

# Books on Beasts

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*The Harp Seal*, David Terhune. Burns and MacEachern, 1973. 45 pp. \$7.95 cloth.

*Children of the Ark*, Barbara Solandt. University of Toronto Press, 1973. 95 pp. \$7.95 cloth.

Books on beasts are plentiful this year. It is the year of the Whale<sup>1</sup>, Dolphin<sup>1</sup>, Owl<sup>2</sup>, and Penguin<sup>3</sup>. It is also the year of those highly photogenic and physiologically fascinating mammals, the Seals. This book is about one of that order, the Harp Seal whose Latin designation "Pagophilus Groenlandicus" was obviously designed to roll off the tongue.

*The Harp Seal* is a particularly visual book, its dust cover adorned appealingly with a near neonatal member of the species. The book is a brief, factual story of Harp Seal ecology within Canadian waters. Twenty pages of text introduce migratory habits, defence, communicatory and breeding behaviour and also describe its environment, though I suspect that it is the reader, not the seal, who finds the latter's environment "harsh." Thankfully anthropomorphism is minimal. Photographs out-strip the text by a ratio of three pages to two. However, in terms of information the brief text far out-strips the content of the photographs. Indeed, the relevance of some photographs to the text is at times unclear, and in some achromatic cases it is the photographs themselves which are a little unclear physically. The colour photography is uniformly good. The text is also uniformly good as might be expected from the Terhune brothers, free lance author and research scientist respectively. The latter author has had much direct field and laboratory experience with seals.

To whom is the book addressed? It is well produced and informatively written, yet it clearly does not contain enough data to act as a reference book or to satisfy the young teenager. This sentiment and a comment on its price were both expressed by my thirteen-year-old son. Neither is it lavish enough to act as a "coffee table" book. Perhaps it is best read by the nine-to-twelve-year-old group, though supplementary information would be required to satisfy the more curious. It would certainly be more buyable as a paperback at about half its present cost, though I'm sure it will be welcomed by all Pinnepedophiles young and old, and will hopefully find its way into public and school libraries.

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Barbara Solandt's *Children of the Ark* covers a wider range of animal life. This handsome book is written, photographed and foreworded by three zoologists at the University of Toronto. In general it introduces a number of animals which are near or threatened with extinction or actually are extinct in the wild, and are now in zoos. In particular it entertainingly introduces zoo breeding programmes and some of their trials and tribulations for thirty-two animals. Blesbok to Bison, Yak to Yellow Baboon are considered in the light of their behaviour in captivity, and the considerable rapport apparently developed between the authoress and the animals is well described. A laudable introduction discusses the purposes of zoos, particularly those of "good" zoos, and stresses the care with which the animals in the text were approached and handled. Each vignette decorated with a black and white photograph reflects such rapport and cooperation. Rather obviously the establishments visited were "good" zoos with exceptional staff and they provide indices for the formation of future zoos.

The underlying seriousness of the book's message is relieved by some anthropomorphism. The reader is introduced to Mr. Pig the Bushbaby, Folly the Llama, Noel the Tapir, Charley the Leopard and several Gorillas with Biblical and African names. Mention is made of the explosive defecatory habits of Gentoo Penguins, the burping of baby Lions, mother-pup Sea-lion "conversations" and the huminoid curiosity of Primates, to name but a few. The problems of breeding, raising and nutrifying animals in captivity are described, and the behavioural problems attendant upon captivity are stressed, a point often not given the consideration it deserves.

There is some substance to this book, though it may require some additional introductory reading on comparative (i.e., "animal") behaviour for the reader to appreciate fully the behavioural implications which captivity imposes upon the animal. The effect upon our own perception of animals which results from our seeing them primarily in captivity is discussed briefly. In this vein rather more text and photographic material about the general behaviour of these animals would not have come amiss.

The book compares more than favourably with *Zoo Animals* and *The Private Lives of Animals*. Teenagers and older readers will enjoy it and as the awful television ad says, "the price is right." A visit to the zoo could be rendered more full of insight by a prior reading of this book.

#### NOTES

- 1 Nayman, Jacqueline. *Whales, Dolphins and Man*. Hamlyn, 1973.
- 2 Walker, Wayne Lewis. *The Book of Owls*. Knopf, 1974.
- 3 Deguine, Jean-Claude. *Emperor Penguin*. Stephen Greene Press, 1974.

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