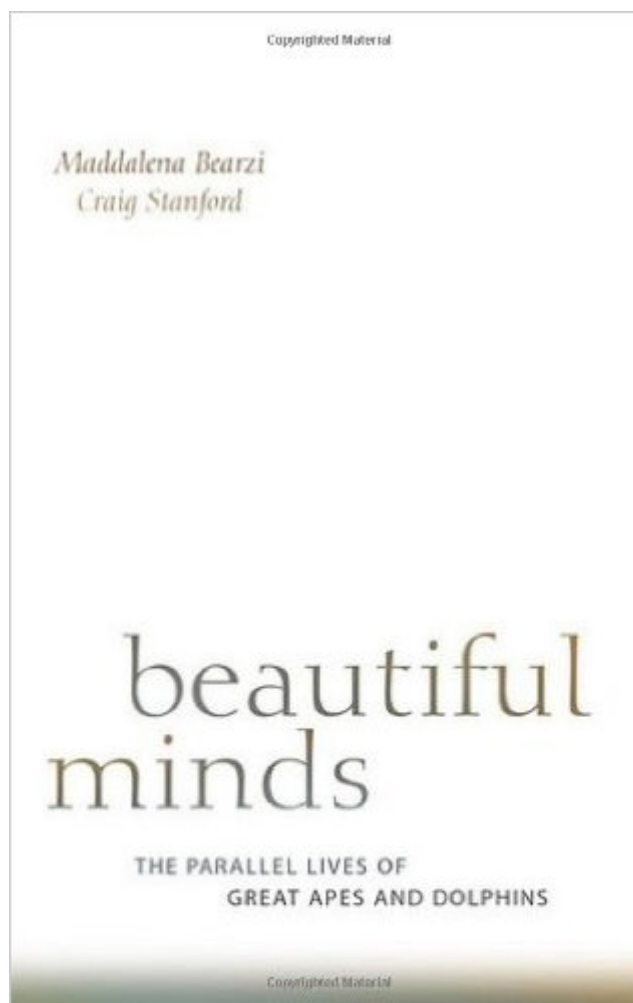


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Beautiful Minds: The Parallel Lives Of Great Apes And Dolphins



Synopsis

Apes and dolphins: primates and cetaceans. Could any creatures appear to be more different? Yet both are large-brained intelligent mammals with complex communication and social interaction. In the first book to study apes and dolphins side by side, Maddalena Bearzi and Craig B. Stanford, a dolphin biologist and a primatologist who have spent their careers studying these animals in the wild, combine their insights with compelling results. *Beautiful Minds* explains how and why apes and dolphins are so distantly related yet so cognitively alike and what this teaches us about another large-brained mammal: *Homo sapiens*. Noting that apes and dolphins have had no common ancestor in nearly 100 million years, Bearzi and Stanford describe the parallel evolution that gave rise to their intelligence. And they closely observe that intelligence in action, in the territorial grassland and rainforest communities of chimpanzees and other apes, and in groups of dolphins moving freely through open coastal waters. The authors detail their subjects' ability to develop family bonds, form alliances, and care for their young. They offer an understanding of their culture, politics, social structure, personality, and capacity for emotion. The resulting dual portrait "with striking overlaps in behavior" is key to understanding the nature of "beautiful minds."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book is the collaboration of a dolphin researcher (Bearzi) and an ape researcher (Stanford). It is structured as intertwined narratives about great apes and dolphins, with embedded attempts to draw parallels between ape and dolphin intelligence and social complexity. This approach is

immediately complicated by the fact the humans, bonobos, chimpanzees, gorillas, and orangutans all have different social structures and reproductive strategies; there are also differences within the dolphin family. (It was not always clear to me whether the focus of the narrative is strictly dolphins or, more broadly, toothed whales. And there are references to the entire whale family.) Longer books have been written just to address differences between the great apes, so this strategy proves very thin in drawing parallels between two diverse families with diverse behaviors. Often, the parallels are drawn between bottlenose dolphins and chimps. But other comparisons are made when they appear to support the thesis of "parallel lives". Individually, the two narratives are well written, engrossing, and serve as good overviews to two fascinating families of highly evolved and generally social mammals. (There are book-length treatments of each family with considerably more detail than provided in this book.) There is some overreach in their arguments about intelligence. For example, a story of a mother dolphin teaching her calf adult dolphin skills is touching, but other, presumably less intelligent mammals, get similar training from their mothers. While succeeding with their argument that both apes and dolphins are among the more intelligent animals, the authors are not as successful in arguing for parallels in behavior, nor for uniqueness of capability.

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