emotions. However, he argues for the relevance of the work he and other scientists have done by asserting that the emotional lives of animals are important to humans because we need animals. In other words, the reasons for writing this book come across as purely anthropocentric. I am sure that knowing all he knows about animals and their rich interior lives, Bekoff knows that animal emotions should be important to us in and of themselves. We don't need to know that dogs are great therapy animals to care for them as a species. At least, we should not and this is where I take issue with the kind of frame that Bekoff selected. In an attempt to lure readers he relies too heavily on anecdotes that sometimes are simply cute and undermine the relevance of the knowledge he and his colleagues have gathered. More books that address a general audience are necessary. But authors should consider the significance of their strategies. As many readers who have already reviewed this book note, Bekoff is preaching to the choir. He could do more with his knowledge.

Tami says

Animals and emotions. It's a touchy subject. Most people can readily admit that most animals have primary (fight or flight) type reactions. However, opinions begin to change when researchers start discussing secondary emotions, like love, compassion, sadness, etc.

Anyone who has ever had a pet knows for a fact that their cat, dog, snake, etc has such emotions. We know for a fact that they have very distinct personalities and preferences. Yet, somehow the same people, find it difficult to believe that a chimpanzee, an elephant, a wolf, a magpie, or a fish might also be capable of something beyond primitive reactions.

The Emotional Lives of Animals gives accounts of animals displaying what would seem to be primary emotions. As one would expect, the author discusses big brained animals such as elephants, higher primates, whales, and dolphins. However, the most interesting studies look at unexpected animals such as fish to examine their capabilities.

Julie says

I wouldn't criticize this book for over-reliance on anecdotes, because Bekoff never contends that he is scientifically rigorous in a traditional sense - in fact, he partially rejected accepted scientific method in refusing to perform dissections while still a student. His arguments that animals need to be observed and studied in their natural habitats is a cogent one, supported by other modern scientists and naturalists - including Renee Askins, whose Shadow Mountain is another terrific recent read. The author is sympathetic, with a seemingly boundless love for animals and genuine desire to understand their thoughts and emotions.

Silvana says

Most people who read this book probably already have the inclination to respect animals and believe that they experience a myriad of emotions so the author is unfortunately, preaching to the choir. If only the people who really needed to be made aware of the topic of this book would actually pick it up. Most moving/memorable story was that of Jasper, the moon bear - held captive in a rusting "crush cage" at a bear bile farm in China (good old China!) for 15 years! The book did feel a bit abbreviated, however, and sounded like a preachy self-help book at times, or manifesto written in a hurry. This subject deserves more.

Melodie says

The premise of this book is to call for a reassessment of how we view animals and how their emotional lives at least to some point drive their behavior. The author puts forth the belief that animals are thinking, feeling sentient beings as we are. And because they are we need to reassess and change the way we study them, care for them and use them.

The book is short and readable in that I didn't have to have a dictionary beside me to understand it. Having been written for lay people, there were plenty of anecdotes to make his points. In large part this book is preaching to the choir as those with the opposing view will probably never read it.

The other thing that bothered me is that he makes some rather sweeping generalizations. I appreciate the courage of his convictions but as a scientist, he needs to avoid those. It has been my experience that while my opinions are my own, the correct answer to big questions and problems lie more toward the middle rather than the left or right.
