

Bekoff says, in the introduction to this book, that, “as word about the encyclopedia spread, people contacted me and asked if they could contribute”. But the danger with a compendium where many of the subject authors are self-selected is that their entries do not always represent mainstream or entirely objective views of a particular subject area. A handful of the authors (I will spare their blushes by not naming them here) appear to have used Bekoff’s invitation to contribute to this venture as an excuse to promote either a pet idea or their most recent publication (or both). In the entries for one or two subjects that I know a little about, it was disconcerting to find that some widely cited and respected papers had been completely ignored — but that the author’s own work had been cited rather fulsomely. A student picking up this book would not necessarily be able to judge which of the entries are objective, wide-ranging and up-to-date reviews of current knowledge — and which are not.

A better approach, perhaps, would have been for the editor, or an editorial panel, to have sought out an acknowledged expert in each of the subject areas and invited him or her to contribute. The essays that work best are those written either by academics who are well established and well regarded experts in a particular field — or by contributors with no particular axe to grind and no recent book of their own to promote. Janice Moore is brilliant on parasite-mediated change in host behaviour; Pat Gowarty’s summary of female-female sexual selection is clear, concise and beautifully written. Sue Margulis has written a very useful and readable section on how to study animal behaviour (although to find her contribution, you are expected to search under ‘e’ for ‘education’, or ‘c’ for ‘classroom activities’, rather than the more intuitive ‘s’ for ‘studying animals’ or ‘m’ for ‘methods’).

Black and white photos are scattered throughout the text, but these are very variable in quality. For an encyclopedia that costs quite this much (a little over £200 for the three volumes), some use of colour photos in the main body of the text would have been nice, although there are a few colour plates in the centre of each volume.

Individual subject entries each have their own short list of references. I always find this approach frustrating — to track down a vaguely remembered reference at some later date, you have to be able to recall not only the name of the author whose paper caught your interest, but also the title of the section in which his or her work was cited. I wonder if I am alone in much preferring a single, comprehensive reference list at the end of a textbook? And frustration over not being able easily to find references in this encyclopedia is compounded by the use of an extraordinary variety of different referencing systems; surely something that could have been checked and tidied up before publication?

So who should buy this book? On the back cover of each volume, the encyclopedia is described as “the most authoritative, comprehensive and accessible resource on the scientific study of animal behaviour”. But with a price tag (in the UK) of over £200, Bekoff’s encyclopedia is likely to be far

from accessible to individual undergraduate students (and not too many other individual purchasers either).

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Jane Goodall: A Biography

Greene M (2005). Published by Greenwood Press, 88 Post Road West, Westport, CT 06881, USA. 146 pp Hardback (ISBN 0 313 33139 1). Price £16.99.

This is what might be termed a potted biography. Not for those who enjoy a good read. Take this example: the suggestion that Jane’s love of a toy chimp when she was two was ‘the first indication of what would become her life’s work’.

This is a difficult book to review especially as Jane Goodall has written her own autobiographies (referred to in the book) which are very readable, this book is not. However the reason for this can probably be found in the Foreword to the series which states ‘in response to high school and public library needs, Greenwood developed this distinguished series of full-length biographies specifically for student use.’ Thus the book seems to be designed for high school students who need information for projects and assignments, and can only be reviewed fairly in this context.

It fulfils this goal; the information is all there and readily accessible. There is even a helpful ‘timeline’ which lists milestones in the subject’s life. Jane Goodall is a remarkable woman and observer of animal behaviour who has written copiously and interestingly about her work, and the book does reflect this. Chapter 4 ‘the hidden world of the chimpanzee’ also provides a useful short history of man’s relationship and study of primates and apes in particular. Chapter 5 provides a concise account of the start of Jane’s chimp work in Gombe, and the chimps that she named and became familiar to, thereby inspiring, many a young primatologist as well as readers of her popular books. It also describes her then groundbreaking discovery that chimpanzees were users and manufacturers of tools. Further chapters go on to describe the many changes in her own life as well as those of the Gombe chimps. Chapter 10 is interesting in that it outlines the changes in her thinking which resulted in her becoming a worldwide ambassador for chimpanzees not only in other African countries, but also in zoos and laboratories.

However this Chapter also tells of the deeply depressing present situation; deforestation of Gombe, the decline of chimpanzee populations throughout Africa, and Jane Goodall’s ongoing battle.

This book, therefore, is a useful potted biography for anyone who wants to have quick access to the life and times of an extraordinary woman. It is not a great read, nor is it that informative, but it is useful and fulfils the purpose for which it was intended.

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