

Beyond Primates: New Essays on Darwin and Evolution

Rebecca Coffey

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The science essays gathered in Rebecca Coffey's *Beyond Primates* summarize new experiments and analyses that bring evolution and its best-known champion into sharper focus.

Coffey, a thirty-year veteran of science journalism, has written essays for outlets including *Forbes*, *Salon*, and JSTOR Daily. This book collects fourteen of those essays. Together, they focus on fascinating examples of evolution at work in the animal kingdom. They constitute a short but powerful sampler of myriad amazing facets of the scientific world. On occasion, photographs of the animals in question are included. Each essay ends with a "For More Information" section, listing sources and suggestions for additional reading.

The essays are knowledgeable and enlightening while maintaining a breezy, often humorous tone. References to Monty Python appear alongside explanations of Charles Darwin's work. Even the essay titles demonstrate this mix of scientific concepts with a robust sense of humor: "Male Brown Spiders May Prefer a Little Death with their Sex," and "So Long, 'Homo Stupidus,' Hello, Intelligent, Compassionate Neanderthals," for example, spark a smile and a compulsion to learn more. The essays move at a brisk pace through different aspects of their topics, commanding attention; they cast light on fascinating subjects not often discussed by those other than scientists in the field.

Indeed, while the book caters to those who are curious about science, it makes its investigations palatable to all. Via brief pauses and asides along the paths of deeper examinations, the essays cover questions and answers that some science journalists might pass over as obvious or unimportant, as about the origins of the brown widow spider's name in standard English and Latin or the genesis of the ubiquitous name *Neanderthal*. Coffey has a knack for picking out interesting information, tangential or otherwise, and presenting it with aplomb. And Darwin is a subject of repeated inquiry: Coffey wonders why he waited decades to publish his ideas on evolution, muses over his use of the word "love" in relation to the animals he studied, and ponders his notes on the similarities of nonverbal expressions in monkeys and humans. These forays are among the book's most compelling, vivifying the scientist through his own writing and quotations.

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PETER DABBENE (June 13, 2023)

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