

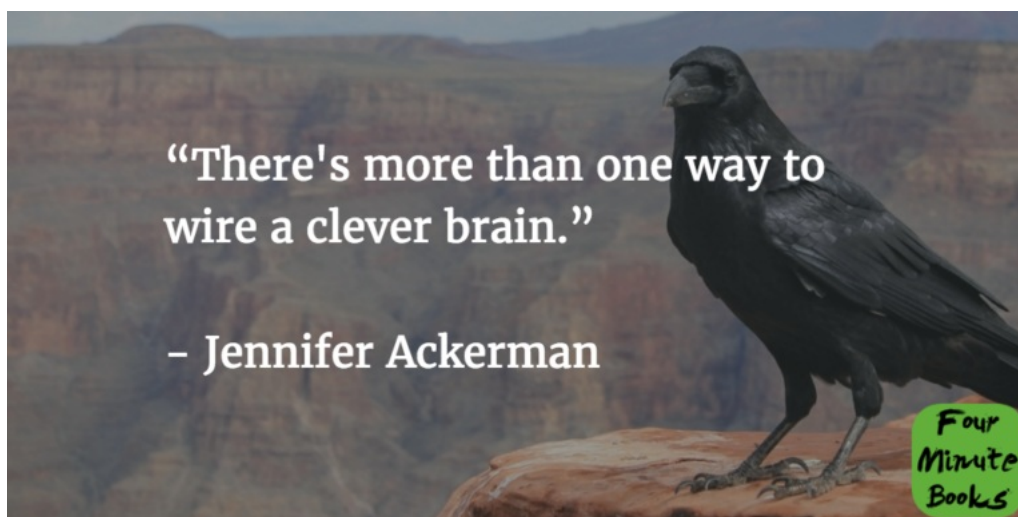
The Genius Of Birds Summary

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1-Sentence-Summary: *The Genius Of Birds shines a new light on a genuinely underrated kind of vertebrate by explaining birds' capacities to be social, intelligently solve challenges, learn languages, be artistic and navigate the planet.*

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



Birds. You either hate them or you love them. I can only speak for myself, but I never cease to be amazed by how smart and funny these creatures are.

I could watch birds for hours. For example the two doves that tried to sit on a wet, plastic canopy on a house across the street and kept sliding down I saw at a café in June. Or the video of a chicken wearing pants. Or the documentary I once saw, explaining how birds maneuver so quickly and in real-time.

In addition to being funny as hell, birds are social, artistic and smart. I wonder why they get such a bad rap. Sure, some doves in big cities behave like rats of the air, but even rats, as we know, are incredibly clever.

Jennifer Ackerman has written *The Genius Of Birds* to shed some much needed light on the matter, and there's a lot to learn from it.

Here are 3 lessons from *The Genius of Birds*:

1. It's not about how big your brain is. Well, not entirely.
2. Birds are the second-best species when it comes to handling tools.
3. Some birds are artists.

I hope you're ready to go "Ahh!" and "Oh, wow!" because that's exactly what's about to happen!

Lesson 1: How smart you are isn't determined by how big your brain is. Not entirely, anyways.

When I ask you to name a smart animal, chances are you'll mention one of these three: a chimp, a dolphin, or an elephant. These are the classics. You probably wouldn't come up with a bird. Yet, just by looking at birds' brain structure, it can be seen that they must be quite smart.

A human brain makes up about 2% of our body's mass, 1.3 kg on average (roughly 3 lbs). The brains of chimps and dolphins are similar in terms of weight, an elephant's brain comes in at roughly 5 kg. Does that mean heavier brain = smarter brain?

Not exactly. What's more important is **the relative weight of the brain when compared to the rest of the body**. For example, since an elephant routinely weighs over two tons, its brain accounts for less than 1% of its body mass.

The brain of a New Caledonian crow weighs 7.5 grams on average, with a total body weight of roughly 200 g (again on average). That's 3.75%!

Throughout evolution, birds have constantly optimized their bodies to accommodate bigger brains, for example by reducing their ovaries from two to just one, reducing liver size and abandoning bladders altogether.

Their relatively large brain size is how they manage to remember thousands of locations where they stored food for months at a time. It allows for a lot of neurogenesis – the creation of new neurons – so they can store each location in a new set of neurons.

As in so many aspects of life, it's not all about the size of things

Lesson 2: Only humans are better at using tools than birds, chimps don't stand a chance.

You probably know that chimps can use tools in clever ways, like inserting sticks into holes in trees to pull out delicious ants. What you probably *didn't* know is that birds are even better at this – only humans surpass them when it comes to employing tools.

For example, some owls spread dung around their nests to attract dung beetles to eat, while others scratch their backs with sticks. But especially smart species, like the New Caledonian crow mentioned above, can even **make their own tools**. These birds can trim branches off of long sticks and even create hook-shaped tools to catch larvae – not even chimps can build these.

What completely blew me away however, was this video of a bird solving a complex 8-part-challenge in the right order. Agent 007, as this specimen is called, has to complete a set of tasks in the exact right order to get his food. By doing this, he shows a strong ability to not only use

tools the right way, but also that he knows how things will interact with each other and what will cause certain things to happen.

Some birds are aware of their actions and their consequences, and that's nothing short of amazing, if you ask me.

Lesson 3: Good birds copy, great birds steal – some birds have a great sense of art.

Granted, the satin bowerbird is a rarity in terms of his behavior, even among birds, but it sure seems like he's familiar with Picasso's work. This type of bird builds a bower – a love nest – so to speak, to attract females. Apart from building walls made of twigs, which he sticks into the ground, he decorates his cosy home with flowers and colorful objects.

If a female agrees with his sense of art, she'll stick around and let him do his courtship dance, before the two eventually mate.

What's stunning is how artistic the satin bowerbird gets. Not only can they distinguish and sort colors, but **they even create their own optical illusions** by placing large items in the back of their bower and smaller ones in the front – it makes them look bigger in comparison, which is a sign of strong genetics to females.

In this weird case, a bowerbird even stole straws, bottle caps and car keys to impress his date, truly living by Picasso's motto: Good artists copy, great artists steal.

Speaking of Picasso, a 1995 study found that after some generic training, birds could even tell apart paintings from famous artists they'd never seen before and other, similar images. The famous artists in the study? Monet and Picasso.

The Genius Of Birds Review

If you're as fascinated by the majesty, beauty and capability of birds as me, then you'll love *The Genius Of Birds*. But I think what most intrigues me about birds is the idea that maybe, one day, humans will be able to fly like them. Whether we make that dream come true or not, there sure are quite a few things we can learn from birds if we only give them more credit. That's what this book is for.

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What else can you learn from the blinks?

- Why intelligence isn't always a good thing to measure
- What a bird funeral looks like and why their social traits make them smart
- How bird songs are like languages and what makes the mockingbird so special
- Why pigeons could care less about going blind
- How sparrows have managed to stick around for over 10,000 years now

Who would I recommend The Genius Of Birds summary to?

The 15 year old farmer's daughter, who always takes care of the chickens at home, the 33 year old urbanite, who hates inner city doves, and anyone who thinks birds are hilarious.