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THE BOOK OF ANIMAL SUPER HEROES



WRITTEN BY CAMILLA DE LA BEDOYERE
ILLUSTRATED BY DAVID DEAN
FOREWORD BY DR JESS FRENCH



FOREWORD BY DR JESS FRENCH

Animals never cease to amaze me. That's the beauty of studying them – there is always something new to learn. I was delighted to read these tales of astonishing courage, unbelievable intelligence, astounding strength and boundless love, many of which I had never heard before. Isn't it incredible that gorillas and orangutans are capable of learning sign language? And that just one pair of robins could be responsible for saving their entire species?

I was particularly touched by the stories of animals that had risked their lives to save humans. We owe so much to the animals of our planet, yet we often don't treat them with the great respect they deserve. If we don't make changes soon, some of the animals featured in this book could end up disappearing altogether.

Young people like you are more aware and passionate than ever before. And I'm sure that after reading this book, you will be inspired to do something to protect them. Luckily, the power to make a positive change is in your hands. You might just be one person but, like Old Blue (a Chatham Island robin who you will find out about in this book), you have the power to save a whole species.

So please take inspiration from these amazing animals. Remember their stories and draw courage from their strength. And maybe, one day, you will find there is a superhero inside you too.

Jess French

INTRODUCTION

Not all heroes are human. They come in all sorts of shapes and sizes – they can be fluffy, scaly, feathered or fanged, swim, run, hop or fly.

This book contains 19 captivating tales of animals who have accomplished the most astonishing deeds, for their human companions, their families or even their entire species. Told are the stories of Mari the Shiba Inu who saved her owner from the destruction of an earthquake, Digit the gorilla who fearlessly protected his family against poachers and Old Blue the Chatham Island black robin who played the starring role in saving her entire species from extinction.

And the exploration doesn't stop there. The hidden lives of animals are often fascinating and it is thought by many that animals are far more intelligent than we give them credit for. Within these pages you can learn not only the true-life stories, but also about the most intriguing parts of animal life. Find out how whales work in teams, how wolf packs communicate with each other, how animals migrate across remarkably large distances and much more.

Humans are only one species of life on this incredible planet. Let this book open your eyes to the wonderful animals that live alongside us.



MARI
— TO THE —
RESCUE

On the morning of 23rd October, 2004, a dog named Mari gave birth to three puppies in Yamakoshi Village, Japan. That evening, a severe earthquake shook the village. Almost all the buildings, including Mari's owners' house, were destroyed. During the tremors, the newborn puppies were jolted away from their mother, and since their eyes were still closed, they could not find their way back to her. Desperate to help them, Mari broke free of her leash, picked up the puppies by the scruffs of their necks and moved them to safety. Then, without hesitation, she ran back into the collapsing building.

The grandfather of Mari's owners lived on the second floor. He was old and unwell, and struggled to climb the stairs without help. As the quake struck, a wardrobe had toppled, pinning him underneath. As he began slipping into unconsciousness, Mari appeared in the doorway. She looked at him with encouraging eyes and licked his face. It made him concentrate and unconsciousness receded.

Mari's paws were cut and bleeding from the pieces of glass and porcelain that lay all over the floor of the house. Occasionally, she disappeared from the grandfather's room and hurried downstairs to check on her puppies before reappearing at his side. Each trip gave her new wounds, but she returned again and again.

Mari managed to kindle hope in the trapped man. He pushed at the wardrobe with all his strength and eventually he was free. Slowly, he began climbing down the stairs. It took him two hours, but Mari encouraged him all the way. Upon reaching the ground floor, he escaped the precarious building and was overjoyed to find the three newborn puppies safe and sound outside too.



EARTHQUAKES STRIKE SUDDENLY.

Even today, scientists have no way of knowing exactly when or where the next one will hit.

So how come animals know before humans?

One theory suggests animals can feel the earth vibrate before people can. Another that they can detect electrical changes in the air or smell gases released as the ground fractures.

An estimated 500,000 earthquakes are detected in the world each year. Of those, 100,000 are felt by humans and 100 cause damage.

CAN ANIMALS PREDICT EARTHQUAKES?

Throughout history, there is evidence of animals reacting quickly to earthquakes.

- In Ancient Greece, rats, snakes and weasels deserted Helice days before an earthquake devastated the city.
- People have seen catfish acting strangely, chickens that stop laying eggs and even bees leaving their hive in a panic.
- In 2011, at a zoological park in Washington DC, USA, apes were seen climbing into trees some minutes before the shakes were noticed by the zoo staff.

On 26th December, 2004, a quake off northern Sumatra, Indonesia, caused a devastating tsunami that killed hundreds of thousands of people. However, very few wild animals were found dead. Scientists think that the animals had fled into the interior of the islands before the arrival of the waves.

HAD THEY SENSED THE QUAKE?

INSTINCTS AND INTUITION

DOGS CAN TELL when somebody is in distress. Scientists have observed dogs go to someone who is crying, and lick or nuzzle them. This happens even if the dog has never met the person before. They will even ignore their owner and go to the crying stranger instead.

Puppies are born very helpless. Their eyes are closed, their ears are sealed and they cannot walk until they are about three weeks old. Mothers move their puppies away from danger by carrying them by the loose skin on the back of their neck.

A dog's sense of smell is much more powerful than our own. Not only can they smell things more easily, but they are better at telling different smells apart. When Mari lost her puppies, she would have been able to locate each of them by their individual scent.

Dogs have lived with people for at least 32,000 years.

Before dogs were people's best friends, they were wild wolves who fought early humans for food and were a dangerous threat. Gradually, people began to tame them. Humans who needed to gather their food, began to use dogs to HELP THEM TO HUNT.

KOKO
A FINE ANIMAL
GORILLA

In 1971, a baby western lowland gorilla was born in a San Francisco Zoo, USA. Her beginnings were not remarkable, but Koko went on to lead an extraordinary life of almost 47 years.

Penny Patterson, a young psychologist, hoped to discover if a gorilla could be taught sign language – the system of hand gestures that are used to communicate words and ideas in the deaf community. She began a long relationship with Koko and taught the young gorilla hundreds of signs. Soon Koko was able to string signs together to communicate her needs and wants, from requesting food to play time. She even developed her own unusual insults for people when she was angry with them, calling them a 'rotten-stink'. Koko called herself a 'fine animal gorilla'.

The scientists working with Koko gave her a kitten as a pet. Koko named it 'All Ball' and loved cuddling her furry friend. When All Ball died, Koko signed 'Cry, frown, sad, trouble'.

People all over the world were intrigued by this gentle giant, and were surprised to learn that gorillas are clever animals with emotions that are similar to our own. There were books written about Koko, the amazing 'talking gorilla', and many people, including celebrities, were filmed visiting her.

Today, ape-human language experiments are rarely conducted, as it is considered unethical to take them away from their families. One of Koko's greatest gifts was to teach us to respect the uniqueness of her species, and the importance of gorillas' natural habitat. There they can lead full, natural and wild lives, and communicate with their own families.

