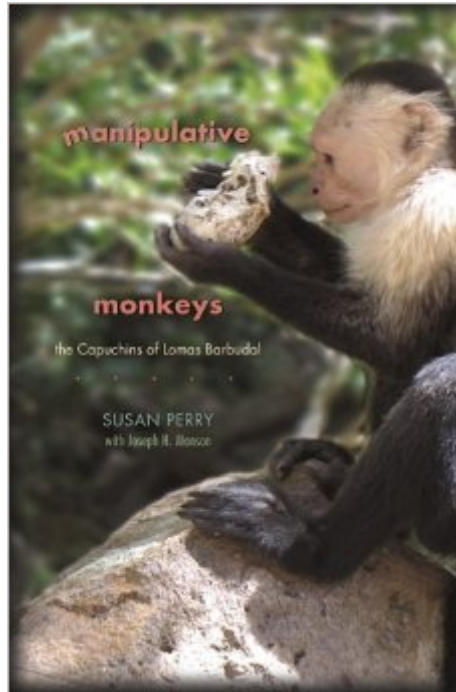


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Manipulative Monkeys: The Capuchins Of Lomas Barbudal



Synopsis

With their tonsured heads, white faces, and striking cowls, the monkeys might vaguely resemble the Capuchin monks for whom they were named. How they act is something else entirely. They climb onto each other's shoulders four deep to frighten enemies. They test friendship by sticking their fingers up one another's noses. They often nurse--but sometimes kill--each other's offspring. They use sex as a means of communicating. And they negotiate a remarkably intricate network of alliances, simian politics, and social intrigue. Not monkish, perhaps, but as we see in this downright ethnographic account of the capuchins of Lomas Barbudal, their world is as complex, ritualistic, and structured as any society. Manipulative Monkeys takes us into a Costa Rican forest teeming with simian drama, where since 1990 primatologists Susan Perry and Joseph H. Manson have followed the lives of four generations of capuchins. What the authors describe is behavior as entertaining--and occasionally as alarming--as it is recognizable: the competition and cooperation, the jockeying for position and status, the peaceful years under an alpha male devolving into bloody chaos, and the complex traditions passed from one generation to the next. Interspersed with their observations of the monkeys' lives are the authors' colorful tales of the challenges of tropical fieldwork--a mixture so rich that by the book's end we know what it is to be a wild capuchin monkey or a field primatologist. And we are left with a clear sense of the importance of these endangered monkeys for understanding human behavioral evolution.

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Customer Reviews

This book gives you an amazing and in depth look into the lives of these highly social, complex monkeys. Primatology has often been dominated by studies on apes, but the Lomas Barbudal project has brought us leaps closer to understanding primate behavior by dedicating decades of intense research to this species of new world monkey. Reading about some of the daily family, political, and territorial dramas of the white-faced capuchins, you cannot help but see just how similar they are to us. These are some remarkable and intelligent capuchins just bursting with personality. They are problem-solvers, drama queens, pranksters, lovers and fighters. I highly recommend this book to any primatologist or person interested in social behavior!!! This book has some wonderful photos and gives you glimpses into what it is like to be a primatologist in the field. It is a great resource!!!

Readers will likely agree with Susan Perry that capuchins are the most intelligent and fascinating of the New World monkeys. This fine book, in the tradition of Jane Goodall's "In the Shadow of Man" (1971), mixes rich descriptions of the personal lives of primates (in Goodall's case, chimpanzees) and of the primatologists. Perry and her husband, Joe Manson, and their coworkers, during nearly two decades of on-going study at a site in Costa Rica, rise at 3 AM to follow the capuchins, machete-cutting through the entangling forest, suffering ticks, wasps, snakes, fungal infections, frequent hospital visits, and maniac drivers when back on the road. For my own brief "study" of capuchins, I sat at a comfortable restaurant and bar on the beach near Manuel Antonio National Park, cold drink in hand, watching these little animals in the surrounding trees, but that hardly counts as primatology. Like Goodall and subsequent primatologists whom she inspired, Perry offers anthropocentric interpretations of her subjects' behaviors, less objective than one would find in a research journal but certainly permissible in this accessible account, which is further enlivened by the author's wit and her obvious love for the arduous work. I suspect that many young readers will contact Susan Perry about signing on for a year as research assistant. I know one who has already.

This book is one of the best to understand what it takes to be a field biologist--an often overlooked detail. But most importantly, I found the topic to be akin to a novel, though it is clearly simply the reduction of many years of hard work into a few hours' worth of reading. Each monkey has a personality that the authors were able to capture and present in such a pleasant way that one could feel attached to some monkeys and clearly dislike the personalities of others. What captured me the most, and what most literature does not talk about, is that monkeys' social structure is a baseline that several modern human social structures are built upon. Their hierarchical nature is akin to the

type of fiefdoms that can be found today in many developing nations (and in some extremely rich and famous nations of the world that need not be mentioned in specific). Though the authors do not suggest that monkeys are able to foresee and be goal-oriented, as these are thought to be exclusively human traits, I argue that some of the monkey behaviors portrayed in this book provide a hint otherwise. As a Neuroeconomist, I enjoy learning about the decision-making processes of non-human primates and other non-human animals. This book is exemplary in its deliverance and is very entertaining to read. I highly recommend it at all levels.

Was very informative about the research work being done by Susan Perry and her team. I was so impressed by the hard work and research being generated from this group for so long. We need more researchers like Susan. Thank you!

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