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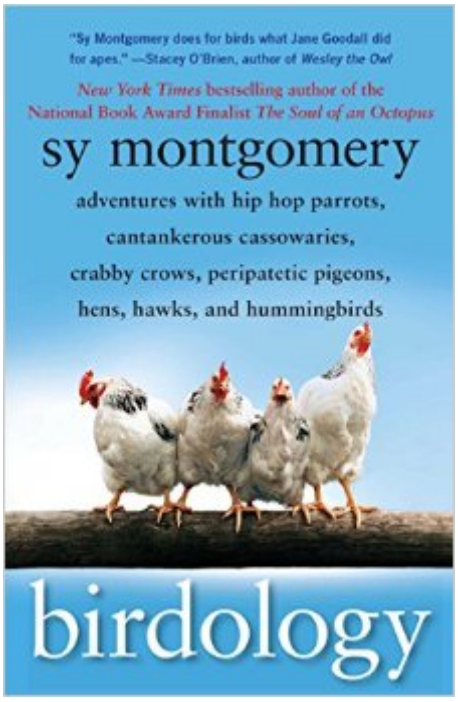
Birdology: Adventures With Hip Hop Parrots, Cantankerous Cassowaries, Crabby Crows, Peripatetic Pigeons, Hens, Hawks, And Hummingbirds



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Synopsis

Meet the ladies: a flock of smart, affectionate, highly individualistic chickens who visit their favorite neighbors, devise different ways to hide from foxes, and mob the author like sheâ ™s a rock star. In these pages youâ ™ll also meet Maya and Zuni, two orphaned baby hummingbirds who hatched from eggs the size of navy beans, and who are little more than air bubbles fringed with feathers. Their lives hang precariously in the balanceâ ”but with human help, they may one day conquer the sky. Snowball is a cockatoo whose dance video went viral on YouTube and whoâ ™s now teaching schoolchildren how to dance. Youâ ™ll meet Harrisâ ™s hawks named Fire and Smoke. And youâ ™ll come to know and love a host of other avian characters who will change your mind forever about who birds really are. Each of these birds shows a different and utterly surprising aspect of what makes a bird a birdâ ”and these are the lessons of Birdology: that birds are far stranger, more wondrous, and at the same time more like us than we might have dared to imagine. In Birdology, beloved author of The Good Good Pig Sy Montgomery explores the essence of the otherworldly creatures we see every day. By way of her adventures with seven birdsâ ”wild, tame, exotic, and commonâ ”she weaves new scientific insights and narrative to reveal seven kernels of bird wisdom. The first lesson of Birdology is that, no matter how common they are, Birds Are Individuals, as each of Montgomeryâ ™s distinctive Ladies clearly shows. In the leech-infested rain forest of Queensland, youâ ™ll come face to face with a cassowaryâ ”a 150-pound, man-tall, flightless bird with a helmet of bone on its head and a slashing razor-like toenail with which it (occasionally) eviscerates peopleâ ”proof that Birds Are Dinosaurs. Youâ ™ll learn from hawks that Birds Are Fierce; from pigeons, how Birds Find Their Way Home; from parrots, what it means that Birds Can Talk; and from 50,000 crows who moved into a small cityâ ™s downtown, that Birds Are Everywhere. They are the winged aliens who surround us. Birdology explains just how very "other" birds are: Their hearts look like those of crocodiles. They are covered with modified scales, which are called feathers. Their bones are hollow. Their bodies are permeated with extensive air sacs. They have no hands. They give birth to eggs. Yet despite birdsâ ™ and humansâ ™ disparate evolutionary paths, we share emotional and intellectual abilities that allow us to communicate and even form deep bonds. When we begin to comprehend who birds really are, we deepen our capacity to approach, understand, and love these otherworldly creatures. And this, ultimately, is the priceless lesson of Birdology: it communicates a heartfelt fascination and awe for birds and restores our connection to these complex, mysterious fellow creatures.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

To quote one of the people in Birdology: Adventures with a Pack of Hens, a Peck of Pigeons, Cantankerous Crows, Fierce Falcons, Hip Hop Parrots, Baby Hummingbirds, and One Murderously Big Living Dinosaur, Sy Montgomery's goal in this book is allow readers to "experiences the divinity of creation revealed in the birds." Montgomery profiles chickens, cassowaries, hummingbirds, hawks, pigeons, parrots, and crows, each with its unique personality quirks and traits. The end result is a delight to read, especially for avid birders or ornithologists.Birdology isn't a natural history of birds or observations of them in the wild. Ironically, most of the birds Montgomery meets live in captivity of some sort, from her chickens (the "Ladies") to hawks used for falconry (only the cassowaries were truly wild birds). In fact, each chapter seems to focus both on a different species of bird and a person who knows it well, such as a pigeon racer or hummingbird vet.I had mixed feelings about this. Obviously, birds are at their fullest in the wild, and that's where it would really be great to see them. At times, Birdology feels a bit too much like a book about "people and their birds.

Naturalist and acclaimed author Montgomery's rhythmic and lyrical subtitle conveys the feel of this entertaining, eye-opening book about birds and the people who love them. If you're one of those who think crows are just raucous marauders and pigeons no more than rats with wings, this book may transform your thinking."Not much gets past a pigeon. They notice details that humans miss: one study found that pigeons could learn to recognize the difference between the painting style of Manet and that of Monet faster than many college students. At one time, the U.S. Coast Guard

trained pigeons in helicopters to spot orange life vests at sea; they outperformed human spotters three to one." One wonders why they are no longer used but Montgomery doesn't go into this.She has a lot of territory to cover. Beginning with her own 20-year flock of chickens, Montgomery celebrates birds - their individuality, biology, and abilities. She opens each chapter with specifics - the people involved and the birds they are involved with - then ranges into the science surrounding the species, exploring their specialized anatomy and the many behavior studies.Enraptured by her free-ranging chickens, affectionate hens who exhibit individual personalities, she intertwines an intriguing account of their lives and habits with results of studies on chicken communication and rooster behavior. But things change when a new flock of chickens takes up residence beside her own. "Everything the Rangers do is writ large. My hens are gentle, subtle; they are Ladies. The Rangers are drama queens." Observation drives her to the stunning conclusion that chicken culture is passed down through generations in one flock "of unrelated chickens of different breeds.

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