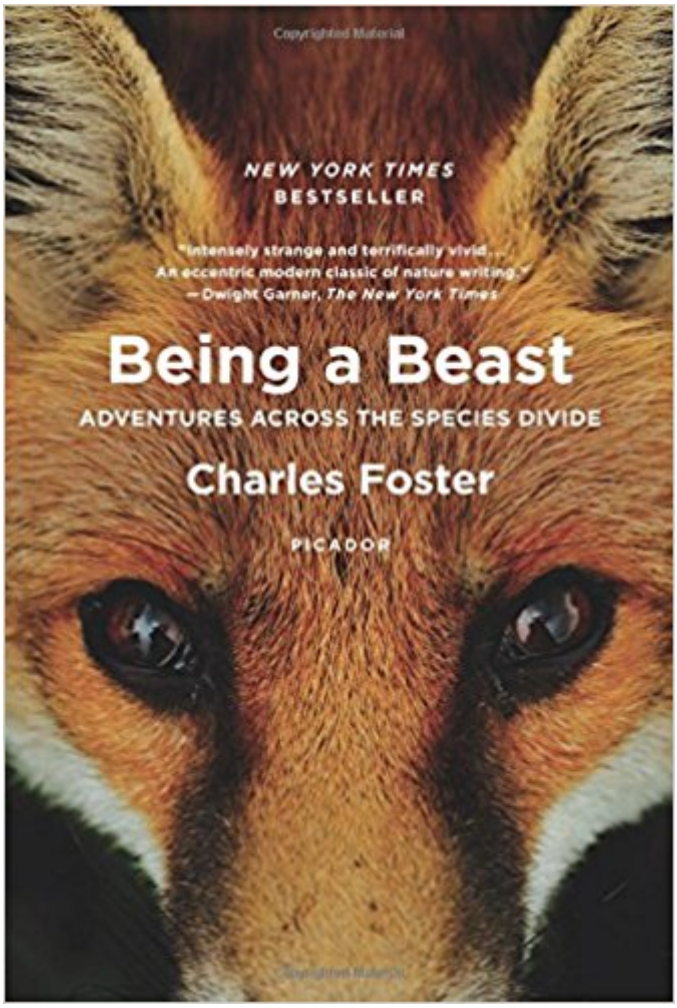
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Being A Beast: Adventures Across The Species Divide



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Synopsis

Charles Foster set out to know the ultimate other: the non-humans, the beasts. And to do that, he tried to be like them, choosing a badger, an otter, a fox, a deer, and a swift. He lived alongside badgers for weeks, eating earthworms and learning to sense the landscape by smell rather than sight. He tried to catch fish in his teeth while swimming like an otter, rooted through London garbage cans as an urban fox, was hunted by bloodhounds as a red deer, nearly dying in the snow. And he followed the swifts on their migration route over the Strait of Gibraltar, discovering himself to be strangely connected to the birds.A lyrical, joyful, and completely radical look at the life of animalsÃ¢â ¬â ¢human and otherÃ¢â ¬â ¢Being a Beast mingles neuroscience and psychology, nature writing and memoir to cross the boundaries separating the species.

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Customer Reviews

"Intensely strange and terrifically vivid . . . An eccentric modern classic of nature writing." Ã¢â ¬â ¢Dwight Garner, The New York Times"Spectacularly unconventional . . . A meditative romp that leaves you laughing out loud (and occasionally cursing in anger), even as you soak up the spray of science . . . Steeped in scholarship yet directed by his own quirky mysticism, Foster brilliantly takes on questions of animal consciousness, cognition, emotion, and theory of mind." Ã¢â ¬â ¢The New York Times Book Review"A tour de force of modern nature writing . . . that shows us how to better love the world beyond ourselves." Ã¢â ¬â ¢The Guardian (London)"A blend of memoir, neuroscience and nature writing . . . that pushes zoological obsession to even greater

heightsÃ¢â ¬â ¢and depths." Ã¢â ¬â ¢The Wall Street Journal"Gonzo nature writing . . . Extremely entertaining." Ã¢â ¬â ¢The New York Review of Books"An embed with the animals . . . Foster's quirky book shows how emulating animals not only helps our understanding of themÃ¢â ¬â ¢it makes us more human." Ã¢â ¬â ¢People"Foster wants to be the wild thing, living as wild things live. In Being a Beast, he nearly convinces us that such shape-shifting is possible in the way he lyrically tells his storiesÃ¢â ¬â ¢uncensored, intensely descriptive and often hysterical." Ã¢â ¬â ¢Milwaukee Journal Sentinel"Extraordinary, hair-raising, and deliberately funny . . . Atrophied senses limit our lived experiences. Be a beast, says Foster, to become a better human." Ã¢â ¬â ¢MacleanÃ¢â ¬â„¢s"A splendid, vivid contribution to the literature of nature . . . Daringly imaginative . . . There's not an ounce of sentimentality in any of it, but instead good science and hard-nosed thought. Furthermore, Foster has the gift of poetry." Ã¢â ¬â ¢Kirkus Reviews (starred review)"A fascinating exploration . . . His attempts to actually be a beast make this a different sort of wildlife book. . . . Ultimately, Foster found reciprocity in his unusual and daring immersion in nature, feeling that he now knows the essence of animals' lives and is somehow newly known in return." Ã¢â ¬â ¢Booklist (starred review)"Woven through the lyrical narrative are neuroscience, facts about the creatures, and philosophy. . . . This book's fascinating premise, with its unique perspective of how animals perceive their surroundings, will be of interest to scientists, naturalists, and those who enjoy reading about natural history." Ã¢â ¬â ¢Library Journal"An extraordinary account . . . In lesser hands this could come off as trite or patronizing, but Foster is quick to acknowledge his shortcomings and errors in perspective regarding his project, and he projects a healthy sense of humor. . . . This approach, along with his willingness to address and avoid the temptation for anthropomorphism, makes his book interesting and informative." Ã¢â ¬â ¢Publishers Weekly"When it comes to wilderness porn, it's going to be very hard to beat Being a Beast." Ã¢â ¬â ¢London Evening Standard"Being a Beast is a strange kind of masterpiece: the song of a satyr, perhaps, or nature writing as extreme sport. Foster marks out the distance between us and the beasts in a way that helps sharpen their boundaries and oursÃ¢â ¬â ¢and ours are not always where we think." Ã¢â ¬â ¢Financial Times"This year's H is for Hawk, the book leaves you feeling that perhaps Helen MacDonald's bestseller might have been improved if she had only tried to fly." Ã¢â ¬â ¢World Travel Guide"An extraordinary book." Ã¢â ¬â ¢Sunday Times (UK)"Living like an animal in order to write about it sounds like a gimmick. It isn't. Groundbreaking? Definitely." Ã¢â ¬â ¢The Scotsman"A highly original attempt to break free from the anthropocentrism that often characterizes nature writing . . . A rich, joyful, and inspiring book." Ã¢â ¬â ¢The Independent (UK)

CHARLES FOSTER is a Fellow of Green Templeton College at the University of Oxford. He is a qualified veterinarian, teaches medical law and ethics, and is a practicing barrister. Much of his life has been spent on expeditions: he has run a 150-mile race in the Sahara, skied to the North Pole, and suffered injuries in many desolate and beautiful landscapes. He has written on travel, evolutionary biology, natural history, anthropology, and philosophy. His books include Tracking the Ark of the Covenant and The Sacred Journey.

This book is quite strange, which I expected and sought out. Many of the descriptions of Foster's experiences and his thoughts on those experiences are nimbly written and very interesting.On the other hand, Foster spends substantial chunks of the book wallowing around inside his own head. Sometimes this feels relevant and worthwhile, but more often it just seems self-indulgent. I found it a chore to read many of these parts. Maybe I should have accepted the book as a traditional memoir with a running theme of "being a beast," rather than a more focused exploration of that topic. But I don't think that's what the book sells itself as, and I don't think it's as interesting or novel a project as really focusing on the relationship between human and animal experience.I was torn on whether to give this book three or four stars. I usually purely enjoy reading, and I can't honestly say I enjoyed reading most of this book. But it made me think, and there were enough bits that were funny or profound or lovely that I feel glad I read it in retrospect, and have therefore rounded up.

I guess I wasn't sure what I was expecting, but I don't care for this author's writing style. I was hoping for more description and less philosophizing, at least in this author's way. Others may love it though.

Weird but good.

This book is pretty much rubbish. The book is fairly well written and has an interesting concept, but Charles Foster shines through for who he is--quite out of touch with the rest of humanity. He is just another arrogant, academic twit who thinks he is authentic. He thinks he knows these animals better than other people because he has pretended to be these animals (before he heads off to the pub, or someone calls the police on this weirdo for crapping himself in public or digging through trash bags). He seems to think that spending months pretending to be an animal (and suffering) equates to somehow understanding the world from their perspective. Despite all his truly gruesome efforts to identify with these creatures, his experiment is a colossal failure. His writing is at times lyrical and

his observations are interesting, but his arrogance and self-satisfaction completely ruin this book. A more humble man would admit he has completely no idea what it is like to be a badger, otter, fox, deer, or swift, but not this expert.

Over-rated.

An interesting set of experiments undermined by the writer's self-indulgent approach to his own rhetoric. After being impressed by radio interviews, I was very disappointed by the book.

It becomes quickly clear that man is man and beast is beast, but there are many interesting insights and the author doesn't take himself too seriously, there is much wry humour. I enjoyed the book.

This book is a big, impressive, question mark about existence itself. Not like some stories (like Ovid's Metamorphoses) becoming an animal here is realistic, therefore impossible. It doesn't happen with a brilliant idea or wit. You can feel the immense friction of the process. The outcome isn't the main issue, but rather the heat which that friction makes.

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