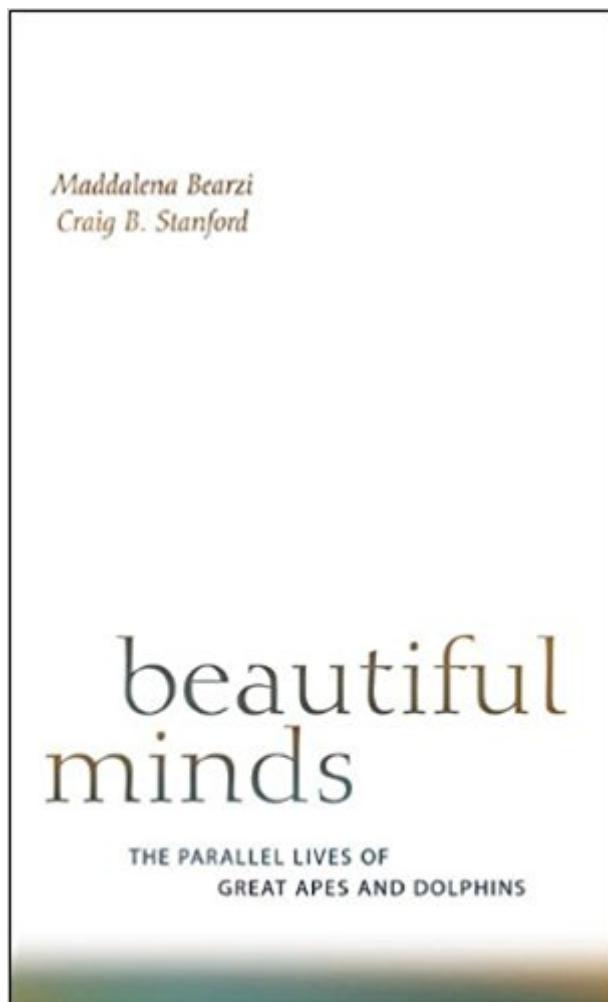


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Beautiful Minds: The Parallel Lives Of Great Apes And Dolphins



Synopsis

Apes and dolphins: primates and cetaceans. Could any creatures appear to be more different? Yet both are large-brained intelligent mammals with complex communication and social interaction. In the first book to study apes and dolphins side by side, Maddalena Bearzi and Craig B. Stanford, a dolphin biologist and a primatologist who have spent their careers studying these animals in the wild, combine their insights with compelling results. *Beautiful Minds* explains how and why apes and dolphins are so distantly related yet so cognitively alike and what this teaches us about another large-brained mammal: *Homo sapiens*. Noting that apes and dolphins have had no common ancestor in nearly 100 million years, Bearzi and Stanford describe the parallel evolution that gave rise to their intelligence. And they closely observe that intelligence in action, in the territorial grassland and rainforest communities of chimpanzees and other apes, and in groups of dolphins moving freely through open coastal waters. The authors detail their subjects' ability to develop family bonds, form alliances, and care for their young. They offer an understanding of their culture, politics, social structure, personality, and capacity for emotion. The resulting dual portrait—with striking overlaps in behavior—is key to understanding the nature of “beautiful minds.”

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Customer Reviews

Endowed through evolution with large brains, the great apes (chimpanzees, bonobos gorillas and orangutans) and the cetaceans (dolphins and whales) are second only to humans in intelligence. In

this delightful and intriguing book, dolphin specialist Bearzi and primatologist Stanford discuss the similarities between these groups. Both use tools, have sophisticated means of communication and cooperation, solve problems innovatively, transmit cultural traditions to the next generation and are able to imitate others. Like humans, apes and dolphins form complex social networks, and they are capable of deception and manipulation. The authors cite many examples: dolphins hoard objects in order to get treats or wear sponges as protective masks as they forage; apes use twigs to extract termites from termite mounds, chimpanzees cultivate alliances with group mates to dominate their communities. In the final section, Bearzi and Stanford survey the factors making dolphins and apes endangered species, and they make a plea for conserving the ecosystems in which they live, because the beautiful minds of these creatures are a terrible thing to waste. (Apr.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Endowed through evolution with large brains, the great apes (chimpanzees, bonobos, gorillas, and orangutans) and the cetaceans (dolphins and whales) are second only to humans in intelligence. In this delightful and intriguing book, dolphin specialist Bearzi and primatologist Stanford discuss the similarities between these groups. Both use tools, have sophisticated means of communication and cooperation, solve problems innovatively, transmit cultural traditions to the next generation and are able to imitate others. Like humans, apes and dolphins form complex social networks, and they are capable of deception and manipulation. (Publishers Weekly 2008-01-28) To see the world from someone else's point of view is hard enough but how much harder when that viewpoint is that of a marine dweller with flippers or an ape whose cognition is based on leaf-centered survival in a rainforest? Hand-signed chimp communications and distinguishing imitation from emulation are two of the topics covered here, the first book to investigate the lives of the dolphins and apes in parallel. It explains why both have big brains and, as far as possible, what it must be like to be them. Fascinating. (Adrian Barnett New Scientist 2008-04-26) Delightful... By the time I reached the final chapter of Beautiful Minds I was so charmed that I felt compelled to read on. Bearzi and Stanford's book has the capacity to delight, entertain, educate, evoke compassion and, I hope, galvanize people into action. (Debbie Custance Times Higher Education Supplement 2008-05-22) Dolphin specialist Bearzi and primatologist Stanford team up in this discussion of the qualities of two species of mammal endowed with remarkably large brains. Among explications of the cultures, politics and emotion of the animals, the authors also make a resounding plea for conserving the ecosystems of these complex creatures. (Elizabeth Abbott Globe and Mail 2008-08-30)

Somewhere along the evolutionary path, cetaceans and the great apes parted ways and headed in different evolutionary directions...one to the forests and one to the oceans. And, that was quite some time ago; around 50 million years, and yet the two groups share many common threads behaviorally. How is that possible? The answer lies in the development of the brain and adaptations to the surrounding environments of each of the species involved. Chimpanzees have adapted to forest life in one way, while gorillas another. The same can be said for dolphins as opposed to orcas and other cetacean species. This book is an eloquently written look into the minds of the great apes, the cetaceans when compared to humans. It manages to enlighten while being highly entertaining and avoiding the trap of anthropomorphism that is so common when comparing animal species to humans. I would highly recommend this book to all, with the exception of staunch creationists, as it will make you look at dolphins and apes in an entirely new light.

This book is the collaboration of a dolphin researcher (Bearzi) and an ape researcher (Stanford). It is structured as intertwined narratives about great apes and dolphins, with embedded attempts to draw parallels between ape and dolphin intelligence and social complexity. This approach is immediately complicated by the fact the humans, bonobos, chimpanzees, gorillas, and orangutans all have different social structures and reproductive strategies; there are also differences within the dolphin family. (It was not always clear to me whether the focus of the narrative is strictly dolphins or, more broadly, toothed whales. And there are references to the entire whale family.) Longer books have been written just to address differences between the great apes, so this strategy proves very thin in drawing parallels between two diverse families with diverse behaviors. Often, the parallels are drawn between bottlenose dolphins and chimps. But other comparisons are made when they appear to support the thesis of "parallel lives". Individually, the two narratives are well written, engrossing, and serve as good overviews to two fascinating families of highly evolved and generally social mammals. (There are book-length treatments of each family with considerably more detail than provided in this book.) There is some overreach in their arguments about intelligence. For example, a story of a mother dolphin teaching her calf adult dolphin skills is touching, but other, presumably less intelligent mammals, get similar training from their mothers. While succeeding with their argument that both apes and dolphins are among the more intelligent animals, the authors are not as successful in arguing for parallels in behavior, nor for uniqueness of capability. Without the argument of parallel social behavior, it is difficult to argue for similar intelligence (in quantity or form of expression) between apes and dolphins. And uniqueness is brought into question by other

animals mentioned and not. The authors mention elephants a couple of times, but only to acknowledge, without examining them, that they also have highly evolved social structures, and may be very intelligent. Looking further afield, the authors briefly mention research into neocortex ratio (the ratio of the volume of the neocortex to the volume of the more primitive parts of the brain) and social group size (and, presumably, intelligence) among primates. This ratio is also large in some monkeys, dolphins, and elephants. (There appears to be an overlap, in brain capacity and behavior, between the "smartest" monkeys and apes.) But some species of bears are reported to have neocortex ratios similar to gorillas. While clearly clever, bears are not notably social (although the same could be said of orangutans). Intelligence is a broad and complex topic, and appears to exceed either the grasp or interest of the authors. Pleas for protecting apes and dolphins and their habitats conclude the book. While supported by the individual narratives, and a sentiment that I agree with, this ending does little to pull together the premise of the book. There may be many animals with "beautiful minds", but the case that great apes and dolphins have "parallel lives" is not proven by this book.

I'm a big fan of science books that show me another world and expose me to ideas that I would never otherwise come across. This rare comparison of great apes and dolphins is truly a treasure. Not only did I learn loads of fascinating information about both these groups of creatures, but the writing is beautiful and enjoyable. It's a great read for anyone as nerdy and curious as me. [...]

The writing style is a narrative of a person working with dolphins (Bearzi) and separate and distinct narrative of a person working with apes (Stanford). Although the narratives are interleaved, they are jarringly distinct. It is like two people wrote two books, spliced them together where the topics match, then wrote a transition paragraph for each splice. There is little in the way of integration of the two narratives or in the way of new perspective on the relationship of the separately evolved high intelligence in these creatures, whose most recent common ancestor lived about 60 million years ago. The narratives are simple in content, with little to offer to someone who has read about the intelligence of these beings. The good news is, the book is easy to read. The bad news is, it is "an" easy read! Well, easy to read is a good thing, but this one is easy in the sense of not very thought provoking. Aside from the light content, even the amount of prose left me feeling gypped. I'm all for getting to the point, and, had there been more content, the amount of words needed to express it would not matter. The writing on each page is contained within a 3 inches by 5 inches rectangle, with wide spacing between lines. Between chapters is about two pages of white space.

The actual "book" ends with page 264. The final "chapter" of 36 pages is really a separate book about the need to be more responsible with our environment. It has little relationship to the minds of dolphins or apes. Then 20 pages of "Suggested Reading" (does a fine job of suggesting related books) is followed by 6 pages of acknowledgments to brothers, husbands, homemade dinners (I'm not kidding about this!), grantors, the "local populace" and a cast of thousands. It would take less space to list the people on the planet not being acknowledged.

This is a beautiful and easily accessible book about the nuances of mind and thinking. I loved it and I shared it with my students. They were profoundly touched by the personal stories and experiences and I think it truly has made an impact in influencing them to further study and always respect the natural world.

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