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# Monkey Portraits



## Synopsis

Jill Greenberg offers a fascinating, funny, and all-too-human collection of celebrity monkey and ape portraits. Each of these 76 amazing anthropomorphic photographs will remind readers of someone they know.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Some say they're just animals. Others say they're almost human. What is it about monkeys and apes that fascinate us? Whatever the reason, we love them, and this is what Jill Greenberg celebrates in her new photographic collection, *Monkey Portraits*. Old world or new, the monkeys and apes are captured in a range of emotions. Somber to silly, bored to brash, these primates will startle you with the depth of their emotions. As Greenberg points out, the beings caught in these intimate portraits can look surprisingly human, expectedly animal, or both. Either way, as you page through, you'll see a set of eyes here or a mouth there that look as though they could belong to someone you know. Greenberg's skills behind the lens are starkly apparent. She has managed to bring forth a stunning array of emotions generally reserved for human "people." Anyone can take pictures, but Greenberg can go beyond the photo to that moment between breaths where the truly remarkable can be found. Are monkeys and apes "mere" animals? Are they something more? Bring this stunning volume home and decide for yourself. Reviewed by Christina Wantz Fixemer 9/6/2006

The photos in this book are stunning, revealing, and thought provoking. That said I wish the silly

captions had been left out. They are contrived and instead of revealing something about the subjects end up being an annoyance. Instead of viewing the portraits and searching the faces for some primal connection we're given the photographers attempt at humor. The occasional quotes were far more revealing and thoughtful. Ignore the captions, which fortunately were designed to not be physically intrusive, and instead enjoy searching the faces of these wonderful creatures for the little that separates us.

The response elicited by these stunningly emotional portraits are like nothing I have experienced in years of looking at photographs of animals. I agree with the reviewer who suggested you ignore the captions. These are prime examples of photographs that transcend the 1000 words they may be worth. Priceless.

There is no doubt that Ms. Greenberg is a very fine photographer. The photographs in this book are technically perfect. Yet, when I looked through the book I was concerned about the captions that are often nonsense puns. I assume this was so that the book would have audience appeal but they take away from the photographs of the primates which are very interesting. There is a second concern which is that these animals are not in the wild but are trained primates used in television and movies and advertisements. Thus they are performing for the camera and for the most part may not be displaying expressions found in the wild under natural conditions. I am sure many people love the book without thinking about the existence of the animals in the photographs and without reflecting on why cute captions are employed to entertain. I suspect for many this book is highly entertaining and funny and for others it is a bit sad and exploitive.

For one who loves books on monkeys and apes, this is never the rating I thought I would give it. However, perhaps I am spoiled by the portraits taken in many of Frans de Waal's books. If you just want a quick, somewhat entertaining book to look at, *Monkey Portraits* is not at all bad. But I had to give it only two stars. The collection of portraits does not evoke emotion; it feels shallow. It might be any one of these factors, or a combination: It uses false studio lighting rather than the true environment of the animal. It shows extremely close-up photos, almost entirely head shots leaving out the "body language" which is so much a part of what makes ape/monkey portraits complete. I mean, if you want to count the hairs on their chin, these portraits are clear and carefully posed. There is one of a little gibbon that shows his whole body - it is by far my favorite photo in the book. Compared to Frans de Waal's *"My Family Album"* (a far better choice for a gift or for yourself if you

really love nature) this book was void and empty.

This calendar was absolutely amazing. The facial expressions of the monkeys in the photos on these calendars was wonderful, and my students looked forward to coming into their lessons and seeing "who" was in for the next month. I happened to be able to get two years of these, and so enjoyed them that I kept them for people to browse while waiting. I was so disappointed when they were not available in new editions with new photos. I will keep looking and hope to see more in the future.

This book is certainly fun to look at - the photos will crack you up for sure. It will serve to remind you of our relationship to other primates, perhaps sparking an interest, whether you are science-minded or simply curious, and you will want to know more about them - and therein lies my criticism of the book. In my opinion, each photo should be accompanied by a small blurb about the primate, it's habitat, etc., or at the very least, the species name. Perhaps it was the author's intent to omit such information, in order to minimize perceived differences between humans and other primates, and let the photos serve as an artistic unifier. While I can appreciate that concept, I still want to know what kind of monkey I'm looking at, so I can go find out more about them if I choose.

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