

WILD ANIMALS,



ENTLE WOMEN

BY MARGERY FACKLAM

ILLUSTRATED WITH LINE DRAWINGS BY PAUL FACKLAM AND WITH PHOTOGRAPHS



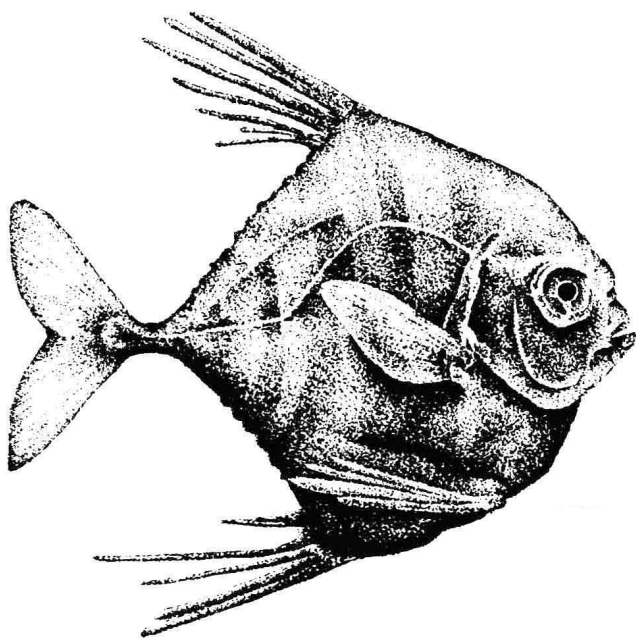
Wild Animals, Gentle Women

Margery Facklam

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Illustrated with line drawings
by Paul Facklam
and with photographs

By the same author
Frozen Snakes and Dinosaur Bones:
Exploring a Natural History Museum

*For Mim, my sister,
who became my best friend
in spite of snakes in the bedroom,
and for Dave, my brother,
the real animal lover in the family,
who helped feed the porcupines*

*and in memory of our parents,
who never discouraged any
of our interests, no matter
what directions they took*

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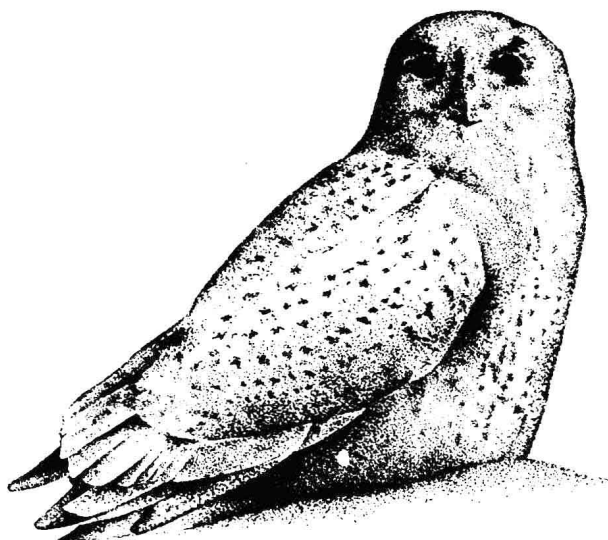
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Wild Animals, Gentle Women



Chapter One

Talking to the Animals



In the very earliest time,
when both people and animals lived on earth,
a person could become an animal if he wanted to
and an animal could become a human being.
Sometimes they were people
and sometimes animals
and there was no difference.
All spoke the same language.
That was the time when words were like magic.

From Songs and Stories of the Netsilik Eskimo

But the magic time is gone, and we can't talk to the animals. We can only guess how they feel, how their senses compare to ours, or how intelligent they are.

We say that owls are wise. Beavers are industrious. Dolphins are smart. Gorillas are fierce, foxes are sly. Snakes are evil, lions are proud.

But are they? How can we really know what an animal is like? Everyone has opinions about animals. Some people think animals react like machines, thinking nothing, feeling nothing. Others go to the opposite extreme and believe that animals are just like people, maybe even smarter.

Ever since we human animals appeared on earth, we have used other animals—their flesh for food, their skins for clothing and shelter, and their bones for weapons and tools. We taught them to help us farm, to provide us with transportation, to carry our messages, to entertain us and give us pleasure as our pets. And we watched them, loving some of them, fearing others.

When we see an animal do something, we explain it the only way we know—in human terms. Our own feelings and reactions get in the way. For example, if we put out bread for birds to eat and a squirrel takes the bread, we call the squirrel a thief. We say he is sneaky. When we see a hawk swooping down on a smaller bird, we call the hawk a murderer.

That kind of thinking is called anthropomorphic, which simply means assuming that an animal has the same thoughts and feelings as we humans.

When zoology was new, it was a science of collecting and organizing animals into systematic groups. Museums began to spring up just to hold all the animals that scientists collected, named, measured, and described. This was useful and necessary, but no matter how many dead animals are collected, they can't tell us much about the way animals spend their lives.

In the 1800s, many of the zoologists and naturalists who were out collecting with guns and traps also became interested in the animals' behavior. But much of what they reported was anthropomorphic. They fell into the habit of describing what animals did in human terms.

As late as 1922, a well-known naturalist, William Hornaday, wrote a book called *The Mind and Manners of Wild Animals*. In it he said that wolves were crafty, dangerous, and cruel. He told big-game hunters they would find lions courageous, confident, and very reliable, but that tigers were nervous, suspicious, treacherous, and uncertain.

Now we realize that that kind of labeling makes about as much sense as saying that all plumbers are confident and reliable, or that all politicians are nervous, suspicious, and treacherous.

But as zoologists wondered more and more why animals did certain things and how they learned, American scientists in particular began to study animals in laboratories full of the newest equipment. They even earned the nickname "rat runners" because they ran rats through mazes to see how fast the animals learned.

They found out how animals breathe, how their muscles work, how they digest their food, and which parts of their brains produce pleasure or pain. They even counted and diagramed the patterns of feathers on birds and the fur on mammals. They really learned about animals from the inside out. But we were still saying things like, "Wolves are vicious."

Fortunately, human animals are a curious lot, and scientists in particular are like the python in Kipling's *Jungle Book*—full of insatiable curiosity. They never stop asking why or how. Why do birds sing? Why do beavers build dams? Why do gorillas beat their chests? Why are dolphins always friendly to man? How does one bee tell another where the pollen is? How does a duckling keep track of its mother in a barnyard full of ducks? How does a baby seal find its mother on a beach covered with seals?

Questions like those were the beginning of a new science called *ethology*, the study of animal behavior. It is very much like the old-fashioned nature study, dealing as it does with animals in the wild. But it goes further. It asks different questions. It uses scientific methods to piece together a picture of an animal's life: how it courts, mates, and raises its young; how it defends its territory; how it handles aggression—in other words, how an animal gets along in its own society.

Konrad Lorenz has been called the father of ethology. His work

has shown that behavior patterns are inherited, just like red hair or blue feathers or curved tusks. A wolf cub taken from its mother and raised by humans will still greet other wolves in the age-old tradition of all wolves. It did not learn that greeting from the humans, but knew it anyway. If a beaver is raised in captivity and has never seen a beaver lodge, it can still build a lodge like any other beaver's.

Do we humans also have behavior patterns that are inherited from generation to generation? According to many ethologists, the way we bow or nod our heads when we greet each other, or the way we back down when a bully threatens us, or the way our hair bristles on the back of the neck when we are frightened are all patterns of behavior that had their beginnings millions of years ago.

Sally Carrighar, a writer and naturalist, said, "In the natural behavior of other animals we discover much about ourselves: our social life and play, our passions and aggressions, our patterns of courtship, parenthood and sex."

She went on to explain that animals, of course, do not always do the right and perfect thing, even for their own survival. Just because we study animals does not mean we should imitate them.

But she added, "The last few recent years are the only time in all history when human beings have had a chance to compare our own behavior with accurately described behavior of the animals from whom we had descended . . . or ascended."

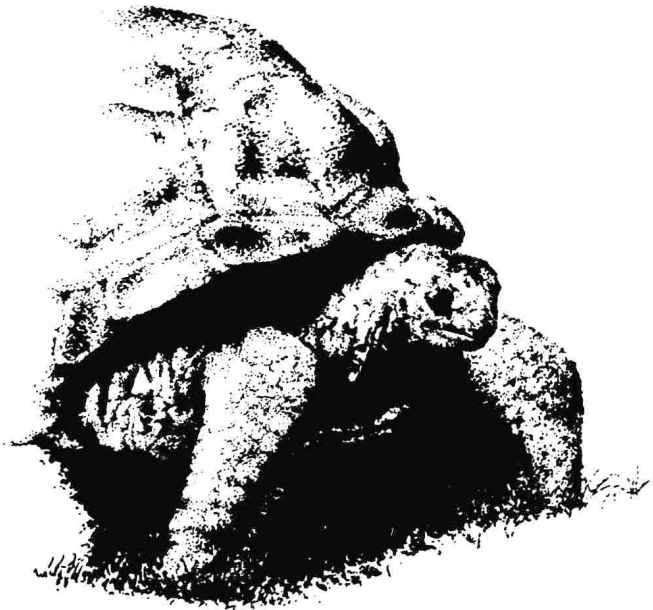
The science of ethology clearly shows us that man is united with all animals. And from these studies we get useful ideas about the unlearned behavior of babies and the ways in which we humans learn.

Thousands of people spend their lives with animals, working with them or studying them. Many of these people are women. This book is about eleven women who became animal watchers. Some are famous, others are little known. Some are trained scientists who knew from the time they were young that they would work with animals. Others never intended to become involved with animals at all, but found their lives totally changed because of an encounter with an animal. Some traveled to distant foreign countries, and others never left home. Some learned from animals in zoos, some in their own backyards, and others in oceans and jungles.

All of these women share several traits. They are patient, strong, and capable. And each of them found one thing to be true: The more they watch and the more they think they know about an animal, the more questions they find to ask.

Chapter Two

Belle Benchley: Zoo Director



Teddy, a baboon, swung along the wire fence outside of the monkey cages. His young mate scrambled after him on all fours, her long arms reaching out along the ground to keep up.

Four keepers banged trash-can lids together, waved brooms, and shouted as they worked to head the animals back to their own cages. Although the two baboons had escaped from their cages, they had not yet noticed that they could be completely free simply by leaping over the high fence surrounding the outdoor area. They were much too busy discovering the other caged baboons and monkeys and staying out of the keepers' reach.