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The Genius Of Birds



The
GENIUS
of
BIRDS
JENNIFER
ACKERMAN



Synopsis

Birds are astonishingly intelligent creatures. In fact, according to revolutionary new research, some birds rival primates and even humans in their remarkable forms of intelligence. Like humans, many birds have enormous brains relative to their size. Although small, bird brains are packed with neurons that allow them to punch well above their weight.

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Customer Reviews

The Genius of Birds, by Jennifer Ackerman is a gamechanger for the way in which the curious reader will think concerning birds. Perhaps you thought birds were cute but not very bright, for example. Get ready to change your mind when you read in chapter one about "007", a corvid (kind of crow from New Caledonia), who goes through 8 steps, using tools, within two and a half minutes to get to a piece of food, after one scrutiny of this puzzle. Many types of birds are very smart, in the manner which humans are smart. Interestingly, the birds which take the longest to raise in the nest are the smartest and have the biggest brains (with the appropriate neurons). This section discusses the brilliance of some kinds of birds. Here you will find the tool users and others, such as the kees, who love clowning around and horseplay. As an illustration of this, the author mentions a kee who was seen rolling up a doormat and pushing it down a flight of steps. The writing by the author Jennifer Ackerman is at times beautiful (as when she is describing the rainforest at nightfall), or laugh-out-loud funny (she discusses attempts by a bird biologist to measure intelligence in his test

subjects by disguising himself, wearing at different sessions: a kimono, a wig, sunglasses, or walking with a limp, or hopping. They always recognized him). I was totally rolling when I read this, thinking of Peter Sellers in the Pink Panther movies. She is always fresh too, with new news on birds right up to this year. As things have changed dramatically in what we know about birds within the past ten years, this book is welcome as an overview, now. This is a book for bird lovers of all sorts. There is a section about the social aspect of birds, subtitled "twitter". This is fascinating too.

I received a copy of this book from the publisher for a review. This book tries to do four things, with varying levels of success. While it has a lot of interesting material, my main complaint is that it's hard to read due to the abrupt shifts of topic and style, and also quite a lot of repetition. Personally, my main interest is in the nature of animal intelligence. The book presents a lot of experimental results in this area, which are extremely interesting. However there is little serious discussion of the meaning of intelligence, it's just defined as ability to innovate. While that's certainly one aspect, it doesn't cover anything. For example, the author discusses why Barbados bullfinches are so much smarter than the closely-related grassquit. She totally misses the irony when describing the difficulty of answering the question because while bullfinches are easy to catch, it's almost impossible to catch the "stupid" grassquit. Clearly there are different dimensions to intelligence. I thought of that in relation to turkeys, which the author lists among the least intelligent birds. While that may be true by some measures, I can testify from experience that it takes a lot more thought to hunt a turkey than a mammal or waterbird. On a related note, the neuropsychology is discussed only in general, superficial terms. The author's interest is clearly behavioral. The book does a much better job in the other three areas it covers. It is a fine account of how bird researchers conduct their work, showing the tedium, frustration, cleverness and occasional breakthrough. It's an inspiring, realistic account of actual science. The author also introduces us to many observers of birds in the wild.

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