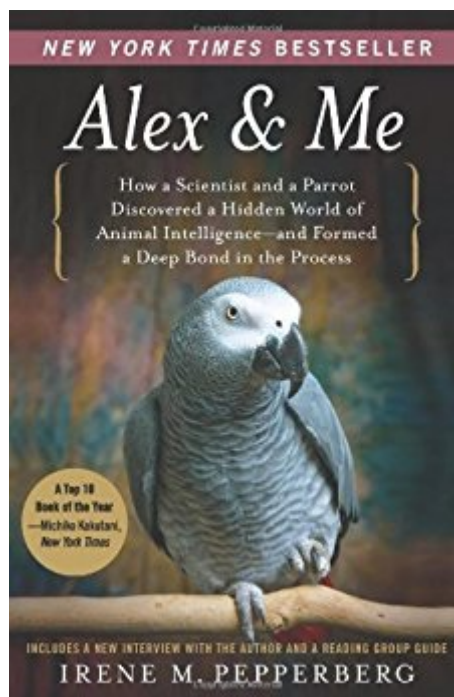


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Alex & Me: How A Scientist And A Parrot Discovered A Hidden World Of Animal Intelligence--and Formed A Deep Bond In The Process



Synopsis

On September 6, 2007, an African Grey parrot named Alex died prematurely at age thirty-one. His last words to his owner, Irene Pepperberg, were "You be good. I love you." What would normally be a quiet, very private event was, in Alex's case, headline news. Over the thirty years they had worked together, Alex and Irene had become famous—two pioneers who opened an unprecedented window into the hidden yet vast world of animal minds. Alex's brain was the size of a shelled walnut, and when Irene and Alex first met, birds were not believed to possess any potential for language, consciousness, or anything remotely comparable to human intelligence. Yet, over the years, Alex proved many things. He could add. He could sound out words. He understood concepts like bigger, smaller, more, fewer, and none. He was capable of thought and intention. Together, Alex and Irene uncovered a startling reality: We live in a world populated by thinking, conscious creatures. The fame that resulted was extraordinary. Yet there was a side to their relationship that never made the papers. They were emotionally connected to one another. They shared a deep bond far beyond science. Alex missed Irene when she was away. He was jealous when she paid attention to other parrots, or even people. He liked to show her who was boss. He loved to dance. He sometimes became bored by the repetition of his tests, and played jokes on her. Sometimes they sniped at each other. Yet nearly every day, they each said, "I love you." Alex and Irene stayed together through thick and thin—despite sneers from experts, extraordinary financial sacrifices, and a nomadic existence from one university to another. The story of their thirty-year adventure is equally a landmark of scientific achievement and of an unforgettable human-animal bond.

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Customer Reviews

What an amazing journey! I lived with a Grey back in the mid 70's, wish I had know more about parrots at the time. I was a teen just out of high school, dad bought him because he always wanted one. Romeo (who later became Juliet 4 years later when she laid eggs) was creative and playful. And I've learned since then that she loved me, I didn't understand her behavior fully, there was no internet back then so i had to surmise her actions were positive towards me. She too liked to play games, such as the time I had just installed a smoke detector in the hallway outside my bathroom. her cage was about 10 feet away in the kitchen but in view of that hallway. I was in the shower when the detector went off, i was home alone. I panicked and jumped out of the shower and went into the hallway where the alarm was not going off. I was perplexed until about a minute later. Juliet imitated the alarm and followed that up with a laugh! It took her one day to learn the sound and she thought it was funny that I reacted! Smart bird. There are more things that she did too. I miss her. Thanks for taking the time to write this book, it brought back memories while learning about the intelligence, which we know better today exists in all living creatures.

Great story about a remarkable bird. The author's relationship with Alex is heartwarming and winningly told. The things she and Alex accomplished are amazing. I liked how well she treated her birds and that she makes clear these intelligent creatures should not be left alone as solitary pets. Her research changed the way people think about birds. After reading this I watched Alex videos on YouTube.

This beautiful story lets us know how intelligent and loving these birds are. But to fully appreciate them, we should let them be free in the wild. They've been evolving for millions of years to fly above the jungle and socialize with their peers. The same way we feel good when we use our arms and legs, and socialize with fellow humans because of our internal reward system that has been developing for thousands of generations, they are rewarded when they fly high and hang out with

fellow greys. That being said, if you're thinking about buying a parrot, buy this book instead. You'll be happier and you'll liberate yourself from the desire of keeping captive such an intelligent individual that was born to fly free.

This was a very interesting book about animal intelligence--or, more specifically, how an animal trained in language can let us know what they know. Alex was an African Grey parrot, selected at random by a pet store owner to protect against any bias on the part of the author who purchased him for study. Dr. Pepperberg, who received her doctorate in theoretical chemistry, was well-schooled in the scientific method when she made the crossover to studying animal communication. Alex became her star pupil for the next 30 years, before dying suddenly about 20 years before his time. During their long association, Alex learned more than 100 words and was able to use them to show that he was not just "parroting" back random utterances but was able to use them to distinguish conceptually among issues of color, shape, size, number, etc. Where the book becomes most interesting is when he starts using comments spontaneously to express his own thoughts, such as telling Pepperberg unprompted that she needed to "calm down" one day when she entered the lab in some agitation. The night before his death, he used such phrases with her as "you be good," "I love you," and "you'll be in tomorrow?" He even showed a mind of his own by one day deciding to give wrong answers to questions that he had answered perfectly up until then. In the end, Pepperberg estimated his intelligence to be comparable perhaps to that of a five-year-old child. A notable subplot to the book is Pepperberg's story of how difficult it was to convince universities and especially funding sources to support her work. When she started in the field, there was little appreciation for her type of research, and it took her years of working with Alex and other birds to turn skeptics into supporters. My only quibble about the book is that it reads more like a research study than the personal memoir the title would lead one to expect. (I was hoping for something more like Wesley the Owl.) Putting that aside, Pepperberg is to be lauded for her groundbreaking work and we are all in her debt for being able to understand our animal friends just that much more.

I'm interested in birds and spend time feeding and watching their behavior. But my brother has an African Gray with a complex personality and my brother's stories regarding him are fascinating to me. This book furthered my knowledge and interest in the need of continued scientific study of these amazing creatures with tiny almond sized brains that have great capacities and gifts to share.

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