

wondering how baby-sitting in Canada differed from the States.

Babysitter adds to the growing set of books Forman-Brunell has written or edited about girlhood and children's material culture. Like her *Made to Play House: Dolls and the Commercialization of American Girlhood, 1830–1930* (1993) and her coedited work *The Girls' History and Culture Reader* (2011), this book serves scholars teaching not only social history but also childhood studies, gender studies, girlhood and women's studies, and play history. Academics from a wide range of disciplines, as well as general readers, will enjoy it. That the examples of some of the artifacts discussed are part of the extensive collection of The Strong's National Museum of Play lends the book extra interest for readers of the *American Journal of Play*. Personally, I want to visit to see the baby-sitter Barbie doll with her pink striped apron! She may bear little resemblance to the exhausted baby-sitter in Rockwell's painting, but she presents another depiction of this important American institution that Forman-Brunell so effectively explores.

—Jacqueline Reid-Walsh, *Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA*

The Exultant Ark: A Pictorial Tour of Animal Pleasure

Jonathan Balcombe

Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011. Contents, images, notes, references, bibliography, index. 214 pp. \$34.95 cloth. ISBN: 9780520260245

Some years ago, my wife and I were hik-

ing along the rim of the Black Canyon of the Gunnison in central Colorado when a group of ravens suddenly appeared in front of us and began surfing the updrafts on the canyon walls. We watched them for a half hour as they swooped and whooped in the air currents like the kayakers at the white-water play spot in the river a few miles from my house. I could think of no explanation for the birds' behavior other than sheer joy. In *The Exultant Ark: A Pictorial Tour of Animal Pleasure*, Jonathan Balcombe combines anecdotes of similar events, recent discoveries in animal behavior, and stunning photographs to make the case that other species experience pleasure. The result is both intellectually and aesthetically satisfying.

I am not particularly fond of cute animal books, a genre which tends to feature mawkish images of chimps in diapers, sad-looking kittens, and big-eyed puppies. Thus, I approached *The Exultant Ark* with some apprehension. I was relieved to find it is not just another feel-good animal tome but an intriguing combination of science and art that also raises troubling ethical questions concerning our relationships with other species.

The Exultant Ark follows Balcombe's earlier, more scholarly treatment of this topic, *Pleasurable Kingdom: Animals and the Nature of Feeling Good*. The central argument of both holds that experience of pleasure is not restricted to *Homo sapiens*. In the first chapter of *The Exultant Ark*, Balcombe, who has a PhD in zoology, provides an accessible overview of the science of animal pleasure, which he calls "hedonic ethology." Arguing that "pleasure is nature's carrot," he correctly notes that the idea that human and nonhuman

animals experience similar mental states is the natural consequence of Darwinism. Balcombe organizes his chapters generally around particular types of pleasure—play, food, touch, courtship and sex, love, creature comforts, companionship, aesthetic beauty, and sensation seeking. He typically begins a chapter with five or six pages of text integrating empirical research with his personal experiences.

Balcombe follows these introductions with a dozen or so pages of color photographs that illustrate forms of pleasure in creatures ranging from bugs to bonobos. The pictures form the heart of the book. One of my favorites is a close-up shot of a tiny beetle reaching for a droplet of nectar. At first I was puzzled; why would a book on pleasure include a picture of a bug? Then I realized that was exactly the author's intention. And I asked myself, could an insect experience the same sort of pleasure from a drop of nectar as I might from a sip of chardonnay? Balcombe provides his answer in the photograph's caption: "We may never know for sure if insects can have conscious experience. . . ."

Therein lies the paradox of *The Exultant Ark*. Humans are inherent anthropomorphizers. We see a man in the moon and faces in the clouds. Are the attributions of pleasure to a nectar-drinking ladybug or a wind-surfing raven the result of sloppy thinking or are they perceptive interpretations of the inner worlds of other creatures? To his credit, Balcombe does not dodge this issue. He notes, for example, that people commonly—and mistakenly—interpret the perpetual smiles on captive dolphins as an indication that the animals enjoy swimming endless circles

around their concrete tanks. Yet, despite Balcombe's warnings about the limits of our ability to know what is in the heads of animals, he bases his book on the supposition that when it comes to animal pleasures, we know it when we see it.

Finally, a subtext of *The Exultant Ark* concerns our ethical relationship with other species. The case for animal rights is largely based on the supposition that non-human species are sentient, that is, capable of experiencing pain and pleasure. Books by animal activists nearly always focus the negative aspects of such sentience, for instance, the suffering of chickens in factory farms or elephants in circuses. In contrast, Balcombe rests his case for giving moral status to animals on the notion that they experience the same sorts of pleasure in life as humans. In doing so, he adds a refreshing dimension to our collective conversation on our obligations to other species. Not surprisingly, in a book aimed at animal lovers, *The Exultant Ark* emphasizes the positive. In reality, however, animal pleasure is not all sweetness and light. The satisfaction a raven gets from playing in air currents seems innocent enough. But the pleasure a cheetah derives from chasing down an impala is not shared by its hapless prey.

In short, *The Exultant Ark* provides an enjoyable and thoughtful window into a rarely studied aspect of the lives of animals. And the book's terrific production values make *The Exultant Ark* one of those rare volumes that will look good on your coffee table but might also change the way you think.

—Harold Herzog, *Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC*