



Of Parrots and People: The Sometimes Funny, Always Fascinating, and Often Catastrophic Collision of Two Intelligent Species

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There are an estimated 50 million parrots kept as pets the U.S. alone, their numbers surpassed only by dogs and cats, yet these complex creatures are not your typical domesticated animal, and they remain a mystery to many. Most people don't know that parrots score at the level of 3-to-5 year olds on human intelligence tests. Nor that they can live to 100 years or more. Nor that pound for pound parrots are worth more on the black market than cocaine. Their startling beauty, social sophistication, and uncanny ability to bond with humans have made parrots sought-after pets, but few people realize how fragile and endangered many parrot species have become.

In *Of Parrots and People*, award-winning journalist and parrot expert, Mira Tweti, reveals the world of a family of birds that is far more complex and advanced than we've acknowledged. Tweti relates stunning scientific findings on the intelligence, personality, and rich lives of parrots that challenge our most widespread and flawed assumptions about non-primates. And she explores the intense and often humorous emotional connections these birds form not just with their flockmates, but with the "parrots" (as some "parrot parents" call themselves) who keep them as pets, often pampering them as they do children.

Of Parrots and People also takes on the much larger, serious issues of animal welfare that are the unfortunate consequences of the "bird boom" of the last few decades. Despite the high demand for them, many parrot species are endangered in the wild from rampant trapping and habitat destruction, while those in captivity are quickly becoming the fastest growing category of unwanted pets, living lives of neglect or abuse. Avian rescuers can't handle the number of birds that need help, and the Humane Society of the U.S. is advocating euthanasia rather than warehousing birds that will outlive their caretakers. Yet unregulated bird breeders continue to put over a million young birds on the market each year from parrot mills across the country. It's an untenable situation of cruelty, especially for such an evolved and intelligent species, and it's just one of the many newsworthy topics that make *Of Parrots and People* just as hard-hitting as it is soft-hearted. Tweti tirelessly follows the parrot trail around the globe, from the living rooms and pet stores of America, to hotbeds of illegal trade in Mexico. She examines threats of avian flu, and takes a first hand look at encouraging progress in eco-tourism that may be our only way to protect these stunning species from being hunted to extinction.

Comprehensive in scope and passionately written, *Of Parrots and People* is a unique and vivid addition to popular works on animals and their behavior, and an important new voice in the burgeoning environmental and conservation movement.

Of Parrots and People: The Sometimes Funny, Always Fascinating, and Often Catastrophic Collision of Two Intelligent Species Details

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Megan says

Disappointing. I'm deeply fascinated by parrot intelligence and got the book after reading the first chapter, in hopes of more anecdotes about parrot education and inter-species communication and relationships.

Instead, this is a heavy-handed PETA piece with wildly inconsistent tone. For example, it's "foolish" to compare intelligence between species, because all species have different values and emphases -- BUT PARROTS ARE DEFINITELY THE SMARTEST. And brain size is irrelevant to intelligence -- BUT PARROTS HAVE THE BEST SIZE BRAIN. Also, the very few glowing anecdotes about people ("parrots") living with their "feathered babies" are immediately followed by paragraphs about how evil and disgusting it is to ever imprison a bird. Yet the author *owns* a parrot. One parrot-owner is quoted as calling himself a slave owner. Incongruously, one sentence depicts a woman lovingly fondling her rare parrot, and barely a paragraph later, the author remarks that only a monster would think of taking such a parrot out of its native jungle.

Very uneven in tone and with only the slightest coating of interesting human-parrot interaction stories to get the reader hooked. 90% of the rest is alarmist conservationist statistics. Don't get me wrong, it's certainly important for us to know about abuses in animal trade, but frankly 2 chapters would've been sufficient.

Zoom says

Excellent exposé of the exploitative relationship between humans and parrots, from illegal smuggling to captive breeding to habitat destruction. Enlightening, fascinating, devastating and utterly depressing. (Forget the teaser on the cover: "The sometimes funny, always fascinating and often catastrophic collision of two intelligent species" - it's misleading.)

I think this book should be required reading for anybody who is considering acquiring a parrot. There are serious ethical issues involved, and it's better to think them through before you acquire parrots than after. (Don't worry - the book won't necessarily convince you not to get a parrot, but it should make you consider the source of your parrot. For example, maybe you'll adopt from a rescue rather than purchase from a pet store.)

Allisha says

I am actually only 2/3 the way through it, but it took me so long to read it, that I had to return it to the library. In all, it would take me about 4 hours to read it without a break, but compared to all the other books I was reading, it did not captivate my interest, and it seemed like a pain to read it. The information in the book was

wonderful, though. And I agree with nearly everything in it!

Beckie says

i learned about the book of parrots and people from one of my dear friends, marilyn. she and one of her granddaughter's came to our house for a visit on april 5, she saw that we have two parakeets, and she told me about this book.

i requested and checked the book out from the library on april 10, and finished reading it on may 15. why did it take me so long? because this book is so heartbreaking and made me emotionally distraught that i had to keep taking breaks from it.

i, like marilyn, normally do not read non-fiction. but this book is just so amazing and wonderful. it is all about parrots, and other birds, and how they are hunted and bred and their role in the world, and how they are going to disappear.

the book took years to write, and the author traveled all over, and talked to a lot of people, to research this book.

did you know that at one time the united states had a native parrot? it was called the carolina parakeet. you can read more at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carolina...>

the author wrote a lot about the treatment of animals at places like petco and petsmart. it is common practice for stores that sell animals to put sick and dead ones in the freezer to get rid of them instead of calling a vet to find out if the animal can be saved. i know for a \$2 mouse no one cares (but should), but a several-hundred dollar baby bird? yeah, that is wrong.

and as far as how these baby parrots are obtained, well, that is a very sad thing, indeed. the babies are stolen from the nests while the parents are away or distracted. the parents cry and look for the babies frantically for days, just like a human.

they mourn, just like a human.

after 'dating', they find their soul mate and they mate for life.

they live to be a 100 or more.

THEY ARE THE ONLY CREATURES ON THE PLANET WHO LEARN TO SPEAK OUR LANGUAGE SO THAT THEY CAN COMMUNICATE WITH US.

i want that to sink it. seriously. read it and think about it. smaller birds mimic. parrots learn and problem-solve and figure things out and are as intelligent as a 5 yr old.

they are so much like humans.

when we bought our parakeets, they had just come out of a 6-month quarantine. the book talked about that, and i understand more of what happened. we bought ours at petsmart and they all come from the same kaytee

breeder in wisconsin. they had a lot of sick ones, and all of the ones out in the shops had to be quarantined until everyone was sure that none of the birds were ill anymore. they grew up in a cage with minimal human interaction. this is why our birds aren't too friendly or finger-trained. but we love them none-the-less. we only clipped their wings when we first brought them home so they could get used to the house. now they are free to fly whenever and wherever they want, but with gage and oscar around, they stay close to the cage ;) they will jump on our arms to get back into the cage, but when i put my hand in the cage, one of them likes to nip me. oh, well.

it is also neat to see how our parakeets communicate with the birds outside when the windows and/or patio doors are open. they talk to each other. heck, even the two budgies talk to each other in the house if one is in one room and one is in another, like they are saying 'i'm over here!', 'no, i'm over here!' LOL!

ok...didn't mean to get off on a tangent there.

the vet we go to has a parrot in a big cage there. i will never at him the same. i wonder how old he is, and why he is there. and does he ever get to fly? it is SO important for birds to fly. but we buy those big birds and keep them locked in cages. that is not what God intended.

many people who buy bigger birds, like, quakers, conures and parrots end up letting them go in the wild or finding a new home for them because they just can't handle the noise and the mess. many birds go from home to home, just like a child in foster care. they never really get to bond to anyone and aren't socialized. and letting them go, well, if they got this bird as a baby, it has no idea how to fend for itself. it has to be taught many things from its parents, and it never had that chance.

so what can we do, you ask? the easiest thing is to not buy birds in a pet shop. i know that is bad for the birds that are already there in the long run, but it is all about supply and demand.

there is a lot more i can say about what i learned in the book, but i touched on the biggies, and the things that stuck with me the most.

even if you just go to the library or a bookstore and look at the pictures in the book, that will be enough to intrigue you enough to read it.

birds are all around us, and they aren't stupid or bird brains or anything of the sort. they are essential to the world around us and need to be taken care of and treated with respect.

Amy says

I learned a lot in reading this book mostly about the negative side of pet trade and smuggling and breeding birds as pets. If I would've known what it was actually about I honestly would not have read it, educational and well researched but depressing. I was hoping to learn about parrot behavior and the relationships and bonds with humans. It was an interesting read but not what I was looking for.

Eden Tran says

OMG! My perspective on parrots has completely changed after reading this book! It's got some amazing information, but also horrifying accounts of past and present methods used to trap wild parrots, which continues to cause their numbers to steadily decline. Because of this harsh reality that the author presents, reading this book is like watching a train wreck, too terrifying to even think about, but impossible to tear your eyes away. As a zoologist & animal lover, I almost did stop reading it about a third of the way through, but I decided that it was the kind of thing that I should read about, so that I can be aware of the atrocities being inflicted on such intelligent, feeling, & emotional creatures. They truly are in more danger of extinction than I ever imagined! If you love animals, read this, because it will definitely teach you something, but be aware that the good comes with plenty of bad. Very informative, very moving!

Catherine says

This is an important and well written book about the relationship between humans and parrots. It looks at several levels of interaction, from the personal level of keeping parrots as pets to the broader social and ecological issues. The author doesn't mince words when talking about the violence brought about against animals, which is distressing, but not gratuitous. I sought this book out because of my personal interests, but I think it will be enlightening to anyone interested in animal welfare and environmental issues.

Michael Andersen-Andrade says

"Of Parrots and People" confirms the conclusion I've come to after owning a parrot for the past 28 years: They are not suitable pets for the vast majority of people. In the first place, even the tamest parrot is never fully domesticated. They are colorful, playful and some talk, but they also bite, scream and make a mess, which often condemns them to a dark closet or being handed off to multiple owners who soon tire of a parrot's high maintenance. Parrots are very intelligent animals whose psychological and intellectual needs are rarely met in captivity. Then there are the conservation considerations. Parrot populations and habitats have been decimated worldwide. Those parrots who do survive capture are transported and held in deplorable conditions with a low survival rate. Even domestically raised parrots born in captivity are often victims of negligent and unqualified breeders whose only concern is the bottom line rather than the developmental needs of the baby parrots. "Of Parrots and People" is a comprehensive study of parrots and their mostly tragic relationship with humans. As a parrot lover I found it very painful to read many parts of the book which describe the horrendous way humans mistreat and exploit them. I highly recommend this book to anyone who owns a parrot or who is considering buying one as a pet.

Jennifer says

People, this book is knocking my socks right off. It might be the best non-fiction book I've ever read, and I'm convinced that it is probably one of the most important books out there about the relationship between humans and animals. Dispels myths & raises questions about bird ownership, and talks about conservation/rescue efforts. Anecdotes will alternately make you laugh and weep.

p.s. Now that I've finished reading, I think I'd lower my rating slightly to 4.5 stars, mostly because the author

made some catty remarks about someone she was traveling with in ch. 10. I didn't think it really belonged in this book. Also, there were many editing errors, which was a little distracting at times. Still, loved this book. Might put those w/ parrots as pets on the defensive.

Diana says

Very informative and moving account of what we are doing to this planet. The sum of it all is we have destroyed the habitats around us and then also have made these intelligent animals basically our slaves. I who have birds as pets, now find myself loathing the decision to have ever done this. I love them and care for them. And as I know birds I know they love me back and have made me part of their flock. But I wonder to the quality of their lives and wonder if they dream of another world. Though my birds are domestic birds and not wild caught the assumption should be that they are still wild animals. This book has opened my eyes to so many other alternatives of how we can be better stewards of this earth. And also to move forward in holding corporations and governments to task to better care for the world around us. One of the more thought provoking, lines in this book was basically. Paraphrased: "If all of mankind disappeared from earth tomorrow, that other creatures would continue. If all other living creatures disappeared tomorrow, man kind would be dead in a year."

Kevin McAllister says

With the title Of Parrots And People I was looking foward to reading a book of "feel good" type stories between parrots and people. The author herself Mira Tweti, wrote the book because she fell totally in love with her own pet parrot. Turns out my expectations were way off. The book is a continuous collection of sordid, disturbing, and often, down right depressing, accounts of people involved in all aspects of the parrot business. No one is spared. Not the breeders, the trappers, the pet shop owners, the pet food companies... No one. I could go on & on, because the author sure did. And that was the problem with this book. Tweti made some very valid very points. But her argument was so one sided and so unbalanced that even a parrot lover like myself, was disturbed by her arrogant and angry argument. Sometimes unbridled anger just isn't the best way to get your point across. Sometimes if you really want to change peoples minds and achieve your goals you have to ... Lighten Up !

Melanie says

Reading this and "The Dangerous World of Butterflies" convinces me that I don't want to read anymore of this type of book. The author of Butterflies was shockingly ignorant of them, which was annoying. Mira Tweti does not have that problem but she obviously espouses the ideas of PETA--she quotes them frequently--and does not believe any birds should be kept as pets. I'm not sure whether this is true or not, but I am sure that her coverage of the subject is slanted to reflect her own beliefs. For example, she examines several instances of the parrot equivalent of "puppy mills" but no instances of responsible breeders or people breeding just a few birds or even happy bird owners. There are a couple of points in the book where she indicates that she has a pet parrot, and that seem hypocritical.

Another area that bothered me was her claim that introduced parrots in American cities are no threat to native wildlife. She interviews someone who shares her opinion but no one who disagrees, which is a theme

throughout the book

She also elevates parrots to near human intelligence and chastises people for not understanding this. She seems to think they are the geniuses of the bird world, the kings of birds, but I get the feeling that she is not all that familiar with some of the other bird groups.

I'm sure parrots do need more protection and I'm also sure most people do not know what they are getting into when they get a pet parrot. The good thing about this book is that it could educate people enough that they won't get a bird that they are not prepared to handle. However, the book is not aimed at people who might get parrots but don't have them already so that's not as useful as it could be.

M Harris says

I enjoyed reading this book. Most of it focused on the issues surrounding keeping parrots as pets, such as how they are wild animals poorly suited to be pets, the horrors of how they are raised commercially and captured and smuggled from the wild. Consequently, parts of it could be quite sad, but the part about the successes of ecotourism at the end was good to read, and I came away knowing far more than when I started.

Eliza says

I did not finish this because the dog ate it, which is becoming an unfortunate theme in my life these days. I believe this book chewing was motivated by species prejudice on the part of the dog, and we are working with her on tolerance for all animals.

The first third of this book, which I did read, was a very, very compelling argument for why people should not keep parrots as pets. The author frequently mentioned that the number of unwanted pet parrots is rising even as the wild populations decline. I trust later in the book she provided a solution for that problem.

Lacey Losh says

I delighted in the first couple chapters of this book.

However, I found the change from heart-warming stories from breeders, pet owners and bird lovers over to the political and animal rights aspects a bit too abrupt. Especially since a lot of this content is horrifying to read about.

This book is fascinating, but the transition into its greater intention could have been a bit more subtle and smooth.
