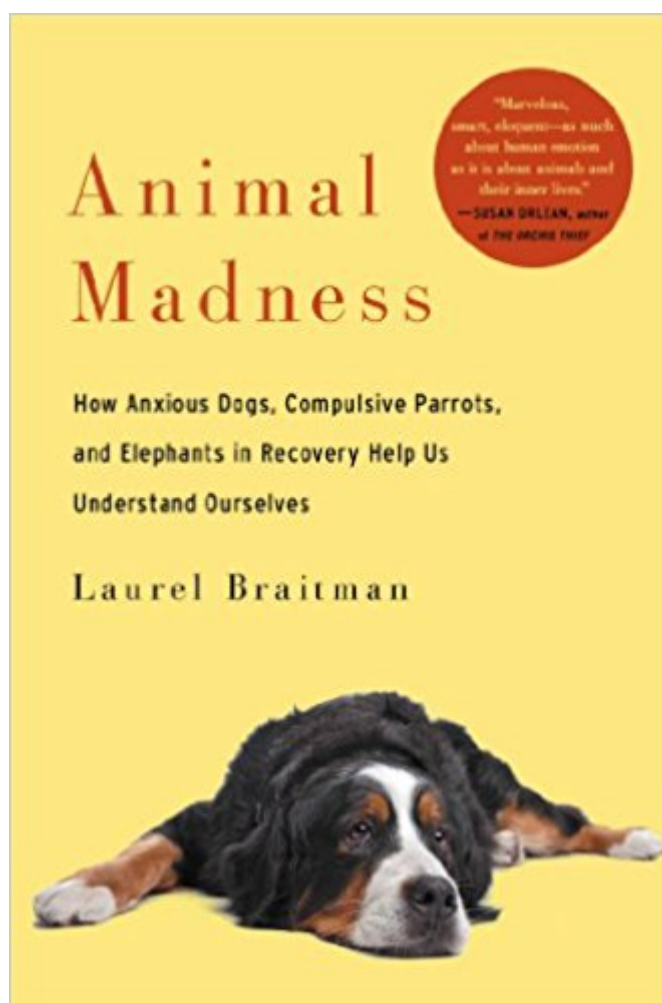


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# Animal Madness: How Anxious Dogs, Compulsive Parrots, And Elephants In Recovery Help Us Understand Ourselves



## Synopsis

**\*\* Science Friday Summer Reading Pick\*\*** **\*\*Discover magazine Top 5 Summer Reads\*\*** **\*\*People magazine Best Summer Reads\*\*** “[A] lovely, big-hearted book brimming with compassion and the tales of the many, many humans who devote their days to making animals well. The New York Times Have you ever wondered if your dog might be a bit depressed? How about heartbroken or homesick? > takes these questions seriously, exploring the topic of mental health and recovery in the animal kingdom and turning up lessons that > calls “illuminating” Braitman’s delightful balance of humor and poignancy brings each case of life’s continuous dose of hope should prove medicinal for humans and animals alike. Susan Orlean calls > “a marvelous, smart, eloquent book as much about human emotion as it is about animals and their inner lives. It is “a gem that can teach us much about the wildness of our own minds (>).

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

An Best Book of the Month, June 2014: As a kid, Laurel Braitman read Charlotte’s Web and suspected that animals really could talk. As a PhD student at MIT studying scientific history, she again honed in on animals in her research. But it wasn’t until she and her husband adopted a Bernese Mountain Dog named Oliver that animal psychology became the puzzle she most urgently wanted to solve. Oliver was inexplicably, uncontrollably anxious, snapping at invisible

flies and shredding furniture when he was left alone. When he chewed through a screen, leapt from a fourth-story window, and—*incredibly*—survived, Braitman became intent on finding a way to help him. In *Animal Madness*, she shares how “one anxious dog brought me the entire animal kingdom.” Elements of memoir make the story more poignant, but it’s primarily a lively, deeply researched history and an unflinching look at the trauma of modern-day captivity in medical labs and faux-natural zoos. What she discovered about how animal minds go awry and the ways their disorders—from depression to anxiety to OCD and PTSD—look so much like our own (and vice versa) challenge and transform our understanding of the animal experience. What she discovered about how they heal illuminates how humans, too, can come back from the brink. --Mari Malcolm

Humans aren’t the only animals that suffer from emotional thunderstorms, and author Braitman came to the same conclusion that Charles Darwin arrived at: that nonhuman animals can suffer from mental illnesses that mirror those that humans endure. Starting her fascinating account of animal neuroses with her own dog, who snapped at nonexistent flies and jumped out of a fourth-floor window, Braitman began to read scientific papers and historical literature, eventually traveling to many countries in search of troubled animals and to observe what people did to help them. She found parrots that plucked out their feathers and primates who pulled out their hair, elephants that were so aggressive that their mahouts feared for their lives, tigers with facial tics, and a neurotic donkey who loves massages. The wonderful thing she discovered is that it is possible for these animals to heal, a message crystallized by her encounters with “friendly” gray whales who sought out human contact, even though they still bore harpoon scars from the whaling days. Acknowledging mental illness in other animals, and helping them recover, obviously can be a comforting experience. --Nancy Bent

The author tries to explain how animals are basically driven mad by the actions of humans, and that if we learned to compassionately coexist with other species we would all be better off. Early in the book the author does a nice job of showing how Alzheimers in humans and dementia in dogs are closely correlated, with the primary difference being that due to the shorter life span of dogs they don’t have time for plaque to build up in their brains but instead suffer dementia from atherosclerosis [hardening and narrowing of cranial arteries]. She also points out how anxiety occurs among the lower ranking animals of a pack or group with their brains being constantly bathed in stress hormones as opposed to the higher ranking members who suffer from much less stress which can

correlate nicely to the differences in human society between the very well off and the middle and lower ranking members of society trying to make do. Something that I never realized before is the primate mothers who were raised in isolation as babies, say in old time zoos and circuses do not know how to nurse and will often push their young away. They are now provided with lactation consultants by watching other primates nurse their young and sometimes even human surrogates, this use of human females as surrogates more frequently done in poorer countries. We are also told that as late as the later 19th century, it was thought that animals contracted rabies as punishment for some evil act they had done, and throughout the 19th and well into the twentieth century homesickness was considered a physical illness with the terms nostalgia and homesickness being used interchangeably. [p71] Trichotillomania [pulling out your own hair] an anxiety reaction and now considered as a form of OCD in the latest DSM-V affects about 1.5% of males and 3.5% of females in the USA. It is also present in six other primates besides humans as well as among mice, rats, guinea pigs, rabbits, sheep, musk oxen, dogs, and cats. [p144] The author documents some animal suicide behavior with the most famous member being a dolphin named KATHY [the mani one of six] that played the part of FLIPPER on the 1960s TV show of that name. She literally died in the arms of her trainer, Ric O'Barry on 4/12/1970. [p166] I loved that show, and who didn't love FLIPPER? We are told that 14-17% of all the dogs in the USA suffer from some degree of separation anxiety.. [p220] And how elephants become so attached to their mahouts that they are jealous of all other human companions of the mahouts to the point of being aggressive towards other humans, which can lead to a very celebrate lifestyle for the mahouts. :-0 And last but not least we learn that 10-15% of the gray whales who come to the lagoons off Baja. Mexico to calve and mate prefer human company to associating with their own species and will actually come up to small boats and make eye contact and let people pet them. Like, how cool is that! This is a great book, easy to read, full of facts of which I have merely brushed the surface, and it goes a long way in showing the interconnectedness of mental process between humans and other species. Highly recommended.

Fun to read even if you've never heard of Konrad Lorenz and backed up by scientific studies from the new-ish and exciting field of ethology (mindful animal behavior), *Animal Madness* is a refreshing cutting edge way to read about the animals in our lives. Braitman shows us relationships to animals not as simply anthropomorphic projections, but intelligent beings who suffer and thrive just as we do. A must read to better understand our animals mental health or just to validate that yes, maybe your dog IS crazy!

I'm very lucky that Laurel Braitman stopped by my blog to tell me that the book was in Kindle format. I'd seen her TED talk and listened to her on KQED, and she came off as a very intelligent and reasonable person. As I work with animals on a daily basis and have experience with bipolar disorder, this book was certainly up my alley. The stories that she goes through are fascinating, funny, and heartbreaking. I was absolutely horrified when reading of their dog jumping out of a fourth story apartment window due to extreme emotional distress :( It's an easy read and something about her style of narration really added a rich, personal element to the book. She doesn't back down from taking responsibility for mistakes, and coherently communicates what she has learned through her experiences. For anyone interested in the relationships and similarities between us and our furry, feathered, scaled, whatever friends, I would highly recommend this book. It should be much more common that people recognize the genuine mental disorders that animals are capable of suffering, and I especially like that she keeps a neutral and objective stance on pharmaceutical interventions; too often this category of book rejects "unnatural" practices. It's not a technical work, but that's why it's so wonderful. These stories, for me, really provoked thought about our connection, as animals, to the other creatures around us. :)

I really loved *Animal Madness* and I couldn't put it down because it was so engaging and every sentence is so carefully crafted. It is touching but also informative. Beautifully written and full of fascinating stories about animals. I didn't want it to end. There are nearly 70 pages of footnotes which shows how much research and work went into writing this masterpiece. The stories are woven together seamlessly and while many are heartbreaking, they leave you wanting to know more about the animals and the people who work with them. I was especially moved by the stories of agitated gorillas in zoos and recovering elephants in Thailand. Everyone should read this book to be more informed about the mental distress humans are causing animals, but also so we can learn how to better treat and understand mental illness in humans. The author's passion about this topic comes through on every page, and I already want to read it again!

This book was a real eye opener. Some of the medical discoveries are not common knowledge and should be. Madness in animals and madness in humans is something we need to find a cure for.

I met Laurel at a memorial service for my Uncle, Mel Richardson, a DVM and animal rights activist who assisted her with her research. I ordered the book and devoured it the day it arrived. For years, humans have ascribed human traits to animals, mostly to the ridicule of others. Saying, "That horse

looks depressed," was often met with eye-rolling by those who claim to know better. Laurel's research shows that not only are these observations valid, they are well-founded in science. By better understanding disorders in other organisms, we can better understand ourselves. It's an entertaining and informative read, and I recommend it wholeheartedly.

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