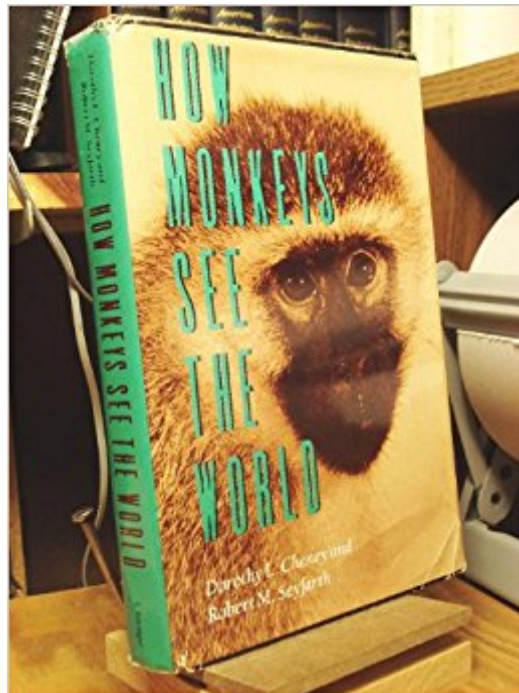




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How Monkeys See The World: Inside The Mind Of Another Species



Synopsis

Cheney and Seyfarth enter the minds of vervet monkeys and other primates to explore the nature of primate intelligence and the evolution of cognition."This reviewer had to be restrained from stopping people in the street to urge them to read it: They would learn something of the way science is done, something about how monkeys see their world, and something about themselves, the mental models they inhabit." —•Roger Lewin, Washington Post Book World"A fascinating intellectual odyssey and a superb summary of where science stands." —•Geoffrey Cowley, Newsweek"A once-in-the-history-of-science enterprise." —•Duane M. Rumbaugh, Quarterly Review of Biology

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Customer Reviews

Enter the minds of vervet monkeys and other primates to explore the nature of primate intelligence and the evolution of cognition. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

This book is really dry. I don't recommend it. I would bet there are many other more interesting and informative primate behavior books out there...

i paid very little for this book and it had a gorgeous thick library binding rather than the paperback most students had. a fascinating book and printed on beautiful paper and arrived fast too. its like a story and very easy to follow

Cheney and Seyfarth started research on vervet monkeys as post doctoral fellows of Rockefeller University, an interest that was to lead to 13 years (1977-1990) of field work in the Amboseli National Park of Kenya and eventually this book. The question is "How do monkeys see the world?" and the interesting answer of Cheney and Seyfarth is that monkeys see and learn that A leads to B but don't know why. As they say, "An individual who cannot reflect upon his own knowledge to form hypotheses about what he knows, will almost by definition be unable to extend knowledge from one context to another". This basic fact accounts for the lack of teaching of young monkeys. They have to learn by observation that A leads to B. The adult doesn't know that it knows anything so it is not surprising that it doesn't do any teaching. Monkeys live in a world of action and reaction without an understanding of what is happening. Cheney and Seyfarth note that at least 70% of the deaths of vervet monkeys in Amboseli are from predation and that frequent predators are leopards and pythons. Consequently reactions to different alarm calls are tailored to meet the threat (leopard- run for a tree, python- stand on back legs and look around), but secondary signals indicating leopards or pythons that are clear to humans are lost to the vervets. They can't make a mental picture of the behavior of leopards or pythons and consequently fail to see the danger of a recent leopard kill (leopards nearby) or a fresh python track leading into a bush. They were observed on occasion to walk straight into the bush despite a very clear and fresh track indicating that the snake was there. Their conclusion is mirrored in human development, where it is only at the relatively late age of 4-6 years that children can imagine another person's point of view (i.e. think in the abstract). This is shown in the important experiment by Wimmer and Penner (page 207) and seems to indicate that this is the developmental stage where monkeys and humans part company. In my opinion this is a very valuable book, especially as the work was done over such a long period and in the animals' natural environment.

I read this book in connection with graduate coursework under Seyfarth at the University of Pennsylvania. Cheney and Seyfarth describe a fascinating line of research on primates, mainly but not solely their own work on vervet monkeys. The goal is to form an account of the mind of the nonhuman primate -- how much do they understand about themselves, about other minds, and about the world? I think that these are questions that fascinate almost all of us. What would it be like to be very nearly as intelligent as a human being, but to lack language (not merely a means of communication but also a way of formulating knowledge -- therefore a modality of knowing)? It is, of course, impossible ever to understand as a monkey understands or to feel as a monkey feels, but

there is no better way to learn what a monkey can know or feel than Cheney and Seyfarth's engaging book.

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