

Bookshelf

THESE TWO NEW BOOKS EXPLORE THE LIVES OF WILD ANIMALS IN INNOVATIVE WAYS. A SEASONED ETHOLOGIST SHARES EXTRAORDINARY INSIGHTS INTO ANIMAL MINDS AND AN INSPIRATIONAL PHOTOGRAPHER HELPS US SEE SMALL ANIMALS IN A WHOLE NEW WAY.

This is a fascinating book. But had a review copy not plopped through my letterbox, I would probably never have picked it up. The title suggests a piece of lowest common denominator pop-science akin to one of those TV shows that recap every five minutes to spin out a 20 minute story to a one hour scheduling slot. This is a shame because from the first chapter it's obvious that what the author, Dr Sally Boysen, is offering has an awful lot more substance than that.

The content is further let down by the slightly cartoonish artwork and the cheesy banality of some of the captions and headings – like the title, these appear to belong to a completely different type of book. Perhaps they are an attempt to appeal to a wider readership, but they sit awkwardly with the main text, which is far from flamboyant, but absolutely fascinating. All in all this strikes me as a book shoehorned into a format that will attract people who probably won't read it, and deter those who would actually enjoy it. It's a shame, because it's really a very good read, suitable

for both students of zoology and other animal enthusiasts with the inclination to understand as well as simply admire.

The photographs are excellent, the balance of text to images is attractive. There are dozens of useful examples and case studies. With a more grown-up title and the addition of a substantial reference section listing the original studies for those wishing to find out more it would be a highly readable text book that would certainly have illuminated my undergraduate studies. Alternatively, a slightly lighter touch with the text could have created an intriguing read aimed at a more general market. In trying to be a bit of both it ends up in a sort of no man's land.

The meat of the book falls into seven chapters each dealing with aspects of behaviour which can be interpreted as evidence of intelligence: tool use, communication, imitation and social learning, mirror self-recognition, numerical abilities, language, cooperation and altruism.

Among the thought-provoking ideas presented is the theory that the design and use of tools in apes (including human ancestors) may

be driven by females – the logic being that a little ingenuity helped offset the natural disadvantage of smaller and weaker build. The theory is backed up by a study of chimpanzees of Fongoli in Senegal – females have learned to make and use spears to extract animal prey from burrows. Innovations by females are also more likely to be passed on to the youngsters who spend long periods accompanying their mother and observing her. Observation and copying of behaviours lie at the root of true culture.

So which are the smartest animals? It's a meaningless question and fortunately one the book doesn't attempt to answer. 'Intelligence' is difficult enough to quantify even in humans, and animals can appear to be smart when simply following instinctive behaviours or trained responses. What Sally Boysen does very well is describe many clever attempts by behavioural scientists (ethologists) to tease these pseudo-smart behaviours apart from genuine powers of reasoning. For this reason I'd recommend the book. Just ignore the captions.

AMY-JANE BEER

READ ON



The smartest animals on the planet:

extraordinary tales of the natural world's cleverest creatures by Sally Boysen is published in soft back by A&C Black, RRP £14.99.

This is a great idea for a book: exploring the world of those creatures that could fit in the palm of your hand – from their point of view. Igor Siwanowicz invites us to shrink down to their size and imagine what it's like to travel through water if you're as small as a frog or listen to a caterpillar munching its way through a leaf if you have hearing as good as a bat's.

Full of fascinating facts about animals as diverse as a slender loris and a sea urchin, this book covers the basic facts about wildlife but with interesting and relatively unknown examples. For

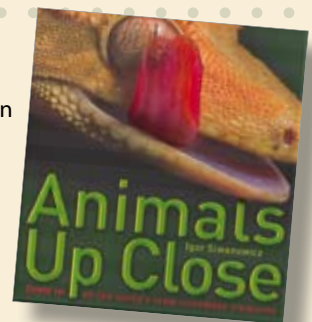
instance did you know that the axolotl, also known as the Mexican walking fish, doesn't develop adult characteristics but retains gills and fins throughout its life? Or that the 'moody' veiled chameleon expresses its tantrums through dramatic colour changes?

There is a well-illustrated and easy to read introduction to the animal kingdom which explains the six major phyla, including chordates – the phylum which contains all the vertebrates. Siwanowicz then goes on to describe over 40 species in detail. Each section contains beautiful photographs, maps of their distribution and information

about their status and ecology.

Written in the first person the reader benefits from the enthusiasm Igor has for his subject and stories of the lengths he has gone to in order to learn all about them. And like all good nature books it inspires exploration – a must for young wildlife enthusiasts who are looking for information on the more unusual and sometimes exotic creatures of this world. *Animals Up Close* was edited by our own Editor, Amy-Jane Beer.

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READ ON



Animals Up Close by Igor Siwanowicz is

published in hardback by Dorling Kindersley, RRP £14.99.