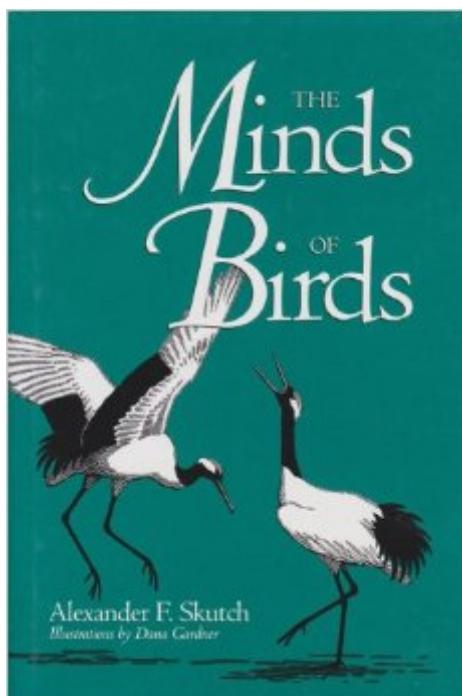


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The Minds Of Birds (Louise Lindsey Merrick Natural Environment Series)



Synopsis

In this controversial culmination of a lifelong quest, Alexander F. Skutch, a well-known ornithologist who has studied birds for more than sixty years, makes a case for "believing that birds' mental capacities have been grossly underestimated." Lacking hard scientific proofs of what birds think and feel, we are left, Skutch argues, with inferences gleaned from observation of their behavior. His intimate, six-decade study of tropical and north temperate birds and his wide survey of the literature inform this remarkable review of the psychic life of birds. Although varying widely by species, many birds have a striking ability to recognize as individuals not only other birds of their own kind (which all look alike to humans), but also familiar humans, even after a long absence. They have good memories and give indications of forethought. Only humans take more elaborate care of their offspring than most birds do, and few animals of any kind live in such closely united families as those of cooperatively breeding birds, which carefully avoid incest. The diverse play of birds suggests their capacity for enjoyment. They can be taught to count up to eight, and some are known to use tools. The tastefully adorned constructions of bower birds and the songs of many other species also point strongly to an aesthetic sense. The journeys of migrants between known breeding and wintering territories separated by thousands of miles speak of memory and navigational skills that baffle human observers. True, Skutch concludes, inferential evidence only suggests hypotheses and cannot offer scientific proof. Nonetheless, his carefully gathered and documented observations, delightfully reported, accord with the strong intuition of many bird lovers that birds are not unfeeling automata but sensitive creatures, aware of what they do. Birders and behaviorist ornithologists alike will find Skutch's work provocative and rewarding; no more easily dismissed than the apparently purposeful behavior of the birds he describes. A timely and useful contribution to the debate on animal intelligence, this book offers--with precision, force, clarity, and a wide range of examples--a challenge to the longstanding mechanistic view of nonhuman life.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I have often wondered about motivation for certain actions and reactions of my pet birds...this book has filled in the blanks..The author studied birds for over 60 years and has given a wonderful record of all types of situations and a basis for understanding the instinctual and functional behaviors necessary for survival. I highly recommend this book for anyone who loves and keeps birds..

this book is a little dated, but covers a great variety of birds and behaviors.using personal, anecdotal and scientific sources, blended by subjects/chapters, he covers a lot of territory with just enough info to make his point and not get bogged down.

Alexander Skutch is amazing! Love this book

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