



# Monkeytalk: Inside the Worlds and Minds of Primates

*Julia Fischer*

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## **Monkeytalk: Inside the Worlds and Minds of Primates** Julia Fischer

Monkey see, monkey do—or does she? Can the behavior of non-human primates—their sociality, their intelligence, their communication—really be chalked up to simple mimicry? Emphatically, absolutely: no. And as famed primatologist Julia Fischer reveals, the human bias inherent in this oft-uttered adage is our loss, for it is only through the study of our primate brethren that we may begin to understand ourselves.

An eye-opening blend of storytelling, memoir, and science, *Monkeytalk* takes us into the field and the world's primate labs to investigate the intricacies of primate social mores through the lens of communication. After first detailing the social interactions of key species from her fieldwork—from baby-wielding male Barbary macaques, who use infants as social accessories in a variety of interactions, to aggression among the chacma baboons of southern Africa and male-male tolerance among the Guinea baboons of Senegal—Fischer explores the role of social living in the rise of primate intelligence and communication, ultimately asking what the ways in which other primates communicate can teach us about the evolution of human language.

Funny and fascinating, Fischer's tale roams from a dinner in the field shared with lionesses to insights gleaned from Rico, a border collie with an astonishing vocabulary, but its message is clear: it is humans who are the evolutionary mimics. The primate heritage visible in our species is far more striking than the reverse, and it is the monkeys who deserve to be seen. "The social life of macaques and baboons is a magnificent opera," Fischer writes. "Permit me now to raise the curtain on it."

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