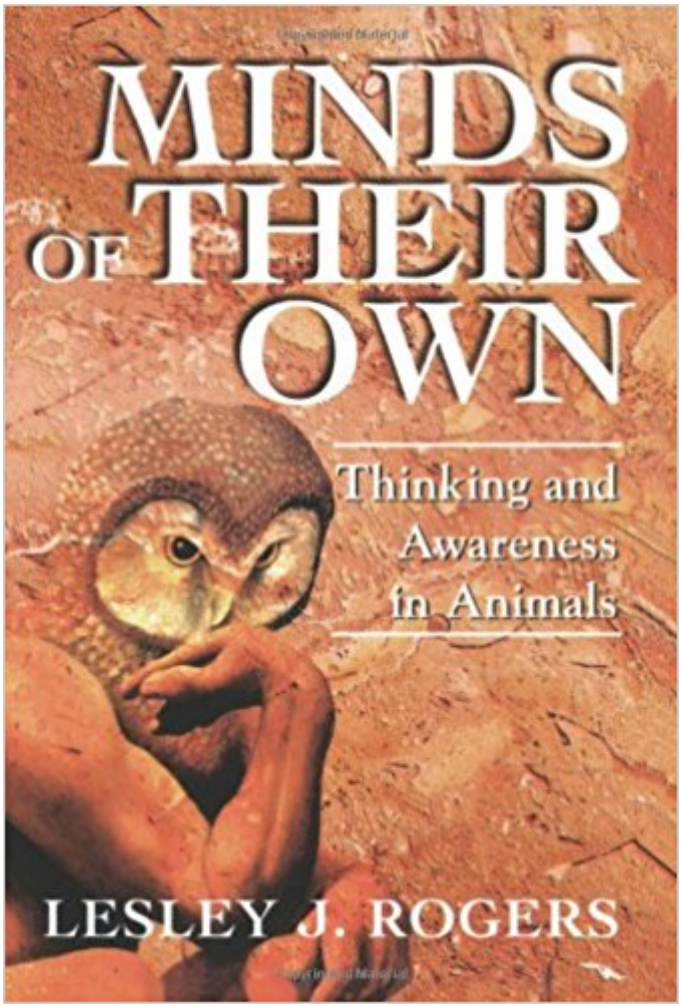
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Minds Of Their Own: Thinking And Awareness In Animals



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Synopsis

Do Animals have ideas? Do they experience pain like humans? Do they think about objects that they cannot see? About situations that have occurred in the past? Do they consciously make plans for the future or do they simply react unthinkingly to objects as they appear and situations as they arise? All of these questions have bearing on whether or not animals have consciousness. The advent of computers that Ã¢â ¬Â•thinkÃ¢â ¬Â• has lead us to consider “intelligenceÃ¢â ¬Â• in a way we never thought possible a decade ago. But when and how does information processing in the brain become automatic?In Minds of Their Own, Lesley J. Rogers examines the issue of animal thought both sympathetically and critically by looking at the different behavior characteristics of a variety of animals, the evolution of the brain and when consciousness might have evolved. To most people, to be conscious means to be aware of oneself as well as to be aware of others. But does this hold true for animals? The answer may have implications which transcend mere scientific inquiry: if animals are cognizant creatures, what, if any, moral responsibility do humans have to assure their rights? This timely book examines this issue and others by emphasizing comparisons between humans and animals: how we evolved; how we remember; how we learn.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"A useful, concise introduction to animal thinking and consciousness.... A valuable addition." -- Choice

Do animals have ideas and do they think about objects that they cannot see or about situations that have occurred in the past? Do they consciously make plans for the future or do they simply react unthinkingly to objects as they appear and to situations as they arise? Are animals aware of themselves and of others or is this an ability unique to humans? Minds of Their Own addresses these questions by looking at the different behaviour characteristics of a variety of animals, the evolution of the brain and when consciousness might have evolved.

In a marketplace crowded with texts popularizing recent research in animal cognition, the sophistication, lack of defensiveness, and engaging liveliness of this short book stands out.Rogers generally avoids a shallow recitation of "gee-whiz" animal anecdotes and instead provides careful discussion and analysis of a few crucial case studies about animal minds. She is well aware that the evidence garnered so far is not conclusive, and she offers many helpful suggestions for new scientific experiments.Rogers' notable successes include her discussion of brain evolution and the facinating "mirror studies" that tried to demonstrate animal self-awareness. Notable failures include the unsophisticated and dogmatic survey of so,me relevant philosophical issues in her first chapter.Rogers book is among the best in a farly weak genre. Readers looking for a somewhat sophisticated general review of cognitive ethology would do well to select Rogers instead of the disappointing contributions by Masson, Griffin, and others. However, readers seeking for greater depth and sophistication should bypass this genre altogether and sample the more techincal works of, for example, Colin Allen and Mark Bekoff.

I expected a much nicer book after paying 37.00 for it but it was a small paperback that even had a 3.00 price tag left on it.

Until very recently the subject of animal awareness has not even been approached with the correct questions. As Rogers clearly points out, most of the research on cognition has been directed at supporting the assumption that consciousness is an exclusively human phenomenon. An inherited predisposition to preserve a human monopoly on consciousness survives only because it appeases our omnivorous behaviors.In the early 1600's Spinoza correctly determined the existence of an emotional balance. He told us that one extreme emotion will dominate the senses until such time that an equally extreme opposite emotion brings us back to emotional center. Antonio Damasio provides a compelling case that consciousness is inextricably linked to emotion in his book "The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness". Using Damasio and

Spinoza as a frame of reference it follows that each and every decision we make is based on an emotion, not a uniquely quantifiable language infused thought, as the popular human interpretation might assume. Examples of this might be choosing the color of paint, a selection from a menu, the selection of a mate or which way to turn when unsure. Animals have provided us with an exhaustive and document able list of emotional behaviors. How is it possible to arrive at the conclusion that animals are not conscious when most animals will clearly display behaviors consistent with emotional stimulus?The last frontier of computer science is the quest for a conscious, non-human entity.Ray Kurzweil has spent the better part of his life predicting the emergence of an exponentially accelerating form of machine augmented human consciousness. In my view, it would be safer to assume that at some point technology will provide us with means to understand the different levels of consciousness that exist. While computers struggle to redefine consciousness by passing "Turing Tests", visionary ethologists might find ways to interpret the world through different eyes.It is exceedingly difficult to discuss the subject of animal consciousness from the point of view of the animal and avoid emotional interpretations. Lesley Rogers has given us a glimpse of this vast subject by asking the correct questions and, providing the current objective answers from each available vantage point. At a disciplined two hundred pages the book stands out as a concise introduction to the subject of Animal Cognition.

There is a lot of very interesting material, reasonably well organized. Rogers, a researcher herself, seems to be aware of all the pertinent research, not only in animal intelligence, but in all the related areas: neuro-biology, anthropology, child developmental psychology and evolution. She takes great pride in her objectivity and care as a scientist, without being afraid to express personal beliefs, clearly labeled. Her style leaves something to be desired. She fears the reader will "unscientifically" draw unsubstantiated conclusions, and addresses this by constant repetition of more or less the same warnings. Surprisingly, a number of birds seem to be as intelligent as primates, and even domesticated chickens are fairly intelligent, not withstanding that birds don’t have a neo-cortex, and must keep brain size small because of weight considerations.

Leslie Rogers writes a very comprehensive and well documented book. As a researcher in dolphin minds and well-being, this book highlighted not only ways to look at the controversal issue of animal consciousness, but also suggested ’gaps’ in the research and directions we should be headed. It covers areas of traditional animal research and the strengths and weaknesses of these, looks into leading edge research and presents all of this is a way that is easy to read and hard to put down. I

find Leslie Rogers to be an inspiration. Anyone interested in animal thinking and awareness, at any level will find alot in this book as it covers intelligence, consciousness, evolution, how the environment effects the physical body and visa versa, as well as many examples of animals that do not seem to fit the 'stereotyped' mould science has so far created for them.

Although I personally would like to have explored the topic a little deaper in this book I think it is the best introduction to the topic I have read. Speacies of Mind was way to difficult to read and Animal Minds was okay but Griffin did not spend enough time discussion the concepts and definitions of his topic. Minds of Their Own is nicely organized and concise. Excellent book!James O'Heare, Dip.C.B.

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