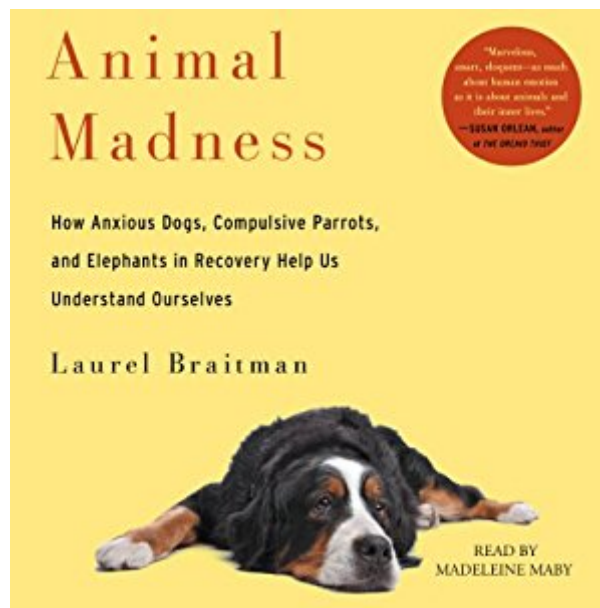


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Animal Madness: How Anxious Dogs, Compulsive Parrots, Gorillas On Drugs, And Elephants In Recovery Help Us Understand Ourselves



Synopsis

For the first time, a historian of science draws evidence from across the world to show how humans and other animals are astonishingly similar when it comes to their feelings and the ways in which they lose their minds. Charles Darwin developed his evolutionary theories by looking at physical differences in Galapagos finches and fancy pigeons. Alfred Russell Wallace investigated a range of creatures in the Malay Archipelago. Laurel Braitman got her lessons closer to home - by watching her dog. Oliver snapped at flies that only he could see, ate Ziploc bags, towels, and cartons of eggs. He suffered debilitating separation anxiety, was prone to aggression, and may even have attempted suicide. Her experience with Oliver forced Laurel to acknowledge a form of continuity between humans and other animals that, first as a biology major and later as a PhD student at MIT, she'd never been taught in school. Nonhuman animals can lose their minds. And when they do, it often looks a lot like human mental illness. Thankfully, all of us can heal. As Laurel spent three years traveling the world in search of emotionally disturbed animals and the people who care for them, she discovered numerous stories of recovery: parrots that learn how to stop plucking their feathers, dogs that cease licking their tails raw, polar bears that stop swimming in compulsive circles, and great apes that benefit from the help of human psychiatrists. How do these animals recover? The same way we do: with love, with medicine, and above all, with the knowledge that someone understands why we suffer and what can make us feel better. After all of the digging in the archives of museums and zoos, the years synthesizing scientific literature, and the hours observing dog parks, wildlife encounters, and amusement parks, Laurel found that understanding the emotional distress of animals can help us better understand ourselves.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Laurel Braitman's experiences as a twelve-year-old on a farm with Mac, a miniature donkey she bottle fed, affected her whole life when he grew up to be a biter and kicker despite her love. Years later, she and her husband adopted a four-year-old Bernese Mountain dog on which they had no background information, and again, the results were not what she had hoped. Desperately in need of attention, Oliver received it from Braitman and her husband without restraint. Despite this, he still remained so anxious whenever he was left alone that he literally "went crazy," eventually becoming a "liability at the dog park." Separation anxiety was just the tip of the iceberg with Oliver, who becomes a recurrent image in the book. Beginning a serious, very intense study of animal behavior, Braitman spends three years at animal sanctuaries, zoos, aquariums, water parks, and animal research centers throughout the world, creating a body of work that is thorough and academically rigorous enough to have earned her a PhD in the History of Science at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She recognizes, however, that the audience for this book is quite different from the academic audience to which she presented her original research. Here her goal is to show that all animals do share some basic characteristics and needs with other animals, including humans, and they are often subject to the same psychological problems as humans. She also understands and hopes to assuage the emotions of guilt, helplessness, and sadness among pet lovers like herself who have discovered that love is not always enough in dealing with a seriously disturbed animal.

As an animal scientist, I found this book to be a good read that was full of interesting stories. However, I feel that the author lacked substance in some areas of the book, and failed to remain unbiased. People should remember that the author is not an animal scientist, so she has limited understanding of animal behavior, psychology, and physiology. As a result, she may make statements that are written from the perspective of a concerned animal lover which can be very relatable. However, these statements may fail to take into account the genetics, instincts, physiology, etc. of the animal or species being discussed that may account for strange behavior. Overall, I would describe this book as a book on the history of animal mental distress. It discussed many stories of animals that have mental problems and why that may be. The book, however, will not provide much insight on how to cure animals of mental illness. Pros:- This book is easy to read- The book contains a ton of interesting stories about animals that are struggling mentally and discusses their life history.- The author covered a wide variety of reasons that animals

may develop mental problems beyond just bad life experiences. This was very interesting to read about. Cons:- The author fails to discuss why some animals go "insane" while others do not in similar situations. I feel like discussing why some animals in zoos struggle while others thrive would have helped our understanding of animal "insanity".- I would have liked the author to spend more time discussing effective treatments for struggling animals. I felt like she skimmed over changes that help to improve animal well-being.

The author tries to explain how animals are basically driven mad by the actions of humans, and that if we learned to compassionately coexist with other species we would all be better off. Early in the book the author does a nice job of showing how Alzheimers in humans and dementia in dogs are closely correlated, with the primary difference being that due to the shorter life span of dogs they don't have time for plaque to build up in their brains but instead suffer dementia from atherosclerosis [hardening and narrowing of cranial arteries]. She also points out how anxiety occurs among the lower ranking animals of a pack or group with their brains being constantly bathed in stress hormones as opposed to the higher ranking members who suffer from much less stress which can correlate nicely to the differences in human society between the very well off and the middle and lower ranking members of society trying to make do. Something that I never realized before is the primate mothers who were raised in isolation as babies, say in old time zoos and circuses do not know how to nurse and will often push their young away. They are now provided with lactation consultants by watching other primates nurse their young and sometimes even human surrogates, this use of human females as surrogates more frequently done in poorer countries. We are also told that as late as the later 19th century, it was thought that animals contracted rabies as punishment for some evil act they had done, and throughout the 19th and well into the twentieth century homesickness was considered a physical illness with the terms nostalgia and homesickness being used interchangeably.

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