



Mind of the Raven: Investigations and Adventures with Wolf-Birds

By Bernd Heinrich

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Mind of the Raven: Investigations and Adventures with Wolf-Birds By Bernd Heinrich

Heinrich involves us in his quest to get inside the mind of the raven. But as animals can only be spied on by getting quite close, Heinrich adopts ravens, thereby becoming a "raven father," as well as observing them in their natural habitat. He studies their daily routines, and in the process, paints a vivid picture of the ravens' world. At the heart of this book are Heinrich's love and respect for these complex and engaging creatures, and through his keen observation and analysis, we become their intimates too.

Heinrich's passion for ravens has led him around the world in his research. *Mind of the Raven* follows an exotic journey—from New England to Germany, and from Montana to Baffin Island in the high Arctic—offering dazzling accounts of how science works in the field, filtered through the eyes of a passionate observer of nature. Each new discovery and insight into raven behavior is thrilling to read, at once lyrical and scientific.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Beyond croaking, "Nevermore," what exactly do ravens do all day? Bernd Heinrich, biology professor at the University of Vermont and author of *Ravens in Winter*, has spent more than a decade learning the secrets of these giants of the crow family. He has observed startlingly complex activities among ravens, including strong pair-bonding, use of tools, elaborate vocal communication, and even play. Ravens are just plain smart, and we can see much of ourselves in their behavior. They seem to be affectionate, cranky, joyful, greedy, and competitive, just like us. And in *Mind of the Raven*, Heinrich makes no bones about attributing emotions and intellect to *Corvus corax*--just not the kind we humans can understand. He mostly catalogs their behaviors in the manner of a respectful anthropologist, although a few moments of proud papa show through when he describes the pet ravens he hand-raised to adulthood.

Heinrich spends hundreds of loving hours feeding roadkill fragments to endlessly hungry raven chicks, and cold days in blinds watching wild ravens squabble and frolic. He is a passionate fan of his "wolf-birds," a name he gave them when he made the central discovery of the book: that ravens in Yellowstone National Park are dependent on wolves to kill for them. *Mind of the Raven* offers inspiring insight into both the lives of ravens and the mind of a truly gifted scientist. --*Therese Littleton*

From Publishers Weekly

In a book that demonstrates the rewards of caring and careful observation of the natural world, Heinrich (*Ravens in Winter*, etc.), a noted biologist, Guggenheim fellow and National Book Award nominee (for *Bumblebee Economics*, 1979), explores the question of raven intelligence through observation, experiment and personal experience. Although he has raised many ravens through the years (beginning with a tame pair that shared his apartment at UCLA in the 1960s), Heinrich focuses much of his attention on four nestlings he adopted from the Maine woods near his home. As he describes tending to the demanding babies, chopping up roadkill, cleaning up after them and enduring their noisy calls for food, readers will marvel at how much Heinrich knows and at how much joy he derives from acquiring that knowledge. As the birds mature, Heinrich details how these and other ravens feed, nest, mate, play and establish a society with clear hierarchical levels. At its best, his writing is distinguished by infectious enthusiasm, a lighthearted style and often lyrical descriptions of the natural world. His powers of observation are impressive and his descriptions of how a raven puffs its feathers in a dominance display, of how a female calls for food from her mate, of the pecking order at a carcass are formidably precise. Toward the end of the book, Heinrich addresses the question implied by the title: To what degree can ravens be said to think? His answer: "I suspect that the great gulf or discontinuity that exists between us and all other animals is... ultimately less a matter of consciousness than of culture." Illustrations.

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From Library Journal

YA-Heinrich's adventures with ravens are consistently interesting and illuminating, whether he's crouching for hours in cold rain to observe them, hauling animal carcasses into the woods to attract them, or visiting in the homes of their human companions. In 29 readable and richly illustrated chapters, he shares his own experiences with the birds as well as many anecdotes collected by observers from around the globe. He explores "the possibility of conscious choice" in these obviously intelligent but often baffling birds, and believes they owe much of their complexity to the fact that they have evolved in close association with dangerous carnivores-wolves and men. Looking at the common fear that ravens damage crops, Heinrich

asserts they have been unjustly accused and persecuted by farmers, and he studies firsthand the relationship of ravens with Eskimo hunters. Sometimes the research just leads him from one mystery to another, but wherever his questions take him, the journey is always fascinating as the many layers of raven psychology are revealed. Perhaps best known on this continent for its "trickster" talents, the raven has been associated in Europe with divination, death, and the Norse god Odin. Heinrich's perspective, that of the scientist, is just as compelling for modern readers and does full justice to this bird's mythical reputation. A fine, entertaining book for general readers, as well as an excellent resource for those seeking meticulously gathered and documented scientific information.

Christine C. Menefee, Fairfax County Public Library, VA

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